Black Girls Living the Answers:

How Young Black Girls Cocreate and Construct Their Worlds

Through Participatory Art Making and Collectivism

Maureen W. Nicol

Abstract

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Set in New Orleans, Louisiana, this qualitative dissertation study integrated case study, participatory, and ethnographic methods to examine how young Black girls curate joy, resist everyday violences, and promote well-being in their daily lives through the use of photography, Black girl literacies, and collective art making.

Given that this country sits on a national inheritance of anti-Blackness and misogyny—both amplified during a global pandemic, Black girls have been implicated in these oppressive structures during precarious times. Contemporary and historical events have demonstrated the precarity of the lives of Black people, especially Black girls. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (2020) shared, "If we are ever truly to protect young Black women like Toying Salau or Breonna Taylor, we must first tell their stories."

This 6-month study inquired how young Black girls (ages 7-9 years old) become/are researchers of their own lives within the exacerbated social conditions of the pandemics of racism, sexism, COVID-19, and natural disasters. The participating Black girls generated content, art, and conversations from their lived experiences, much as Black people have been doing for their counter-narrative and truth telling. Scholars (Fontaine & Luttrell, 2015; Ghiso, 2016; Templeton, 2020) have

documented the need for young children to find their voice to share their perspectives within the classroom space as well as examined the generative role of photography to foster inquiry among young children.

This participatory study documented how three Black girls in early childhood education engaged with their artistic research through the use of disposable cameras and community art spaces during a time of multilayered and intersectional pandemics in their racial and gendered identities. The intent was for this study to be about and for the girls and their families and their city, with a potential consequence of adding/initiating conversations about the creative journeys needed/possible of *remaking (early childhood) spaces for Black girls with Black girls and their families who are living and thriving in complex and unique ways in a society that makes it hard for them to live fully (or with ease) and thrive effortlessly.*

There were so many hard questions about identity posed to the girls during this study, and their articulations of themselves through words and art show how they are living the answers willfully and courageously.

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I started the pursuit of this degree not knowing clearly why I wanted a doctorate. It just felt like the right thing to do—the next step.

So much time and life have happened during this journey—time I will never get back with people, myself, and in certain spaces. The last 6 to 7 years have been focused on this work that was not always clear to me. But others saw something in me and my research. I owe the most gratitude to these people because they have reminded me that what I have to say and my ideas are truly special.

Thank you to my colleagues and friends who took time out of their lives to sit with my ideas, read my writing, and vent with me when I often felt like giving up.

Thank you to my mom who always asked me how my homework (aka my dissertation) was going, and if I keep going, I will pass and get an A. Thank you to my dad who always reminded me that I was strong and that I could do it.

Thank you to my sisters who did not seem to know exactly how this dissertation process works, but always checked in on me and said I could do it.

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The most thanks to my advisors and committee, who always knew how my heart and mind worked and how this translated to my research, identity, and bigger goals for my community and career work.

I owe so much to the girls and families who participated in this story. The girls and their mothers are the orbit around whom this dissertation spins. I will never have the words to show how my heart feels holding their stories, art, and vulnerability.

This dissertation was born along with the birth of my perfect baby girl, Adi Rose. While carrying her I spoke out these research questions, I read bell hooks aloud, and I touched my belly when I sometimes felt alone in all this. Adi Rose carried me through to the end and gave this research and doctoral pursuit the purpose I did not know I needed.

Me and Adi Rose doing data collection

I will never forget this span of life while writing and researching while simultaneously becoming a mother, while becoming displaced due to COVID-19, while becoming stronger, while becoming… I could not have done this without my community and participants.

M. W. N.

Dedication

I am very reliable and trustworthy, honest.
I have a lot of talent and I know whatever I set my mind on something
I can accomplish.
I show people I care by giving what I have to people who actually need it.

A Poem by Latasha Harlins
with a mural immortalizing her at
Algin Sutton Recreation Center playground in Los Angeles, California.
Latasha's brother said the park was a place they called their ***sanctuary.***

PREFACE

Black Girls Can Do Anything!

Don't throw yourself away.
To leave yourself
would be the real tragedy,
and you Ain't no tragedy.

You somebody,
you somebody good.

You don't got to be their somebody
to be somebody

Be your somebody,
and be your somebody good,
real good,

be your somebody so good
that you question
how you ever thought you could be nobody
in the first place.

By Poet Jasmine Mans

Throughout the journey of this research and dissertation, I was constantly seeking inspiration, words, affirmations, and memories to keep me on course and maybe even at times to give me purpose. I would ask myself often, "Why am I even doing this and does this even matter?" But it does matter. It did matter. Showing up for young Black girls so they can show up for themselves in the best way they know how is a political act of care and love. This research was a form of *seeing* the participants through their own eyes, based on their own stories and visions of their worlds. They live in a world where they are inundated with messages that could influence them to believe they do not matter or that their identities are less than, but this is not the truth. They are somebody and they should have the power, words, and experiences to grow into their bodies to be the people they imagine themselves to be.

Halfway through my data collection, a close friend who lives in Austin, Texas told me about her niece who is seven years old. Her niece is half Black and half-Filipino, adopted, and she considers herself an artist! Gray, a girl of color, seen in the images below won first place in Texas's state storytelling and art competition for her piece, "Black Girls Can do Anything." Gray's words to go along her with her art, read:

> I matter because I am me.
> I am a Black girl.
> I am a filipina girl.
> I am adopted.
> I am brave.
> I am beautiful.
> I can do anything.

Figure 1. Gray and Her Work

This text from a friend about her niece who had found the words and colors to construct her sense of self came to me on a day when I felt like none of this research was making sense anymore. As a researcher, I have learned along the way that sometimes when you are doing something new or different, or have a question that does not seem important to others, it can be very easy to feel like there is no point—or maybe an easier way is the only way.

> I knew that I wanted to be big and outlandish, and I had this really sharp moment that I think so many black women and women of color have when they walk into an industry that they're unfamiliar with. I thought, "should I just do what I know is accessible or should I try my best to be as brilliant as I think I can be? (Poet Jasmine Mans, from https://submissionbeauty.com/submissions/jasmine-mans-is-living-breathing-poetry/)

From the beginning of my doctoral journey, I knew I wanted this research to be arts-based, place-based, and Black girl-based. I was told by many that it was not a good idea, not academic or scholarly enough. The industry I am in is academia, and I was very unfamiliar with the territory. I had the choice to turn away from what I knew was my research or walk towards the research and researcher I wanted to be. The researcher I aspire to be is one who takes the work and humanities of Black girls and their families seriously. The girls in this study reminded me of WHY I should. Black girls and Black women should always try to be as brilliant as we can be because we are indeed geniuses and creatively limitless. I do believe Black girls and Black women can do anything, and this is even more possible when Black girls and Black women have the support and materials to believe in themselves and their brilliance. For 6 months, I and the girls and their moms, and sometimes their grandmas, tried our best to just be who we are and experiment with ways of getting to know ourselves in many different ways.

Whether it was a collage, photos, words, a museum talk about a Black woman artist, or just being in the same room eating goldfish and gummy bears…there was never a doubt that we were somebody.

This dissertation is some of *our* work—*together*—an affirmation of our brilliance and personhood when we spent the summer figuring things out together while committing to realizing our capabilities and not throwing ourselves away.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

I've been here, and you just didn't see me.

Deborah Roberts critiques ideas and notions of body, race and gender in society through art that centers the gaze of Black children—historically and today—as she understands them to be the most vulnerable members of our population (Oyeniyi, 2021; Sargent, 2018). When asked about her inspiration as an artist, Roberts has said to a reporter:

> What I want as an artist is for the viewer to see that face, first and foremost, as the face of a child because that's the image I think you need to come to. I tell my audiences that this is the idea—to 'see' that little girl! I am also hoping they see vulnerability, strength, and beauty. If you can find yourself in her face, then you can see and embrace your own humanity. Once you see me as human, then we can coexist equally. That's the basis of the work. (Oyeniyi, 2021)

At Roberts's exhibition in Austin, Texas entitled "I'm" (2021), large visuals of predominantly Black girls hang from the walls, towering over viewers. When Roberts started her formal career in the art world, she introduced herself through collage and mixed-media works that revolved around the experiences of Black girls (Oyeniyi, 2021). Contemporary Austin wrote about her work and her subjects as:

> —investigating how societal pressures, projected images of beauty, and the violence of American racism conditions their experiences growing up in this country as well as how others perceive them. Simultaneously heroic and insecure, playful and serious, powerful and vulnerable, the figures Roberts depicts are complex.... (Oyeniyi, 2021)

In addition to visual imagery, Roberts has explored text work in her efforts to legitimize the complexities of Black girl experiences. For example (see Figure 2), in her series of prints called *Pluralism* (2016), the artist typed out in Microsoft Word a list of names commonly given

to Black females (e.g., Denisha, Latifah, Mikayla, Shemika). The work shows the result, as the software automatically underlined these names in red, signifying their incorrectness or unrecognizability.

Figure 2. *Pluralism* (2016), Deborah Robers

The work of Roberts fits within the broader dialogue of engaging viewers on American history, Black culture, pop culture, and the experiences of children, with the goal of drawing people in to take a closer look, to see through the layers and digest what it means to be a Black child. Roberts said she has considered herself to be an artist since the age of 8. When interviewed about her work finally being exhibited in her hometown of Austin, Texas, she said, "I've been here, and you just didn't see me…. But I've been here."

Grounding the Rationale

As an early childhood educator for over 8 years, I can recall the different ways that my Black girl students felt "unseen." My 7- and 8-year-old students would say things like:

"You just do not get it! I wish you would try and understand me."

"I am not going to apologize. I did not do anything wrong."

"How come at home we are talking about Mike Brown but at school we are not?"

"My mama is working!! She cannot come pick up from detention."

"Ms. Nicol, I do not want to show grit today. My feelings are hurt."

"WHERE IS THE BOOK WITH THE BLACK CINDERELLLLA!!!?"

In all of these moments, I wish that my students had the works of Deborah Roberts towering over them, so they could look up to themselves and people who looked like them. As I reflect on my experiences as an educator, I cannot overlook the amount of will, patience, and brilliance that my Black girl students had to show up every day to school. Going to a place that barely saw them, that administered rigid discipline policies and offered very few educators who shared cultural similarities must have been exhausting.

I am a Black woman who believes in the brilliance of Black children (Delpit, 2012). It was this belief that led me to become a teacher at a low-performing school in New Orleans, Louisiana. There, I encountered Black students who were doing their best, but grappling with serious issues emanating from systemic racism and entangled bigotries (Kendi, 2016), particularly the incarceration and unemployment of family members. Aware of the injustices that permeated their lives and shaped their identities, I decided to reject narratives that pathologized them purposefully and intentionally. Instead, I sought to reorganize my teaching to center Afrocentric ways of knowing (Asante, 1991; King & Swartz, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2000). In

doing so, for example, we studied the artist Jean-Michel Basquiat for one of our many art projects. The students wrote stories of the times they showed courage; their stories were featured at the Ogden Museum, in an exhibit entitled *Crowns of Courage* (2015). When they saw their work in the same building with pieces by Basquiat, they were shocked. When I asked my students how they felt, 7-year-old Taylor,[1] a girl who was constantly being suspended and had been labeled with emotional and behavioral issues, said, "I just hope they get it. I hope they get me." Taylor, whose name was always underlined in red in Microsoft Word, considered herself already an artist like Deborah Roberts. I could tell with how Taylor carried herself that she had started to become conditioned to take on and believe society's prevarications on the "unrecognizability" and "incorrectness" in her life as a Black girl (Roberts, 2016).

Taylor's experiences, and the experiences of many other students who found power through an Afrocentric approach to the arts, propelled me to idealize and establish Camp Story in Sierra Leone, a place for Black youth to center their stories and positively (re)author their identities. In this space, Black histories were centered and (im)possible futures were authored by Black youth as they learned about the powerful legacy of their ancestors and the ingenuity of their communities (Lee, 2007). In this dissertation, I sought to build on this work while engaging young Black girls (Grades Kindergarten-2) in how they are seeing and understanding the world amid exacerbated social conditions of political changes, unique schooling experiences, the consequences of COVID-19, and the height of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 and 2021. Historically, the stories of Black girls have been deliberately silenced and tenaciously erased, and this reality has only been heightened in 2020 and 2021 with limited stories and experiences coming from young children.

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[1] Pseudonym given to former student.

My experiences as an educator as well as a doctoral student have illuminated how young children are not regarded and respected as the creators, storytellers, and mobilizers of change that they are and can be (Dyson, 2013; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Early childhood education spaces and research are fields dominated by (white) adults (Yoon & Templeton, 2019), which impacts the possibilities and capabilities for young Black children to story themselves on their terms. By being curious about how young Black girls sit in a unique space in the United States and working with them to research their own lives and communities, we can push back on dominant discourses framing them at the intersection of gender, race, and childhood. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of opportunities for Black girls to be seen as having the capabilities to impact change, as generators of work, and as people to pay attention to, which thus impacts their schooling experiences and, consequently, how they see themselves and interact with the world. I insist that change in how we regard and support Black girls in America cannot happen until we pay attention to Black girls the way they want to be seen and heard. My research explored how structures can make room for young Black girls in America ***as artistic, political people to learn from and pay attention to.*** Arts-based and participatory approaches to research are especially suited to undertake this work.

Theaster Gates, a creator who uses art to radically reimagine urban neighborhoods as "vessels" of opportunity for the community, believes that art and social progress can go hand in hand. When interviewed, he stated that the world is ripe for remaking and that art can be used for activism and social mobility to create change—to create something beautiful in spaces that people thought were abandoned (Goldstein, 2020). Contemporary and historical research as well as experiences and current events illustrate the precarity of the lives of Black people—Black girls...the "unseenness" and/or "hypervisibility"—a social abandonment. As Kimberlé Crenshaw

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(2020) shared, "If we are ever truly to protect young Black women like Toying Salau or Breonna Taylor, we must first tell their stories." For Black girls to take back, exercise, and/or come into their power, there first needs to be understanding of and reckoning with the fact that Black girls in America are born into a world committed to surveillance and punishment. Thus, for this qualitative study, I used visual participatory methods, namely cameras and arts materials, in the hands of young Black girls so that they could capture their worlds on their terms and discuss their visual data with each other in order to tell their stories.

Statement of the Problem

The lives and positively framed stories of Black girls remain under-researched (Evans-Winters, 2006, 2011, 2016; Hill-Collins, 2000). Overall, common themes in research about Black girls in both adolescence and early childhood have focused on three themes: criminalizing Black girls, fixing assumed flaws of Black girls, or positioning Black girls in a deficit or achievement only perspective. Discussions on race in education often center Black boys and Black men, while discussions on gender focus on the experiences of white girls and white women (Ladson-Billings, 2017). Only a scarce number of pieces have looked at Black girls in (early childhood) education and positively position and discuss their value by including their voices, bodies, capabilities, and stories. This is not a surprise because Black girls and women are rarely featured in the narrative of American schooling and U.S. history (Ladson-Billings, 2017). The education system was never created to support those who sit at the tender intersection of race/racism and gender/sexism. Black girls have a unique positionality, and their educational experiences show this. Major themes that emerged in the literature included how Black girls are often viewed in a singular/stereotypical/defected manner, the violence Black girls experience in schools, and how Black girls are often discussed in relation to resilience and strength.

Historic systematic racism and sexism have established constructs and archetypes that adultify Black girls, stripping them of the privilege of childhood innocence (Boutte, 2012; Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2011). This means that Black children's bodies—specifically Black girls' bodies—are assigned racialized and gendered meanings, producing school-related and societal consequences. Critical childhood studies take the voices of children seriously and see their ideas and questions as "opportunities to influence the socialization activities directed at them" (Närvänen & Näsman, 2004, p. 72). In my research, I hope to co-construct knowledge with young Black girls that makes clear how the scripts imposed on Black girls are indeed arbitrary classifications and descriptions that perpetuate anti-Blackness, sexism, and ageism— historically and contemporary events showing that some bodies literally do not even have a chance to exist outside of racialized and gendered narratives. Nevertheless, Black girls within their identities and as a result of these impositions have a unique way of looking at the world that should be heard and paid attention to because they should have the privilege to a childhood that sees them as the beings they are right now—as humans who hold potentials and possibilities and are *simply people* with their unique understandings of the world.

The Need for Alternate Nows

The literature, in concert with historical and current events, has made me deeply reflect on gender, race, age, and my own lived experiences and feelings. Robin Boyer (2014) merged the words BlackGirls to make them touch on paper the way they touch in everyday existence (Boyer, 2014; Hill, 2019, p. 276). Hill (2019) argued that a BlackGirl must deny elements of her identity and prioritize the objective in order to attain success—in other words, "neglect and dismember parts and experiences that define her" (p. 276). Historically, practices and actions have shown the sanctioning of dichotomous discourses and policies that split BlackGirls into

race or gendered individuals (American Association of University Women [AAUW] Educational

Foundation, 1998, 2001; Hill, 2019, p.276). For this project, I aimed to create a context in which

art, inquiry groups, and participatory research come together as a space that centers BlackGirls

by examining creative expressions and truth telling to develop "alternate nows" (Elliot, 2017).

With inspiration from Boyer (2014), I began to think about the different ways/words/layers/

experiences that touch BlackGirl identities:

<div align="center">

BlackGirlliteracy

BlackGirlSES

BlackGirlbodies

BlackGirlstories

BlackGirlart

BlackGirlmemories

BlackGirlschooling

BlackGirlresistance

BlackGirljoy

BlackGirlmagic

BlacGirlreimagining

</div>

Not only am I interested in the vastness that each of these categories holds, but I also

wish to understand how all these layers impact the experiences and, consequently, the

possibilities for how Black girls understand themselves and the larger ways the world can

understand Black girls. The everyday experiences of Black girls suggest, as Hill (2014) states,

splitting up the identities and experiences of Black girls into raced or gendered individuals.

Considering this, I was curious how Black girls play as their full selves when given the

opportunity to research their own lives. I turned to art making and creating as a way for Black girls to document the many parts and experiences of who they are. I consider how this type of meaning making can create emotional, intellectual, and visual "alternate nows" needed in the everyday lives of Black by intersecting art, history, and visual representation.

In the field of early childhood education, previous research has suggested that young children can practice agency and develop meaningful capabilities by choosing classroom activities relating to their interests and by engaging freely in play. Miller Marsh and Zhulamanova (2017) positioned young children as curriculum-makers by giving children cameras, asking them to take pictures of the things that mattered to them the most in their home environment, and integrating their interests into the classroom. The camera served as a means for students to narrate their identities and share their lived experiences. When the teachers decided to take students' input seriously, the students' social and academic engagement dramatically improved.

The growing pockets of scholarship centering Black girl brilliance in the form of "alternate nows" point to how educators might create counter spaces where Black girls can author their own experiences and explore them collectively. While these new frameworks provide powerful grounding to challenge the symbolic violence of schooling, most of the research in their area has been situated in middle school up through college settings. Therefore, a shortage of research exists in early childhood and elementary school surrounding the experiences of Black girls in these spaces. *Affirming the identities* of Black girls *in affirming ways* that are inclusive of the past, present, and future is necessary, yet unfortunately proportionally low in scholarly research and day-to-day experiences. My work here explored how we can move away from violence-based or deficit-oriented research studies and move towards reimagining and

conceptualizing into practice new spaces for learning, with particular attention to young Black girls.

The Research Gap

My dissertation research focused on young Black girls as participants and researchers because of how they are positioned in American schooling and society: as young people who breathe life into the world, but are often regarded as less than and/or thought about in singular, problematic narratives.

Historically, empirical research has made the stories and experiences of Black girls and women in the United States invisible. An overwhelming amount of research on K-20 schooling experiences has centered the experiences of Black girls in relation to white girls and Black boys (Evans-Winters, 2011; Morris, 2005, 2012). Black girls are seen through a narrow scope in the literature regarding discussions about their everyday lives and lived experiences in school. This narrow scope leaves unexamined the intellectual, cultural, social, and emotional needs and understandings of Black girls. The common representation of Black girls is one of a deficit orientation (Evans-Winters, 2011; Morris, 2007). Scholarly work is lacking in situating Black girls in a humanizing way that understands the multiple layers and identities Black girls have as they use their abilities to navigate systems and structures that were not historically made for them.

The dominant narrative of early childhood education sees young children as persons in the making and still developing. Often, teacher-student interactions and curricula perpetuate this narrative by claiming that young children are "not ready" for agentic learning experiences (Adair, 2014; Adair et al., 2017). In contrast, Black feminism stresses that education should be a humanizing process, especially for children of color who are too often denied the status of

personhood (Brown, 2013; Pérez et al., 2016; Langer-Osuna & Nasir, 2016; Ohito, 2017; Saavedra, 2011; Souto-Manning, 2017).

Whereas many studies have focused on adolescent Black girls, the experiences of young Black girls have been limited in such studies to date. Yet, researchers have long established that racism and racial identity issues affect very young Black children (e.g., Clark & Clark, 1947). Additionally, the surge of research and stories being told during COVID-19 have been authored by adults and the white majority.

Theoretical Framework

In using these counter-stories and aligning them with Black feminist theories and critical race theory (CRT), My dissertation research with Black girls has been inspired by my own position of taking the work of children and women of color seriously. This research is also supported by stories, concepts, and epistemologies of Black feminist thought (BFT) (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984). For example, BFT views women of color as intellectuals with skills, knowledge, and experiences from which others can learn (Foster, 1995; Kohli, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Ohito, 2017). These frameworks take shape in all my work and in early childhood settings because my orientation to my research and work aims to interrogate common tropes and narratives by offering new stories and perspectives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I believe my work in the academy should always be fueled by reflection on how to use my privilege in research and in the field of early childhood education to ensure certain people are represented, heard from, and understood. These values of constant reflection, questioning, and respecting the stories and experiences of all have been constructed by my experiences and identities as well as the needs of the community and BFT (hooks, 2002, 2014, 2015). In this dissertation, I have brought together BFT and CRT because, together, they work to unpack the

need for changing the lingering portrayals of Black girlhood and how school experiences can be redefined for Black girls with a more expansive understanding of their experiences.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

I understand (schooling) systems through the lens of CRT, which asserts that "racism [is] endemic and deeply ingrained in American life" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55); therefore, schools, as institutions, perpetuate white supremacy and impose barriers for people of color, including Black girls. Critical race theorists have argued that systemic racism is built on an underlying mindset of white normalcy, superiority, and right to dominance (Delgado, 1989), and, consequently, policy reforms will have little lasting impact if the prevailing mindset remains unchanged within the society (Bell, 1992).

Researchers who aim to work towards liberation must attend to and center the counter-stories of youth, adults, and communities of color. For example, my research aimed to center the stories of Black girls through their unique learning experiences impacted by race/racism, age/ageism, gender/sexism, and class/classism. These stories can serve as a powerful method for revealing the social construction of reality and then imagining a counter-reality that subverts white supremacy along with other forms of oppression (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Counter-stories of the capabilities and cultural knowledges of young learners who are also Black girls can challenge dominant societal narratives of colorblindness, neutrality, and meritocracy. This countering can reveal the cultural wealth of communities of color that is expressed through their aspirational, familial, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). My research focused on the counter-storytelling and cultural wealth expressed by Black girls. In countering dominant deficit narratives about Black girls (Brown, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009), my hope is to identify how their language, actions, and

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relations convey cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that can create cracks in the seeing, valuing, and understanding of Black girls.

Black Feminist Thought (BFT)

BFT was introduced to actively set into motion ideas that explain oppression and social injustice (Collins, 2000). BFT attempts to give Black women and girls the agency to move themselves from the margins of society into a more self-defined space of justice because oppressive systems and structures have failed to do so. Since the enslavement of people from the continent of Africa, Black women's experiences and ways of knowing have been oppressed and/or appropriated, and oppression and appropriation have been systematically enforced through patriarchal, white supremacist, and Eurocentric perspectives and traditions. BFT validates these experiences and feelings of oppression that Black girls have been exposed to and experienced (Akom, 2011). This validation acknowledges the past and the intersectionality of Black girlhood experiences in order to give Black girls room to explore their agency and produce a body of knowledge and identity narratives that reflect their own lived experiences as a form of healing and liberation.

BFT is grounded in the belief that racism, classism, gender bias, and sexism are all interrelated aspects of black womanhood (Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Love, 2016). This belief stands in opposition to Black girls and Black women being excluded or treated inequitably, and thus supports the knowledges, voices, and experiences of Black girls and Black women in schooling experiences and public discourse as well as being present and seen in sociopolitical concerns. Because BFT deliberately practices seeking equality and equitable experiences for Black women and girls, this theoretical framework purports that my dissertation research of including the culturally relevant ways of making meaning and lived experiences is a

valid form of knowledge from and in support of Black girls. This provides Black girls with the opportunity to self-define and self-express. Though Black women and Black girls are no longer legally considered property, Black women 400 years later are still being objectified while their hearts and minds do emotional and mental push-ups to exist freely on their own terms. With my dissertation research, Black girls will have the opportunity to define their own images of self, value, and validity through art since Black feminist knowledge is inclusive of many ways of knowing and expressing voice and experience, such as song, dance, literature, film, and other media (Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1981; Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Both CRT and BFT attend to liberating experiences for Black girls by subverting the narratives that confine the identities of Black people. To shape distinct spaces for Black girls, both of these theoretical frameworks are needed to unpack history, create self-expression and healing, and celebrate the unique experiences that the mingling of race, gender, and class inspire. The historical and oppressive makeup of this country has relied on making Black girls feel less than human; both CRT and BFT in this present research acknowledge the past while providing frameworks of looking towards a future in which Black girls know they are brilliant people who deserve to be creative, political players in the world.

Purpose of Study

This 6-month research study allowed for a sharing of the lived realities of Black girls in America on their terms through the use of disposable cameras to story their current experiences against the 2021 U.S. landscape. I aimed to provide an agentic, critical research opportunity for young Black girls with the hope that they would author new possibilities for their identities and experiences through art that resulted from critical dialogues among their histories, experiences, and identities intersecting with race, gender, and age (Freire, 1970; hooks, 2002).

As such, this focus is long overdue. This study centered Black girls' right to know their strengths, recognize their looks, learn their history, and sustain their cultural ways of being—all right that are ever more important during a global pandemic. This visual- and arts-based research provides the opportunity for Black girls to be behind the camera and visually illustrate their lives to create forward-thinking approaches in early childhood education that center young children— Black girlhood in particular—to inform more nuanced representations of how young Black girls move through the world while creating, playing, and researching.

Through this research, I hoped to document young Black girls' processes of inquiry and self-authorship amid intersecting health, racial, and gendered pandemics as an antidote to how society tenaciously denies Black girls this right. Through this research, I take a stance of humanization (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017), whereby "co-constructing knowledge, co-creating relationships, and exchanging stories are central" (p. 373). Relying on humanizing research methods, I sought to foster "more inclusive, interconnected, and decolonizing methodologies that disrupt systemic inequalities found in Western constructs of...research" (p. 373).

This study was guided by an interest in how young children, specifically Black girls, become/are researchers of their own lives (i.e., spaces and places, identity, people, routines, etc.) in relation to and within the exacerbated social conditions of the pandemics of racism, sexism, and COVID-19. Black girls have a unique perspective on the current times as well its echoes of historical inequities, and I sought to center and learn from their arts-based inquiries on these pressing issues.

Creating research conditions with and for young Black girls that include play, imagination, and creative inquiry can lead to new narratives in the often-stuffy space(s) of academia, with early childhood and structural practices that are heteronormative and racist by

design and upkeep. Participatory research in early childhood education has the potential to change the dominant discourse because it foregrounds more sophisticated understandings of how young children think and experience the world by recognizing them as experts of their world(s).

This research aligns with what I value as a researcher, an educator, and a person. It is grounded in the following beliefs:

1. Black girls and young children have a unique perspective on the world. We should listen.

2. The arts and photography are powerful tools for social change and storytelling.

3. The individual voices of young children have tremendous power. The collective voices of young children have tremendous power.

4. Those who are listened to least often have the most to say.

My work is inspired by a global vision of Black girls who are able to live and exist freely across the African diaspora—without being pathologized, assimilated, sexualized, or prematurely adultified (Morris, 2015). Using a critical, Black-centered perspective of American schooling (e.g., Siddle Walker, 1996, 2018), I engaged in participatory research methods to explore how young Black girls use photo-ethnographic methods to develop counter-images to the dominant narrative that dehumanizes Black bodies and experiences (Hill, 2016) by offering them tools to story their experiences. In doing so, they identified what is important and/or necessary in/for their current experiences as they became the main researchers exploring time, space, and belonging in America during a pandemic.

In this research, I positioned Black girls as people whose stories and personhood are often abandoned, as people who are often "bred out of a struggle to thrive in a world bent on surveillance and punishment" (Wun, 2016) and who are indeed citizens of a country with a

history of 400 years of anti-Blackness, misogyny, and heteropatriarchy now colliding into a global pandemic. Black girls' stories and their versions of citizen footage matter; their perspectives need to be shared as their stories can help reshape and remake a country that was never built for them but needs to center them now more than ever.

Research Questions

Given the historical and contemporary social and political climate, my participatory research study was steered by the following questions:

RQ1: How do Black girls engage with the construction of Black girlhoods through artmaking and collective inquiry?

RQ 2: What dialogues are sparked from the images of Black girlhoods that Black girls create?

RQ 3: What intersecting factors and influences inform these constructions of Black girlhood?

Black girls as co-researchers can produce knowledge, as opposed to being consumers of Eurocentric knowledges, stories, and images (Caraballo et al., 2017). As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, I invited the participating young girls to collect, create, and analyze images and artifacts that reflected how they are understanding their lives amid intersecting pandemics, and engaging in collective digital discussions with other participating girls to think together across their individual experiences. The research centered the Black girls' emotional, mental, and physical well-being as they inquired into their experiences and positionings.

Significance

With this research, I inquired into how Black girls can use the arts to document Black lives—their lives as a form of truth telling—using images and stories to document the

complexities of Black girls in order to imagine something new and possible…new and possible

for them first, with a ripple effect on education and education research. For example, by using

multimodal approaches, there will be visuals for experiences where there are not enough words;

by co-researching with Black girls, there will be leadership from those individuals for whom and

about whom this research was carried out; lastly, by designing inquiry groups, there will be

collectivism to illustrate the diverse ways Black girls can exist. My intentions with this research

were to display the agency and leadership Black girls can assume to author their lives. Young

children have the power to assert themselves, their imaginations, and the creative will to story

themselves and the world around them (the world that is and could be). Young Black girls are

naturally curious—natural artists and natural protestors in their own right—and these ways of

being should be seen as assets. This research is a hopeful invitation into the process and lives of

Black girls ages 5-7 years old as they learn their power, step into their power, or potentially take

back their power to cultivate new realities and futures for them and by them. By recognizing the

capacities, complexities, possibilities, visions, and values of/for Black girls and creating a

research design that does this, I hope through this dissertation to generate new ways of

(re)positioning Black girls in research as people who are researchers and multidimensional

individuals in early childhood education settings. The design and research questions of this study

especially worked to interrogate Eurocentric patterns in research and in early childhood

education.

In addition to traditional scholarship, this research generated a digital exhibit curated by

the Black girls who participated in this study. After learning and sharing together, the girls

worked together to curate an exhibit that would engage the larger community, centering Black

girl identities (across time and space) and offering a powerful and accessible collective counter-

story to the marginalization and erasure of Black girls and Black voices.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Urgent Situation for Black Girls in the Current Moment

In 2013, Quvenzhané Wallace, a then 9-year-old actor who is a Black girl, attended the Academy Awards. The Onion, a news organization and digital media company, tweeted from the ceremony, "Everyone else seems afraid to say it, but that Quvenzhané Wallis is kind of a cunt, right? #Oscars2013" (Ng, 2013).

In 2015 in South Carolina, a Black female high school student was body slammed to the ground and dragged by a white police officer. The officer's partner responded with, "If she had not disrupted the school and disrupted that class, we would not be standing here today. So, it started with her and it ended with my officer" (Ford, 2015). The officer did not face criminal charges.

In 2016, a mother's tweet criticizing her daughter's high school dress code went viral (Irby, 2016). The Kentucky high school upholds a dress code that requires students to dress professionally and does not permit dreadlocks, cornrows, or twists because these hairstyles are distracting, extreme, and attention-getting. The mother and other Black mothers tweeted messages with similar sentiment such as "@BTHS_Bears @JCPSKY no braids, twists or cornrows.... I guess girls are not welcome at #butlerhighschool... Especially black girls. #shameless" (Irby, 2016).

The National Women's Law Center began the "Let Her Learn Campaign," which works to fight the mistreatment and over-suspension of Black girls. The campaign launched with Black girls looking into the camera and reflecting on moments when they were stereotyped and

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marginalized and mistreated at school because of these stereotypes. The girls on camera shared that they were told they are aggressive, angry, rude, and unlady-like. They mentioned being critiqued for their hair, clothing, and body types (National Women's Law Center, 2017).

