The Sexual Surveillance of Black Girlhood: How do Blackgirls Inhabit Their Bodies?

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THE SEXUAL SURVEILLANCE OF BLACK GIRLHOOD: HOW DO BLACK GIRLS INHABIT THEIR BODIES?

by

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Under the Direction of Lia T. Bascomb, Ph.D

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

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ABSTRACT

Black girls inhabit bodies marked as hypersexual, ungendered, and undisciplined and have a particular orientation to the compounded everyday violence of hegemonic patriarchy, anti-Black racism, and capitalism. This study analyzes the possibilities for Black girlhood to transgress power structures through the performance of sexuality to curate, define, and name their girlhood for themselves. Research questions include: How is sexuality used by Black girls to create and transgress power? What aspects of sexual surveillance impact the embodiment of sexuality? Using Black feminist theory, this thesis recognizes Black girlhood as an ever-evolving experience and spatiotemporal realm existing in the lived memory of self-identified Black girls beyond childhood. My sample size includes eight self-identifying Black girls ages 18-40, recruited via purposive sampling in the Southern United States. The methodology integrates participatory technology of photovoice in a focus-group activity and in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture the full complexities of Black girlhood.

INDEX WORDS: Black Girls, Black Feminist Thought, Black Sexual Politics, Sexual Surveillance, Black Girlhood, Black Women
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August 2021
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all the Black girls surviving, living, and creating joy no matter the circumstance. I dedicate this work to those I have been absent from and those who are absent from me; your spirit, words, and memories fueled my resilience. I will forever thank my immediate and chosen family for their continuous support throughout the project, ya’ll reminded me I’m human and that it’s okay to not know, to not be okay, and just to be.
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The guidance, wisdom, and grounding from my thesis committee supported me throughout this process. Their words of encouragement granted me resilience to continuously re-dedicate and re-commit to my project.

I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Lia T. Bascomb, for helping me locate the words I did not know and reminding me to breathe throughout the process. Thank you for seeing and grounding my vision to research the lived experience of Black girls.

I appreciate the intention and warmth of all those on my thesis committee, Dr. Chamara Kwakye and Dr. Sarita Davis. You both have made yourself accessible to me throughout this process supporting not only my current endeavors, but also future academic aspirations and for that I am forever grateful.
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1 INTRODUCTION

“dark phrases of womanhood/of never havin been a girl” (Shange, 2010, p.17)

This introduction provides an overview of how sexuality/eroticism, girlhood, and surveillance manifest for Black girls during the dynamic experience of Black girlhood. The background of this research describes the structuring of Black sexuality, Black womanhood, and girlhood in the United States. This overview supports the research problem, purpose, and significance of this thesis. Black girlhood’s sexual experiences are reimagined in this research by listening and centering the voices that are illegible to the existing power structures. Acting as an intervention in Black feminist discourse on the sexual politics of Black femme bodies, this project identifies the liberatory potential of Black girlhood.

1.1 Background

Reading Black girls’ bodies as sexually deviant and excessive while simultaneously existing as ungendered, places them “beyond the grammar of woman” and outside the promise of patriarchy’s protection and structures Black girlhood in the United States (Spillers, 1987). Parents, guardians, and caring adults intentionally curate the feminine, gleeful, freedom of western girlhood for Black girls by parents, guardians, and caring adults. For Black girls surviving at the nexus of anti-Black racism, hegemonic patriarchy, and capitalism, the joy and curiosity of childhood are secondary to the daily negotiations of their humanity. These structures compel many Black girls to take on responsibilities and expectations of adults while simultaneously navigating the vulnerability and violence of girlhood (Morris, 2015). Black girls encounter this everyday violence interpersonally, with one of four Black girls experiencing sexual abuse by the age of 18, and institutionally in the public-school systems where Black girls
account for 45% of school suspensions (Ujima Community, 2018; DuMonthier, Childers, & Milli, 2017).

This research explores the ways sexuality manifests in Black girlhood employing Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown’s conception of girlhood as a “the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female” (Brown, 2008, p.1). For clarity, this project does not define girlhood as a linear experience predicated on pubertal development and adolescence. Instead, girlhood is understood as an evolving experience for girls, women, and folx to experience in the present and relive through memory. Girlhood morphs spatiotemporal reasonings as we know it to both expand and condense time based on space/place and sensations. Remembering and living in girlhood through spacetime acts as a personal archive. As discussed in Black feminist and womanist traditions by bell hooks in Belonging: A Culture of Place (2009, p.5),

[Black women] are born and have our being in a place of memory. We chart our lives by everything we remember from the mundane moment to the majestic. We know ourselves through the art and act of remembering. Memories offer us a world where there is no death, where we are sustained by rituals of regard and recollection.

Memories, for Black women, offer portals for remembering, feeling, and living girlhood. Memory is activated by our girlhood rituals and artifacts of childhood or specially girlhood. Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown’s *Hear Our Truths* describes the radical youth intervention project Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truth (SOLHOT) organized by Dr. Brown and adult women known as “homegirls.” For “homegirls” SOLHOT acts “as a living archive of Black girlhood possibilities” (Brown, 2013, p.49). This spacetime intervention within collective spaces held by adolescent Black girls and adult Black women grounds the parameters regarding the age of who is
considered a part of Black girlhood. Also, this study recognizes the breadth of gender identities and importance of inclusivity for non-binary, trans folx, and femme folx. It encourages Black girlhood scholars to stretch who girlhood can exist for and how this manifests. While the literature informing this discussion centers Black female experiences, sexuality, and adolescence, this research expands to include self-identifying Black girls beyond the identities of child, female, or woman. Despite the sample recruitment including only cis-girls/women, when this research refers to girls it is referencing all Black individuals who experienced, or are experiencing, what they identify as a girlhood or who self-identify as girls, femmes, non-binary, or folx of marginalized genders.

Working from Sylvia Wynter’s understanding of sociogeny, placing blackness beyond the category of human thus “frames blackness as an object of surveillance” as discussed in Simone Browne’s *Dark Matters* (Browne, 2015, p.7). This research considers the surveillance of Black girlhood in concern to sexuality or more specifically sexual performance. An array of surveillance technologies exists and surveillance occurs in particular ways for Black girls given their subject position outside the bounds of human and woman. Sexual surveillance includes the “mass or targeted surveillance by state actors, corporate surveillance for marketing purposes, or peers like family, spouses, friends or strangers monitoring one another” (Shepard, 2017, para. 3). This research examines surveillance within interpersonal relationships manifesting in person and possibly within digital spaces occupied by girls. This surveillance acts as a reinforcement of hetero-patriarchal, anti-Black, and classist systems that aim to manage how girls inhabit their bodies. The traditional modes of documenting sexual surveillance involve record-based documentation of sexual violence from police departments or population-based self-reported surveys (Basile et al., 2014). To focus this research on the experience of Black girls it is vital to
recognize the particular position and ontological experience of blackness that racializes surveillance in the everyday from stop-and-frisk policy to fitness trackers (Browne, 2017). This study diverts from traditional modes of documentation of sexual surveillance by focusing on the emotional or physical harm caused through interpersonal management of perceived sexual risk. Societal norms inform the purported sexual risk that identify Black women’s and girls’ bodies as hypersexual and unmalleable to White middle-class norms. A vital aspect of the phenomenon of sexual surveillance is contextualizing the hypersexualized and surveilled Black woman body. Later chapters will inform the prevalence of the sexual surveillance of Black girlhood.

The literature informing this study explores the current and past dialogue on Black girlhood and Black sexuality. A combination of statistical data on the state of Black girlhood, sexual surveillance of Black women, and the historical treatment of Black femmes’ bodies ground this research. This study intervenes by illustrating particular aspects of girlhood as feelings and experiences of sexual surveillance and the ways agency and autonomy exist concerning Black girls’ sexuality.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which the embodiment of sexuality is manifested by Black girls and what feelings of sexual surveillance emerge from this performance. A phenomenological approach expounds upon a common experience amongst multiple people (Creswell, 2013). Examining sexual surveillance amongst eight Black girls ages 18-40 positions phenomenology as an appropriate methodology to identify the commonalities and nuances for this study. The design of this research is qualitative utilizing a focus-group activity and separate one-on-one semi-structured interviews with eight participants. Through a qualitative approach the sample provides sufficient data to respond to the research questions and
describe the phenomenon of sexual surveillance. Phenomenological studies’ sample sizes include a heterogeneous group varying in size from 3 to 15 individuals (Creswell, 2013, p.78). Given this, eight participants were chosen to participate in two separate focus group sessions and single in-depth interviews.

Current literature on Black girlhood primarily focuses on Black girls in educational spaces such as schools and girl empowerment programs. This research seeks to intervene by expanding conversation beyond the confines of school to the girls' navigation at home and in the community (Morris, 2015; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). While Black girls’ experience in education offers valuable insight into the negotiations and experiences of girlhood, it is vital to capture the girls’ experience beyond public systems to describe the ways Black girls’ bodies are disciplined within the home and community. Additionally, this project stretches the liminalities of Black girlhood concerning age, through the reconceptualization of girlhood beyond adolescence, rather, existing through space-time through the lived memories of girls, women, and femme folx. Black girls’ existence as racialized and ungendered in girlhood postures this query as an intervention for Black girls to redefine Black girlhood for themselves. To color the hues and complexities of girlhood and sexuality, this study focuses on girlhood precisely how Black girls understand their bodies concerning sexuality, personhood, and their sense of surveillance. This project recognizes that not all girls have the same experiences. Some girls grew up or are currently comfortable with their sexuality in public and private spaces; in contrast, others could be more reserved about expressing their sexuality. Silence is not equivalent to non-existence, so the research focuses on multiple sensory modalities of information such as speech, interaction with environment, and analysis of their testimonies.
My experience as a Black girl enacting resistance to the mappings of hypersexual and undisciplined act as the impetus to pursue the study of sexual surveillance. Utilizing phenomenological methods employing epoche or personal bracketing is necessary to locate my positionality as a researcher for reliability purposes. While understanding the component of personal bracketing in phenomenology, I do believe, as a researcher, that no data is solely objective, especially with qualitative research. Also, centered on Black feminist thought, I did not wish to replicate the hierarchical power dynamic of the researcher and subject. Within this participatory study, instead, I act as a researcher and participant while the subjects and interviewees are co-participants. Given my positionality to the research throughout the interviews and coding process, I am able to empathize and translate the emotional aspects of Black girlhood that can be challenging to articulate. However, while the impetus for the research is personal, the data and research centers the participants’ experience. Conducting this research with care, intentionality, and ethics provides alternative voices and experiences within systems that seek to discipline and dilute the brilliance, creativity, and liberation of Black girlhood.

1.3 Problem Statement

To explore the performance of resistance through sexuality, it is vital to understand how Black girls understand their bodies and enact agency amid sexual surveillance in their everyday lives in the context of sexual violence against Black girls, women, and folx. This study seeks to affirm girls and uplift the ways they practice self-determined sexuality by affirming their personhood and sexual autonomy through collaborative dialogue and activities through which participants name their girlhood and semi-structured interviews focused upon the theme of expressing their voice through self-definition and affirming their experience.
Black women and girls navigate the intersections of multiple identities and forms of oppression. These intersectional experiences present particular challenges and an everyday violence perpetuated in society and within Black communities. Black women’s and girls’ sexuality is molded either to be hypersexual by larger society or asexual as a reaction to the purported hypersexuality. Both binaries of Black women’s sexuality dehumanize the full complexities of their lives and experiences. Moreover, Black girlhood presents a unique engagement with systemic violence given the racialized and (un)gendered experience. Through the adultification of girlhood Black girls are privy to responsibilities and expectations that disregard their youth and agency (Morris, 2015). At the center of this study is Black feminist theory specifically self-definition and autonomy for girls. This project also recognizes Black girlhood as an inexact, ever-evolving experience not confined to pubertal development and spatiotemporal realms, but also existing in lived memory of girls and women over the age of 18. Often research with marginalized communities, and specifically Black girls, is placed in binaries of loud/silent, sexual/asexual, obedient/deviant. I aim to nuance these binaries as well as present alternative ways to know Black girlhood.

1.4 Nature of the Study

This study utilizes a phenomenological approach to explore the meaning of Black girlhood’s lived experience with a focus upon sexuality and the particular phenomenon of sexual surveillance. As stated in qualitative inquiry & research design, a phenomenological study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon...the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description” (Creswell, 2013, p.76). Phenomenology centers a human
experience or phenomenon in relation to the social constructions that structure participants’ way of being.

This phenomenological study explores the ways sexuality is embodied and performed by Black girls as a subversion of power structures. It also gives particular attention to the occurrence and transgressions of sexual surveillance that transpire during Black girlhood. Examining the experience of eight women, girls, and folx in a collaborative focus-group setting, this research seeks to humanize discourse on Black girlhood, while also nuancing conversation to deconstruct binaries of hypersexuality/asexuality, silent/loud, and girl/young woman. This research integrates creative technologies to capture the full complexities of Black girlhood. Participants will not only speak of their past or current Black girlhood but emotionally through participatory action research. Emotions provide an approach to explore how Black girls produce and understand knowledge regarding their bodies, agency, memory, and sexuality. Using emotions as an interpretive framework for responses adds a richness to the understanding, and analysis of participants responses.

1.5 Significance

Contributing to the academic discourse on Black girlhood, this research examines how the intersecting aspects of race, gender, age, and expression of sexuality manifest through one’s Black girlhood experience. Giving particular emphasis on the ways sexual surveillance occurs positions this research as an innovative entry in Black Studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies to reexamine the function of sexuality as a form of expression and agency.

This particular research embraces interdisciplinarity, by combining anthropological praxis of participatory research with phenomenological grounding to embrace a new mode of discussing girlhood for African American folx. Additionally, by intentionally including folx of
non-binary gender identities in definitions of girlhood, new embodiments of girlhood are located. This research expands girlhood beyond pubertal development, to include individuals over the age of 18 who experience girlhood through lived memory or intentionally curated girlhood moments of celebration, play, and creativity. This expansion interrogates the aspirations and inclusivity of girlhood as discussed in current literature. Moreover, considering the phenomenon of sexual surveillance as an aspect of sexual development within an individual’s girlhood shifts conversations from the objectification to affirmation of Black girls. Rather than focusing on objectification, this research centers the experience and reflections of the girls with a methodology that aims to produce healing. Beyond academia, this research intends to benefit Black girls individually and communally by modeling the possibilities of integrating creative technologies in discussion and methodology concerning Black girl’s sexuality. I hope that variations of this research model are implemented to heal and affirm the realities of Black girlhood.

1.6 Research Questions

This study’s research objective is to evaluate how sexuality is enacted by self-identifying Black girls and what instances and feelings of sexual surveillance exist within this enactment. These research questions are explored through a qualitative methodology. Using a phenomenological approach, this study will respond to the following questions:

1. In which ways do Black girls perform sexuality?
2. How is sexuality used by Black girls to create and transgress power?
3. What feelings of sexual surveillance emerge during Black girlhood?
4. What aspects of sexual surveillance impact the embodiment of sexuality?
1.7 Theoretical Framework

Methodologically, this research centers on Black feminist thought (BFT) to operationalize the objectives and experiences of participants to fully describe the complexities of existing at the intersection of anti-Black racism, patriarchy, and capitalism for Black women (Collins, 1989). While recognizing the impact of these systems individually, it is vital to analyze how the interaction and collusion amongst systems of oppression produce a specific experience to fully grasp the lived reality of being Black and woman. Approaching the methodology from a BFT orientation affirms Black women’s humanity and history at the nexus of triple oppressions. Utilizing a Black feminist theoretical framework, this study does not assume that sexuality itself is a problem. Instead, this research seeks to explore how the girls themselves understand sexuality, not solely sexualization. BFT challenges dominant narratives to center and empower the voices of Black girls’ lived experiences as youthful and sexual. Chiefly employing the BFT concept of self-definition as defined by Collins as “speaking for oneself and crafting one’s own agenda,” this research seeks to understand how Black girls curate their Black girlhood (Collins, 2000, p.36). The creation of oppositional knowledge that reworks narratives to resist objectification of Black women’s and girls’ bodies is vital to this research’s objectives. BFT seeks to dismantle systems of anti-Black racism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy to locate a liberatory space for self-definition and agency for Black women, girls, and femme folx.

This research also considers womanism as a form of engagement for the self-determination of Black women. Womanism engages discourse on gender from a Black American cultural perspective and offers valuable insight into cultural, communal, and spiritual components of Black women’s experience (Phillips, 2006). As described by Alice Walker, womanism honors and prioritizes the experience of Black women and Black queer women in the everyday beyond
the academy to center wholeness in community. Furthermore, womanism acts as an expansive and deeper hue of BFT to account for Black womanhood’s specific historiography in the United States to prioritize healing and appreciation of Black women (Walker, 1987). For this particular research applying a BFT lens in conjunction with womanism proposes new ways of knowing and learning about sexuality for Black girls. The orientation of this research within BFT and womanism also poses essential questions on who is and who is not considered a woman, particularly regarding gender-expansive folx.

1.8 **Operational Terms**

Black- Individual of African descent, who identifies as being a part of the African diaspora.

Black girlhood- As defined by scholar Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown, Black girlhood is “the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female. Black girlhood is not dependent, then, on age, physical maturity, or any essential category of identity” (Brown, 2008, p.1). This research diverts from this position slightly to include Black individuals whose gender identity or expression is not classified as being a woman based on societal norms. This expansion in gender includes gender fluid people, enby or non-binary folx, genderqueer, and transgender folx who relate to the experience of Black girlhood and can identify feelings of sexuality and sexual surveillance.

Blackgirls- the neologism Blackgirls refers to the Black individual regardless of age and gender orientations who identify with the experience of Black girlhood and self-identify as girls. Blackgirls (one word/nospace) as coined by Robin Boylorn and further explored by Dominique Hill is also intentionally used to denote a refusal of monolithic engagement with
Black girlhood, rather the term blackgirls identifies a transgression of race and gender norms to describe the full complexities of being Black and girl.

Folx- The term ‘folx’ indicates and intentional inclusion of people of color, Black folx, trans folx specifically those with non-conforming sexual orientations and identities.

Racializing Surveillance- Dr. Simone Browne defines racializing surveillance as a “technology of social control where surveillance practices, policies, and performances concern the production of norms pertaining to race and exercise a ‘power to define what is in or out of place’” (Browne, 2005, p.16).

Sexual Surveillance- Sexual surveillance in the context of racializing surveillance and the objective of this research accurately describes the practices and performances of social control in response to the Black girl’s embodiment of sexuality and sensuality. Distinctly in concern for Black girls, the occurrence of sexual surveillance will be explored through social norms and the politics of respectability.

1.9 Limitations, Assumptions, and Scope

This research’s scope does have considerable limitations due to the global outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) occurring amidst the structuring of this research. Given this outbreak, social distancing, as recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), altered the in-person data collection elements. Also, the research results should not be generalized due to the limited sample size and a particular location in the metro Atlanta area. Moreover, utilizing phenomenological methods questions highly subjective experiences of participants; given this, data is not generalized. Using snowball sampling through personal networks and relationships for recruitment of participants also limits the population represented in this study, therefore data is not generalizable.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Reclaiming the body as well as subjectivity is a process that Black feminist theorists in the academy must go through themselves while they are doing the work of producing theory. Black feminist theorists are themselves engaged in a process of fighting to reclaim the body—the maimed immoral Black female body—which can be and still is used by others to discredit them as producers of knowledge and as speaking subjects (Hammonds, 1994, p. 137).

This chapter reviews canonical and relevant literature on Black girlhood studies, Black sexuality studies, and Black feminist theory to root the overarching research question of how Black girls understand and define their sexuality amid the practice of sexual surveillance. Grounding this analysis in BFT is necessary for its consideration of the Black woman's body and Black sexuality. Additionally, discourse outlining the realities of Black girlhood across spaces and institutions inform this discussion. To examine the discourse on Black women's and girls' bodies, it is necessary to review the history of how Black women's bodies and the flesh came to be and how this preoccupation has manifested and morphed throughout time. Conceptualizing these primary categories is imperative to contextualize the history of the sexual perceptions and origins of the subjugation of Black women's bodies to interpret the current conditions of Black girlhood.

