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“SHE WILL TELL ME THE TRUTH”: LISTENING TO BLACK GIRLS CO-ORGANIZING
LIBERATORY SPACES

by

MAYA M. WHITE

Under the Direction of Makungu Akinyela, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study explores the process of co-organizing a youth program for and with Black and/or African-American identified girls age 11-14 years old in a program, Girls of Atlanta. In the light of the deficit silencing and stigmatizing of Black girls and their girlhood, youth development programs for Black girls are typically sought out by parents and girls to engage in a social, academic, and/or recreational space centering Black girls and their girlhood experience. The current thesis evaluates how Black girls in Girls of Atlanta responded to co-organizing the space. The study centers Black girl voices in the organizational process of youth programming, analyzes the barriers that arise in the implementation of the program, and also covers the intervention of COVID-19 pandemic on a Black girl afterschool program. The thesis concludes with implications for community advocates establishing and designing programs for Black girls to cultivate agency and focus on liberation.

INDEX WORDS: Black girls, Youth development programs, Black girl standpoint, Black Feminist Thought, COVID-19 pandemic

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LIBERATORY SPACES

by

MAYA M. WHITE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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LIBERATORY SPACES

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MAYA M. WHITE

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Georgia State University
August 2020

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my Mother and transitioned Father, Leveta Ellis and Michael Troy White. Collectively, their prayers have engineered a source of power that is unwavering. Believe it or not, the two of them have been working together to keep me here in school both in spirit and the other in the flesh. I am indebted to their love and spiritual investment in me to rise high.

I dedicate this work to my nieces: Amerie Nicole, Mikhila Jae, Zaniya Nykole, and Skylar Mykel. They are my reason and reminder how full Black girls are with creative power and vibrant ingenuity.

I dedicate this work to my yoga practice, which has strengthened my capacity, holistically, and physically to understand true dedication and devotion.

I dedicate this work to my hometown Louisville, Kentucky, specifically the west side of Ninth street, which has cultivated resistance, creativity, and cultural wealth in my DNA.

I dedicate this work to Girls League of the West, GLOW. A black girlhood program geared to liberate, motivate, and celebrate the Black girlhood experience – established September 16, 2016. A descendant of SOLHOT and Combahee River Collective. A vessel of power, magic, and young artistry in action! I love y'all!

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The tedious and devoted time this thesis demanded was made possible by my thesis committee. I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Makungu Akinyela, for reminding me to stay focused on my vision and purpose. Thank you for supporting my vision for researching Black girls and being supporting me with advice that transcends outside of the academy.

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NOTES

1. Sankofa is an Akan principle that encourages people of the African Diaspora to “go back and fetch”, which is encouraging Black and African-descended people to seek historical understanding and positionality in modern life and restore oneself and community with the knowledge of going back.
2. Trans* is a positionality of an embodied identity that aligns to non-conforming queer body that negates the gender-binary politic. (Green and Bey 2017)
3. Misogynoir is a neologism coined by Black feminist Moya Bailey that explains the anti-black racism and misogyny experienced by Black women, and in this context Black girls’. (Bailey 2018)
4. The inconsolable child mentioned in Marais Kromidas (2019) article is Hazel, a fictional, resilient, and powerful girl character in Toni Cade Bambara’s novel, *Gorilla My Love*. Hazel is Black girl character utilized in the story to challenge the hierarchal barriers of youth practicing their power to stand up against misopedic abuse and neglect.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The data surrounding Black girls' neglect in schools, states, and throughout public care is growing in research and praxis. Black girls and their families are seeking outlets for positive experiences and spaces that nurture their aspirations. Between the battles with school policies targeting their creative expression, aesthetics, movement, and silence, along with how their inquiries being mistaken as deviance—they can't seem to win. The search for spaces that cultivate Black girl magic and a promise for Black girls' futures exist in communities that celebrate their identities and creative potential (Brown 2013).

Youth development centered programs, clubs, and organizations are active in the social progression of youth through specific activities, identities, and interests. As a program coordinator, I had an opportunity to fill in the gaps in my hometown, Louisville, KY to co-create Girls League of the West (G.L.O.W.) one of many programs geared specifically for Black girls, yet one of the few that caters to their leadership, voice, liberation, and celebration of their lives. Youth development programs are common safe spaces were Black youth and girls collaborate their voices, creativity, knowledge, and sisterhood. Nationally and locally there has been a wave of Black girlhood support through programming and campaigns since the inception of programs like, Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100), Radical Monarchs, S.O.L.H.O.T, and Black Girls Code, and other grassroots efforts (Nyachae 2016; Love 2012). However, their numbers are growing slowly in comparison to the initiatives founded on behalf of Black boys and the prioritization of boys' liberation over Black girls, rather than a collective national and local support for both boys and girls. In our schools and local communities, we know there are initiatives geared to uplift and embrace the joy and love in Black boys' lives. It is common to

hear and see such initiatives support boys, and this work is definitely needed. However, programs for Black girls are not as common and supported by institutions. Girls programming are geared to include all girls multiculturally with neutral names that do not support or center unique identities. Unique identities that experience beauty, joy, and love but also require national and local attention to experience liberation as well.

1.2 Background

Today there is growing attention toward the well-being, educational retention, decriminalization, and many other conditions that affect Black girlhood experiences. However, in 2014 the national administration under Barack Obama neglected Black girls in their initiative, My Brothers Keepers (MBK), which addressed the phenomenon of marginalized violence against Black boys. The initiative prioritized marginalization and joy of Black boys over the oppression of Black girls, which created an unfair advantage in resources for Black girls. Conferences, program funding, and individual residencies centering the Black male identity was created nationally and addressed the concerns of solely Black men and boys. The unresolved attention toward Black boys and men experiences with state violence, implicitly draft another narrative that Black girls do not experience the same inequities. Scholars, political figures, and community members collectively engaged in the conversations of how problematic and insensitive the initiative is to similar issue Black girls and women are up against. For example, in the Crunk Feminist Collection article, *My Brother's Keeper and the Co-Optation of Intersectionality* (2014), Brittney Cooper explains,

What MBK does is remove Black women, very particularly, from this social equation. By arguing forthrightly for the legitimacy of excluding us, it suggests that we are not

structurally disadvantaged by long standing systems of racism. Or if we are, the refusal to commit resources to help us, suggests that we have magical powers to overcome these systems. (para. 38)

The rhetoric and overwhelming support geared only for Black boys and young men of color plays a dangerous role in the political and patriarchal invisibility of Black girls and young women (Cooper 2014). The linear ideology of choosing who deserves more attention and who is oppressed more diverts us from thinking about more radicalized visions of transformation and liberation. Today, boardroom conversations surrounding distributions of financial support for programming depend on data to make decisions about money and resources.

In the boardrooms of non-profit and for-profit organizations that target community “empowerment” require specific data (i.e. age, household members, annual income, and grade point average) as ruling justification for financial capital philanthropy to provide resources for communities in need. Philanthropists often depend on data to numerically prove who deserves more support out of impoverished backgrounds, decreasing test scores, and deficit-based support. Data can be manipulated to support biases with disproportionate reasoning. Data, and measures to retain specific data often exhaust that means of reaching to communities. In many cases similar to MBK (2014), data is utilized to bolster the notion that Black boys and young men are emasculated, endangered, and disrespected by institutions far more likely than their sisters, daughters, friends, and mothers—which is not true nor ethically appropriate in engaging in social change for boys or girls. Brittney Cooper (2018) raises a point in a tweet stating, “Anytime your data leads us down a path to patriarchy as freedom for Black people, you should know you done fucked up somewhere. Moynihan and My Brother’s Keeper are not the answer. Neither is making Black men richer. #ThatIsAll” (Cooper Twitter Post 6:34 AM - 19 Mar 2018). Her

argument is that data driven policies that reinforce patriarchy are dysfunctional to the freedom it intends to attain. The data provided to support MBK (2014) actually supports the indication that Black girls tolerate social inequities, and supportive themselves in their systematically designed hardships. It suggests the idea that Black girls are not in the equation of any systemic exploitation to receive any support or resources on a national level. Black feminists and many other women and men have supported and proved these statements to be false, pathologized and damaging to the lived experiences of Black girls and their girlhood across all institutions. Letters and reports have been written to address the issues of marginalizing Black girls in youth development programming, studies still present that not enough is being done.

Youth programs that do not have a strategic agenda and planning which incorporates the identities or participation of the youth are skeptical sites for youth development. For example, Pinckney et al (2011) shares a rites of passage framework that centers an Afrocentric model for out of school adolescent programs. In their article, there is an overwhelming presence of stereotypes and assumptions about Black youth. The recurring narrative that Black adolescent youth are apathetic to their conditions in systemic oppression and perform poorly in school due to devaluing education is a poor understanding the conditions surrounding Black youth and an insult to their identity. The re-occurring concerns about Black youth are misguided due to the lack of the youth voices in addressing their problems. In youth development work, Pickney et al (2011) makes a drastic list of deficit risk factors for Black youth and their development. The authors agree upon statistics which pinpoint poverty rates, school drop-out rates, and exposure to community violence. Pinckney et al (2011) suggests that there is a lack of identity, cultural significance, and resilience in Black youth and their rites of passage framework in youth development programming will address the concerns of violence amongst Black youth. Scholars

like LaBennett (2011) write that surrounding Black youth in youth studies has too much concentration on poverty, pregnancy, obesity and violence. Her 2011 ethnography, *She's Mad Real: Popular Culture and West Indian Girls in Brooklyn*, examines Black youths' culture through the voices of Black girls in Brooklyn. Her work highlights the play labor of Black girls and youth in Brooklyn, New York and the engagement with leisure time after school. Besides LaBennett, many other researchers lack an understanding of Black girls and youth are the systemic institutions that disregard their humanity and cultural self-esteem. In this research project, I celebrate and recognize scholars who center Black girls' voices and agency. Unfortunately, there is existing work that centers youth, but don't include their identity or agentic concerns in the frameworks or disciplines they present.

For example, Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, Nakkula (2016) propose the well-known youth development framework, positive youth development (PYD) model to adapt for the support of girls of color. Positive Youth Development is a standard programmatic approach utilized to structure youth programs and engage young people in environments that focuses on topics like peer support, self-esteem, decision-making, and career building. Their research emphasizes the intersectionality of race, class, gender and sexuality in the emerging identities of girls. In contradiction to the pathological narrative and stereotypical resolution, their objective is to emphasize a critical race feminism in tandem with PYD. Clonan-Roy et. al (2016) explains, "The PYD perspective, as applied to girls of color, shifts the scholarly focus from problems and deficit to identifying key assets and sub-competencies that can be enhanced in order for girls of color to develop optimally" (117). The model considers the work and "asset-based" paradigm in Black girl programming from scholars, Brown (2008), Evans-Winters (2019), Love (2012), and Gaunt (2006).

The work of Brown (2008), Evan-Winters (2019), Love (2012), LaBennett (2011) and others have identified the need for the collective safe spaces for Black girls. What is distinctively different about the aforementioned scholars is that they are educators and Black women. Their scholarship is situated in the lived experience of Black culture, Black feminism and theory, and Black girlhood. Their knowledge as Black women is written in the language they choose to describe Black girls, the frameworks they develop to work with them, and the praxis of involving their own personal identity to create programs and pedagogy that is culturally relevant to Black youth and girls. They also write from a space of Black girl genius and not the ways others have defined them. Their works are applied to multiple and necessary disciplines (i.e. education, girlhood, youth and Black studies). Considering this research study centered the voices of Black girl adolescents, it is important to continue the emergent standpoint of Black girlhood studies and Black girls' standpoint to center their analysis of reality. It is also important that the celebration of Black girlhood (Brown 2008) addresses the disparities while also presenting an effective praxis of Black girl liberation in youth development practices. What I have learned from scholars and Black girls in community is that the praxis of Black girlhood and space holding for their liberation has many layers. Centering their identities, voices and celebrating their truths contributes to contemporary Black girlhood studies and praxis.

“She Will Tell Me the Truth” is an exploration of a Black girl youth development program, while evaluating the praxis and pedagogy of the curriculum utilized in the program to engage their girl youth participants. Out of school spaces for youth serve as a safety net with recreational, social, and educational purposes that may have the intentions to uplift, empower, and build resilience and community with young people. Out of school spaces for youth refer to many terms that serve simultaneous purposes for the time and people who are a part of them.

Free-structured time, third spaces, after-school programs and clubs are references for the spaces examined in this project. They are also foundational to the experiences of youth and their community upbringing. Researchers looking into out of school spaces for Black youth examine this phenomenon in the disciplines of Parks and Recreation, African-American Studies, Women and Gender Studies and Educational studies. In the lens of African-American studies, this paper takes a closer look at the instruction of Black youth programs and their development as liberating agents through a Womanist lens. The act of liberation is a state of acting, reflecting, and then transforming their reality toward truth—praxis (Freire 2000). The theoretical framework of womanism is heavily applied in this project which criticizes the banking model expectations and limitations of educational and after-school spaces for Black girls.

Deficit centered pedagogy, as Pinckney et al (2011) rites of passage youth development framework, and its intentions surrounding marginalized youth has raised the question about its true and sustainable impact on its participants. The data-centered, quantitative approach to the experiences of Black youth raises the question of how influential and “youth-centered” the programs may actually be. Scholars such as, Ruth Nicole Brown and Aimee Meredith Cox develop programs that are engineered to exercise Black girls’ autonomy as creative agents and citizens with dynamic and transformative perspectives. Their programs are qualitatively based and contextualize the lives of the girls’ and engage authentically in inquiry but in personal understanding as well. Essentially, that is how Black feminism, womanism, and all following feminisms work. Their work is inherently in a state of praxis that reflects, acts and then reflects again on the strength of Black girlhood, and girlhood represented, celebrated, and contextualized by Black girls and women.

This research study dives into the work of scholars centering youth and girls in youth development programming, and the evolving practices and pedagogy geared for Black youth and girls. “She Will Tell Me the Truth” aligns with the previous work of Black girlhood scholars such as, Brown (2008, 2013), Love (2012), and Nyachae (2016). This project confronts the barriers in the plight of Black girl liberation but also celebrating their voice to make curriculum and physical after school programming space in their interest. The purpose is to uplift Black girls’ voices in the organization and implementation in programming that centers their experience.

1.3 The Problem Statement

Black girl youth development programs should be community safe havens for Black girls to counter the intersectional experiences they may face in their girlhood. Their experience as Black girls automatically place them at the margins of vulnerability to violence due to their race, gender, and age. Racism more than likely show up in spaces outside of home for Black girls. Interactions with school staff, state officials and figures, even store owners and staff racially target Black girls due to their skin color. Intersecting identities such as, gender and age add to the practice of marginalization and oppression Black girls may experience. Gendered expectations, like home-keeping, child-rearing, and sexual availability are a few issues that Black girls encounters. Black girls face levels of oppression that target their youthful age as a marker to silence them and neglect their agency. Black girl centered programming as community safe havens have an important role in the development of the girls and these third spaces. Instead, there are some issues that surround youth development practices of Black girl programming. Issues like requiring a conservative dress code, monitoring conversations around sexuality,

silencing girls' voices to distinguish authority roles, requirement of membership fees and grades. Issues such as these can exist in Black girl programs, hindering a truly transformative experience for the participants. As I dive into this research project and considered co-creating a Black girlhood space, with—for—by Black girls, I beg to generally question, *In the development of youth initiatives, how are Black girls supported in the curriculum and structure of the space? In the implementation of the work being done for Black girl youth development, where do Black girls voices appear? What is the purpose of the program, and have Black girls agreed to the purpose?*

1.3.1 Black girl knowledge as an organizational tool

In my reflection of girl programs in and out of Atlanta, Georgia, I consider the most common themes that surround youth development practices for Black girl programs are health (i.e. sex education, fitness), academic success, mentoring, etiquette, and the arts. Although the programs are intentionally designed to empower the girls to overcome adversity and learn respectable mannerisms, the programs potentially take part in silencing girls and engages an anti-dialogical experience. The anti-dialogical practice that exists in programming relies on the oppressive education model that prioritizes the teacher-learner relationship (Freire 2000). In the teacher-learner relationship, learners are denied active agency in the learning experience while teachers are active agents depositing information to learners. While examining the intentions of empowering Black girls' programs and their impact on Black girls, program facilitators, and teachers have to be held accountable how they are holding space for Black girls to develop as agents of their lives and their futures. Aimee Cox (2015) defends Black girls as “epistemological experts in transformation” in her exploration of Black girl social choreography as citizens in

Detroit, Michigan (20). She approaches this statement stating how Black girls should not be approached as puzzles to be solved but as intellectual foreseers of their conditions and presented a purposeful platform to articulate their reality as a theoretical standpoint to seek resolution (Cox 2015).

The problem that purposed this research is that Black girls' knowledgeable standpoints are not considered in the implementation of programming initiatives geared to influence their developmental lives. This study explored the interests of Black girls in the program, Girls of Atlanta, and purposes that their agency to voice and co-organize their after-school program creates the potential for liberation.

1.4 Purpose and Nature of the Study

The purpose of this case study explored the process of co-organizing a youth program for and with Black girls at Girls of Atlanta. This study explored youth development practices that center Black girls' knowledgeable standpoints in co-organizing Black girl youth development programs. This study utilized the case study research method according to Creswell's (2013) text, *Qualitative Inquiry*. A qualitative case study offers an examination of the participants responses to a purposed eight-week program, Girls of Atlanta. Creswell (2013) writes, "A case study develops an in-depth description and analysis of a case" (Creswell 2013, 78). This approach is appropriate for this study because it will consider the bounded space of the youth development program, Girls of Atlanta, and analyze the themes connected from the conversations, behaviors, and organization of the program. In this study, I examined the youth development program, Girls of Atlanta, for Black and/or African-American identified girls ages 11 to 14 years old. The study engaged the girls' perspective as being Black girls and identifies

the ways their youth development program incorporates their identity and voice. The study took place at a Black girlhood program at the John's Creek Clubhouse in Atlanta, Georgia. I recruited 5 to 10 Black and/or African-American identified girls who will be active participants in the study. The John's Creek staff, participants, and the parents of the girls' consent will be required to be a part of interviews for the study.

As a young Black woman and girlhood scholar, my positionality in this study is to authentically protect and share the voices of Black girls. As a cultural worker in education and youth development programming, I have experience in youth and parent relations, and the coordination of programming for girls. My active participation at the research site as the program facilitator developed first-hand observations of the program sites, while also creating substantial relationships with the participants.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study builds on the research surrounding Black girls' support programs, after school curriculum, and the surrounding institutional barriers that resist such spaces to happen. The importance of this study explored the voices of Black girl participants in the youth development programs geared for their Black girlhood experience. Usually, Black girls are encouraged to participate in youth development programs for social mobility, educational retention, recreational involvement, and developmental support. Such programs support Black girls developmental girlhood and create memories in their Black girlhood experience, however, often times their intentions and social motivations do not involve the agency or cultural and creative sensitivity for Black girls. This research study contributes to the liberatory pedagogies and programs that are intentionally designed to amplify the Black girl perspective on their experience in youth

programming, while exploring their interests in the creation of youth program curriculum development.

This study investigated how Black girls respond to a program designed to center their voices, interests, and their Black girlhood experience. This study encourages cultural workers, teachers, and maybe parents to engage Black girls in planning lessons in educational and youth development settings. This study revealed an opportunity for Black girls to become a part of the conversation and organization in their spaces and programs. Compared to prior research, this project uniquely facilitated the standpoint of Black girls and their engagement in youth development spaces. The girls' interaction with the program's instruction, intentions, and activities will be observed to evaluate the research site.

I specifically tap into the disciplines of Parks and Recreation, Education, Black girlhood studies, and youth culture. Parks and Recreation and Educational studies are disciplines that utilize curriculum for developmental strategies in and out of the classroom. Parks and Recreation studies, specifically, is in need for critical and Black feminist intervention in the evaluation of standards for youth programs. This study also adds to the emerging discipline of Black girlhood studies, and the literature that surrounds the contemporary perspectives of Black girls.

“She Will Tell Me the Truth” expands the narrative of Black girls, their needs, and creative desires, while also identifying their responses to the program designed for them.