In late November of 2018, a Black girl, Mariah, was enthusiastically screaming, "I have Black girl magic!" The young girl was so loud and proud about her Blackness that it rubbed her classmates the wrong way, sending them into a teary-eyed fit and prompting a letter home to her mother (Harris, 2018). The teacher sent home a letter to the girl's parents stating what happened and that the white female students in the class felt sad and began to cry. The teacher then asked the parents to talk to their daughter about the situation. Although it was important for Mariah to feel empowered, her response was deemed inappropriate in the eyes of the school.

In 2020, a 15-year-old Black girl, Grace, from Michigan was sentenced to juvenile detention for not doing her online homework during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Grace was sentenced to 2 months in juvenile detention for her homework infraction.

Also in the Summer of 2020, Oluwatoyin "Toyin" Salau, a 19-year-old young Black woman and Black Lives Matter protester, was murdered after speaking out about being sexually assaulted.

Black girls and Black women are not welcome to feel at home at the Oscars, in Kentucky, in South Carolina, in their mistakes, in their trauma, and even in their own homes. Black girls are one of the most neglected, misunderstood, and over-surveilled people in the United States (Cox, 2015; Morris, 2018). The humanity needs and brilliance of Black girls are often overlooked by educators, administrators, policymakers, and classmates (Brown, 2009). Black girls are falling through the cracks of American schooling (Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters & Espositio,

2010). Black girls deserve to feel at home in their feelings, strength, looks, history, and culture. However, society does not tell this to Black girls.

The seemingly isolated cases described above speak to the impact of institutional racism and sexism and how over-surveillance, lack of representation, and repeated acts of (symbolic and actual) violence shape the lived experiences of Black girls. For this literature review, I highlighted the urgency of the situation for Black girls with regard to American schooling in order to contend that Black girlhoods "[are] 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" (Dumas & Nelson, 2016, p. 27). We are in a moment—we <u>have</u> been in a moment—where reimagining and reimaging the lives of Black girls and Black women should be a priority. These re-imaginings are necessary for the survival, safety, and happiness of Black girls and Black women.

With my dissertation research, I sought to create a participatory context for Black girls to document and inquire into their experiences from their perspectives and on their own terms. I investigated how Black girls participate in visually cataloguing and documenting their lives and how they discuss these narratives and visuals as representations, memories, and lived experiences. With the desire to ground the realities of Black girls and their cultural and political responses to the world, I invited 5- to 7-year-old Black girls to explore who they are, what they think, and what they desire in their lives right now (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). In this undertaking, I assume an approach to conceptualizing Black girlhoods as situated in the present (youthful) time in which the participants are and not what/who they are becoming. Given the intersectionality that Black girls experience in their gendered and Black bodies, their humanities have historically been under assault and society has adultified their childhoods (Boutte, 2012;

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Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2011). When Black girls do the things that girls do, they are often treated as adults and, therefore, are treated more severely. Black girls then are assumed to bear pain and take on the "strong Black girl" resistant role (Fordham, 1996; Nunn, 2016). Adultified representations of Black girls impact how they are (mis)treated, (mis)understood, and (dis)positioned. This research study focused on the girls' current moment(s) while dancing between histories and narratives of Blackness and gender of the past, the present, and the future. There is still a shortage of research that theorizes Black girls as children who are agentic in the right-now who also hold power, politics, agency, and radical aspirations (Hartman, 2019).

Methods for Literature Review

To conduct this literature review, I used keywords and variations of "Black girls," "Black girlhood," "race," "gender," "African American students," "schools," and "education" to guide my work. My search included peer-reviewed articles using Google Scholar and the online Teachers College, Columbia University databases such as ERIC, EBSCO, Springerlink, PsycINFO, and Proquest. Additionally, given the topic of my literature review, I went directly to specific journals and publications focusing on race, gender, and education equity that included, but were not limited to, *Teachers College Record*, *American Education Research Journal*, *Gender and Education*, *Equity and Excellence in Education*, *Urban Education*, and *Journal of Negro Education*. To prepare for this literature review, I completed an annotated bibliography over the course of several months and divided this bibliography up in?to the following sections, which constituted an initial categorization of insights from the academic literature and popular press: Violence Black girls face; Research on Black girlhoods broadly; Theoretical frameworks; What teachers can do/teacher practices to make room for Black girls; Agency and Black girls; Community initiatives; Black girl brilliance and genius.

In the next step of my process, I differentiated among strictly empirical and conceptual pieces. It also felt intentional and necessary to include news articles and social media pieces (i.e., Black twitter) because, for the Black community, these are often spaces of dynamic conversations and a different type of sharing and knowing, especially when limited information is available on the day-to-day Black experiences by and for Black people in academia. I did not set parameters in terms of when articles were published, but most are within the last 10-15 years, as this is a growing body of work.

I reviewed literature that addressed the intersections of race and gender in the lives of Black girls to analyze the entanglements of their multiple and intersecting identities, how society responds to these entanglements, and how Black girls make sense of the world at these complicated intersections. Furthermore, I reviewed how these multiple identities influence not just the school experiences but *the full lived experiences* of Black girls. In the sections below, I organize the literature to reflect two main trends: (a) findings that point to the urgency of Black girls' intersecting oppressions in and out of school; and (b) new areas of scholarship that highlight Black Girl brilliance, joy, and resistance.

Scholarship on the Urgent Situation for Black Girls

Historically, empirical research has made invisible the stories and experiences of Black girls and women in the United States. An overwhelming amount of research on K-20 schooling experiences has centered the experiences of Black girls in relation to white girls and Black boys (Evans-Winters, 2011; Morris, 2005, 2012). Black girls are seen through a narrow scope in the literature with regard to discussions about their everyday lives and lived experiences in school, with less attention paid to the intellectual, cultural, social, and emotional needs and understandings of Black girls. The common representation of Black girls is one of a deficit-

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orientation (Evans-Winters, 2011; Morris, 2007). Comparatively, there is a much smaller but burgeoning body of scholarship centering Black girls in a humanizing way that is understanding of their multiple identities and their abilities to navigate systems and structures that were not historically made for them.

The literature documents how Black girls experience racism, invisibility, harsher school discipline policies, a shortage of representation in classroom materials, and a lack of support from caring adults and peers. I searched widely through scholarly pieces, news articles, popular culture, and social media to find the most prominent topics and everyday issues that Black girls are experiencing in American schooling. Because of my own K-20 experiences and my current experiences in a doctoral program, I felt a visceral response to some of the prominent topics and situations affiliated with the schooling experiences of Black girls, some of which included racial identity, over-surveillance, policing, otherness, sexualizing, microaggressions, and objectification. My own experiences, coupled with those discussed in the literature, led me to assert that Black girls experience a multitude of inequities—inequities which influence the representation of Black girls, the methods through which they resist, and how that resistance leads to "defiant" and "disruptive" stereotypes.

Archetypes and Stereotypes

Discussions on race in education often center Black boys and men, while discussions on gender focus on the experiences of white girls and white women (Ladson-Billings, 2017). There is a scarcity of pieces that have looked at Black girls in (early childhood) education and pieces that have positively positioned and discussed the value of Black girls by including their voices, bodies, capabilities, and stories. The portrayal of Black girls has historically been in comparison to white girls because society has deemed white girls the image of femininity. White girls are

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depicted as modest, self-controlled, cute, and virtuous, while Black girls are often seen as uncivilized, aggressive, loud, lewd, and tempting (Epstein et al., 2017). For example, when examining adults about their perceptions of Black and white girls of the same age, Epstein et al. (2017) found that adults perceived Black girls, starting at birth through age 19, *as more adult* than white girls. The portrayal of Black girls is also connected to controlled images of popular culture and the historical oppression of Black people, specifically Black women. Muhammad and McArthur (2015) analyzed Black femininity and discussed images in media and the internet with whom most members of society interact. Their research showed depictions of Black woman and Black girlhood that played into stereotypes going back centuries. Depictions of Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire, that some have argued are no longer present, <u>are</u> present in the way Black girls are portrayed and treated in American schooling. Muhammad and McArthur also argued that Black girls are treated by their peers and educators based on their physical looks (hair, body type, etc.) and thus sexualized and/or represented as loud and angry. These views are carried out in mainstream media as young Black youth are present as guilty *adults* (Baker-Bell et al., 2017). In a content analysis carried out by Noble (2018) of the representation of both Black women and girls in the media, the data showed that a Google search of "black girls" generated pornographic images as the initial and primary representation of Black women and girls. Though Google recently adjusted its algorithm to shift what results are produced when "Black girls" is typed in the search engine, even algorithms determine what data are seen and have the potential to reproduce racism and sexism (Mims, 2019; Noble, 2018). These stereotypes tend to morph into more specific stereotypes that are often used in school settings, such as being regarded as aggressive, masculine, hypersexual, and loud (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-

Winters, 2011; Morris, 2005, 2007, 2016). All of these stereotypes impact how Black girls are treated, policed, and over-surveilled.

These same narrow stories in society are echoed and read in the children's literature and curricular representations Black girls encounter in school settings. Children understand who they are from a story's illustration, narrative content, the subject of a story, and the story's author (Gardner, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to critique these representations of curriculum artifacts of what society is telling Black girls about their identities. In 2015, 11-year-old Marley Dias decided to curate a list of children's books with children of color as the main characters. Marley concluded that most of the books she read "were all about white boys or dogs" (Anderson, 2016). In 2015, less than 10% of published children's books had a Black main character (Horning, 2015). This number dwindled when searching for Black girls; it became even smaller when attempting to find Black girl characters; the number was at its smallest when attempting to find a book with a Black girl that is not a story about oppression, a historical figure, race, trauma, hair, identity, Blackness, and/or slavery. A significant body of work has shown that, generally, children's books lack the presence of Black children, and when Black children are present as characters, their representation is not diverse, especially for Black girls (Garner, 2017; Johnson & Mango, 2004). Many children's authors are white, which impacts the stories being told and perpetuates a single narrative of an impoverished, oppressed view of Blackness (Adichie, 2009).

There is more to Black girl lives than the dominant narrative that Black children's books suggest with their emphasis on oppression, racism, and marginalization (Gardner, 2017). In a 1920s publication from the National Association for the Advancement Colored People (NAACP), Black writers discussed the difficulties they faced in getting published if their stories

did not subscribe to stereotypical views of African American people (Brooks & McNair, 2018; Du Bois, 1926). For contemporary children's book writers, this problem persists, perpetuating specific storylines Black people have in books and in society, which further maintains deficit views of Black people (Tate, 2001).

Lastly, these representations suggest singular and exaggerated images of Black girls and Black women. Unfortunately, these images of Black femininity have been firmly woven into the fabric of American history, which has seeped into American schooling. Consequently, they suggest that Black girls can be treated and seen as less important, less human, and/or less dynamic than others. Stereotypes and representations are hard to overcome because they are normalized and shape the storylines children take on in society, impacting how children are socialized (Nasir et al., 2013). Effectively, they render how Black girls treat themselves, treat each other, and get treated. Black girls exist in a system that already has preconceived notions of who they are before they can show up as *who they are.*

To enhance the schooling experiences of Black girls, it is necessary to make visible the possibilities for disrupting deficit-oriented tropes, such as the trope that Black people only have stories connected to their oppressed histories, historical figures, and deficit views of girlhood and Blackness. Thus, because dehumanizing stereotypical images of Black women persist in children's literature and media at large, a historical backdrop should be provided to help illuminate the contemporary struggles of Black girls.

Violence, Policing, and Criminalization

Scholars who have recently published bodies of work that explore the lived experiences of Black girls and women include, but are not limited to, Monique Morris's (2016) *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*; Crenshaw, Ocen and Nanda's (2015) *Black Girls*

Matter: Pushed Out: Overpoliced, and Under Protected; and Smith, George, Graves, Kaufmann and Frohlich's (2014) *Unlocking Opportunity for African American Girls*. These works explore and examine the missing conversations about Black girls' experiences. A common theme by these scholars is the violence Black girls endure in schools.

The intersections that Black girls sit at because of the social constructs of race, gender, and class often increase the invisibility and forms of violence that they encounter in American schooling, which ultimately silences their voices (Evans-Winters, 2011; Morris, 2016). Research shows that when schools attempt to erase the experiences of a Black girl and silence her, she will attempt to show she matters by resisting (Koonce, 2012). This form of resistance is not usually received well by schools. This resistance is seen as violent, criminal, disruptive and threatening. Speaking her truth gets translated by the school as "being defiant" and being agentic gets misconstrued as "being disrespectful" (Cox, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Epstein et al., 2017; Koonce, 2012; Mirza, 1997; Morris, 2005). Teachers then respond to this agency and speaking of truth based on the aforementioned negative stereotypes (Evans, 1980). The current events offered at the beginning of this response show the emotional, physical, verbal, and cultural violence that Black girls experience in schools and how power structures attempt to diminish their identities. These schooling experiences feed into teaching Black girls about their roles in society. They are structural and institutional barriers that deny Black girls equal access to emotional, academic, social, and financial success that will ultimately impact their adult lives.

For example, in *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected,* scholars have analyzed the over-surveilling and disproportionate disciplinary experiences that Black girls have encountered (Crenshaw et al., 2015). A noteworthy finding is that when Black girls do not receive their mandated counseling, their resistance increases, which demonstrates

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how the social, emotional, and academic priorities of Black girls are not always centered. Additionally, the report illustrated the lack of school accountability during incidents of personal violence against Black girls. For example, schools failed at being involved when Black girls were being sexually harassed or bullied (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The report provided insight into the disproportionate suspensions, expulsions, and disciplining of Black girls in New York and Boston. In both cities, Black girls were suspended at least 10 times more than white students. With these violences that Black girls face in American schooling, one must ask: How are they supposed to feel comfortable and how can they trust their peers, teachers, and administrators in a space that is supposed to be safe for them? The literature suggests that American schooling can be violent and traumatic for Black girls, which can impact how they see themselves and their future trajectory.

Adversity, Resilience, and Othering

As previously described, Black girls throughout history have faced a multitude of challenges. Unfortunately, the literature is steeped in discussions, negative attitudes, and behaviors such as teen pregnancy and school dropout rates (Corcoran & Kunz, 1997; Dixon et al., 2000). Research has also highlighted challenges Black girls have faced, including sexual encounters, harassment, and violence. Others have noted how Black girls have become successful, despite low socioeconomic status and cyclical factors that can impact Black families. Because these challenges are thoroughly documented and researched in relation to this population, a vast amount of research on empowering Black girls has pointed out their need to be strong in the face of adversity and resilience (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). The overwhelming research in this arena positions Black girls as needing empowerment, which means their success and voice can only exist in relation to and/or with the support of others. The literature also

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highlights how Black girls are socialized at a young age to be strong and resilient. Instead of society changing structures and systems in place that work against Blackness and girlhood, Black girls are required to handle many of life's stressors and oppressions because of how society views them. Simultaneously, they internalize and manage these deficit views by policing their own identities. Nunn (2016) described this call for strength from Black girls in the face of inequities as being "super girl in waves of the sadness." Her research in American schools documented her participants' (Black girls 8-13 years old) complexities as being both strength-based while also being rooted in sadness (Nunn, 2016). Nunn further complicated the notions and limited understandings of Black girlhood through the use of the Super-Girl metaphor to give weight to the imbalance of the multiple social constructs and sometimes damaging conditions the Black girls navigate.

On the contrary, the level of resilience carried out by Black girls as a result of adversity and/or being othered shows capabilities that should be celebrated. Their ability to develop coping skills and (life) navigation skills despite inequalities is extraordinary. O'Connor (1997) found that this type of resilience in the face of the injustices of race, class, and gender at school was possible because of a strong sense of racial identity (Evans-Winters, 2011). O'Connor's (1997) study suggested that her participants' understandings of themselves and their recognition of how race, class and gender operate could have contributed to their sense of human agency. Therefore, resilience could be one of the many diverse ways that (often) oppressed people use to respond to and interpret their lives. Critically thinking about the schooling experiences of Black girls holds opportunities for scholars, schools, and community organizers to reimagine and re-examine their preconceived notions about Black girls: who they are, how they learn, what they need, and which

talents they use on an everyday basis. On a daily basis, in fact, Black girls are doing mental gymnastics and extra work in schools while sometimes still being unnoticed or over-policed.

The mental gymnastics become connected to how identity is formed and what individuals take in and take on as their identity as they make meaning in particular contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Lerner et al., 2002; Spencer, 1995). Black girls are constantly confronted with understandings of who they are and what it means to be a Black girl. In general, Black youth, including Black girls, within the sociocultural contexts of racism, sexism, ageism, and prejudice (Spencer, 1995), consequently understand what it means to be a member of a group targeted by these "isms" and prejudice (Tatum, 1997). Developmental theory in collaboration with Black feminist theory suggests that these messages of race, gender, class, and age play a critical role in shaping the understandings Black girls have of themselves, the world, and the systems in that world as they come to understand they are "tied to interconnected systems of power" (Collins, 2016; Crenshaw, 1997; Spencer et al., 1997), and this informs the self-perceptions of Black girls. Therefore, the deficit and intervention-based arguments on or about Black girls lie in direct opposition to how Black feminist theory presumes we should see and understand Black girls, which is as "situated knowers" who possess important ways of knowing, and critically discerning the conditions of oppression in which they exist (Collins, 2002).

Reimagining Black Girlhood through Centering Black Girl Brilliance

Daily, Black people actively do things to free themselves in order to take steps towards a just future (Solomon & Rankin, 2019). This active creation of a counterculture that is not oppressive acts as a means of healing and liberation for Black girls in the form of reimagining that centers their brilliance and their ability to have an ordinary life. Bringing about new meanings should work in dialogue with the histories of Black people, women, and young

children as a form of world-making through imagination, desire, creativity, and brilliance. Historically, marginalized people have been committed to forms of reimagining as a means of asserting the value of their existence and that their lives matter—these imaginings by Black women have led to the abolition of slavery, the right to vote, equal education, and, as of late, restoring democracy in the 2020 U.S. Presidential election. Black women have been leading revolutions in the world by reimagining something new, something better, something they deserve. Black girls are presented with constant confrontations that influence them to fight frequent revolutions and desire to create countercultures that subvert oppression(s). World-making through reimagination is a way for Black girls to "have a chance at agency, self-worth, cultural entitlement in a country dead set against us [Black girls] having any of it" (Solomon & Rankin, 2019).

There is a need to foreground the ability of Black girls to rename, reclaim, and reimagine how their lives have been discussed and theorized. It is integral to assume that Black brilliance is present and within Black girls while "achievement gaps," "behavior issues," and/or responses to narrow stereotypes are examples of how systematic racism, sexism, and oppression often repress and restrain the "intellectual rights" and expressions of brilliances of Black children (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Young, 2011). Therefore, academic research needs to shift from the hyper-surveillance and examination of the actions and behaviors of Black girls to a close read that "locates and highlights the unique characteristics" (Bullock et al., 2012) of Black girls on their terms.

Black girl brilliance is the emotional, physical, and mental leeway where Black girls can "reclaim spaces for themselves in order to define their excellence" (Price-Dennis et al., 2017, p. 4). Black girls continue to navigate their identities in relation to the (mis)treatment of Black

bodies in the current and historical social-political landscape. Collectivism and creativity are required for a multimodal approach that Black girls use to experience the world and express themselves in an anti-Black, sexist world.

The observance, theorizing, and articulating of the methods through which Black girls are reclaiming spaces and reimagining through their own genius is a growing field to which my own research aims to contribute. Scholarship in this area has documented the forms of Black girl literacies, the creativity of Black girls, and the magic of Black girls. In addition to scholarly work being done in the academy, there is digital collectivism and IRL (in real life) support to celebrate Black girlhood in all of its complexities. These forms of research and advocacy challenge deficit-oriented and singular, harrowing depictions of Black girls' experiences and identities. To stabilize and give new energy to the field of Black girlhood studies, the literature calls for using formal and informal ways of seeing, caring for, and protecting Black girls through recognizing and better theorizing Black girl brilliance.

Defining Literacy and How It Relates to Black Girl Brilliance

The term *Black girl literacies* has been used to encompass the many ways of seeing, hearing, and creating with and for Black girls and to understand the many ways that Black girls see, hear, and create through their complex identities in a complicatedly oppressive world. Though Black Girl Literacies has begun to expand on the nuances of the lives of Black girls by centering their brilliance, this scholarly movement needs further unpacking. The many strands of scholarship included within Black Girl Literacies and Black Girlhood Studies deserve individually specific attention to understand and appreciate the strides being made in reimagining Black girlhoods. By untangling these key efforts in this section of my literature review, I hope to give each thread room to breathe in order to make further visible the individual vibrations and

the scholarship and scholars that are coming together to create space for a new, needed wave of understanding Black girls' brilliance and capabilities.

In the 1800s, Black people learned to read and write as tools of community empowerment, progress, self-reliance, and strength, despite this right being denied to them due to white supremacy and racism (Muhammad, 2012). Black people were intentionally kept "uneducated" so their white oppressors could have power over them. Even with the absence of "formal" literacy education, there was still an extensive amount of literacy exercised through oral transmission, storytelling, music, dance, and visual art. These forms of literacy were born from fundamental needs for release, communication, and safety (Belt-Beyan, 2004). These ways of communicating may not have been regarded as standard literacy practices but were (and still are) the ways in which knowledge, stories, and histories are transported between people and communities under oppressive conditions.

The relationship between literacy + education + racism + sexism has had a strong throughline from the 1800s to the present day. The narrow definition of literacy as solely being confined to reading and writing started out as a white supremacist and Eurocentric narrow educational method that, historically and currently, kept Black children, especially Black girls, boxed in (Willis, 2015). However, it is reductive to think of literacy in such a constricted way. In contrast, Muhammad and Haddix (2016) defined literacies as "the diverse modes of communication and ways of knowing and sense-making that youth practice in and outside of school, which include broad categories of reading, writing, language, embodied literacies, and literature" (p. 305). This more expansive view of literacy challenges the Eurocentric definition by unearthing the assumed normalcy and implied supremacy of white values and knowledges. In

its place, a more inclusive foundation for literacy is laid that includes, affirms, and celebrates Black literacy and Black girl brilliance.

Scholars revitalizing the field of Black girlhood studies have grounded their work in re-shifting how discussions and research on/about Black girls are taken up. According to Price-Dennis (2016), "Black girls' literacies are the multiple ways of knowing that Black girls draw on to not only read, write, speak, and act in academic spaces but that they rely on to make sense of and write their worlds" (p. 340). To comprehend the brilliance of Black girls, it is necessary to understand the literacies of Black girls (Price-Dennis et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the literacies of Black girls as a language, an embodiment, and a rhythm that span academic spaces, both inside and outside. Both Muhammad and Price-Dennis made clear that Black girl literacies travel through the multiple dimensions of writing, reading, comprehending, digital media, and community engagement. Together, these scholars have created a Black Girls' Literacies framework to provide a necessary foundation in order to be able to attend and see that Black girls have their own multilayered, nuanced, and complex epistemologies (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Price-Dennis, 2016).

Based on the literature review on the multiple ways of knowing Black girls, Muhammad and Haddix (2016) developed a Black Girl Literacies framework that highlights the ways Black girl literacies are complex yet colored by a terrain of exclusion and oppression. This framework defines Black girl literacies as: multiple, tied to identities, historical, collaborative, intellectual, and political/critical. This framework has supported scholars (myself included) in advancing the field of Black Girlhood Studies by connecting research and collaborative action. In 2016, I was a part of a group of doctoral students at Teachers College, Columbia University that planned and executed a read-in that over 100 Black girls attended. The goal of that event, called *Black Girl*

Read!, was to defy the single, problematic narrative of Black girls and to create a space for the girls to build on their cultural heritage and connect with their individual literacy desires (Gordon et al., 2019). The Black Girl Literacies framework was used to interpret the literacy experiences of the participants in order to continue to illuminate the need for affirming spaces for Black girls (Gordon et al., 2019).

To expand our understanding(s) of Black girl brilliance, I unbraid the ways scholars have taken up Black girl literacies in the forms of community interventions/programming, creativity, culture, and collectivism in order to expand the definitions of literacy. This review of Black Girl Literacies as it relates to Black girl brilliance uses a range of literature, connecting scholarly work with grassroots organizing and synergistically building on existing research of Black girl brilliance. My review highlights the importance of honoring research that has been done but also calls attention to the fact that the number of studies is low in proportion to other research. Through this review, I argue that academia needs to learn from and be in better dialogue with work occurring outside the academy.

Black Girl Brilliance: Collectivism and Meaning-Making in Asset-Based Programming

To move this field *together,* there are collectives of Black women scholars prioritizing Black girls. By definition, a collective is a group of entities that share or are motivated by at least one common issue or interest or work together to achieve a common objective. Collectivism among Black women and Black girls is a form of space making that has become integrated into change-work for and with Black people. It is a space of communication that connects back to literacy and community circles created for and by Black people, specifically Black women.

Gilkes (2016) reported that "Black women embodied, according to Du Bois, the 'three great revolutions' that defined the age [of the early 20th century]: labor, black people, and

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women." Black women have been and continue to exercise their brilliance in the form of organizing and collectivism. One of the most notable collectives with regard to the lives of Black women is the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black women who identified as Black feminists who gathered together because they believed the Civil Rights Movement was not addressing their needs as Black women.

Collectivism is reflected in the scholarship of Black women. Scholars and educators Price-Dennis, Muhammad, Womack, McArthur, and Haddix (2017) have collectively worked together to expand the discussion on Black girlhoods in order to transform the limited ways in which Black girls are seen and understood. Together and individually, they conduct research and write with and about Black girls' multiple identities and literacies in and out of academic spaces. Each member facilitates ongoing literacy-based research to advance the literacy development of Black girls (Price-Dennis et al., 2017). Their individual and collective experiences as Black women, Black women scholars, and Black women educators have conceptualized ways to transform the experiences of Black girls in and out of school through literacy and community-based practices (Price-Dennis et al., 2017).

Historically, movements and visions for a better humanity for all have often been led by Black women and Black girls. For example, Black women and girls have create spaces for themselves through literacy circles that other groups have adopted as well. Historically, literacy circles and collaboratives made of Black girls and Black women were not defined by accumulating skills, but rather was a community practice or

> a tool used to define their identities, advocate for their rights to better themselves, and address issues of inequity for the wider society. Young Black women came together to make sense of their complex identities through a literary means. As they were reading text, they were not only discussing their collective identities as Black women, but also their individual and unique self-identities. (Muhammad, 2012)

These historical legacies have informed current collectives on Black Girl Literacies. The members of the Black Girls Literacies Collective (Price-Dennis et al., 2017) described how they created programs that center the identities and literacies of Black girls. These initiatives included:

1. Digital Literacy Collaborative—which highlights the potential of technology for leveraging African American girls' digital epistemologies;

2. Black Girls W.R.I.T.E. (Writing to Represent our Identities, our Times, and our Excellence);

3. African Ascension—a group that explores the ascent and advancement as Black women; and

4. The Dark Girls—an exploration of Black girlhood through different creative mediums

Across these initiatives, Price-Dennis et al. (2017) argued that school-based and community-based programs must create opportunities for Black girls to navigate their identities and meaning-making. This bridge between in- and out-of-school support helps to honor the intellectual agency of Black girls; increase the critical fluency of Black girls and their literacy so it can be used as a form of activism; and create holistic spaces of identity-making, healing, and joy. With each of the above programs these scholars created, they harnessed and began with the intellectual agency and brilliance of Black girls as the starting point. Given the urgency of the situation for Black girls, in order to research Black girls' meaning-making from a place of brilliance, scholars had to first create a context (through initiatives and collectives) that honored and sustained such brilliance.

A number of scholars are centering Black girls in ways that seek to center their brilliance and provide openings for critical inquiry and self-expression that counter dominant narratives of

Black girlhood. For example, Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown straddles scholarly research in and out of school programming for Black girls. Through the medium of hip hop music, she created *Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths* (SOLHOT), a space for Black girls to celebrate their girlhood in their entirety (Brown, 2009, 2013). Brown (2009) encouraged Black girls to "[resist being completely organized]" and to "commit to freestyling" (p. xi). The research of Dr. Maisha Winn highlighted how playwriting opportunities for incarcerated Black girls afford dialogue for the girls to create, write, and express their lives in collaborative ways. Additionally, this form of creative literacy further illustrates Black girls having the ability to express their civil and human rights (Winn, 2010, 2011).

Movement allowed for Dr. Meredith Cox's (2015) participants to explore their lives and imagine possibilities outside of the gendered, classed, and racist violence they experience as Black girls living in poverty in Detroit, Michigan. A grassroots effort by Tashira Halyard is reclaiming Black girl handgames as a form of shared expression and language of Black girlhood that promotes healing and joy (Varlas, 2019). Dr. Gaunt believes that these handgames are a form of literacy that teaches Black girls their social identities through music, body, (safe) touch, and words—a form of brilliance that is generational (Guant, 2006; Varlas, 2019). These kinesthetic and oral traditions in the form of handgames date back to slavery and the Jim Crow era as a response to racism. Gaunt's research documented how these connections and communications became a way to express joy and dream of freedom (Varlas, 2019).

All of these scholars have showcased how their grassroots organizing outside of the academy—and their activist research—does not seek to create programming to "empower" Black girls, but instead to center the various ways Black girls decide to show up *for* themselves, *as* themselves. Individually and collectively, this research foregrounds Black girls' cultural

wealth, value, and literacy skills that are multilayered and complex. Additionally, this

scholarship also reveals the necessity of paying attention to the brilliance and capacities of Black

girls by transforming literacy pedagogies to be attentive to identities, history, systems, and power

by creating "other spaces" outside of oppressive and Eurocentric norms (Wissman, 2011). These

other spaces have shown to be affirming and capable of equipping Black girls with the tools to

"talk back" to problematic systems and structures (Brown; 2007; McArthur & Muhammad,

2021; Wissman, 2009).

Sutherland's (2005) qualitative study highlighted the interconnectedness of literature,

literacy practices, identity, and social positioning by adding literature by and about people of

color to the language arts curriculum. Her study provided a window on the meaning-making of

six 16-year-old Black girls as they studied *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1994) in their high school

English class. Unlike most English language arts courses where students are asked to analyze

literature by white authors in response to a prompt, Sutherland encouraged participants to use the

text as an invitation to unearth their own lived experiences. Sutherland's findings from

interviews and literacy groups illustrated that when Black girls are invited to use texts that mirror

their own experiences, their identities can be validated and affirmed, and Black girls have

openings to discuss how their identities are contested and constantly need modification because

of the ascriptions others place on their lives. Literacy practices that allowed participants to

construct identities while unpacking *The Bluest Eye* provided them with words to discuss

boundaries in their own lives along with self-worth. A participant, Tiana, wrote a personal

identity essay, "Being an African-American really explains itself," and described herself in a

journal entry as follows:

I AM. . . . .
A BLACK AFRICAN-AMERICAN GIRL
WHO STANDS AND LOOKS TALL AT THE WORLD.
I LET NO ONE GET IN THE WAY
NO WAY WILL THEY MESS UP MY DAY.
I AM WHAT PEOPLE DREAM OF.
FOREVER AND EVER UP ABOVE.
I AM WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS
BECAUSE THIS IS MY STORY THAT IS GOING TO BE TOLD.
I AM THE FUTURE, THE WORLD, AND WHAT SOMEONE
WILL DREAM OF. (Sutherland, 2005, p. 378)

Sutherland's (2005) study documented that as Black girls read, write, and talk about texts and events in the world, these understandings "shape and are shaped by how people think about themselves and their place in the world." As Tiana's writing suggested, when given the opportunity, Black girls are able to illustrate their brilliance by speaking to who they are and want to be; they speak up about what they deserve while inquiring into what it means to be Black and female in America (Sealey-Ruiz, 2016).

For Black girls, writing becomes a literacy practice to make meaning of their identities (Muhmmad, 2012). Through Muhammad's 5-week summer institute for 16 Black girls, it was made clear how Black girls can be afforded ways to express their selfhood and write their identities (histories, pasts, and presents). This institute became a space for Black girls to explore literary pursuits, literary characters, and literary presence as a form of self-expression and collaborative, civic, and critical thinking for Black girls (Muhammad, 2012). History and scholarship have shown us that radical change occurs, and revolutionary dreams erupt when political engagement and collective social movement work in tandem as incubators for new possibilities (Kelley, 2002, p. 8).

Black Girl Magic, Movements, and Social Media Literacy

Given the historically little cultural and expressive freedom for Black girls in America, Black girls have to imagine a future that values them. Within but also beyond academia, music, art, poetry, and social media created by Black girls help them envision that future. For example, well-known Black women like Serena Williams, Michelle Obama, Beyoncé, Amanda Gorman, and Rihanna have been celebrated using the trending hashtag #Blackgirlmagic on social media, and it has become synonymous with famous Black women figures. While not all young Black girls are household names or symbols of popular culture like these famous Black women, their lives and experiences are also in need of being celebrated and seen (Ladson-Billings, 2017). The hashtag not only serves as a caption but also as an applause to the extraordinary *as well as* ordinary power, joys, victories, and beauty of Black girls and women (Wilson, 2016).