2.1 Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought is a guiding critical social theory that describes the social structures and ideologies that inform the lived reality of Black women in the United States. BFT acts as a framework of analysis to understand and critique oppressive social structures impacting the lives of Black girls and women. A critical declaration of BFT is the importance of the
interactions of social systems of power to produce layers of repression for Black women and girls (Collins, 2000). Patricia Hill Collins’s *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and The Politics of Empowerment* not only organizes primary tenets of BFT as a theoretical framework to understand the collusion of systems of power, but also analyzes how Black women and girls empower themselves in their everyday lives. Legal scholar and Critical Race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw further explores the interactions amongst structures of White supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism coining the term “intersectionality” to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape multiple dimensions” of Black women’s lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989, p.139). In “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” Crenshaw distinguishes Structural Intersectionality to describe how “women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1242). Crenshaw also defines Political Intersectionality, which analyzes the ways “feminist and antiracist politics have functioned in tandem to marginalize the issue of violence against women of color” (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1243). Ultimately, intersectionality as employed in this project illustrates the various layers, interactions, and dimensions of Black women’s and girls’ everyday experiences.

In the context of this research, BFT presents ways oppositional knowledge is curated to act as counter-narratives to the perceived heightened sexuality of Black girls. Collins describes the tenets of BFT regarding the realities of Black women and girls in the U.S. which are self-definition, sexual politics, and controlling images such as the hypersexual Jezebel, asexual Mammies, and aggressive Matriarchs (2000). This research gives particular attention to the nuances that exist around the negotiations of controlling images. While existing as mechanisms
of dehumanization, controlling images or stereotypes of Black women can be critically discerned as misrepresentations, however, Black women and girls must negotiate the hegemonic conceptions of themselves with their own identities (Harris-Perry, 2014; Hills-Collins, 1989). This research shifts from pathologizing Black women’s and girls’ performance of these controlling images to expand previous limitations of BFT engagement with Black sexuality by locating agency, pleasure, and complexities in Black girlhood. The thematic focus of self-definition explores the ways oppositional knowledge is in communication with the dominant narratives and images of Black womanhood from the standpoint of Black girls and women. Self-definition dismantles the objectification of Black women’s experience and the bodies they inhabit to describe the ways Black girls are able to locate and explore their girlhood and sexuality beyond deficit frames of hypersexual, asexual, and disobedient (Brown, 2009). Black girls curate figurative and literal spaces that include sexual expression across a range of technological realms such as hip-hop culture and collective organizing spaces (Bowen, 2016; Brown, 2013).

While BFT is employed in the academy, this research recognizes that Black women and girls historically embodied this theoretical framework. As discussed by Barbara Christian in “Race for Theory,” Black women historically contribute and expand critical theory and praxis within or beyond the confines of academia (Christian, 1988). As stated by Christian “people of color have always theorized - but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic” (Christian, 1988, p.68). Christian positions theory as necessary, but also recognizes the elitist privileging of knowledge produced in academia. Within the genealogy of BFT theory and praxis has occurred beyond the academy; the liminality and marginalization of Black women in the academy, feminist, and Black liberation spaces necessitate a grounding in the histories of
BFT. Historically the work of Black women such as Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman” speech appealing to white women abolitionists and suffragists on the reality of Black womanhood in the U.S. grounds the legacy of theory and praxis working in tandem in the everyday lives of Black women (Truth, 1851). Moving into the 20th century, Ida B. Wells’s discussion of sexual violence and lynching of Black women in the U.S. demonstrates early iterations of BFT (Feimster, 2009). The seminal work produced in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective furthers the tradition of Black feminism by discussing the personal praxis and theoretical articulations of Black feminist engagement with marginality, moreover the collective demands the end of all forms of domination to liberate all peoples (Combahee River Collective, 2019). BFT intervenes within essentialist notions of Blackness being man and Womanhood being white, by expanding singular analytical categories to the multi-dimensional experiences of marginalized peoples. The engagement of BFT theories displays a continuous conversation considering the positionality of Black women throughout space/time in the U.S. These contributions lay the foundation for the expansion of the Black feminist theoretical archive.

Further articulations of the liminality of Black women from a Black feminist perspective emerge with Hip-hop feminism in the 21st century as discussed later in this section. The principles and genealogies of BFT underpin the methodology and approach of this thesis. By contextualizing the histories of BFT, I seek to intervene in current discourse to further theorize the marginalities within BFT, specifically Black girlhood, sexuality, and queer identifying folx.

2.1.1 Hip-Hop Feminism

Hip-hop feminism illuminates the connections amongst hip-hop culture and discussion of Black girlhood in the 21st century. While girls and women are reading Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, they are also jamming to Megan thee Stallion, Nicki Minaj, and
Lauryn Hill. For many Black women and girls, they enact feminist politics without the academic language because they negotiate being Black and woman every day. Hip-hop feminism articulates an engagement with a system of domination through Black art and hip-hop culture for followers of hip-hop culture and music (Pough, 2004). As the hip-hop feminist, Joan Morgan, states, "Feminism claimed me long before I claimed it" (Morgan, 1999, p. 24). Hip-hop feminism is learned and embodied in a particular way through inter-generational relationships for folx outside the "traditional" feminist gaze. While conceptualizing hip-hop as a liberatory mode for combating systems of oppression, a tension strains the relationship amongst hip-hop fans and Black women, given hip-hop’s misogynist and sexist engagement with Black women. As discussed in Ruth Nicole Brown and Chamara Kwakye’s *Wish to Live: Hip-Hop Feminism Pedagogy Reader*, “Too often, Hip-hop and feminism are positioned in diametric opposition to each other, through multiple points of cooperation, articulation, contestation, and convergence is much more of the stuff that gives meaning to its style, aesthetic, and commitments” (Brown & Kwakye, 2012, p.6). Hip-hop feminism disrupts and complicates discourse on respectability as well as the dimensional lives Black women and girls maneuver by dislodging traditional political orientations and personal pleasures to resist, refuse, and critique forms of oppression. The muddying of binaries to unsettle notions of “good” feminist, and “proper” representations of sexuality position hip-hop feminism as a necessary tool to explore the sexual surveillance of Black girlhood. As the authors navigate the nuances of the meaning and impact of hip-hop culture for Black girls, hip-hop presents “the voice of people and a generation who have not yet had access to institutional power and voice”; here lies the creative possibilities of hip-hop feminism for agency and autonomy to self-determine liberation (Brown & Kwakye, 2012).
Hip-hop feminism caters to a specific generation raised upon hip-hop to describe the experience of being Black and Woman for an audience beyond the academy. This research’s inclusion of Hip-hop feminism acts as a reflection of the target population’s (ages 18-40 years old) upbringing and girlhood and post-1970s emergence of hip-hop that participants either live or will recall. Recognizing that hip-hop interacts and appears differently across girlhood for participants, this theoretical orientation offers insight into the variety of ways Black girls come to rationalize their relation to the world.

Black girls experience invisibility in hip-hop culture and discourse, while simultaneously having hip-hop as a marker of movement, dance, and freedom of girlhood (Brown, 2009). Even as scholar Kyra Gaunt presents in *The Games Black Girls Play*, rhythm, beats, flow, and cadence exist in Black girl games, and dances are akin to modern rap and hip-hop music (Gaunt, 2006). Despite these similarities, Black girls and women are not noted as creators and rarely contributors to hip-hop culture. As Gaunt proposes, Black girls do hip-hop but are hip-hop in their own way. Hip-hop feminism integrates a specific orientation combining autonomy and creativity to position Black girlhood as a space to perform and express on behalf of hip-hop culture. Ultimately, Hip-hop feminism acts as an additional mechanism to humanize and know Black girls in the 21st century. I would be remiss as a researcher not to integrate this orientation in this analysis of Black girlhood.

### 2.1.2 Ontology of Blackness and Womanhood

BFT historically explores the question of Black women’s humanity with a focused consideration on Black women’s agency and autonomy. Anna J. Cooper’s *A Voice from the South* explores the “worth” and the value of Black lives in the early twentieth century and emphasizes the importance of Black women as, “agents of their own future, and that much of the
health of their community rests on their shoulders because of the burdens they are forced to carry” (Gordon, 2008, p.71). Cooper’s engagement in her essay “What Are We Worth?” contends with the ontological questions of “worth” in response to anti-Black racist arguments of Black people’s lack of contribution to civilization (Cooper, 2017). In response, Cooper asserts Black people appear in “the world’s roll of honor” and if the metric for worth is what an individual produces in measurement to what is invested in them, then Black people, even more so Black women, are extremely productive and “worthy” despite the severe lack of investment (Cooper, 2017 p.273). Cooper’s intervention retorts to the dehumanization of Black peoples, as well as analyzes the orientation of women as the greatest producers of the Black community.

Hortense Spillers’s canonical work, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” innovates language to describe and identify the stripping of personhood, and gender of Black females’ experiences during enslavement (Spillers, 1987). This inquiry is positioned with an understanding that Black girls exist as ungendered, or not fitting into the category of woman rather existing as sexualized bodies or “flesh” (Nash, 2014, p.40). The process of pornotroping, or “being reduced to a thing,” acts as a way to diminish and dehumanize Black women and girls, marking them as objects of sexual excess (Spillers, 1987, p.67). The pornotroping of body, personhood, and reduction to sensuality positions Black female flesh as innately harmful, but readily available (Nash, 2014, p.41). Spillers proposes that current discourse must consider vocabulary to humanize and articulate the realities of existing as Black and woman.

Sylvia Wynter unsettles conceptions of the universal hu(man) in her article, “Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument” (Wynter, 2003). She proposes that Black people in the west
are “made into the Other to our present ethnoclass norm of being human” (Wynter, 2003, p. 330). Through this “othering” western humanism produces and overrepresents the western bourgeois formation of the ethnoclass human figure in contrast to the “human struggle” against forms of domination. Through this scholarship Wynter seeks to imagine and invent new conceptions of what it means to be human, rather than replicating humanist ideas rooted in European domination. Speaking specifically to the possibilities of feminism, Wynter’s “Beyond Miranda's Meanings : Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman’” presents the dualism of sameness/difference in relation to western feminism’s challenges of universal liberal humanism (Wynter, 1997). By the exclusion of women of color within western thought, these women exist and write “beyond the limits of our present ‘human sciences,’ to constitute itself as a new science of human ‘forms of life’” (Wynter, 1997, p.356). As Wynter describes, beyond the limits of western thought within a “demonic ground” women of color writers navigate their positionality, contradictions, and limits specifically as Caribbean women intellectuals. As Katherine McKittrick expands in Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle, the possibilities located in Black women’s geographies, and within this context broadly, BFT “indicate[s] that traditional spatial hierarchies are simultaneously powerful and alterable. This simultaneity suggests that human geographies are unresolved and are being conceptualized beyond their present classificatory order” (McKittrick, 2006, p.122).

Examining literature on the ontology of Blackness as it relates to BFT, and particularly Black girlhood, orients the systemic historical positioning and possibility of this research. Cooper’s, Spillers’s, and Wynter’s interventions display the dialogue across time and space, theorizing the ontology and standpoint of Black women’s imagining of freedom, liberation, and revolution.
2.2 Black Girlhood

Black girlhood is defined as an ever-evolving experience for Black subjects marked as a girl, youthful, and femme to exist in healing and celebration for the girls by the girls (Brown, 2009). Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown's scholarship on Black girlhood theorizes from a Black feminist and hip-hop feminist orientation on the power and creative potential of girlhood through her radical youth intervention program Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT) which presents “visionary Black girlhood as a space of freedom” (Brown, 2013, p.14).

Extending Brown’s vision for Black girlhood, other scholars such as Aimee Meredith Cox discuss Black female youth marginalization in girlhood, childhood, and Black studies. As Cox states in Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship, “Research in the social sciences on Black men and boys, media attention, and even the initiatives taken by our president have provided the general public with at least a language to talk about young Black men. Black girls, however, remain illegible” (Cox, 2015, p.vii). Black girlhood studies present a space to move the margins to the center by locating and demonstrating Black girls' perspective and experience. As an emerging and critical subfield, Black girlhood studies’s interdisciplinary audience crosses the bounds of African American Studies, American Studies, Education, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

A neologism of “blackgirl” expresses the transgression of racial and gender norms in both researching and being a “blackgirl” (Hill, 2016; Boylorn, 2013). A discrepancy exists in the literature on Black girlhood in what we as “blackgirls” and women recognize about our experience and the “expertise” of girl-empowerment programming and policies. Within programming and education, the blackgirl’s particular experience is negated and undermined by
hegemonic narratives of Black girlhood. This discrepancy indicates what those in power understand blackgirls and women to be in contrast to how the girls know themselves.

This gap in the literature is slowly being filled with scholarly work on Black girls' experience in education. Literature such as Monique Morris’s *Pushout: the Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* focuses upon the criminalization and adultification of Black female children, specifically in educational spaces of "structures of dominance" that discipline and render Black girls susceptible to the school-prison-pipeline (Morris, 2015). From these institutional spaces of education, including schooling and girl programming, descriptors of Black girls being defiant, sassy, silent, loud, and overly sexual emerge (Brown, 2009). In these environments, blackgirls are not perceived as knowing and producing knowledge for or about themselves, but rather as objects in need of proper guidance and discipline.

The policy report, *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girl's Childhood*, presents data displaying adult perception of Black girls ages 5-14 as more mature and less childlike and innocent (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017). From this study, researchers indicated, "Black girls were perceived to know more about adult topics and are more knowledgeable about sex than their white peers" (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017, p.8). *Black Girls Matter: Pushed out, Overpoliced and Underprotected* details the disciplinary surveillance, punishment, and criminalization of Black girls in the public school system. The report findings discuss how "The failure of schools to intervene in the sexual harassment and bullying of girls contributes to their insecurity at school" (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Quantitative data in *Girlhood Interrupted* and *Black Girls Matter* provides insight to the intersectional oppression of Black girls in the educational realm.
Exploring blackgirls experience in school acknowledges the historical significance of Black girls and women's pursuit of education as a way to express their civil and human rights, or even as a mechanism of socio-economic and class advancement. However, this thesis considers discussions beyond the classroom in order to refuse compartmentalizing blackgirls experiences in alternative spaces and perspectives of Black girlhood. Black girls remain vulnerable to systemic violence beyond school which includes the home, the community, and church. This research intentionally chooses not to confine the inquiry to educational settings, such as school and programming spaces, but expands beyond to capture the everyday experience of being both Black and girl.

2.2.1 Black Girl Narratives

For this research I orient quantitative data to support what qualitatively and creatively has already been spoken about the lived experience of Black girlhood from Black women writers and scholars such as June Jordan's *Soldier: A poet's childhood* (2001), bell hooks’s *Bone Black* (2007), and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (2007). As asserted by Christian, “our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seemed more to our liking” (Christian, 1988, p.68). The narratives describing the lives of Black girls in the U.S. can be traced as far back as Harriet Jacobs’s autobiography *The Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), describing her gendered experience during enslavement of sexualization and escape; as well as, Phillis Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), describing her girlhood as an enslaved Black girl through poetry. Nazera Saqid Wright’s archival work in *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* (2016) offers a genealogical source to present the voices of Black girls from the 19th century providing insight
into the everyday roles and representations of Black girls in their communities. *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow* by Joyce Ladner (1971) follows the lived experiences of 30 Black girls in the mid-west ages 13-18 years of girlhood and their transition into womanhood. Ladner studies Black girlhood in low-income Black communities during the early 1970s and late 1960s before the development of the Black middleclass was the majority of the Black community. Black girlhood experiences in these communities differ from “what is typically held to be the standard norm in American society” (Ladner, 1971, p.45). Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* (1976), acts as a canonical inquiry into the experience of Black girlhood and womanhood by expounding on Black women's experience through the innovative performance of setting poetry to music via a choreopoem. *for colored girls* subverts traditional form to present a new way of knowing and telling Black women's position in the United States (Shange, 2010). Narratives of time and space illustrate Black girlhood’s particular intersections of identities positioning blackgirls’ lives in the U.S. as distinct and critical to study.

Girlhood studies is established in the late 1990s by feminists in response to the silencing by adults on the experiences and voices of girls given youth perception as “not mature, rational, and experienced enough to handle the responsibilities of adulthood and thus citizenship” (Kearnery, 2009, p.9). However, similarly to the marginalization of Black women in second and third wave feminism, Black girlhood was largely absent from literature on girlhood. Black girlhood studies develops from the liminality of blackgirls’ experience across disciplines to speak to the particular racialized and gendered lives of Black girls in the U.S. As the visionary for SOLHOT Ruth Nicole Brown lays the groundwork for Black girlhood studies with the her radical youth intervention project that is as “much a political project as a pragmatic concern...to
counter normative academic management of Black girls’ voices as only objects of feminism” (Brown, 2013, p. 191). Aisha Durham further specifies that SOLHOT “privileges the in-betweenness of a Black girl epistemology or a Black feminist standpoint” (Durham 2010, p.122).

Framing Black girlhood studies as its own distinct epistemology rooted in Black feminism, as well as hip-hop feminism illuminates Black girls' perspective. Despite the emergence of Black girlhood studies as a critical subfield in the 21st century, a repository of narratives, archives, and Black girl imaginations exist within and beyond academic disciplines. Chiefly the area of African American women’s history, and recently the discipline of education has led the literature on Black girlhood. Narratives of Black girlhood in the 19th, 20th, and 21st century inform the current discourse. The importance of fiction and non-fiction creative narratives is to emphasize and articulate the ways Black girls and women speak and have spoken about the experience of being both Black and girl in the United States. In particular, literature such as *Black girlhood celebration* position art and creativity as ways "of presenting knowledge that aims to produce Black girlhood subjectivities that require her to tell her story" (Brown, 2009, p. 37). Locating creative technologies such as the choreopoem provide ways of telling and expanding Black girl's stories. This aspect is central to this thesis, especially the methodological approach.

This study intends to study Black girls' and women's experiences and center the space of Black girlhood as liberatory. While there are specific connections blackgirls experience during childhood, for some Black girlhood has to intentionally be curated given the intersecting oppressions of Black girl youth lived experience. Given this, I orient this research to explore spacetime to understand Black girlhood as a nonlinear dynamic experience not confined to adolescence instead existing in the spatiotemporal realms of lived memory for women and girls over the age of 18. As Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown discusses, regarding the radical youth intervention
program SOLHOT, "Homegirls consciously and collectively use memory to make SOLHOT more than a program, something bigger than us, a sacred space of teaching, learning and healing" (Brown, 2013, p. 48). By stretching the outer bounds of who and when someone can be considered girls I propose a larger evaluation of what and who is allowed to define girlhood and what does girlhood aspire to be? While this question of ontology is a part of the work, I seek to expand the query in later projects.

2.3 Historical Views of Black Femme Bodies

This section evaluates the historical position of the Black female body in the United States specifically the subjection of the body to injury regarding sexuality. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* Patricia Hill Collins discusses Black women’s sexual exploitation manifesting in a wide array of systems, from the commodification of labor to marking Black women as sexual deviants through hypersexual to asexual moral women (Hills Collins, 2000). Reviewing Black women’s bodies in pornography and rape culture Collins marks the beginning of Black women’s sexual objectification in the realm of representation as a site of production for difference and inferiority on the basis of race and sexuality.

The iconic figure and history of Sarah Baartman, a South African Khoisan woman also known as Hottentot Venus is often cited as the principal location of modern-day treatment and sexual objectification of Black women across the African diaspora. Baartman was exhibited nearly nude in Paris and London in the early 1800s, where spectators would marvel at her large buttocks and genitalia as she stood as an object and embodiment of the purported deviant African sexuality. According to Collins, “Black women were not added into preexisting pornography [but]...reconceptualized as a shift from the objectification of Black women’s bodies in order to
dominate and exploit them, to one of media representations of all women that perform the same purpose” hence structuring modern-day pornography, and fueling Black women’s objectification (Collins, 2000, p.138). The exhibition of Baartman sustained numerous racist notions of Black deviancy, alterity, and inadequacy. These similar notions construct race as biological and justify reasoning for the innate inferiority of African descended people, the pseudoscience of phrenology, and eugenic practices.