1.6 Research Questions

In this study, I employ a qualitative methodology. Specifically, I use a case study method of this study which explored the practices of Black girl centered youth programs from the standpoint of their Black girl participants. The method utilized for this study will formulate data to answer the following questions:

1. How does a Black girl program help girls shape their identities?
2. How did Black girls respond to co-organizing a youth development program?
3. What barriers arise in the organization and implementation of Black girl centered programming?

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Thought

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) text, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and The Politics of Empowerment*, constructs a theoretical framework that supports the intellectual energy of Black women's standpoint. Black feminist thought reaches into the developmental psyche, reality, and understanding of Black women's oppression. With critical social theory as its foundation, Black feminist thought "...encompasses bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing U.S. Black women." (12). Critical social theory dissects the organization of social ideologies and theories, then works on behalf of justice to discover ways to dismantle injustice and contribute to social transformations (Collins 2000). As Black feminist thought has this foundational theoretical framework, it also works to critique existing realities that adhere to inequitable socialization in Black women's and girls' lives. Black Feminist Thought is U.S. Black women's critical social theory acknowledges the relationships of power amongst oppressed groups, which uphold their ideas, livelihood, and relationships in a state of oppression (Collins 200). Patricia Hill Collins reminds us to unfold the layers of Black women's ideologies, lived reality, and relationships to power as contextual and activist response to the oppression happening in the United State of

American. The theoretical framework of Black Feminist Thought involves a list of themes that approaches the knowledge of U.S. Black women. The themes are:

- Work, Family, and Black Women's Oppression
- Controlling Images (Mammies, Matriarchs, Jezebel)
- Self- definition
- Love Relationships
- Sexual Politics
- Motherhood
- Activism

This framework was chosen for this study because Black girls and their futures are protected and exist freely under the praxis of Black feminism. For this study, I utilized Black feminist thought's theme of *self-definition* to conduct the analysis of Black girls creating ideas and nurturing their identity in the safe space of youth development programs and radicalizing the norm of suppressing their voices. Collins (2000) defines self-definition as "speaking for oneself and crafting one's own agenda is essential to empowerment" (36).

Black feminism draws attention to the oppositional knowledge (Collins 2000) and imagination of Black girls and women. In Black girl-centered youth development programs, Black feminist thought provides a theoretical lens to rearticulate their narratives and experiences by expressing a valid meaning to stimulate new consciousness surrounding their lives (Collins 2000). Black feminist thought observes the power of self-definition of Black womanhood and girlhood by the standpoint of women and girls. Collins (2000) makes a point that Black women's standpoint is a key to survival and collectively it strengthens women away from objectification.

This means that Black women and girls survival factors their own interpretations of self. Self-definition is important in the work of Black feminist thought. Collins (2000) explains how significant self-definition is practiced through the journey of self-exploration to get to internal freedom. Black feminist thought debunks the controlling images and narratives that surround the Black girlhood and womanhood experience, which provides a place for Black imagination to manifest a liberated self and space.

Collins speaks to the development of safe spaces for Black women and girls to resist objectification and victimization of controlling narratives that suppress their lived experiences. Safe spaces are usually housed in the same institutions that rebut the messages of control, yet Black girls and women designate them as important locations to reclaim safety. Youth program spaces for Black girls typically are designed as safe spaces not only for Black girls, but their families, school administrators, and the overall community. Community members and parents often rely on after-school and out of school programming to exist as positive and affirming institutions toward their youth's development. Youth programs, after-school spaces are safe grounds for youth transitioning from school to home. Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, community recreational centers are few places that are designed for Black youth and girls to gather for food, safety, and sense of belonging. With Black feminist thought in mind, youth development centers and programs can create places for Black girls' safety in collaborative from Black girls' standpoints to reach potential liberation.

1.7.1 Dialogical relationships in Black Feminist Thought

The function of Black feminism is dialogical. Patricia Collins (2000) mentions, "A dialogical relationship characterizes Black women's collective experiences and group knowledge. On the individual and group level, a dialogical relationship suggests that changes in

thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness” (34). In this light, exploring a youth program from the standpoint of Black girls has to demonstrate a collective effort of radical activism. Black feminist thought highlights the need of creative safe spaces founded by Black women are necessary and “designed to foster Black women’s empowerment and enhance our ability to participate in social justice projects” (Collins 2000, 121). Collins furthers the conversation to highlight how African-American women in consistent collective dialogue, defining and informing their lives, contributes to the visibility and organization of the work that follows the need for action. This dialogical relationship attests to Black feminism in action and recognizes the work, autonomy, and social position of Black women. Edwards et al. (2016) shares, “Our girls give of themselves that we might tell stories that benefit the greater good; it is our responsibility to honor them in return by respecting their voices, incorporating their perspectives, and sharing our findings in ways that expand the meaning of the Black girl experience” (434). The power of self-definition develops autonomy in the Black girl’s experience which uplifts their voice in hegemonic spaces that typically suppress Black women and girls.

Along the same perspective of Collins self-definition and dialogical relationships, Evans-Winters (2019) writes, “Research with girls entailed locating a social problem or issue relevant to girls and asking them what we needed to do or what program was needed to address the problem” (73). In the creation of Black girl programming, their agency and humanity have to be acknowledged to authentically get to the root of supporting them. Evans-Winters point of “locating a social problem and asking them” demonstrates the importance of dialogue, and the power of self-definition which engages the Black girl as an intellectual expert of her life, which in turn challenges the objectifying ideas surrounding their existence. An example of this is

allocating time and space for Black girls to discuss freely what happens in live day-to-day lives and holding the space to listen and affirm their responses.

Affirming and listening to the truths of Black girls utilizes the praxis of Black feminist thought in youth programming. Black girls are and should be the subjects of defining and curating their freedom and safe spaces. For example, crafting alternative and radical subjectivity would be similar to deconstructing the practice of hegemony and the role of hierarchy in the program, such as GLOW in Louisville, KY. Thinking of my own position as a Black woman organizer, academic, and cultural worker, there has to be awareness not to exert my own Black girl expertise into the ideology of what liberation looks like for younger Black girls. Although, the inter-connectivity of Black womanhood and girlhood intersect and evolve into one another, there has to be some level of autonomy practiced on behalf of Black girls/adolescents to adhere to the theoretical and revolutionary importance of Black feminist thought, Womanism, and evolving Black feminist theories and practices. In my cultural work with youth, I incorporate the Black Feminist Thought (BFT) theoretical themes in the praxis of youth development. Below you can see the table for correlating examples.

Incorporating Black Feminist Thought themes in Youth Programming	
BFT Theme	Youth Programming Practice
Self-Definition	Centering youth identity in its multifaceted ways Creating spaces for them to express who they are
Dialogical Relationship	Open the space for youth to address their issues and critical topics in an open discussion. Build the connection to learning more about one another in relation to Black women and girls' truth. Center Black girls' truths as non-debatable and non-judgmental discussions, especially in relation to what maybe happening in the world

Activism	Learning about Black Women’s cultural and historical contribution, and developing ideas and projects around Black Women’s intellectual thought
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Table 1: BFT youth program praxis guide

1.7.2 Womanism

Black feminist practices such as, self-definition, group-knowledge, and dialogical relationship building are key themes and concepts that stimulate resistance. Black feminist theoretical framework arises based on the necessity for oppositional knowledge distanced from marginalized identities to cultivate critical alternatives to surviving oppressive institutional practices (Collins 2000; Freire 2000). Patricia Hill Collins shares that, “Black women’s standpoint is a key survival and their collectivity strengthens women away from objectification” (109). The objectification of Black women begins during their girlhood experience, hence, Ntozake Shange’s reflective choreopoem (1975), *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf*. Womanism is a culturally curated theoretical standpoint that guides the creative, spiritual, and communal contextualization of girlhood and womanhood. An excerpt from Shange’s choreopoem carefully explains how the line cannot be drawn between the metaphysical, queer, and non-conforming determinations in a Black woman’s life. She writes, “but bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical dilemma/ i havent conquered yet/ do you see the point my spirit is too ancient to understand the separation of soul & gender/ my love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face” (Shange). Shange indirectly expresses Womanism (Walker 1983) by addressing how encompassing, non-linear, spiritual, and affectionate the social experience of being a Black woman. Walker’s Womanism offers a space in academia for the knowledge and lived experience of Black women and girls to uphold an articulable theory that address the multiplicity of being. This multiplicity exists away from the

binarization and dualism of typical theoretical knowledge and output. Womanism is the praxis of Black feminism without the speculation of whiteness. Whiteness is an oppressive guide to structure linear and rigid boundaries in a variation of institutions. Womanism, in fact, disregards the existence of oppression, and rather highlights the beauty and queerness of Black feminism and liberation from the eyes of Black girls and women.

Womanism shows up in many Black feminist works that have a vision toward liberation and anti-oppressive goals. In a response to the well-known Shange choreopoem, Brown (2008) inquires, “Where do you draw the line between Black girlhood and womanhood, the choreopoem made me ask, because some the Black women characters acted like girls, and some of those Black girl characters acted like women” (38). Black girls and women are transitioning within their experiences. Consistently healing and defining themselves as women and girls in this oppressive society. The essence of the Black girlhood speaks to women through the conceptual framework of womanism, originated by Alice Walker (1983). Walker defines ‘womanist’ as a Black feminist or woman of color that embodies a mature nature of self, wisdom, and pleasure. A womanist is courageous and curious for depth in solutions of survival, liberation, and culture (Walker 1983). Womanism is the theological process that cultivates community, spirituality, and all things informal and culturally indebted in Black feminism.

Walker forms a term of endearment, and emotional understanding within the Black girlhood experience that defines girls’ as women. In an article Dianne Smith (2018) writes, womanism is a cooptation of womlish or womanish, a slur that stirs all hegemonic discourse against girls truest inquisitive, bold, and innovative behaviors. The overlapping perspectives of Black girls and women in the definition of Walker’s womanism applies to the practices of youth development described with SOLHOT (Save Our Lives, Hear Our Truths) in Ruth Nicole

Brown's text. She explains, "I believe in creating spaces where Black girls and women can have the conversations that need to be had in order to connect with girls we once were, the girls we are, the Black girls and women whom we live, the women we've become" (Brown 2008, 55). Spaces like SOLHOT which resist traditional dialogical connections in the practice of youth development and offer Black girls' room to be brave and authentic connection are transformative and adhere to critical conjunction with theorist and practitioners of freedom like Paulo Freire.

1.7.3 Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a theory of education coined by Paulo Freire, which breaks down the formulation of banking concept of education, an objective system of depositing information into students without humanist intentions. Freire describes the resolution of oppressive education through humanist and libertarian pedagogy. Freire's critical pedagogy demonstrates the power of subjectivity, dialogue, praxis, and critical consciousness as fundamental practices toward a state of true transformation. To this point, Richard Schaul explains in the foreword of the text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Freire, 2000, 34)

Freire's critical pedagogy explains how the concept of banking education is a mirrored standard of how the world interacts with another through oppression. Freire offers a synthesis to the binary dialectic of education called critical consciousness (Freire 2000). In the current proposed study, "She Will Tell Me the Truth," I will incorporate themes of critical pedagogy

from Freire's concept. Black girls, among the most vulnerably oppressed population were engaged in co-organizing a girlhood program centered on their identity, and creative intervention. Through dialogical relationship with the program facilitator and researcher, a new educational phenomenon surfaces: "teacher- student" and "students-teachers" (Freire 2000, 80). The practice of transformation in education methodology performs in the pursuit of liberation, which adopts praxis. Praxis is "the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire 2000, 79). Freire's pedagogy participates in a revolutionary process of acknowledges the self, advocate for humanist subjectivity, and producing the critical awareness to participate as "Subjects of the transformation".

1.8 Definitions

This study incorporated conversations about Black girls and includes a variety of descriptions to describe their identity by age, race, and ethnicity, and even circumstances. The chosen identifiers for the population discussed are operational terms chosen with compassionate intention to appropriately and authentically respect the girls. The girls of this study are one of the most vulnerable populations on the planet. In the following sections detailing the definitions used in the study, I draw upon the work and conceptualizations of LaBennett (2011) and Cynthia Carruthers and James Busser (2000). These researchers offer clear, yet socially just ways to define race, age, gender, and space.

Race

This study will reference the participants race and ethnicity as Black and/or African-American in a general sense to incorporate any participants that have self- and genetically identified within that cultural group descended from Africa. LaBennett (2011) explains using the terminology "African-American refers to descendants of African slaves who have lived in the

United States for generations, and “Black” refers to the broader members of the African diaspora” (38).

Age and Gender

The operational term, youth, will be used to capture the specific age group, 11 to 17, in gender neutral terminology. LaBennett (2011) acknowledges the importance of language of choice when referring to her girl participants. Instead of the term “kids,” she chooses the references “youth,” “teens,” and “teenagers.”

Unless the participants of this study choose other gendered terms to be identified as, the terms “girls” and “young women” will be used interchangeably to describe the age and gender of the participants. LaBennett describes this process of the girls choosing, accepting and agreeing to the terms of identification throughout her study. She states, “The teens did not object to being called “girls,” and so I employ this term, in addition to referring to them as “young women” (LaBennett 2011, 37).

Space

Space is a physical expansive location. In regard to youth programming, the operational terms will interchange as “youth programs”, “youth -development programs”, and “after-school programs”. Cynthia Carruthers and James Busser (2000) use the term after-school program and youth program interchangeably in their study that discusses outcomes of involvement in a Boys and Girls Club.

1.9 Assumptions, Scope, and Limitations

Considering the multiple parties involved to conduct an ethical IRB regulated process to research youth, there are existing limitations halted and extended the time frame for interviewing to gather all required materials. It is essential to note that responses from the girls' does not account for all Black girls' perspectives or responses to the program's practices.

A major limitation that arose during this study was the historic pandemic led by the respiratory virus, coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The coronavirus pandemic appeared in the midst of data collection causing the planned methodology to dismantle and reinvent a new process to collect data and conclude the project. Although the data collection was shortened, the scope remained prevalent in acknowledging the voices and perspectives of Black girls in their youth program, Girls of Atlanta.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Black girls are creative experts of their own lives. They create music and language. They invent theories and innovate style and fashion. Black girls show in many spaces, industries, and worlds. However, in those spaces they are not recognized as full agents they are becoming.

This literature review examines the research surrounding Black girls and the Black girlhood experience from key contributors whose research surrounds Black girls' truths, tragedies, youth development and cultural upbringing. The first section of the literature review, "Exploring Black Girl Identities", offers definitions supported by archival research and literary examples of Black girlhood. The second section is titled "Addressing Deficit Narratives and Images of Black Girls and Black Girlhood." In this section, I pay close attention to the negative and often times, dominant names and narratives usually chosen to describe and define Black girls. These were created absent of the voices and truths of Black women and girls. This chapter observes the objectifying narratives of Black girls and how controlling destructive narratives can portray Black girls' lives. The final section, "Black Girl Centered Programming, Research, Pedagogy and Praxis", addresses and collaborates Black girlhood scholars, youth development and educational researchers and scholars work surrounding praxis and practices for working with Black youth and girls. In this literature review, I chose texts that center Black girls, and their lived realities. The literature is mostly authored by Black women, youth educators and workers.

The texts and authors of in this chapter speak to the identity of Black girls, the images and narratives attached and imagined in their girlhood experience, and their mobility in spaces of

celebration and oppression. I found the texts and authors in scholarly databases, and in the references of Black feminist and womanist journal articles that centered Black girl identity, knowledge, and educational liberation practices. The concepts and development of Black girls' identity and cultural experience are explored throughout this study to distinctly understand the work being explored with, for, and against Black girls in youth development spaces. The differences between the positive narratives and support for Black girls, compared to the negative narratives of Black girls explicitly showcase the ideologies and compassionate towards the wellbeing and protection of Black girls' identity. Youth development and educational practice that nurture Black girlhood identities invest in the innovation of Black girlhood. Last but not least, the exploration of Black girls' identities and creating spaces for them cultivates an ingenuity to imagine Black girls' liberation in our near futures.

2.1 Exploring Black Girls Identities

2.1.1 Defining and Exploring Black girls

Black Girlhood is complex in the way it is identified, performed, and lived. Black girls are not a monolith, their way of being stretches into many pockets of expression and characteristics. Their experiences are unique to their familial traditions, geographic regions, and physical characteristics. However, as a cultural group, Black girls and their girlhood experience offer the world something distinctively innovative and raw. Black girlhood is the moments of joy, creativity, and living in the flesh as a Black, female, girl child in the Black and/or African American community. Marcia Chatelain (2015), author of *Southside Girls: Growing up in the Great Migration*, argues that “girlhood is a culturally created and constantly shifting category shaped by culture, religion, and family structure” (14). Ruth Nicole Brown defines Black

girlhood as, “the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female.” (Brown 2008, 1).

As a scholar, artist, Black woman, and once a Black girl herself, Brown’s definition is academically trusted, considering she is recognized as a pioneer in Black girlhood studies. The definition she creates encompasses the ineffable and distinct nature of being socialized and culturally refined as a Black girl. From the literature, Brown is intentional on defining and refining what it means to celebrate the identity as a Black girl. In a world that finds ways to narrate and imagine Black girls in their own image, Black girls and women have to collaborate to define their truth.

Bearing resemblance, Nazera Sadiq Wright offers the text, *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* (2016), as a genealogical search for Black girl reference and representation in nineteenth century literature. In her archival research, Black girls were objectified, called to action, and/or hyper-visible to the eye of the Black and the general public. Wright never distinctly defines girlhood, but rather addresses their existence from written work, such as newspapers, novels, and other written platforms from the early 1800s. Based on the evidence, she explains their identity as this, “in-betweenness” that doesn’t quite characterize them as citizens or subjects (Wright 2016). What was distinctive in the literature, was the proposed behaviors, roles, and labors Black girls should participate in their family, peer groups, and community.

Wright contributes to Black girlhood studies with early findings of Black girl existence and identity. Earlier literature that pioneered research in collaboration of Black girls’ voices is Joyce Ladner’s (1971) *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow*. Ladner’s study follows thirty Black girls, ages 13 to 18 years old, who live in a low-income Midwest city. The study follows the experience of

Black girls and their interpretations of Black womanhood. Concepts like femininity, motherhood, and becoming a woman led the conversations that did not define Black girlhood directly. Instead, Ladner's study strategically connects us to the reality that Black girls somehow miss the opportunity or lack thereof experiencing childhood. Wright approaches this conversation by stating, "Age is inherently transitional..." (10). Ladner (1971) explains, "...when one speaks of childhood in the lower-class Black community, it relates to a different phenomenon that what is typically held to be the standard norm in American society." (45). Keeping in mind the historical context on Ladner's time, the Black middle class was emerging and not as wide as it is today. The low-income population of Black people was and still is an American norm. Black children across the diaspora experience a childhood that incorporates stigma, maximized surveillance, and survival. Institutional racism, sexism, classism, and hetero-sexism disconnects Black youth from middle class beliefs of "child-centeredness" (LaBennett 2011).

2.1.2 Exploring Examples of Culture through Black girlhood

Across class and culture, girl children are reared socially uniquely different based on the traditions and behaviors of the particular cultural group. There are three examples of culture and Black girlhood influence that I will describe in this section. Black girls engaging in their girlhood in action of play (Gaunt 2006), shapeshifting their lives through agency (Cox 2015), recognized fictional and ethnographic literature that centers their perspective (Morrison 1970; Shange (1976); Carroll (1997)). This section shares the examples of Black girlhood revealing its vibrancy in example of culture on American soil.