#BlackGirlMagic (Thompson, 2013) continues to trend on the internet, and Black women and Black girls continue to create the space of seeing that cradles, protects, and celebrates the brilliance of Black women and girls. Nonetheless, the thoroughly tagged and discussed "magic" of Black girls in America remains challenged, unheard, unseen, ignored, and even appropriated, particularly in K-12 schooling. In spite of this, Black girls continue to organize, create, and resist. For example, *Assembly* is a digital newsletter and publication that released an anti-racism guide for girls in 2020. The author, Kwolanne Felix (2020), a Black woman, used her brilliance to create a resource guide to help young Black girls learn more about the fight for racial justice and how they can take action and steps to protect their mental well-being. Using various social media platforms as a form of digital literacy and expression, Felix shared the works of various content creators of color, many who are Black women and girls. Also in 2020, 17-year-old Tiana Day organized the first-ever Black Lives Matter movement in San Francisco, CA. In response to

the death of George Floyd (*The New York Times*, 2020), Zee Thomas, at 15 years of age, led one

of the largest peaceful protests in Tennessee through the use of the social media platform of

Twitter (Hineman & Bartlett, 2020). Zee partnered with four other Black girls ages 14-16 years

to organize this movement that she noticed was missing from her city. Shayla Turner spent her

high school years on the frontlines of grassroots/community organizing for climate change and

against racism and police brutality (McMenamin, 2020, p. 1).

History and scholarship have shown us that radical change occurs and revolutionary

dreams erupt when political engagement and collective social movement work in tandem as

incubators for new possibilities (Kelley, 2002, p. 8). Collectively using digital literacies, these

Black girls have been shaking our worlds with their brilliance and dreams. It is not the job of the

oppressed or marginalized to continue to shoulder change with their genius. Still, many Black

girls are creating, navigating, and shapeshifting out of the confines of labels and restrictions and

histories that harm them. Though the history of Black girls in America and American public

schooling has been one of violence, exclusion, and trauma, the experiences of Black youth can

inform and reshape society (Muhammad, 2019). When in dialogue with other Black girls,

research and activism have demonstrated that Black girls are able to articulate their wants,

desires, fears, and even status in society through words, movement, performance, photos, and

music (Brown, 2009; Cox, 2005; Vasudevan & Dejaynes, 201; Winn, 2011).

Reimagining and Black Girl Brilliance

Dr. Bettina Love (2019) argued that reimagining involves sitting with and actively

engaging the tensions present when people dare to dream while being situated in the

contemporary and historical oppressive terrain of the intersections of age, race, gender, and class.

Black girls have had to imagine something different than their current realities because

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systematic racism has had limited imaginations for them and their lives (Hamer, 1964). These imaginations have been speculative, full, and lyrical—bigger and more nuanced than "simply surviving" in a broken system (Kelley, 2002). For example, author Jacqueline Woodson is known for her ability to write young adult stories that balance the realities of Blackness and the hopes of Black girls. When interviewed about *Another Brooklyn*, which tells the story of four Black girls, Woodson (2016) stated:

> To black girls, to the things that we black girls survived, and to the ways our brilliance is recognized, even when there was no mirror for it. I've tried to address those things in all of my books, but in this one specifically I was answering a big question: What am I going to do about this? What am I going to do about a time of my life in which the brilliance of black girls had no mirror? Without apology, without excuse. (p. 1)

Historical and current events have shown the mirrors that have been lacking in the Black experience, especially for Black girls and women. Through action and reimagining, researchers, educators, writers, and artists alike have an opportunity to create mirrors for Black girls to see themselves as a form of celebrating their brilliance, experiences, and possibilities. Furthermore, acts of resistance in the forms of art, representation, and literature have created spaces for Black women and girls to no longer be participants in their own oppression (Abrams, 2019) and proactive in their own liberation(s). Recently, we have seen Black women undo systems of oppression by leaning into what could be and knowing what is possible. Stacey Abrams, who was once a romance and suspense novelist, and who could have been the first Black woman Governor of Georgia, used her imagination to carry the 2020 election by helping Black people get free-er. Vice President Kamala Harris was the first woman and Black woman elected to this role in a country with a history of excluding non-white people and women from voting and running for office. These transformations are happening in a time when Black girls and Black women need mirrors to know their brilliance is recognized and celebrated (Edwards, 2016).

Abrams and Harris were once the reimaginings of those from the past. Potentially liberating and transformative work requires (re)imagination and urgency to provide a creative space for young Black girls to respond in order to create something for now while imagining what could be in dialogue with what is by engaging the political and "rebellious" spirits of Black girls (Love, 2019).

> We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
> Of such a terrifying hour.
> But within
> it we've found the power
> To author a new chapter,
> To offer hope and laughter to ourselves. (Gorman, 2021)

Du Bois (1896) saw Black women's community activities, participation, and experiences as an integral part of the material, cultural, and political contribution to the making of America. This continues to be true in the present day as Black girls use their brilliance in the multiple forms of literacies to shift, morph, and push back on a country that does not do the same for them. Du Bois discussed nine gifts that Black people have given to America, one being Black women and their cultural and social force in making America. At age 22, Amanda Gorman used her words to wake up the country after 4 years of fragility and loss under the Trump presidency. Black women and Black girls continue to create infrastructures and new chapters using their intellectual and cultural capacity from which others can benefit. Black girl brilliance is what has authored change for this country and communities-at-large. What if the country poured into Black girls what Black women and Black girls have poured into and invested in this country? How can we reimagine Black girls' humanities and livelihoods, their presents and futures? This literature review serves as a way to jostle singular narratives, deficit research, and limited imagination in order to consider what could be possible for Black girls when we take time to observe and celebrate all forms of Black girl brilliance.

Conclusion of Literature Review

We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody, considered all speech a code to be broken by us, and all gestures subject to careful analysis; we had become headstrong, devious, and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. Our limitations were not known to us—not then. (Morrison, 1970)

From this review of literature on the experiences of Black girls, it is apparent that scholars have observed the ways institutions have attempted to silence, other, objectify, and negatively view Black girls. This research is a reminder that American schooling was never meant for Black girls. Nevertheless, Black girls are managing to exist in these institutions upheld by structures of power, racism, sexism, ageism, and classism. Similar to Dumas's research with Black boyhoods, it appears that the positive positioning of Black girlhood in American schooling seems unattainable and often unimaginable because of how devalued Black girls have been in schools and society (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). *Affirming the identities* of Black girls *in affirming ways* that are inclusive of the past, present, and future is necessary, yet unfortunately proportionally low in scholarly research.

The growing pockets of scholarship centering Black girl brilliance point to how educators might create counterspaces where Black girls can author their own experiences and explore them collectively. While these new frameworks provide powerful grounding to challenge the violence of schooling, most of the research in their area is situated in middle school to college settings. A shortage of research exists in early childhood and elementary school and the experiences of Black girls in these spaces. How do we—and can we—move away from these violence-based research studies and pieces towards reimagining, conceptualizing into practice, and researching new spaces for Black girls to learn, with particular attention to young Black girls?

Lastly, there seems to be an extensive number of scholarly pieces, current event news articles, and community organizing that focuses on the resistance and resilience of Black girls. This is needed. However, further work could explore the everyday ways of being for Black girls. Currently, the research highlights how Black girls are existing by surviving and resisting. I am looking for work that does not restrict Black girls into sites of study for strength and resistance/resilience, or, at its binary, for the study of oppression and deficit. I am looking for work about their humanity that shows the vastness of their experiences and lives and celebrates these complexities (Brown, 2009, 2013). Counter-narratives of Black girls can only authentically emerge by Black girls themselves reclaiming their identities. To push back on stereotypes and narrow views, Black girls should be able to define their own identities on their own terms. I am eager to see more scholars, educators, and community organizers of color doing the political work of reaffirming the humanities and cultures of Black girls in their complexities and contradictions. As Ladson-Billings (2017) noted:

> If we take time to learn from Black girls and their magic, learning for Black girls will shift from complacency to acquiring knowledge, thereby enriching their whole identities. Magic is the ability to persevere despite being rendered invisible. Magic is setting your own standard of beauty while every representation of beauty displayed to you from the time you are a little girl is the antithesis of your skin color, your size, your hair texture, your nose, your lips, and your hips. Black girls are so much more than magic. They are strong. They are smart. They are brave. They are resilient. They are capable. They are so much more than what society claims they are. They are responsible for almost every civil rights movement that tackles racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and ability discrimination. What makes them more than magic is that they have not allowed all of the things they are up against to deter them from continuing the fight for justice and right. Instead of being ignored or despised by society they should be venerated. (p. 3)

As Ladson-Billings (2017) illustrated, the experiences of Black girls include a multitude of factors such as hair, historical oppression, lack of representation, body image, covert and overt racism and sexism—and the list could go on. While Black girls are their stories and histories,

they are more than their oppression and marginalization (Edwards et al., 2016). In order for

Black girls to see themselves in bigger ways, researchers (myself included) need to see and

discuss them in bigger ways by centering their brilliance, capabilities, and even the ordinary.

Research on Black girlhoods should capture the richness of intersectionality, but not be limited

to ones of trauma and violence or centered purely on resistance. Telling a full story of how

society has framed her, who she is, and what she wants to be on her terms can and should

support the agency, political power, capabilities, and educational and social needs of Black girls

in U.S. schooling. I want my research to contribute to the existing literature by foregrounding

Black girls' narratives as constructed and co-researched by Black girls themselves.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Research Questions

In 2019, *Education Weekly* published a three-part series that explored the question, *"What does it mean to be young, Black, and female in America?"* The third part of the series spotlighted the work of education researchers and activists to improve the schooling experiences of Black girls. Scholars such as Dr. Venus Evans Winters and Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz illustrated that Black girls experience this world in a specific way—an experience where racialized gender bias and resistance collide (Ferlazzo, 2019). According to these scholars (2019), education researchers are just now understanding the complexity of the Black girl push-out problem, teacher bias, and the effect of zero-tolerance policies on Black girls' overall educational experiences and socioemotional well-being and the adversities they experience inside and outside of school. Dr. Winters (2019) shared:

> Sadly, black girl students from working-class families, and/or black girls with disabilities, those who identify with the LGBTQ community, or nongender confirming youths are more likely to be negatively impacted by racialized gender bias in schools.

There continues to be a misreading of Black girls' bodies, experiences, and movements that leads to violence, trauma, and inequities. Limited research has detailed Black girls' lived experiences as told by Black girls themselves. The research becomes further limited in the early childhood age range. Research on the perspectives of Black girls that values the happenings in their everyday lives is needed to deepen, nuance, and add to the understanding(s) of the early childhood schooling experiences of Black girls from their perspectives and artistic compositions. As the field of (Black) Girlhood Studies grows to be in conversation with Black girls and their experiences, the methods of research about/with/for Black girls are expanding as researchers

begin to understand that Black girls deserve research experiences where they are valued and seen, and, furthermore, their experiences are worth documenting and centering in academic research (Brown, 2014).

One major stride in shifting the conversation about Black girlhoods is research that is interdisciplinary and antidisciplinary to make way for how research on Black girls is taken up and how these conversations are seriously engaged and extended (Brown, 2019). To make clear, interdisciplinary is when different disciplines come together *and* antisdisciplinary describes work that does not fit into any existing academic disciplines—something entirely new (Asadi, 2018). With participants who have experienced histories of trauma and violence, and whose brilliance should be paid attention to, research and inquiry decisions are not neutral decisions (Brown & Strega, 2005); they therefore require methods that are not traditional and complex. Research can be a highly political activity with implications for researcher and participants. With this in mind, the purpose of this visual qualitative participatory action research study was to explore the ways in which Black girls in early childhood education settings engaged with their own artistic research during multilayered and intersectional pandemics[1] to inquire into their racial and gendered identities. Through this study, I sought to challenge common adult-centered and deficit-oriented narratives of Black girls by using photo-documentation practices to center young children's voices and their own literacy practices. Situated in a critical childhoods studies framework alongside critical race and Black feminist theories, I consider how Black girls in early childhood settings are active, political agents in sexist and anti-Black educational institutions and society at large.

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[1] Racism, sexism, ageism, and COVID-19.

This project included collective inquiry groups with the participants and provided a space for participants to experiment with their understandings of the self, of creating, and of the world through multimodal making, grounding these inquiries in the social history of Black girls in America. Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown (2014), creator of a radical youth intervention for Black girls called *Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths* (SOLHOT), has worked to carve out a creative space for the performance of radically new interpretations of Black girls' lived experiences. With this same desire, my dissertation research was guided by the assumption that there is creative potential within Black girls that may be going untapped because of the ways in which we are asking them to show up and/or the limited ways in which we are seeing them (Brown, 2014); thus, radical new interpretations are needed that are created by Black girls for themselves. With these assumptions and goals in mind, as a reminder I ask the following research questions in this work:

RQ1: How do Black girls engage with the construction of Black girlhoods through artmaking and collective inquiry?

RQ 2: What dialogues are sparked from the images of Black girlhoods that Black girls create?

RQ 3: What intersecting factors and influences inform these constructions of Black girlhood?

I designed this study to gather data *with* participants about Black girl identities as participants visually narrated who they are and audienced their photos and art to the world and their co-researchers (other Black girls) as they worked through their personal and collective perceptions of their experiences of being Black girls. I anticipated that the way Black girls see themselves in relation to the world will offer insight into their complex identities. The purpose of this study, then, was to first give room to Black girls to explore their artistic literacies and legacies individually and collectively. In addition to this, an anticipated consequence of this research was to generate new ways of relating to and understanding Black girls in order to foster dialogic spaces within early childhood and beyond that show up for Black girls and are informed by their insights.

Site and Participants

This research included participants who identified as school-aged Black girls, ages 5-7 years. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted the research virtually initially. However, as the pandemic situation shifts, physical in-person meetings took place, following IRB guidance and protocols. The girls resided in Louisiana. For recruitment, I discussed the project with girls and families in my networks and sought participants through word-of-mouth recommendations from groups focusing and working with Black girl (see Appendix A for recruitment script).

**Context: A Series of Vignettes of How I Came to Know New Orleans
and How These Experiences Informed My Research,
Understanding of Blackness, and Education**

How I Came to Know New Orleans as an Alternative Spring Breaker

Before becoming a teacher and, later, a doctoral student who lives in New Orleans, I had

only been to New Orleans once back in 2008. It was for a service project with the university

church when I was a senior at the University of Maryland. Over spring break, my co-volunteers

and I were tasked with "rebuilding" homes with Habitat for Humanity after Hurricane Katrina.

As a college student, I felt *proud* about doing "good work" instead of spring breaking with my

friends in Mexico. Back then, I was one of the volunteer tourists who volunteered by day and

went to Bourbon Street at night, or who sat on the tourist buses that drove through the lower

Ninth Ward—the part of the city that got hit the most from Hurricane Katrina—because *I wanted*

to see the damage. I took the photos in Figure 3 in 2008 and remind me of how:

> I took photos of everything.
> I asked locals really personal questions.
> I was probably a voyager of the trauma and vulnerabilities of locals.
> I had sprinklings of a savior mentality (Perez, 2016).

Figure 3. Lisa + Donnie R OK

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Figure 4. Welcome it is going to be a great year (2008)

As a researcher and resident now in the city of New Orleans which she calls home (and home to my daughter), my volunteer trip still haunts me because none of my coursework as an undergraduate or even as a Master's student, and none of the leaders on my mission trip, ever touched on equity, racism, class, and environmental racism. No one told me about the toxic relationship that Black people in New Orleans have with the environment, education, housing, and speaking out against the police and political corruption (Perez, 2016). Over time, I would learn of the long history of toxic relationships between Black people and New Orleans, even before Hurricane Katrina. Years later, I know I should have somehow known how to treat people with care and respect, in ways that did not dig at their hurt, even if no one had ever explicitly taught me.

How I Came to Know New Orleans as a Young Educator

In 2014, for my third year of teaching, I went back to New Orleans. I worked at a failing charter school run by a for-profit CMO[2] company, where all of the leadership was made up of former white Teach for America (TFA) educators who centered on improvement, data, rigid procedures, and moving the "bubble kids."[3] I took the job after a series of online interviews because I was living in Tanzania at the time. I was elated to work at this school because it was called an arts-integrated school that served children of color. My white, Jewish boss, who was the principal of the school, took seriously "being down"[4] and believed he knew how to approach the 99% Black student population because of his well-versed background in hip hop. He would often quiz me on Nas albums. I did not listen to much hip hop.

The values of the school were grit, curiosity, and respect. These words were littered in every classroom and throughout the school and were often said during testing pep rallies on assessment days and morning assemblies.

For almost 2 years, I worked at this charter school. In Figure 5, I am seen teaching a theater literacy lesson. While at this school, I saw physical and verbal abuse of the students.

I saw Black students get small around white leadership. I saw Black students come to school smiling and leave red in the face, frustrated.

I saw teachers trying desperately to stand up for their students.

I saw Black teachers come and go and come and come and go.

I heard students recite the values of '***curiosity, grit, and resilience***' every day.

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[2] Charter management organization.
[3] Kids teetering between proficient and basic and basic and mastery.
[4] A term used to say one connects or relates to Black people or a particular group.

Figure 5. Teaching a Theater Literacy Class

I heard a second girl, Breontaye, scream, "I DO NOT HAVE GRIT

TOOOOODDAAAY!" when she was asked to move beyond a moment she needed time to work

through.

I heard Mikayala say to the interventionist, "Just because my curious *don't match* your

curious; don't mean I am not curious. I do not want to read this!!!"

I saw parents get pushed out of the school building and wondered what their place was in

their child's education. The students I had were in the bellies of their parents during Hurricane

Katrina.

I saw the trauma come through their families and them.

I sat in a professional development where workshop facilitators told my colleagues and

me we had to be firm with the students because that is how *they* understand.

I saw preschoolers walk on tape with pretend bubbles in their mouths. I heard the

preschoolers be congratulated by leadership if they could state their reading and math levels.

I saw parents having to miss work because of their child receiving detention because their uniform was too dirty.

I heard this conversation between the Behavior Interventionist coordinator and a parent about the uniform:

> BI Coordinator: Well, why don't you buy more?
> Parent: We do not have that [money] right now.
> BI Coordinator: Well, why don't you get a uniform coupon?
> Parent: The store is usually closed when I get off work.
> BI Coordinator: Well, can you ask anyone else to go for you?
> Parent: I will figure it out.

And she did. The parents always did. Somehow, as they navigated work, personal lives, families, and larger things beyond uniforms.

I saw, heard, and felt the school's leadership's confusion when they could not understand why students "acted out" the way they did and disbelief when parents just weren't more involved.

My former boss at this charter school later told me in so many words that he hired me because I was Black and I would be able to relate to the students. I chose to come back to New Orleans because it felt otherworldly and third world-ish. A city of dysfunctions that always made sense, this felt comfortable to me after living in Tanzania for a couple of years…the chaos and beauty of being in a place composed of predominantly Black people with Afro Caribbean influences.

When I reflected on this time during my teaching career, I remember being called on to talk to Black moms or attempt to relate to students in ways that white leadership felt they could not. I remember the instructional team having high hopes for me because I was Black. But when faced with the 60 students I would be teaching (many born or conceived around Hurricane Katrina), I realized I could not be more different than my students. They often joked about how I

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talked white and my style and me were natural. Children will humble you in that way and have you face the depths of your identity. *I never thought about my Blackness deeply, until they noticed **my** version of Blackness.* I began to think about the different versions of Blackness that there could be—even in one person—and what it meant to be a Black educator.

My third graders, some of my most patient teachers in my opinion, were so complex and beautiful. They unearthed all the cavities of my identity that no book, professor, or friend have even considered.

Together, we had informal discussions about Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Mardi Gras, their mamas and pop pops, snoballs, their dreams, and their superpowers. One day we had a heated debate about if America's "stain of slavery" (the wording used by the curriculum) is really, truly gone. After research, they decided that the stain is still here. My student Jaamal said, "We may not see it, but we know it's there, like you have to look very, very, very, very hard and close your eyes like this (squints)." I agreed.

My third graders held stories and creativity and compassion and patience. I say patience because even though they were being taught by educators so completely removed from their realties and by educators who often disrespected their cultures and ways of being, they still were patient and open-minded while we, the educators, stayed stagnant in our one-dimensional beliefs on children, Blackness, and radical teaching. When I think of the word *patient*, I think of a former student, Ms. Cash'A Hunt—she was a whole mood.[5]

How I First Came to Know Black Girlhood in New Orleans

Back in 2014 in New Orleans, my students had 15 minutes for lunch and 10 minutes for recess, walked on colored tape with bubbles in their mouths, and the leadership team could not

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[5] Big energy and her own personality.

figure out what was going on with the students and why there was **no joy.** I told myself I would never become *one* of the teachers who took their joy.

My student, Cash'A, was one of the most special people I have ever met. Truly, she is one of a kind. Cash'A was taller than all of the other third graders because supposedly she was held back twice—this was a site of sore jokes from her peers and educators and the base of discipline threats from educators (i.e., educators would often say, "Do you want to be held back again?!?"). Cash'A clashed personally with almost all of her educators, which predisposed her to be disengaged from school and uncompassionate toward discipline measures. She loved to laugh, wear tight skinny jeans on dress-down days, and knew everyone's business. Cash'A asked questions and tried *so so so* hard. She barely ever made it to basic proficiency academically, but she told the most beautiful stories that centered her love for her family. Already at about 10 years old, she had developed a voice that was soft but powerful. Her drawings still light up my brain.

I have many memories as an educator, and some stand out more than others—for better or for worse. There was a day before a high-stakes benchmark test, when as the ELA teacher, I had to further prep my students and practice test-taking strategies. In one of my two third grade classes of 30, Cash'A included, we were reading a nonfiction passage about snow—something most of the students had not seen but were expected to be invested in (because we know how these exams go). I remember looking at Cash'A during this class, and she just kept fidgeting with her hair—she had a ponytail weave that would not stay in place properly. She loved fun hairstyles. I remember saying something along the lines of "Cash'A, don't you want to do well...please stay focused." As if it were so simple. But Cash'A still persisted to attempt to perfect her hair while the indoctrinated educator that was now me (that I had become) became

annoyed by her lack of attention. As I reflect on this situation, this is the part that haunts me the most.

At this moment, my form of "discipline" was to make her take out her ponytail weave, and I hung it up in the front of the classroom and then told her she needed to focus. I remember Cash'A's classmates laughing at her. I remember Cash'A not even fighting, but just standing there embarrassed and crying. I remember her taking out that ponytail weave and her self-esteem and joy vanishing.

After the class period, Cash'A asked when she could get her ponytail back, and I told her she could retrieve it when her mom came and got it from school. Her mom never came because she was always working. The ponytail weave stayed in the drawer of my desk along with "Gu-Bucks," the fake money named after the principal that was given to students for good behavior.

Days, weeks, and months passed, and Cash'A forgot about it and I did too. At the end of the school year, I remember Cash'A saying to me, "I love you, Ms. Nicol! Imma miss you. But don't think I forgot about my hairrrrrrrrr!" She was so forgiving to me after a moment that caused, or could have caused, severe joy stealing and emotional violence on the tenderness of Black girls in America.

When I first met the city of New Orleans, I did not treat the city with the respect that it deserved. When I first started teaching predominantly Black children in the city of New Orleans, I was unprepared and did not even understand my own Blackness and what could have even been possible to be a critical educator in that space during that time for those students and families.

One thing I do know is that Cash'A Hunt is probably one of the most dynamic people I have ever met. One of our first interactions we had was when she told me ***I was not Black like***

her. I think this was when the seed of exploring Black girlhood was born because, indeed, we had similarities but our differences were vast.

Cash'A, and all 39 of the third grade Black girls I taught in New Orleans, were so out of this world, and also constricted by their school and the traumas of their families and history of the city. They thrived in ways people did not want to take note of, and were drowning in a city that has neglected Black people—even the youngest members were sinking in the inequities— but still there were stories, joy, movement, and art. My girls were everything. I came to grad school to find the words to meet their power and the frameworks with which to study their magic. Figure 6 is a book my students self-wrote and published about their fairytales and folktales related to their own lives.

Figure 6. My Students' Book

When I first visited New Orleans, I did not have the words and frameworks. Now, as a doctoral student and resident of New Orleans, I may not have the words, but I do have the respect and clarity to understand how geography, environment, race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, health pandemics, and resources can all merge to give Black girls in New Orleans a specific way of being, understanding, and navigating their worlds. From my observations, it can be a girlhood that is grainy, unpretentious, colorful, emotional, forgiving, joyful.

Cash'A Hunt was my first teacher of this lesson.

The participants in this dissertation study have continued to teach me more and more. The context provided was based on their realities and the history of New Orleans (education, race, etc.) as it related to them, their stories and their families' insights.

Context of Place: New Orleans

New Orleans is a city along the Mississippi River in Louisiana. The city is known for its music, cuisine, and the *resilience* of the people, or, as I like to say, it is a place where people have to live a life in which they have to be resilient. Additionally, it is one of the Blackest cities in North America, with 61% of the population identifying as Black (New Orleans Population, 2022). What I have realized from formal and informal chats throughout the duration of my research study is that, in New Orleans, history is just as vital an element in the city's culture as food, music, architecture, spirituality, and celebration. In fact, history may be the most powerful force because the stories we know, and have come to know, shape how we view every other aspect of the culture, Blackness, girlhood, and education.

The parents and grandparents involved in this study drew on memories and artifacts because many histories in New Orleans are passed down orally and are often not captured in textbooks or assessed on standardized tests. A piece of history (that often goes without

acknowledgment) in New Orleans intersects with the city, the Deep South, education, Black girlhood, and *Brown v. Board of Education* (Brownstein, 2014). In the landmark decision in 1952, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that U.S. state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional, even if the segregated schools were otherwise equal in quality. After this ruling, it was not until 1960 that Ruby Bridges, a Black girl, a kindergartner, was one of the first Black children to attend the all-white public school William Frantz Elementary in the South.

William Frantz Elementary is located in New Orleans and is one of the first schools in the Deep South to become integrated. The city of New Orleans is divided up into 17 wards. William Frantz Elementary School, into which Ruby Bridges walked, is in the Ninth Ward. One of my participants' grandmother remembers moving into the Ninth Ward in the 1960s a few blocks from William Frantz Elementary. She shared that the neighborhood was diverse, but the streets were divided between Black and white blocks. She said, "Everyone got along just fine, until they didn't. There were Black people, Polish people, and a lot of immigrants with no problems." My participant's grandmother went on to say, "But they do not teach my girls—our girls about Ruby and it happened right here. Right here."

William Frantz Elementary School is about a 10-minute drive from the home of my participants and the schools they attend. It is a symbol of courageous Black girlhood within reach, but that goes unaddressed and unmentioned in many schools in New Orleans—though this was not always the case. My participant's grandmother said:

> Coming up, we used to have Black teachers telling us the way. Like about ourselves and how we can love each other and how to see the world and the Black was everything. Things were hard, but I felt good about me and I felt good about my family and my community and I knew our history. *They told us things*. Things are different with the kids now and really after Katrina...it's like everything started and ended around Katrina. We used to feel good as Black kids, that's for sure, now you gotta be scared to be Black.

Figure 7. Joel's Grandmother and Family

Figure 7 shows Joel's grandmother with her daughter Jasmine and grandchildren. To

offer some insight into Joel's grandmother's memory, prior to Hurricane Katrina, the education

system was made up of public elementary schools. Because so much of the city began and ended

before and after Katrina, the storm will be mentioned often, as New Orleanians mention it often.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and flooded 80% of the city (Lincove, 2018). Mardi

Gras, celebrations, and the colorful houses tend to disguise the trauma that the city has faced, and

the systematic racism that the city has experienced and continues to feel. One of the side effects

of Hurricane Katrina included a large wipe-out of the city's failing public schools. Post storm, the educational system was rebuilt from the ground up as an experiment for charter schools. The storm birthed the first all-charter school network in the United States (*Sun Herald*, 2018), along with gentrification and the displacement of many of its residents—specifically Black people (Marshall, 2017)

Those most affected by the storm were, and are, Black people because of the systematic racism steeped in the city that exists in housing inequities and poor schooling experiences of Black children (Marshall, 2017). Data has shown that citywide, there has been educational progress in New Orleans post Katrina (Center on Reinventing Public Education, 2018). Though these academic advancements are important, these academic gains are occurring at the expense of children of color.

Black girls may have educators who have not examined their racial and gender attitudes and thus disenfranchise Black girls in soft, as well as explicit forms, of everyday violence (Miller & Harris, 2018). Given the rich culture of the city engulfed by a terrain of struggle, racism, and resilience, I attempted to situate the voices of Black girls in New Orleans as they navigate these layers along with gender and sometimes socioeconomic status in New Orleans schooling.

"That is not what summer is about":
Meeting the Participants and Opening up the Possibilities

This dissertation research began in the Summer of 2021 in New Orleans, Louisiana, with the hopes of in-person data collection, story sharing, and art making. Due to COVID-19, data collection had to be modified—often.

The participants were Sia, Mya, and Joel. Sia was 9 years old. Sia and Mya are sisters. Gladys, their mother, described her eldest daughter Sia as "the person who thinks she knows it all. She is always talking and goes off topic because she has a lot to say to the world." Sia's little

sister, Mya, was 8 years old. Gladys described Mya as "the dancer and singer and designer…she is the popstar!" Sia and Mya have a 4-year-old sister who desperately wanted to take part in the study, but they both agreed their baby sibling "would just wreck everything!" Joel was 8 years old and was Mya and Sia's neighbor. Jasmine, Joel's mom, described Joel as "really fascinating and philosophical. She is so honest it hurts." All three girls identified as Black girls and lived in the same apartment complex in New Orleans. Their complex is an artist loft, and both mothers, Gladys and Jasmine, are multimodal artists, born and raised in Louisiana. Both mothers identified as single Black women who were single moms to three daughters and live and breathe art. As mentioned, Sia and Mya have a younger sister and Joel has two older teen sisters. All six girls (participants and their sisters) are in art magnet schools and programs and are specifically enrolled in these schools for their creative extracurriculars. Below are miniature vignettes so that readers can get better get to know each participant.

Joel

One morning after the storm and when school returned to normal, Joel was in the car with her mom while waiting in the student dropoff line. The night before, Joel had explained to her mother that, in class, they have table mates where each pod consists of two people. Joel felt happy that she got to sit next to her *very* best friend as her table mate, and they have been sitting next to each other for a while. However, Joel came home and told her mother that her teacher would be switching her table mate. Her mother asked her, "Why is she doing that? Is it 'cause y'all were talking?" Joel said no, that was not the case. That night, Joel could not stop talking about the switch. Her mother said very few things to Joel, who still could not stop talking about it that night or the next day at dropoff. She was experiencing a lot of stress about the change because she could not figure out why it was happening. Joel then asked her teacher if she could

pick her replacement, and her teacher said no. Joel's mother asked her, "Why are you so stressed about it?" Joel said, "Because she said she was switching me! It feels personal. Also, I want to sit next to someone I know and love. Also, not everyone keeps their desk tidy and follows the rules. I do not want to be sitting next to just anybody." Joel's mother told her to go to school and keep an open mind because maybe her new table partner could work out. Joel came home from school that evening and simply said, "It did not work out, but I will just get over it, I guess. But I am not happy about it." Figure 8 shows Joel in the big open community space in the girls' apartment building. This was often where our inquiry groups were held.

Figure 8. Joel

Sia

On one of my first visits to Sia and Mya's home, I was greeted by a house full of plants and cats. I said, "Wow, you all have so many living things in here!" Sia said, "Yep and we're gonna get more." Her mother said, "Oh no we are not, girlfriend!" During this informal visit, Sia

told me about their 4+ kittens. She walked me through how she takes care of them and each of their personalities and temperaments. I said, "Well, they all kind of look alike. I mean, how do you know which one is which?" Sia said, "I know them 'cause I raise them and I love them. Now, that is _____ (insert cat name) he gotta keep his bell on or we will lose him. Do you know what I mean? I like to sing to them, and I let them cuddle in bed with me." Sia's mom said she is so nurturing and built with love. Figure 9 shows Sia holding one of her kittens. The photo was taken by her sister Mya.

Figure 9. Sia and Her Kitten

Mya

On another visit to Sia and Mya's home, I decided to get my hair braided by their mother Gladys. I sat in the kitchen/living room in a dining room chair while Gladys detangled, sectioned, and braided my hair. Halfway through the appointment, Gladys asked Mya for advice on how she should design my braids. Mya said, "Hmmmm. That looks good, mom! I think you should do some criss-cross and leave that part out maybe…?" Gladys told her daughter that she liked her advice. A few minutes, Mya came back to "check in." She said, "You took my

suggestion!" She turned to me and said, "You are gonna look cute when you leave. Do not worry! I won't set you up!!!"[6] Figure 10 also shows Mya with one of their cats.