Extending this relationship to science, Black female bodies have been mutilated and fragmented as flesh to produce western scientific innovations in the 20th century and beyond. As detailed in Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present by Harriett Washington, “Physicians discovered many imaginary physical differences in blacks such as fingernail anomalies, a distinctive topography of the breasts...distended labia and clitorides, all of which provided scientific racists with ample evidence of black biological primitivism” (Washington, 2008, p.38). Specifically, in Baartman’s case a “large buttocks and genitals that indicated hypersexuality” would construct a biological determination of difference, or otherness (Washington, 2008, p.37). There was a fervor across Europe to examine Baartman’s sexual body parts. The gaze of the European spectator fragmented Baartman of her name and personhood to just her body and flesh (Gilman, 1985).

Following Baartman’s death in 1815 she remained a spectacle for racist fascination. The founder of modern-day comparative anatomy Baron Forfies Cuvier, dissected her body then plastered and displayed her skeleton and organs condemning her to a “never-ending inferiority” given the alleged biological inadequacies (Washington, 2008, p.93).  Baartman’s life story is the site where a majority of Black feminist thinkers locate the exploitative representation of the
Black female body. The work of Janell Hobson in her book *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* as well as her article “The “Batty” Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body” further contextualizes the subjugation of the Black female body (Hobson, 2003). Hobson’s work accounts for the iconography of Baartman’s legacy and image; it contextualizes the representation in 21st-century popular culture as well as focuses on the buttocks that echo Baartman’s legacy (Hobson, 2018). The iconography of Baartman’s image grounds a Black feminist agenda of reclamation and redemption of the Black female body in western society.

Baartman’s life experiences and the representation of Black women’s bodies in media is important; it is also vital to not treat her experience, being, and personhood as a monolith. Blackness is an ever-evolving identity formulated in the rise of modernity to determine the human (European) and non-human (African). While patterns in history and dehumanization exist across the African diaspora, there still must be an account of the diverse ethnic and cultural orientations of people included in the blanket term “Black.” Who is and who is not considered Black is ever-evolving and negotiated depending on time, place, and space. As discussed in Zine Magubane’s, “Which Bodies Matter,” Baartman’s legacy is “constructed as a theoretical object” removed from historical context and locality essentializing race and gender based upon western categories purported as the standard in the social sciences” (Magubane, 2001, p.831). Magubane emphasizes the social construction of Baartman’s legacy, chiefly by Gilman’s assumption that there is a fixed universal ideological engagement of the sexual alterity of Black women’s bodies. Particularly, how Baartman’s “genitalia and buttocks summarized her essence for the nineteenth century observer” (Gilman, 1985, p.235). Overall, the life and treatment of Baartman cannot be minimized to a singular psychological reaction in the European imagination of racial and sexual
difference. Rather, the larger and specific social relations in which Baartman lived must be accounted for by scholars to fully engage and humanize the legacy of Saartjie Baartman.

The reclamation of Black women’s sexual subjectivity seeks to enact self-definition amongst Black women to “name ourselves rather than be named” (O’Grady, 1992, p.16). Collins defines the stereotypes and images such as the “mammy,” “Jezebel,” and “welfare queen” as controlling images produced by the systems of oppression for Black women (Collins, 2000). These controlling images are extended to 21st century popular culture and arguably the rise of hip-hop to include the “diva,” “gold digger,” “freak,” “earth mother,” and “gangster bitch” (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Self-definition beyond controlling images prompts Black women to “un-mirror” themselves from dominant images of Black women’s sexuality. This unmirroring acts as an oppositional gaze to enact the agency of Black women spectators in the midst of white supremacy’s perceptions (hooks, 1992).

Black feminist theorists’ engagement with visual culture, especially regarding sexuality, must be nuanced and complicated particularly in considerations of agency and transnational belonging. The presence in dominant western culture of controlling images is not indicative of an emptiness in Black women’s sexuality within visual culture, as Hortense Spillers describes Black women’s orientation as “beached whales” located in a “black whole” existing as “unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting their verb” (Spillers, 2003, p.153). As Evelynn Hammonds states in “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality,” Black female sexuality is not a “silent void” and the objective is not to… merely to be seen: visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence nor does it challenge the structure of power and domination, symbolic and material, that determines
what can and cannot be seen. The goal should be to develop a “politics of articulation” (Hammonds, 1994, p.139).

These “politics of articulation” and ways Black girls and women speak back to dominant controlling images is a primary focus for this research.

### 2.3.1 Sexual Surveillance

The ontological being and bounding of Blackness mandates Black life as an object of surveillance for the maintenance of anti-Black systems of power. Using Simone Browne’s *Dark Matters*, this section explores the use of surveillance within the Black community while also contextualizing the phenomenon to explain the ways gendered and sexualized surveillance occurs for blackgirls. Browne's conception of surveillance is grounded in the racializing of surveillance particularly how the “enactments of surveillance reify boundaries along racial lines, thereby reifying race, and where the outcome of this is often discriminatory and violent treatment” (Browne, 2015, p.8). Extending Black feminist Patricia Hills Collins’s “intersectional paradigms,” Browne describes “intersecting surveillance” to illuminate the “interdependent and interlocking ways that practices, performances, and policies regarding surveillance operate” (Collins, 2000, p.18; Browne 2015, p.9). Engaging racialized surveillance with the ontological understandings of Black femme folx being both outside the conceptions of human and woman, I seek to center instances or feelings of surveillance that occur within girlhood. Particularly, attention will be placed on surveillance within interpersonal relationships and institutional management of blackgirls’ bodies through surveillance technologies. Additionally, Browne’s definition of *dark sousveillance* describes, “Black epistemologies of contending with anti-Black surveillance, where the tools of social control...[are] appropriated, co-opted, repurposed, and challenged in order to facilitate survival and escape,” (Browne, 2015, p.21). *Dark sousveillance*
is integrated in this work to examine the ways blackgirls engage and facilitate autonomy in instances of sexual monitoring (Browne, 2015, p.21). Incorporating dark sousveillance with Black feminist self-definition and blackgirls imagination, this research intends to defy and nuance mappings of deviancy and acts of disciplining to locate ways blackgirls practice self-determination amidst surveillance.

Applying Browne’s notions of racialized surveillance and dark sousveillance, this research reviews instances of sexual surveillance as, “several interdependent, gendered, sexualised, and racialised modes and effects of surveillance” (Shepard, 2017). Definitions of sexual surveillance tend to involve documentation of sexual violence in surveys, and police records (Basile, Smith, Breiding, Black, & Mahendra, 2014). The modes of surveillance this research engages with will be highly subjective and based upon interpersonal management of perceived sexual risk institutionally and personally during Black girlhood. Branching from Foucault’s contributions to surveillance, I not only wish to engage blackgirls as objects to be surveilled, but also explore the effect of surveillance as a fear of being or appearing to do something wrong (Foucault, 1977). Applying surveillance to hip-hop culture from a hip-hop feminist perspective, this study also employs George Lipsitz’s “culture of surveillance” to describe the counterculture of American hip-hop in which environments and bodies become “sites of performance and play” (Lipsitz, 1997). Situating the phenomenon of sexual surveillance in Black girlhood within the culture of hip-hop is necessary given the sample population ages of 18-40.

To discuss the perceived sexual risk of blackgirls, it is necessary to further contextualize the deviancy associated with eroticism and Black femme bodies. This section analyzes how the purported deviance of Black women and girls interacts with interpersonal sexual surveillance
through respectability politics in response to sexual scripts and controlling images. Often, Black girls are pathologized through terms such as “urban” and “at-risk” to describe a lack of accessible resources and proximity to domestic, sexual, and interpersonal violence and drug/alcohol usage (LaBennett, 2011). Adults associate blackgirls with adult-like behaviors including sexual activity (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017). The perceived sexual deviancy of blackgirls is informed by literature such as the Moynihan Report outlining deviant sexual practices and risky behaviors amongst blackgirls due to a lack of family structure and immorality as described by Moynihan (Moynihan, 1965). Pathologizing Black sexuality as uncontrollable originated during enslavement in which Black women were vulnerable to sexual violence from both Black men and white slave owners (Roberts, 1997; West, 2018). In the 21st century, hip-hop porn, as described by Mireille Miller-Young, considers the possibilities for “work, survival, consumption and identity-formation” in the historical context of “appropriate Black sexuality” (Miller-Young, 2007, p.263). Representations of Black women in visual culture construct a mythologized Black femininity furthering the fear and fascination of Black femme bodies (Rose 2001). The othering of sexuality further positions Black people as human others and promotes essentialist notions of difference as described in the readings of Saartjie Baartman’s life (Hobson, 2018; Hobson, 2003; Miller-Young, 2014). As discussed in Robert J. C. Young’s Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race, readings of Baartman’s experience such as Sander Gilman’s utilized “racial theory [as] a form of cultural self-definition..[to] define against the limits of others…through cultural difference” (Young, 1995, p.88). Specifically, in the life of Baartman, Young proposes that sex and race were constructed “fantasies derived from cultural stereotypes” in which Blackness stimulates an excessive, risky, and alluring sexuality
Black sexuality is constructed through cultural stereotypes as a fantasy and racialized desire.

Black women navigate this prescribed sexual meaning in dominant patriarchal culture that reads and categorizes Black women’s sexuality by controlling images of Black femme bodies (Collins, 2000). However, Black women have attempted to “un-mirror” themselves from sexual deviance. Respectability, particularly within the Black community, is central to this “un-mirroring.” During the Reconstruction era for the United States, Black women practiced a “culture of dissemblance,” a term coined by Darlene Clark Hine, in order “to protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives” by performing asexuality in the public sphere (Hine, 1989, p. 915). Curating a culture of dissemblance was not simply a reaction to dominant images of Black sexuality, but rather “in the face of the pervasive stereotypes and negative estimations of the sexuality of Black women...they collectively create alternate self-images” (Hines, 1989, p.916). Often, Black women would mask the mere presence of sexuality by presenting a desexualized image and asexual performance publicly as a survival tactic to protect themselves and dismantle negative stereotypes of deviant Black sexuality; this included hypersexuality as well as alternative sexual orientations. This tactic is largely linked to assimilationist methods of appealing to white American middle class values and was chiefly present within the Black church—predominantly religious institutions with majority African American congregations and leaderships (Harris & Mushtaq, 2016). Particularly analyzing politics of respectability, as coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, as the “reform of individual behavior as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform,” this research engages respectability politics as a method for intracommunal interpersonal surveillance (Higginbotham, 1993, p.187).
While recognizing the violence of anti-Black patriarchal structures, this study approaches the disciplining of deviant blackgirls’ sexuality through systemic policing and management of bodies and expressions of self-hood across spaces of schooling, recreational programming, and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, Paul Gilroy proposes that Black political resistance occurs through the sexualization of the body in “bio-politics” (Gilroy, 1994). As Krista Thompson frames in “Performing Visibility: Freaknic and the Spatial Politics of Sexuality, Race, and Class in Atlanta,” women’s bodies operate within the “domain of sexuality” as “an alternative site for the articulation of political freedom”; this engagement nuances how sexuality is operationalized to exemplify personal and political pleasures (Thompson, 2007, p.38). By parsing through the interpretations of the performance and embodiment of sexuality, the dichotomies of Black femme bodies and sexual expression illuminate spaces of resistance to respectability and sexual surveillance. Savannah Shange’s “Black Girl Ordinary: Flesh, Carcerality and the Refusal of Ethnography,” describes her notion of Black girl ordinary, 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). This project explores resistance and refusal of the disciplining of blackgirls’ bodies to fit within the bounds of institutions and larger white American values. Ultimately, by delving into the mechanism of racialized and gendered sexual surveillance occurring within Black girlhood, this project hopes to locate the emancipatory ways blackgirls retort and refuse surveillance through expressions of personhood and creativity in the context of Black and hip-hop feminism.
3 METHODOLOGY

“...if I were not here, I would have to be invented.” (Spillers, 1987, p.65)

This research examines the ways blackgirls understand their sexuality, specifically through the ways sexual performance is perceived and embodied by blackgirls and what feelings of surveillance emerge from this performance. Exploring the experience of Black girlhood, I intentionally center the voices of blackgirls and women. Blackgirls in academic and educational spaces are often not understood as autonomous individuals able to know and produce their own epistemology. This research seeks to deconstruct objectivity by critically engaging with what is recognized and who can produce “valuable” theory and praxis (Smith, 1999). This project intends to display the full humanity and complexities that exist in harmony and tension for blackgirls. This qualitative phenomenological study seeks to explore the fine-grained details of the experience and phenomenon of Black girlhood, posing both epistemological approaches to describe the nature of blackgirls’ sexual performance as well as the ontological material perspectives and meanings of blackgirls’ specific orientation.

Data collection includes conducting interviews using telecommunication technology Zoom. For recruitment, I used social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. The photograph documentation technique photovoice is also employed in this study to allow participants to name and describe their girlhood autonomously throughout this project. This chapter details the qualitative methods of this study, including the design, recruitment, demographics, research questions, sampling, data collection procedures, as well as the study’s internal and external validity.
3.1 Research Design

Utilizing phenomenological methods for a qualitative study, this approach seeks to describe “what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p.76). A central aspect of this study is the phenomenon of sexual surveillance. Data collection explores the lived experiences of sexual surveillance, and performance of sexuality through in-depth semi-structured interviews and a focus-group activity using photovoice with eight self-identified blackgirls.

Intentionally employing qualitative research methods captures the fine-grained details of blackgirls’ experience. While quantitative methods aide in describing the prevalence of phenomena, qualitative research offers a depth not bound by metrics. Qualitative data considers the intersectional lives of marginalized folx (Creswell, 2013). Interviews in this study are in-depth and semi-structured. An interview guide is used for all participant interviews. Semi-structured interviewing allows for a flow of conversation and gives space to explore specific topics depending on participant responses. Integrating participatory action research approach, participants will engage throughout the research process particularly in documenting and naming their girlhood with photovoice. Photovoice is a documentation technique that allows participants to narrate and depict their experiences through photography (Wang, 1999). The methodology of photovoice is informed by empowerment education, documentary photography, and feminist theory (Sutton-Brown, 2014). Using photovoice, this research design seeks the input of participants throughout the data collection process to maintain fidelity to empowering their experiences.
3.2 Research Questions

This research intends to explore the performance of sexuality for self-identified blackgirls and their experience navigating sexual surveillance specifically asking:

1. In which ways do Black girls perform sexuality?
2. How is sexuality used by Black girls to create and transgress power?
3. What feelings of sexual surveillance emerge during Black girlhood?
4. What aspects of sexual surveillance impact the embodiment of sexuality?

3.3 Setting

The designated research setting for this study is the Southern region of the United States. The Southern region of the U.S. includes the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. There is a concentrated Black population in the southeastern states with a majority having more than 1 million people who identify as Black. According to Census data, a majority of the U.S. Black population live in cities located in the South such as Atlanta, GA; Washington, DC; Miami, Florida; and Memphis TN. Additionally the histography of the Southern U.S social conservative Protestant population known as the Bible Belt benefits this research examination of respectability and sexual morality as observed in the phenomenon of sexual surveillance. The Southern U.S occupies a specific place in hip-hop culture, especially with the emergence of women rappers in the 21st century. This study’s setting aides in understanding the impact of the Black church, respectability, and hip-hop culture upon blackgirls experience with sexual surveillance in the South.

While this research is inclusive of the Southern region of the United States, I utilized personal network and relationships at Georgia State University to assist in recruitment through
university organizations, departments, and programs. Given the CDC mandated policy of social distancing during COVID-19 pandemic, building networks through in-person coursework and campus events has been eliminated. I also used snowball sampling via social media.

3.4 Recruitment

Participants were recruited from the Southern region of the United States. Recruitment occurred online through the my personal social media account via flyers advertising the study’s purpose, inclusion criteria, and time commitment. Flyers were posted on the my personal social media platforms of Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. In addition, Georgia State University, having a significant Black student population, operated as a convenience sample to recruit participants specifically from the Department of Africana Studies and the Institute of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

3.5 Sample

Using phenomenological methods necessitates that the sample is a heterogeneous group of individuals having all experienced the phenomenon of sexual surveillance (Creswell, 2013). Participants must have experienced sexual surveillance; however, the inclusion criteria intentionally includes multiple generations, sexual orientations, class backgrounds, and geographic locations to explore the diversity and nuance amongst the ways sexual surveillance exists for blackgirls in the south. Hence, the inclusion criteria establish heterogeneity amongst the sample. The inclusion criteria for a participant includes identifying as a person of African descent, identifying their gender as a woman, femme, girl, or person of marginalized gender, being age 18 to 40, and having experienced and being willing to discuss feelings of sexuality and/or eroticism via personal or sexual history. Given this research approach using hip-hop
feminism, participants also needed to consider themselves fans or consumers of hip-hop culture.

In summation, the inclusion criteria for this study include:

- Black and/or African descent identity
- Self-identifying as girl, women, femme, or person of marginalized gender
- Ages 18 to 40
- Experienced sexual surveillance and girlhood
- Be willing to discuss with researcher in focus group settings personal and sexual experience and participate in collaborative group activity
- Participants raised or living in Southern region of the U.S. for over 10 years
- Participants identify as fans and/or consumers of hip-hop music or culture

3.6 Measures

This study measures the relationships amongst sexual performance, sexual surveillance, emotional responses, and individual agency through a focus-group activity employing photovoice, and semi-structured interviews. Sexual performance describes the ways sexuality, sensuality or eroticism is expressed through interpersonal interactions with others or with themselves in pursuit of pleasure. Sexual surveillance is the practices and performances of social control in response to the Black girl's embodiment of sexuality and sensuality. Participants' emotional responses are observed for positive and negative implications upon interpersonal relationships and feeling towards themselves concerning sexuality. Feelings of individual agency are also measured to locate the ways participants identify and transgress power structures in their everyday lives.
3.7 Data Collection

Data collection occurred through eight semi-structured in-depth interviews as well as focus group activities. Participations were paid $5 for a single interview, $5 for photovoice activity, and $5 for participation in the focus group discussion. Participations could earn a total of $15 if they choose to complete all 3-parts of the research study. However, for the completion of any task the participant received payment. Recruitment for the study occurred primarily through digital platforms. I posted the recruitment digital flyer on personal Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. I also contacted various professors in the Department of Africana studies and the Institute of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies requesting to share the digital flyer via their online course platform in order to recruit participants for the study. For individuals interested in participating, I emailed the informed consent document, and if they agreed to the guidelines, we scheduled a time and date to conduct their one-on-one interview. Participants completed a demographic form to collect basic information, including age, nationality, gender identity, and zip code. Semi-structured in depth interviews were conducted prior to the focus group activity to develop a rapport with participants. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and were an hour to an hour and a half to two hours in length. Questions explored themes of participants’ identification as Black girls, their Black girlhood experience, Black sexuality, and the occurrence of sexual surveillance. The research questions of this study also explored the emotional reactions and implications of participants’ lived experience. Each participant created their own pseudonym. I reviewed informed consent documents with the participant at the beginning of each interview. I stored all recordings of the participants' interviews on their password protected laptop. Files containing the recording of the interviews were password protected as well and deleted after transcription of data.
This study also uses photovoice for participants to name and capture their girlhood as they see fit. After the interviews, the participants received an overview of the photovoice methodology's purpose and goals. From this discussion, I described how the thematic focus of the photos should narrate their lived experience with Black girlhood, sexuality, or sexual surveillance; however, participants were encouraged to communicate their girlhood according to their own experiences. Participants then captured photos and wrote a brief narration of the story, memory, or feeling informing their choice to then email. For the focus group activity using photovoice, two separate sessions were available to give participants flexibility in scheduling, a maximum of 6 slots were available for each session. I advised participants to alter Zoom names before the focus group session if they wished to maintain anonymity. The purpose of the focus group activity is to connect the common themes and experiences among participants. Photos and titles created by participants were displayed, and I invited participants to offer their interpretations. If the participant who captured the photo felt comfortable explaining, they were encouraged to do so; however, it was not required. I analyzed the photos, semi-structured interviews, and focus group transcriptions.

3.8 Data Analysis

Demographic data were analyzed for the frequency to identify patterns amongst participants. Interview and photovoice data were examined for themes specifically using the concept and axial coding. Nvivo technology was used for the coding process. Following Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design for phenomenological study, transcripts were read multiple times to grasp the content's general sense (Creswell, 2013). Then significant statements related to the research questions were marked in the transcripts. From this process using phenomenological reduction statements, I filtered data for overlapping or redundant data.
Rounds of code mapping categorize and organize the identified significant statements to form “meaning units” or themes. Words or short phrases (processes, feelings, stories, etc.) were marked that symbolized particular meanings in response to the research questions to create a description of what participants experienced.