Black girls' culture reveals its influence from "play." Black girls at play is the active recreational engagement of joy and imagination. Black girls at play is the site where we often witness Black girls become creative agents in our American culture. Black girlhood researcher

Kyra Gaunt (2006) argues that Black girls are musical engineers and contribute to the hip-hop genre, Black popular culture and aesthetic through hand clapping games, cheers and dances in their play with other Black girls. Their creative agency is validated by connecting with other Black girls, while using their bodies as instruments and technology for rhythm, story-telling and fun. Gaunt expresses how Black girls musical play is the training ground for learning social skills in Black culture (Gaunt 2006; Brown 2008). The experience in Black girls play develops a non-verbal cultural communication skill that is sacred in a definitive experience, such as Black girlhood. The Black girlhood experience is an intercommunal experience that is created with other girls, alike. This connectivity is formed through relationships that contain two or more Black girls creating, loving, and connecting with one another. The connectivity is formed by the praxis of sisterhood in Black girlhood, which are the sacred relationships of trust, refuge, and fun in their girlhood. Black girls at play, playing the games, and in sisterhood create and influence hip-hop culture and pop culture in fashioning and music. Jamila Woods, a R&B and Soul artist, highlights a Black girl cultural moment in her 2016 track, Popsicle Interlude. Popsicle Interlude is a reflection and recollection of Black girlhood play. Jamila's track reflects,

So one day these random girls are at my office, and one girl's like

Y'all remember how to play Rockin' Robin?

And we all broke out into formation, we were like

"Popsicle, Popsicle, a bang-bang we was rockin' in the treetop"

And it was so great, it was like

These Black women that I did not know, had met that day

And we like all knew how to play Popsicle together

And then like all of the people who weren't Black were just looking at us like

"Did y'all go to elementary school together?"

It was literally like the best inside secret that I felt like I had ever had

That's one of my favorite things about Blackness (Woods, 2016, stanza 1)

Gaunt (2006) and Woods (2016) speak to the linked importance of Black girlhood showing up in musical culture, but also the sacred relationships in builds across time and space in the cultural experience of Black girlhood. The trust, refuge and fun developed in Black girls' relationships with one another develop an intercommunal language that aligns with non-linear and intentional disconnection to mainstream understanding. We notice this intentional disconnect in the theoretical framing in Alice Walker's theoretical definition of womanism.

In Alice Walker's (1983) theoretical definition of womanism, she mentions the Black girlhood experience in detail, which is coded in cultural non-verbal communication detailed in Kyra Gaunt's work (2006). The imagination encouraged in girlhood play defines how they articulate and reflect on their realities. Hence, Walker's definition excerpt, "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the last time" (Walker 1983). Walker's definition is coded in a sacred intercommunal language that prioritizes the gaze and ears of Black girls and women. In Black girls play, we can notice the cultural moments notions that

Aimee Meredith Cox (2015) ethnographic study analyzes Black girls in Detroit, Michigan and their contradictory status as American citizens. The standpoint of Black girls provides a critical perspective and "reveals their collective vulnerabilities" as shapeshifters of organized oppression in the United States Shapeshifters, as Cox defines, are Black girls defending, exposing, and addressing the "material impact of systemic oppression" (Cox 2015, 7). What is unique about the participants, and the intention of Cox's study is the praxis of the girls

lives as knowledgeable experts in changing their livelihood as citizens. Aimee Cox does a great good laying out the development of childhood, child, and adolescent figures in our American society and its control on the Black girls' identity. Cox (2015) explains,

Research on adolescence has been largely written from the perspective of fear. Youth increasingly, represent middle-class anxieties, and the particular subpopulation of youth in need of systematic subjugation changes to meet the prevailing embodiment of racialized fears and the concern with enforcing class- and gender-based boundaries. Thus, their category of adolescence, like those of race and gender, is essential to defining and limiting citizenship. (12)

As Black girls are attempting to defend and challenge the ideas surrounding their livelihood, they are constantly confronting biased narratives attributed to the illusions of respectability, and ideologies of anti-Blackness that surveillances the private and public perimeters of Black girls' lives (Cox 2015). *The Shapeshifters* in Cox (2006) text reminds us that Black girl culture shows up when there is space to authentically and unapologetically be themselves and provided the space to authentically share their truth. This truth is not always joyful, and bright due to systemic subjugation. *Shapeshifters* reveal how problematic and harmful systems are to Black girls when Black girls agency is not acknowledge. Cox's work holds systems accountable to face the tragedies and truth it has fostered in Black girls lives. Truths and tragedies in the Black girlhood experience are not only applicable in reality but show up in fictional literature as well.

Well-known canonical texts that add to the conversation around Black girls and their girlhood are Toni Morrison's novels *Sula* (1973), *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and Ntozake Shange's choreopoem *for colored girls who considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf* (1976). The

Black girl characters in the texts all apply to the sorrows and celebrations that Black girlhood experience. In both of Morrison's text, discourse surrounding skin color, friendship, and community from the eyes of Black girls was new to literature. In *The Bluest Eye* (1970), characters Pecola and Claudia were distinctively different but shared that essence of emptiness. Pecola and Claudia's relationship is connected in their shared sadness and joy of playing, but also in the woes of being a Black girl child in a society that undermines Black girl children autonomy. They share an emptiness that is birthed from an internal itch of white glorification. White glorification that runs deeply, violently, and inter-generationally, as Paulo Freire would state, "This violence, as a process, is perpetuated from generation to generation of oppressors, who become its heirs and are shaped in its climate" (Freire 2000, p 58). Although, Shange finds space to celebrate and amplify the beauty of Black girls and women in the 1976 choreopoem, she also displays the internal suppression that exists in the reality of Black girls and women's lives and allows their voices to narrate what oppression does to their bodies, their children's bodies and the bodies that look like their own.

Toni Morrison and Ntozake Shange brilliancy allow their words to become lived experiences in art form. Rebecca Carroll, author of *Sugar in the Raw: Voices of Young Black Girls in America* (1997), mentions the importance of Maya Angelou's autobiography, Toni Morrison's Pecola, and Shange's choreopoem as saving literary spaces for her Black girlhood. Carroll produces a literary text that features fifteen narratives of Black girlhood. During a tour through five cities, Carroll interviews and listens to what Black girls have to say. Since Joyce Ladner's 1971 research study, Rebecca Carroll's ethnography is among the first texts, where authentic story-telling from Black girls collaborate into a literary tell-all of America's most vulnerable. The girls' in Carroll's text mention everything between school pipelining, beauty,

dreams, and culture. They share their geographic location, and their community concerns from a racialized perspective. Carroll's girls are intellectually involved with their reality, and capable to mold their identity as Black girls' and agents. Carroll's (1997) *Sugar in the Raw* debunks the narratives that stigmatize Black girls from truly developing into their creative potential.

Black girls as experts of their lives, show up as experts, and contributors in our American Black culture. This section reviewed how Black girls show up in a myriad of spaces that influence culture. In play, music, fiction text, and performance Black girls are creating, defining, and exploring what it means to be in Black girlhood.

2.2 Addressing Deficit Narratives of Black Girls and Black Girlhood

2.2.1 The roles of Black girls

Ladner's beginning chapters address the becoming of a woman through Black girls' lens. Contrary to her title *Tomorrow, Tomorrow*, she addresses Black girlhood with a Sankofa¹ effect by examining "Yesterday". Ladner traces familial lineages and their roles in the Black experience from the seventeenth century to the twentieth for socio-historical context of Black child development, Black relationships, based upon the narratives of Black women. Ladner (1971) weighs heavy on the discourse about stereotypical images of the Black matriarch, the causes and effects of how Black youth are socialized, the sustainability of Black families and the roles Black women partake for work and pleasure. Although, the Black family has been pathologized to function as a matriarchy, the reality of the Black family contradicts its definition. Ladner introduces Margaret Mead's (1949) definition of matriarchy that supports this claim,

...a society in which something if not all, of the legal powers relating to the ordering and governing of the family-power over property, over inheritance over marriage over the

house are lodged in women rather than men (Mead 1949, 14)

The ongoing narrative of matriarchy has developed into the modern trope, Strong Black Woman, similarly to what has happened with the term resilient Black girlhood as the resilient Black girl. Strong Black women is trope used to signify Black women's strength and ability to bounce back from hardships, assault, mishaps (i.e. oppression) as a sign of compliment. The trope is dangerous (Samuel 2020) in terms of labeling the tears and push back against Black women's oppression as earned and victorious, causing an insensitivity to their livelihood. An article that approaches the Ruth Samuel (2020) mentions, "Institutional racial biases that claim Black people are "not as sensitive to pain" as white people subsequently influence the fact that Black women have the highest maternal mortality rates, dying 2.5 times more than white women in 2018." (Samuel, 2020, para 6). This same energy exists in the trope of a resilient Black girl, which alludes to Black girls obtaining the capacity to withstand downfalls and mishaps and recoil back into society. This language and idea of resilience upholds a dangerous tone that normalizes pain and strife to innately occur in our lives, rather than confronting the pain and strife to never happen. Samuel mentioned this great point, "Black girls, specifically darker-skinned Black girls, are inadvertently thrust into this activist position by those applauding them for their strength and "passion." We are robbed of the chance to transition into womanhood, stripped of softness or delicacy and expected to perform like superhumans while being treated as subhuman." (Samuel 2020, para 2). Indeed, the adolescent development of Black girls is unique to their identity. However, while addressing the narratives that differ from mainstream ideas of Black girls and non-Black girls, it is important to pay attention to the ways Black girl narrate their own lives especially with Black women supporting their truthful narratives.

Black girl narrating their realities happens in Ladner's text, as she analyzes the early patterns of learning development of growing inner-city pre-adolescent Black girls. Ladner argues, "The standard conception of the protected, carefree, and non-responsible child has never been possible for the majority of Black children" (Ladner 1971, 47). Black girls in such circumstances, are not afforded the opportunity of youthful carelessness, but rather require an amount of resilience to survive the inequities that intersect in their lives. Implicitly, Black girls develop an amount of mature knowledge which produces coping strategies and disconnected social behaviors that result to this idealistic nature of strength that is praised for surviving in hegemonic social and cultural conditions. This absence of childhood is subjective upon what is being measured, to what standards and *whom* fault or benefit. However, it's important to dissect the *why*'s of systemic dysfunction that may potentially expose Black youth psychological mishaps. In Ladner's text, she states that such psychological mishaps are rarely exhilarated in real life. Psychiatrists, Robert Coles and Alvin Poussaint, analyzed that the growing consciousness through engaging in the survival of oppression builds positive self-image and the ability to re-define identities and cultural status (Ladner 1971). It is through social change and action against oppressive system, where youth can produce emotionally healthy adaptations and responses to defeat internalized hate. (Ladner 1971).

2.2.2 Archival evidence of Black girl narratives and images

Nazera Sadiq Wright (2016) centers the Black girlhood narrative in her investigation through nineteenth century literature with her text, *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*. In her investigation, she discovers the intricate wonders of literature controlling the bodies, attitudes and livelihood of Black girls in hope to achieve racial upliftment. The historical context of Black

lives in the nineteenth century is supplemental to the stationary ideals of what Black girls should do in their lifetime. Post-Civil War, the introduction to Jim Crow, Black citizenship, and woman citizenship, how does a society who doesn't value the lives of female bodied beings become to understand Black female bodied beings? Nazera Sadiq Wright publishes a work of looking back into the manifestations of what it meant to be a girl and Black synonymously. Wright (2016) provides readers with evidence of the language and techniques used in the writings of the 1800's that conveyed the narratives of Black girls and their girlhood experience. According to Wright (2016), early press published articles that encourages Black girls to be model wives, mothers, and housekeepers that cultivated safety for Black men. She explains how newspapers were conduct manuals for free and literate Black people to learn skills, habits, and culture that emulated white meritocracy. From columns titled "The Children's Department" and "The Youth Department" in the Colored American Newspaper from 1836-1840, Nazera Wright (2016) states, "Articles that features girls encouraged youthful readers to find viable solutions to disenfranchisement by channeling their literacy toward an engagement with political topics that were important to their immediate lives" (55). The articles were intended to apply youth's attention to their participation in consciousness raising. However, gender layered roles of hierarchy to the instruction and information of conscious-raising for each gender. Black girls' roles were summoned into caretakers of their families, and their community.

Black writers of the youth centered columns conveyed the control of Black girlhood and Black girls in the hand of social abuse of and against Black men, overworked Black women and mothers. Expectations and images for Black girls were to contribute to the survival of their families, and even themselves. It seems the stage of Black girlhood coined "prematurely knowing" by Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is a common point of

transition where Black girls are obligated to be involved and aware of adult issues and patterns of behavior (Wright 2016).

2.2.3 Emergence of Black girlhood studies

Considering a large percentage of Black women were previously girls' and Black girls are encouraged to become women, we often misinterpret the two stages of life connected which categorizes Black girls' concerns invisible compared to Black women's. This issue is overlooked when it comes to talking about the concerns about Black girls and women. Similarly, to the marginalization of Black women in the early feminist movements, the movements also marginalized the issues and voices of girls (i.e. adolescents, children, teenagers). Kearney (2009) talks about the development of girlhood studies, and its origin development in the silencing and overbearing adult control of their experience. Girlhood studies came out of adult-centered feminisms (Kearney 2009). Just like Black feminism came out of a racially insensitive feminism, Black girls are positioned at the intersection of identities that have to evolve into its own epistemological standpoint. This is not to dismiss the foundational logic in Black Feminist Thought and its heavy concentration in Black women. However, Ruth Nicole Brown, a pioneer of Black Girlhood studies bravely states, "As a way to counter the normative academic management of Black girls' voices as only subjects of feminism, SOLHOT "privileges the in-betweenness of a Black girl epistemology or a Black feminist standpoint" (Durham, 2010, p. 122)" (Brown, 2013, p. 191). Brown and Durham identify the agency in Black girls' experience yet recalls its roots in Black feminist standpoint. The emergence of Black girlhood studies is substantial to accentuate the perspectives of Black girls and position in a hegemonic state.

2.2.4 Pathologizing Black girls' behavior and expression

Considering a large percentage of Black women were previously girls' and Black girls are encouraged to become women, we often interpret the two stages of life mutually inclusive which categorizes Black girls' concerns invisible compared to Black women's. This issue is overlooked when it comes to talking about the concerns about Black girls and women. Similarly, to the marginalization of Black women in the early feminist movements, the movements also marginalized the issues and voices of girls (i.e. adolescents, children, teenagers). Kearney (2009) talks about the development of Girlhood studies, and its origin development in the silencing and overbearing adult control of their experience. Girlhood studies came out of adult-centered feminisms (Kearney 2009). Just like Black feminism came out of a racially insensitive feminism, Black girls are positioned at the intersection of identities that have to evolve into its own epistemological standpoint. This is not to dismiss the foundational logic in Black Feminist Thought and its heavy concentration in Black women. However, Ruth Nicole Brown, a pioneer of Black Girlhood studies bravely states, "As a way to counter the normative academic management of Black girls' voices as only subjects of feminism, SOLHOT "privileges the in-betweenness of a Black girl epistemology or a Black feminist standpoint" (Durham, 2010, p. 122)" (Brown, 2013, p. 191). Brown and Durham identify the agency in Black girls' experience yet recalls its roots in Black feminist standpoint. The emergence of Black girlhood studies is substantial to accentuate the perspectives of Black girls and position a hegemonic state.

2.2.5 Black Deviancy

"At-risk" is a pathological term associated to Black and brown youth who have access to participate in activities often linked to low-income and impoverished living stabilities such as gangs, drug and alcohol use, sexual and domestic assault (LaBennett 2011; Evans-Winters

2019). The term is commonly used for students typically categorized as “urban” youth (Milner 2012; Muhammad & Tatum 2012; Lindsey 2015). “Urban” and “at-risk” are just a couple of categorizations and terminology that centers the respectable and privilege gaze to describe the deficit of developing lives.

In schools, the respectable white gaze views Black girlhood as deviant agents with unimaginable futures. Shange (2019) speaks about the heavy marginalization of Black girls in a so-called propagated liberation and social justice schools in San Francisco. Her analysis speaks with the gaze first-hand, and acknowledges the disinvestment in Black girls’ reality, future, and humanity. A disappointing yet eye opening interview with white female teacher of a social justice centered academy, confronts her bias about a Black girl student named Tarika. Kate, the White female teacher states, “And maybe Tarika’s going to be fine. Maybe she’s fine. It’s hard to imagine her in the world. It’s hard for me to imagine her in a retail job, or however people transition from youth to adulthood.” (Shange 2019, p.12). Shange contextualizes this perspective as a “Black Hole” of Black girls’ future, and further only imagining Tarika as incompetent and irresponsible “flesh” (Spillers 1987) that holds great responsibility and anxiety over the impoverished circumstances for generations to come. Shange reads this conversation as one of the many sources of the Black girls’ criminalization in the school system (Shange 2019; Morris 2016). The deviancy of Black girls’ is a misinterpretation of their girlhood, or as Shange coins, their Black girl ordinary (2019). Shange describes Black girl ordinary as, “...that which signifies on (but does not conform to) normative notions of gender through a performative Blackness shaped by hip hop, social media, and conspicuous consumption” (Shange 2019, p.4). Black girls in their authentic and agentic control refuse the respectable boundaries that institutions inhabit to mold and govern Black youth bodies. Their cultural and dynamic choreography of living doesn’t

align with the investment of so-called emancipatory systems that cultivate respectability, have built for Black people to succumb (Shange 2019; LaBennett 2011; Cox 2015). In spite of misunderstanding Black girls' expression, ordinary and livelihood, Black girls are left known as burdens in educational spaces and deviant, un-belonging and imaginable to the Human experience. In fact, Savannah Shange's study uses schools as a research site as "carceral" borders that target Black girls, just as much as Black boys.

The criminalization of Black girls is a topic in the discourse and studies of Black girlhood. Monique Morris's PUSHOUT (2015) is an ethnographic study that explores the push to punish Black girls in and out of educational space which continues the racially gendered cycle of institutional system investment in controlling the physical and intellectual development of Black girls. Morris calls for a reconfiguration of school policies, pedagogy, and values to notice the phenomenon of Black girls learning. In her latest text, Morris (2019) speculates updated data around the disproportionate percentages of suspensions. In her notes she states:

Black girls are 16 percent of girls in the school population, but they represent 28 percent of girls restrained in school, 37 percent of girls suspended, and 55 percent of girls experiencing out-of-school suspensions. (Morris 2019, 188).

The over-policing of Black girls has an unfortunate presence before the Black Lives Matter movement and the coining terminology of preschool-to-prison pipeline (Morris 2015; Brown 2013, Lindsey 2015; Love 2012). In 2015, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Priscilla Owen, and Jyoti Nanda gathered a report titled, "Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Pushed Out". The report raises a call to action to develop policies and programming that acknowledged the challenges Black girls and girls of color face in the school system (Crenshaw et al 2015). The

report shows the largely disproportionate ratios of Black girls being expelled from school compared to their White girl classmates.

Black girls are rejected the experience of childhood innocence. Their lives are held to standards that are considered adult rated for many reasons which research and lived experiences have justified, denounced, and explained in the maturation of Black girlhood. Black girls childhood experiences are shortened due to the racialization and gendered expectations of their identity. To start with the plight of Black migration to the North of the United States of America, the 1910's emphasized and heightened positionality of respectability for Black people, Black girls particularly had an effect on the efforts of white philanthropy and Black elite. Social positioning in the Reform Culture gravitated to Black social elites, migrating Black women and philanthropists to create an "influx" of institutions like reformatory schools, orphanages, clubs, and recreational programs (Chatelain 2015). Chatelain (2015) speaks about how this influx questioned the child status of Black girls and fed into the stereotypes that shamed and criminalized their sexuality and identity.

2.2.6 Contemporary narratives surrounding Black girls

Bettina Love describes the layered necessity of agency in the lives of Black queer youth. She states, "Agency is highlighted as an affordance of youth in redefining and reimagining established norms" (Love 2017, 540) Love navigates agency through a methodological lens of "messy" and humanizing research to discuss the fluidity and creative ratchet lives of Black youth. Ratchet is another word and narrative used to frame and shame the lives of Black women and girls that are oppositional to follow or partake in respectability politics (Love 2017). Black women and girls that are considered "ratchet" are shamed and threatened with violence due to negating or navigating against heteropatriarchy, White supremacy and capitalism. Love (2017)

and Cooper (2012) addresses ratchet as challenge to respectability politics and rejection of white supremacist emulation. Particularly, Love utilizes the Black ratchet imagination as a methodological tool for Black queer youth to reclaim and embrace their messy, fluid, and full humanity in their identities.