Figure 10. Mya and Her Cat

The Setting

As mentioned before, all three participants lived in the same apartment complex. The setting where they lived add/ed texture to this research. For more than 100 years, the two blocks worth of what was formerly the Art School (pseudonym) campus has been anchored in New Orleans' Tremé neighborhood as a place for education, music training, and cultural development. Abandoned since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the five-building apartment complex has become a center of the community by offering 79 units of affordable live/work housing for low- to moderate-income artists, cultural workers, and families, and the space has creative and common spaces for creative use for residents and their community.

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[6] Phrase in this context to mean, "I will not let you leave looking bad or not cute."

One of these spaces was where the girls would meet collectively in the community room of their complex while I initially joined virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions and later in person. The complex was set within the Tremé, one of the oldest Black neighborhoods in the United States, where Black Indians can/have been heard chanting "Wont Bow Down, Dont Know How" on Mardi Gras Day (see Figure 11). The significance of the neighborhood is framed by the Civil Rights Movement, FREE Black people, and the jazz culture.

Figure 11. Mardi Gras
Mardi Gras Indian on Film, by Maureen (top)
Black Girls as a Mardi Gras Indian on Film, by Maureen (bottom)

Context: Framing the Girls During This Time

During our initial one-one-one virtual interviews with Joel in her apartment, her mom could be seen in the background dancing and her two older sisters were in and out of frame. I sat with Joel, a rising second grader. She was playing with some blocks and stacking them into various shapes. There was some scuffle or discussion about her older sister going on a date and Joel said, "You are going on a date with a boy you literally just met LAST NIGHT (eye roll and smile)." Joel's mom said, "Hey hey hey mind your business and soon it is going to be bedtime." Jaserya responded with, "Bedtime? **That is not what summer is about**." She said it with a cheeky smile. Joel's mom then said, "...and you also need to clean your room!" to which Joel replied, **"THAT IS NOT WHAT SUMMER IS ABOUT!"** Joel's mom said to me poking her head on screen, "She been sayin' that for weeks. Telling me what summer is NOT about and all of that!"

I asked Joel**, "Then what is summer about?**

Directly looking into the camera, Joel answered:

I just do not want to spend my summer like *that.* This is the longest I get with no school.
It is about now.
It is about me.

For the Summer of 2021, the girls and I got together in their apartment complex, built in favor of the community organizers and artists in New Orleans, set in one of the first Black neighborhoods in the United States known for the freedom and creativity of Black people. They worked collectively as I looked on, and the moments were about them and now because, according to Joel, that is what summer is about. This is a showcase of their data and how they discussed what was important to them.

Interlude/Pause/Break?!?: What Is Black Girl Magic?!

> Maureen: How do you feel about being a Black girl. What does is it mean?
> Sia: It feels wonderful...great!
> Maureen: Do you feel proud to be a Black girl?
> Sia: Yes
> Maureen: At school or in general?
> Sia: In general.... At school people are like really nice to me.
> Maureen: Joel, how do you feel about being a Black girl? Do you consider yourself a Black girl?
> Joel: Ahhhh yea I do and I like **how my skin is like chocolate and caramel.**
> Maureen: You like how your skin is like chocolate and caramel? Hmmmm. Did you come up with those colors yourself? Like how did you know chocolate and caramel?
> Joel: 'Cause they are light?!?!
> Maureen: So, do you feel like good when you like look in the mirror and go out?
> Joel: Mhmmm!
> Maureen: Why?
> Joel: 'Cause I look pretty
> Maureen: Do you think there is something about you 'cause you are Black girl?
> Joel: Ummm yea.
> Maureen: What is that?
> Joel: Uhhh mmmm 'cause 'cause I can make up something and also I can talk some things about Black people?
> Maureen: Like what?
> Joel: Like they are really brave and they have dream jobs.
> Maureen: Wow, so do what does Black girl magic mean? Have you heard that before?
> Joel: It means something…like there is something magical to Black girls.
> Maureen: Like what?
> Joel: Like their skin color and how they look.
> Maureen: Do you believe there is something magical?
> Joel: Mhmm!
> Maureen: What?
> Joel: Like hmmm maybe I can go to space potentially.
> Maureen: So, you think 'cause you have Black girl magic you can go to space?
> **Joel: Yes! 'Cause if I have a little magic on my side, I can have a little luck to go to space.**

Rationale for the Research Design

Qualitative research is an activity that situates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). These practices can turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, one-on-one sessions, conversations through collective inquiry groups, photographs, and recordings

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(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research aims to interpret sociocultural phenomena in relation to the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This type of research involves collecting and analyzing (non-numerical) data to understand concepts, opinions, people, or experiences. It is used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research.

In this study, I sought to understand the experiences of young Black girls in America on their own unique terms in order to generate new ideas on young children, Blackness, and girlhood. Given the range of qualitative research approaches and my commitments to centering the perspectives and questions of Black girls themselves, this inquiry brought together art-based visual approaches and participatory action research (PAR) methodologies.

Co-Researching with Children Through Participatory Methodologies

Participatory methodologies are a form of action research that are intended to be attuned to the well-being, practices, and goals of the participants themselves. Participatory action-oriented research encompasses the systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and taking action to make practical change and *new noticings*. This type of research is a circular process of data collection, reflection, and action that is conducted collectively with research participants (MacDonald, 2012). Participatory action-oriented research is a democratic process that recognizes and supports those who are often the subjects of research studies and sees them as *people with knowledge and power* who have the right to participate in all phases of research, from design to analysis, when it concerns their own lived experiences (Vollman et al., 2004).

According to University of Berkeley (2018), Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is an innovative approach to youth and community development that works based on

social justice principles that engage young people in systematic research to potentially improve

their lives, communities, and institutions intended to serve them. YPAR has the potential to:

1. reconsider who is seen as producing knowledge in our world;

2. provide skills of inquiry, community, and collaboration to young people;

3. generate findings that can only be surfaced based on the issues and experiences young

   people face; and

4. evaluate systems and structures that young people interact with.

YPAR can be powerful for young people who are experiencing marginalization due to

racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, or other forms of oppression

(YPAR Hub, 2018). Additionally, both PAR and YPAR emphasize the sharing of power;

however, the dynamic is unique because there is an inherent power differential between adults

and youth that must be acknowledged and surmounted, to some degree. The process of YPAR

calls for adults to *work with young people* as researchers with equal voice in the cycle of inquiry

and action (Ozer & Douglas, 2015). To align to the theoretical implications of YPAR as an adult

who is researching with young children, I must promote ownership of leadership thought

processes, respect the ideas generated by participants, and guide them in managing the

responsibilities of their research (Larson et al., 2005; Ozer & Douglas, 2015). I approached my

dissertation research in this way as well to give the respect, responsibility, and ownership that are

often kept from Black girls and early childhood students.

In alignment with YPAR, my research with my participants had the goal of developing

(visual) narratives of worth and collaboration among the participants based on their lived

experiences in order to interrogate systems and narratives. The hallmark of YPAR that sits at the

cornerstone of my research method is the valuing of the lived experiences of Black girls and their rights to research issues and interest that impact them.

Participatory Action Research and Valuing Lived Experiences

Collectively and collaboratively, Black girls in this study were constructing knowledge, curiosities, and community as they looked closely at their lives and the world around them (Chen et al., 2010). Unlike traditional research methods, these constructs are formed by the lived experiences of participants and are seen as research partners. Through these conversations and constructs, participants had the opportunity to deliberately and subconsciously identify, understand, and inquire into social problems, their identities, and their own inquiries (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; London et al., 2003). Conducting research with individuals is an intentional method of producing knowledge that generates data by the people who are most affected by social inequities in ways that are authentic to their own experiences and contributes to the larger body of knowledge (Latz, 2017; Liebenberg, 2018; Nykiforuk et al., 2011).

To center Black girls' own perspectives and lived experiences among intersecting pandemics, I followed the tenets of YPAR, which included: (a) youth training and practice of research skills; (b) introduction and practice of critical thinking; and (c) adults sharing power with the young people involved in the research. To value the experiences of Black girls, power needs to be shared with them so they can voice and create loudly in order to story their lives. Power is the central element in what keeps Black girls stratified in society, and it is the central element in YPAR that promotes the narrative-sharing of young people to influence systems and communities to listen, pause, and pay attention (Ozer & Douglas, 2015). Only limited research studies have included Black girls and young children in early childhood settings in such

democratic ways. To open as many pathways as possible for Black girls to express themselves, I utilized open-ended visual methods in the form of photovoice and visual art-marking.

Rationale for Visual Methods: Art, Politics, and Resistance

Deciding to take a photo is an active choice that is agentic and powerful, and, in 2020-2021—the height of the Black Lives Matter movement—also a political statement and a form of survival. In the Black community, cameras have been used as a tool for survival and truth telling. Citizen footage, the act of documenting from the ground in real time via cameras—specifically camera phones—have played a pivotal role in the Black Lives Matter movement by documenting, streaming, and sparking questions on police brutality and racism (Seiner, 2020).

In the wake of Breonna Taylor's and George Floyd's deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic, cameras and camera phones have allowed protestors, activists, and community organizers to tell their stories, share them, and be in dialogue with their content on social media. Every demonstration, act of violence, and change in the global pandemics of racism, sexism, and COVID-19 is being documented and shared, many of which serve as evidence of what Black communities have been complaining about for years.

Because of citizen footage and user-generated data, Black people have been able to change the narratives on Blackness, Black communities, and the power of community organizing through digital research and digital storytelling. Instead of looking at the news, people are looking for visual data from camera-bearing and cellphone-bearing citizens. The contemporary and historical research, experiences, and injustices of Black people continue to be documented in ways that are often visceral and in response to how society has created and maintained systems of oppression for and against Black girls on the basis of race/racism and gender/sexism. For example, "The Evidence of Things Not Seen," a photography exhibit at Johannesburg Art

Gallery, foregrounds "the intangible but pervasive nature of identity" that can sometimes only be captured through photographs. The exhibition stands on the quote, "Of all art mediums, photography is perhaps the greatest weapon against exposing and calling to order injustice. A photograph has a sense of immediacy and cannot be denied" (Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2018). While my research is not about the realities of South Africa's apartheid or the daily inequities, indignities, and injustice visited on Black South Africans, this exhibit pointed to the benefits of photography and visual methods to portray the tensions that exist between white supremacy, inequities, and the transnationalism of Blackness that are indeed immediate and cut across contexts and time.

Both citizen footage and photographic explorations of racial identity underscore the role of photography in social justice movements. Intentionally, I wanted the Black girls who were participating in and co-constructing this study to use a tool that was foreign but familiar to them and that felt unique to this research. While the girls were not using camera phones or other devices that can quickly publish images, the disposable camera may have conversely encouraged them to pause before taking a photo with the understanding that every exposure counts.

Miller Marsh and Zhulamanova (2017) positioned young children as curriculum-makers by giving them cameras, asking them to take pictures of the things that mattered to them the most in their home environment, and integrating students' interests into the classroom environment. The camera serves as a means for students to narrate their identities and share their lived experiences, and when the teachers decide to take students' input seriously, students' social and academic engagement dramatically improves. Souto-Manning (2017) and Adair et al. (2017) found that young children of color who can engage in free play, move freely about the classroom, and ask and search for answers to their own questions are also able to "[ask]

questions, [develop] community, and [stand] up for fairness" (Souto-Manning, 2017, p. 787), although these opportunities for play and for agentic learning, especially in the form of art, are too often denied to young children of color.

With my dissertation research, I inquired into how the use of visual methods, predominantly photovoice with the research tool of a camera and photography as the medium, can speak to the immediacy of the need to pause, listen, and learn from Black girls and their experiences while also creating a moment for them to share the deepest parts of themselves (hooks, 1981). Furthermore, I asked how these user-generated data created in the form of images that represent Black girls can help re-shift narratives on Black girlhood.

Photovoice Methodology

Photovoice is a participatory research method designed to support participants through photography and storytelling, often in a small group setting (Miln & Muir, 2020). Furthermore, this method allows participants to share their perceptions, questions, and lived experiences by capturing and narrating their images. Photovoice has roots in feminist and critical consciousness that align with this study's intention of seeing, expressing, and narrating as a form of building Black girl artistic legacies and legitimizing and affirming their multitudes (Harley & Hunn, 2015; Harley et al., 2015; Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice is known for providing space for people from marginalized groups to enact their agency through the construction of meaning from their own realities (Minthorn & Marsh, 2016). By design, the photovoice process elicits meaning from images of the participants' realities. This is especially necessary with the experiences of Black girls who often live in adult-authored worlds in a society that is oppressive to their identities.

I believe young children—young Black children—have a vibrancy that cannot and should not be contained. Because of this vibrancy, I believed that photovoice would provide the opportunity for my participants to harness their photo exploration and their own voices and experiences to respond to (educational) inequities and limited imaginations of Black girlhood. Therefore, this research was grounded with these understandings and approaches with working with young Black children and visual methods (in this case, photography specifically):

1. A camera can work as a tool for Black girls to express themselves.

2. Photovoice and the process of meaning-making with the participants can provide creative ways to imagine new solutions and discussions to old problems and narratives.

3. Youth have the right and ability to fight for these new discussions, solutions, and narratives while engaging themselves and their communities.

Scholars have documented the need for young children to have a voice in sharing their perspectives within the classroom space, and of the generative role of photography for fostering inquiry with young children (Fontaine & Luttrell, 2015; Ghiso, 2016; Templeton, 2020). Thus, this study documented how Black girls engaged with their own artistic research during multilayered and intersectional pandemics in their racial and gendered identities by allowing each child to use disposable cameras for photo exploration to inquire into themselves and the people and spaces around them. Photography has the power to cross cultural and linguistic barriers while capturing moments in time, and it is suitable for a range of abilities and age groups, including young children. Photovoice is a creative method that can easily tap into the minds of children and support them in communicating their genius both visually and verbally (Derr et al., 2013; Gant et al., 2009; Goodhart et al., 2006). By utilizing photography as an

artistic medium and form of expression, this study provided Black girls with the autonomy to explore their own worlds and the landscapes of their lives while storytelling. This method can also help to extend the conversation that the Black girls in this study began with their work. With the potential goal of participants creating a digital exhibit, their images can invite a larger community of participants into the conversation (Derr et al., 2013; Driskell, 2002).

Together, Black feminist thought and photovoice can create openings and possibilities for young Black girls to develop and speak their own critical consciousness in the form of their own images and digital stories. Given the age of the participants and how they were positioned in society due to age, race, and gender, photovoice and a camera as the tool allowed for multiple, open-ended opportunities for Black girls to interact with the world and themselves in this deliberate way. With at least two disposable cameras, the research became ongoing (Luttrell, 2010) and the meaning-making (Riessman, 2008) around their experiences were communicated in their own interpretations by how they decided they wanted to author moments and images. Because the construction of meaning-making and children's realities continue, there will always be tools accessible to them to explore these constructions and realities. The voice of the photo becomes louder when participants decide how they want to engage and interact with the images, if they want to share the images with the world, and which narratives surface from the many ways in which they share their work (Rose, 2013).

Summary of Methodological Rationale

A participatory action research (PAR) approach with specific attention to photovoice was the chosen methodology for my dissertation. Grounded in Black feminist and critical theoretical roots, participatory inquiry using photos called for re-imagining Black girls in society by acknowledging and supporting them as people who generate unique knowledge by shifting

power dynamics (Harley et al., 2015; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005) and honoring their voices, realities, and concerns with their chosen images (Harley et al., 2015). The benefits of this research design were on behalf of my participants and society at large. I hope these Black girls, who formed part of my dissertation study, experience increased decision making, a sense of power and community, the feeling of being free to create and take risks, and the ability to practice their critical analysis skills by participating in this study as co-researchers.

With this research, I considered how young children can be/become co-researchers of their own lives. Through this form of visual storytelling and research, I co-constructed this study with and for them.

Overview of Methods

This study took place over 6 months, from June through December 2021. Fieldwork for this study included artifact collection of photos (two disposable cameras per participant) and collages made with their photos, individual one-on-one sessions with each participant (no more than six sessions of about 15 minutes each per participant), and inquiry groups with all participants together (no more than six sessions). In these inquiry groups, participants discussed their photos in relation to current events and their identities and any other ideas that piqued their interest (e.g., each other's photos, current events, joys, etc.). In terms of participant data collection, participants took photos in their communities in their everyday lives using disposable cameras as their research tools. After participants took all of their photos, they were invited to make a collage that represented them using their photo prints and a provided art care package. At the end of participant data collection, they were asked if they want/ed to share their photos with others, and if they did, they would help create a digital gallery of their photos and curate this gallery based on how they wanted their photos and stories to be shared via their discussions,

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opinions, and creative abilities. In this very deliberate way, the voices, lives, and communities of these young Black girls were centered through their co-creation of this digital gallery. One-on-one sessions and collective inquiry group discussions occurred via Zoom and were recorded, but this changed to in-person meetings outdoors and masked indoor meetings as the safety and health guidelines of research during COVID-19 permitted. All materials were mailed to participants. This was cadence of the collective and individual one-on-one sessions.[7]

- **Phase one: Getting to know everyone**
  - One-on-one[8] sessions with each participant to get to know them and their families.
  - Collective session to introduce all the participants, discuss the study, and do research training and rollout of cameras.
  - One-on-one sessions to check in with them on their work.
  - One collective session to discuss work and process after photos were developed.
- **Phase two: Continuing the work**
  - One-on-one sessions to check in with everyone and delve more deeply into pieces, noticings, and/or questions (second cameras distributed).
  - One collective session to discuss work after photos were developed.
- **Phase three: Processing the process**
  - Art care packages distributed → one-on-one sessions to discuss the planning of their collages.
  - Collective session to discuss collages.

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[7] Participants were informed that they could call for extra sessions or feel good about where they were and not attend upcoming sessions.
[8] One-on-one sessions were no more than 15 minutes.

- One collective session to discuss the overall process, coding, and digital gallery.
- Last one-on-one sessions were member checking and affirming the girls of their capabilities.

The participants, Black girls ages 7-9 years, were involved in the data collection, the meaning-making, and the interpretation, and they impacted the dissemination of the findings. This translated into participants creating images and art, guiding the direction of inquiry groups, participating in coding images, and assisting with curating the digital gallery of their work, which aligned with my belief that young children have the right to express themselves on all matters affecting them (Lundy, 2011). Scholars who have carried out research where children are co-researchers made clear that there are limits to what children can and will want to do in adult-led research studies (Lundy, 2011). Nonetheless, there are positive implications of children's contributions to discussions which impact them when they receive the support, strategies, and resources to engage with their questions, thoughts, and world in meaningful ways. For the purposes of this study, the meaningful ways took the form of Photovoice, collaging, and inquiry groups using the research timeline below.

Research Plan

The timeline for this study was as follows:

Month 1: I identified participants and developed relationships with them virtually and over the phone. I sought nominations for participants from teacher friends, colleagues, and community members and developed relationships with the families of the participants. I explained the study to the girls and their families so they felt comfortable, supported, and invested. I also carried out brief one-on-one sessions with them during this time. I aimed to recruit three Black girls in Grades K-2. The first digital meeting occurred so participants could

meet each other, discuss the project, and gather how the current moment of intersecting

pandemics has impacted their lives. At this point, the first round of disposable cameras was

mailed out. The girls were introduced to disposable camera/film and photography and became

comfortable with the camera and how to use it as a tool.

Months 2 and 3: I conducted in-depth inquiries with participants individually and

collectively. Unpacking their first round of research experiences with the cameras, I

teleconferenced discussions with participants (i.e., how do you feel about using the cameras,

what are some things you learned about yourself and your community during this time, what are

your thoughts on COVID-19, etc.). Participants discussed their photos in relation to these

questions and had the opportunity to shape questions and discussions. For example, I asked them

if there were key questions I should include in our inquiry groups. Photos were already

developed, scanned, and available for participants digitally and via screen sharing.

Months 4 through 6: The second wave of camera disbursement and data collection by

participants commenced. I developed and scanned these photos and held another inquiry group

session. During this phase, I sent out art care packages for participants to collage their photos.

Participants discussed these collaged stories and what they represented. After data collection, we

analyzed the data and inquired into the meaning(s) of their artistic representations while working

collaboratively to curate a digital exhibit that put their data in dialogue. During months 4-6 (post

data collection and future plans), data analysis occurred.

<div align="center">

Overview of Activities: Data Production

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Community Building and Research Training

Prior to data collection, participants attended an hour-long "research training." In this

virtual session, participants met each other, got clarity on the research study and steps, became

aware of how they would co-construct the study with me, and asked questions. Project goals were outlined together with the girls. I used an ice breaker so the participants could begin to know each other. Participants conducted a virtual gallery walk of photos (that they brought beforehand) they liked by Black women and shared why they liked them. Participants also received the opportunity to learn about their cameras.

Research Training: Data Collection with a Disposable Camera

For this research study, participants used disposable cameras or single-use cameras meant to be utilized one time and then developed. The cameras had 27 exposures and a flash. Many types of cameras could have been used for this study, so the decision to use a disposable camera was intentional. In the present digital age, people (children included) have become accustomed to instant gratification that digital cameras and camera phones can provide. I wanted the tool the participants used for data collection to be a novelty, foreign and special. The decision to put disposable cameras in the hands of the participants for their data collection is intended to encourage a slower form of taking photos and a process that was thoughtful and required participants and me to sit with (a) the photo they wanted to take, (b) how their photo turned out and the memories connected to the moment, and /(c) the process of the data collection (i.e., taking the photo, processing and sifting through prints). The choice of a disposable camera also spoke to my desire to take the work of young children seriously and, thus, give them a tool with which they could engage specifically for this study in order to author their identities. Each participant received at least two disposable cameras and could take at least 54 photos. At the beginning of the study, I included an orientation to the disposable camera which entailed how to use it. The overview included a breakdown of what a disposable camera was, how to advance and use the flash, what the counter/dial exposures left meant; how to use the viewfinder, and how

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to "wait" for photos. I did all this via Zoom or phone call, if and as often is needed.

During this time, participants and I also discussed art response prompts to help guide their making. For example, some questions were:

1. How do you see yourself as a Black girl?

2. How do you think others see you as a Black girl?

3. How does being a Black girl impact or affect your life?

We came up with prompts together to guide their work when these prompts did not work.

Research Training: How Participants Were Guided to Take Photos

I was curious about the photos themselves as well as the interpretive process of when/how the participants expressed that they made decisions to use the camera to determine what and how to shoot pictures. Dr. Wendy Luttrell (2010) conceptualized image-based work with young children through the concepts of voice, image, and narrative. By looking at how voice, narrative, and image /were entangled in the body of work that the girls created, I hoped to be invited into the many meanings of their representations and connect with them in one-on-one sessions and collective inquiry groups that respected their openness and multiple identities. To create the conditions for participants to have the room to make their own meaning with the cameras, I intentionally kept the directions and sessions open-ended. The initial prompt/instructions were given over a Zoom call with all participants in this manner:

- Think about who you are (pause and discuss).

- Think about the world right now (pause and discuss).

- Think about your community and family (pause and discuss).

- Think about what you are feeling (pause and discuss).

For example, I asked the girls, "Use your disposable camera to take photos of what you want people to know about you or what you want to share—the things that make you who you are. Take photos of the things that make you happy, curious, and even sad." Participants were reminded about respecting the autonomy of the people they photographed and how to practice respect. This sounded like, "You have to ask people for permission and respect their space and privacy and willingness if they do not want their photograph taken. If they do agree, you should thank them for helping you with your art."

Photo Processing and Inquiry Groups

Once a participant used up the disposable camera (there were two rounds of cameras), they mailed the camera back to me in a prepaid/addressed envelope to be developed at a photo store within 24 hours (see Appendix B on inquiry group and photo processing details). This ensured that the images were printed and developed in a timely fashion to conduct the first group discussion within days of the photo-making. As well, the photos were printed and mailed to the participants (in addition to their digital scans). Once the images were printed, I included a note in the mailed envelope to remind the participants to look through their images (digital or physical) and select up to five "favorite" or "most meaningful" images that they wanted to discuss in the Zoom conversation collectively. If more time was needed, I held one-on-one meetings with participants to delve more deeply into their work.

In our Zoom discussions and once the participants selected their "favorite" photos, they audience them in the group discussions (one participant at a time). If desired, the photographer/presenter showed and responded to questions about her photographs during that time. During the discussions, I focused on how the participants talked to each other and were in dialogue with their photos: what were their favorite images, what was their process of

photographing what are they talking about, what/who seemed to be included/excluded, and what was common or different across the participants and their works. While each participant shared, the others who are listening were asked to think about noticings and "wonderings" they had about the participant's work and thoughts.

Inquiry groups provided the opportunity for participants to take ownership of their work, thoughts, and desires by narrating their photos and the stories connected to their photos while highlighting the reasons they chose their "top five" photos, why they took them, and why these particular photos were important to share. The way participants story and audience their photos could allow a window into their experiences, identities, and truths. Additionally, the way participants discussed each other's works allowed for cross-cultural understandings of Black girlhoods—the similarities and various forms of Black girlhoods that can exist.

Collaging

All people are made of many experiences, moments, and feelings. Collaging is an art form that symbolizes these many elements. After participants took all of their photos and the cameras were developed and prints scanned, they were able to create collage pieces with their prints in addition to various art supplies. This act of collaging was seen as putting it all together or taking it all apart, but it was nonetheless a journey of "processing the process" as a form of sense-making. The collages were physically created with the contents of the art care packages that were mailed out (see Appendix B of art care package contents). According to Holbrook and Pourchier (2014), collaging can be an art form that tells us how we think by "searching for

visible traces of what happens when we think through data, theory, words, images, and lived experiences" (p. 755).

<div align="center">Figure 12. Collage</div>

These collages allowed participants to talk with texts, words, photos, voice, and art to speak within and about a singular instance or many instances and/or wherever their work led

them as they strung together the process to unpack and make sense of who they are within the many layers and spaces in which they exist. Collaging can offer a multimodal and multidimensional space that Black girls need to explore their brilliance in dynamic and extended ways while they cut, tear, rearrange, and repurpose pieces of their lives to create a picture that best represents them. They shared an unapologetic relationship of composition and configuring that was not always given and permissible for Black girls.

Sharing Virtually in a Digital Time

Ideally, inquiry groups take place in person so participants could share space while sharing themselves and their work, but due to COVID-19 restraints, this study took place virtually, unless restrictions on research guidelines changed. To account for this and not to

minimize the work of participants, after each girl selects their "top five" photos, I asked them to tell me which photos they selected and the order in which they want to share their photos with the group. I asked that they or their parents relay this information to me a day before each inquiry group. Once I had this information, I took the photo scans of their favorite photos and created an inquiry group PowerPoint/gallery for that day so I could easily share my screen of the selected photos while the sharing participant did not have to worry about the visibility of her photo. I advanced to the next photo or slide when she told me to and/or when the group was ready to move on. Each inquiry group focused on one to two participants sharing their work.

Postproduction of Activities

Coding Together: Black Girls as Researchers

One of the major tenets of my work was having Black girls sit with their data and code their photos. At the end of all of the photo/sharing inquiry groups, I had a visible display of each girl's "top five" photos. These photos were in Google photos with shared digital albums that the girls could access beforehand. I asked the girls to help me code what they were noticing—in short, how can they group the photos, memories, and experiences they shared with each other and with me? While sharing my screen, I physically moved photos into categories that the girls brainstormed and raised. To me, this information allowed them to be co-constructors of their knowledge and participate in their research by working together to create themes and strands that they found important about their lives and that best represented them and their work(s).

Data Analysis

This study generated two types of data: the artifacts produced by the girls, including their photos, collages, coded work, and digital gallery; and the data documenting their engagements

with the artifacts and with each other (e.g., field notes and transcripts from one-on-one sessions and collective inquiry groups).

The photographs, collective inquiry group discussions, one-on-one sessions, and collages from the art care packages were analyzed to make meaning of the participants' lives. I employed content analysis in an attempt to code for emerging themes to understand the experiences of the Black girls involved in this study and what these data could mean for larger narratives about Black girlhood (gender, race, and age). I also took into account how participants coded their data and their research processes in order to construct understandings of how they represent and analyze their experiences.

Content Analysis

A qualitative content analysis was the method to interpret these data sources. A content analysis was used because this method was ideal for interpreting the "messages encoded in the communication product" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 288). The content analysis process of the photos and art pieces included selecting a sample of artifacts to study, developing steps to classify the data, coding the data, and interpreting the results (Gall et al., 2007). Content analysis asks, "What can be learned about this phenomenon in question by studying certain documents?" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 31). The phenomena in question were the meanings and messages created by those impacted by race, gender. and age and how these constructs shaped how they see the world and how the world sees them. The approach I used with this content analysis was a thematic analysis of the sites of data, and I coded these themes. Since I initially coded with the girls, I derived codes and themes based on how they wanted their work interpreted. Then, I will did another layer of analysis on how they valued these themes and why and how they came up with

them. Zoom transcribed the virtual meetings so these transcriptions were read back to the girls

for accuracy and further analysis.

With participants, I created digital posters using Google slides; these contained case

studies for each participant including key facts/quotes from conversations from participants in

the inquiry groups, photos, artwork, and any necessary artifacts. Examples below are in Figures

13 and 14.
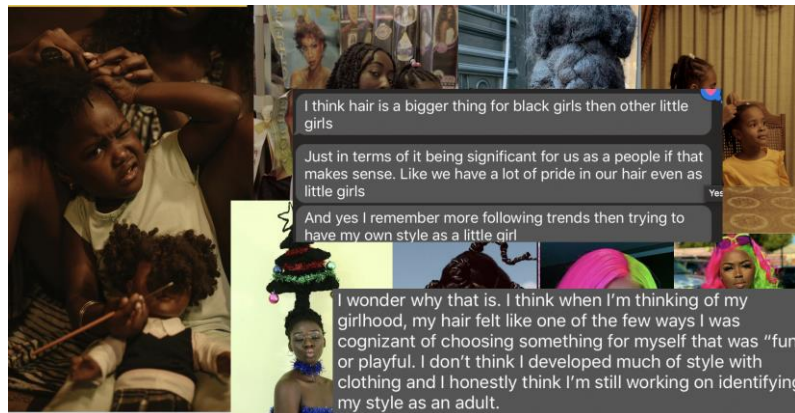
Figure 13. Google Slides and Digital Posters to Layer and Touch in Ways Words Cannot

Figure 14. Examples of How Combined Quotes and Images Provide
a Multimodal Approach Toward an Experience or a Question

I also created physical posters for my own understanding, coding, and analysis. The

posters were displayed to explore the data and any emerging themes and categories. This was

how initial themes and understandings of the data were made.

Narrative Analysis

After these initial phases of the analysis of the content, I used a narrative analysis

approach to understand how the participants words and art related to the social world and the

content created. It was not about the art and images they produced, but about the stories and

narratives around these productions. To lift their words and art together, I analyzed how they

were in dialogue together in connection to a larger context of the inquiry groups and what these

discussions could mean in society. By interpreting their artwork, words, coding, and

collaborative techniques through a narrative analysis, it was possible to link as many parts of

them and their hard work to larger discussions, social conditions, and systems (Rose, 2012) for a

more robust narrative and window into their lives, essentially to a larger narrative and story. To

guide this narrative analysis on Black girlhoods, I used Drew and Guillemin's (2014) questions

of (a) "what knowledges are deployed?" (p. 347) and (b) "whose knowledges are excluded from

this representation?" (p. 347). These questions explored the ways in which children and Black

girls are regarded in a larger context. With an effort to pay respect to the complex and dynamic

lives of Black girls and the many meanings their work can have, I saw their productions and

experiences as a valuable document of their social life and knowledges (Azoulay, 2012).

Furthermore, I considered these documents valuable and brilliant artifacts and literacies that can

have powerful contributions on how systems, society, and conditions are experienced or

remedied.

Member Checks

Towards the end of my analysis, I asked the participants if they agreed with/supported the

themes and noticings and if they believed anything was missing. I also shared my findings and

themes with participants and their families to ensure I made meaning of their experiences and

work in ways that were agreeable to them. They had the opportunity to ask questions, challenge ideas, and make suggestions during my analysis and coding process.

As mentioned above, I brought back themes and insights from this study to my co-researchers for a member check process after the coding and data analysis. The girls were asked to clarify meaning for their photos and art and provide feedback on themes; their responses were incorporated into the final analysis. These member checks took place via one-on-one sessions, as part of the inquiry groups, and through reviewing transcripts together. The co-researchers were reminded that alterations can and should take place so they could feel comfortable, proud, and represented. It was also important to note that the girls helped shape the data analysis from the beginning through engaging in their own coding processes.