3.9 Reliability & Validity

To establish internal validity, I included raw data and quotes in the findings. I also did follow up with participants to validate the my reading of their perspective and establish credibility. Research questions were also asked in various ways by to confirm the validity and reliability of responses. I included a positionality statement in the introduction and the participants’ demographics alignment with research goals to establish external validity. Given this research is a qualitative study analyzing the narratives of eight self-identified Black girls in the southern United States results are not generalized. Therefore, external validity is not necessary to establish given this study is in-depth, descriptive and specific rather than quantifiable research. I discussed preliminary codes with peers working in Black studies and Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies. I also requested codes be reviewed by participants to ensure accurate interpretations of their experiences. Reliability is ensured by documentation of variations and limitations during the data collection phase that could impact participants’ responses.
4 FINDINGS

This project included eight one-on-one interviews with self-identified Black girls from the South. Seven of the participants completed the photovoice activity, submitting all three photos, titles, and captions. One participant submitted one photo as a response to all of the photovoice questions. Six out of the eight participants attended a collaborative focus group session. There were two sessions held; the first included four participants and the second included two. This data is representative of the lives and experiences of all eight self-identified Black girls. This finding section will present and analyze the data collected in the context of this study’s four research questions listed below:

1. In which ways do Black girls perform sexuality?
2. How is sexuality used by Black girls to create and transgress power?
3. What feelings of sexual surveillance emerge during Black girlhood?
4. What aspects of sexual surveillance impact the embodiment of sexuality?

4.1 The Participants

This study included eight participants recruited from or living in the southern United States between the ages of 21 and 28 who identified with the girlhood experience, considered themselves a fan or consumer of hip-hop culture, and experienced sexual surveillance or monitoring. Participants chose their pseudonyms and were referred to as such in all documentation and activities. Participants using the pseudonyms Adele, Ash, Ayin, Brooke, Carla, Barbara, Ellie, and Sarah engaged in both semi-structured interviews and photovoice activity. With the exception of Ellie and Adele, every participant attended a collaborative focus group as well. Every participant completed a demographic survey, reviewed the informed consent document, and participated in the photovoice activity as described in Appendices A, C,
and F. Three photographs were requested to respond to three separate questions, Adele only submitted one photograph responding to all three questions. The interview guide for the one-on-one interviews consisted of 20 questions divided into four themes of Girlhood, Sexual Performance, Sexual Surveillance, and Individual Agency/Resistance. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed space for many follow-up questions particularly about the participants girlhood and sexual surveillance experience.

Many of the participants were from central or southern Georgia. Two participants were from central Mississippi and west Texas. All participants were currently pursuing or had a bachelor’s degree education. More than half of the participants identified as queer or bi-sexual, with the remaining identifying as heterosexual. All the participants identified as consumers or fans of hip-hop culture, however, there was variation to the extent of participation ranging from general consumers to rap enthusiast and writers. Throughout all of the data collected the family in particular was a contributing factor in their development during girlhood and sexual surveillance. This varied across single parent and two parent household, however, consistently the mother’s presence, behavior, and values towards their daughters profoundly impacted their girlhood and sexual surveillance. I constructed individual accounts of the participants experience below based upon the interview, Photovoice, and focus group activity. I do provide extensive and descriptive accounts as well as use the participants’ words, and expressions to best describe their experience.

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4.2 The Interviews

*Sarah* is proudly from Atlanta, she/they is 21 years old. Sarah identifies as a woman and queer descriptive. She participates in hip-hop culture specifically Atlanta hip-hop culture as a fan of many local westside Atlanta artists in addition to dancing and writing lyrics as a form of expression passed down from her mother. She is currently completing her bachelors at a local university. As described by Sarah, her girlhood consisted of playing outside in her neighborhood, a section of apartments in West Atlanta. As the second oldest sibling with three little brothers, her mom taught her “how to defend myself from people” and to be “a better defender for my younger siblings” through fighting in the neighborhood often. Sarah also attended church with her maternal grandmother regularly as a child, where she was taught etiquette of dress and behavior as a girl.

Once her grandmother passed away, Sarah began staying with her mom full-time and met her father. During this period in her later adolescence, the neighborhood became a central aspect of her life. However, she noticed a shift in the “politics of the neighborhood” or rules. Growing up, dancing or what we now call “twerking” was a regular activity in the neighborhood, specifically at kids’ parties. Often the girls were imitating the adults, and the adults were encouraging the children. Sarah spoke of the importance of Atlanta hip-hop from both men and women artist in guiding her with how to deal with men romantically as well as a space of radical transformation. She shared feelings of shame and violence from her relationship with her mother as her experience with sexual surveillance. Her mother was involved in sex work within the neighborhood as a self-described “pimp” working with a white man who would frequently visit. This white man developed a relationship with many families involved in this alternative
economy. However, he was accused of sexually assaulting a minor and Sarah’s mom decided to cut ties with him. Once her mother discovered Sarah engaged in sex as a freshman in high school, she would conduct a “draws check” to check her underwear whenever she came home as well as check her phone constantly. From this experience Sarah “was so disgusted” and “just felt gross.” In her words, “It was a very, very degrading experience to have my mom do that. I even, started to resent her after that; it was violent as hell.” In reflection, Sarah believes the assault of the young girl and mom’s involvement with sex work for survival inform the violence she experienced for her sexuality.

Sarah felt as if “that surveillance really stunted my growth, there are certain things that I feel like I should’ve experienced or, got the chance to explore and think about, or have thoughtful conversations with my parents about it.” College for Sarah marked a transitional period where the “shackles” of sexual surveillance “was choking the hell out of me and I can't I'm not gonna let this just sit on my chest and my back and, keep me from growing. I'm still dropping it.” Despite still feeling that she makes herself “smaller sometimes” she’s growing and coming into her own as a woman. She emphasized using the knowledge she’s gained from her experience at the university to embrace herself “being true to my identity is engaging in a form of resistance and anything is going against these social standards, everything else that have been placed in slavery. I feel good about my sexuality and sexual orientation or sexual.” She also brings her experiences back to her neighborhood to make connections on gender expansion and sexuality.

the older I get, the more connections with the people around me about sexuality, whether it be orientation, or like presentation. The more I realize that you're all like, on the spectrum, and you're not here or there. And that's empowering to me, not just myself, but other black people, making these connections between specific gender identity and
sexuality and their marginalization. I'm saying it's like, there's some powerful stuff to do
me.
In all, Sarah describes herself as “grown.” While realizing she’s being pushed into her adulthood,
she avoids “trying to be this protector, like some superhero shit” because it composed a majority
of Black girlhood. As a lyricist she wholly embraces Atlanta hip-hop as a “carefree and
uncensored” culture, to express yourself and your politics. She now affirms her sexuality by “not
being dismissive of whatever feelings about situation or, people” and “checking [her] language.”

Adele is a Texas native hailing from a military background. She identifies as bi-sexual
and describes her upbringing as the typical middle child experience, she was not given much
attention growing up, both of her parents were very involved with the local church and their
military career. Adele was heavily involved in the church and did not have many Black friends
growing up due to the demographics of El-Paso, Texas. At the age of 28 she says, “I don’t feel
like I fit in with Black people” even citing she begins “to feel anxiety because I don’t feel like
I’ll ever be accepted.” She felt as if her parents “lacked putting me on to blackness in general,”
even stating she thought she was supposed to have a quinceañera at the age of 15 like her
Mexican American peers and being “completely culturally confused.” Fitting in and appearance
composed most of her Black girlhood that impacts her until this day. She even cited not being
able to do her hair and not learning how to properly wrap her hair until she was 19. Growing up
as one of the few Black girls in her community she now finds herself in this “made
up…competition with other Black women.” She contributes this feeling to not “feeling attractive
or desirable all throughout my youth in the same book as Hispanic women.” As an adult despite
the feeling of competition she strives to be “pro black, as much as possible in everything” and
views being a Black woman and girl as the “most powerful being” and “kingdom associated.”
Adele grew up as a fan of hip-hop writing and reading lyrics of popular artists like Ciara, even learning dance routines, and performing them with friends. Hip-hop was a space she felt represented and joy as a girl.

As Adele grew up, she had a “cultural awakening.” Prior to that she “didn't recognize racism as racism, sexual assault as sexual assault.” She does recall catching her father looking at other women and feeling disgusted, citing that experience as the start of her recognizing sexual surveillance. She participated in a church mission trip at the age of 14. As she was walking around the city with her peer “in just normal ass jeans” a man experiencing homelessness made a comment sexually harassing her friend. Adele reacted and “cussed him out so bad” to the point a deacon chaperoning the trip intervened telling her to calm down. She remembers when being with this friend “people would just look at her, men would just look at her and I was like that’s fucking disgusting. That’s not okay.” A few years prior around the age of 10 or 11 she recalls a group of men driving by a park she was playing at with other girls and whistling at them. Adele also began experiencing surveillance in church and began feeling as if she needed to monitor herself. As a child she recalls being asked to remove a hat by the first lady stating, “this hat would cause so much attention to me that no men will be able to focus with me up in the choir stand.”

As she grew up and began to experience hormones and starting her cycle, Adele went to her older sister for advice. She felt, “If I asked my mom, she opened up the book to Genesis and show you why women have to do with this. So I wouldn't come to her for any advice.” As she transitioned to college she continued to learn about her sexuality and the experience of Black people at the intersection of race and gender. She cites another Black girl being kicked out of yoga class due to her leggings as she recalls,
there was literally nothing wrong with them, besides, the real racism is showing, or your jealousy is showing, and I remember that. And I remember just not saying anything because I wanted to survive. I don't really, I'm just barely learning. I'm black bitch like, well, I don't even know. Like, you know, I'm just hoping that that doesn't happen to me one day, but little did I know it probably had happened, without me even honestly realizing.

She also no longer attends church as of two years ago after an usher placed a jacket on her shoulder because it was “ungraceful to show my shoulders.” Adele cites hip-hop lyrics as having a “negative impact, unfortunately” citing that people, particularly men, choose not to enjoy and listen to the music and “treating people based off of those lyrics you hear.” She did make a distinction with Black made hip-hop praising “mixed girls…lighter skinned chicks” and “dark skinned girls” being at the strip club or needing saving. While she does not appreciate this portrayal, she did find women hip-hop empowering citing Megan Thee Stallion lyrics and feeling represented. Becoming a mother in 2019 prompted a sexual awakening and identifying as bi-sexual. She disclosed prior experiences she had with other girls from childhood, high school, and college that she ignored completely. Now she does choose to act on her feelings. However, she still feels the shame associated with her sexuality and chooses to keep it private amongst family and friends to maintain an appearance as a “good girl.” To counteract sexual surveillance now she attempts to not “appear almost too sexy” by covering up her body, even citing having to resist and cover up around her own child’s father because she was so uncomfortable as she prepared to move to a different home.

**Barbara** is 22 years old from central Georgia. She identifies as a heterosexual woman. Barbara attended a private Christian school from elementary until 10th grade. She was one of
only two Black girls in the entire school. Being the only Black girl heavily impacted her body image and her perception of Blackness. She recalls, “the girls who look nothing like me will go through certain experiences I didn’t go through or bring up stuff at home that my parents would say “Black girls don’t do that or that’s not a Black girl thing.” As an example, Barbara begged her parents to shave her legs in response her mother told her “Black girls don’t shave our legs. That’s not something Black girls do.” Other topics discussed amongst her peers was dating, however, she was “so scared to bring it up” because in her household “it wasn’t a thing.”

Moreover, being the only Black girl at the school Barbara felt as if she had “negative outlooks on what it means to be Black” and she tried her best to not be “sassy and loud.” Moreover, she recalls her body image and self-esteem being impacted. She wanted to be “super skinny” and despite her mom telling her “that’s just not how your body is” as a Black girl she thought she was overweight almost developing an eating disorder.

Realizing the impact of being the only Black girl at her school, her parents transferred Barbara to the local public high school, which she says “was the best thing that’s ever happened to me. Because it was people that looked like me and it was stuff, I could relate to like hair experiences.” Barbara spoke about how she was introduced to hip-hop culture given “it wasn’t something that they would listen to” at her prior school. She fondly recalls she “was inspired to come back [home] with, something new” such as requesting edge control and air Jordans. At this time artists such as rapper Nicki Minaj heavily influenced how she regarded rap. Regarding sexual surveillance, Barbara describes her maternal grandmother heavily monitoring her mother’s interactions with boys growing up. Despite her parents attempt “to distance themselves from that they still somewhat bring it into, how they parented me” resulting in Barbara stating “I’m really careful and I’m very conscious” about her sexual behaviors and decision making. She
alluded to “certain family instances” where she decided she’d “rather cover up and don’t want anything to come in mind like I’m trying to send signals” given commentary made by family members. She further elaborated that at some family functions, “I cover up so it’s nothing to show or I’ll try to look more kiddish I guess you could say. I would rather them not know i’m developed. I just try to look conservative as I can and not look as I'm developed.” Additionally, Barbara recalls experiencing sexual surveillance primarily at the public high school she attended from a male teacher communicating “you remind me of my first girlfriend.” This same teacher was later arrested for sexual abuse towards minors.

Barbara feels sensual by getting her eyebrows done consistently, and recently introduced going to nail salons. Additionally, as she explores Black feminist thought in her coursework; she finds the literature of Black feminist of Black beauty and Black women’s sexuality to be helpful. She reiterates that she still feels insecure about her Blackness at times.

Since I had such a bad experience where like, I'd technically didn't like who I was. I'm scared that could come back up or like, it could be something though. I feel like it empowers me and like, validates me and being like, Oh, so I think that's, like, I want to say still like wounds from back then I feel like, if I keep doing this, and I keep doing this, eventually they're gonna be healed.

For Barbara hip-hop can encourage sexual surveillance and monitoring at times depending on the artist. For men artists she cites that Black women are only sexualized, while women of other races are praised for aspects beyond their sexuality such as personality. She made the distinction that "newer music over sexualized Black women in images and the lyrics…older music they think they’re empowering Black women, but you put us in a box, you say that we can’t be what other women can be.” Barbara described the box as “stereotypical women stuff, like a
housewife” where it “puts us in a box where we can’t even explore that sexual side of us.” For her, woman hip-hop artist such as Megan Thee Stallion and Nicki Minaj normalize Black women’s sexuality. This aspect resonates with Barbara as she finds experimenting with clothing as an avenue of sexual expressions as well as normalizing her own sexuality. Her sexuality for her now is a “middle ground where it’s just normal.” It’s a part of her that she is learning to embrace and normalize in her healing process.

Ayin is 21 years old, born and raised in the metro Atlanta area. She identifies as a cis woman who is bisexual and is currently pursuing her bachelor’s degree. Ayin had a “normal childhood” as an only child and grew up with her mother and father in the household. She described her girlhood experience as one where she “got to figure a lot out on my own.” She does not recall having conversations about “what I should and shouldn’t do to go on about sex and relationships.” The extent of conversation was primarily initiated by her mother stating, “I just need to use condoms. And don’t let boys pressure me into it. That’s all I got.” Her father viewed Ayin “as a little girl” and her mom was not “really open to it” rather “it was either she did it or I just didn’t know at all.” As a child she was taught “traditional feminine stuff” such as ballet and jazz dance classes as well as how to do her own hair at a young age of 10 or 11. Doing her own hair was important to Ayin because her mom always wanted to style her in “pigtails and the barrettes when I was starting middle school,” however, she wanted to wear “traditional Black girl styles like cornrows, buns, learning how to slick my hair back.”

Growing up in Atlanta surrounded by people who looked like her, she “never had to question what being a Black woman was.” She cited the natural hair movement as a space she had “to look and view that Black can also look…Black women don’t always have to wear weave, Black women don’t always have to look a certain way.” From this experience, she
“always knew I was a Black girl.” For Ayin being a Black girl or woman, “you always have something working against you” given the intersection of identities. As she describes further being a black woman is already being better than everyone else because you’re so used to having to be ten times as good just to be considered. So one thing I've noticed, whenever black women are in charge, things be getting done. I think that usually just always going somewhere, we typically know the cards are stacked against you, you just know you have to be better regardless. Being a black woman, it sucks, but like you're not allowed to fail. Ayin elaborates as she pursues a career, the attention she receives is odd cause she is “used to being in the shadows.” She describes herself as soft-spoken growing up and that it “was always hard for people listening to me and wanting to believe me.” She recalls during childhood feeling as if “I need to relax, I need to calm down, I need to not take things so seriously.” Ayin had to learn to advocate for herself and describes having a “violent streak in high school…because I know for so long, I was just like, it was pent up anger.” For Ayin, hip-hop is inclusive of the “Black experience” in Atlanta. She believes “hip hop culture really just made things worse” and “set unrealistic expectations on standards,” which intensified behaviors she called “boys being boys and teenage hormones.” In Ayin's experience during high school, this made it challenging “to sexually express yourself, or even just show interest in men, like girls weren’t allowed to explore without being called a hoe.”

Ayin’s mother began pole dancing when she was a child, so she “always had sex-positivity around me and just like sexuality.” Her mom now owns a pole fitness studio as well. However, as she recalls, “being sexually expressive in my household was not allowed.” Restrictions on sexual expression emerged as sexual surveillance with her parents reading her diary in elementary school. As she remembers, she wrote in her diary, “I kissed a boy in the
fourth grade. And it was just a regular diary entry. And they were upset about it and like why do you have a boyfriend? Why do you have this? Why do you that? And it’s just like I’m a child.” It felt like “an invasion of privacy,” and from that point on, she stopped writing even until this day. As she got older, things escalated, stating, “my parents went through my phone a lot.” Even finding sexual images or “nudes” once and never talking about it again. She remembers having “to lie a lot and just sneak around to hang out with boys.” In retrospect, she thinks they were “always assuming sex was the only thing that mattered,” and she questions “why [couldn’t] you have faith in your daughter to weed out boys like that” or even “how you know your daughter don’t want sex?”

Ayin is now exploring her sexuality. She states, “I am a bit more on the sexually active side, but I know that I’m really just exploring that because I really didn’t have much information or tools.” She “feels confident when I feel sexy and knowing that others view me as sexy” and “I know what I’m working with, and I’m confident in it.” She describes that she fits the “mold of attractiveness” and “plays into that a lot.” As a child visiting her mother’s pole fitness studio, she saw “being sexual as a sign of empowerment.” She recalls seeing “women be powerful in the pole studio” from teachers, lawyers, and doctors as she describes “loving themselves and still doing this thing that was quote-unquote taboo.” The embrace of her sexuality is partially because “for so long I was just very shy about it or not even allowed to explore what my sexuality was,” so now she embraces and explores. Controlling and owning her body is central to Ayin in this process as she reiterated, “I have control over my own body. I don’t belong to anyone. I decide what to do with my body. It’s power over my own sexual experience.” She embodies this through her own words and experiences, pursuing heel fitness classes and “playing into her sex
appeal” in public on social media through “twerking or dancing videos I post online,” as well in private with herself or whom she chooses.

Atlanta native Brooke is 24 years old. She identifies as a heterosexual woman who has completed her bachelor’s degree and is currently pursuing a graduate degree. Brooke's household growing up “was dominated by women” and has a “very strong matriarch in the family.” She lived with her mother and stepdad and is the oldest of three daughters. She has a relationship with her biological father as well. Brooke states, “girlhood for me extended into my early 20s. But I feel like I have transitioned out of it.” Brooke recalls attending a predominantly white private school growing up that “shaped a good bit of my word view” she later transitioned to a diverse public school into a gifted program “that was very much segregated.” Despite growing up in the same household with her sisters, “I was not close with them at all…even though like we all grew up in the same household, we were not close.” When she was younger, Brooke was “very close with my mom, and my mom was a stay-at-home mom. So I spent all of my time with her…She was the kind of parent who as at the school once a week, always…like perfect mommy-daughter.” However, there was a shift in her family dynamic over time with her mother and stepfather separating at the end of elementary school, which caused her to feel “even more out of place” and transition to a public school as her mom began working. At this point, her relationship with her sisters shifted. In her words, “I stopped, really being sisterly with each other because I started to feel responsible for them.” She began to learn the “reality of things” and details her experience during her teenage years as: “I hated the high school I went to. I love the program that I was in, but like, hated the high school. I just became really cynical, just kind of depressed, very angsty as well. I stopped relating to anyone in my family. And I felt like I didn’t really have the guidance that I would have needed during that time.” Brooke elaborates that she
“just felt completely alone” and attempted “to speak out or do certain things as a cry for help. No one paid attention or kind of diminished my experience or feelings.” In retrospect, Brooke recognizes her mother having to work rather than “having nothing but free time” as a stay-at-home mom previously. She acknowledges “how a child would feel a little bit abandoned, even if they weren’t” and how having “to start looking after my sisters in a way, which I still feel like to this day is completely unfair to do to any child.” She reflects that “I missed out on part of my childhood,” resulting in “hurt feelings towards my mom.”