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) Black feminist standpoint articulates the space where Black women profess self-definitions of their lives. She states, “By insisting on self-definition, Black women question not only what has been said about African-American women but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define” (Collins 2000, p. 125). The power of self-definition liberates an individual in the processing their humanity and affirming that transformation, as Lorde (1984) would explain, “the transformation of silence into language and action” (p.84). Self-proclamation dismantles the labels and narratives that construct how people and institutions engage with your being. Venus Evan-Winters (2019) describes how language is imperative to the objectification and humanization of Black girls and women. Terms like, “at-risk”, “urban”, “first-generation”, and “high-need” add to the invisible and hypervisibility of prescribed youth that honestly exposes the marginalized paradigms of programs and systems using such language. Evans-Winters (2019) raises questions about how labels and categorizations of youth truly address their identity. She states, “Language is political and can serve both as a functional (i.e. a word or phrase is more efficient for a sound bit) and psychological purpose.” (Evans-Winters 2019, p. 48). Deficit language and discourse supply mythologized definitions and assumptions upon Black and Brown children lived experiences. This objective language fuels the implicit and explicit narrative that Black girls are always in need of resources, emotionally unstable, lack guidance, and so on. (Brown 2013). Additional to

the names in educational spaces, images about Black girls on the American home front are devalued and hyper visible.

Stereotypes that aligned to the naive labels often associated with Black girls and women. The Jezebel, Sapphire, Matriarch (i.e. Black women and older Black women without biological children), Matriarch-in-the-Making (i.e. Black girl, Black young women without children), and even the modern-day categories: video vixens, Divas, thugs and wannabes (Cox 2009). Marcia Chatelain discusses in *Southside Girls* (2015), how such stereotypes were in living color, marked deviant, unbridled, immoral, and even criminalized. Black girls “moral fitness” was scrutinized and problematized in fear of the horrors the Northern urban city life. Despite the moral capacity to dismantle patriarchal systems that trafficked on Black southern girl’s vulnerability and becoming in urbanization, Black elites and white philanthropist opened institutions to protect their livelihood while also nourishing the stereotypical ideologies of Black girls.

Brown’s (2013) *Save Our Lives, Hear Our Truth* chapter, More than Sass or Silence, highlights the narratives of Black girls that usually critiquing the voices of Black girls. For example, when a school official refers to a Black girl’s personality, volume of her voice in a particular word we often hear that she is “sassy”. Indeed, Black girls are expressive, vibrant, Black, and memorable. However, when using the term “sassy”, it is condescending to be anti-Black and silencing in its word choice and sound. Ruth Nicole Brown argues, “Black girls are all too often admonished for the memorable, stylistic and always recognizable way they emphasize tonality with expressiveness.” (Brown, 2013, p. 186). In the same breath, recognizing the Black girls’ who are shy are deemed as mute and powerless. Brown expresses in blurbs from SOLHOT girls and home girls how their so-called, sassiness, is too loud or too silent yet no one seemed to listen.

More than *Sass or Silence* highlights a resolution to the labeling and silencing of Black girls in the community spaces such as, SOLHOT (Save Our Lives, Hear our Truths). As described in the text, SOLHOT is a personally collective, sacred, loud, meditative, and organized in the essence of Black *girlness*. Ruth Nicole presents her production, “creative potential of Black girlhood”, which works within its own living energy. Black girlhood is a momentous and intellectual incubator that can “move ideas and people” (Brown, 2013, p. 190). In fact, Black girlhood is an epistemological standpoint that exists outside of academic feminism, Black feminist thought and all things centered on Black women. Brown’s “creative potential of Black girlhood”, is the organizing principle when it come to the praxis of listening to Black girls’, organizing for/with them, and creating. The framework is radical, and revolutionary is its analysis of connection and teaching. Brown mentions the sampling of Andres Smith’s (2006) “Heteropatriarchy and The Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing”. Smith’s framework dissects the existing form of organizing are restrictive and marginalizing to the complex and interconnected distinctions that involve theorizing and conducting transformative realities. Smith pillars and Brown’s frameworks go hand-in-hand. It is the idea of theorizing, yet actively producing and cultivating the theory at work. Not only is it liberatory, but also, the creative potential of Black girlhood confronts the systematic discomfort of cultural ideation.

2.3 Black Girl Centered Programming, Research, Pedagogy, and Praxis

Schools that inherit the “pedagogy of respectability” commit to the lashings from enslavements protocol of discipline, surveillance, and conforming to the hierarchy’s vision of system. As Hartman would quote, “The whip was not to be abandoned: rather, it was to be internalized. The emphasis on correct training, proper spirit, and bent backs illuminated the

invasive forms of discipline idealized as the self-fashioning of the moral and rational subject” (Hartman, 1997, 140). The pedagogy of respectability and Paulo Freire’s (2000) concept of a banking education all participate in the politics and practice of education. What is unfortunate and continuing in educational practices today are restrictive and carceral practices are masked behind decolonial liberation propaganda (Shange 2019). The investment in respectable, pathological, and oppressive education has been a continuous practice school administrators can't seem to let go of despite their “social-justice” efforts. The identities of Black students are bound by the laws of social respectability.

2.3.1 Black girlhood programming in research

Programs are the spaces where young people develop a social life and creative sensibility outside of school. Typically, youth programming provides a safe space for young people to build community, play, and imagine possibilities beyond the threshold of home and school responsibilities (Cox, 2015; Brown, 2008; LaBennett, 2011). The spaces for Black girls’ social development and leisure is a great site for evaluating youth culture critically and consciously to develop rich context of the present and future conditions of younger generations mobility, social choreography (Cox 2015), and creative autonomy. Many researchers, like Love (2012, 2017), Brown and Kwayke (2012) and Muhammad (2012), would argue that Black girl spaces in programming should be sacred and protected from external forces that adhere to hegemonic force or restraint that has led them in need of said safe spaces. The notion of leisure is a significant point of view to evaluate in the examination of youth culture and programming. LaBennett explains in *She’s Mad Real* (2011) how cultural expression and identity formation is presented in young people’s art of living and their conceptualization of the world they live in (Maira & Soep, 2005; LaBennett, 2012). LaBennett’s setting for her study is located in a

Brooklyn Children's Museum that hosts an internship program for neighborhood youth to earn income while also "staying off the streets". It is positioned to interfere with the participants from participating in activities that would be considered to categorize them in higher ranks of being "at-risk" to violence of the neighborhood concerns (i.e. crime, teen pregnancy) (LaBennett 2011). LaBennett's approach to the Brooklyn Children's Museum is opening the gap in leisure studies to incorporate youth and leisure as a site of inquiry.

Ruth Nicole Brown's work challenges spaces of programming to clearly understand the language and praxis surrounding Black girlhood and their spaces of celebration. In Brown's 2008 book, *Black Girlhood Celebration*, she takes off into a powerful conversation in the chapter "Power, Not Program: A Political Work for the Children". She challenges the notion of program and its implications of following an agenda to correct a problem. A problem that translates into youth, "Programming for programming sakes defines young people as the problem", states Brown (2008, 26). She includes the strategic importance of power, cultivating and igniting the power of young people to dismantle the normative narrative that construct programs agendas, and implement the power of young people to create political reformation around their livelihood (Brown 2008). Ruth explains it like this, "...recognizing power requires an understanding that because institutional narratives do often frame Black girls' actions as too loud, too much, too sexual, too disruptive, we must work to resist these narratives created by us." (Brown, 2008, 26) In the acknowledgement of Black girls' power in organizing, she presents an oppositional framework in the pedagogy and praxis of Black girls' programming, or Brown's neologism Black girlhood celebration which calls forward her methodological framework from working with Black girls in political and creative organizing. This is later to be conceptualized as the creative potential of Black girlhood (Brown 2013). Brown's political science background is

transformative in the position of naming, examining, and shifting the ideology and language involved in “empowerment” of Black youth and girls’. “Without analyzing power within and outside of the program processes marginalize some of the same young people they claim to be “empowering” (Brown 2008, 26). The inquiry of program intentions and inclusion of Black girls’ in their organizing signifies not only the goals but the potential of its reach toward true transformation.

2.3.2 Transformative organizing, listening, and learning with Black girls

Paulo Freire’s (2000) concepts, transformation and humanization, are considered the goal to true liberation. Freire (2000) shares this logic, “Authentic liberation- the process of humanization-- is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” (p.79). When researchers and scholars speak of the human phenomenon of living and acting as informed, political and inquiring agents that often refer to the Hegelian concept of praxis and its implementation in the work they theorize and practice (Love 2012; Evans-Winters 2019; Brown (2008, 2013). Praxis is the multidimensional process of transforming the ordinary through: reflection and action. Black feminist theorists and activists, Black liberation and cultural workers are well known to identify their politics, thinking, and work in this evolving conceptualization of transformation. Freire is an important figure in this conversation because his interpretation includes the reflection of pedagogy and work surrounding the normative principles of educating the masses. In the act of transformation and revolutionizing, Freire (2000) mentions

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world (Freire, 2000, 88)

The “dialogical” man is critical and knows that although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power (Freire, 2000, 91)

Without faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation. (Freire, 2000, 91)

The inclusion of all participants, the oppressed (i.e. Black girls) and “the dialogical man” (i.e. program organizers) in dialogue develops organizing power to create and transform lives. However, Freire notes that prior to the rise of the dialogical exchange, trust must be established.

Brown develops an after-school pedagogy around Black Girlhood Celebration from trusting Black girls perspective. She critiques spaces that are so-called designed for the “empowerment” Black girls’, and yet not inclusive or trusting of their creative and wayward existence. Freire would frame the slogan “empowerment” as, “Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects.” (Freire 2000, 65). Brown responds to this act of empowerment organizing as “girl saving” (Brown 2008). She argues that the “girls saving” paradigm connected to girl empowerment programs is problematic and uses the tool of objectification and paternalism to govern girlhood in route of empowerment. Brown (2008) states, “Black girls’ knowledge and presence have been excluded and deemed unimportant in three surprisingly interrelated academic discourses: hip-hop, girls’ studies and girls’ programming” (34). Trusting Black girls to voice what they desire in a free and safe space is an act toward liberation. Trusting Black girls and their lived experience as a site of intellectual production and creative ingenuity is a step toward celebrating and fully acknowledging the Black girl epistemology.

Brown (2013) presents an evolving analysis of praxis by Andrea Smith (2006) called, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy: Rethinking Women of Color Organizing”. Smith names three pillars that are interconnected yet work separately to control and consume humanity through political force. The pillars are, slavery/capitalism, genocide/capitalism, and Orientalism/war (Brown, 2013). In the text, Brown highlights the musical production of SOLHOT’s CD as an approach to clarify that the narrative of addressing Black girls’ issues singularly will not address the complexity of Black girl’s reality. Black girls’ sound and theorizing calls for an intervention that does not function on the oppressive organizing logics of binary categorization. Smith’s framework dissects the existing form of organizing are restrictive and marginalizing to the complex and interconnected distinctions that involve theorizing and conducting transformative realities. Smith’s work challenges the dichotomy in concepts, ideas, and resolutions that often led to resolutions of divide and conquer (Brown, 2013). What Brown offers readers and organizers to think about with Smith (2006) is to develop strategies of organizing beyond the principles of ‘this and that’. Instead, strategies should incorporate the well-rounded and multi-layered aspects in Black girlhood, in order to develop new practices and theories to connect to the source of Black girl celebration.

In tandem with *Black Girl Celebration* (Brown, 2008), Aimee Meredith Cox (2015) presents the praxis of Black girl epistemology in an analytical concentration—*shapeshifting*. *Shapeshifting* describes how young Black women living in the United States engage with, confront, challenge invert, unsettle, and expose the material impact of systemic oppression. (Cox, 2015, 7).

Shapeshifters presents the voices of Black girls navigating a racist misogynoir¹ capitalistic system while exploring the potential of transgressing theoretical and political

playbooks of neoliberalism through their critique, direction, and performance in such a brutal system. Cox develops a deep understanding throughout the text about Black girls governing the conversations centering their livelihood but also their genius of their very own lives.

Through the deliberate work of Freire, Brown, and Cox provide an interconnectivity of understanding the humanistic centering in praxis and transforming spaces of education and celebrating Black girls and their girlhood. The vitality in listening to the dialogue shared amongst Black girls about their lives builds the language to articulate and imagine the potential of liberation.

2.3.3 Pedagogy and praxis in critically designed frameworks for Black girl work

Black girl liberation requires a framework that supports the deep work of organizing with Black girls. Tiffany Nyachae (2016) attempts to develop a Black feminist curriculum that centers Black girls and women to potentially seek space of hope and liberation in their learning experience. Nyachae's discussion about the Black feminist curriculum, *Sisters of Promise (SOP)* (2016), share the contradictions of planning a curriculum that educational institutions won't accept both indirectly and directly. Nyachae (2016) identifies the challenges she was up against in an attempt to teach a Black feminist curriculum. The real challenge was the restrictions and hesitation of support from administration that did not allow Nyachae to teach resistance. Nyachae states, "One contradiction within the SOP curriculum is that Black girls are encouraged to name their oppression without resisting it. A second contradiction is that Black girls are to be self-aware for the benefit of others, more than themselves" (Nyachae 2016, 800). The restrictions went as far as addressing the curriculum to lose the characteristic language that identified Blackness. It was alarming and disheartening to hear that truth. However, the overarching fact Nyachae (2016) raises is that the respectable, neoliberalist, individualistic, and

White normative of school environments cannot host a space or pedagogy for Black girls' liberation.

Scholars such as Gholnecsar Muhammad (2012) have found that literacy spaces that center Black girls' identity and the historical practices of literacy from early 1800 African-American literary societies. Muhammad curated the program, Black Girls W.R.I.T.E! to devote the Sister Authors (the program participants) to pen collective proclamation of liberation through their identity, and individual time to write their own stories. She grounded the curriculum of the writing institute under four themes: identity, resiliency, solidarity, and advocacy (Muhammad 2012). Muhammad implies, "Teachers can create a safe space where Black adolescent girls can openly and unapologetically express themselves and need not mask who they are" (Muhammad 2012, 210).

2.3.4 Hip hop feminism in praxis

In creating safe spaces for our students, it is equally important to understand the need for them to be brave as well. Inserting the elements of hip-hop culture in the classroom offers a space for Black youth to feel confident to speak and connected to the learning material at some capacity. Hip-hop as a Black engineered source of culture centers Black identities. The dismissal of Black identity and Black girls' identity is a common practice in the educational setting, which often calls for urban education, social justice, and hip-hop pedagogies to intervene in the learning development for youth.

Treva Lindsey (2015) elaborates the significance of hip-hop feminism in theory and praxis in urban education to emphasize the realities and truths of Black women, girls, trans*², and queer communities that often are over looked in hip-hop studies. Milner (2012) investigates the terminology urban education as, "typically has some connections to the people who live and

attend school in the social context, the characteristics of those people, as well as surrounding community realities where the school is situated' (558). Milner (2012) suggests and creates new politically developed terms to describe school contexts, environments, and characteristics of what makes a school 'urban'. Milner (2012) establishes the categories, (1) urban intensive, (2) urban emergent, (3) urban characteristic. Lindsey (2015) doesn't clearly define the utilization of urban education in her article, but it is clear that she is describing urban education in the same context as Muhammad and Tatum (2012), "Schools that are characteristically urban have become synonymous with predominantly African American or Latino populations from lower-middle- to lower-class communities besieged by violence and other illicit behaviors primarily committed by male youth of color." (436). Lindsey's (2012) article intervenes in the heavy male of color concentrated urban educational settings to include hip hop feminist pedagogical practices to eliminate misogynoir³ violence. The evolving theoretical framing of hip-hop feminism from Joan Morgan's, *When Chicken Heads Come to Roost* (1999), to Kyra Gaunt's musicology breakdown of Black girls' creative hip hop cultivation, *The Games Black Girls Play* (2006) add valuation to the history and culture of hip-hop. Including the feminist intervention in hip-hop urban pedagogy deconstructs the marginalization of girls in learning experiences and their engagement in urban production. The praxis of hip-hop feminism develops a holistic appreciation and celebration of Black girls' action, sound, choreography, and expression and how their role in hip-hop (Brown 2008; Cox, 2015; Gaunt, 2006; Love, 2012; Morgan, 1999).

Hip-hop feminist pedagogy offers a full interpretation of the complexities of Black girls' epistemology. Brown and Kwakye (2012) offer hip-hop feminist inspired pedagogy that is intentional edited to teach and organizes inclusive communities in learning spaces. Brown and Kwakye (2012) define hip-hop feminist pedagogy as "a way of asking questions about and

speaking to the discrepancies and the contradictions that exist in the material lives of young people” (2012, 5).

2.3.5 Challenges in transformative pedagogies and praxis for Black girls

The work of the aforementioned scholars has developed exclusive spaces outside of institutional urban education settings. Such spaces implement emancipatory “policies” and practices that allow for sound production, imagination, play, and conscious development of Black girlhood. Due to uniformed policies, such as Nyachae (2016) contradictions to incorporate a Black feminist curriculum in her classroom, alternative spaces are encouraged to pick up the practices of empowering cultural and feminist learning interventions.

In the out-of-school context, scales, and models that develop out of school curriculum in need of hip-hop pedagogies and praxis learning that offers unique and relatable perspective, language and figures for their Black girl participants. The Positive Youth Development (PYD) model is a well-known theoretical model when working with young people. Lerner et al. describes the PYD model as “a conceptual alternative to deficit models of adolescence and assumes that a developmental system can work to promote positive outcomes rather than focusing on avoiding negative or desirable behaviors.” (as cited in Clonan et al., 2016, p.100). The positive youth development is the go-to model and has been reconstructed by scholars, such as Clonan et al. (2016), who included additional components of healthy development for girls of color to potentially experience positive and culturally competent programming. The authors agreed the five components (confidence, competence, character, connection, and caring) that outline the model needed three additional components (critical consciousness, resistance and resilience) to adjust for girls of color. It suggests that girls of color have a better response with

curriculum that involves criticality, resistance and resilience practices. Although the intentions of the adapted PYD model collaborate the truth of girls of color lives in theory, it is not realistic to develop the components in praxis. Black girls being their authentic selves are resistance, resilient, and radical. The authors argue that their adapted PYD model aligns with the work of Brown (2013), Love (2013), and Evans-Winters (2019), however, it is difficult to agree with such a statement. The significance of the aforementioned scholars and their Black girl work with Black girls' is organizing in collaboration with Black girls' and organically developing a presence of resistance by highlighting their innate socialization and consciousness from their Black girlhood experience. Radical and intentional foundations on pedagogy and praxis, while also incorporating new spaces for learning allow for unfixed and humanizing frameworks to respond with Black girls' realities.

In creating spaces for Black girls to arrive with liberation in mind, there is a large importance in centering their voices to articulate what this liberation looks, sounds, and feels like. It is heavily shared in the literature that Black girls are more than capable of sharing the standpoint of how hegemony from white supremacy and capitalism show up in their lives and strips them of their agency in becoming autonomous beings, dissimilarly to their non-Black peers. This review brings up the conversation of how Black girls are socialized and defined by others to draw them into the narratives suggested for them. Black girls are constantly and effortlessly rejecting negative narratives and continuing to create, celebrate and transform their girlhood and influence in mainstream culture. After-school spaces for Black girls are important sites to consider in cultivating their influence and building on the transformation toward liberation.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study explores the process of co-organizing a youth program for and with Black and/or African-American identified girls age 11-14 years old in a program, Girls of Atlanta. The purpose of this case study explored the process of co-organizing a youth program for and with Black girls at Girls of Atlanta. This study explored youth development practices that center Black girls knowledgeable standpoints in co-organizing Black girl youth development programs. In this study, I explored the components of the research site's (girl program) youth development model through observations and two focus-group interviews with their participants to explore the praxis, or lack thereof, in working with Black girls. I employed a qualitative methodology which is an explorative research model that considers narrative responses in data collection and explores the in-depth reasoning of how and why something happens. As a qualitative case study, this study aims to reflect the potential of active youth development research, and creative youth development organizing from a Black feminist lens.