Digital Gallery

In addition to traditional scholarship, this research generated a digital exhibit curated by Black girls who participated in this study. The exhibition was guided by the questions and concerns of the girls, with the goal of honoring their interpretive decisions and what they wanted to make visible (or not) to the wider group. After learning and sharing together, the girls worked together to curate an exhibit that engaged the larger community, centering Black girl identities (across time and space) and offering a powerful and accessible collective counter-story to the marginalization and erasure of Black girls and Black voices. The aim of the exhibit was to braid Black girlhood—its power, possibility, and ingenuity—into portraying how their language, stories, actions, connections with space, and relations conveyed cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that can better be apprehended. Educators and the larger community were invited to this space, along with whoever else the participants believed should be in attendance.

Pilot Work Using Visual Methods and Inquiry Pedagogies

My teaching approaches centered photography and arts integration as a form of meaning

making, expressing, and challenging. My art making with former students showed me that

children do have the power to work collaboratively, to build community without adults, and to

create spaces of inquiry that center their worlds. This context afforded me the opportunity to

unpack ways of facilitating collaborative inquiry using artistic and visual methods and to pilot

methods of visual data analysis. Something I found important with my projects with children was

the idea of seeing their "making" through from beginning to end (planning, executing, deciding

how it will be shared, etc.). Overall, I do believe that when I asked my students to see each

piece/project through, they willingly did so, and I think they did so as a way of seeing

themselves through—a way to show up and see themselves in an institution that was not

holistically made for them. These moments were filled with joy but also with questions, realities,

and community. The complexities and tensions that were present made it a space of inquiry that

students wanted to engage in to be curious about their worlds and themselves. It was a space of

realities, but it was also a space of reimaginings. My students could negotiate, exist, and create in

and for these two worlds while thinking deeply about who they were. Black children are

incredibly talented at doing this. Some of the institutions where I have taught had structures in

place that did not always bend to make room for the experiences and cultures of the students who

existed in the space because they were conditioned to <u>not</u> take up space. But to the best of my

abilities, I asked students to invite me into their interests. They humored my questions and

shared their concerns and curiosities. Oftentimes, this sounded like students sharing what they

wished they were reading or doing or making, and I followed up with statements like "So it

sounds like you want to do this (insert their desire). Is that correct? How can we make that

happen?" Together, we would dream, plan, and collaborate. I looked forward to bringing this same energy to this research through my methods and work with participants as we saw this work through as a way of seeing them. My teaching practices informed by dissertation research inquiries. I asked my students to be thought partners and dreamers with me to co-create a space of making and learning. It was important and intentional to show my students I was listening, and wanted to listen, to their desires; this made them feel valued and important. Additionally, by using the works and materials of Black artists, my Black students felt a sense of pride and were intrigued by the layers and complexities of Blackness.

Conclusion and Implications for This Methodology

Figure 15. Black Girls on the Way to Creating

When this research started to bloom, I began to mention it aloud to classmates and colleagues. The goal of this study to deliberately center the lived experiences of young Black girls was supported and acknowledged through art making, photography, and collective inquiry. A common response to the consideration of the participants as co-researchers and co-creators

was to position them as "cute" and "wholesome" and "ambitious." I was asked, for example, "How will you even get little kids to take pictures that are good?" These perspectives further illustrated the need for this research as they demonstrated how an adult-author lens makes assumptions about what young children can create and the quality of their creations. My assumptions were that I believed in the abilities of young children, and I was not just interested in the photos produced from these abilities but also curious about the individual and collective meanings that they produced through this inquiry. This research has the potential to be a revolutionary and rebellious act because it challenges the bounds and conventions of early childhood education, academic research, race, gender, and age.

These methods are provocative and political, serving as a means to encourage dialogue that substantiates the political, creative, and brilliant will of Black girls. The implications for this methodology do not lean towards a "good or bad photo." Rather, the implications for this methodology could influence participants to (a) self-define who they are, (b) create a sense of collectivism and community, (c) strengthen their critical awareness and consciousness, (d) believe they are artists with power, and (e) foreground **joy**. Black girls go without these feelings, base-level needs, and **joy** in their school settings on a daily basis. So, yes, to some degree, I believe it was ambitious to create a restorative space with mindful methods that attempted to foster experiences that Black girls have been conditioned to believe they do not deserve or are unworthy of.

Nothing About Us Without Us is a mantra that became the rallying call for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and has been taken up by various activist communities. When I heard this mantra, it replayed over in my head. This study was crafted for and with Black girls in mind to leave room for Black girls to represent their needs,

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identities, and stories. One contribution of this research is for these stories and works of arts to produce conversations on how this form of reimagining alongside reality can inform the formation of counter-narratives that value the dynamism of Black girls and the redesign of spaces in which Black girls can thrive.

Chapter 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Figure 16. Sia Taking a Photo of Mya and Her Sister Destiny,
by Their Mom Gladys

One of the purposes of this research was to explore the lived experiences of Black girls

through collectivism and art. By centering the girls' identities and communities, I mapped how

race, gender, age, location, and class impact their realities and notions of Black girlhood.

Furthermore, I considered how the participants negotiated layered identities that converged with

the people, circumstances, and places with which they interacted (i.e., school, family, museums, friends, and even natural disasters and a pandemic).

Organization of the Findings: Themes of Black Girlhood

This chapter presents an overview of the participants, data analysis, and findings. The images, vignettes, and artifacts selected and presented in this study are symbolic of the themes that were identified through coding and analysis of the written narratives, observations, and notes from my fieldwork—all of which consistently responded to the overarching questions:

1. How do Black girls engage with the construction of Black girlhoods through artmaking and collective inquiry?

2. What dialogues are sparked from the images of Black girlhoods that Black girls create?

3. What intersecting factors and influences inform these constructions of Black girlhood?

The themes that follow represent participants' embodied (Bentsson, 2013; Knowles, 2011) versions of Black girlhood while living life as Black girls that were generated through collective discussions. The themes are organized based on collective discussions and represent ideas the participants and I came up with *together*. As such, in representing the findings, I sought to use their words and explanations as much as possible. We agreed on these themes and words:

Theme One: Me
Theme Two: My Family
Theme Three: My Community

The data hold attempts and trials of shaping themselves while contending with the realities of their everyday lives. The style in which these findings are displayed are through

vignettes, photographs, quotes, and artifacts because many forms of data are necessary to build up and hold up the vastness of the girls and their families.

The findings sections are:

1. The Secret Sauce: How Black Girls Constitute Themselves through Words and Art (all about me);

2. The Girls and Mothers Creating Black Girlhood in Tandem (about my family);

3. "An Enormous Amount of Work": The Nature of Black Girls Weathering Storms and Protecting Their Joy (about my community).

The girls, their families, and their communities were the parts of their worlds to which they turned for resolute affirmation of Black girlhood amid debilitating systems and structures. Although the individual, family, and community flow into one another, the girls chose to present these themes as distinct from one another, such as when they decided not to talk about school at home. Discussions were about the girls, their families, COVID, nature, and friends. Very little discussion touched on school up until the end of data collection. These moments of making and seeing and discussing and observing Black girls and their families and communities made me realize this research and their wonderings were:

> About the things they saw.
> The things they felt.
> The data were about family.
> The data were about place.
> The data were about their moms, especially.
> The data were about the things they love.

The data were about how all of these came together to make the worlds of Black girls and how these things came together for them and about them. These findings show the skills, capabilities, and needs of Black girls in an interconnected way. Sometimes these sections overlapped, and there were often moments when the participants and I had to talk out why

certain art, stories, or photos belonged in one section. The process of data analysis with the participants was complex, layered, and iterative (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The classifying of conversations, art, and events often came down to the "best" section or what felt right—and even this was hard for both the participants and myself, so we changed our minds and kept moving things around. The process was affective to align with my research agenda of producing/sharing embodied data and experiences to experiment with inventive ways to engage Black girls and their knowledge (Knudsen & Stage, 2015).

The primary purpose of this chapter is to explore the findings of the study through the presentation of the themes that emerged for the participants and by the participants. For these themes to unfold in the way they did, certain conditions made it possible. These conditions were also a site of inquiry and data that were necessary to unpack and make clear with regard to thinking about these data and the trajectory of Black girlhoods.
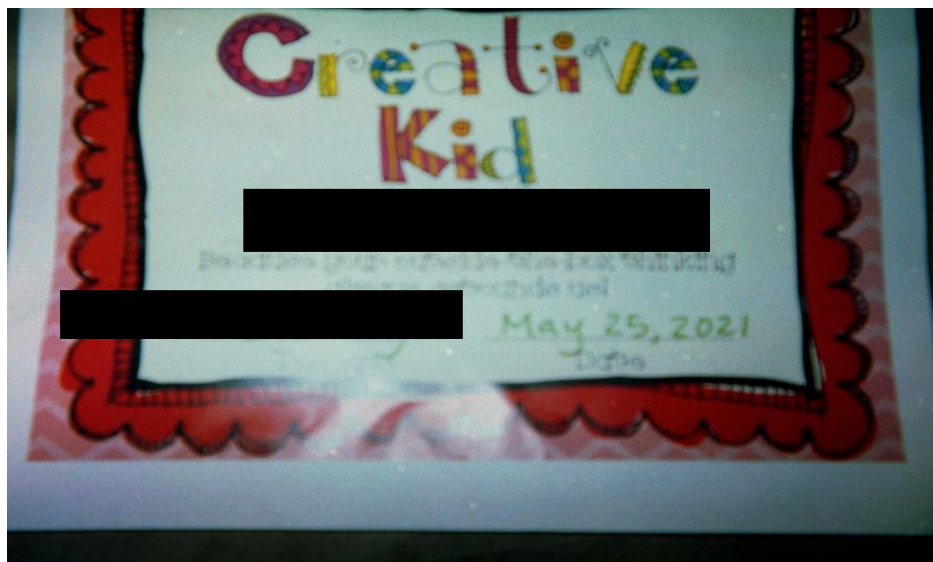
Figure 17. Photograph by Joel Showing an Award She Received for Being a Creative Kid

(Joel said the award was an **honor [she laughed when telling me this]).**

The Secret Sauce: How Black Girls Constitute Themselves Through Words and Art

> Sia: Do you know how to make the special sauce? It is equal parts ketchup and equal
>   parts hot sauce. My mom said that my grandma had the original secret sauce recipe
>   and I am just copying it, but I know mine is the best.
> Mya: Yes, yours is better. I like the way you do it.
> Sia: Thanks sister! Also nobody can make it do like I DO!
> Mya: My sister's art is better than anybody else's, believe that!
> Sia: Thank you sister. I've been practicing.
> Mya: I know!!

Figure 18. Mya and the Crab Legs

The Sanctuary of Themselves

Figure 18 shows two images of Mya, Sia and their little sister Destiny eating one of their

favorite foods, crab legs. Actually, Mya filled her camera roll with pictures of crab legs. When

asked why she did, Mya said, "Well, you said to take pictures of things that were important. This

is very important." They also like to eat their crab legs (and many other foods) with Sia's secret

sauce (mentioned in the vignette above) that is supposedly a family specialty. The secret sauce

conversation and images of the sisters eating crab legs helps situate the girls and their family.

Like most cultural groups, we see this family connect over food (patterns). In many cultures,

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food is used as a means to maintain cultural identity, to connect to where people live, and to understand their origins. I argue that food in this example is doing all of these things as it relates to Blackness and Black girlhood in these photos and this vignette. The secret sauce and crab legs have become a part of their identity and their family's identity.

Regardless of their age, unsteady circumstances, or any doubt or feelings of confusion, the girls in this study found the words to explore powerful themes about their identity creatively and precisely. Through their art, writing, and discussions, the participants authored multidimensional depictions of Black girlhood. One of the most common aspects hey always centered was themselves and their experiences—as if they were giving themselves permission to take space and fill it up with only discussions about them. This sanctuary of themselves that they created was encouraged with stories and art—a collaboration that illuminates how words partnered with art have the power to heal, the power to carry love, and the power to express agency. In this research study, the stories and the art became an experience for the girls to discover who they were and to dream about what they could be. Often in early childhood settings, there is a curricular unit called "All About Me." It is a brief and sometimes surface-level invitation to learn about the student—not an ongoing commitment. The unit usually runs for a couple of weeks to help students learn about each other and each other's families in a closed-ended way. For example, questions might be "What is your favorite food?" or "What is your favorite color?" or "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Activities might be self-portraits, building one's house in the block area, or bringing in a favorite dish from home. For this study, the "All About Me" study was ongoing and ever deepening, as the girls used all available resources to create the worlds they deserve to exist and thrive in while centering themselves as Black girls. Additionally, there were no prescribed questions or activities, just

many discussions and observations where the girls felt open to share themselves. This is how I came to learn about the crab legs and the secret sauce and many other family traditions and histories.

Throughout my observations, parents and the girls centered each other's stories by ensuring everyone was fully heard, understood, and responded to during each story share-out[1] and photoshare.[2] The participating girls also worked very hard with their bodies, eyes, ears, and questions to make whoever was speaking as central as possible—a way of valuing the other girls' self-expression. They made the speaker feel important and worthy.

As a researcher, I took up some of their behaviors and also modeled and welcomed movement and touch as important elements of self-expression and communication. The girls and I moved while working; they intimately touched each other's hair, and the moms would pop in to give the girls a nudge or a pat and look on while we were in the same space. The participants' movements and sense of expression, along with the movements and expressions they received from me and their parents, were an integral part of their expressing and trying in the form of their storytelling of self. The girls demonstrated their abilities to express their identities, their frustrations, and their sureness of who they are and want to be. In the sections that follow, I unpack the varied and multiple notions of Black girlhood.

"'Cause it's mine": A Story about More Than Hair

> Mom: You gotta comb your hair. You cannot go to school with it like that (Mom gently touches Mya's hair and rubs her back).
> Mya: I want it out and I want it BIG. Poofy (hand gestures like a fro or a cloud around her head).
> Mya turns to me and says: I like when like my hair stands up tall and like big (reaches arms tall over her head like reaching for the sky)
> Me: Really!?????? I like that too, but my hair shrinks with the weather here.

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[1] When the girls would share a story or piece of art.
[2] When the girls would story the photos they took.

Mya: Mine too, but even when it is small, I like it big. (Smiles again). Like after I wash it, it gets small, but I comb it out. (Pulls at her hair to stretch it out to show how long it can get)

Mom: Girl, we are going to be late. Let me put it up or braid it (Mom scrambling around the house cleaning and getting the other girls ready).

Mya: NO!

Mom: Why? (frustrated)

Mya: 'Cause it is **mine.**

Mom: (sighs). You are right. You are right. Okay okay okay, fine. *Sorry.*

In this interaction, Mya and her mother Gladys were having a difference of opinion on how Mya should go to school. In the hustle and bustle of the morning rush, Gladys still remained in the conversation, and there was a back-and-forth about why her hair needed to be *done*. It is clear that how Mya goes to school matters to her mom very much, but she also finds her daughter's perspectives just as important and welcomes Mya's opinions about her own identity. Gladys's gentle touches and questions to her daughter show this. Mya takes the time to elaborate on the description of her hair and the different flexibilities and forms it has (it can be big, small, and after a wash day, it changes again). In the end, Mya knows she wants her hair to be big and tall; this is meaningful. These words have a power when she says them.

Later, Gladys told me that she wanted to do Mya's hair so she could look *neat* and *okay* for school, but in the end, she knew that her daughter was right. She was just scared of how Mya would get treated or what the teachers would say if her hair was in a fro. Gladys later told me that Mya had an awesome day and wore her hair in a fro the rest of the week.

Mya has made a connection to how her hair looks and how she wants to present herself, and she is able to be firm in her beliefs about her appearance and her hair because they are connected to how she will feel at school in ***her body***. Without the dialogue with her mom, Mya would not have been able to assert what is hers, and her mother would not have realized how

Mya's hair is indeed hers and why her choice and opinions matter. Through this seemingly small moment, Mya illustrates how she and maybe other Black girls are able to engage in complex communication skills and to claim space to express herself and what she feels to be hers.

Figure 19. Mya and Sia's Mom Gladys, by Sia

Figure 19 shows Mya and Sia's mom, Gladys; the photo was taken by Sia. Gladys is pictured doing a client's hair in their apartment. Gladys has several sources of income, of which the main ones are doing hair and cleaning homes. Gladys takes much pride in making her clients happy with her hair skills. One day, Gladys braided my hair, and the girls helped with the styles and designs. Gladys willingly honors the wishes of her clients because she believes they know how they want to look to feel their best. When juxtaposed with the morning routine captured in the vignette between her and her daughter Mya, this photo demonstrates how Gladys makes a living by following the lead of her clients on how they want to look and express themselves through their hair. In the vignette above, Gladys seems to be navigating her daughter's right to

assert herself and celebrate Black girlhood with her own knowledge of the discriminatory

practices Black girls face in school because of how their bodies are criminalized (Blake et al.,

2017). Without this moment, Gladys would not have been able to have a shift in her own

thinking about (Black) girlhood, identity, and the communication skills of her daughter. This

moment also helped Gladys unpack her ideas of looking "tidy" for school, the worries of how

Mya would get treated, and the racial connotations that accompany this loaded term, especially

in relation to Black girls. The word "tidy" and its connotations uphold white norms that act to

erase Black culture while controlling Black bodies. This moment also brings to light how Black

caregivers want to protect Black girls from being mistreated, even if it means upholding

eurocentric beliefs of beauty and childhood. This moment highlights the intricacies and tensions

Gladys felt as a parent and her understanding of how her daughter's appearance will be policed

in white, patriarchal spaces; yet, she also wanted them not to have to deny their identity and

agency.

"I am dark dark, and that's cool too":
How Black Girls Delightfully Describe Their Identities

> Maureen: Tell me about your piece and the colors you chose.
> Mya to the group: Welllllllllllllll....I'm dark dark, and that is cool too.
> Maureen: Why wouldn't it be cool?!?!?
> Joel: Uhm yea totally!
> Maureen: What do you mean dark dark?
> Mya: Like rocky road and I like that.
> Maureen: (laughs hysterically)
> Joel: ICE CREAM?!? YUM! Your eyes are goldfish too! DOUBLE YUM!
> Mya: Yeah, I got oval eyes. I know I look angry, but I am not. Promise. (Laughs really
>   hard)
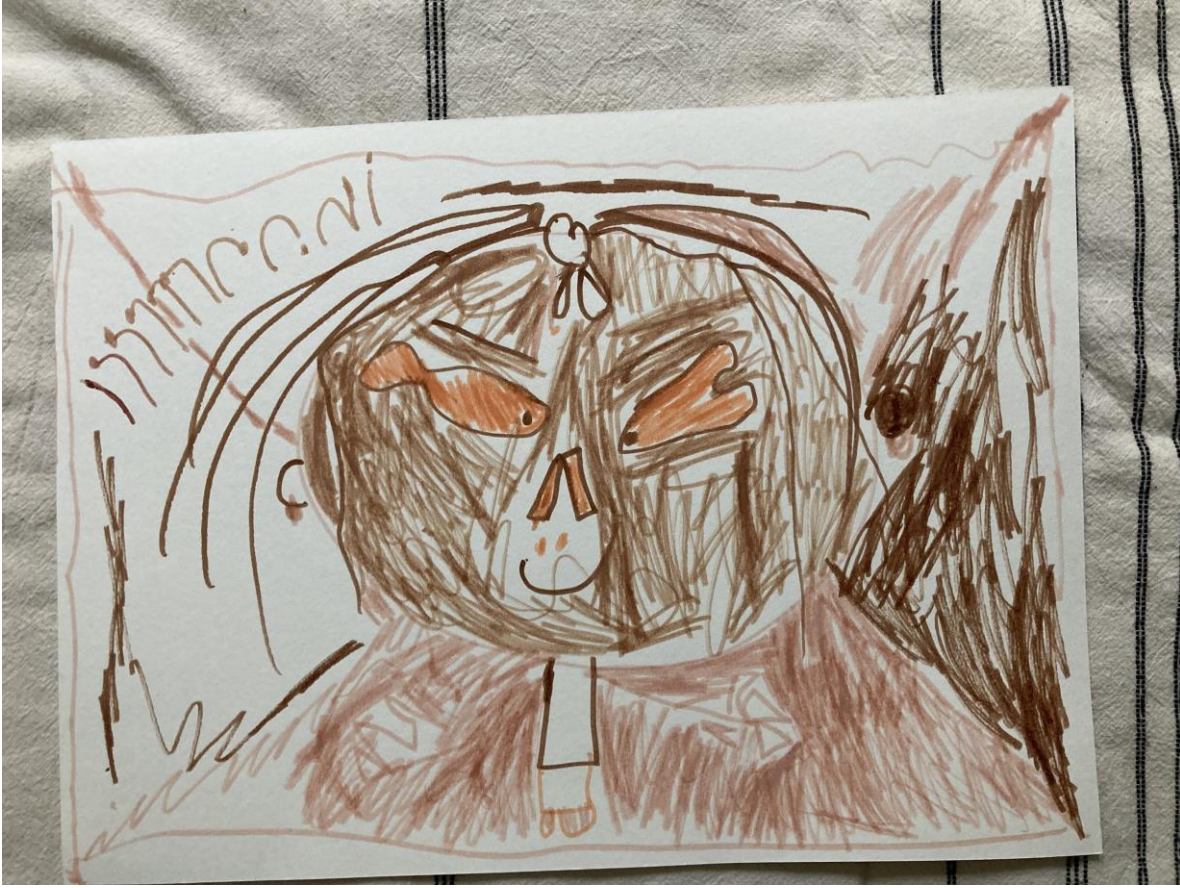
Figure 20. Free Drawing/Self-portrait by Mya

Consistently, the girls in this study showed a sureness of their physical appearance. Their

hair, eyes, and skin were discussed and artistically documented often—all of which were

discussed in *delightful* ways that were frequently connected back to something sweet or yummy.

In Figure 20, Mya has illustrated herself with all shades of brown and orange, and she has given

her self-portrait a border and sense of framing. When asked about the colors she selected, she

immediately shared how she is "dark dark, and that is cool too." I did not delve more deeply, but

I wondered if she has learned to love her darker skin or if she understands ideas of colorism and

then felt the need to share how dark skin is "cool too." The rest of the girls in the group affirmed

her statement because, of course, dark skin is cool. Mya used dark twice—"dark dark"—and

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when asked what that meant, she connected the description to something sweet and delightful and desired, like Rocky Road ice cream. In an interview, Joel described her skin as "the yummiest of chocolates" and her eyes as almonds. In a country where Black girls have been conditioned by media, education, and other influences of white supremacy to hate their skin and their identities, it is illuminating and powerful for these girls to see themselves and each other in ways that are desired and connected to positive ideas of self as they compare themselves to things that are delightful, delicious, and yummy!

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison is an early study of Black girlhood. It tells the story of an 11-year-old Black girl, Percola, who has dark skin and wants blue eyes because she believes they will make her beautiful. The story explored discrimination and colorism on the basis of upholding eurocentric beauty standards and resisting Black love. What was witnessed with Mya and her hair and skin were lessons of self-authentication in how she wants to fashion herself (Rosenberg, 1987). Unlike Percola in The Bluest Eye and other Black girls, Mya's ideas of beauty and her looks are not proximal to whiteness. For years, Black women and Black girls have been forced to fit into molds of beauty standards and to bend to meet societal expectations while internalizing mistruths of Blackness, beauty, and girlhood. Mya's hair story and her dark dark skin serve as markers of new possibilities and inhabited experiences for Black girls when they can have control of their narratives and fashion themselves in sweet ways.

"I want my face to smash up the buildings":
How Black Girls Center Themselves Through Art

In the fall of 2021, the girls returned to in-person learning at school. They were reluctant but also simultaneously excited to go back into their classrooms. When I met with the girls, we

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always talked about school as if it was some other world: "What did you do there? And how was it?" I also found myself asking such questions as "Well, what did you learn today?" On one day, this was Sia's response:

> Sia: We been working on sorting things using diagrams. We can find some circle in the class and we can trace them on our paper and make lines and we title each circle and the middle is what it is the same.
> Maureen: OOOOO I have not done a Venn diagram in a long time. Got it, so what do you think of the Venn diagrams? Does it make sense?
> Sia: Of course, and I like it. We did it with animals and with foods and plants and flowers. Then we did one with home and school and I put my name in the middle. I feel like the part in the middle.
> Maureen: What does that mean?
> Sia: It's me, you know?
> Maureen: No, I do not know. What is in the middle? What do you mean?
> Sia: I am in the middle, my feelings I put that I think 'cause I have them in both places. I put books in the middle, my friends, my sister 'cause she goes to school with me, I put me, art and colors, and I cannot remember.
> Maureen: Yeah, that is a lot. What did you put in the home and school?
> Sia: For school I put rules, computers, uniforms, my teacher, tests, learning, and long days.
> Maureen: I see. That is a lot. What about home?
> Sia: Mama, cats, Mya and Destiny, TV, our home, swimming, cooking, food I like, dancing, and singing.
> Maureen: Oooo that is very different.
> Sia: Yeah, some things go in both circles, but I picked. I could have added more, but then I never would have stopped.

On a separate day, Sia made this artwork (see Figure 21). She made drawings of herself in various places, and on the outside of the paper is her family and her cats. Then she drew her house right in the middle because she said everything moves around her home. Her school is the blue and black building to the left, further suggesting how far apart and different these worlds are.
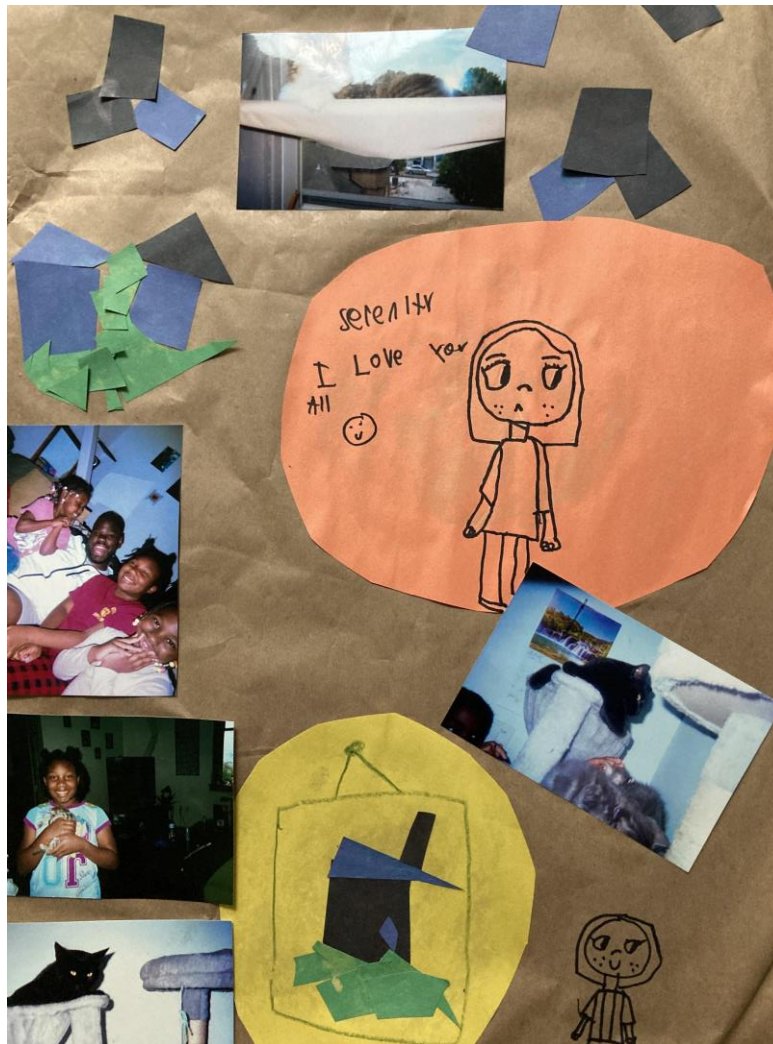
Figure 21. Mixed Methods of Gluing, Moving Pieces Around, and Drawing by Sia

Sia's reflection on the Venn diagram she did at school and her artwork seem to be the literal and physical classification parts of herself and her identity. She does not touch on othering, power, race, or gender, but the words she uses to sort through her home and school life suggest power dynamics, assimilation, rigidity (i.e., adults, uniforms, rules, and tests), and comfort (i.e., animals, mom, dancing, and singing). In the middle of her Venn diagram, she put feelings, community, and art. In Figure 21, the mixed-methods piece, Sia has outlined the different parts of herself. Her school is the blue building with the black roof to the left, her

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family is scattered throughout the art, and she put a bubble around her house and herself. The Venn diagram conversation illuminates how students at a young age learn how their lives are segmented between home and school and, therefore, how this separation becomes a part of how Black girls construct and deconstruct their identities in different spaces. The girls throughout this study seemed to understand and be curious about who they are and the many layers of who they are—their age, Blackness, girlhood, who they are as students, as daughters, as friends, and even as granddaughters—and how all of these identities are indeed impacted by their intersectionality and important, while also being inclusive and supportive of every layer of their personhood.

Figure 22. Mixed Methods of Gluing, Moving Pieces Around, and Drawing by Mya

The mixed media collage in Figure 22, "About Me," was created by Mya. She wanted to make all of the strips of paper as curvy and colorful as possible. Mya worked very hard to show photos of parts of the body and her cats because she said, "Sometimes people do not pay attention to pictures like 'these'." The girls became skilled at capturing photos of everyday life, home life, family, and generally photos they found to be of worth and value. Mya's statement about selecting photos people may not pay attention to raises the question of who gets to choose what is paid attention to and how is that chosen.

Joel decided to center herself in her artwork in one inquiry session. She made the following image (see Figure 23).
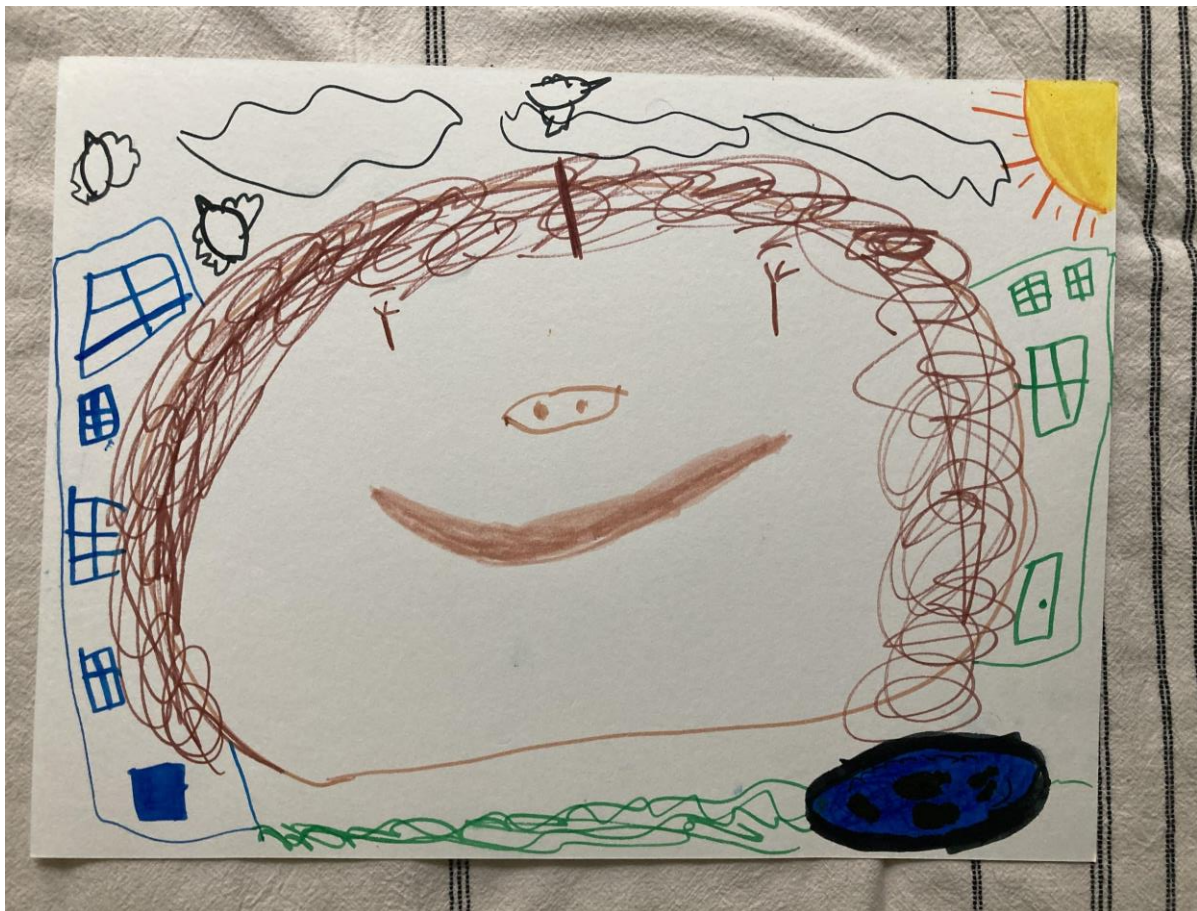
Figure 23. Joel's Portrait

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In describing her drawing, Joel and I had the following conversation.