While Brooke’s mother is not very religious, her father became a Christian pastor when she was in elementary school. Her paternal grandmother is very religious and Brooke recalls attending vacation bible school during her summers with her. Brooke’s paternal grandmother and father had her involved with his church. She “didn’t like how the people acted in church. I felt like they were snobs, and all this completely turned me off to the idea of being religious.” She recalls a repressed memory of attending a “tribulation” in which adults “take you into a field in the middle of the night and they'll have things on fire. And you're walking into hell. There's a woman giving fake birth or getting a fake abortion, and like you're going to hell.” As a girl, she recalls not being allowed to have red nails “because it's a sexual color. A color that like loose women wear.” Sex or sexuality was not discussed much in Brooke’s household as she states, “everything I learned about puberty and sex, came from a book…the general sentiment was don’t get pregnant...I never had a discussion with my parents about sex, not even sex safety, like nothing.” She had sex education at her private school where they explained things thoroughly, neither framing sex as positive or negative. However, once she began attending a diverse, high school, sex education was abstinence-only. As she describes purity, leaders gave girl students physical credit cards, which were their “virginity cards.” The analogy of the card is if a girl has
sex or her card is “swiped,” she loses value. In retrospect, Brooke assumes that her parents thought regarding sex, “you’re the oldest, you’re smart. Like you’ll figure it out on your own.” She now questions, “did they do more harm to me by not talking to me about it?” but also assumes her parents did not think she was sexually active at the time, which she states was true. She recalls her grandmother describing young cousins as “being fast” for having crushes as a child. Brooke also expressed during her experience with children older Black women describing Black girl students as fast. She described the latter experience as particularly frustrating, given that the Black girls’ white peers were not described the same way in response to having crushes.

While Brooke is a fan of hip-hop, she does think it has a “toxic” impact on “the relationships between men and women, [and] even women with each other.” She feels that in Atlanta specifically, the “young Black male population definitely follows a lot of hip-hop culture and shaming women for being sexual.” Reflecting on her college experience, despite feeling as if “college is a place where you should be exploring sexually,” she was hesitant because she “didn’t want to be labeled a certain way.” She only listens to female rappers but still thinks female rap in “hip hop culture is very toxic.” She cites “women are just treated like objects by men,” and even in cases where ”they reclaim female sexuality, they’re still shamed for it,” citing criticism of Megan Thee Stallion. Brooke believes “black women, in general, should divest from the [hip-hop] culture.” She even finds herself “at odds a little bit” with women rappers questioning, “why is there such an emphasis on sex?” Despite women rappers reclaiming their sexuality and feeling empowered, it’s still “focused on men, and sex, and looks” and being “toxic on both sides.”

Her transition to college improved her relationship with her family partially due to distance she believes. However, she was still searching “for some kind of guidance” in which a professor
became “like a second mother.” From her relationship with these women, she began healing from some of her “childhood wounds.” Brooke furthered this post-college through relationships with older Black women mentors in her professional work in education. Brooke’s relationship with other Black women was integral for her transition to womanhood. Recommendations from Black women mentors and seeing other older Black women with toxic behaviors and being unhappy inspired her to pursue therapy. Once she was able to identify her “childhood wounds,” she began healing. Healing through therapy also improved Brooke’s relationship with her body. She describes herself as a “pretty modest person”; however, her relationship with her body was not always positive. As she describes

I don’t know if it’s just a growing confidence in my body or just feeling like okay, whatever, be free. I have a different perception of it. I probably was very covered up in my teenage years, at least not because I felt like sexual shame. But just because I wasn’t very confident in my body. I felt like I was just very like critical of it. And now that I’m, older, not as critical, and then also understanding that if I’m unhappy with something, I have the ability to change it, but there’s nothing wrong with it.

Brooke’s growing confidence also included pursuing a healthy monogamous relationship in which she has been able to explore her own sensuality with herself and sexuality with her partner in what she calls her “sexual awakening.” Defining her sensuality and spirituality is central to being “in touch with that side of myself” which includes “self-care, a lot of yoga, spiritual practices like I’ve never ever owned a cute pair of silky lace pajamas. I’m gonna splurge on that for myself. I’m just going to pamper myself.” For Brooke, now sexuality “feels pretty neutral…part of like being human” and something she is learning in a healthy relationship with herself and her partner.
Ash is a 22-year-old Nigerian American living in the metro Atlanta area. She has completed her bachelor’s degree and is currently a graduate student. Ash describes her upbringing as a “relatively normal and protective environment.” She is the youngest child and has three older brothers. She describes being “protected in a sense that I wasn’t allowed to go outside, have sleep overs, or invite friends over the house” because her parents “didn’t trust people easily.” There was a difference in her parents protection of their children stating “there’s still a difference with how my parents treat the girls versus the boys. They’re just a bit more protective with the girls,” and this made it challenging to do “things normal teenagers do.” She recalls not being allowed to attend a football game with friends in 11th grade; it was only after her older brother intervened that she was allowed. For Ash, religion is central to her life she’s “been going to church since forever,” and as a Nigerian American, “praise and worship is very engrained...everything in my life just centers God.” She attends a traditional “worship chapel” in which the women wear head wraps and long white skirts to signify purity. The men and women also sit on opposite sides during church service. Ash explained that being the only and the first daughter in Nigerian culture presented her with more responsibilities than her brothers, as she elaborates

In our culture, if you're the only daughter or the first daughter, you're considered just a daughter, and what they mean by that it's like you're the second mother in a sense. So you have a responsibility to be mature and to give advice and just follow the lead or the footsteps of your mother. So, you have a different role in the family, compared to everybody else. It just came with a lot of responsibilities and make sure that I do well in school, that I don't get in trouble. And just make sure, I make something of myself, being and doing something productive.
Despite these responsibilities, Ash stated, “I don’t think I’ve faced any hardships growing up in terms of my race and gender or things that don’t really stick with me.” However, Ash does feel that her two eldest brothers “had expectations” from their parents and “didn’t get the same amount of pressure I got or the third brother.” Regardless of the responsibility she has as the only daughter, Ash “still feels like I’m in my Black girlhood, I’m still growing.” She feels as if she has yet to have a “milestone moment where I transition to a woman.”

Ash was introduced to hip-hop culture and music through her older brothers and mentions this as central to southern and Atlanta culture in her adolescent girlhood. She recalls watching popular shows such as *Girlfriends* and *Half & Half* on Black Entertainment Network (B.E.T) to gain “insight on how to act in future relationships and with my own girlfriends.” As a child, she had “no choice but to watch men play NBA live and then 2k, that just really introduced me to [hip-hop] culture.” For female rap, she cites Nicki Minaj, Lil’ Kim, and Trina, which she listens to every single day and as the epitome of Black women’s sexuality in hip-hop. She appreciates female rappers who have embraced their sexuality but “maintain that respect as a rapper,” mentioning artists Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion as examples. However, Ash does not “really feel like I’m represented at all” with Black women in rap and hip-hop, given her more conservative upbringing. She did feel represented at first with rapper Saweetie. According to Ash the rapper Saweetie was someone going to school and “very business-minded, always talking and thinking about making money,” however, her music is “more sexual” now and not as relatable for Ash now. Despite being a fan of hip-hop music and culture, she makes a separation as entertainment to not “get caught up with what this culture is doing.”

Ash describes herself as heterosexual. At this time, Ash is “not really interested in dating,” reiterating that “people shouldn’t be in relationships when they’re broken and fighting demons”
instead, she’ll focus on “trying to get my money up.” She has no sexual experience and does not want a relationship that will make her “unhappy or unstable” and stated she “likes the track that I’m on in life right now.” Growing up, Ash knew to wait until marriage to have sex or date a Nigerian guy. While she is not “strict” on waiting until marriage, she would want to be with someone she “really trusts because I have a wall up and I’m really protective with myself.” She does not recall having any conversations with her family or others involving purity rings or contracts; however, she did see classmates wearing them. Ash could not recall any experiences she had being sexually surveilled, but did also state intentionally, “I suppress a lot of stuff, I really forget a lot of things,” yet she did witness church members gossiping behind girls' backs regarding their bodies or perceived sexual activity. She remembers some church members hiding certain clothes from their parents that might have been considered inappropriate. Additionally, she took heed to warnings by her parents and “people instilling fear to me…to stay back or like be to myself, because anything could happen.” When encountering catcalling or sexual monitoring in her everyday life, Ash did state, “I wear certain things so I don’t attract that type of attention…the way I was brought up, it just made me more aware of the way you carry yourself or the way things you wear brings about a type of attention, even if it’s unwarranted, even if it’s intentional or not.” When asked about her body, Ash stated she feels “pretty confident, everybody has insecurities, but I feel confident with who I am and what I look like.” She cites seeing Black women in hip-hop culture “really helped me appreciate where I’m from, who I am... even what I look like.” She even mentioned issues of colorism in music videos with lighter skin women. She never “really took to heart because I had an appreciation for what I look like and my skin tone. I guess that comes from family telling me I’m more than enough.” She describes self-care and specifically skin care “means the world to me.” Ash also enjoys getting
her hair done as she emphasized: “I want my hair to be healthy…I like to get my hair done, because it makes me feel better about myself because if your hair is not done then you just going to feel ugly.” While she does not wear make-up, she does appreciate dressing up, wearing heels, putting on jewelry or perfume; however, she has not been able to do this given the mandatory COVID-19 quarantine. Ultimately for Ash as she practices her sensuality, she embraces Black women as “multifaceted, we don’t have to stick in on box…we’re not just entertainment figures.” Ash embodies this notion by defining her sexuality as “feeling confident in my skin color, where I’m from and who I am.”

Ellie is a 23-year-old African American college graduate from southern Georgia who identifies as bisexual. She listens to hip-hop music daily as well as writes poetry. Growing up, Ellie describes her adolescence as “figuring things out on my own” her mother was a survivor of domestic violence and physically present but at times emotionally absent. Ellie says, “she was there, but she wasn’t there.” Even as Ellie remembered her girlhood, she stated, “memory is kind of…somethings I’ve blocked out at certain points.” Ellie attended a Catholic school that was majority white until the eighth grade. She describes, “by fifth grade, I was the only Black girl in the entire school” and felt very isolated. Raised in a “very Christian household” where “it was only those three stops,” being home, church, and school, she rarely listened to hip-hop. In addition, Ellie’s classmates “weren’t listening to hip-hop and rap at first,” and she “had to know the music that my classmates were listening to” to fit in being primarily pop music. As a child, Ellie “would take everything to heart when people said something.” She recalls a classmate stating, “oh, your arm hair is so hairy. You know, taking that to heart and went and shaved my arm hair.” Beginning puberty for her was “uncomfortable,” she remembers after physical education class, “a teacher interrogating me about if I put on deodorant.” She questioned, “Like
do you interrogate everyone? I know you don’t interrogate everyone.” She experienced severe bullying from sixth through eighth grade. During this time, her mother was on bedrest given multiple surgeries. With her mother being absent, inappropriate comments were continuously made to Ellie by adults, as she elaborates

that comments was definitely like one of those comments where it's like, I know you're you're not going to tell your mom type thing. And she's not gonna be able to come up here so you know, what is what's really gonna happen type thing and she was right. I didn't tell my mom that until like years later.

Ellie reflects on her girlhood as a “guideline of what not to do” regarding “how I let people treat me and how I let people talk to me.” She does not “want to be the same person that I was when I was a kid.” Her girlhood was “just trying to survive. I’m just trying to get through today. I don’t want to argue; I just want to make it through the day.” She reflects not wanting to bother people and “overcompensating for adults” who did not responsibly protect her during her adolescence.

There were multiple days at school for Ellie going the “entire day without talking to people” despite saying hello. In her school journal for a literature class, Ellie wrote, “how awful school was, and never heard anything back” from teachers reading the journals daily. Ellie even began intentionally avoiding lunch because classmates would move her things, even placing them on the ground. As she recalls,

At some point, I was like, I'm just not gonna go, and it was a one-day thing. So I ended up going to the band room. Because I was doing after-school stuff for church, I knew how to get in and out of there. So I left it unlocked one day, and I just sat back there. And it was great. It was the best lunch ever. I go back there. I just drew, I just was chillin, and it was great. That became my habit of going there for lunch instead of to the lunchroom.
But people eventually began to notice that I was there. I remember someone locking that door, so I wouldn't be able to be in there. But the joke was, I've been going there long enough. I know how to get into the bandroom front and back. You're not stopping me. So that door was locked after some time, and I remember just sitting in the hallway because it was locked, and someone came down and was said, “Oh, you can't be here.”

Eventually, the policy was that everybody had to go to lunch.

Ellie located ways “to basically leave for a temporary amount of time” as a mechanism of care given adults despite witnessing her bullying never intervening.

Transferring to a predominantly Black high school, Ellie describes the “first year was such a chaotic year” but a “fresh start,” which “turned out to be a blessing” for her given her experience. While some of her previous Catholic school peers did attend her high school, she “had a chance to not see them. I didn’t have to sit with them at lunch,” giving her the ability to “branch out” socially. High school was also the first time teachers advocated on her behalf. Previously “teachers had seen me being bullied and not [said] anything.” The experience at the Black high school was a “complete switch, night and day.” Ellie attended a high school close to Kendrick Johnson, a 17-year-old Black boy discovered murdered in a gym mat in Georgia. She vividly recalls the incident as “a day that I don’t think any of us will forget. I don’t think that we’ll ever know what happened, unfortunately.” She grew up playing with the brothers of “KJ” as she referred to him and even attended her previous Catholic school with an alleged witness. Interestingly, Ellie described the contested case as “one of those things where it’s going to the grave” and “not the only case like that” in the southern Georgia town.

During her high school years, she was introduced to hip-hop and fondly recalls learning to sing and writing poetry as a “release” to “clear my mind.” For Ellie Black women’s sexuality
in hip-hop feels as if you “have to be in tip-top shape…you can’t have any days off”; this includes being “done up all the time” and having to be multi-faceted to “prove that you’re super smart and then also you have to be a bad bitch at the same time.” Regarding sexual surveillance, Ellie does recall having to “change clothes because a man was coming over” as well as “this strong push for us to be very abstinent” in high school. There were instances of “fingertip checks” in school where she had to put her hands down to see how long her skirt was. A teacher would “definitely check the Black girls” but rarely check the white girls. She also remembers being approached in a beauty supply store at the age of 12 and having “two men coming up to me and talking about my lips.” These experiences resulted in a need for Ellie “to cover up more…kind of overcompensate” to avoid attention from adults. She does recall a specific teacher at her high school always calling a peer “fast” and having multiple conflicts. Ellie’s peer became pregnant twice during high school and was labeled a “fast ass” by this teacher. Later the town discovered her father was raping the girl. Like Kendrick Johnson's death, it’s “one of the things that people would whisper about, but no one really did anything.” Ellie also hopes that the particular teacher apologizes to her peer eventually.

In Ellie’s household, there was not “any type of conversations about sex because you're not having sex.” Even now, with Ellie identifying as bisexual, she’s “learning and figuring out my likes and dislikes with that” and “very selective” with who she shares her sexual orientation with, including not telling her mom. Ellie describes “a love-hate relationship” with her body feeling as if “my body has both brought me so far, but also failed me at the same time,” given a condition she has which causes her weight to fluctuate. She is currently finding “ways to be comfortable in this new size.” However, she still locates what makes her feel sensual by “getting dolled up for an event” or feeling sexy by being “very flirty when I feel confident.” The latter
tends to involve “getting that affirmation because I know I look good. So I know I’m gonna hear it back.”

Carla is a 22-year-old Mississippi native who identifies as queer. Carla’s girlhood “starts and stops as soon I hit puberty,” given the responsibilities she had. Carla sums up her girlhood throughout the interview as “no one knew what to do with me and my mother worked a hell of a lot.” In Carla’s words, “My girlhood really can be summed up with; I don't think a lot of people knew what to do with me, I was really smart and my body grew fast. So I think I was really just kind of overexposed in areas as well.” Carla attended an inner-city school until the eighth grade before transferring to a predominantly white school. She grew up “in a house full of girls” as the youngest of three daughters with her mother. She describes a lot of “sacrifice on my part as a child,” including “stress and toughness” with experiences that “put a lot of strain on sort of the innocent parts of girlhood.” Carla was really smart, which “was dangerous,” and enjoyed “figuring things out,” so her experience at school molded her confidence as well as experiences both good and bad. She was “living in the Black girl body that just like no one knows what to do with,” given she was inquisitive and strong-willed. She cites learning things about her cycle and sex from her older sister and the internet, resulting in “a hell of a lack of innocence.”

The adults in Carla’s life, especially teachers at school, “did not handle me with all the care especially as I aged and progressed.” She recalls having responsibility and high expectations placed upon her in a “tough love sort of situation because that’s how they deal with Black children.” There was no “vulnerability or niceness and just being gentle,” which resulted in “a lot of humiliating experiences” where she was “speaking up for myself in situations with adults.” In reflection, she feels that she was just a child and people should have advocated on her behalf. In these experiences, Carla was not “handled warmly” and “as a Black child, expected to just know
better at all times.” She recalls grading her peers’ papers and even helping her peers complete their work constantly because she always completed her school work early. Carla sums up her girlhood experience in the south as “womanish,” Alice Walker’s term for acting like a Woman or being grown-up. She also describes her girlhood as “slipping in and out of that kind of girliness or womanish to something a lot more tense. A lot more risky.” At home, Carla was “in her head a lot,” crafting her personality based upon the educational experiences making up her own world in what she calls a “dreamscape.” Her need to “figure things out” transitioned to finding the best way to sneak around, walking a “line of danger and safety” in very “tense and risky situations.” She felt as if this was her way of satisfying herself, given that school quickly became boring. Being womanish as a Black girl for Carla often manifested in her language as a “toughness that you feel in your body” and “very slick.” As she illustrates her dreamscape, she identifies southern hip-hop as her “costume or set.” It was “very flirty” and something she could “have fun with” citing artist Trina and Gangsta Boo as favorites. Hip-hop, for her, “colored a lot of the things that were bleak growing up.”

Being a Black girl for Carla “had made my world” illuminating the “practices…and systems we see in daily life” as “the wall that people put the paint on” and a “guardian angel.” This guardian angel for her was something she “calls into” that is a “sweet spot” and “comforting no matter the struggle” and a space to “take off this kind of armor.” Carla lost her older sister in the seventh grade and transferred to a predominantly white school “to start over,” and her home life became “really bleak” during this period. At the new school, “being a smart Black girl” she was not the “shiny penny to white people.” She reaffirms that “people not knowing what to do with you” and whiteness “just hovered. It was like another anxiety; it didn’t go away.” This anxiety extended to her body with practices such as getting dressed for church, remembering
having “anxiety knowing that…I was thick. I was curvy,” and while it “was invisible” to white people “for Black folks there was no hiding.” Carla began her cycle the first day of fourth grade and recalled once she “hit puberty and my body like shot up.” She describes a similar relationship to anxiety and whiteness concerning “policing over a Black girl’s body.” She recalls “being called fast because my pants were too tight…a lot of times these were Black women.” However, led by a single mother, her household only went shopping when her mom received a tax refund and tax-free weekend, which all occurred in the spring. Resulting in ill-fitting clothes as her body continued to grow. She describes the teachers as “hypercritical” and felt as if “I was being picked on… having these rough encounters with teachers where I felt humiliated, where I was being pulled out of class.” As Carla recalls

I was taking pictures in my shorts. And sitting on the bathroom sink in, turning around and like, my butt was out, I guess. Yeah, I'm taking pictures of it in the mirror. I put it on Facebook. Some older girls at the school snitched and told all my teachers when my teachers called me out of class again like that happened a lot. I mean, always that class and like, always same hallway. My teacher gave me this speech and told me to log into my Facebook, and I'm a Cancer. So my password had six-nine in it, because Cancer, that's how they make the crab. And I had to give my teacher the password and everything. And she began to say how like, that was like sexually perverted.