During this qualitative case study, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) impacted the United States of America at a great length, causing places of gathering, learning, and socializing to close. The prevention of spreading the coronavirus caused the eight weeks of data collection to be shortened to four weeks. I engaged in one focus group interview, one interview with a parent and participant, and four weeks of program observations. COVID-19 is a novel virus that affects the respiratory system and is easily spread from person-to-person. Although, the illness has been tracked since November 2019 in Wuhan, China—America was impacted in late February 2020 by the coronavirus causing many institutions and socializing to cease until the spread of the virus

decreased in numbers. This study explained how the illness and its following pandemic impacted Black girls at homes, their afterschool spaces, homeschool transitions, and relationships.

The following components of the chapter include: the design and its appropriateness, the site setting, the sample population demographics, data collection procedures, coronavirus pandemic intervention, and the methodology's validity and reliability.

3.2 Design

The design chosen for this study is a qualitative case study. According to Creswell (2013), "Case study is...in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or cases over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case-based themes." (73). Out of five approaches of qualitative inquiry, case study seemed fit for the project's purpose to observe, explore, and develop the practices and praxis of youth development programming. Case studies grasps the external and internal flow of a distinctive within-site study site (i.e. Girls of Atlanta), its case (i.e. youth program), and collects in-depth data over time to report themes based on the site's case. (Creswell 2013).

Qualitative research allows for flexible understanding in the data. This is especially important when working with marginalized populations, such as Black girls, on the occasion of a global pandemic. Creswell elaborates, "Interactions among people, for example, are difficult to capture with existing measures, and these measures may not be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status, and individual differences" (Creswell 2013, 48). A case study accomplished the study's goals of analyzing and observing how Black girls utilize safe spaces of youth development programs, while also incorporating the desired practices in Black girl co-organized programming.

3.3 Setting and Population

The research site of this study is located in the metropolitan Atlanta, GA area. Atlanta is the largest metropolitan city in the state of Georgia. The U.S. Census Bureau calculates the city of Atlanta's population to be a total of 498,044 persons. The percentage of persons who identify within the category "race and ethnicity" origin as Black or African-American alone consists of 52.3% of the population. The percentage of persons under the age of 18 consists of 18.8% of the Atlanta, GA population. Although Atlanta residents live in surrounding suburban cities outside the Atlanta perimeter (i.e. Decatur, East Point, Smyrna), Atlanta is an accessible and promising location for the research study's centering of Black girls.

The study is targeted a Black girlhood program at the community clubhouse at John's Creek Apartments clubhouse that supports a predominantly Black and/or African-American population of girls. The clubhouse is administered by a non-profit company called Build Project, which offers programs and resources to the John's Creek community. The Build Project granted permission for me and my partner to utilize the space for programming.

Participants in this research project identify with the race and ethnicity, "Black and/or African-American". Considering this research study is exploring girl youth program practices, participants identify as girls, young women, or nonbinary female. The participants are between the ages of 11 and 14 years old, generally the ages attached to middle school, two parent/guardian, and the facilitator of the program, Tanisha Holmes.

3.4 Sample

This qualitative study utilized criterion sampling strategy. Creswell describes criterion sampling as, “All cases that meet some criterion; useful for quality assurance” (2013, p. 158). Creswell suggests that the most effective way to structure a case study with criterion sampling is to select a case(s) that fit into a specific criterion which will offer the most efficient and honorable data (2013). The focused site for this project will be a Black girlhood program in the Atlanta Area. The minor girl participants will be considered for sampling if they meet the identification of the study’s requirements. The identification requirements are:

- Black and/or African-American identity
- Girl or nonbinary female
- Ages 11 to 14 years old

The sample size for interviews will be held for 5 to 20 participants, per the suggestion of Creswell (2013).

In addition to the girl participants a part of the study, two parent/guardian of the girls, and one partner and facilitator, Tanisha Holmes, were a part of the data collection sample. Their input was not intended to be a recorded, however, their involvement and consent accounted for reliable pertinent data.

Before the creation of the proposal of the project, Girls of Atlanta, Tanisha Holmes was introduced to me by Dr. Chamara Kwayke. Tanisha and I co-created the proposal, curriculum and goals for this program, Girls of Atlanta. Throughout the study, Tanisha is influential in the recruitment and sustenance of the program. Tanisha is a Spelman 2020 graduate, middle school educator, and has a deep study in Black feminism and spirituality. Her Black girlhood research and experience poured into the potential impact the program had amongst its participants.

Due to the pandemic arising in the midst of data collection, the program ended abruptly. Reaching out to the participants required more surveillance and heightened communication with the girls' parents. This change of course increased communication with parents and guardians of the participants, which resulted in two parent/guardian becoming participants in the data collection.

3.5 Procedures

The procedural process to conduct this study involved a series of scouting an after-school youth space that would welcome a program centered on Black girlhood. My partner, Tanisha I developed a written proposal to facilitate a Black girl youth development program at Atlanta youth development facilitates. As a researcher and community organizer in the Black Mecca City, Atlanta, Tanisha and I set out with great enthusiasm to find a space for Black girls to organize, learn, love, and be. However, over time, the list of organizations, community centers, and middle schools narrowed as emails were ignored, meetings disrupted, and volunteer processes were exhausted. Housing non-profit organizations, public schools, public libraries, and Boys and Girls Club were vetted out with schedule and prepared meetings. Preparations of meetings included a draft of curriculum for the program, its mission, milestones, theoretical support and a resume of the previous community and youth I have partaken. In the events of meetings with the organizations and facilities that centered youth—it pained me to notice that the organizations didn't center youth at all. Our second to last meeting at Johnson Middle School, presented a list of barriers that arose in the meeting to propose the girls program Girl of Atlanta. The barriers raised many concerns that flagged a disinterest in Girls of Atlanta, but also led

Tanisha and I to consider organizing and implementing the girl program at her apartment complex clubhouse, John's Creek Apartments.

The John's Creek Apartments Clubhouse Community Engagement Coordinator agreed to host the program for their middle school girls and also agreed to assist in recruiting for Black girl participants for the study. After reviewing the research proposal with the Community Engagement Coordinator and Program Director and answering in-depth questions about the purpose of the research, physical flyers were posted throughout the John's Creek apartment complex. A virtual invitation flyer was posted in the complex's February newsletter as an invitation to the program's orientation. Given that the program, itself, is not the research, the research project was announced during the orientation of the girlhood program.

The first meeting was scheduled as an orientation for the girlhood program, which included food, information about the program, and program dates. The orientation brought six girls and two parents inquiring about the girl's program, Girls of Atlanta.

I presented the research project to parents and potential participants in a formal presentation of the project and its connection to the program. I personally met the parents and interested participants for the girlhood program and research project, while also explaining the girlhood program and research project. The orientation was scheduled two weeks prior to the first program start date to allow for time to decide on participation in the program. Parents of the youth participants were encouraged to call, text, and email the researcher and program facilitator with questions regarding the project.

3.5.1 Pandemic Procedures

The coronavirus pandemic required the methodological process of this qualitative project to shift its measures, analysis, and expectations. In the event of social distancing and only four

weeks of data, the last focus interview and three observations were not obtainable to complete. In this knowing, a care package and social distance meeting was scheduled in the park near in the community clubhouse to close out the program, Girls of Atlanta. The Atlanta community supported the fund raising for the care packages, where the researcher received more than \$600. In the event of the fundraiser, I (the researcher) contacted parents and guardians of the participants to receive information about any specific needs of the Girls of Atlanta to purchase for their care packages. In a phone conversation, the parent/guardian and I also confirmed their level of comfortability of meeting in person at a social distance for a closing program picnic, lunch provided by the fund raising for Girls of Atlanta care packages. All parents/guardians consented to meet and close the program at the open lawn near the community clubhouse.

3.5.2 Timeline of the project

The Black girlhood youth program, Girls of Atlanta, is a youth development program. The research project took place for four active weeks of programming out of the eight proposed weeks for the program. The program met once a week on Thursdays from 5PM to 7PM. Prior to the first week of programming, a meet and greet hosted an introduction to the program, the research, the facilitators, and the space. The Black girlhood program, Girls of Atlanta, began a week after the orientation. Girl participants were well aware of the research and the Black girlhood program, unless they missed the orientation. The curriculum was planned for an eight-week experience organized around the responses from the participants focus-group interviews, pre-planned curriculum and activities. However, the coronavirus pandemic intervened in the program's progress, causing the data collection to end at week four.

The first week of programming, I hosted the focus group interview, getting to know the girls, their expectations, and hopes of being involved in the expected eight-week program. The observations took place between the first and fourth week of programming. As planned, the eighth week of the program was scheduled to gather the girls in a second focus group interview to reconvene and share their responses to their experience in the Black girlhood program, Girls of Atlanta. Unfortunately, the last focus group interview was not able to happen due to only four weeks of programming happening amidst the pandemic.

3.6 Data Collection

There will be two forms of data collection: observations, interviews, and documents. Interviews were chosen to engage their voices and interests in the curation of the curriculum for the program and co-organization of Girls of Atlanta. Observations were chosen to experience and note the action of the program. Documents, like my researcher journal, were utilized to recount experiences before programming happened.

3.6.1 Observations

The observations of the program were a key tool for qualitative data collection. I chose this method to understand and clearly articulate the energy of the program. As encouraged by Creswell (2013), observing require a watchful eye of the entirety of the site. This includes the external and internal views of the site, the participants, activities, engagements, relationships, behaviors within the setting. It is suggested to use all the five senses in during the recording of observations, however as a Black girl cultural worker, it is equally important to use your consciousness and intuition in the role of an observer. Working and researching in spaces with Black girls require active participation as an authentic and present participator, rather than a skeptical data collector. This change of pace in the researcher role allows a listening ear to the

perspective “data” the girls deliver but also a trusting arm of support in this sacred time. The observations of the girls’ program are necessary to gain trust with the girls in the program and the site directors. The stance of the researcher on the observation process would be what Creswell notes as a *Complete participant* (2013, 166). Creswell (2013) explains the position “Complete participant” as, “The researcher is fully engaged with the people he or she is observing. This may help him or her establish greater rapport with the people being observed (Angrosino, 2007)” (167). As a complete participant, I can contextualize the girl’s response in action, by reflecting and engaging with the girls hands-on. My role as a facilitator of the program puts me in the position as a complete participant due to my roles and responsibility to co-curate the experience with the girls. The observation was recorded by notetaking, while using an observational protocol to record the notes of the program session. At times, Tanisha facilitated conversations and engagements as I recorded and took notes of the space. None of the girls are identified during the observations. The observations were written and guided by an observational protocol table (See Appendix E).

3.6.2 Interviews

The girls chosen to be participants for the interview portion of the study were considered based upon their identity, but also by their voluntary and parental agreement. Focus group interviews were conducted to interact with interviewees for collaborative ideas to be shared amongst the girls and facilitators as well as creating a comforting cooperation in dialogue about Girls of Atlanta. The first focus-interview, pre-assessment, conducted as a brainstorming session on creating a girl program based on their Black girlhood (See Appendix B). The girls were asked to share how they want to be involved in the program, the activities/experiences and expectations they have of the program. The last focus-group interview, post-assessment, was intended to host

a series of interview questions to reflect on their experience in the program and their experience during quarantine. However, due to change of plans on the participants end, only two participants (a girl and her mother) showed up to the planned closing gathering which resulted for the post-assessment interview to be an open-ended interview.

The questions centered their Black girl standpoint (Lindsey 2015) to be shared while highlighting their experience in Black girlhood, interests, and perspective of the girlhood program (refer to interview questions in Appendix B). The focus-group interview style was chosen for a collective conversation for the participants comfort with other program members. Focus-groups interviews offer an array of collaborative information, while also confronting the convenience of time.

Before the focus group interview, I read the assent form for interview protocol with the participants under the age of 18. The reciting of the assent form will follow the greeting of the researcher and participants. The purpose of the study, the amount time needed for the interview, and the plans for the project's results was discussed with the participants (Creswell 2013). Prior to the interview, the participants' parents signed the consent form for their child's participation in the study project and authorizing for audio recording. Some girl parents signed the consent forms the day of the first focus group interview. The location and time of the first focus group interview was scheduled before programming began. Time was allotted for a one-hour pre-assessment focus-group interview. The post-assessment focus-group was scheduled for the eighth week of programming, however, in the mist of the pandemic a closing interview gathering was planned to collect the post-assessment data.

The interviews were transcribed manually on my laptop, where I had an in-depth listening of the interviews. The transcriptions of both interviews were typed and printed to begin the coding analysis process.

3.6.3 Documents

Documents are reliable sources of data collection in qualitative research. Due to pandemic shortening data, it was important I recounted all experiences surrounding the development of Girls of Atlanta to provide as much data as possible to complete this project. The document used in this study was my researcher journal, which accounted for the experiences that happened in the organizing and scouting for the program.

3.7 Coding Analysis

3.7.1 Cycle One

To make connections between Black girls' response about their unique Black girlhood experience and their experience in their girl centered program, I believed it was best to utilize the exploratory method of holistic coding. Holistic coding is defined as "...an attempt "to grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole [the coder as 'lumper'] rather than by analyzing them line by line [the coder as 'splitter,]" (Dey 1993, p. 104). Holistic coding is described to gather a middle ground approach in my research exploratory questions and piecing together detailed and categorized idea of what the researcher is asking and how the interviewee responds. Holistic coding is appropriate to use when there is "self-standing" units of data (Saldana 2009). Self-standing unit of data are vignettes, episodes and interview transcriptions; effective tools to comprehend the totality of what is being answered. As instructed from Saldana (2009), reading the data repeatedly and reviewing the entire passage with

cautionary judgement will produce effective results. Once interview data is collected, the transcribed interview data will go through a process of holistic ‘splitter’ analyzation, going through the transcription line-by-line to examine the details of the responses, after a series of reading and re-reading the transcriptions to fully understand the bigger picture.

In the first cycle of Holistic coding, I read over the transcriptions, observational notes, and researcher journal three times. After digesting the data in its organic form, I revisited the three research questions individually. With each individual question in mind and written in front of me, I highlighted the response from the participants that had answered the research question. Each question had a unique highlighting color. Each research question was analyzed in its specific color individually. The data revealed twelve codes.

3.7.2 Cycle Two

According to Saldana (2009), second cycle coding is an essential and creative process in research to re-organize, re-categorize and analyze data to clarify research results. The primary function for second cycle coding is to “develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of First Cycle codes,” (Saldana 2009, p.149). This process for this study decided to use holistic coding in the first cycle of coding which determines several options for second cycle coding, one as thematic analysis. The data is ‘lumped’ into themes in the first round of coding and will go through further analyzation with thematic analysis (Saldana 2009). All questions in the interview align with the study’s theoretical framework, Black feminist thought, and centered on Black girl’s epistemology. The information the girls provide about their youth program experience are represented in the themes pulled from the holistic coding analyzation.

The second cycle of coding revealed the themes that arose in the data collection. Due to the data being limited, observations and documents were highly prevalent in the second cycle of coding. A deeper review and reading of the analyzation and recollections of the program provided the themes of the analysis. From the twelve codes revealed in the Holistic coding process, four themes summarized the initial twelve codes.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

3.8.1 Validity

The validation strategy for this study utilized the process of triangularization to corroborate the need for research surrounding Black girls' and youth development program organizing. In light of the literature review surrounding Black girlhood and their youth development and pedagogy, this study brought attention to a specific population in the Black diaspora, and in youth development instruction and organization.

Coding software, such as NVivo, collaborated the codes from the transcribed interviews, analyzed document, and observations to deliver consistent and definitive results based on the participants' responses.

3.8.2 Reliability

Given the parties associated in the study (parents/guardian, girl participants), the process for completing assent and consent forms, speaking with parents collectively and individually, and scheduling focus-group interviews required a significant amount of time to coordinate. However, the high rate of reliability comes from the one-time scheduled interview.

3.9 Reflexivity

For the past 6 years, I have been involved in youth programming, mentoring, program coordinating, curriculum development and research. In 2016, I co-founded a Black girlhood program in Louisville, Kentucky in partnership with the Louisville Urban League called Girls League of the West (GLOW). GLOW is a Black girlhood program geared to liberate, motivate, and celebrate middle school girls. In the past three years, GLOW has touched and been touched by up to 100 Black girls across the city of Louisville. We have hosted a summer camp, seminars with high school girls, led campaign for healthy eating, and collectively written a book titled, “For Girls Who Glow”. My experiences with Black girls and in Black girlhood studies has established a platform to support Black girls, Black women, and youth in their plight toward liberation, motivation, and celebration their best lives. My collaborative experiences in African-American studies and in my cultural work is to expand on the research about Black girls’, create spaces in collaboration with them, and explore Black girls’ cultural aesthetic and brilliance from a womanist lens. As an evolving Black girl and woman, I resonate with the participants on a cultural, racial, and gendered level. However, my responsibility as a cultural and youth researcher is to amplify my participants voices in the academy as authentically and intellectually as they deliver it.

4 ANALYSIS

During this project, eight Black girls actively participated in the interviews and observations of the research, as well as two mothers. The girls shared as much as they could of their Black girlhood experience, although the event of the Coronavirus disease pandemic interrupted the data collection of the research project. Therefore, data collection had to shift to abide to safety precautions. The data represented in this analysis is compiled of the interactions held in the Black girlhood group, Girls of Atlanta. Thus, I hope to construct a careful narrative and synopsis of the data collected, and the relationships built from the program to share how Black girls participated in the organization of Girls of Atlanta, while also explaining the frustration of reporting this research in the midst of a pandemic and Black Lives Matter uprising. The three research questions, as stated in chapter three, are the foundational and theoretical perspectives that guided the content analysis of the girls' response in relation to the literature and real time experience of Black girls sharing space for their liberation. Each participant was given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Below is the demographical information that shares the protected identity of the subjects' (i.e. pseudonym, age).

<u>Age</u>	<u>Pseudonym</u>
13	Jade
11	Raven
11	Faith
12	Lamya
14	Neveah
11	Ashley
14	Janae
11	Jasmine
N/A	Faith's Mom, Kim
N/A	Ashely and Jasmine guardian/parent, Shanna
N/A	Tanisha

Due to abrupt changes in the planning process of this project, the data analysis reached in multiple sources of data to formulate an analysis that best answered the research questions. The themes of the data reflect the timeline of the program of Atlanta, how the girls responded to program, and how the program responded to the girls. The themes in this analysis reveal an answer to one or more of the three research questions.

4.1 Seeking away from whiteness. Planning and organizing against it.

This theme is an analyzation of the organizational process of finding the physical space for the girls program, Girls of Atlanta. It is a summarization of the interactions and engagement with community members in the positions of coordinating youth after school spaces. In this section I explain an interaction in a school system that upheld standards of whiteness for its after-school programming. Whiteness is described in this context as a hegemonic process that requires inflexible and controlled standards of doing and being. In tandem with the pandemic, whiteness in regard to this study prevented the program, Girl of Atlanta, to fruitfully become a space of potential liberation. Girl of Atlanta, a Black girlhood program created with and for Black girls was barricaded by the time of communal investment (i.e. being ignored by community organization), lack of institutional health prevention protocol (i.e. COVID-19 pandemic), obsession with longitudinal youth development and educational data measures, and lack of believing in Black girl liberation which led me to summarize the codes of data into this section, Seeking away from whiteness. Planning and Organizing against it.