Joel: I made my face fill up the whole paper. It just seemed like the only way.
Maureen: Hmmm I see. Why?
Joel: I made my face smash up the buildings.
Maureen: Okayyyyy, tell me more.
Joel: Like, I made my face the focus like all about me.
Maureen: And the sun and the birds?
Joel: They are there. I like looking at the birds with my mom. We look at the clouds and
sky like almost every day.
Maureen: And the buildings?
Joel: I just wanted my face like righhhhht here. Like in the middle. I wanted my face to
make them small, but I want my face to be the most important part. I want the sun
shining on my face. I tried to get the curls of my hair.

When I think about Joel's drawing along with her words, I wonder what it might be like

for Black girls to take up so much space that they shatter systems of oppression and structural

barriers—this might be a goal when I think about research in Black girlhood. Joel uses powerful

words and forceful words like "smash,'" which elicit feelings of strength and impact. Joel's

artwork discussion calls forth a power and action of refocusing and literally taking up space.

Making her face take up the whole paper could be interpreted as a provocative way to say *Pay*

attention to me while asserting action and agency to change the degree of focus and placing it on

her (and Black girls). I take these artifacts and vignettes as efforts to understand intersectionality,

identity, and larger themes around ways of being. My understanding of intersectionality through

my own lived experiences and through the observations and data of my participants and their

communities is about acknowledging that issues and people are multifaceted and can have many

identities/issues within their personhood. Furthermore, the framework and concept of

intersectionality is a way of thinking about power, privilege, and oppression that takes into

account a person's *combination* of social identities (like gender, race, class, sexuality, ability,

religion, and more) rather than considering each of them separately (Crenshaw, 1990). This

research was stabilized by the belief that Black girls, given their intersectionality, have a unique

perspective on the world. Their works and their words show how they express themselves individually across varied storylines (school, home, dreams, the body, etc.). They may not be using the word "intersectionality," but they are subtly discussing ideas of self in the world that are starkly heavy and large. These highlights show how they understand intersectionality, given understandings of race, gender, age, and being a student, and how these layers and identities are all different but sometimes intermingled. Additionally, this is a celebration and reflection on how the girls, physically and artistically, tried to center themselves within these identities—over and over again.

"I am going to try, but I am not going to like it":
How Black Girls Assert Their Feelings and Nuance Ideas of Strength

One morning, I accompanied Jasmine to drop Joel off at school. While we waited in the carpool line, Jasmine turned to me, starting the conversation below.

> Jasmine: (in a low voice): I think Joel is mad because her teacher switched her seat. I can tell it has been bothering her all weekend.
> Maureen: Oh well, that is kind of hard. I get it.
> Jasmine: (looks in the rear-view mirror at Joel) Joel, what's wrong? You mad about the seat thing?
> Joel: Mama, I already told you.
> Jasmine: Well, tell me again. Girl you know I be forgetting. Tell me.
> Joel: Well, she (the teacher) switched me and (friend's name) outta nowhere. And I been sitting next to her for a while. That is my desk buddy.
> Jasmine: Yeah. I know. But maybe she is going to switch you and you will get to sit next to someone even better.
> Joel: But why did she have to switch ME?! She asked ME to move. (exaggerates the "me" and points at herself)
> Jasmine: Well, were you talking or playing? Cutting up huh?
> Joel: No.
> Jasmine: hmmmmm well all right. You got to be strong and just try this change out.
> Joel: I am [strong]. Mama, the problem is not everyone is neat and together. Me and my desk buddy work together well and we keep our area clean, and I like where we sit in the class.
> Jasmine: Joel you seem really upset and I am sorry.
> Joel: I just do not want to be sitting next to just *anybody.*

Jasmine: I am just going to ask you to try something different. If you feel brave talk to
    the teacher.

Joel: I tried.

Jasmine: Okay, it's our turn. Love you Joel. Have a good day. I will be back here in a few
    hours. Just try, okay?

Joel's back door opens and a carpool teacher lets her out. Joel looks back and says this: I
    am gonna try, but I am not gonna like it. I already know. Love you!

Joel puts her mask on and runs into school.

The car ride leading up to this moment was quiet and calm but also a little tense. Joel was not her usual bubbly self, and her mom Jasmine could tell. Joel was frustrated and took the time to process it all. Through this back-and-forth conversation, it begins to surface that Joel is not mad just about the physical shifting of space in her classroom, but more so about why it happened in the first place. Joel feels the desk move was personal to her (i.e., she emphasized "me"). It seems like Joel has said something to her teacher and wants to say more but is unsure if speaking to the teacher would even matter to her teacher.

Jasmine asks Joel to be strong. Joel speaks back, saying "**I am** (strong)." When she says this, she has no doubt about her power and strength. The problem at hand is not about Joel's strength. Joel then asserts why this situation is really bothering her, and she lists the reasons in a way that highlights her preferences and how she feels she works best. Moving through the conversation, Jasmine reminds her daughter that she does have a voice and she can talk to the teacher.

Joel is aware of her voice and the power of communication when she reminds her mother that she has tried to problem-solve the situation by talking to the teacher. Throughout this conversation, Joel expressed herself through words and nonverbal gestures like fidgety fingers, eye rolling, and sighs. Joel's power of communication centers herself as she works out a big problem that she feels she had no control over. Joel makes her stance clear when she closes out

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the conversation by reminding her mother of her stance on the situation and that she will roll

through the day and take the new seat. However, just because the change is happening, it does

not mean she has to be silent about not liking the switching of her seat.

"It would not make sense unless they knew me or were in my brain":
Why Black Girls Know Their Story Better Than Anyone Else

> Joel: If we just paste our photos to the paper with no words it will be like an uhhhh a
>   book with no words. A WORDLESS BOOK (grins two teeth missing)!
> Mya: That's cool. Kinda. (quizzical face looks for agreement on this)
> Joel: I guess.
> Maureen: Sia, what do you think?
> Mya: Sia do not know what she thinks (laughs and pats Sia shoulder and laughs
>   uncontrollably).
> Gladys: Girl you better leave my baby alone.
> Sia: I do not know I like looking at pictures like this. My pictures are *cute*.
> Mya: Yeah…
> Maureen: Yeah…
> Joel: Well, I like it for me, but if someone looked at it, I do not think I would like
>   someone looking at my photos with no words. It would not make sense unless they
>   knew me or were in my brain or my head and that is not possible.
> Maureen: Yeah, I see that, but you know with wordless books, you can kind of make up
>   the story and that is what is kind of fun.
> Sia: I do not want someone making up what I did. Nothing to make up.
> Mya: I think we should add some drawings to it and words or sentences, but I am not
>   good at that. Whatcha y'all think?
> Joel: I think sentences. I can help you spell, but I am not good either.
> Sia: Can we have pencils to erase or what should we do?
> Maureen: I think you should write what you want and do not worry about spelling or
>   periods, but what you want to do. You do not even have to scratch anything out
>   if you make a mistake, just like keep going (rubs Sia on the back while making eye
>   contact).
> Sia: Okay.
> Gladys: Let's go, girls. (helps to hand out materials)

Figures 24. Writing Captions

As seen from the vignette, the girls seemed opposed to/hesitant about having their photos not be connected to words—their words. I remember Joel asking, "How would someone even know what was going on?" It was very important for the girls to say what was happening and they selected each photo; in Figure 24, they are pictured writing their captions to their photos. This vignette illustrates the importance of participants not leaving wiggle room for someone "not in their brain" potentially determining the context of their photos and, furthermore, their life that they captured in photos. To them, their work existing without their captions was not okay. This was a literal example of not wanting others to story their lives and experiences.

Figure 25. A Selfie of Sia

**Section Summary: Black Girls Learning about Themselves
and Teaching Others about Who They Are**

This section about the participants based on their own words and creations feels like a close-up view of their desires and questions, a close-up view of what they decided they would like to share. When space is given, that space can be taken (up) by and for Black girls. There can be invitations for Black girls to zoom in on themselves, as Sia is doing in Figure 25. The vignettes in this section showed the capabilities of Black girls to express their frustrations and identities about larger issues that impact them (i.e., identity and power dynamics between parents and teachers). Historically, Black girls have been limited in their abilities to advocate for themselves and/or are often pressured to be advocates of who they are. My study documented a space where Black girls are not punished for speaking out and an experience where they do not always have to exert themselves consistently to curate joy and a sense of self. But when space

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and time are created for Black girls in free, unstructured, and intentional ways, it is possible that they can assert themselves in matters that feel important to them, even if these topics are seemingly small in adult eyes (i.e., hair and switching table seats). When Black girls learn to talk big, they learn to not stop talking and stand up for themselves when they have safety in speaking and signs of success in sharing their feelings.

The participants were nurtured through their thoughts and conversations by me, their co-participants, and their community. This made me realize that women and girls of color are leaders of care and conversation, and should be positioned as such. Essentially, yes, they do have the secret sauce. With regard to supporting the never-ending study of Black girls learning about themselves and teaching others about who they are, the overarching findings (or conditions) I noticed clearly indicated how necessary it is for adults to:

1. pause and listen to Black girls;
2. provide a space for verbal expression and expression through movement and touch and art; and
3. respect the experiences and stories of Black girls.

Across these examples and artifacts, there is a complicated performance of care exhibited by parents, myself, and the participants. To promote space for Black girls to share, I believe there has to be constant performance of concern, pausing, listening, interrupting of routines, and gestures for Black girls to say more and take up the space they deserve. This performance of care seemed to create community and empathy, and to construct Black girls and their identities and their capabilities. These capabilities of how Black girls (try to) choose themselves are truly talents and skills that reflect their conscious and intuitive approaches to claiming, reclaiming, and redefining language for their own needs and lives. Feminist theories support the notions of Black girls' speaking capabilities as political action and a radical form of care that affirms children by validating their personal experiences (Brown, 2013; Pérez et al., 2016; Langer-Osuna

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& Nasir 2016; Ohito, 2017; Saavedra, 2011; Souto-Manning, 2017). Making space for a child to assert herself when she wants a particular hairstyle, for a child to give meaning to her own artwork, or for children to share their experiences of missing their friends are sophisticated and complicated enactments of care about who they are. These moments center the knowledge that Black girls derive from their home communities and their lived experiences. I do believe that when these interactions are repeated in big and small ways every day, they chip away at systematic forms of oppression by developing the agency of historically marginalized groups (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Saavedra 2011). Additionally, to position children as having knowledge and power to project their thoughts, voice, questions, art, and feelings means to work towards agentic spaces of care and empathy for and with Black girls.

The Girls and Mothers Creating Black Girlhood in Tandem

Although this findings section follows the "Me" findings, it was *the* section of my dissertation that took a while to bring myself to write simply because family is a lot and the data captured in this section were full. The girls in this study shared sentiments of feeling propelled by their family members, while at other times feeling they were the ones holding it down for their families by being flexible, patient, and hopeful. Their families and homes continued to pour affirmations and validations into them and truly seemed to be their spaces of safety and peace, creating an alternate universe from the weight that schools tend to make Black families and Black children carry (Powell & Coles, 2020).

Academic research and everyday news media show the stress and trauma involved with being a Black parent and raising Black children in the United States (Powell & Coles, 2020), particularly highlighting mothers grieving for their young children who have been mistreated at the hands of the educational and justice systems. In contrast to this narrative, my findings

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emphasized the direct link and relationship that Black families—specifically Black mothers—have in creating alternate worlds of love, safety, and hope for their daughters—worlds of ice cream, art, cats, vulnerability, honesty, and plants. Here, I center the stories *about* the girls' families and stories *from* their families, offering a unique perspective and angle of sense-making on Black girlhood in a holistic and intergenerational way. Richardson (2020) unpacked the stories of Black mothers as forms of critical literacies, acknowledging the meaningful work mothers do for their daughters to change stereotypical views and illuminate intersectional structures in order for their daughters to sustain and thrive. From the ways that the participants in my research talked about their mothers and how the mothers talked about their daughters, there are levels of negotiating, vulnerability, and understanding. These ways of parenting while constantly being mindful of the complexities of raising Black girls are examples of the meaningful work the mothers in this study are doing (Richardson, 2020).

The girls told stories about their mothers and centered their families at every opportunity possible. The photos and vignettes that follow demonstrate how Black girls and their mothers are actively and deliberately co-creating ideas of Black girlhood, based on the mothers' pasts and the girls' presents. I argue that these interactions were an exercise of healing the Black girlhoods of the mothers through their daughters' presents and futures. This understanding can broaden our insight into how Black girls and their mothers/families work in tandem to create experiences, however hard, in search of new realities that honor both the girls and their mothers.

In this chapter, I explore the interrelationship between the girls' and mothers' experiences and enactments of Black girlhood. I first outline the ways in which the girls demonstrated appreciation for their mothers, as it was the girls who led me to see their mothers as an inextricable part of their Black girlhoods. I then follow with narratives of two mothers, Gladys

and Jasmine. I intended for these narratives of the mothers to which the girls led me to demonstrate how Black motherhood/parenting and Black girlhood are indeed connected and informed by one another. The data in this section suggested how Black girls and their parents are developing and processing ways of being while also reckoning with themselves, their pasts, and societal influences of Blackness and gender.

"She's the one who helps and feed us, gave us a good place and sleep": Appreciating Their Moms

Figure 26. Joel's Mother Jasmine (photo by Joel)

Alongside this image, Joel wrote some text to go with the photo, guided by the prompt of "Tell me why this photo is important and what is happening in the photo." The caption reads:

this is My MOM
She's the one
Who helps and
Feed us and
Gave us
A Good place and
Sleep. And I love
her when she
has fun with me.
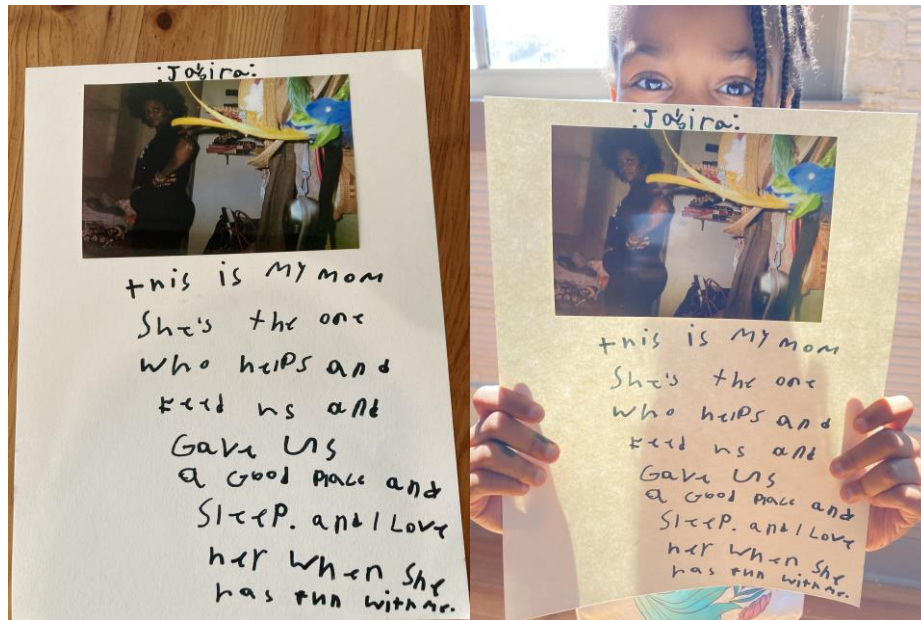
Figure 27. Joel's Words about Her Mom

In Figure 27, Joel proudly holds up her photograph; behind her work, she was grinning the biggest toothless smile. Her words stand out: My, MOM, Feed, Gave, Good, and Love. These words suggest pride, comfort, and ownership of the person who is her mother. The format of her text is one long sentence broken up by "ands," a poetic inflection that speaks to Joel's understanding and appreciation for everything / mother does for her. Joel lists basic needs like food, shelter, and getting help until, at the very end of the caption, she writes, "...and I love her when she has fun with me." This made me wonder if Joel conceptualized the amount of work her mother has to do to get these basic needs met before prioritizing "fun." Joel relishes the fun times with her mother.

A constant occurrence in the discussions about mothers in the inquiry groups and art making was a thankfulness and an awareness of how busy their mothers are and how hard they work. The girls showed an appreciation for their mothers when they tried to understand their moms' realities as single moms to three girls who live financially unsteady lives. For example,

Sia commented to the group, "My mama, she do a lot. That is why I try to do my chores. Mya always wait for my mom to tell her to pick up and do things and that is not right." In another instance, Sia shared, "I know mom cries 'cause sometimes her face is a little wet, but I act like I do not know. Sometimes I do not want people to see me cry either."

Figure 28. Gladys's Body, by Sia

In Figure 28 is Gladys's body as photographed by Sia. When asked why she took this photo, the following conversation took place:

> Sia: Well…it's my mom's butt (laughs). I like that she is not skinny like a pencil or too tall. I do not know!
> Maureen: Hmmm you do know.
> Sia: I just like it. It's my mom.

During one of the inquiry groups, I asked Joel to tell me about her mother and to pretend I did not know her. Joel said:

> My mom likes to dance. My mom likes to dress up. She likes to talk and she is good with music. I think she is helpful and she likes to go to parties and sometimes she comes home late. She smiles a lot. You cannot miss her cause she gotta lot of tattoos and her hair is a big fro.

To some degree, there is a level of protection the girls feel for and about their mothers while also reckoning at a young age with the feelings and emotions their mothers might be experiencing. The participants often found it difficult to express their feelings for their mothers, but at times they also spoke of their mothers as if they were otherworldly. They believe their mothers are the best at basically everything. Whether it is taking care of the cats or of them, doing hair, cooking, or playing, their mothers to the girls are not struggling or failing but, in actuality, holding up their homes. Their words and artwork about their mothers show empathy, curiosity, and admiration for their moms.
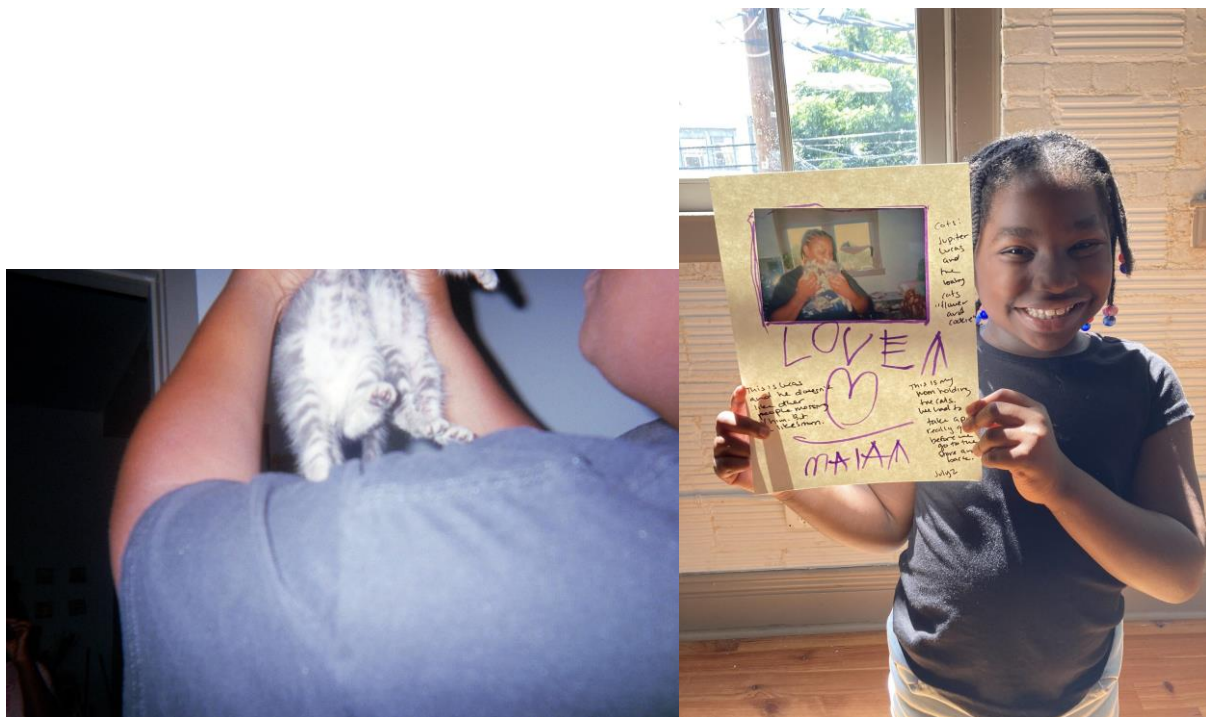
Figure 29. Mya and Mother
(left) Mya's Mom With Cat; (right) Mya with Message for Mom

Mya also centered her mom in her images and writing. Figure 29 shows a close-up of her captioned photograph of her mother. In big purple letters, she wrote, "Love (heart) MAMA (spelling). Mya needed help with her caption writing and asked me to write this text about the photo and her mother.

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This is Lucas (the cat). He does not like people messing with him, but he likes mom. This is my mom holding the cats. We had to take a pic really quickly before going to the store and back.

When Mya was asked why she selected this picture as one of her top photos for the inquiry group discussion, she said, "I just really love my mama and I really love my cats."

It was necessary to take time to carry the stories of the mothers and the daughters' stories of the mothers throughout this research because the girls wanted to focus on their moms, and so much of their creations and language focused on the girls' depictions of them.

"Life kept throwing me stones and I built a brick house":
Getting to Know Gladys

Figure 30. Gladys and Family

Mya and Sia's mom is Gladys. Gladys has three daughters (see Figure 30) and is a single mom who does hair, house cleaning, and other jobs to keep life afloat for her girls. When I asked the girls to tell me something about their mother, Mya said, "My mama is always laughing. She likes to watch TV and she makes the best spaghetti. Like OMG (eye roll) the best. I like that I can talk to her."

Figure 31. Series of Photos of Gladys, by Sia

In Figure 31, Gladys is photographed in the family's apartment by Sia. Sia said these photos were taken during a dance party which the girls often have at home. In an interview with Gladys, she opened up about how it is very important to raise confident girls who can command the room when they enter. To her, this is part of her vision for Black girlhood because she grew up shy and unsupported. Essentially, she feels as though she lost her childhood and girlhood at a young age.

Both Gladys and Jasmine expressed how their actions and decisions now regarding their kids are informed by their own experiences as kids. Both moms have a desire to do more and provide more for their kids than they themselves had as children. The desire to want more for their children resonated loudly in all my observations and interviews with both Gladys and Jasmine.

Throughout my interviews and interactions with the moms, it became clearer that the "thing" or experience they lacked was a sense of childhood or a shortened childhood. This

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sentiment aligns with research on the adultification of Black girls (Blake et al, 2017; Epstein et al, 2017). I asked Gladys what she thought family or childhood is or should be and she responded:

> For white families, there is an idyllic sense of childhood…like a picture of it that floors the media and mainstream pop culture. There is the green grass, annual family vacation, and catching lightning bugs, feeling free, and ending it all with a cup of milk at family dinner.

Gladys told me she thought this idea was nice and believes Black families and Black girls have glimmers of these experiences. Gladys went on to say:

> For me, maybe it was Double Dutch or walking to the corner store or racing home to jump on the trampoline with my cousin. But that is so far away. I feel like I had to learn to be an adult at lightning speed, and I do not want my daughters to experience this. I did not have time to be just a girl. That ain't right and I still feel that.

Gladys feels as though she did not get time to be curious or explore, although she admits to often having a sense of wanderlust and wonder of what could have been. Gladys can clearly remember the series of events that took her childhood away. Her loss of her childhood came as she simultaneously watched her mother die, had to move because of Hurricane Katrina, and became pregnant as a junior in high school in Mississippi where she was displaced due to the hurricane. As a student at a new school in a new state while mourning the loss of her childhood, her mother, and her home, Gladys experienced trauma, racism, and deep sadness. She felt alone, as if she did not have community. When Gladys found out she was expecting, she was a teenager, and her family in Mississippi and her colleagues in school did not make it easy for her. She decided to keep going because "I wanted my mom to see me walk across that stage. I am not sure if she was in heaven or where she was, but I wanted her to see me graduate and I did." Gladys's educators told her that even though l*ife kept throwing her for loops and obstacles and throwing her stones, somehow she built a brick house.* This stream of events that began when she

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was 10 years old happened in a blink of an eye and, in her opinion, she had to learn how to stop being a young girl and more of a woman and a "strong adult."

From Black girlhood to Black motherhood, Gladys has had very little space and support to develop a level of emotional well-being and community that she feels confident and comfortable to model for her children. Gladys is still processing her own childhood while mourning it and trying to (successfully) be emotionally supportive and stable for her daughters. The strong Black girl and Black woman narrative is what Gladys learned to assume at a young age as a form of survival, which is a sexist and racist form of conditioning that Black girls and Black women experience in society in response to trauma and a lack of support and resources. Countless studies have explored how the strong Black woman, strong Black girl, and Black superwoman narratives have all been spurred by stereotypes of Black girls and misperceptions that Black girls need less protection, nurturing, and love (Blake & Epstein, 2019; Blake et al., 2017; Epstein et al., 2017). Therefore, they are pushed to learn to survive at a young age, which is consequential for Black girls. Research has also shown that poverty, racism, and sexism are all factors that contribute to the adultification of Black girls (Georgetown Law, 2019). This adultification bias of Black girls in response to adversity is oppressive and has ripple effects on the girls when they become women as well as their families. For example, in the ways that Gladys reflected on her youth, it is evident that she felt she was lacking resources and emotional care to be present in her youth. Because of this lack of care and support, she had to become wiser, stronger, quicker, and craftier to navigate situations and challenges.

Because of her experiences, Gladys is invested in ensuring that her girls have love and a shoulder to cry on—both of which she did not have. Additionally, Gladys always wants them to

be prepared for what life has in store for a Black girl...a Black woman. The research on Black girls has unpacked the criminalization, adultification, and violence Black girls are exposed to, but time with Gladys revealed the trauma and stress parents feel in knowing that their children can one day be faced with these violences—experiences that the parents themselves experienced as children. My research adds to the field of Black girlhood by sharing how Black mothers feel the need to prepare Black girls for the moment when they will be mistreated by oppressive structures and barriers, and how this preparation for the inevitable is embedded in the construction of Black girlhood. For example, during an interview, Gladys reflected on the number of times she goes to Walmart and experiences racial profiling. These moments fill her with rage and anger. She wants to teacher girls how to handle these moments. Often, in an effort to prepare their children better, Black parents must have difficult conversations with their children concerning the inevitable prospect of racial discrimination—conversations that their white counterparts may never experience (Janey, 2021; Sanders & Young, 2020). Necessitating these conversations is further proof that Black girls must learn at a young age how to navigate adult topics that no one should experience. As Gladys said, "Sadly, I feel like every Black girl and Black boy needs to know how to handle themselves when this country throws everything at you. This is what chips at the length of childhood that Black girls experience." Research has shown that Black girls as young as 5 years old are considered less innocent than their white counterparts (Georgetown Law, 2019). The inequities of Black parents raising their Black children are burdensome, and these prejudices present as obstacles and early maturation for Black girls on the basis of class, race, and gender. Black girls have to learn how to respond, be prepared, and start doing the mental, emotional, and physical gymnastics of what survival, joy,

and the mundane should be. As Gladys has shared through her narratives, even when one prepares, it is exhausting to always respond to or be hyperaware of one's personhood/identity.

Gladys wants so much for her three daughters, but at the top of the list, she wants them to have a childhood and to feel loved. With these two goals in mind, Gladys believes they will all be able to maintain and pursue their dreams with the confidence to stand tall and command any room. Gladys's childhood was riddled with anxiety, trauma, and loneliness. These elements still haunt her parenting to the degree that she has a vision of what her girls' lives should be like. She imagines a life full of joy, laughter, and support. This dual influence of abundant joy as well as trauma and anxiety was a consistent insight in many layers of my research study.

From Gladys's interviews on girlhood, it appears that she is healing her own girlhood based on how she is raising her daughters by giving them what she did not have and supporting them in areas where she needed someone. During interviews, she repeatedly expressed how she wished she would have had a shoulder to cry on and time to not grow up so fast. Gladys has made it a priority to talk to her girls, be open with them and expecting them to be open with her. Through their play, dance parties, and outdoor adventures, she is attempting to build a healthy relationship of communication and love that will remind them that they can just be girls.

I sought to honor the synergy between the girls and their mothers in my methods. I asked the girls what their mother, Gladys, likes to do. They said, "Clean, watch tv, and go to instagram." With this information from the girls, I asked Gladys to send me her favorite photos of Black girlhood using Black Archives, a digital gathering place for memory and imaginations that hosts evolving visual artifacts of Black experience (Cherlise, 2015). Using Black Archives Instagram, Gladys sent me these images through direct message (see Figure 32).

Figure 32. Gladys's Images of Girlhood (from Black Archives)

When I asked Gladys why she picked these images she said,

Mmmmm they just stood out to me. I mean look at them *you can hear the happiness.* I want my girls to be so happy that people hear them coming from faraway. I am working so hard to give them everything and happiness is not easy.

I showed the same images to Gladys's daughters Mya and Sia and told them these are the pictures that their mom picked of what Black girlhood looks like. I asked the girls what they noticed. Their words were.

"outside, smiling, music, family, people, dressed up, old 'people pictures,'
sisters, playing, jumping, hair done, nice clothes."

I then asked them if they would use these words to describe their lives, and both nodded very hard with a "Yeah, I guess so." I asked the girls if they were happy and Mya screamed, "EVERYDAY!"

"I am a country girl and I am raising city girls": Getting to Know Jasmine

Figure 33. Jasmine, in a photo from Joel

Jasmine, pictured in Figure 22, is a mother to three girls (one in college, one in high school, and one in elementary school). She is a dancer, an early childhood educator, and a costume designer. Jasmine grew up in a rural town outside of Lafayette, Louisiana, which she described as conservative, segregated, and incredibly religious. Jasmine's mother raised her in Lafayette while her father lived in New Orleans, and she would visit her father often in the "big city." Jasmine described her mother's parenting style as strict and authoritative. Because of how her mother raised her, Jasmine knew at an early age that if she were to have a daughter, her parenting style would be committed to creating a space where her daughter felt comfortable talking to her and being open with her. The relationship Jasmine yearned for with her mom is the one she is attempting to foster with her daughters; she said, "I know my daughters may not tell me everything, but I do want them to know that no matter what it is, they can talk to me. I had no one to talk to and, essentially, I wanted to give them the mother-daughter relationship I did not have."

Our interviews were always circled around parenting, her daughters, and Black girlhood. One of the main reasons Jasmine ended up migrating to New Orleans was she observed how free Black women and Black girls were in New Orleans. Jasmine reflected:

> Like I remember…Black women in New Orleans. So free. In Lafayette, I would be worried about being called "too loud…too common." I was supposed to be very reserved. But in New Orleans, there were full-bodied women with big smiles who were attractive and seductive. They did wild things with their hair! Blonde hair and gold teeth! They had a type of freedom I had never seen. You know, they were cussin' women and women who would cuss you out from head to toe! And they were still church-going women too! Like they would drink you under the table and still be at the Baptist church at seven in the morning. I remember being like "wow, and they look like me too!"

This reflection captures the multiplicities of Black girlhood and Black womanhood that Jasmine was seeking in her own everyday realities and lifestyle. So, when Jasmine became a college student, she decided to attend school in New Orleans to be close to her dad and to find

herself. Jasmine believes New Orleans taught her so much about the world and people and has

ultimately shaped her parenting. Her interviews suggested that as a child, she was not exposed to

women and girls who carried themselves like the people she described from her memories of

New Orleans. Her own Black girlhood desires and ideas of Black girlhood did not align with her

realities in Lafayette:

> Growing up, I never saw women act the way they did in New Orleans. So, I said to myself, "I got to get out there as soon as possible." In New Orleans, I found my friends and art and experimented. I found a sense of home. If you have ever lived anywhere else (you know this), you always compare other cities to New Orleans. I have had some of the best times here with the best food and best music. I am pulled to New Orleans because you are just accepted here. Just as I was as a young girl—a college student here, I am still the same at forty years old because I can be free here. That is what I want for my girls— to grow to embody all that they are. That is what New Orleans gave me.

As a country girl raising city girls in New Orleans, Jasmine has built a community of

educators, artists, and organizers who cradle her and her daughters. Growing up, Jasmine felt like

the people around her—whether it was her neighbors or church community or even her mother

who often tried to make her feel small with assertions of "This is what a lady should do" or "This

is not lady-like." She often felt like she had to be "tame and reserved." Jasmine felt a lot of

pressure to carry herself a certain way. To this, she said:

> I realize looking back on my childhood, though there was so much joy and I was around so many friends and Black girls that were my cousins, I still felt then and sometimes now…Black girls can never just *be*. Like Black girls can never just be girls. There was also pressure of being the best in class. The prettiest. The smartest. I remember growing up singing certain songs or a certain lyric, and people would critique me if I stepped out of a certain box or what they thought I should be. Sometimes I feel like Black girls can't really just…*be* even with family, but sometimes they can when they find their people.