She remembers “people just always constantly watching,” describing resource officers and teachers checking dress code at the school entrance and after the pledge of allegiance at school, teachers checking skirt lengths of uniforms with “a ruler in hand.” She does recall her siblings checking browser history and discovering a guy seven years older than her texting her phone. However, “there were no consequences,” unlike at school. During the interview, Carla recollects
a previous incident she suppressed. She went to the fair with a childhood friend in the seventh grade. Carla and her friend began discussing sex, given she became sexually active at that time. She thinks someone overheard her discussing this in the hotel room at the fair. She recalls

My mom gets an anonymous message when I get home. And they told her that I needed to get tested on for an STD. I don't I still, to this day, have no idea. And I wish I could make this up. I really wish I had like read that. And I'm lying. But I'm not. They told her that I needed to get tested for an STD HIV again. I remember the feeling that I felt so angry and so disrespected. My mom did not know how to deal with like, sex. I don't know. She didn't like, there was no consequence or anything. She didn't like, sit me down and have a talk with me.

The anxiety continued at her high school “just more riddled” she recounts, “styling my hair in a way that my teachers did not like” and being “called out in class because she didn’t like my hair and couldn’t see my eyes because it was bangs.” These are a few of many situations Carla “had to have the heart to get through it” cause “I was again tough, so I can never tell you that I was bullied.” Carla's anxiety intensified; she began double-checking herself and tapping into not “all the way respectable…but classy” persona at school. At this time in high school, she was no longer slipping in and out of girlish and womanish; in her words, “you got what you got for me, you’re gonna get all of me” across home, school, and church spaces. However, as she matured, she began cultivating her own sensuality by “being inquisitive, intuitive, smart and getting to know your body better” as well as feeling mature and comfortable she was going to “feel good and good with it.” Sensuality for her had “nothing to with men” more so wanting “to be in my body” and “growing up” which emerged through practices “for your interior life” against things that were “very rough” from “stress, grief, sadness, depression, and anxiety.” Sensuality was a
space that she experienced softness that “sometimes was about survival.” These practices were cleaning and lighting a candle, “masturbating more freely,” or getting her a Chanel perfume for her 16th birthday because “that’s what I wanted, and I got it, and that felt good.”

*Carla* feels as if “she had no choice but to have an open mind about sexuality because everything else is boring as shit. Just so boring.” She describes herself as overexposed to sexuality because she had older siblings. She recalls being sneaky, getting with friends, and “trying out things together,” which was “dangerous…because it looks like assault. It looks like molestation. But with friends. We were like experimenting together.” Her mother worked at an HIV clinic, and her “sex talk” with her was bringing home a graphic with photographs of what STDS did to the body and taking her to a purity event in the eighth grade, where she received a “purity bracelet.” Although at this point, Carla disclosed, “I had already sucked dick. It was nothing to reveal to me, I was already there.” She did not identify as queer until college; however, her “life was a queer life” given that she was sexually active, friends, and politics. She was “queering those values that people wanted to instill and being rebellious” and was always “outside of the norm.” Carla partially contributes to being picked out of class. She recalls being “sexually active, very, very young” in situations that “would be considered rape today.” She found ease speaking about her sexual performance compared to her girlhood given she’s “been experiencing sexuality for so long.” In reflection her sexual experiences were less about “getting love” rather she found “sex was interesting” at the time.

When she became sexually active, the “bleakness [of home] began to creep out into that work that I was making and processing for myself” she describes her body and the world she was making her mind “begin[s] to connect.” As she describes suffering with “being present and in the moment” she says,
When I did begin to be in my body and be busy with myself, and all the ways that we get to show up that was repressed, that was ridiculed. Not ridiculed, but there began to be shame in that...You can be so tough, be as tough as you want. And sometimes that shit is like, I really can't power through this, I really can't have heart and hold my head up and just I can't. I really can't just roll with the punches here. I think I would rather my softness now not be for survival and it'd be more an aesthetic. And I think that sort of survival mode is really just made me not feel like I was deserving or worthy of sensuality. I feel like I have to deserve it.

In the present, Carla has not been sexually active since high school does not “have the best relationship” with her body and feels that “the stress of childhood and adolescence began to really wear and tear” on her in the past few years. Now Carla is still “figuring things out”; however, “figuring out trauma,” specifically her own trauma, “doesn’t bring the same gratification.” Moreover, now she affirms her sexuality by being inquisitive and learning that “it’s not something that’s icky” and “making it a part of my way...and unlearning a lot of shame” despite the shame surfacing “every now and then” with memories. Despite this, the ways Black women “make life an experiment” and rebel against the norms affirms her today.

4.3 Photovoice Activity

Seven out of eight participants submitted three photos, titles, and captions in response to the photovoice questions. Adele submitted a single photo with a caption in response to all the photovoice questions. Participants were given a week after the date of our interview to submit photos, titles, and captions. If often took longer averaging about three weeks to receive all
completed documents. The photovoice guide instructed participants to submit one photo, caption, and title in response to each of the questions below.

Photography should respond to each question below:

1. In which ways do you perform sexuality?

2. What feelings of sexual surveillance do you relate to your Black girlhood?

3. How does hip-hop culture make you feel about your sexuality?

   Photo 1 correlated with question 1 and was coded for “Sexual/Sensual expression(s) and Performance.” Photo 2 responds to question 2 was coded “Black Girlhood and Sexual surveillance”. Photo 3 responds to question 3 and was coded “Hip-hop and Sexuality.” Below are a few photos that were expository of the experiences described by participants along with the accompanying captions.

   *Sexual/Sensual Expressions and Performance*
“Rest”: not much thinking, mostly doing -Sarah
“CONCEAL”: Makeup was everything to conveying and presenting myself to the world, as well as, learning about the colors and looks that suit me. I did not think much about my sexual performance, but for all the ways wearing makeup as young as the fifth grade said as much on the matter, it was too advanced. -Carla
"In Plain Sight": My parents quickly found themselves in anything labeled 'diary or journal' I began to make my diary look like regular school folders so they would assume I no longer wrote. -Ayin
‘Culture and Dress Code’: When my sexuality is being surveillance, I feel insecure and inferior.

I feel as if I am acting in an egregious manner to the outside world. – Barbara
‘Distorted Views’: I feel like hip hop culture makes things blurry. Like the perception that everything and everyone is perfect and peachy with their perfect lives and bodies. That once you figure out your sexuality that everything else around you will fall in line. When really it’s all complex and intricate and can never be tied in a bow.-Ellie
Covered: This picture is from a night out I had with a friend about 4 years ago. We were spending the night out at a Buckhead bar then hanging out with a music producer and his friend. The friend I had gone out with embraced her sexuality and body. Many of the friends I went to clubs and lounges with did/do. I noticed that I was always 1 of 2 people who would wear dark colors and cover up more, opting for less "sexy" outfits. I realized that I hated the even more aggressive attention it brought me from men who frequent these places which is how I feel about hip hop. The overwhelming majority of male rappers have nothing but demeaning things to promote about Black women's sexuality. The female rappers that have gained popularity over the past few years have reclaimed Black women's sexuality through their music. It can be empowering at times, but I still question why it ties so much of a woman's value into her sexuality and emphasizes dominance over men and women (i.e. competition). -Brooke
While participants’ experiences differed based on sexual orientation, geography, and upbringing, a consistent theme of the photos included resistance to the norms projected upon Blackgirls and curating their own experiences. Participants extended care to themselves through self-care practices, healthy exploration of sexuality, world-making, or simply making sense of the world to ease the tension of being both Black and girl in the south. While images were sent and interpreted following their interviews, many themes were further clarified or validated during the focus group.

4.4 Focus Group

The two focus group sessions included six out of eight participants and lasted about an hour and a half. The purpose of this focus group was to identify and discuss the common experiences amongst participants and how that informs their girlhood and their present lives. All participants altered their names upon entering the Zoom room, in addition, they did not have their cameras on, only audio. The focus group included a PowerPoint presentation with all submitted pictures from the photovoice activity. Two to three photographs were presented at a time and grouped with their designated photovoice question. Sarah, Ash, Carla, and Barbara attended the first focus group for an hour and a half. Brooke and Ayin attended the second focus group for an hour and fifteen minutes. As the facilitator, I asked a series of questions on each slide using the SHOWED method to encourage the participants to critically engage with the photographs (Gaunt et al., 2009). Included in the SHOWED methods were the questions:

1. What do you see here?
2. What is really happening here?
3. How does this relate to our lives?
4. Why does this condition exist?

5. What can we do about it?

The focus group allowed the blackgirl participants to connect and commune based upon their shared or contrasting experiences. It acted as a safe space to interpret and explore images from the photovoice activity. Facilitating the focus group also illuminated common themes in images and alternative perspectives and details of the photos, informing the expansion of initial themes.

4.5 Analysis Process

Three forms of data collection occurred via semi-structured interviews, photovoice photographs, and focus group discussions amongst eight participants. I coded a total of 37 nodes in the focus group and interview transcriptions. The semi-structured interviews ranged from an hour and a half to two hours long. All quotes supporting codes or thematic concepts relating to the research questions were identified as significant statements. Examples of these significant statements include:

- “I was like in denial. I was like, No, I'm proud of being a black girl. But really, I hate to say it, but I had negative outlooks on what it means to be black. Like, I didn't like anything about it. I had like a negative outlook.” - Barbara

- “I think that a lot of times, [hip-hop] made it hard to sexually express yourself, or even show interest in men, like girls, really weren't allowed to explore and stuff without being called a hoe…Just like, girls really weren't given the clemency to [date].” - Ayin
“Because to be honest with you, being a smart black girl, you're no longer like a shiny penny to white people, you know, unless they can, use it to their advantage. But they had that covered by that time, I think they had their like shiny penny, of a black girl that was smart by the time I transferred.” - Carla

“My mom raised me as a single mother, so it was kind of like, she was there, but she wasn't there. So I was kind of like figuring things out on my own.” - Ellie

“So I myself, like no matter what, do not, like, appear almost too sexy. Until you get to your location, you can take off your jacket, or you can like wear the actual outfit that you want to wear to show but every moment is resisting every moment.” - Adele

“I probably was like, very covered up, in my teenage years, at least, not because I felt like sexual shame. But just because I like, wasn't very confident in my body. Like, I felt like I was just very like critical of it.” - Brooke

“I just felt like when I was around men, and that I had to create distance, and not do anything to bring attention to myself.” - Sarah

“Well, Southern culture period, like Southern hip hop, you know with like, Juvenile and Pimp C and Outkast of course, it’s the epitome of what like Southern culture is. And that's the videos and stuff that I watched. [I] still watch this day.” - Ash

Using phenomenological reduction, I filtered out redundant and overlapping data to then began using elemental concept codes to identify words or short phrases (processes, feelings, stories) relating to the research questions. Concept coding analyzes “smaller observable actions that add up to a bigger and broader scheme” (Saldana, 2016, p.119). An example of the concept codes
includes Sexual Surveillance, relationship with mom, anxiety about the body, and hip-hop in girlhood.

4.5.1 Cycle One Coding: Concept Code Mapping

The code mapping technique generated the initial 37 codes from the interview transcriptions. All 37 codes were in categories as experience, feelings, or relationships. These three categories were created based upon patterns and themes highlighted by all participants about their Black girlhood experience, sexual surveillance, and sexuality. These codes were categorized and labeled based upon their similarities, differences, and overarching themes. Moreover, these codes were organized, condensed, and grouped through three iterations of code mapping to identify the thematic significance of Black girlhood and sexual surveillance.

The first iteration of code mapping all 37 codes from semi-structured interview and focus group transcripts was listed. Using concept coding, I located “suggested meaning broader than a single item or action – a ‘bigger picture’ beyond the tangible and apparent” (Saldana, 2016, p.119). The code of playing outside, twerking, and sex work was eliminated due to a lack of substantial data and representing an action rather than a theme. Combining codes for sexual trauma and secrecy with exploring sexuality, I also organized codes classification of experiences, feelings, and relationships throughout the categories.

For the second process of code mapping, I labeled all codes for general themes related to the phenomenon of sexual surveillance and Black girlhood. These codes included, but were not limited to, interpretations, experiences, feelings, and influences upon Black girlhood experience. I generated three categories in this process: Black girlhood means, this includes the ways participants self-defined and determined their girlhood, including themes of protection, survival, healing, and influence of hip-hop. The second category Figuring out a lot on my own represented
the aspects that encroached and influenced participants' girlhood. These themes included responsibility, sexuality, and secrecy. *Living in a Black girl body*, the last category discussed the experiences shaping participants' Black girlhood, such as sexual surveillance, feeling sensual, and anxiety. I generated these categories by analyzing the significance and meaning of codes. The codes were then arranged based upon similarities and grouped with the appropriate category.

For the third and final iteration of code mapping, categories were fine-tuned and defined for distinctions and similarities to account for any overlap. As part of refining the categories, I combined codes to eliminate any overlap in statements and then reviewed the codes once again to interpret if coded with an accurate theme. For all the concepts listed below, hip-hop in girlhood had varying influences. Given this, the code for hip-hop in girlhood is organized to be combined with the concept or theme discussed in hip-hop music and culture. Codes for the relationship with mom, relationship with men, and upbringing experience were re-coded with specific key codes included in each category. A category titled moral sexuality includes codes of church, being fast, moral sexuality, and feminine etiquette. The category angst represents codes of making self small and survival. While codes were labeled to identify concepts, the larger thematic categories were labeled verbatim from participants' words.

Category one, *Black Girlhood Means*, represented themes and concepts which defined participants’ experience. Primary codes included protection, healing, and resistance through Black girls' relationship to themselves and adults. I went through all codes representing relationships with other Black women and relationships with adults to code for actions of care or a lack of care from adults. This theme emerged primarily by participants exercising reflexivity on their girlhood. Category two *figuring out a lot on my own* was re-labeled as *Black girl figuring it out alone* to express the concurrent feeling of isolation accompanying participants’
experience and to recenter the particular experience of Black girlhood at the intersection of race, gender, and class. *Black girl figuring it out* embodies the blend of assumed independence and adultification that Black girls experience primarily from adults. Codes representing adults’ projections of responsibility, feelings of angst, pacts of secrecy, and exploratory sexuality occurred for participants as they “figured out” critical aspects of existing as both Black and girl. The final category *Living in a Black girl body* explores the ways participants inhabited their bodies and the experiences emerging from living in a Black girl's body. Codes include sexual surveillance, feeling sensual, anxiety, moral sexuality, and shame.

### 4.5.2 Cycle Two Coding: Axial Coding

Transitioning to Cycle two coding, I structured the thematic categories to be distinct and demonstrate connections to the research questions. Many of the codes were condensed and expounded upon or redefined during the cycle one code mapping activity. Given this, the objective for cycle two coding was to further define and elaborate the themes and codes or sub-concepts that informed them. For clarity, codes structured using significant statements in cycle one coding are now sub-concepts informing more prominent themes. The previous categories of cycle one coding would now be further established and characterized by sub-concepts to cultivate succinct themes. I interchangeably use themes and thematic concepts throughout this process; however, sub-concepts transitioned into grouped themes.

I used axial coding for this process to define and “link categories with subcategories [to] ask how they are related” (Charmaz, 2014 p.148). Employing axial coding, I sought to determine the overarching dominant codes to identify the best representative codes (Boeije, 2010). Grouping the codes into larger meaning units or categories occurred during the cycle one code mapping process to capture the details. Using axial coding, I identified dimensions of each
category to explain the necessary nuances and fine-grained details that make each code distinct and relate to other concepts. Cycle two axial coding emphasized the properties of the grouped codes or sub-concepts that feature the characteristics and attributes. The dimensions of the sub-concepts describe the “context, conditions, interactions and consequences of a process” or as described the “if, when, how and why” (Saldana, 2016, p.244). This process integrates extensive significant statements from participants to support thematic concepts to achieve saturation. In all, the intention and purpose of cycle two axial coding are to sharpen and refine codes to construct and later describe the themes of blackgirls’ experience with sexual surveillance. All thematic concepts included the notion of care and influence of hip-hop; however, the meanings and functions were altered based on the categories and discussed in-depth in a later chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Concept</th>
<th>Properties (attributes or characteristics)</th>
<th>Dimensions (context, conditions or causes)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Girlhood Means...</td>
<td>Blackgirls internal relationship with themselves and their reflexivity on their girlhood experience. Care functions as a practice of healing for some through the identified sub-concepts. The themes describe the practices of healing, resistance, and sensuality exercised by the blackgirls as a form of care.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Resistance | Affirming identity as blackgirl or woman through practices.  
• “being a black girl means to me. I view it as like the most powerful being like real talk like I look around I can see, everybody kind of wants to mimic what my black people do. Even some black men will create content off of black women. And I’m just like we are. We’re everything. We’re everything. And more” -Adele | Blackgirls existing and striving despite existing at the intersection of multiple oppressive systems.  
• “When I have to, call into something that’s like, going through the world, and [Black girlhood] is calling to something that is just sweet it feels comforting or no matter the struggle or the rough shit I deal with if I have to like call into something I feel like black girlhood, being a black girl is like that Angel. It’s that sweet spot, no matter, what really strange or really rough and difficult things that I had to
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blackgirls extending care to themselves as a form of protection.</th>
<th>Healing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Once I like went to therapy, and like, we’re all running from like, our childhood wounds, in a way. And once I saw all of this around me and was able to identify it and see it and other people, I just didn’t want to live my life like that. I am a much happier levelheaded person. But no, I seriously, thank the older black woman who told me like, go to therapy, at some point in my twenties.” -Brooke</td>
<td>Blackgirls extend care as protection as a result of not receiving care from adults in adolescence. Essentially “healing” from their girlhood.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“So I’m, I’m finding now at 22, trying to find new ways of like, connecting with it. It’s really like a lack of confidence. It’s more like a lack of esteem. You can be so tough is like, you know, be as tough as you want. And sometimes that shit is like, I really can’t power through this, I really can’t like have heart and hold my head up and just I can’t. I really can’t just roll with the punches here. I think I would rather my softness now not be for survival, and it’d be more like an aesthetic. I would rather you know, for those purposes,</td>
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### Sensuality

Sensuality was distinct, relating to the body, senses, and the individual participants as spiritual and emotional care practices.

- “Just any type of self-care on the external body. I guess I think that stems from externally not ever feeling desirable enough because of my leg. So now that I’m like more into it, it’s like, Okay, I will take the time to get my nails done, I will take the time to get my toes done. And I’m still buying heels. Because I won’t let be the ability to like not flex my foot as much as I want to have stopped me from still buying the heels stepping out.” - Adele

Sensuality is internal practices for and by blackgirls. This is a form of care amidst the oversexualization of Black women’s bodies in popular and hip-hop culture. Sensuality is an expression of self-definition and care.

- “It’s just different things to do. I don’t know. I don’t know how to put it into words, but I think it’s empowering. And I think it’s like, because anyone can do it’s just since it’s women it’s looked down upon what we want to do, and especially black woman do it. It’s like, oh, if it is sexy, then it’s sexy for me or something. But it’s like if you want to be sexy like it’s literally sexy for me like right? It’s like, no, I’m just like, doing stuff because I enjoy it” - Barbara

### Living in a blackgirl body...

Blackgirl’s external relation to their bodies and the environments they navigate critically impacted their girlhood experience. This theme describes the experiences emerging from inhabiting their bodies, chiefly analyzing sexual surveillance. Hip-hop acted as a representation (positive or negative) of Black women’s sexuality. Ultimately blackgirl bodies are read and managed in society through sexual surveillance, moral sexuality, and feelings of anxiety and shame.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience sexual surveillance</th>
<th>The phenomenon of blackgirls bodies being monitored or oversexualized by others.</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>“I guess they draws check. That was like the worst. And that’s like the one that sticks out the most. Like when you say sexual</td>
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Black women and girls being oversexualized in hip-hop culture through lyrics and videos.