In the event of meeting with Johnson Middle School, their staff criticized the initiative based on the lack of data measurements and the disbelief in the creative potential of Black girls (Brown 2016). The disheartening experience of explaining the benefit of a free and collective organizing space for Black girls to Black administrators exposed the inequities of Black girls'

interactions with power and power figures in the school system, despite race or gender. Similarly, to the Savannah Shange's (2019) encounter with a San Francisco Teacher, Black girls at Johnson Middle School in Atlanta, Georgia were not imagined to be in a free space, or creators of their freedom. Their feedback to our curriculum and proposal was countered with suggestions such as: "What type of Black girls, specifically, are you hoping to reach?"; "What about Black girls from single parent homes?" The administrators suggested that we should consider reaching "high achieving" Black girls, assuming my previous experience working with Black girls and youth was not enough to be with all students. The doubt, respectable lens, and shame toward their Black girl students blatantly criminalized and institutionalized the Black girl ordinary (Shange 2019) in the flesh (Spillers 1987) and in their potential. The doubt existed in their response to us, as organizers and Black girl dreamers. Despite our credentials, scholarly representation of applying, succeeding, and creating programs centering Black girls, the middle school administrators depleted any amount of conviction in our words and work. Their doubt was an outcome of the educational investment in linear, white-centered, deficit framed standards. Their expectations and governing of their school policing Black girls, instead of engaging with them. The policing of Black girls relies on respectability politics which silences the identities and voice of Black youth and girls'. Muhammad (2019) reflects, "Black girls are often represented in and out of schools, and the focus has been on their behavior, not their academic aptitude" (39). Dennis et al (2017) also states, "School spaces should be transformative and educators must be intentional and deliberate in teaching practices that serve to embolden students to be agents of collective community change. (4)

Their response to cater to a specific Black girl population objectified their identity to characteristics that held stigma. Their disbelief in two young women, reflected their disbelief in

the attention all Black girls could benefit from in the Black girlhood celebratory and liberatory spaces. The administrators' suggestion to focus on "high-achieving" Black girls rejected the quality of attention to so-called "low-achieving" Black girls. Their ideal of girl empowerment, aligned to an elitist paradigm of "girl-saving", simultaneously upholding the Black hole (Shange 2019) and white supremacist funnel for "low-achieving", "single-parent", "uncontrollably misbehaving" Black girls to fall through. In fact, as I explained the creative and liberatory space of Black girls co-organizing the space with community building strategies and research support of this work (i.e. collectively creating a name, community agreements) the Johnson Middle School faculty member responded, "Oh, now it's just going down a rabbit hole".

The Johnson Middle School experience motivated me and Tanisha toward a creative space to think about the options we had left. We knew we had to prioritize organizing where Blackness and Black girls were valued as well as uplifting our autonomy as organizers. Tanisha brilliantly mentioned her apartment complex community center as a potential space. The community clubhouse had all the components of a space we envisioned. The clubhouse was community centered, absent of hierarchal demands, white supremacist pillars and measures. The clubhouse is managed by a non-profit, The Reach Project, which "envisions the development of stable communities through the empowerment of members, an environment of continuous learning and community engagement." (*The Reach Project*, 2020)

It took one meeting with the community engagement coordinator Devin, and the program director Jane to present our program, the curriculum, and our backgrounds for a yes to arrive. Devin and Jane listened, contained a space with community and freedom in mind. Girls of Atlanta was approved to take place at the community clubhouse at John's Creek Apartments.

4.2 Sisterhood as refuge in Black girl work

Black girl work is the practice of space holding in a physical, emotional, intellectual, and mental capacity for Black, African-American, girl youth. Across the spectrum of Black girl work, especially if its rooted in Black feminisms or communal significance, one will easily notice the praxis of sisterhood forming and sustaining the space and work. Sisterhood is foundational in every space Black girls' share with one another. It is the support and foundation of sisterhood amongst women that solidify and uphold the example of letting go and loving each other. Sisterhood is the praxis of Black girls learning, organizing, dancing and creating together. Sisterhood is the effect of Black girls learning about their self, community, and the world. Black girls practice sisterhood in many forms—including companionship, labor, and survival. In this context, refuge is the condition of feeling protected. Displaying authentic sisterhood in Black girl work reminds the girls of their sacred relationships with other Black girls and the protection that exists in that sacredness.

Girls of Atlanta (GOA) had three sets of sisters. The sisters in our group were, Lamya and Neveah, and Raven and Janae. The other set were actually cousins, but lived as sisters in the same home, this was Jasmine and Ashley. All the girls signed up to be in GOA, however, the girls either came to together, came alone/left a sister behind, or was “dropped” off by the eldest sister. In my first meeting of GOA, a set of sisters Lamya and Neveah locked eyes the entire time with each other in the new space. I sat in between them during the focus group interview and witnessed them communicate through their eyes with an itch to leave the formality of a focus group interview. Their telepathic-like communication tickled me and made me wonder about the barriers of formality for academic research protocols exist in authentic community spaces. Their telepathy-like sisterly gestures, sly text communication interpreted to me as a call for help. A

sense of refuge in communicating and reaching for refuge from your sister. The head nudges, eye contact, and whole-body language made me wonder—how could I as a researcher allow this research container to merge the standards of academic research and provide even more space for Black girls to not feel contained?

Participants in Girls of Atlanta (GOA) showed up to community center for a few different reasons. Two of the girls that came to Girls of Atlanta were encouraged to come to Girls of Atlanta by their mother. The sisters, Neveah and Lamyia were almost four years in age difference but were held onto each other tight. The remainder of the girls, which is about four of them that were present, expressed that they wanted to come and wanted to learn more about Black girlhood. The variety of expressions toward the space of Girls of Atlanta, was open to possibilities and the curious to the limitations of what was going to happen in the girl's program. The variety of responses during the program displayed how dynamic Black girls' interests and sound can be. Ruth Nicole Brown speaks to this stating, "There is also something about being in a space to celebrate Black girlhood that makes introspective thoughts sound louder. Hearts beat. Minds race. Blood moves." (Brown 2013, p. 186). It was in the long silent moments of Girls of Atlanta, in the short interview, or as the recording came to a pause that Black girls was saying so much, even when nothing is being said at all. The non-verbal communication amongst Black girls is often overlooked and deafening to educators and workers that spend a lot of time with Black girls. Instead, when Black girls are silent or using different mediums to communicate they are labeled and struck with stigma that ostracizes and punishes them rather than listened to with an ear that is clear of stigma of their identity.

Although, Neveah was encouraged by her Mom to come to Girls of Atlanta, Faith, an only child, was eager to show up to the girl group. Her enthusiasm was engaging and

expressively free in the focus group interview and the last interview. When I asked Faith the benefits of the program she responds, “You get to be with people similar to you, the same skin tone as you.” Emphasizing the connectivity of being with Black girls. Although Faith is an only child, she spends a lot of time with her girl cousins and since school was not in session she mentioned how different her life is not seeing friends from school regularly. GOA was a space that Faith and her mom looked forward to after school and work. In the last interview Faith’s mother, Kim, reflects,

This has been a very positive experience. I like it because she was able to get away for a little time. Like I said it’s just me and her, other than her hanging with like her cousins or whatever. It was good for her to take that hour or two hours to get away... (Interview, 2020).

GOA became a space of refuge for Faith, a space for freedom and positive need for after-school paces for youth. It reminded me of Jade’s soft and bright presence and response, “I want to learn more about Black girlhood”. Or even Ashley’s dropping in at the last minute just to soak in girl time by kicking out Mr. Devin to be able to be in her space. Jade and Ashley would show up to GOA after athletic school practices, usually step and/or track and field. Everyone’s presence was appreciated due to the busy after school and work schedules and own personal interests and needs. Their presence together rendered the potential of deep connectivity, sisterhood, we were cultivating to truly establish Girls of Atlanta.

4.3 Community Agreements

In community work with youth, establishing boundaries and community understanding is essential for holding everyone accountable to keep the group and space safe and welcoming.

Community Agreements at Girls of Atlanta compromised an ongoing list of written space-holding boundaries which protects our words from being misunderstood with honest support, acceptance to be LOUD and unapologetic, resilient and soft, and access to vulnerability.

Community Agreements allow the girls to express the limits of the space. In the making of community agreements, we are architects, theologians, and poets. In the creation of community agreements, we consider –how much space is too much? What does respect, and volume feel and sound like? Why am I silent? What does Girls of Atlanta mean to me?

The second Girls of Atlanta meeting, Tanisha leads the circle to discuss the development of Community Agreements, and why we should want them in our girl time. Tanisha advises ways to think about and through the agreements as a portal to address what the girls would want to feel and do in GOA. As we begin to think through the process of developing agreements, Tanisha recognizes the standard and often linear boundaries mentioned in learning space for young people. When we encouraged the girls to “shoot out” some agreements we should have in the space, a number of them responded, “Be respectful!”, “Respect each other”, “Show respect”. In that recognition, Tanisha shifted the perspective and encouraged the girls that though, we do need to show respect, “We hear ‘be respectful so much’”. The language, although is needed, stems from deficit centered youth spaces that expect and require young people to devalue people, things, and spaces. Though Aretha Franklin spelled it out for us, demanding and agreeing on the colloquial phrase of the aforementioned “Respect” did not settle the spirit of what Girls of Atlanta is intended to create for the girls—liberation. Though the girls were right, we do need to be respectful, Tanisha and I engaged the girls to embrace language that embodied Blackness and freedom. bell hooks speak to this transitional and liberating counter-hegemonic speech in her text *Teaching to Transgress (1994)*. She states, “When I need to say words that do more than simply

mirror or address the dominant reality, I speak Black vernacular... We take the oppressors language and turn it against itself. We make our words a counter-hegemonic speech, liberating ourselves in language.” (hooks 1994, 175). In this moment of creating community agreements, we encouraged the girls to use any comforting language (i.e. Black vernacular and intracommunal language) to set the tone of how GOA will become our own. Tanisha moved on saying, “What is another way we can be respectful that doesn’t sound so controlling yet we all will be able to understand and respect?” From that moment, the girls collectively came up with five community agreements to begin containing the space of Girls of Atlanta as their own.

Girls of Atlanta Community Agreements	Community Agreement Colloquial Terms
Don’t eat what’s mine / Don’t eat my leftovers	Being respectful
Don’t touch my Spirit	Have positive support other interests
Don’t touch my hair	Respect each other’s space
Move and Be LOUD	Move and Be LOUD, PERIODT!
There is time and place for all noise	Encouraging that the girls appreciate the silence yet find space to be as free as they need

Table 2: Girls of Atlanta Community Agreements

I was proud of the girls for creating authentic and communal inspired agreements that centered their autonomy and how they imagined Girls of Atlanta. This activity established a great conversation of recalling times somebody had them “messed up”, speaking toward how they wanted to be treated and were being treated, and also how they wanted to move and be in their space.

The agreement, “Don’t touch my Spirit”, inspires Girls of Atlanta to be positive and spread positivity. This agreement intends to set the boundary around respect one’s energy and interests. The agreement first was phrased by Tanisha as “Don’t yuck my yum”, translating to

the effort to uplift rather than tear down someone interests. The agreement is containing the safety for the girls to be able to be open about what they need, like, and desire. In the pre-assessment when asked about building parameters in the group to ensure safety and bravery, the Lamya answers,

“Not being judged... Learning something about somebody else... Knowing they are loyal” (Interview, 2020)

Though this agreement may be analyzed and interpreted as standoff-ish, I believe it is necessary for the space the girls were containing considering they were not close friends and were getting a feel of what the community should become. The intention and conversation surrounding the “Don’t touch my Spirit” agreement brought up how the girls did not want to space to consume energy that was not warm, inviting, happy, and uplifting.

“Don’t touch my hair” is an agreement that encourages everyone to ask for consent for touch. Black girls and women are constantly in tug of war of taking full ownership of our time, space, emotion and body. This agreement is direct, just like “Don’t touch my Spirit” in setting the tone for creating boundaries and speaking firmly to that boundary. Though the work of liberation requires vulnerability and soulful interactions and Girls of Atlanta is intended to express and curate liberation—I believe that meeting the girls where they are is the perfect way to flow into a state of liberation that builds trust and strength rather than forcing. This agreement is a reminder that Black girls have a voice and needs that requires their consent. Even with one another. As a facilitator, this community agreement prompted potential curriculum and conversations surrounding consent: the meaning of yes and no in sex, touch, and friendships, and also the discrimination against Black hair. In early January of 2020, a Georgia Senate bill just passed that limits the discrimination of Black natural hairstyles in employment, education, fair

housing, and other public spaces. Black kids in the mythical Black Mecca were blatantly discriminated against in Dekalb County (neighboring Metro Atlanta county), where their creative barbered fades, colorful ball-balls and barrettes, and golden yarn braids were displayed as inappropriate hairstyles. The discrimination targeted the cultural aesthetic of Black youth creatively expressing their autonomy and support of that autonomy from home (Vigdor 2019). This agreement is protective of Black girls and guards their power while exuberating it simultaneously. It adds volume to the Solange track “Don’t Touch my Hair”, which centers the time, effort, work, that it takes to tend our cultural aesthetic and the need to protect it from controlling institutional forces that present discrimination or pure hatin’ on Black girls dopeness. The agreement reiterates the need for space to protect and honor Black girls. Girls of Atlanta is a space that honors and protects the voice and power of Black girls. Don’t Touch My Hair is a mantra that demands you to hear me and see that Black girls have limits—limits worth listening to and abiding by. It is a mantra that honors the crown of the head, a bush and braided political statement. It is a call to agree that Black Hair stands for something inside of Black girls and around them, so respect it!

Agreement number four – “Move and Be LOUD” was inspired by Faith. Specifically, the “Be Loud” part Faith clung to the most. Girls of Atlanta in its first few weeks had a yielding air to it. The girls would arrive to the community center softly and silently, with a calm and curious spirit to what we were doing that day. To me, their softness presence still entered with a bold presence. In our conversations and activities, Faith always participated with enthusiasm. As I built a relationship with Faith and her Mom, I witnessed how much of an adventurer, compassionate, and loving person she is. Faith loves Six Flags; she and her mom faithfully use their season pass at least twice a week in the summer time. Faith loves to take care of and spend

time with elderly people, the Golden Girls is one of her favorite shows. Faith also liked Girls of Atlanta. Her presence was a joy to be around. Her presence reminded the girls to get up and move their bodies without restraint. As a facilitator and researcher of Girls of Atlanta, I chose this as a Community Agreement in agreement with the girls because I witnessed the freedom of space and expression Faith had in being at Girls of Atlanta. As a Black girl space holder, Auntie, and cultural worker I am conditioned to the busy bodies of young people moving, grooving and being all over the place. At GOA, it was different. The girls would come in and sit down. There were times Tanisha had to tell them to “Let’s stand up and move” because their sitting was automatic. Sitting was comfortable and familiar. Sitting allowed safety but also resisted praxis to reflect, act, and reflect on the space built for them, Black girls. Sitting was not in the agenda. Although, GOA was created for the girls to stretch their autonomy, we knew exercising the right of autonomy as Black girls and women required some discomfort. Thankfully, GOA is a safe and brave place for discomfort to happen. Tanisha and I would facilitate icebreakers to encourage and open the space for the girls to speak aloud, perform, and write. Faith enjoyed participating in those activities. Faith found every reason to speak her piece, state her wants in GOA, and move with them. I looked at Faith and every girl at GOA that day before I exclaimed, “MOVE and Be LOUD”. MOVE the motion in your heart, in your Blackness, and in your being. MOVE as in dance, stretch, sing. LOUD meaning in your expression and volume. LOUD in your words, what they mean and how they make you feel. The community agreement Move and Be Loud encouraged the girls to show up and state who they are.

Agreement number five—There is a time and place for all noise. This community agreement co-exists with community agreement number four, “MOVE and Be LOUD”. It is a response to the duality that exist in loudness and movement. It is a reminder from the sweet

reserved soul Lamya to be cognizant of time, space, and sound. Lamya is a cheerleader, little and big sister, and honest. This community agreements rebuttals number four as Lamya spoke up to remind us all that being loud is not always needed. She is right, and we all agreed. There are going to be times that expansive volume, unnecessary small talk, crazy dancing, and dramatic scenarios will not be needed in Girls of Atlanta. When the silence is present, that doesn't mean nothing is being said. The soft air of Girls of Atlanta was present at its time, for its reason. This community agreement really confronts my own need for Black girl noise to occur, to develop more data and consume more from them to write about them. As a researcher, you are trained to listen for the noise and then record it. You are trained to capture the noise in words to report it. Lamya, a soft spirited Black girl reminded me that maybe this is not the time for noise to happen, but rather more listening. More listening to Black girls and Black girl presence. Lamya reminded me that Black girls will show up, but will you listen?

4.4 Black Girlhood centered Curriculum

The interests and identities of Black girls came up in the interview questions of asking the girls to reflect upon their identity and what would they want to do the girls program, Girls of Atlanta. Their responses are reflected in the curriculum developed in this section. The curriculum was analyzed as a structure that reflected the patterns and responses of Black girls co-organizing and engaging in Girls of Atlanta. Due to limitations of time and data, this section displays and explains how the girls responded to the interviews and the program simultaneously. The curriculum has a five-layer framework that allows for flexibility depending on the needs of the girls on that programming day. Below is table that explains and labels the components of the curriculum developed for Girls of Atlanta.

Intention:	Theme of the day
Opening:	A welcoming opportunity to express oneself in voice, movement, and/or writing.
Activity:	An engaging exercise that correlates the day's intention and an interest of the girls
Reflection:	Open-ended question for the facilitators to consider asking and engaging conversation with the girls throughout the activity and discussion
Activism: Auntie/Sis of the Week	A cultural and historical component that celebrates legacy leading Black girls and women

Table 3: Five-layer framework for Girls of Atlanta Curriculum

The curriculum for Girls of Atlanta (GOA) was pre-planned by myself and Tanisha. We took inventory of our previous girlhood programs, SOLHOT (Brown 2008, 2013), from Black feminist pedagogies and studies at Georgia State University and Spelman College, as well as our own Black girlhood. Most importantly, I asked the Black girls in GOA how did they want to spend their time at this after-school program. Two questions that were asked: what topics would you like to talk and learn about in this program? What activities or interactions do you look forward to? Their responses to the question were – hair, self-care, edges, nails, make-up, design clothes, jewelry, cooking, instruments, hand games, community service, and exciting field trips. They spoke about their interests with conviction. As I collected their responses, Tanisha and I began to review and revise the pre-planned activities to center the girl's interests. The curriculum was designed to allow for modifications and flexibility just in case events and needs changed in the time we were with one another in programming. This happened in two occasions where events and needs were presented to our attention. In a space of liberatory movement, we allowed for changes to take its time, including an emerging pandemic.

	Week One	Week Two
Intention	Co-Organizing	Black girls need Black girls
Opening	Introduce yourself: Name, fav thing to do, school, funny thing you've done lately	"What is a food that describes your personality?"
Activity	Focus- Group Interview and GOA Name Change	Decorate Journals
Reflection	"What is Black girlhood?" "How we can we create a safe space for us?"	Review of what is Black girlhood, how journals can support us
Auntie of the Week	N/A	N/A

Table 4: Girls of Atlanta Week 1 and 2 Curriculum

Week one and two of Girls of Atlanta were fresh and raw experiences that required more time for openings and activities to build relationships. The first two weeks centered defining Black girlhood and recognizing our own unique identities as Black girls. The focus group interview opened the discussions towards a co-organizing praxis that reflected the input of Black girls. In the focus group interview the girls were new to each other collectivity and the space. The girls were not new meeting each other, considering some of them knew one another from the neighborhood, school, and previous community center events. Instead, the girls were new to us – me and Tanisha. Tanisha was a bit more familiar considering she worked as a fellow at the nearby school, Johnson Middle School, and lived at John's Creek Apartments. I, on the other hand, was a fresh face at the center. The girls were always reading the room, interested in what the aroma therapy diffuser was for, sniffing into the lavender and peppermint vaporizer. I recall Raven thumbing through the craft materials, and items laid out for the day's activity. Lamya, Neveah, and Jade swiping in their phones, waiting for the next instruction from me.

Girls of Atlanta began in a community center lounge space. The comfort of being in the girls' neighborhood, one of the leaders lived there and the community center coordinator was present. Music was curated, hugs were welcomed, all family members were invited. The focus

group interviews were conducted to begin in the plight of programming to allow space for the girls to express their interests, wants, and needs for the space of Black girlhood liberation.

The focus group interview was short in duration, considering the girls were new to me and the others. Their silence filled the space and the questions asked from the focus group interview. The silence was not an answer of yes or no but held as inquiry (to me, for me, for what was to come). As Dr. Brown stated, “Silent Black girls and speaking Black girls both have in common the all-to-usual response of misunderstanding all-things-theirs, spoken and unspoken. Too often, even when Black girls speak, no one hears them. We do not know” (Brown 2013, p. 184). This unanswered questioning of “not knowing” adds to the complexities of Black girls, however, it is being in space with them, and continuously experiencing their trust and presence where their silence and often disconnection can be accounted for as information and language worth listening to and understanding.