Jasmine's comments underscored the tensions present when Black girls attempt to figure

out who they are and/or step outside of the narrow ways they are expected to perform and

present themselves. Black girls receive messages of who they are or should be from church,

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school, their families, and media. These messages suggest the "right way" to look and act, which is evident in how Joel was policed for her identity due to societal and cultural norms of gender. With all of these competing messagings battling individual desires and curiosities, it seems it can be hard for Black girls to be (without critique); this was especially true for Jasmine in her hometown. Jasmine found herself in New Orleans and found a way to *be* as a young adult with the people who made her feel comfortable and dynamic. Her parenting for her three daughters and ideas about Black girlhood are defined by experiences, conversations, and reflections that will allow her daughters to be and exist in ways she could never imagine. Like any parent, Jasmine has hopes and dreams for her daughters, but she believes for her daughters to be happy, it means letting her daughters construct their own realities and futures. For example, during data collection, Joel came home and said, "Mom, I am nonbinarium." When Jasmine asked Joel what this meant, Joel said, "Well, I have a crush on a girl and I do not know, I do not always feel like a girl. I am not sure." To this, Jasmine said, "I am not going to tell her it is nonbinary (lol). I am not going to say much else. I am going to listen as she figures it out, and I want her to know I will help her and everything is okay. 'Cause it really is!" Jasmine's approach to Joel's gender identity exploration is open and accepting and one that might not have been present within the context of Jasmine's girlhood.

An element of Jasmine's version of Black girlhood is flexibility and experimentation. For Black girls to arrive at who they are and forever be in a stage of "becoming," it appears necessary for Black girls to have the safety and support to play with an understanding that they can be many things or who they are can change. This flexibility of experimentation and the ability to shift in, out, and through identities and layers is framed as a courageous act for Black girls when it should be a nonissue. Jasmine called the ability for Black women and Black girls to

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change a power, and she believes it is her daughters' birthright to be able to lean into those powers, whether it be changing their goals, hobbies, or hair. Jasmine is passionate about giving her daughters possibilities for change and exploration because of the tight parameters of Blackness and girlhood she attempted to thrive in as a child.

With so many rules and ideas being imposed on Black girls, Jasmine believes her number-one job as a mother to three Black girls is to defend them. Jasmine is aware that she is raising three different young people who are also Black girls, and she finds it necessary to show them all that life is worth living and that Black woman and Black girls have so much life to give and live. Jasmine models this by attending social events, making time for herself, and always finding the good in every situation. As a Black woman who is a mother, she expressed how easy it is for the world to beat one down, but it is a necessity to try and find the joy.

Section Summary: "She is made up of people before her"

> In raising my girls, I realize they watch everything I do, which is why I left my marriage because I want them to see a happy mom. I am always mindful of what I am doing, but I try to remind them that I am human as well. Raising Black girls is like raising them like you are protecting them from the world while also letting them see you…. It's like you know how the world is so cruel to Black women and Black girls, and you want to protect them so much, but you have to give them their freedom. Like Black girls are so big and just so whole…almost like a big hole…like a galaxy…like so wide and expansive, it's never-ending, so the possibilities of Black girls can go anywhere because of what she is made up of. She is made up of people before her. She is made up of me, and because she is big and expansive, it is hard because the world tries to keep her small, and my protection is in not making her feel small. I let them know every day how big they are by loving them so hard and loving on them so hard and aloud and in front of people, and I will always fight for them and their honor. (Jasmine)

One of the research questions framing this study centered on what aspects of Black girlhood the girls shine light on through their art and conversations. A primary finding was the importance of the conversations and capturings of their mothers. The photos that the girls took of their mothers opened up conversations about the mothers themselves and their own girlhoods, a

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lead which I followed in my methodological choices to include the moms more intentionally as part of the study. What became clear through the data was that the girls were not creating their worlds in isolation, but their mothers (and sisters and cats) are creating these worlds as well as they navigate joy and struggle. Listening to the girls and what they centered made visible the ways the mothers were the crux of this research—and the girls were not operating in a vacuum in documenting Black girlhood because their moms were facilitating a space where girls could compose and be curious. One of these spaces was in support of this research. Figure 34 below shows Gladys supervising one of the artmaking and inquiring sessions while watching virtually via Zoom. The moms literally and figuratively are cultivating spaces for their girls to come to be who they are in their multiplicity and joy.

Figure 34. Gladys Supervising Sessions

Gladys and Jasmine come from different backgrounds and, in turn, arrive at differing understandings of Black girlhood. Accordingly, their approaches to raising their daughters vary. The journeys of both Gladys and Jasmine were riddled with escaping loss and pain, holding ideas of what they should be, and trying to find joy and community. Regardless of how they are presently becoming and arriving at understandings of Black girlhood and motherhood, they are both haunted by their own past experiences. These hauntings are consequently shaping the Black girlhoods of their daughters. Together, the girls and their mothers are figuring everything out because the moms are offering opportunities for dialogue and negotiation.

For this research, I had many questions for the girls during our inquiry invitations and one-on-one conversations about race, gender, and overall identity. The girls explored some of these questions, but mostly did not have the words for the questions I was asking. In starting the research, I was certain that my participants would have so much to say about Black girlhood in very explicit ways, including their positionings along multiple axes of oppression. But when analyzing the data, I learned that their moms grappled with these issues of racism, classism, and sexism—and still are—while protecting their daughters so they will not have to do so in ways that are deficit-oriented. The moms are juggling racism and sexism, or have done so in the past, while giving their daughters what they deserve: opportunities to find joy and confidence. In speaking with the mothers, it became clear that Black girlhood is complicated, haunting, hopeful, and a deliberate and necessary space that needs to be created. Black girlhood is a moment—a tender blip that requires stability and constant affirmations of the multitudes Black girls hold. The mothers spoke of innocence, fragility, wholeness, and galaxies when speaking about their daughters. The girls spoke of love, care, strength, tenderness, and vulnerability when speaking about their mothers. There is a dialogue of love and seeing one another present in the healing of

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Black mothers from their girlhoods, while constructing and supporting the Black girlhoods of their daughters. With the foundation of the Black girlhoods being their mothers and the space the moms are creating for the girls, it becomes clear that Black girlhood is not constructed alone. Many factors can build up or tear down how young Black girls see themselves and their worlds. In this research study, the mothers were crucial in facilitating the space in which the girls were given permission to compose themselves and their worlds freely.

"An *enormous* amount of work": The Nature of Black Girls
Weathering Storms and Protecting Their Joy

Figure 35. "Getting the house tidy after Hurricane Ida" by Joel

The above photo by Joel is titled "Getting the home tidy after Hurricane Ida." According to Joel, her and her family were gone for a while and their home was okay, but their cats got fleas and they had to make the plants come back to life. Joel said, "It was an *enormous* amount of work." The work included cleaning, pivoting and making new plans, grocery shopping, and trying to stay cool, literally and figuratively.

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Based on my observations of the girls and their families, I unfortunately believe they have become accustomed to *enormous* amounts of work in response to both natural and emotional storms that may come their way. This section highlights how for Sia, Mya, and Joel and their community, the storms happen as they will, but the ongoing "storm" of racism creates disparate risk and enormous amounts of work while also distilling fresh, living, radical art. Additionally, as these intense moments are happening, in so many ways, the community, girls, and their families are also making the most of the moment while also being <u>of</u> the moment; their legacies tether them to what is happening. Hurricane Ida was an example of this, and Joel's image (Figure 35) displays how her family has learned to cope with the storms, has been traumatized by the storms, but also can also seemingly make it through the storms—even if it is an *enormous* amount of work.

One recurring finding from my analysis of the data was how Black girlhood is situated in and curated by larger communities within a particular time and place. For my participants, their girlhood and the livelihoods of their families sometimes felt out of their control, a bit haunting, and unsteady—emblematic of their precarious state at times. "Nonetheless, these experiences also demonstrate the agency of Black people in dialogue with the geographies of land and time" (Allen, 2018). The timeframe of this data collection and its geographic location had an impact on how the girls saw the world.

Given the support to be curious and space to create, the girls sat with a recurring topic: elements of community and events happening in their community. The biggest influences were Hurricane Ida, their schooling, and COVID-19. These factors were all interconnected and woven into their everyday realities and versions of Black girlhood. In this section, each photo and narrative reveal the complex exterior worlds and interior lives as experienced, imagined, and

seen through the eyes of Black girls. Despite the challenges the girls kept encountering, whether

virtual learning, the pandemic, natural disasters, or finding themselves in their communities and

community spaces, they discovered an ethos of living that I can only describe as "defiant joy"

within themselves while being anchored by *their people.* The data in this section show a

profound act of salvation and a testament of how deeply connected they are to their

community—for better or worse.

**"I do not have anything left from when I was [a] girl": Community Resilience
and How Black Girlhood Impacts Future Generations of Black Girlhood**

On the weekend of August 28, 2021, news broke that Hurricane Ida, a Category 4 storm,

would tear through Louisiana, eerily on the (sweet) 16-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina.

The parents of my participants experienced Katrina and are still traumatized from that storm.

They are still picking up the pieces from Katrina, and some pieces cannot be restored—like

people, childhood artifacts, and dreams of what could have been. When I asked Sia and Mya's

mom Gladys if she had any photos of her own childhood that we could use to show the girls for a

photo discussion inquiry group, she said, "I do not have anything left from when I was that girl.

There is nothing left from before Katrina. Katrina happened to me, if you know what I mean."

When Gladys said this to me in an interview, my heart sank when thinking about the feeling and

emptiness of not having anything left from childhood. I imagined the storm actively erasing this

portion of her life in the form of material things, memories, places, and people. Then I thought of

Joel's image (Figure 35) and the enormous amount of work she and her family had to do after

Hurricane Ida. It made me wonder about the ways in which Black girls are consistently doing

enormous amounts of work in their communities to rebuild, re-insert themselves, and recreate

after erasure and the storms.

NOLA Ready is the official preparedness campaign for the City of New Orleans, managed by the Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness. As the weekend storm warnings loomed over the city, NOLA Ready texted subscribers (myself and my participants included) constant and persistent warnings of the storm and urged residents to leave and evacuate the city. So, I texted the families involved in this study to gauge their safety and needs. I texted to check in on my participants and their families. One family left and went 90 minutes away to their family's home in Lafayette. While there, a family member contracted COVID and was hospitalized. The other family stayed; both girls in this family were already home from school because they both had contracted COVID. Gladys, Mya and Sia's mom, described this time and being home with the girls as feeling powerless and lost.

The common narrative around the city of New Orleans is that it is a resilient city and so are the people because there has been Katrina, Gustav, and now Ida. What this framing elides is how the communities and people who have to exert this resiliency do so because there is no other choice, and oftentimes these people are disproportionately women, people of color, and those living in the margins financially.

What I have come to realize is that resiliency is a problematic concept when some people do not have anywhere to go. I mean this literally and figuratively in society, in New Orleans, and in the United States. This is an issue of mobility and access, and it requires reframing from an individual attribute to a systemic problem. With Hurricane Ida:

> Some people did not have the funds to go.
> Some people did not have the vehicles to go.
> Some people did not have networks to fall back on.
> Some people did not have the emotional or mental capacity to explore opportunities.
> Some people did not have the resources.

Figure 36. Gladys with Sia and Mya Riding out the Storm

Figure 36 by Gladys (with photo direction by Sia) shows Sia and Mya and their little

sister and cats. To place a picture to some people—"Some people" were my participants and

their family in Figure 36. So, as some went about leaving the city, others felt equipped to stay

and others left immediately. One of the two families in my study stayed because it was their only

option. Mya and Sia, their little sister Destiny, their mom Gladys, their four cats, and over 20

house plants made it through the storm. Their home was fine, but they experienced almost 3

weeks with no power and food insecurity. Their mother said, "We are fine and we will be fine.

We are just taking it minute by minute."

Figure 37. Scenes from the South by Mya

Figure 37. Scenes from the South from the Car by Mya

Mya's photos of the sky and water in Figure 38 provided us a starting point in our inquiry groups about nature, storms, and Hurricane Ida. For the participants and many New Orleanians, the environment and weather have become a topic they talk about with ease because it has become normal, but it is also a topic they discuss with great stress and pain. This storm (Hurricane Ida) and natural disasters are especially important to highlight with regard to my research because they are an example of how natural disasters disproportionately impact Black and brown communities, poor populations, and vulnerable people. This environmental racism inequitably impacts mobility, housing, food security, and health outcomes. Both Hurricane Ida and Hurricane Katrina disproportionately affected predominantly Black areas in the state of Louisiana.

Additionally, the mental health struggles that accompany living with little flexibility in the face of the storm are heart-wrenching and uproot lives. Gladys and Jasmine, the mothers in this study, are both Hurricane Katrina survivors who recounted their traumatic experiences, fearing for the worst as they braced themselves for Ida. The similarities between the storms were glaring. This time, however, they had the added stress of previous financial strain, keeping their own children safe, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Post-Hurricane Ida temperatures wavered between the high 90s to 100 degrees while the city went without power for 20 days. When I asked Gladys how she and the girls sustained themselves, she said, "We cuddled when it was not too hot. I made them read their books and they played outside. I tried to make it fun for them." Gladys's daughter Sia said, "I had so much fun playing chase and going on journeys with my mom and sisters. I took extra care of the cats and put them near the fans." Gladys and Jasmine said their girls were aware of the storm but also seemed unphased, while they, as mothers, struggled to keep it together while worrying about

FEMA, food, and just the next day. It was an expensive natural disaster for them to experience, which illuminates the precarity of their lives.

Figure 39. Scene from the South from the Car by Mya

Figure 39 is another image of the sky and trees by Mya. This particular camera roll was filled with photos of just the sky and nature, but because so much time had passed between the beginning and aftermath of Hurricane Ida, Mya and I could not remember when exactly these photos were taken. These weeks seemed a blur. After listening to the news following the storm, however, I came to know that a recurring description of my participants and their families and the people of New Orleans was *resilient*. Dr. Venus Evans-Winters (2014), in her research on resilience and Black girls, based her definition of resilience on Ashford et al. (1997) and O'Connor (1997), where resiliency is the ability to recover from or adjust to problems, adversity, and stressors in life. According to Evan-Winters (2014):

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Terms that are synonymous with resiliency in urban education are positive coping, persistence, adaptation, and long-term success despite adverse circumstances (Winfield, 1991). Resilience as currently understood is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that incorporates the bidirectional interaction between individuals and their environments within contexts (family, peer, school and community, and society). (American Psychological Association, 2008, p. 3)

Resilience is always defined in relation to risk factors, specifically the number and intensity of risks. For example, the abundance of research on Black girls' resiliency has shown that adversity or risk for Black girls can take the form of poverty, marginalization due to race/gender/class, local climate, single-parent household, and whether her mother was a teen mother (Evans-Winters, 2005). In New Orleans, I would add that a risk factor could be lack of access and resources during a natural disaster. Moreover, for a Black girl "to make it out" and "overcome these obstacles" "despite these challenges," she must be resilient. Gladys, Mya and Sia's mom, said that when she graduated high school, she received an award for her resiliency because she was a teen mother who had recently lost her own mom and had experienced Hurricane Katrina. In her words, "They gave me an award, but none of those teachers ever wanted to help me or make my life easier." Gladys's story is an example of how the histories of "celebrating" resilience instead of enacting systematic change towards equitable infrastructure and opportunities do not meaningfully benefit the lives of Black people, Black girls, and Black communities.

The issue with how Black girl resilience is taken up in research and describing the people of New Orleans as resilient is that, while originally theorized as a *process* (similar to coping), resilience is sometimes measured as an *outcome* and defined by dominant (i.e., White, male, heteronormative, middle-class) values about how to measure "success" (Birkamand & Elliot, 2020). In this way, resilience reinforces dominant definitions of success valued by traditional leaders and institutions that have perpetually othered Black people in labeling them as "at risk."

Instead of a resilience framework to understand and support Black girls and Black families, policymakers, educators, and community organizers should operate from an intersectional perspective (Tefera, 2018) because an intersectional framework heeds how race, ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship, sexuality, age, ability, and religion account for the dynamic and complex ways that identity impacts life. An intersectional framework takes into account the complexities of Blackness and girlhood and thus makes room to imagine why Black girls and Black women might be tired of always being resilient without fair policies and structures. Resilience celebrates Black girls and Black women for always getting back, but it does not meaningfully make their lives easier. Reframing Black girlhood also means problematizing resilience through an intersectional lens that questions who most significantly bears the responsibility of systematic trauma and oppression.

Hurricane Ida cast a magnifying lens over the structural inequalities that New Orleans and cities like it have continued to face. Based on the feedback from my participants and their families, as well as the energy of the city post-Hurricane Ida, one aspect is certain: Black people have continually expressed their dissatisfaction with having to be "resilient," when their communities are decimated again and again. My research aimed to document and unpack narratives of Black girlhood in relation to the capabilities of Black girls as well as societal limitations placed on Black girls. When I hear the city of New Orleans being repeatedly described as resilient, I cannot help but think about which people are far too often called upon to be resilient. Instead, I wish we could imagine what is possible when Black communities are given resources, flexibility, room to play, and room to not have to exert that resiliency in the face of adversity over and over again.

In describing the precarities from Ida, Jasmine made a direct connection between the storm and Black girlhood. She said it is the expectation that Black girls and Black women be always forced to recover, rebuild, return, and keep going, similar to people affected by the storm. This pattern of recovering, rebuilding, and returning also seems to be the rhythm of resiliency work with Black girls and Black women. This calls on emotional and mental labor to shift and pivot around disasters and unbudging forms of oppression. When I asked what Jasmine wants for her girls after the storm, she replied:

> I have learned to rebuild, recover, and return 'cause that is what I was taught and that is what my mom did and everyone around me. But I want my girls—my young ladies—to know that they are strong enough to rebuild, recover, and return, but they are also strong enough to walk away. I want them to know they are capable of whatever they decide, and they do not have to keep proving themselves to others. They can only do this when they understand how big this all is. This is not their burden to carry.

When asked what she meant by "this," Jasmine paused and said:

> **This!** I have not been able to go back to my house for three weeks! My daughter has not been able to go to school. I cannot work because of COVID and the storm. My daughter did not get the healthcare she needs 'cause of my insurance. **This!** What Black people keep having to pay for. These are not their grievances to pay. *We are just out here* and they (the government) leave us out here. **But** it just has to get better. Things cannot get worse.

Despite everything going on, Jasmine inserted a defiant ***but*** for radical hope and resistance.

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"It's Going to be okay…I think": How Black Girls Coped with Virtual Learning, Time, and Schooling

Figure 40. School by Joel, August 2021

In one of the inquiry sessions, Joel shared an image of her computer. When sharing this image, she said, "...andddd this is the computer I use every day AND I have to sit there HOURS but I like this more than school." The computer in this image symbolizes the precarity of this particular moment in time and the change to which many children and families had to adjust due to COVID-19. The timing of the data collection of this research was unique and tender. Formal data collection began in May 2021 and was completed in October 2021. The participants in this study had already been at home in virtual schooling for almost 15 months when the study began. Their families shared that the girls preferred virtual learning over in-person learning. Gladys, a mother of two of my participants, said that it was a lot to have both girls at home in addition to her youngest daughter, but the girls seemed happier and more comfortable at home.

For many Black youth, virtual learning and hybrid learning became a preference that their families later adapted via homeschooling (Raiyn, 2021). According to the Homeschool Census Bureau, the number of Black families homeschooling rose from 3% in October 2020 to 20% in April 2020 (Miles, 2021). Black families cited that their decision to transition their children to more at home learning was influenced by the pandemic and because they noticed their child was happier and more engaged at home. The top reason, however, why Black parents decided to keep their children in a home setting environment for schooling was that they did not want their child to be subjected to racism. When Joel and her co-participants shared out Figure 40, their tone suggested that they were experiencing burnout from the screen time while schooling virtually. Even so, both mothers of the participants spoke about how much happier the girls were while not attending in-person learning, and if home schooling was a viable option, they would consider it, despite work schedule and financial constraints.

During my time of data collection, it did not become clear to me why the girls preferred virtual or hybrid learning versus full-time in-person learning experiences. However, I do know that the pandemic increased the awareness Black parents had of the schooling experiences of their Black children regarding the curriculum, bullying, policies, racism, and sexism. Research has shown that Black children and Black families suffer in American schooling due to inequitable access to educational opportunities and resources (Dumas, 2014). Additionally, gender discrimination and systematic racism for Black girls is present in school buildings in the form of school policies, larger structural conditions that influence schooling, and stereotypes of Black girls that influence teacher perceptions of and interactions with Black girls. The racism and sexism that this country is built on provide a foundation to understand the inequitable and traumatic schooling experiences of Black girls and Black families. Wun (2016) described these

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experiences as "part of a larger structural condition that authorizes institutions and individuals to perpetually violate Black girls and women without acknowledging the possibility of their victimhood" (p. 192). Again, it is not clear why all three participants felt more comfortable with at home learning, but it is possible to understand how and why their school environments could be a site of emotional trauma that was not comfortable, given the history and research of schooling experiences of Black girls. Joel did not enjoy logging into her computer every day for virtual learning, but her mom did note that when Joel was not attending physical classes, Joel was relieved and happy.

Figure 41. Coping with COVID by Mya

In mid-August, both of Gladys's daughters, Sia and Mya, returned to in-person school, and it seemed as if there was again a temporary normalcy and routine. As I walked with my daughter in the mornings, I saw Sia and Mya waiting for the school bus and rushing to get to school in time, their hair decorated with hair accessories and their uniforms perfectly pressed. The feeling of normalcy was fleeting, and the gears quickly shifted to the demands of parenting and the ability to pivot.

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A week into the school year, however, both Sia and Mya contracted COVID-19, despite their mom's hyper-vigilance and the school's mask policies and mandates. Figure 41 was taken by Mya who captured her sister Sia doing a puzzle on a day off from school when they both got COVID-19. Gladys, their mother, already felt hesitant about sending her daughters to school, but felt pulled to do so because their school would not offer virtual/hybrid opportunities. She had the pressures of her own work obligations and needed space and time to herself, even though she was worried the girls would fall behind academically and socially. Gladys described their home during this time as quiet and restful, which is also suggested in Mya's photo of Sia working on her puzzle. While the girls were home from school, Gladys had to miss work and cancel all of her hair appointments with her hair clients. Initially, Gladys felt very scared and upset about her girls getting sick. After contracting COVID-19, however, she said she took the time to slow down. Gladys and her girls made the most of this moment by drawing, doing puzzles (as seen above), taking walks, and watching movies. Gladys jokingly said, "I would give myself five stars for my COVID camp!"

This research took place during COVID-19 and the life that was happening during the pandemic. Mid-way through the research, Joel, my third participant, had a family emergency. Her older sister had to suddenly undergo several back-to-back surgeries, and due to childcare and family concerns, Joel had to stay with her grandmother in Lafayette, Louisiana, a Cajun and Creole town 2 hours from New Orleans. Due to these family emergencies, Joel continued to chat with me and attended some of the inquiry groups from Lafayette. During one of our one-on-one catch-up chats, I asked Joel what she had been up to. While in Lafayette, Joel said she supported her mama, helped her sister get better, and had ice cream with her grandma:

Well, I help my mama. Tell her it's gonna be okay. I think she needs that. I get ice cream every day with my grandma (laughs). I check on Em (her sister). I make sure she is okay. It is going to be okay… I think.

Joel seemed very present with her family's needs and was eager to help make life easier. Joel's words also showed that she was aware of her family members' feelings and, fortunately, Joel's school was understanding of her missing school. During this family emergency, her school did not provide her with virtual learning opportunities, although they did supply her with her packets of work. While in Lafayette, several members of Joel's family contracted COVID-19. Joel is now a second grader and spent her whole first grade and half of second grade learning virtually, which she said was by preference. Due to Hurricane Ida, all three participants ended up missing a total of 5 weeks of in-person learning, in addition to being out of their physical schools due to COVID-19. The participants' schools sustained damage due to Hurricane Ida, and it was not safe for them or the teachers to be in the building after the storm. At the completion of this study, the parents estimated that their girls had been doing virtual learning for about 1.5 academic school years.

"I miss them": How Black Girls Mourned and Memorialized Their Community

The participants in this study used their voices to speak up often about their families, friends, music, TV, and cats. They also intimately shared feelings of joy and yearning. During the time of data collection, however, there was so much loss and shifting due to COVID-19, the Presidential election, virtual learning, Hurricane Ida, and the social and political climate of the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. The girls' words embodied the full spectrum of emotions for which many adults often could not find the words. As I continue to sit with the Black girls' thoughts about *their friends and family*, I see how they found the words to express many complex aspects about their communities in ways that were simultaneously clear and full

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of joy and yearning, when given time, space, and creative opportunities. In the inquiry group

discussion below, the girls chatted with me about their schools and friends. Joel's feelings about

her friends or the people she called her sisters carry a tug-of-war of joy and pain.

> Maureen: Sia and Mya, do you get sad when you can't see each other at school since you
>   are in different grades?
> Mya: No, I got my own friends. I have my best friend K.
> Maureen: How do you know she is your best friend?
> Mya: 'Cause we like the same things. The same dancing. The same food. The same
>   clothes.
> Maureen: Do you all have a lot of other Black girls at your school?
> Sia: Yeah. We have a lot of girl teachers too. We just don't have a lot of boy teachers.
> Joel: hmmmm (looks up to think). Yeah.
> Maureen: How does that make you feel?
> Joel: I do not know. Like we pretend we are sisters. Just pretend.
> Maureen: What does that mean?
> Joel: We are best friends.
> Maureen: Are best friends different than sisters?
> Joel: Yes and no. I do not know. We are sisters and we are friends. We band together. It
>   is us.
> Maureen: Band hmmmm
> Joel: Sticky tight glueeeeeee ba-by (NOLA accent)!
> Maureen: You and the other Black girls? Band together for what or against what?
> Joel: For everything!!!!!! When we see each other, you know, and it is just us. We are
>   like sisters.
> Maureen: Okay...so sister friends?!?!?
> Joel: We stick together. They are not my real sisters, but it feels important.
> Maureen: Can you draw them for me?
> Joel: ….agh. Maybe someday, I have not seen them.
> Maureen: Ooooo like just virtually?
> Joel: Yeah, and I cannot say the word I want to say (eye roll sigh smile) but it sucks. *I
>   miss them.*

Friendships are complex. Navigating a pandemic is complex. Finding a group of people

who make one feel safe and protected is very hard. In the vignette, Joel shared how at her school,

her Black girl friends "pretended" they were sisters and created a bond that was sticky, tight, and

protective. When Joel said this, her New Orleans accent emerged to emphasize her point. Black

girls have been working tirelessly to find sisterhood and community in order to sustain and thrive

and create new avenues of joys. Though Joel said they are just pretending to be sisters, she

expressed **that this sisterhood felt important to her.** Joel is filled with so much joy talking about them, but almost left without words and/or the ability to draw them because she misses her friend group so much.

In 2020, *The New York Times*, in collaboration with The Learning Network, gathered comments, drawings, and essays from teenagers on how they were maintaining friendships amid the pandemic while the world was drowning in racism and bullying (The Learning Network, 2020). The young contributors said they felt disconnected and struggled to maintain their friendships; they missed having regular interactions with their friends—the physical proximity was something they missed. Jasmine, Joel's mom, described Joel as a homebody. Joel was relieved to stay home and study via virtual learning, but the pang for seeing her friends in person at school was heavy. Joel's explanation of her sisterhood and friendship group emphasizes joy, comfort, and safety (i.e., "we band together"), as something that could have provided comfort during rocky times because they *stick together "for everything."* Joel saw this group as her people for everything, and they have created a collectivism against everything.

This vignette revealed how Black girls are able to use their language to express complex matters of the heart and community that are filled with joy and yearning. For example, with Joel being home during virtual learning, she was able to express her spectrum of emotions on this matter as a relief, but simultaneously as also being overwhelming because she has to sit in front of her computer for hours. When describing her friends, her emotions moved through waves of happiness to sadness—a sadness so strong she actually could not draw her friends. Joel was asked to draw many pictures throughout this research study. Drawing her friendship group was one she never came around to drawing, although she spoke about it regularly and always stressed

its importance in her life. In my interpretation, Joel redefined and reclaimed this moment through creating boundaries around what she was willing to share. Joel also showed the interconnected emotions that Black girls can feel and experience. Joel's vignette illustrated how young children can sit in overlapping emotions and express these intersections in ways that are honest, vulnerable, and true to their realities and feelings. With time and space to share their stories, it is possible to unveil the complicated nature of life that even young children experience while simultaneously experiencing a plethora of feelings and community traumas.

"It is like an artifact of me": How Black Girls Found Themselves in Their Community

Part of the legacy of the participants in this study is about allowing meaning making and interpretation of their lives through community and art. One of the ways this presented itself was by exploring Black woman artists in community spaces where Black people are often excluded, such as in art museums. When I asked their parents if the girls and I could walk over to the museum, one mom said, "I never go in there as much anymore. They are always watching Black people like they're gonna steal something." Museums and the art world continue to be contested spaces that lack continuous and consistent accessibility (Embrick, 2019). But with permission from their parents, I was excited to walk over to the New Orleans Museum of Modern Art (NOMA) with the girls to see the work of Clementine Hunter, a Black woman who was born and raised in Louisiana. The piece in Figure 42 is titled *Harvesting Gourds* near the African House and Wash Day Near Ghana House, Melrose Plantation (Hunter, 1959).

Figure 42. *Harvesting Gourds near the African House and Wash Day near the Ghana House, Melrose Plantation* by Clementine Hunter, 1959

On a not-so-busy day, we sat and looked at the painting *Harvesting Gourds near the African House and Wash Day near the Ghana House, Melrose Plantation*. The girls used the words "mazey," "interesting," and "faceless" to describe the piece. The girls were told to look closely at the piece and, similar to their photo discussions, consider any "wonderings" and curiosities. In this museum space, we discussed how Hunter is a folk artist, and folk art is when people make art about their culture and their lives. I remember saying something similar to "New Orleans has a culture, we have a culture in this group, and your schools have cultures. Do we know what this word means?"

While sitting in NOMA under the painting, we read *Art from Our Heart*, a picture book about Clementine Hunter. The girls had previously shared an online reading of the text. The story unpacks Clementine Hunter's life as told by Kathy Whitehead and Shane Evans (2008). NOMA gave Clementine Hunter her first museum show in 1955, which was among the first solo shows for any African American female artist in the country.

According to NOMA's (2021) website, Hunter lived and worked most of her life on the Melrose cotton plantation near Natchitoches, Louisiana, which is about 3-4 hours from New Orleans. She did not start painting until the 1940s when she was already a grandmother. Her first painting, executed on a window shade using paints left behind by a plantation visitor, depicted a baptism in Cane River. Hunter painted at night after working all day in the plantation house. She used whatever surfaces she could find to draw and paint: canvas, wood, gourds, paper, snuff boxes, wine bottles, iron pots, cutting boards, and plastic milk jugs. Working from memory, Hunter recorded everyday life in and around the plantation, from work in the cotton fields to baptisms and funerals. Even with such success, Hunter chose to stay in Louisiana, working at Melrose Plantation until 1970, when she moved to a small trailer a few miles away on an unmarked road.

I found it important to show the girls Hunter's work because she is a Black woman artist from Louisiana who worked to capture her everyday life. Additionally, her paintings make important new connections between her work and current conversations around race, class, gender, Louisiana, the South, and history. I framed the trip to the museum as a time to see and be in conversation with art. This framing spurred the conversation below.

> Mya: WHAT? We cannot talk toooooooooo the art.
> Sia: Well...you do not have to say something to the art, but the art may do something to you like with your feelings.
> Maureen: UH-HUH! Say more.
> Sia: Well, like how music just makes you wanna dance or move, I guess, or a book or a movie.
> Maureen: I think you have the right idea.
> Joel: I can see that.
> Maureen: Many times, I have seen art and it always makes me think or sometimes it makes me upset, but even more times it has made me want to cry. I read the placard next to [the artwork] and get really into the story of the artists and the work.
> Joel: CRY?!?! You cried.
> Sia: Okay, so let's go talk to this art then (says it in a mocking way)
> **(all the girls laugh)**

I was open to the museum trip being an open-ended exploration with no particular adult-determined or research goal in mind. I was also worried that maybe they would not be ready for such an experience or be in the space to consume Hunter's story and art. There were several silent responses to questions and prompts, which made me think that maybe the museum space felt overwhelming or alienating to the girls. However, I could tell that Sia had wanted to say something for a while, but she was nervous to speak initially. When Sia decided to speak, it woke up the conversation and the vignette below captures it all.