- I think that a lot of times, [hip-hop] made it hard to sexually express yourself, or even just,
surveillance, that's the one I really like, think about. I was so disgusted. I just felt gross. I felt disgusting. I just felt really, really gross. It was a very, very degrading experience to have my mom do that. I even like, started to resent her after that it was violent as hell.” -Sarah

Adults’ perception of “being fast” or hypersexual activity or behaviors amongst blackgirls during adolescents.

- “I remember talking with my grandmother when [my cousin] got in fifth grade or sixth grade. And she was like, "Oh, yeah, like, She's so fast. She's trying to have a boyfriend". She was like, "Oh, do you know, your aunt's like, boyfriend, like, had his son over to her house, and like, she just wants it to be up under him. She's so fast, like, she's going to be pregnant as a teenager, like, if they don't get a hold of that". And I'm, like, you know, she's a preteen, she's a teenager, she's gonna have crushes like that as a healthy and normal and even if she didn't have a crush, that would be normal.” -Brooke

like show interest in men, like girls really weren't allowed to explore and stuff without being called a hoe. Like in high school, like, I mean, in hindsight, now that I'm grown, I'm just like, there's really no need to date in high school. But just like, girls really weren't given the clemency to do that. So yeah. I think it just really made it harder to just be open about who you liked and what you liked.- Ayin

Engagement from adults possibly well-intended as act of protection,

- “When I start approaching puberty, like 9,10,11, they're like, now, you get a little bigger, you know, your breasts start to grow. People want to start sexualizing you so eventually, some stuff began being sexualized, it became "Don't do that. Don't shake your butt." Like don't dance in front of men. And you can't dance at the parties [twerking] anymore because the uncles are here, the men in the neighborhood. So you can't dance like this in this environment. They don't really assume that people want to harm kids. I think that that's when it comes in when people are concerned about you being harmed by men” -Sarah

Moral Sexuality

Adults were evaluating the bodies of blackgirls based upon a moral, ethical or religious parameter of appropriate sexuality principally based upon the appearance of body and practice of actively monitoring.

- “It was a program at my elementary school one time fifth graders you know, because fifth
grade stuck around a lot of girls started cycles fifth and sixth grade. And I couldn't be a part of the program to learn about, you know, periods and then like the whole purity. It wasn't like a what the white people do with the rings and a ball and all of that. It was like, you know, promise me "You're not gonna give yourself away" - Sarah

Measuring of moral sexuality can occur across various spaces but is especially prominent in church spaces.

- “Two years ago, I was sitting in church, and one of the girls comes up, and she grabs my jacket, and she puts it on me. This was two years ago. She put that jacket on me for me. And I just remember being like, and this is why I switched churches. I was super, like, reserved, and, you know, Yes, ma'am. Amen. But you don’t see the men and women sitting next to each other. No, I remember she came in and then so she put her jacket put, she put my jacket off for me. And after the service, I talked to her about it. And she was just like that it was just ungraceful to show my shoulders. And I never showed my shoulders again. After that, and never show them again. shoulders.” - Adele

- “The Christian conservative thing was like, you know, your body is a temple. Don't, you know, do these things, and you know, was more sugar-coated not sugarcoated, but it wasn't brutal. It was more like, God has a purpose for your body, and you should treasure it.” - Sarah

| Feelings of Anxiety and Shame | Feelings of distress and anxiety about body developing from experiencing or witnessing sexual surveillance. |
| Adults engage with blackgirls bodies as innately sexually excessive given intersecting systems of racism, anti-blackness, and patriarchy and historical conditions producing hypersexual or deviant Black femme sexuality concepts. |

anything, even if it's white like it can't be like see-through lace. And as it is, you have to wear something like underneath and like every piece of your hair has to be covered.” - Ash
because I was like dress code situations. Same type of anxiety, like the same type of sort of policing over a black girl's body. Or like the ways that a black girl expresses themselves” -Carla

- “I wasn't really interested in going to church. But even if I did go it was like, I didn't even, exist. I was going through a very, very deep depression. I just felt like when I was around men, and that I had to create distance, and not do anything to bring attention to myself.” -Sarah

Feelings of shame emerging from perception body impacting esteem and self-concept of blackgirls.

- “I remember in middle school, the thing was, to be skinny, like, super, super, super skinny. So I told my mom, she won't know, but I'll be trying to diet it's like, “why are you trying to diet?” because I'll be I don't look like them. My body doesn't look like that. I'll go home. I'm eating only salads and I'm only eating once a day because I want to be so skinny. They'll be like, so skinny and like petite. And I was so jealous. My momma like "that's just not how your body is." But that's all I saw. So I was like, well, I see something wrong with me. I think like I'm overweight or obese. I would say I was on the road to an eating disorder. I would try to make myself vomit but I be too scared.” -Barbara

- “So I was growing, and it was weird. And a lot of times, these were black women before I transferred. It was black women teachers that were just very, hypercritical they were always on me about something. So to me, it was really, it was really rough, like just thinking about other teachers, you know, even bad with those encounters with them”-Carla

- “I remember I have this one student who, really looked up to me, she felt like a little sister to me, like her and her whole friend group. And I remember one teacher was saying to me, like, "oh, such she's such student. She's really fast. You know, have you seen the way that she acts around such and such teacher and it was like a young male teacher, like, he's like, our age, he was really attractive. He was really cute. The way that she acts around him, like, She's fast, she's like, I don't know, if something happened to her.” Basically insinuating that this girl might have been like, sexually abused. And that's why she was fast and had a crush on this teacher and was like, you know, I wish she had like a little boyfriend in fifth grade. And I was like, Whoa, like, this is such a toxic idea.” -Brooke

Blackgirl figuring it out...

Blackgirls sought to ease the tension between their internal practices and external experiences. Blackgirls attempt to balance the projections of adultification with the reality of growing and learning in their bodies, managing responsibilities, exploring and defining their sexuality, and
feelings of angst. For some black girls hip-hop existed as a tool to make sense of their lived experiences.

| Responsibilities | Adultification of black girls causes adults to treat adolescent Black girls as adults.  
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Having responsibilities and expectations as an adolescent or teenager to care for family and even community.  
- “Whenever black women are in charge, things be getting done. Right. And I think that usually just always going somewhere, we typically know the cards are stacked against you, you just know to just, you have to be better regardless. Being a black woman, it sucks, but like you're not allowed to fail.”  
- “I had no business thinking like that or feeling like that as a child because one, it's my parents' responsibility to hear whatever is happening with me to handle what I can't handle. And also, it was the responsibility of those around me to say stop, this isn't acceptable, hey, let's not do this or whatever. So like, I definitely was doing a lot more than I should have for my age as far as overcompensating for adults.”  
- “In a way, I could see how a child would feel like a little bit abandoned, even if they weren't. And then like I said, I felt like I had to start, like, looking after my sisters in a way, which I still feel to this day is like, completely unfair to do to an child. And so it'll be like, oh, I can't go to this birthday party this weekend. Because I have to watch my sister's at home while my mom is working."  
| Black girls having to figure out and make sense of their lives on their own.  
- “I was basically raised by a single mother, so it was kind of like, she was there, but she wasn't there. So I was kind of like figuring things out on my own. We would have conversations, but if she felt like I was good. She was like, okay, you know, or she felt like I was talking about stuff in school. She just wouldn't talk about it at all.”  

- Ayin  
- Ellie  
- Ash  
- Brooke
### Sexuality

Experimenting with self or others to define or enhance desirability and pleasure.

- “Stuff like that really heightens my sexuality, my sexuality for myself—just any type of self-care on the external body. I guess, I think that stems from externally not ever feeling desirable enough because of my leg. I won't let be the ability to like not flex my foot as much as I want to have stopped me from still buying the heels stepping out.” -Adele
- “I feel sexy in myself, I feel confident when I feel sexy, and knowing that others view me as sexy. Like, I'd say, I fit the mold of attractiveness so I tend to play into that a lot. But it's just like, I know that for so long. I was just very shy about it or not even allowed to explore what my sexuality was.” -Ayin

As an aspect of exploring sexuality, secrecy to cultivate a space in which they self-determine the ways they perform sexuality.

- “I’ve had to lie a lot and just sneak around this, like, hang out with boys. So they will be strict about me hanging out or just like, like, it was once by most of the time hanging out as a teenager you walking around the mall and that’s it, activities like that. Maybe like, but sex, I’m just my bra? No. We’re just always assuming like, sex was the only thing that mattered, or they were just like, boys just want sex. And it’s just like, why can’t you have faith in your daughter to weed out boys like that? And even if

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Hip-hop culture ideals of Black women as metric of beauty</th>
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<tr>
<td>• “I’m not the thickest thing walking, but like, I got legs, and I got hips and lips. Um, I know that I wear my natural hair more often than anything or like, do locs or something. So maybe like the quote-unquote, natural beauty in the black community. And like, the real feminine appeal, you know” -Ayin</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “I feel like we have to be done up at all times like we have to be, we have to be like, we have to be like, multi-faceted, right. And it’s like, you have to be able to talk about any and everything at any time, so that you can prove that you’re super smart. And then also, you have to be a bad bitch at the same time. And like, you can’t have any off days,” -Ellie</td>
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<tr>
<th>Hip-hop culture as a tool of sexual expression or affirmation</th>
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<td>• “I mean, her name is big mother. I listen to a lot of her music but there's one song that like really went up and she really talks about exploring like pushing not pushing by the limits of how we performs sex and everything else, but like, make really like opening people up or her listeners up to try new things. Like I like a man send a picture of his bottom to his, you know, woman. You know, a lot of people they have their conservative stakes or they see sex a very conservative thing. So With her doing stuff like that, okay you pushing limits, and she was like she dropped the straps</td>
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<td>Angst</td>
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boys want sex, how you know your daughter don’t want sex?” - Ayin

• “The thing about black girlhood and black girls in a way you know why people are like really fucking sneaky. Like, they don’t even like to tell their best friend that they like did some sneaky shit. They’re very like, hush I’m a cry about it to my mom, if I get pregnant and give an abortion and like, it’s very, like black girls. I feel like you had accomplices, you had to get together. We were trying out things together, and in some ways that was really dangerous for me because it looks like assault. It looks like molestation. But with friends. We were like, experimenting together. And like I think I had an open mind because that was stimulating. It was figuring that shit out was very, like my mom didn’t tell me stories and things like that.” - Carla

on them and all of that. Okay, you know like this is a this is a representation of black woman's sexuality and everything goes in a different way there's not usually you know, pushed out.” - Sarah

• “The language, the sort of slick talk and shit-talking and also like sex. I thought it was like, even for like the men. It's very sexy. It's very, like flirty, in ways that like in other regions, they're not like that. It's not as slick and it's not as like, sexy, even like, I know lil kim brought a sexiness to hip hop, like, that was great. But then it was like, you know, genre-defining for what she did. But there was a sexiness to like, a gangster boo from Memphis that felt it just felt like...It felt different. And I guess the like, nastiness of it was, I think they're like, it's really transitioning into my sexual performance. But that's what I think it was just a lot more, um, funky and like, nasty that I just like, really have fun with when I could have fun with it.” -Carla
always feeling like, I need to relax, I need to calm down, I need to not take things so seriously has just turned into the adult woman. That's when I'm speaking on an issue. It's really an issue, because I know I've sat on it and dissected the issue to make sure it's really an issue.” - Ayin

- “I remember multiple days coming in, and saying hi to people, but no one really speaking to me. Like, maybe until lunch, but a lot of the times all day, I literally would go the entire day without talking to people. And like teachers may call on me every once in a while, but like, they may not, you know, I remember writing because we had journals for literature, whatever that we would have to turn in, like, our daily whatever. And like, I remember writing about, how awful school was, never heard anything back. Mind you my teachers definitely reading this.”-Ellie

Blackgirls having deep feelings of anxiety when navigating and surviving isolating environments.

- “I used to do yoga in college and one of the other black girls in the class, she was bigger than me thicker than, she got sent home for her leggings, or she got kicked out of the class for her leggings. And there was literally nothing wrong with them, besides, the real racism is showing or your jealousy is showing, like, and I remember that. And I remember just not wouldn't listen to me if I spoke up in class. Or tried to speak up for myself, so it just kind of became like, I will say, I kind of did have like, a violent streak in high school. But that's definitely just because I know for so long, I was just like, it was pent up anger.” -Ayin

Blackgirls in spaces seeking acceptance from peers; however, they are isolated even when attempting to “fit in.”

- “I went to like a Christian school. And it was predominantly like white and I was the only like, black girl. So I would try to assimilate to what I really feel like girlhood is like, it's a universal time. But I feel like To me, it was completely different. Because the girls who look nothing like me will go through certain experiences. I didn't go through or bring up stuff at home that my parents would be like, well, "Black Girls don't do that. Or that's not like, black girl things. "When I was in sixth grade, I want to shave my legs. And my mom was like, "Black Girls don't shave your legs. That's not, that's not something black girls do." And I was like, they don't? And I begged so much to do it. And that was just like a huge thing to me. I was like, Oh, I'm being a woman to have shaved my legs. It would just be certain things I would try to be because most of my peers at school would do it.” -Barbara
saying anything because I wanted to survive.” -Adele
- “I'm just trying to survive. I'm just trying to get through today. I don't want to argue I don't want to do I just want to make it through the day...when I was definitely younger, I don't believe it was that it was mainly not wanting to have a conflict. yeah, I would say it was mainly that not wanting to be a conflict. Not really wanting, and I'm still the same way now. I don't like bothering people.” -Ellie

Using axial coding, themes and concepts emerged from data to characterize each theme's attributes or properties. The causes and conditions informing the themes further contextualized the data. Second cycle coding also illuminated the nuances of each theme and the ways they relate to each other. For example, living in a blackgirl body highlighted the external reckoning of blackgirls’ hypervisibility with thematic concepts of their experience with sexual surveillance, moral sexuality, and feelings of shame and anxiety. Black girlhood means describes the internal resistance and reflexivity practices centered in the care blackgirls extend to themselves with concepts of sensuality, healing, and resistance. Lastly, Blackgirl figuring it out characterized the visceral reaction to easing the internal care and external violence with the concepts of responsibilities, sexuality, and angst. Ultimately the themes explored how participants navigated the tension of being and living in a blackgirl body. The relationship amongst the themes are explored further in the discussion chapter below.

5 DISCUSSION

This study examined the possibilities of blackgirls to transgress power structures through the performance of sexuality to curate and name their girlhood experience. Utilizing semi-
structured interviews, photovoice, and focus groups amongst eight blackgirls ages 18-40 in the southern United States, I explored the overarching research questions of

1. In which ways do Black girls’ perform sexuality?
2. How is sexuality used by Black girls’ to create and transgress power?
3. What feelings of sexual surveillance emerge during Black girlhood?
4. How is Black girls’ performance of sexuality impacted by sexual surveillance?

Blackgirls performance of sexuality is an experience of exploration and secrecy to resist and grow. Sexuality creates and transgresses power through acts of agency to "figure out" their everyday lives. However, their performance of sexuality can include trauma, which makes care and healing central to blackgirls experience. Sexual surveillance is also a concurrent experience for blackgirls, producing feelings of angst from silencing and disciplining. Being sexually surveilled often translated to girls having anxiety and shame about the bodies they inhabited and the ways they explored sexuality. Sexual surveillance is demeaning, violent, and traumatic for some. Embracing sensuality and sexuality for blackgirls in their adulthood was an act of resistance and healing.

At the onset of this study, I assumed from my womanist and Black feminist politics and my experiences that blackgirls resisted sexual surveillance across home, community, and school environments. However, you cannot contain the experiences of blackgirls in the South to their performance of sexuality or instances of sexual surveillance. As my participants' stories, experiences, and lives came to life I realized that while this was a study examining the phenomenon of sexual surveillance, the constant amongst all participants was the hypervisibility of blackgirls and the care blackgirls extended to themselves.
Living in a blackgirl body is to be aware of your hypervisibility to everyone, everywhere, at any time. Being a blackgirl in your body also means you have a multi-dimensional experience at the crux of hetero-patriarchy, anti-black racism, and capitalism, which often renders your experience illegible to society (Cox, 2015). From a Black feminist perspective these systems inform Black women’s ontological experience grasping what it means to be through resistance and self-definition. These “structures of dominance” incessantly attempt to discipline blackgirls’ bodies within educational spaces (Morris, 2015). However, in this study, I sought to expand environments to examine the illegibility of blackgirls in the community, church, and home. In many ways, for some blackgirls, the home can represent a haven from hypervisibility or an intensified reifying experience of how their body is read in the world. The constant presence of care and hypervisibility of being and living as a blackgirl will be contextualized within the themes emerging from participants' experiences. Grounding the discussion will be the principles of Black feminist thought, specifically self-definition as the processes of “speaking for oneself and crafting one’s own agenda” (Collins, 2000, p.36). I also employ hip-hop feminism as a guiding framework and tool of expression for blackgirls in the 21st century, informing blackgirls’ epistemology. Within a phenomenological framework, I provide a textual description of the experience of the Black girlhood and the phenomenon of sexual surveillance. A structural description of the how and the where of these phenomena will characterize the sexual surveillance of Black girlhood.

*Living in a blackgirl body* describes the external influences and experiences of blackgirls inhabiting their bodies and the ways society reads them throughout various spaces, and how hip-hop acts as a representation of their sexuality. This theme explores the management of blackgirls’ bodies in society through sexual surveillance, concepts connecting morality and
sexuality, and the feelings of shame and anxiety emerging from these actions. All participants
described experiencing sexual surveillance themselves or witnessing the sexual surveillance of
other blackgirls. This phenomenon often occurred in social interactions with older Black women
or men who sexualized blackgirls. Adults’ belief in blackgirls hypersexual activity, or “being
fast,” informed most of the interactions that occurred in adolescent girlhood. The prompt for the
belief of “being fast” was interpreted by the participant as being guided by hip-hop’s
presentation of Black women’s and girls’s sexuality. As described by Ayin from her experience,
“I think that a lot of times, [hip-hop] made it hard to sexually express yourself, or even just, like
show interest in men, like girls really weren’t allowed to explore and stuff without being called a
hoe.” Barbara even stated that hip-hop encourages sexual surveillance given artists “over-
sexualized black girls I feel like they put it in a negative way” and only praise black women
“when it’s sexualizing stuff” and “puts us [Black-women] in a bad spot depending on whose
music it is.” Concepts of moral sexuality also influenced how blackgirls’ bodies were evaluated
based upon which moral, ethical, or religious parameters of appropriate sexuality were being
employed. Politics largely informed this aspect of respectability, linking being morally upright or
good with appearance and sexual activity. Moral sexuality grounded beliefs that supported
adults’ interactions with blackgirl participants, especially in church environments. The act of
sexual surveillance varied from random encounters of men making comments, preemptive
routines to avoid commentary, or explicit monitoring by others to manage appearance or activity
deeded sexual. The ways sexual surveillance occurs varied widely and depended on who was
performing the action and the social context. As described by participants, the prior sexual
surveillance of their bodies produced routines and self-monitoring to resist possible harassment
or commentary about their bodies. Barbara said,
It's been instances where I was like "Okay, let me cover up" because, you know, past occurrences, it's like, I'd rather cover up and don't want anything to come in, someone's like, mind or something. Like, I'm trying to send signals to them.

More direct actions described as “violent as hell” by Sarah occurred as her mother checked her underwear whenever she returned home to indicate whether Sarah had been sexually active. She stated,

I guess they draws check. That was like the worst. And that's like the one that sticks out the most. Like when you say sexual surveillance, that's the one I really like, think about…I was so disgusted. I just felt gross. I felt disgusting. I just felt really, really gross. It was a very, very degrading experience to have my mom do that. I even like, started to resent her after that it was violent as hell.