The activities in week one and week two center the focal point of the study which is, Black girlhood. How are Girls of Atlanta defining their Black girlhood experience? How are they defining who they are? The icebreakers helped ease into the conversation with funny remarks, and recollections of them being themselves. The following activities explicitly opens the floor for Girls of Atlanta to express their interests on paper or in the focus group interview. The reflections from week one and two dive into what it means to be a Black girl, and to be the expert of your life. In asking the girls, “How would you describe what it means to be a Black girl?”, a long silence and pause occurred. It occurred to me that my own reflections of being a Black girl from the Midwest, in a highly segregated state, Kentucky, where most of my teachers, elected officials, classmates, and business owners were white will greatly differ from the contemporary perspective of a Black girl that is from a Metropolitan Black administered and

sometimes centralized city, known as Atlanta, Georgia. I had to step back and affirm my experience yet listen and understand that Black girls and Black girlhood across time and place internalize Black girlhood differently with complexity. I had to remind them, “You are the expert of your life. Think of the question this way, what are some things you do or experience with other Black girls or just with yourself?”. “Sometimes underprivileged” Lamya responds to the question. However, when I opened up the question to seek if anybody felt like they experienced being privileged they all said “No”. I thought about my interaction at Johnson Middle, which three of the GOA girls attended, and knew underprivileged treatment was probably happening, just not on an explicit race-based level. The underprivileged treatment that happened to me in the meeting room with Johnson Middle School administrators reflected the mistreatment of Black girls who were from single-parent homes, and more than likely from low-income homes. I wanted to explore this more, but the girls continued with “Being yourself” “Dance” “Sing” “Talk...they’re born with it”. Their responses to “Sometimes being underprivileged” became action words, words that move in the body and are audible. The creative potential of Black girls and their girlhood shows up in movement, in action. (Brown 2013).

	Week Three	Week Four
Intention	Community	Self-Love
Opening	“Think of a time you were extremely happy: partner with someone, create a script, perform the moment”	Music, journaling and Homework, Individual check-ins
Activity	Create Community Agreements Make Bath bombs together	Self-love box
Reflection	“How did our experience making bath bombs build community?”	Discussion about emotional responses, and how to retreat to self and comfort with affirmations from the box
Auntie/Sis of the Week	Clara Brown.	No Name the rapper

Table 5: Girls of Atlanta Week 3 and 4 Curriculum

Girls of Atlanta third and fourth week were guided with the intentions of community and self-love. The third week was working towards more community organizing when we gathered to create community agreements. Week three utilized community organizing as the support to bring in the girls' voices to shape the boundaries and expectations for Girls of Atlanta and for one another individually. This session began with an opening to loosen up any remaining first day jitters and shyness, as well as open the floor to express who they are. The opening provided the opportunity for Lamya, Faith, Tanisha and I to recollect our happiest moments and bring each-other in our worlds by co-starring in those moments. This opening creates laughter, positive recollection, and intimate bonding on times that are sacred to one's identity. It also displays the girl's interests in things, places and people that make them happy in a multi-modal presentation. Tanisha offered the girls multiple ways to share their happiest moment. Lamya was not willing to get funky and dramatic like Tanisha, Faith and I in her recollection. She accepted the offer to write about her moment in her journal. We encouraged her to share in any way she felt comfortable.

Immediately after the opening the Jade, Janae, and Raven came to Girls of Atlanta to join us in the next activity of creating our Community Agreements. Following the 30 minutes of remixing language and discussing our agreements on how we wanted to mold our sacred space, we moved on to our hands-on activity. In the focus group interview, the girls were asked "What activities and interactions would you like to do?". Their responses all centered hands-on engagement with their local community and physical public spaces that offered an experience to remember. Their responses were:

"Feeding the homeless" (Lamya, Interview 2020)

"Animal shelter" (Faith, Interview 2020)

“Six Flags... King Center... Mall” (Faith, Interview 2020)

To include the many things the girls said, we wanted to begin the activities inside the clubhouse and center self-care. The activity of making bath bombs from scratch allowed the girls to communicate with one another, as well as collectively engage in some literacy by reading the instructions and ingredients together “pop-corn style”. Each girl had the opportunity to make measurements of the ingredient, stir it into the mixing bowl, read from the instruction list, and learn about the differences of measurement units (i.e. tablespoon, teaspoon, cup). This experience incorporated the girls’ responses across all parameters of their responses from the pre-assessment focus group interview. This includes suggested topics of cooking, self-care, peace. Following the activity and a collective clean up, Tanisha and I reflected with the girls by asking “How did our experience making bath bombs build our community?”.

Following our activities and proceeding our Girls of Atlanta closing, we sit down together in a circle to read and reflect over the Auntie/Sis of the week. Auntie of the Week is a segment of programming that was curated by a Black girlhood program I co-founded in Louisville, KY, called Girls League of the West (GLOW). Considering GLOW and GOA centers with and from a Black feminist praxis lens, it was an essential task for the programs to create a space to highlight Black feminist and womanist that inspire Black girlhood liberatory spaces to exist for refuge and freedom. Auntie/Sis of the Week encompasses an appreciation and celebration of Black women locally, nationally, and internationally that have built nations and systems of love, care, and action. At Girls of Atlanta, Auntie of the Week, also remembered as “Queen of the Week” by Faith, allows a segment of literacy and cultural and historical responsive education (Muhammad 2020) to appear within the standards of Black girl identities and intellectualism (Muhammad 2016).

A few days before the first day of programming, Ashley and Jasmine's mom/guardian reached out to me inquiring about the Black girlhood programming and tutoring. She was in need to find a tutoring session for her girls and believed Girls of Atlanta was the space to offer this practice. In the phone conversation, I reassured her that Girls of Atlanta was not solely an academic space, but that Tanisha was arising certified teacher and potentially could help in this encounter. I also reassured that Ashley and Jasmine could come to Girls of Atlanta little early with their homework, where I would be available to help as I prepared the space for their arrival. I forwarded some tutoring sessions I came across overtime.

Listening to Black girls incorporates communicating and deeply listening to their advocates and parents as well. There were a number of times, I walked into the community center to find Devin, the John's Creek community manager, reading and working on homework sheets with two younger girls that visited the center and Devin daily. Academic enrichment and investment are a dire need in this community, honestly, across the entire school district of Atlanta Public Schools. Ashley and Jasmine's care taker, Shanna, seems to consistently center the girls academic needs, especially in the period of COVID-19. The transition to in-person to digital learning raised many concerns for Black and Brown students in Atlanta and across the nation. About two months in of quarantine and home-schooling, I called the girl's parents to let them know funds were donated to Girls of Atlanta for any essentials needs they may need during their social distancing. Ashley and Jasmine's guardian, Shanna, mentioned that the girls needed a tablet, a large electronic device that could replace the smart phone that was not compatible for learning necessities. After I let Shanna that the donations were not large enough to purchase that essential need, we settled to compromise the digital divide with Girls of Atlanta donations purchasing Ashley and Jasmine a Brain Quest Workbook: Grade 6 (Walker 2015), a 74-page

work book filled with all middle school engaging subjects. Unfortunately, the shift to virtual learning spaces for Black and Brown kids has waning an effect that is caused by systemic racism. An article written in the Atlanta Journal Constitution by Marlon Walker states how the digital high-speed internet budget needed to raise \$1.5 million dollars to support Atlanta Public School students to buy laptops and access to internet. Instead the school system only could raise \$350,000 ultimately leaving more than 100,000 of Metro Atlanta public school students locked out of their digital classrooms (Walker 2020).

In a Pew Research article, it is proven that though Black and Hispanic people have access to smart phones which contain an amount of online access, like Ashley and Jasmine, the high 80 percentile of smartphone usage does not compare to the lower percentage access of 61% to 66% access to high home broadband service compared to 79% of white people. (Perrin and Turner 2019). Recent data shows that students are experiencing “chronic absenteeism” and new obstacles are arising with the arising need for online learning. On top of resources like public libraries and community centers, like the John’s Creek Clubhouse, which house desktop computers and high-speed internet access were closed due to strict social distancing practices. The disparities of digital education hit home with our girls’ and the need to focus on academic retention became a goal Tanisha and I were willing to address in the near future of Girls of Atlanta.

On the fourth week of programming, our first girl to arrive was Ashley. She walked into the center with her multiplication homework sheet. Tanisha agrees to help Ashley with her work and they begin to review over the worksheet for about an hour. Faith walks into the space a few minutes late, and we ask her if she wants to write in her journal, she declines but finds great interest in Ashley and Tanisha doing math problems. Tanisha asks Faith, “What are you working

on math?” and she replies “Subtracting fractions” as she begins to show me an example of a problem. Seeing Faith having an enthusiastic interest in math inspired my own nostalgic interest. Faith and I began to practice together sharing mathematical knowledge, navigating the ways we play with numbers and solve fractions problems.

This programming day went into a mode of “flowing, not forcing” to follow the day’s agenda. Ashley was being tutored on her double-digit multiplication, as Faith and I began the activity, Self-love box project. A self-love box is a decorated shoe box covered and filled with affirmations, love notes, goodies that will send uplifting messages to girls in their time of affirmative reconciliation. The discussion for the activity began with discussing the project, and the use of it in Tanisha’s personal life. She asked the girls, “Is there something somebody tells you, you do a lot of like, you cry too much, or you do too much”, “Does your parents or somebody yell at you for no reason?”. She uses the example, “When I was younger I was always told I am an angry person.” The girls agree. They responded with “People say I cry too much”, “I do too much”, “I talk too much”. The box is explained as a source that is filled with affirmations that combat stigma, sadness, anger that may up come in their lives. We continued to decorate the boxes, while Tanisha also decorated her own box and I assisted the girls in decorating their self-love boxes. I also added notes in them to begin filling up their self-loving inventory

	Week Five (CANCELLED due to COVID-19)
Intention	Black Girls Creative Self-fashioning: Nail Art Talk with Local Nail Tech
Opening	Sketch a design of your favorite nail styles and accessories, share
Activity	Learn how to do own manicure taught by a local Nail tech business
Reflection	“How do you self-fashion through nail art?”
Auntie of the Week	Florence “Flo-Jo” Griffith Joyner

Table 6: Girls of Atlanta Week 5 Curriculum

The fifth week of Girls of Atlanta was curated around the self-fashioning of Black girls creative aesthetic – nails. Painted natural nails, acrylic nails, no design simple nails. This GOA day was personally a favorite to co-create with the girls. Black girlhood and girls created the trend of wild nail art and sculpting. Girls of Atlanta knew this, the facilitators and researcher knew this, and the local Nail tech artist and business woman knew this fact. Week five was a day to celebrate and learn the technique of maintenance of this “new” trend and lifestyle. In one week, I had the opportunity to book a local licensed Nail Tech to come speak about the nail business, teach the girls a hand-on manicure lesson, and an offer to design a nail art design on their nails. The nail tech was ecstatic to be able to be in the space of Black girls and even offered to put together gift bags for the girls to take home. The opening of this session was to begin by a hand drawn sketch of the girls’ hand and nails, along with sharing the colors they would use to design and paint them. Then, they would share why they choose that nail art and color. This opener emphasizes the girl’s individual identity. The session was intended to conclude with a read aloud about Florence “Flo-Jo” Griffith Joyner, a late 80’s Olympic track and field world record breaking Rockstar whose Rockstar nails gained unpopular mainstream attention. This Auntie was highlighted for her unapologetic Black creative self-fashioning and while also serving as a lesson about cultural appropriation of Black girlhood and womanhood creative aesthetic.

Unfortunately, a letter to all families of Atlanta Public Schools (APS) was sent on programming day March 12, 2020 that all schools and offices were being closed to prevent exposure and spread of coronavirus. Prior to March 12th, the previous days were filled constant memorandums of anxiety and pressure to follow updates and procedures from the Center of

Disease Control (CDC) to address the arising pandemic. School officially closed on March 16, 2020. Following the guidance of the Center for Disease Control, and APS, Girls of Atlanta had to cancel until further notice.

4.5 Take Care Black Girl, Take Care

“...taking care meant taking a risk and moving closer to people with whom I want to be and organize with.” (Smith 2019, 7)

Due to the 2020 pandemic caused by the coronavirus (i.e. COVID-19), the proposed research project and youth program, Girls of Atlanta was abruptly cancelled amid its progress. The week of March 12th, the Fulton County Public School district shut down which directed other public spaces to follow lead as the coronavirus spread across Atlanta, Georgia and surrounding cities. After four weeks of collected data and a growing global virus, I grew feelings of weary, confusion, misdirection, and a tad bit hopeful for my research completion and potential. This project holds data for four weeks of programming, a post interview via COVID-19 regulations and rules to ensure one's wellness and health.

During programming in March, the girls decorated journals which were used during times of reflection in the program. The journals stayed with me, the researcher, to guarantee the girls always had their journal during the program. Due the pandemic and social distancing, the journals were in the security and care of my possession. Due to the array and roller coaster effect of emotions I have felt during the pandemic early phases I wanted to make sure the girls had the same resources to self-reflect and evaluate their feelings like I had. So, with the help of 15 individuals in the community, I was provided with a substantial amount of resources to put together a care package which included the girls' journals, bath bombs, two Black girl

protagonists book, a couple Brain Quest books (per request of a parent) nail polish, snacks, water, original face masks, edge control hair styling product, bubbles, slime, and shea butter. The care package was crafted based on the responses from the girls in the pre-assessment focus group interview, my interpretations and relationships with the girls, and from personal calls to the parents of the girls.

The care packages were distributed to the girls at a planned social distance picnic, where the girls and their families were encouraged to attend for lunch, reflect about their experience during the pandemic and the program, while also receiving the packages. Weeks prior to the social distance picnic parents received phone calls, where I asked them, was there anything the girls needed specifically during the time of COVID-19, and would they be comfortable meeting with distance at the empty green lot near their living complex. The parents agreed and were on board with the social distance picnic, though as the scheduled event came many situations arose. Only Faith and her Mom were present at the social distance picnic. Faith shared her experience at Girls of Atlanta, as well as her mother. They both engaged in an exercise, “Creating Black girl loving world”, curriculum inspired by SOLHOT (Brown 2013).

4.5.1 The Care Package

The care package is crafted as a physical bundle of items that represents what has happened and continues to happen in and outside Girls of Atlanta. The care package was inspired as an offering of comfort and remembrance of Girls of Atlanta, especially as time and space were cut short by the coronavirus pandemic. As I remembered the journals were in my possession and thought of ways I was going to return them to the hands of their owners, I became slightly more curious about the needs of the girls especially in this time of isolation. What tools from the Girls of Atlanta program framework and curriculum can be accessible to the girls in their homes

during the pandemic? What items can inspire the Girls of Atlanta participants to celebrate and cultivate their Black girlhood into a meditative praxis? Essentially, how can we bring Girls of Atlanta to the girls living rooms?

The care package includes:

- A Girls of Atlanta decorated journal
- Two books authored by Black women. One, specifically, is a chapter book featuring a Black girl protagonist and the other is an instructional picture book titled, “How to be a Fashion Designer or a poem book titled, Black Girl Magic. Two girls received a Brain Quest educational learning text per request of their mother and guardian, due to the lack of resources available for homeschooling.
 - The selected chapter books are:
 - Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson
 - One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia
 - Piecing Me Together by Renee Watson
 - PET by Akwaeke Emezi
 - The second option selected are:
 - How to be a Fashion Designer by Lesley Ware
 - Black Girl Magic: A Poem by Mahogany Browne
 - Brain Quest 6th Grade Level
- A face mask originally sewn by a friend
- One nail kit which includes a nail file, nail clippers, toe spacers, etc.
- Two nail polishes
- One bath bomb
- One spa brightening face mask
- Bubbles
- Sidewalk chalk
- Slime
- Writing utensils (mechanical pencils, gel pens, ballpoint pens)
- A water bottle
- Snacks (popcorn, Welch’s Fruit snacks, peanut butter crackers)
- 4oz of shea butter crafted by Xane Organix
- Graphic photos and sayings of positive and loving messages and Black girls being cute.
- Travel size Cantu Edge Control



Figure 1: Girls of Atlanta Care Package at the social distance picnic

G.O.A.
Girls of Atlanta
Care Bundle 101

-  **1** **Read books by Black women and about Black girls**
The books in this bundle are written by Black women, and/or writing about experiences about Black girls. Once you complete the book (in your own timing) ask yourself and journal, "What were my favorite parts and how were they similar or different than your own experience?", "Did a Black woman/girl in your family experience this?"
-  **2** **Take a bath bomb bath**
 - Let your family know that you are taking alone time for self care.
 - Take a bath with the bath bomb in the bundle and put on the Que Bella spa face mask.
 - Set on positive affirmation like, "I am bold and beautiful." "I am worthy of everything I want and need".
 - After soaking in the tub, rub yourself down with Xane Organix Shea Butta (inside the bundle).
 - Journal how it felt speaking the positive affirmation out loud or in silence.
-  **3** **Do your NAILS!**
NAILS, NAILS, NAILS!! Black girls and women are definitely the trendsetters to the nail game! Nail care maintenance is one of the activities the group mentioned they wanted to learn more about at G.H.O.K.! Use the nail kit in the bundle to file, shape, and clean up your nail beds. When you're done, paint and design them with the polish in the bundle or with your own nail polish!
-  **4** **GO OUTSIDE!**
Write or draw a positive message with your siblings on the sidewalk to inspire your neighbors and your family (use chalk in the bundle). Take that daily walk, do some cartwheels, have lunch on a blanket outside. The sun is good for our melanin, emotions, and health sis!

Figure 3: Care Package Guide (1)



-  **5** **Black Girlhood Cinema**
POP some popcorn, bring in the snacks!! Watch a movie from the list of movies that center Black girls living, loving, and being unique!
Black Girlhood and Nostalgic Movies:
 - Crooklyn (1994)
 - Little (2019)
 - Just Another Girl on the IRT (1992)
 - See You Yesterday (2018)
 - Akeelah and the Bee (2006)
 - Pariah (2011)
 - Cinderella (with Brandy and Whitney Houston) (1997)
 - If Beale Street Could Talk (2018)
 - Maya Angelou: And Still I Rise Documentary (2016)
 - The Simone Biles Story: Courage to Soar (2018)
- 6** **Your feelings and thoughts matter. So, journal.**
Free write your thoughts, spelling, grammar all that proper writing doesn't matter at this moment. Your journal is a reflection of you being so free, fearless, and bright!! What you feel and think about matter lil' sis.
 - How do you feel today?
 - How is your "new" school day of homeschool different from regular school?
 - What do you miss about life before the pandemic, coronavirus? What do you like about life now?
 - Write a rhyme or poem about the coronavirus and the changes it has made in your life.
 - How do you imagine the future will be like after all the changes that have already happened?
-  **7** **Protect yourself and stay hydrated.**
Try your best to follow safe ways to stay free of germs and bacteria. Use the face mask when you travel outside to reduce the spread of coronavirus. This face mask was made by a sista friend, dancer, multi-talented artist living in California.
Oh, and drink your water sis!

Figure 2: Care Package Guide (2)



Figure 4: Text selection for Girls of Atlanta Care Package

In the event of the pandemic, the care package is intended to support the girls in their social distancing. The items were considered based on the responses from the participants in their first focus group interviews and the essentials needed during the pandemic (i.e. water bottles and the face mask). During the interview, the questions was asked, “What topics will you like to talk about and learn about in this program?” Their responses to the question were – hair, self-care, edges, nails, make-up, design clothes, jewelry, cooking, instruments, hand games, community service, and exciting field trips. The care packages reflected some part of the experiences we had collectively at Girls of Atlanta, as well as guide with journal prompts for the selected texts in the package, recommended Black girl protagonist movies and support when engaging in self-care. Below is a table that displays the connections between the girls pre-assessment focus group interview responses and the care package items related to that response.