> Sia: She could be my mama or her mamas or mamas. It just reminds me of my mama and pop pop. It is like she just been working and working and look at all that (points to the painting) that is just too much. It seem like a lot. None of the roads connect or touch and there is no grass and no sun. Is she even really happy?!?!?
>
> Mya: Whatchu mean is she happy, we cannot see her face? (screams a bit)
>
> Sia: Exactly!!!
>
> Joel: Yeah, like my nana and pop pop. Like it could be an artifact of me.
>
> Maureen: Tell me more.
>
> Joel: Well, Mr. X said an artifact is a thing that can tell us something. We did something once and we looked at pictures and letters and even music.
>
> Joel closed out this moment with: She *(Hunter)* made her skin so licorice. Well, she painted it right?!?!? (assertive voice but quizzical face). She made it! Maybe now she is [happy]—but if I could tell her something, I would say she needs a sun right here (points to the top left of page and makes a circle motion) and I would tell her to give herself a face...a smiley face.

To me, there is something compelling about the ideas of Black girls wanting to see Black girls and Black women with "smiley faces." At the same time, during this research, there was a clear connection to the histories—pasts, presents, and futures—of Black girls and Black women. In a space that their own parents did not feel comfortable visiting, these Black girls conceptualized the histories and stories of their parents and grandparents and their great-grandparents in art as "mazey" and "faceless" through analyzing the work of an artist from Louisiana. This visit required a pre-talk before the museum, a book reading before the museum, and a read-aloud at the museum. With all of these preparations, there were still many awkward

pauses or moments when it seemed like the connections were not happening or not going to happen. But with time and pauses and sitting in those awkward moments, the connections did happen.

I believe the conversations happened but took longer because the participants needed to draw on many possibilities and ideas to find connections. They drew on words and experiences from school (i.e., artifacts and culture), called on their community knowledge, pulled from their family history and daily lives, and drew on what they wanted for Black women and Black girls (i.e., "she needs to be smiling and there needs to be a sun"). Research has shown that young children enjoy talking about art and artists, but are just not given the opportunity (Eckhoff, 2008). Just as much as they liked producing their own pieces, my participants also benefited from having meaningful conversations about the works and aesthetics of Clementine Hunter, and how her life and experiences intersect with their lives and experiences and visions for Black humanity.

By placing the girls in the museum, I realized it came down to reconfiguring accessibility and access to their legacies. Based on the mother's feedback about the museum trip and how she had been treated in the past, I realized that Black history and Black art has become commodified for the white gaze. The art no longer serves as an interpretation or connection to the experiences of the girls and their families and those of their ancestors, further illuminating how community spaces alienate the people whose culture is simultaneously commodified for consumption.

The Power of Making Life Possible: Section Summary on the Community

Hurricane Ida, COVID-19, virtual learning, family emergencies, and an art museum visit are all connected to community, time, and place, but the real tie is how historical and systematic oppressions are still present in the communities of Black girls. The data imaged how these

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oppressions are impacted by time and place, and how time and place can be oppressive. The community happenings revealed the precarious state that the girls and their families live in and are, therefore, forced often to take life "minute by minute" or do "enormous amounts of work" because of oppressive structures and systems. Such inequities may present themselves in quiet and subtle ways that deviously seem natural yet have a significant impact. For example, when Joel's sister was sick, Joel did not receive virtual learning support. A series of silent responses during a trip to the museum may speak more of the generations of families alienated by the space than a lack of curiosity or questions.

The inequities also present in very loud ways, such as when the girls do not have access to their legacies of Black art, or shelter and food insecurity or loss of memories due to fierce hurricanes, or being forced about school attendance during a national health pandemic, despite issues of safety and personal learning preferences. When I disentangle the storm, the museum, virtual learning, and COVID-19, the strand I have left is how Black girlhood and Black communities bear the responsibilities of moments of oppression, yet also make the most of these moments through movement, resistance, and defiant joy. Or perhaps they make the most of these moments because they have learned to do so—what other choice do they have? Somehow the participants found their Black girlfriends at school and knew that felt important; somehow they found themselves in art and were reminded of their nana and papa and their heritage.

When I envision the future of Black girlhood, I envision one of choices, mobility, and access, rather than just "making the most" of what is available. My participants and their families consistently seemed exercise the power of making life possible, regardless of which storm was assailing them. I can only imagine what might happen if Black communities and Black girls

could be moved from the brink of precarity, if they do not have to rebuild, or if they could reside in spaces where they and their histories deserve to be, front and center.

Chapter 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS:

TOWARD COURAGEOUS WAYS OF BEING

The purpose of this study was to unpack how Black girls make meaning of their lives and worlds through art and collectivism. Furthermore, this study illuminated how Black girls made creative and collective shifts to becoming theorists about their intersectional ways of interacting and understanding the world while reading the world around them (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Richardson, 2002). Cooper (2018) wrote that "Black girls are always the compass pointing us to the North" (p. 37) when their subjugated knowledge is moved from margin to center. This study serves as a visual and textual correction to dominant positionings by foregrounding the capabilities of young Black girls and their families to create, be curious, and push back as they collectively work through their own theorizations of themselves and how they show up in the world. As the main characters in this research study, it was important for them to participate in the development of the research, steering the journey of this process through their stories and priorities.

Creating better outcomes for Black girls and their families, despite what the dominant research agenda may suggest, does not have to be a never-ending cycle. The answers are within the girls but are only apparent with time and listening (Yoon & Templeton, 2019). The girls and their families exemplify the push and pull of living in and through pain and struggle, but they also exemplify an enormous amount of joy and happiness. The girls storied their lives as

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complex, frustrating, playful, and incredibly full. It was not originally planned for the mothers to be a focus of this study, but the girls grounded their mothers as key figures necessary to understanding their lives. Together, the mothers and daughters finessed lives that I would describe as "courageous ways of being"—together, they were consistently hopeful for something more, aware of their current realities and willfully persistent of who they are. The data from this study underscored how, if we take time to listen to Black girls and their families, their needs are clear: (a) desire for community, (b) spaces for creativity and storytelling, and (c) understanding of the precarity of Black families and how that intersects with the multidimensions that Blackness can present. These points are elaborated on further below.

The participatory nature of this research sought to understand what layers and capabilities of Black girlhood can emerge when they are given the creative support, collective community, and space and time to be curious about themselves. Historically, cameras have given Black people a means to participate fully in the production of images, disrupting the ways they are often imaged in narrow, singular narratives. With this in mind, my intentional use of photography aimed for Black girls to participate fully in the image production of their versions of Black girlhood in order to influence the visual imagery of Black life. The participants assembled their realities through photos, art making, and discussions in ways that felt important and meaningful for the moments of life they were experiencing during data collection. Their photos and ideas were their own; my role was to create a space for engagement and to follow their leads. The data that the girls collected with my support suggested that Black girlhood is about the girls and their identities, their families, and their communities. The girls braided these layers of their lives together in everyday ways of expressing, and they unbraided these layers through conversations, photography, and questions.

Inviting Black girls to participate in the qualitative research process by positioning them as the collectors of the data about their lives centered them in the theoretical discussion of Black life, Black girlhood, and the relationship of Black life to the visual. Their works demonstrated a powerful location for the construction of ideas about Black girlhood, Black communities, and Black families as a counter-narrative and as a new site exploration. As hooks (1995) suggested, photography (in this case, visual methods as a whole) has revealed subjugated knowledges and served as a tool of resistance in oppressed communities. Indeed, Black feminists have used art to connect individual struggles with the collective, forging new imaginaries for self-empowerment and dissent (Brown, 2013; Shaw, 2004; Tesfagiorgis, 1993; Wallace, 2004). Black Feminist Thought stabilizes the power of qualitative arts-based research to expand on visual and Black girl literacies.

The use of participatory-based research with artistic methodologies allowed my participants and their families to see themselves in a world where they are often hypervisible and/or unseen. hooks (1995) posited that the image production of life making and happening was a form of art making but also of life-capturing and reimagining, further suggesting how photography and art are powerful tools for identity construction and deconstruction of larger systems and structures. This research suggested that there is no one version of Black girlhood, and I believe my participants and their parents would agree. The words of my participants and their families, in conjunction with their works and their daily lives captured in photos, drawings, and voice memos, revealed the collective struggles of Black girls and Black women along with individual ones. Had it not been for the participatory nature of this research and the prevalence of visual and multimodal approaches, I would not have known:

- how hurricanes impact Black families from the perspective of a Black girl.

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- how schools attempt to adultify children by saying who can wear a Halloween costume and who cannot wear one because of behavior or age.
- how a pandemic can cause so much sadness and joy to young children, simultaneously.
- the ways of knowing how young children take their friendships seriously.
- what it looks like when young Black girls make powerful connections between themselves and others and their communities.
- how family is everything.
- how Black girls think their hair and brown skin are truly beautiful.
- how Black mothers are trying to heal themselves while protecting and raising their children.

To produce spaces where young Black girls can discuss and create, rather than pick between their families' values and their schools values, means to honor their identities and the complex and hopeful ways in which they see the world.

This research can open a window in considering what early childhood education can be, what qualitative research should be with Black girls and their families, and how art and community-based interactions can be powerful forces for young children. These Black girls and their families built the roadmap for this study based on their questions, stories, and makings, and their insights directly speak to opportunities for transformation beyond academia. With time, space, and patience, Black girls and their families can and should be able to participate in creating better outcomes for Black girls and Black families in all communities and schools. Educators, policymakers, and communities need to engage Black girls to be participatory in these areas because they can be. It is also up to educators, researchers, community organizers, and policymakers to engage Black girls, to pay attention to their desires and the many ways they can present (i.e., artwork, interviews, observations, etc.), so that Black girls can be active makers in the arenas that impact them.

Insights for (Re)Conceptualizations of Black Girlhood

Expanding the Framing of Black Girlhood

Black Girlhood Studies is a growing field in which scholars have worked tirelessly to establish the levels and perspectives in which Black girls experience schooling and the world at large. This study contributes to situating sexual orientation and gender identity as they impact gender and racial constructs for Black girl bodies, which are sexualized, adultified, and criminalized. The field continues to present new avenues straight from the words of Black girls themselves. For example, towards the end of data collection, Joel said to her mother, "I am nonbinarium (non binary)." What does the field of Black Girlhood Studies mean in 2022 when Black youth are learning new ways they can identify beyond being a Black girl? How might young children's gender expression intersect with, and contribute to expanding, the nomenclature used in scholarly fields like Black Girlhood Studies? Love's (2017) scholarship begs for imaginative methodologies to make room for queer Black youth whose lives are centered on/around hip hop—a sometimes homophopic space for Black bodies. This act of blurring the lines and developing more frameworks and ways of thinking is necessary to make room for the identities of Black youth. My research suggested that scholarship has not caught up with the many ways Black children are exploring and putting words and realities to their fascinating and fluid identities. The research journey of sexual and gender orientation also lies in how academia, schools, and policies make shifts to nuance the self-identification of Black youth.

The emotions of Black girls and Black women should be a space of inquiry. As an educator, I believe this research study was one of the few times I have observed Black girls being (freely) emotional without policing their own feelings or curating their own reactions about how they would be perceived. As a teacher, I remember the social and emotional professional development workshops on supporting Black boys and their emotions and the importance of affirming Black boys in their tears and fears. The same support was not awarded to my students

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who were Black girls. Additionally, the mothers in this study were maneuvering through many emotions while mothering, working, and surviving. Ahmed (2013) discussed emotions as intentional because they are "about" something and offer a direction or orientation towards something. Ahmed unpacked that societally, not all emotions are weighted equally; "into a hierarchy between emotions: some emotions are 'elevated' as signs of cultivation, whilst others remain 'lower' as signs of weakness." This hierarchy of emotions is narrated by whiteness, masculinity, and power; then, it works to control bodies and deem what is appropriate or good or bad. This categorization maintains the othering of certain bodies, while their emotional experiences are dependent on relations of power. I saw this in the ways that the mothers would try not to cry in front of their daughters or try not to be angry during frustrating moments. This concealing of emotions also feeds back to the strong Black woman narrative that Black girls take on at a young age. Black girls have been told how to feel, when to feel, how to react, and they are constantly moderating their emotions because of how they could be perceived. As a Black girl, I remember considering the emotions of others and what they could be feeling or assume about me, so I could act accordingly—further proving how some bodies are allowed to be emotional and others are not given the privilege to honor their own emotions (first). This study carried many emotions and we tried to surrender to them—by choice and willingly. What would be amazing to witness are research possibilities around the emotional intelligence, emotional well-being, emotional olympics, and emotional spectrum of Black girls in relation to cultural politics and power in order to reimagine ideas and discussions of Black girlhood.

Black Girlhood and Local Geographies

This study was situated in Louisiana. The girls and their families experienced a unique way of living and specific catastrophes and happiness because of their location. Black

Geographies is a growing field in which researchers are contributing scholarship that explores

how Black agency, experience, and geography are all connected (Allen, 2018) and, specifically,

how Black women navigate in/with spaces that have been marked by legacies of violence and

slavely (McKittrick, 2006). This suggests that Black girls may experience places and their

surroundings in a unique way based on gender, race, and age. The participants' version of

childhood and Black girlhood had a backdrop of intensity, precarity, and color. The location

(time and context) and geography (physical location) can impact ideas and notions of living,

Blackness, schooling, community, parenting, access, and childhood. Therefore, Black girlhood is

not delimited but varied, always unfolding and being constructed by location and geography.

Across such dimensions, there might be similarities and differences nationally and

internationally on Black girlhood. However, no matter how landscapes may change, I believe

Black girls and their families are often faced with issues of being seen, issues of respect, issues

of self-doubt, issues of love, and issues around systems and structures that can make life full of

joy and meaning.

In April 2020, the Chicago-based organization A Long Walk Home (2020) published an

executive summary that highlighted how COVID-19 was disproportionately affecting Black

communities, even though Black residents only make up 29% of the city. Furthermore, the study

highlighted how the intersecting pandemics of COVID-19, racism, and sexism have been

impacting the livelihoods of Black girls and their families. The data covered the initial outbreak

of COVID, the Chicago stay-at-home orders, the racial and social justice protests, and the

experience of virtual learning for Black girls and their families. Their data revealed how Black

girls increased their level of responsibility during COVID by being caregivers to adults and

young children in their homes, had to work as essential workers in COVID-19 hot spots, and

faced an overall increase in the experience of adultification even as young as 5 years old. The

girls in the study reported they were more vulnerable to an array of violences and had fewer

resources and less hope for their success and safety.

A Long Walk Home is a community arts-based organization that believes in the

experiences and expertise of Black girls as essential in addressing systematic racism and sexism

and advocating for structural change. For this reason they have established:

- a Black Girlhood Altar—an exhibit produced by Black girls and their communities during the pandemic to transform public spaces from sites of trauma to places of collective remembrance and power.
- Black Girl Freedom Fund—an initiative to help invest in the lives of Black girls.
- Black Girl Takeover—a public art program by Black girls and youth to address the rising crisis of violence against Black girls in Chicago.
- Picturing Black Girlhood Exhibit—an intergenerational exhibition that included the work by numerous Black girl photographers alongside Black women professional artists and practitioners.
- Black Girl Movement Conference—a 3-day gathering at Columbia University in New York City that occurred in April 2016 to focus on Black, cis, queer, and trans girls in the United States. Bringing together artists, activists, educators, policymakers, and Black girl leaders themselves, this first national conference on Black girls sought to address the disadvantages that Black girls in the United States face, while creating the political will to publicly acknowledge their achievements, contributions, and leadership.

Aligned with A Long Walk Home, this Louisiana-based dissertation revealed how

community and collectivism can invite Black girls to learn about themselves while cultivating

their voices to share with the world who they are and what they want. My research contributes to

shifting discussions, spaces, and trajectories for and with the Black community. The pandemic

has emphasized how schools operate as a microcosm for American society; therefore, my

scholarship illuminates how a collective alternate space of healing, research, and learning for

Black Girls is a valuable resource. Additionally, my research and organizations like A Long

Walk Home exemplify how organizations, researchers, and community organizers can

potentially work together to conduct research and execute programming to support resources,

opportunities, and creative pursuits for Black girls.

Implications

Implications of Caring for Black Girls in Research and Practice

      In working towards a more just future for Black girls, my research suggested that one cannot think about progress or transformation without considering how care should blanket all strides for and with Black girls: Care for what they have to say, care for their futures, care for their education, care for their hopes and dreams, and care for their families. This *care* has a demonstrable impact on how research is taken up with Black girls, how policies are enacted, and how their schooling experiences unfold day to day.

      As described via vignettes and the girls' works, I found that around me, their caregivers of color, and friends, the girls felt *invited and welcomed,* and their stories were *centered* about their experiences. Unlike school, their parents and the inquiry groups invited the girls to speak about their lived experiences; additionally, their peers in this research and their families gave room for the girls to surface and explore spontaneous stories about their day-to-day lived experiences. During times of observations in the girls' homes and during interactions with their families, the caregivers showed deep care and love for the words and feelings of the girls. The parents nodded, smiled, laughed, and made eye contact during their conversations. These gestures and interactions became the norm in our art inquiry groups—full of love, curiosity, *trying*, and patience. I thought I would have to teach the girls how to pay attention to each other and actively listen to one another. I had outlined a whole inquiry group day for this entitled "active listening and inquiry." To my realization, the girls knew how to do this already for one another and how to listen to me, because their parents and community had already modeled with them how to make someone the central focus or voice in the room. They were also hyperaware of how to do it "correctly" or, better yet, genuinely, based on the interactions they wished they

had at school. The data were possible because of the care their communities have shown them and because of the interactions they wished they had more of in other spaces.

Implications for Caring for the Stories and Families of Black Girls

In a Medium article "Vulnerability and Strength: Black Mothers Raising Free Black Girls," Dr. Seanna Leath (2020), a professor who is a Black woman scholar examining positive identity development among Black girls and women, explored the question *"What does it mean to be a healthy Black girl? How do we raise whole Black girls—free Black girls?"* These questions seem to be a constant in the emerging field of Black Girlhood Studies. Scholars and parents alike have tried to unpack this question in answers that can hopefully unfold in the daily interactions and experiences that young Black girls have. For this research, I sat with two moms in the summer of 2021, both of whom are single moms to three girls. Both moms are also artists and were born and raised in Louisiana. With them, I discussed their childhood experiences, what nourishes them, and what it means to parent Black girls ***in this moment.***

While it was never an intention to interview the mothers in this research, the girls kept drawing roadmaps that led to their mothers. The frequency with which their mothers were discussed illustrated how much family shapes the story of Black girlhood. In hearing from their parents, the Black girlhoods of the present and future will always be haunted by the traumas, dreams, and sweet memories of the past. I found that as much as this dissertation research was about Black girls growing up in this moment, this moment is also tethered to the moments of the girls' mothers, and their mothers, and their mothers. Despite the traumas they experienced, the mothers still forcefully curated moments and conversations that were joyful and practiced creating platforms for the girls on which to stand tall and speak loudly. The moms were raising

the girls amid many violences while actively creating an environment that was not only tenable but safe and welcoming.

"Healthy" and "free" are subjective words with many definitions. To include the family in research of Black girls means to also peel back the histories and experiences of those around them to better understand the girls and their history. Leath (2020) wrote there is an emotional recognition and reconciliation that she and her daughter have been cultivating since birth, with the hopes that as a mother she can bear her full humanity to her daughter and, in return, her daughter will grow to have an emotional wholeness and a freedom of expression. The implications for including families in the research of Black girls necessitates also foregrounding their humanity alongside the systems and structures they are processing and undoing in order to raise their daughters in a way that maybe one day would have been unimaginable. Bearing witness to Black girls has a direct avenue to also bearing witness to the humanities of their families and those raising them. Researchers seeking to document and understand Black girlhood must account for the often-invisible networks that inform young children's meaning-making.

Implications for Carefully and Courageously Considering Community as Curriculum

Exploring the need to reconfigure spaces for Black girlhoods was an unintentional consequence of this dissertation. By planting our inquiry discussions and meetings in public spaces, the girls and I maintained curiosity, flexibility, and connectivity between the spaces and our identities. The girls and I met in so many places that they and their parents did not visit (often) because of how they felt in those places. We sat in bakeries, coffee shops, playgrounds, and museums. What could be felt but not seen is how spaces are indeed racialized (LaFleur, 2021), which impacted what we thought we could or could not do in certain settings.

The places served as another character in the dissertation. When visiting the New Orleans Museum of Modern Art, the parents and I were incredibly concerned about the girls feeling comfortable in the space, but we also went down a road of "making sure they behave in the space." I believe these concerns were heightened because we were visiting what Anderson (2015) called a "white space"—an area that Black people tend to perceive is off limits for them and/or where feel they need to conduct themselves in a certain manner while engaging in the space. This tension between letting the girls be, but also the risk of potentially upholding problematic narratives of how the girls (as Black girls) should act, was an invisible and silent cloud hanging over the experience. As a researcher, I had to dance constantly between the concerns of navigating historically white spaces while simultaneously protecting the girls and sitting with ways they could organically take up space without policing their own behaviors or what they believe they should be doing. Delaney (2002) argued that historically, race has constructed space and what certain bodies can and cannot do in certain spaces. Though feeling the constraints, with every interaction the girls had in a public space, we were also establishing ourselves as worthy to be there in whatever form. I had to remind myself of this often.

There were moments when we entered a space and immediately began to whisper because in our Black bodies, that is what we have learned to do. I remember at the bakery, one of the participants was nervous about taking the cookie off the rack before paying; at the museum, another participant stomped the whole time because she liked the way her feet echoed throughout the big building. There was so much to observe in behavior, words, and voices while also engaging as a collective group in public spaces. These moments speak to the learning that is possible with Black girls outside of traditional school spaces in order to understand the multitudes they hold and the questions they are curious about.

Literature on Black girls and how they interact with the school setting suggested that Black girls do experience a heightened level of emotional and mental trauma from school (Wun, 2016), and there is research on preparing (Black) young children for school (Dumas, 2014). These forms of conditioning and preparation uphold eurocentric and white supremacist ideas of childhood, Blackness, and gender. Instead of constantly attempting to condition Black children for school and public spaces, there needs to be a reconfiguring of the spaces to let *all* Black girls in, not just a filtered or constrained version. Black children stripped of their innocence to just "be" impact beliefs on how they should act when, instead, they should be encouraged to take up all spaces. Exploring places with the girls in this study forced me to do the work as a researcher and an adult to guide them through new spaces without limiting their expression, inviting all of us to pay attention to what was happening outside of our bubble of an inquiry group.

Implications for Art as a Vehicle for Care

Figure 43. Series of Black Girls Creating Art

Art making along with visiting community spaces can support Black girls in finding artifacts of their identities, while actively making the artifacts memorialize their current and limitless futures. The girls in this study have mothers who identify as artists. Their mothers have used art to heal, mourn, and find joy. The girls themselves consider themselves artists and love to dance, build, draw, and tell stories with vivid imagination. The people in their lives have learned to watch them perform their dances and theatrics and present their "best work." Their fridges in

their homes display drawings, and many of their pieces are framed—a version of their museum but made by them for them. The girls live in a city where art has historically been, and will always be, an anchor of hope, direction, positivity, and connection for Black people. During this study, art and artistic talks captured the tension and sensitivity of *this moment.* In 2020, 75% of Black girls in a research study named photography, dance, writing, visual art, and hair braiding as necessary selfcare practices during the quarantine (Allen, 2020). Art as a necessary source for care, communication, and political contribution for Black girls and their communications is a site for continued exploration. There needs to be support for the political and creative vision for Black girls.

Based on my insights from this research, storytelling and visual art can be used to explore the dynamic possibilities inherent in Black girlhood and foster healthy identity formation. In this research study, art was the vehicle to create conversations. In Figure 43 above, everyone is working on something different, and there is room for them to commit to their projects. The projects were informed by the desires of the participants (i.e., collaging, drawing, painting), with the exception of the cameras. By following their artistic pursuits, I was able to enter their spaces of interest. These spaces of value would never have emerged without letting the girls freely create and without me waiting to be invited into their stories and lives through their art share-outs and discussions. Additionally, all art activities came with choices, which I do believe helped the girls in this study feel as if they had control over the experience.

Implications for Showing Care via Ethics and Research During Precarious Times

With COVID-19, Hurricane Ida, personal traumas and tragedies, and daily life, the plans I had for research had to shift to give my participants and their families room to negotiate and process all that was going on. I had to check in through bigger ways than just as a researcher.

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I had to help them seek out resources, which could only happen if I cared about them in ways that extended past my research interests. I also felt that I had to protect my participants and my scholarship simultaneously. I had to modify and pause and be ever more present and read the room during interviews, inquiry groups, and art making. After the storm, our next art session happened 3 weeks later. I had a plan for what we would discuss, but instead Sia started off saying, "Where did y'all go for the storm?"—a question that every person has asked strangers, friends, and family in New Orleans, which can also be understood as "How did you make out? Are you OKAY?" So, the art discussion on this day did not happen and was replaced by "Storm Stories." The girls giggled when talking about the family they saw, missing school, and what they ate. Joel said in the middle of this session, "But my mama said things are crazy, but we still have joy and love."

The timing of this research was unique, tender, and sensitive, and our research practices needed to shift to be responsive to the realities impacting participants' lives. The families and me included were looking for a tiny bit of hope, or small joys to make life feel a bit more pleasant and not so lonely. After many days of intensely bad and sad news and extreme heat and discomfort, these discussion groups, check-ins, and art-making sessions became a time for the girls and the moms to commiserate with others; this research became another extension of community. For the moms and me, we realized the loneliness of parenting (during a pandemic), and the exhaustion of the complicated and imperfect choices we were all forced to make while trying to keep our girls safe. For the girls and me, we realized this was a time where much of life was happening, where sometimes words worked, sometimes art worked, sometimes nothing worked at all. At other times, maybe both art and words were necessary.

Figure 44. Jasmine and Her Girls

Because of this research, I conceptualize Black girlhoods as situated in the present (youthful) time that the participants are in and not as what/who they are becoming. This (youthful) time is impacted by community, their parents' trauma and experiences, the current moment in the world, their families, schooling, media, community spaces—and the list goes on. At the time of data collection, this time appeared to be tense, messy, hot, precarious, and spontaneous. But still, there was joy and love during this time in their version of Black girlhoods.

Educators and researchers should listen to Black girls. They should observe Black girls. They should learn from Black girls. They should question Black girls. Black girls are intellectuals who can learn that school and public spaces can indeed be supportive and engaging places to be curious, to be expressive, and maybe be themselves. As we noticed with the family interactions and inquiry groups in this study, if Black girls are handled with care, they can not only learn to talk with others but also to express their feelings with words; to be listened to, respected, and understood. Regardless of age, gender, or race, all children should be encouraged

to share as much of themselves while including children's familial and cultural knowledge. This sharing can be in the form of art making, adventure talks or visits to community spaces, one-on-one discussions, or supported storytelling. To position children as having knowledge and power to project their thoughts, voices, questions, and feelings means to work towards agentic classrooms of care, respect, and empathy. This research showcased how Black girls and Black families have deep thoughts, questions, worries, hopes, and resistance. Taking up these recommendations as an educator or a researcher could invite the ideas and feelings of Black girls and their families into schools, policy, and community spaces. These ideas and feelings are what could alter how Black girlhood is understood, researched, and expanded on in a multitude of ways.

Conclusion: Picturing Black Girlhood

Figure 45. Themes of Their Life and Work in Photos

When I began this research, I felt as if I was trying to study something invisible. I was attempting to share a form of knowledge embedded in my body as a Black woman that I know needed to be present in literature and material form. I am indebted to the girls who participated in this study as storytellers and artists, took photos of importance to them, led the discussion groups, showed courage trying new things in new spaces, and gave me permission to sit

alongside them for several months. Their disposable cameras took time to process, and they were patient with me as we processed life around them together. It took many visits, failed questions, and a lot of cameras to get snapshots of the lives of my participants and their pictures of Black girlhood. They coded their photos into the themes that best represented their lives and works. They could not see themselves without seeing their friends, family, cats, homes, and intense and unique school year due to COVID-19 and Hurricane Ida; some of these themes are captured through their images in Figure 45.

During the early inquiry groups, I kept asking the girls direct questions about race and gender: "How does it feel to be a Black girl?" Or "What would you say being a Black girl is like?" Those questions would often go unanswered, and the room would be filled with stale silence. What I realized through the process of conducting this study is that though the girls did not always have answers to my questions in words about race, gender, class, they were in fact living the answers. Lindsay-Dennis (2015) has worked to illuminate research that accurately and appropriately theorizes the lives of Black girls. I hope my research will contribute to how Black girls research themselves and how researchers work with Black girls because, in order for this data to unfold, it is necessary to learn how to support the girls as they ask questions about themselves. With eyes and ears wide open, it is possible. it is a prolific site to witness Black girls forming communities and living out the answers to fierce questions about systems, structures, and oppressions. The answers involve Black girls learning to shape themselves while contending with inequities and the resolute affirmations that their families need to provide in systems and events of oppression. The data the girls and I produced are multidimensional depictions of Black girlhood that carry powerful themes of identity through the lives these girls and their families are actively creating as they unleash defiant joy within themselves.

The girls carried themselves with great curiosity, great love, and great self-regard. Their work can teach us, as researchers and educators, how to create new worlds committed to the protection of Black girls and the fullness of their identities by conceptualizing Black girlhoods on their terms and paying attention to how they feel they deserve to be treated. We have to willingly picture Black girls in the significant and remarkable ways they picture themselves.

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Appendix A: Script for Recruitment

Script to introduce study to participants via phone or zoom for child:

Hi＿＿＿＿＿ (insert child's name). As you might know my name is Maureen Nicol and I am a student at Teachers College, Columbia University where I am studying education. I want to let you know about a special project I have in mind for you. It is important that the world knows more about you and who you are especially during this time (explain the relevance). (Have potential participants share some things about who they are). In order to learn about you, you are not going to tell me with your words at first, you are going to tell me with pictures. What are some ways we can take pictures? (Have potential participants share). You will get a turn with one of THESE CAMERAS and these are special for the research that you are going to do about yourself and who you are. Which I will show you how to use. You only participate if you want to, and your families want you to and there will be a form sent to you for you and your family to say yes or no. You can also ask me questions. For this project I am only working with Black girls because I am curious about how YOU see and understand the world. You will also have the time to meet other girls around your age who are researching too. Once you and your family say it is okay, if you are interested, I will send a camera out to you so you can exercise being a researcher AND artist. Any questions?"

Script for parent/family via phone or zoom:

Hello - My name is Maureen Nicol, and I am a student pursuing my doctorate and studying early childhood education at Columbia University. I'm calling to talk to you about your child participating in my research study. This study will be documenting how the lives of Black girls (ages five to eight years old) research their experiences of Covid-19 and racial justice. This four-month study will allow each child to use disposable cameras for photo exploration to

inquire into themselves, people and spaces around them. By utilizing photography as an artistic medium and form of expression, this study will allow Black girls the autonomy to explore their own worlds and the landscapes of their lives in these times. I obtained your contact information from [*describe source*].

This study may contribute to educators' and researchers' understandings of how young Black girls describe their lived experiences, communicate their perspectives and engage in conversation with each other, themselves and the world. These insights may inform efforts by educators and researchers about how they can connect to children's lives and interests, a cornerstone principle of early childhood education and one that is missing with the education of young Black girls.

If you decided to allow your child to participate in this research, the study would involve interviews (one-on-one sessions) with participating children via Zoom, it requires your child to use a disposable camera to photograph people, places and things in their community.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You and your child can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate, we can go ahead and schedule a time for me to meet with you and your child virtually to give you more information. If you need more time to decide if you would like to participate, you may also call or email me with your decision.

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

If you have any more questions about this process or if you need to contact me about participation, I may be reached at mwn2106@tc.columbia.edu. Thank you so much.

Appendix B: Logistics and Materials

Care packages of art materials for each participant will most likely contain:

- Paper

- Glue

- Scissors

- Glitter

- Magazines to cut up

- Stickers

- Crayons/pastels/markers

- **Participants will already have their printed images

*****Art care packages will be mailed to participants' homes. I will be paying for this postage and delivery.*

Photo processing, mailing of items and inquiry discussions:

- I will provide disposable cameras to participants.

- I will provide addressed and prepaid envelopes for them to mail their cameras to me.

- I will pay for photo processing and developing.

- I will get digital scans of their photos which will be sent to participants and their families digitally.

- Copies of their photos will also be mailed to them. I will pay for this.

When sharing/audiencing their photos, participants will be reminded to:

- Think about the memories connected to the photo

- Consider sharing what was happening during the time - what were you thinking about, what stood out to you, what questions and curiosities did you have?

- Why this photo / these photo?

- What did you struggle with?

- What do you think these photos/this photo tell us about you? What does it tell us about the world right now?

When serving as an audience and active listening participants will be reminded to:

- Think about what stands out in each photo and story

- Considering finding affirming/validating words for the presenter (i.e., "I like how this photo...XXX.")

- Share wonderings and noticings

- Think about any connections and similarities

- Share how someone's work may have inspired you to think about something, photograph something or try something new

Online photo gallery

- The platform of which they set it up on will also be guided by them and how they want to share it and with whom.

- They will have the choice of what they share and why.