Girl responses from focus-group interview and/or observations	Care Package Item
Hair, Edges	Edge Control
Self-Care	Bath bomb, Spa face mask, Xane Organix Shea butta, Journal
Make-up, Nails	Nail polish
Design clothes, Jewelry	How to Be A Fashion Designer: Ideas, Projects and Styling Tips to Help You Become a Fabulous Fashion Designer by Lesley Ware
Cooking	Snacks
Loving yourself, Peace	Sidewalk chalk, bubbles, Graphic Love messages, journal
Field Trips (Mall, MLK Center, Six Flags)	Social distance picnic for last interview and care package distribution
Learning tools for homeschooling (Shanna's request)	Brain Quest grade level 6 th
	Poetry book
	Face mask, water bottle
	Black girl protagonist book
	Slime, sidewalk chalk, bubbles

Table 7: Care Package Response to Girls of Atlanta

The care package is an at-home meditative praxis of what Girls of Atlanta intended to do for the girls. It is a response to listening to them, and a response to the historic moment in our world. The pandemic required many of us to surrender to stillness in our homes and in our relationships as we all had to quarantine and seek connection inside our homes and shelter. The care package required me to listen to the girls from transcriptions but also their silence in and out of Girls of Atlanta.

5 DISCUSSION

“SHE WILL TELL ME TRUTH” as an academic document, experience, and report is an archive of the Coronavirus disease pandemic’s effect on Black girlhood. Black girls, their spaces and connections to the elements of their girlhood were influenced implicitly and explicitly. As a researcher, Black womanist, and youth cultural worker, it was imperative that the girls received communal care in the time of the pandemic. A womanist is courageous and curious for depth in solutions of survival, liberation, and culture (Walker 1983). Womanism is the theological process that cultivates community, spirituality, and all things informal and culturally indebted in Black feminism. Womanism showed up in praxis for Girls of Atlanta in its timeline. Even though Girls of Atlanta is no longer physically existent, it completed the work of ascendant Black girlhood support groups founded. This research project contributes to the group-knowledge of Black girl knowledge, in and outside of Black feminist academic formality. This study contains eleven participants, eight of them are Girls of Atlanta subjects from the age of 11 to 15. The remaining two are parent/guardian of three of the participants, and one is my partner and co-organizer, Tanisha Holmes. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How does a Black girl program help girls shape their identities?
2. How did Black girls respond to co-organizing a youth development program?
3. What barriers arise in the organization and implementation of Black girl centered programming?

“SHE WILL TELL ME THE TRUTH” was qualitative case study that centers the voices of Black girls in co-organizing liberatory youth spaces for and by them. The eight girls and two

mothers that participated in this project were collectively interviewed and observed for the eight-week process of data collection. The purpose of this thesis project is to document Black girls interests in youth programming designed for them. In my analysis, I reveal a few common themes that arose in the research experience. They are, navigating the researcher's process organizing the youth program, engagement and co-organization with Girls of Atlanta participants, Black girlhood centered curriculum, and the event of taking care of oneself in the midst of a pandemic. Overall, Girl of Atlanta provided a communal space for Black girls to be and celebrate their unique identity and interests. The responses from the community, girl participants, parents, and the pandemic shaped the analysis to reveal how far-fetched liberation can be practiced, specifically for Black girls. Girls of Atlanta was a literal practice and praxis of motioning what liberation looks and feels like with Black girls at the center. As this study contributes to the study of Black girlhood, it remarks the theological foundation of Black feminist theory which objects the oppression of Black girls and women, the project of misogynist capitalism, and centralizes Black girls and women freedom. As Maria Kromidas (2019) states,

Thus, the goal is to challenge, stretch, reorder, and craft new norms and valuations of childhood. Said differently, spotlighting the humanity and freedom dreams and Black girls entails a refiguring of childhood and humanity that uplifts all children and adults.

(24)

This chapter wraps up the project with concluding thoughts of the study, implications for Black studies, Educational, and Youth development studies, and discussion about the project's limitations. Furthermore, this project revealed a few suggestions and recommendations for further research that will proceed this section of the chapter.

1. Black girls are not granted visibility to be autonomous or deserving to acknowledge their identity nor express it by their means
2. Black girls speaking through silence: Meaning-making of Black girls' language through utterances, body language, absence, and stillness
3. Shaping curriculum that centers Black girls' identities

Black girls are not granted visibility to be autonomous or deserving to acknowledge their identity nor express it by their means. The hyper-invisibility of Black girls has a historical lineage in many oppressive spheres Black girls are involved within. As discussed in chapter 1, the issues that surround youth development practices hinder transformative experiences toward the actual development of Black girls, while trying to maintain practice of hegemony and capitalism. Considering the interaction at Johnson Middle School, Black girls were rejected the space to practice freedom as well articulate how that freedom can exist (Cox 2015; Kromidas 2019; Freire 2000). Collins (2000) Black feminist Thought speaks to Black feminism being a dialogical practice. Patricia Collins (2000) mentions, “A dialogical relationship characterizes Black women’s collective experiences and group knowledge. On the individual and group level, a dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness” (34). In the inaction of hegemonic educational figures providing a space for Black girls to create their own worlds of freedom for two hours a week, it became prevalent that the commitment to the banking education model, its linearity and restrictive dichotomy within dialogical relationships hindered Black girl liberation to exist. As SOLHOT homegirl reflects, “Yeah, having that freedom is political—and just a space that is very political” (Brown 2013, 84). The requested oppressive

tactics to revise the programming of *Girl of Atlanta* silenced and restricted any practice of agency to be allowed even after school hours. It is through the control of children, specifically Black girls and youth, that we can witness our own critical reflection of ourselves, as adults. When we put Black girls in the center, we—as women—deliberately have to reflect, reclaim and declaim our truths which mobilizes us to heal (Brown 2013). The reflection starts by evaluating our choice of words, perspectives, and reactions to Black girls. As Johnson Middle School recommended our project to specifically target “single parent” students or “high-achieving” students, deeming the opposition of the latter to be unworthy of attention.

Such implication did not only reveal their dislike of children but the inability to challenge systemic tools of oppression. Love (2019), Brown (2013), Evans-Winer (2019) and Cox (2015) deliberately imply in their texts that the deficit languages that are upheld in systems reflect the dehumanizing work institutionalized and indoctrinated to keep Black girls marginalized. Kromidas (2019) reflects, “The affective power of this inconsolable child⁴ is in the mirror it holds up to adults’ trickified business, the way that upholding misopedy ultimately dehumanizes us” (33). Being honest to one another as women and girls, unlearning the possession of Black girls time, voices and image, is required in the praxis Black girlhood organizing.

Black girls speaking through silence: Meaning-making of Black girls language through utterances, body language, absence, and stillness. As humans, we first learned to listen before we speak. Listening is more ancient than speaking. Disregarded the rights to read and write, or to be able to go to school to read and write—we, Black people, had to listen. Listening for instruction, to learn skills and tools to survive. Listening to the radio to receive daily news. Listening to neighbors to know the ins and out of the community. To listen does not require

sound, “Listening is the archive” (Brown 2013, 187). Similarly, how Oyewùmí (2005) intervenes Black feminist intellect into the Western ideology the correlations amongst sound and visual, explaining how blind the complexities of what it means to be beyond the margin. Essentially, it limits the ways in which Black people are in motion, speech, and in silence. Girls of Atlanta were more silent than I expected. My expectations required an internal confrontation of unlearning binary categorizations and expectations of Black girls, while also sharing how prescriptions of Black girls can cause limiting logic of who they are. The process of qualitative data collection requires constant sound and noise to exist for data. To record, write, review, scale the responses of subjects, participants, embodied numbers. In this study, I realized colloquial research and Black girl liberation cannot co-exist—adjustments ideologically, theoretically and methodologically had to persist. Brown (2013) states, “The creative potential of Black girlhood organizing frame suggests a Black girl sound that nobody can organize.” (188). As a facilitator in the space, my presence was required to listen to Black girls across the spectrum of sound, needs, interest. This is Black girl work in action. To show up, and face you and her, Black girl. To be seen in awkward silences, not to take them personal, and to listen to what is being said without anything being said at all. To notice their bodies, eyes in communicate amongst one another and then with you. To listen to their expectations, their questioning, and their wisdom.

Why am I here? I hope we....

We have fun sometimes, will today be fun?

Do I have to participate? I don't know her like that,

Who does she think she is?

I'm bored. Eye roll, glares look at the phone. Glares. Smiles..

Speaks.

She always been right there.

Morton mentions, “We are always looking for something... We are so busy looking for the answers in these works that we cannot see what is right in front of us. Maybe if we stopped looking, perhaps, we might see that all our work is not working for who it needs to work for the most.” (2016, 753). As explained in chapter 4, Brown states, “We must resist archiving the ways Black girls sound, as loud or quiet, as the most important thing about them and instead embrace and begin to name a wider repertoire of how Black girls sound as a potentially creative source of knowledge...” (2013, 188). The pandemic abruptly showing up in this project required me to listen to Black girls with more than my ears. It required a meditative praxis of memory, and stillness that was modeled in *Girls of Atlanta*. The silences of being home alone for days at time in quarantine while analyzing data would bring up correlating answers of how to respond to a pandemic. My discomfort in silence and stillness of Black girls revealed what was truly happening in that moment.

Shaping curriculum that centers Black girls' identities. This work is being done, published, and documented across disciplines. I am rather elaborating and supporting the archive of Black girl literacies (Dennis et al 2017), Black feminist curriculum (Nyachae 2016), urban education developed with hip hop feminist praxis and theory (Lindsey 2012), hip-hop feminist pedagogy (Brown and Kwayke 2012). Amongst all the aforementioned scholars that create Black girl

centered pedagogies, and Bettina Love (2017) elaborates the necessity for studies to become “intersectional, seek to understand youth’s agency to reclaim space, refuse binary identities, subvert language, create economic opportunities with new economies, and recognize the precariousness of queer youth of color” (p. 541). In regard to this research study, supporting spaces of refuge for Black youth, specifically Black girls to be and learn the beyond parameters of liberation, require authenticity and awareness. The strengths of Black girlhood centered pedagogy are the honorable recognition of Black girls’ voices in co-organizing, expanding and celebrating the extricate details of moments in Black girlhood that so unnoticed, and the creative development in the plight of pedagogical Black girl celebration. The weakness of implementing Black girlhood centered curriculum is the political practice of hegemonic discourse and respectability driven to control the bodies, sound, and relationships of Black girls.

5.1 Limitations of this study

This study was shortened in the midst of data collection, due to the 2020 pandemic. The program, Girls of Atlanta, was scheduled to last 8 weeks, but only could withstand for 4 weeks. The amount of data anticipated for this research project was not able to be reached. In the event of designing an alternative process to close the program and collect final data, the practice of social distancing and prolonged disconnection from Girls of Atlanta limited the participation for the final interview. The Coronavirus disease impacted the physical space of Girls of Atlanta being available, but also the substance of emerging relationships in that space as well.

5.2 Implications and Further Research

This study aims to listen to the Black girls' contemporary interests in the development of youth programming centering their liberation. This study critical addresses familiar educational and afterschool youth spaces of Black youth that continuously push a respectable and criminalizing agenda on youth even in uniquely designed space for them. This address should open the eyes of educators, cultural and community workers with youth that centering their interest and voices can address nonproductive and harmful stigmatizing messages of young people. This study revealed how hegemony intervenes in the plight of Black girl liberation, but also how Black girls guard their liberation in silence. Black girls require Black women, men and adults to listen to more than sound but to their movement, gestures, and relationships. "She Will Tell Me the Truth" is a project that shares Black girls' contemporary interests and needs in the midst of a pandemic and in liberatory afterschool spaces.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

RESEARCH ON GIRLS OF ATLANTA
AT ASHLEY COLLEGETOWN



You are invited to participate in observations and 2 focus group interviews for a research study to look at the ways you will help create and participate in a Black girlhood program like Girls Club of Atlanta.

This study is for girls in the program, Girls of Atlanta. You can be in the program and not in the research study.

To participate in the research you must:

- BE IN THE BLACK GIRLHOOD PROGRAM, GIRLS OF ATL**
- BE AFRICAN AMERICAN / BLACK GIRL**
 - AGE 11-14 YEARS OLD**
- HAVE PARENTAL PERMISSION**

Share your ideas on how to make Black girlhood programs unique for you!

If you are interested in the full study or have questions contact:

Student Principal Researcher:
Maya White mwhite115@student.gsu.edu [REDACTED]

Principal Researcher: Dr. Makungu Akinyela makinyela@gsu.edu
Research Institution: Georgia State University

Appendix B

“SHE WILL TELL ME THE TRUTH”: LISTENING TO BLACK GIRLS CO-ORGANIZING LIBERATORY SPACES

Student PI: Maya White

Note: Please do not share any names or information that can identify other people.

Interview Questions

Pre-assessment Focus Group

1. How would you describe what it means to be a Black girl?
2. How did you get involved in this program?
3. Do you like that the program is for Black girls, specifically? Why?
4. What will make you feel safe to share your opinion, issues, or thoughts about your life as a black girl in the youth program?
5. What topics would you like to talk and learn about in this program?
6. What activities or interactions do you look forward to? Why?
 - a. Does the program engage in activities or interactions you like often?
7. If you were to name this Black girlhood program what would you name it?

Coronavirus Post-Focus Group Questions

1. *How are your parents, school teachers, and community supporting you during the pandemic?*
2. *How are you connecting with friends and family during the pandemic?*
3. *What are your favorite ways to past time during the pandemic?*
4. *How do you interact with other Black girls during your time social distancing?*
5. *Why do you think it is important/unimportant to come to this black girlhood program?*
6. *What are the benefits of this youth program for Black girls?*
7. *What obstacles do you come across in the process of attending your girls program?*
8. *How were you able to express what and who you are in the girls program?*
9. *If you were given the chance, would you change anything about the program to feel free to express what and who you are?*

Appendix C

Parental Consent Form

Title: SHE WILL TELL ME THE TRUTH?: LISTENING TO BLACK GIRLS CO-ORGANIZING LIBERATORY SPACES

Principal Investigator: Dr. Makungu Akinyela

Student Principal Researcher: Maya White

Introduction and Key Information

Your child is invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you and your child to decide if she would like to take part in the study.

The purpose of this research study is to look at the ways your child will help create and participate in a program like Girls of Atlanta. Your child's role in the study will last 90 minutes over the period of eight weeks.

Your child will be asked to do the following:

- Be observed during your program participation
- Be audio recorded for two focus group interviews
- Participating in this study will not expose your child to any more risks than they would experience in a typical day.

This study is designed to benefit youth development programs designed for Black girls. The study will address how Black girls define their girlhood and their ideas for such programs. Your daughter can still participate in the Girls of Atlanta Program, even if she does not participate in the research.

If you do not wish for your child to take part in this study, the alternative is not to sign this form, and verbally communicate to the Maya White to opt out of the research.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to co-organize a youth development program with and for Black girls. Your child is being asked to be a part of this study because she is involved in the Ashley College Town Clubhouse Black girlhood program, Girls of Atlanta.

Procedures

The research study will require a time commitment during the focus group interviews. The focus group interviews will last no longer than 90 minutes, a total of 180 minutes. The focus group interviews will take place the first week and the eighth week of programming. Observations taken for the study will be made throughout the second and seventh week of programming. The research study will take place in the meeting room at Ashley College Town Clubhouse during Girls of Atlanta meeting time.

If your child joins you will be allowing her

- Interview responses to be studied
- Participation in two audio-recorded interviews. The first interview will take place before the girl program. The second interview will take place at the end of the girl program to talk about your experience. The interviews are at Ashley College Town Clubhouse in a private space. Each audio-recorded interview will last for about 90 minutes.

To be observed by the researcher throughout the second and seventh week of programming.

Future Research

Researchers will remove information that may identify your child and may use data for future research. If we do this, we will not ask for any additional consent for you.

Risks

This study, neither you nor your child will have any more risks than in normal daily life.

Benefits

During the focus group interviews, the participants will have the opportunity to share how they would like to be engaged in a Girls of Atlanta. The girls will have a space to talk about their unique girlhood experience with other girls like them. There are no benefits to being observed.

Alternatives

The alternative to taking part in this study is not to take part in the study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your child does not have to be in this study. If you decide to allow her in the research and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. She may skip questions or stop participating at any time.

Confidentiality

We will keep your child's records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

Dr. Makungu Akinyela (Principal Investigator)

Maya White (Principal Student Researcher)

GSU Institutional Review Board

Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use a pseudonym rather than your child's name on study records. Your child's information will be stored in a locked file in Dr. Akinyela's work office. The information your child provides will be stored on a password- and firewall-protected computer in her work office. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your child's name or other information that may identify your child. Any identifying information will be removed from these study records. The audio of your child will be destroyed one (1) year after the study is completed. There are no additional agencies that will have access to your child's data.

During the focus group interview, participants will be openly responding to questions in front of other interviewees. Participants will be asked not to reveal what was shared in the focus group interview. However, the researcher does not have complete control of the confidentiality of the data. The amount of privacy the researcher has control of will be shared with the participants.

Contact Persons

Contact Maya White at 502-***-**** or mwhite115@student.gsu.edu

If you have questions about the study or your child's participation

If there are any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study

Contact the GSU Office of Human Research Protections at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research
Consent

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you give your child permission to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Printed Name of Child Participant

Printed Name of Parent or Guardian

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix D

Assent form

Title: “SHE WILL TELL ME THE TRUTH”: LISTENING TO BLACK GIRLS CO-ORGANIZING LIBERATORY SPACES

Principal Investigator: Makungu Akinyela

Principal Student Investigator: Maya White

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to look at the ways you will help create and participate in a program like Girls of Atlanta. You are invited to take part in this research study because you are:

- In the Black girlhood program, Girls of Atlanta
- An African American / Black girl and
- Between the ages of 11-14 years old

A total number of five to twenty girls will be asked to be in the study.

Procedures

If you decide to take part, you will, you will be a part of a focus group about Black girls and their experience in the program, Girls of Atlanta. The focus group interviews will be held for 90 minutes, at the Ashley College Town Clubhouse the first week of the program and the eighth week of the program. You can still be in the Girls of Atlanta program, even if you decide not to participate in the research.

If you join, you will be agreeing to:

- Talk about your time in Girls of Atlanta
- Talk about what you hope to learn and do in the program
- Participation in two audio-recorded interviews. The first interview will take place before the girls program. The second interview will take place at the end of the girls program to talk about your experience. The interviews will be held at Ashley College Town Clubhouse in a private space. Each audio-recorded interview will last for 90 minutes.
- Be observed during the course of the program

Risks

This study, you will not have any more risks than in normal day life.

Benefits

Your input will help with planning Girls of Atlanta. There are no benefits from the observations.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time

Confidentiality

We will keep your information private allowed by law. The following people and organizations will have access to the information you provide:

- Dr. M. Akinyela (PI)
- Maya White (principal student researcher)

We will use a false name rather than use your name on study records. Your information will be stored in a locked file in Dr. Akinyela's work office. The information you provide will be stored on a password- and firewall-protected computer. This computer is in her work office. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name. We will not use any other information that may identify you. Any identifying information will be removed from these study records. Your audio will be destroyed one (1) year after the study.

Contact Persons

Contact Maya White at 502-***-**** or mwhite115@student.gsu.edu

- If you have questions about the study or your participation
- If there are any questions, concerns, or complaints about this study

Contact the GSU Office of Human Research Protections at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu

- If you have questions about your rights as a participant
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research

Assent

We will give you a copy of this assent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Assent

Date

Appendix E**Girls of Atlanta Observational Protocol**

Observer:

Date:

Start time:

No. of Participants Present:

End time:

Topics of the Day:

Number of adults providing support and their roles:

Any special circumstances that delayed or interrupted the program? (Please explain)

Materials (Check materials that were used):

- 1. Journals
 - 2. Art supplies
List art supplies used here:
 - 3. Computers
 - 4. Videos
 - 5. Paper and Pencil
 - 6. Music
 - 7. Text handouts from supplementary materials, magazines, internet.
 - 8. Other
-

Below is the observational guideline for field notes taken by the researcher

<i>Descriptive Notes</i>	<i>Reflective Notes</i>
<p>Details to think about: What is the organization of the program? How is the facilitator guiding the program to maintain relationships and focus to the programs agenda? How are the participants engaging in the material?</p>	