Some participants also recall sexual surveillance as acts of protection chiefly by women to protect them from men describing being told to no longer dance in a specific way or putting on clothes to cover their body. Regardless these interactions produced concurrent feelings of anxiety and shame given the perception of their body impacting participants' esteem and self-concept of themselves. Being hypervisible produced a consistent worry and anxiety about whether their body meets societal norms or would be sexualized. As described by Carla, it was often an inescapable hovering in daily interactions. As Carla described,

I would wake up and get dressed on Sunday morning and knowing that my mother wouldn't approve and have that sort of anxiety knowing that like my body… I was thick I was curvy. I was fat, whatever like at the time and so knowing that to white people it was invisible…but for black folks there was no hiding, the way that your like pants was ill-fitting or like a shirt.
For participants, the external experience of living in a blackgirl body is to be hypervisible and constantly negotiating how you occupy environments. This theme exemplifies the lack of care extended to blackgirls by adults. Sexual surveillance was a recurring, if not daily violence inflicted upon blackgirls. Some participants' experiences were more frequent and explicit, producing psychological and physical harm impacting their relationships with their bodies and others. In contrast, there is nuance and space for adults who surveilled blackgirls to consider how broader American societies perceive blackgirls. However, these actions were inflicted to be punitive and produce shame and anxiety to “correct” inappropriate behavior. Producing this theme is blackgirls navigation of their black girlhood, primarily during participants adolescents’ years and the ways their perceptions and projections shifted of what blackgirl bodies represent.

*Black girlhood means* focused upon blackgirls internal reflexivity and relationship with themselves and particularly their adolescent girlhood experience. Care functioned in this theme as a form of healing, resistance, and sensuality. *Black girlhood means* references specific practices by participants that act as an inner dialogue and everyday practice of caring for themselves. Participants' resistance to societal norms exercised Black feminist principles of defining their lives and processes of healing for themselves. Hip-hop feminists also related to this theme as resistance to norms of girlhood often grounded in whiteness and patriarchy. Hip-hop culture redefined and modeled the standards of what it meant to be a girl specifically for blackgirls in the southern United States. Blackgirls are dynamic and resist any norms limiting their potential and expression. As stated by Ash, “You know, [Black girls] are multifaceted. We don’t have to stick to like the one box.” While informed by affirmations, this resistance also included acknowledgment of the struggles emerging from blackgirls intersectional lives. As Ayin explained,
I think being a black woman, you always have something working against you because if it’s not being black, it’s being a woman in the patriarchy. And it is not being a woman, it’s being black in a white society. But I also think that being a black woman is kind of just being already better than everyone else, because you’re so used to having to be 10 times as good to just be considered.

Participants also expressed extending care to themselves through reading Black feminist literature and seeking therapy. This care was a part of their process to heal form their adolescent girlhood experience for many participants. An example below is Ellie’s reflection on the bullying and isolation she experienced while attending a majority white catholic school. Ellie described,

In a way that I’ve never trusted myself. I’ve always had like, some type of “Oh, this might not, I don’t know I feel a little nervous. This might not be the right thing to do.”

And like, second guessing and self-doubting myself, when really like, I know the answer. I know what I plan. I know, I know how to do this. I know how to improvise. If I get it wrong, you know, it’s okay, if I do get it wrong, and really like forgiving myself along the way for like, the things that I did or did not say when I was younger. In trying to just take things day by day.

This reflexivity and act of healing also was present with the participant Carla’s rumination on the tension she has in the relationship with her body, even citing feeling disconnected given multiple anxieties and traumas occurring in her girlhood.

I’m finding now at 22, trying to find new ways of like, connecting with it. It’s really like a lack of confidence. It’s more like a lack of esteem. You can be so tough is like, you know, be as tough as you want. And sometimes that shit is like, I really can’t power through this, I really can’t like have heart and hold my head up and just I can’t. I really
can’t just roll with the punches here. I think I would rather my softness now not be for survival and it’d be more like an aesthetic.

Through participants’ stories, I realized a distinction in language and intention when using sensuality versus sexuality. Despite the conflation of sensuality and sexuality in the question structure and framing, many participants distinguished between sensuality and sexuality. Both sexuality and sensuality revolve around concepts of pleasure and self. However, sexuality had a focus on corporeality, and the interpretation of a spectator, be that in occurrences of sexual surveillance or the act of sex itself. In contrast to sexuality, sensuality involved a “contained, inward, not at all performed for the spectator” practice (Nash, 2014, p.51). Given this, sensuality was distinct for participants and related to the ways they cared for their body and self spiritually and emotionally. These practices include simple things such as yoga, getting their nails polished, buying lace pajamas, all in support of maturing and developing a healthy relationship with their bodies. As described by Adele, sensuality can involve beauty practices for the external body. However, the central tenet is a feeling of affirmation and care to express blackgirls’ self-definition of themselves and their girlhood experience.

Just any type of self-care on the external body. I guess, I think that stems from externally not ever feeling desirable enough because of my leg. So now that I’m like more into it, it’s like, Okay, I will take the time to get my nails done, I will take the time to get my toes done. And I’m still buying heels. Because I won’t let be the ability to like not flex my foot as much as I want to have stopped me from still buying the heels stepping out.

- Adele

Structurally Black girlhood means… is grounded within blackgirls relationship to themselves, chiefly their bodies. This theme consists of acts of love, healing, and care amidst the over-
sexualization and adultification many blackgirls experience in adolescence. At the core, this theme exemplifies the agency and self-determination of blackgirls to curate their girlhood experience through practices of healing and care despite the challenges societal structures may present.

The final theme *Blackgirl figuring it out*...explores the ways blackgirls mitigated the ways the world externally read their bodies and the violence they experienced with the practices and reflexivity to care for themselves internally. In many ways, this theme embodied the participants' attempt to balance societal projections of blackgirls’ sexuality and adultification with their everyday experiences learning and defining their girlhood. For some participants, hip-hop acted as a tool to make sense of their lives.

All participants described having expectations to be responsible to care for themselves, family members, or their community during their adolescence. For some, they were given this responsibility given changes in a family dynamic; as Brooke describes, “I felt like I had to start, like, looking after my sisters in a way, which I still feel to this day is like, completely unfair to do to any child,” which resulted in reflection Brooke feels “like I started to miss out on a childhood” given these new responsibilities. For others like Carla, her girlhood “starts and stops as soon as I hit puberty” because “people put a lot of responsibility and a lot of expectations” in “tough love situations” with teachers and adults. Similarly, Ellie details, “I was basically raised by a single mother, so it was kind of like, she was there, but she wasn't there. So I was kind of like figuring things out on my own.” Given this, Ellie had to advocate for herself at school to adults regarding the bullying she experienced, resulting in her “doing a lot more than I should have for my age as far as overcompensating for adults.” Ash also describes having responsibilities as the first daughter in her Nigerian family “to be mature and to give advice and
just follow the lead or the footsteps of your mother.” Managing the responsibilities of an adult while growing into a blackgirl body limited participants' childhood and left many feeling isolated and having to “figure out” many aspects of adulthood, Black womanhood, and sexuality by themselves. As Ayin expresses, “I feel that with my girlhood experience, it was definitely I got to figure a lot out on my own. I don't really remember having a full birds and the bees talk.”

Feelings of angst existed for blackgirl participants as a result of not being heard from adults. In the rare situations where the blackgirls were able to voice their feelings, their feelings were invalidated or discredited. Expanding the concurrent relationship amongst Black girlhood hypervisibility and care, this particular aspect illustrates the strain of being simultaneously hypervisible for discipline but invisible for the necessary care blackgirls require. This angst, while being an anxiety, also emerged as anger in Ayin’s words.

People really wouldn't listen to me if I spoke up in class. Or tried to speak up for myself, so it just kind of became like, I will say, I kind of did have like, a violent streak in high school. But that's definitely just because I know for so long, I was just like, it was pent up anger.

This angst existed primarily in the home and school environments with adults “not listening” or extending care to advocate for the blackgirls during adolescence. Participants, Brooke, Barbara, Adele, Carla, and Ellie felt isolated from being “othered” at schools being the only Black girls or bullying by peers and teachers. As Carla recounts

A lot of it was humiliating and... it was a lot of me, finding myself speaking up for myself, in situations with adults that I had to, like, it just felt like they were mean, and I had to stick up for myself and defend myself….it was rough…It's a very careless way that [teachers] handle you and they don't handle you warmly. So they're raising their
voice, and it's very harsh. I think as a black child, you were expected to just know better all the time. It was a lot of just rolling with the punches.

Despite feeling the angst as children, the blackgirls in ways, “made themselves small” to survive the environments. For some, it was an appearance of softness and being “classy,” and it was avoiding conflict for others. As Ellie expresses often, she was “just trying to survive. I'm just trying to get through today.” As Barbara describes at her predominantly white Christian school, “I would try to assimilate to what I really feel like girlhood…Because the girls who look nothing like me will go through certain experiences I didn't go through.”

For blackgirls having to “figure out” their lives at the center of gender, racial, and class oppressions also translated in the ways blackgirls learned their bodies and experimented with sexuality. For most participants hip-hop culture roots in urban Black communities structured the metric of beauty and desirability. These metrics of beauty applied standards that were unrealistic, as Ellie states having “to be done up at all times, we have to be like, multi-faceted…to be a bad bitch at the same time. And like, you can’t have any off days.” Hip-hop also represented a tool of affirmation as Sarah details the music of rapper Big Mutha “pushing the limits of how we perform sex” and queering the narrative of Black women’s sexuality. Hip-hop lyrics also inform how Carla understood sexiness as something “funky and like, nasty that I just like, really have fun with.”

Sexuality for participants was a space of desirability, pleasure, and secrecy for some. As Barbara describes, “…it's something that I've never been able to experiment with until, recently, I got really comfortable with it, it's just fun. I just enjoy it. It's just like, experimenting with different clothes or just how you put yourself out there.” The secrecy of sexuality primarily developed from not having discussions about sex in the home resulting in having “to lie a lot and
just sneak around [to] hang out with boys.” Particularly for queer descriptive and bi-sexual participants, their sexual orientation and activities were understandably kept private from friends and family. Raised in the Baptist church, Adele sought to maintain the image of “good girl behavior, professional and appropriate to others.” Likewise, Ellie avoids telling men she casually dates given “they just sexualize it. I don’t even want to go down that path.” Sexuality while a space of fun and experimentation, can hold traumatic experiences for some, it is vital to uplift the possibility of both experiences with blackgirls’ sexuality.

*Blackgirl figuring it out* structurally describes the act of blackgirls mitigating and making sense of the tension of their internal self and external realities at the crux of multiple oppressions. This process attempts to balance the invisibility and hypervisibility of Black girlhood. It also prompts blackgirls to be their own champions and advocate for their protection, care, and survival. Blackgirls enact a sense of resilience, agency, and self-determination to adapt and survive their environments. However, society must consider accountability for the adults who fail to handle the blackgirls warmly.

### 5.1 Implications for Black Studies

This study sought to examine the possibilities for Black girlhood to transgress power structures through their performance of sexuality to name and curate their girlhood in their image. Critically this research intervenes and expands Black studies literature on the lives of Black women and girls. Going beyond analyzing Black girlhood as a singular experience, this study nuanced conversations by incorporating a hip-hop feminist orientation to discuss sexuality, care, and the visibility of blackgirls in the home, community, church, and schools. This work is deeply grateful and informed by the legacy of Jennifer Nash, Hortense Spillers, and Janell Hobson that expand and nuance the representation of Black femme bodies. The numerous
narratives of Black girlhood by scholars such as Ntozake Shange, Ruth Nicole Brown, Chamara Kwakye, and Monique Morris delicately tend to the lives and experiences of blackgirls with care and intention. While focusing on the phenomenon of sexual surveillance, this study does not intend to amplify the trauma Black girls can experience. Instead, this research provides insight and nuance to Black girlhood literature examining sexuality, responsibilities, and healing to reflect how communally and academically researchers can extend care to the blackgirls who still live in many adult Black women and femmes.

5.2 Limitations of the Study
Methodologically, phenomenology examines highly subjective experiences; therefore, data is not generalizable to a wider population. Data collection for this research occurred nearly a year after the national quarantine for the COVID-19 pandemic; given this, all participants could have been experiencing additional distress. The study interviewed eight blackgirls living in the south; therefore, the sample size and geographic specificity results are not generalizable. A majority of participants are born and raised in the state of Georgia, with only two participants located in the Southwest. Half of the participants reported as queer or bi-sexual, however, despite the complex ways in which gender exists within Black girlhood, only blackgirls identifying as cis-women are represented in this data. All participants also graduated with or are in the process of completing bachelor’s degrees.

5.3 Summary
The purpose of this study was to explore the ways blackgirls name and curate their girlhood, as well as inhabit and perform their sexuality. The research questions directing this study include:

1. In which ways do Black girls’ perform sexuality?
2. How is sexuality used by Black girls’ to create and transgress power?
3. What feelings of sexual surveillance emerge during Black girlhood?
4. How is Black girls’ performance of sexuality impacted by sexual surveillance?

Blackgirls navigate the line of hypervisibility and illegibility in society. They often encounter a structure of dominance within educational and community experiences not given the necessary care or grace of childhood. Despite the violence, blackgirls self-defined and cultivated their girlhood experience, even healing from their girlhood. It was a process, an act not to be read by society but to be defined by themselves. It was an act of agency and autonomy to self-determine how they showed up across spaces, explored girlhood and sexuality. Their self-definition resisted society’s anti-black, hetero-patriarchy, and capitalist labeling of their bodies. The blackgirl participants directed their own narratives to express their Black girl epistemology to produce black girl subjectivities in many ways. Memory interacted and lived with the participants in interesting ways, which I am describing as slippage. Despite not all participants currently identifying as blackgirls, specific repressed memories of adolescent girlhood were triggered and reflected upon across multiple interviews. This same slippage of memory from the past to the present also represents their adolescent experience slipping between adult responsibilities throughout their developmental stages as children. My hope for the memories blackgirls live with is to create healing through their reflections and extend care and grace to themselves.

While this research focused primarily on sexual surveillance, I believe there are numerous opportunities to expand various dialogue on the experience of blackgirls in the south. Future research that can recruit and nuance participants' gender demographic could present insightful perspectives for gender non-conforming folx identifying with the Black girlhood experience. Furthermore, researchers specifically interested in sexual surveillance could benefit
from clinical training to enhance the formatting of questions such as Narrative centered therapeutical practices. Work to center expands the ways care exist for blackgirls could also provide insight. Interestingly many participants' feelings of hypervisibility and lack of care were inflicted by Black women adults; it would be insightful to learn the intention and rationale of the Black women for the practice of sexual surveillance. Assuming that politics of respectability inform a majority of their perspective, I am curious about any reflections they may have given the findings and harmful impact upon blackgirls.

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APPENDICES

Appendix: A

The Sexual Surveillance of Black Girlhood: How do blackgirls inhabit their bodies

Informed Consent Document

You are being asked to take part in a research study. It is called The Sexual Surveillance of Black Girlhood: How do blackgirls inhabit their bodies. The Principal Investigator is Dr. Lia Bascomb. The Student Principal Investigator is Aliyah Winfrey.

1. Introduction and Key Information

You are invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in the study. The purpose of this study is to learn about Black girls' experience with sexuality and sexual surveillance. Your role in the study will last in total for three hours. There are three parts to this study. This study includes an interview, a photography activity, and a focus group discussion. You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the student PI. The student PI will ask you questions about your experience with sexuality, Black girlhood, and sexual surveillance. This portion will be an hour and fifteen minutes long. Then the student PI will request that participants take photos. The photos will describe their experience as a Black girl with sexuality or their feelings of sexual surveillance. This portion should take no more than thirty minutes. Individuals will be requested to participate in a focus group activity. The photos taken by all participants will be discussed and displayed in a group setting. This portion will be an hour and fifteen minutes long. Participating in this study will not expose you to any more risks than you would experience in a typical day. The study is may or may not benefit you. Overall, we hope to gain information about how self-identified Black girls understand their bodies and sexuality.
2. Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn more about Black girls' sexual experiences and any feelings of sexual surveillance. You are being asked to be in this study because you are a Black individual between the ages of 18 to 40. You are a self-identify as a girl or relate to the girlhood experience. You have experienced sexual surveillance and are a fan/consumer of hip-hop culture. A total of 8 people will be a part of this study. The study will take place via the online platform Zoom.

3. Study Procedures

If you choose to participate, there are three parts to this study. The first part is an interview. The student PI will ask you about your experience as a Black girl with your sexuality. She will ask what you think about your girlhood, sexual expressions, and feelings of sexual surveillance. The interview with participants will be for an hour and fifteen minutes. If you agree to participate in this study, all interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

For the second part, participants will be asked to take photos. You will have one week from the date of your interview to email photos to the student PI, Aliyah Winfrey. The picture-taking portion should take no more than thirty minutes. The pictures you email should not include identifying information such as faces or names of yourself or others. You will take a total of three pictures. The pictures will describe your experience with what it feels like to be sexually monitored as a Black girl. There should be a title and a brief caption for each photo. The photos will be published as a part of this project.

The third part of this study is a group discussion. Following interviews and the photo-taking activity, a focus group will occur to discuss photos taken by participants. The purpose of the focus group activity is to discuss common themes and experiences among participants. There
will be two focus group sessions hosted with six slots available each session. The participants will choose one session to attend that best fits their schedule. Each session will be an hour and a half long. During the activity, photos and titles created by participants will be displayed. The student PI will invite participants to offer their interpretations. The student PI will choose the most flexible day/time for all participants.

4. Benefits and Risk

This study may or may not benefit you personally. However, the study will benefit research on improving the lives of Black girls. There are no more risks in the study than in a normal day of life, however, the questions you will be asked are personal, and you may feel stressed. If you are uncomfortable at any time, we can skip questions or stop participation in the interview, Photovoice, or focus group discussion at any time. A mental health resource guide will be shared with participants.

5. Compensation

Participants will receive $15 electronic gift card for participating in this study (interview, Photovoice, and focus group). Compensation will be provided per task, $5 for single interview, $5 for photovoice activity, and $5 for participation in the focus group discussion.

6. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Being in this study is up to you. You do not have to be in this study. The alternative is not to take part in the study. If you want to be in the study and change your mind later, you have the right to drop out at any time. No matter what you do, you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

7. Confidentiality
The only people who will see these records are the PIs, GSU Institutional Review Board, and Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). Data will be stored on the Student PI's double password-protected computer for up to three years after the study’s completion. This data will be stored on a separate external hard drive. When the Student PI presents or publishes this study's results, she will not use your name or other information that may identify you. No video will be recorded during this study. Participants will also be advised to alter Zoom names or pictures before the focus group session if they wish to maintain complete anonymity.

8. Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, feel free to contact Aliyah Winfrey at awinfrey1@student.gsu.edu or 678-871-9173. The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

You will receive an electronic copy of this consent form to keep.

It is up to you to choose if you want to take part in this study. Do you agree to participate in this study (if yes, please click the box below)?

☐

Please sign your full name, and date below.

X
Appendix B: Flyer

RESEARCH STUDY ON BLACK GIRLHOOD AND SEXUAL SURVEILLANCE

YOUR ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN A 3-PART STUDY!
BLACK GIRLHOOD AND SEXUAL SURVEILLANCE

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how self-identified Black girls experience their sexuality and the feelings of sexual surveillance or monitoring.

TO PARTICIPATE, YOU MUST...

- be of African descent.
- Identify as a Black girl (genders including women, femme, non-binary, or folks of marginalized gender).
- Be aged 18 to 40.
- Have experienced girlhood and feelings of sexual surveillance/monitoring.
- Have lived in the Southern U.S. for over 10 years.
- Identify as a consumer or fan of hip-hop culture.

3-PART RESEARCH STUDY

You can receive a total of $15 or $5 per participation in each activity in the 3-parts of the study. A total of 8 participants will be involved, and the study will be held online via zoom.

- **Phase 1** involves a one-on-one interview for 1 hour and fifteen minutes
- **Phase 2** includes a Photovoice or photography activity taking 30 minutes
- **Phase 3** consists of a Focus Group with other participants for 1 hour and fifteen minutes

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED

All information will remain confidential. If you would like to participate or have any questions, please contact the student principal investigator Aliyah Winfrey at 678-871-9173 or awinfrey1@student.gsu.edu.

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Appendix C: Demographic Form

Please answer the following demographic questions by typing in the necessary information.

Your Chosen Interview Pseudonym ______________
1. Do you identify as Black or of African Descent? Yes, or No
   a. What nationality do you identify as (i.e African American, Nigerian)?
      __________________________
2. What is your age? _________
3. What is your gender identity? _________
4. What are your preferred pronouns? _________
5. What is your sexual orientation? ________________
6. What is the zip code of your home address? ________
7. Do you identify as a fan or consumer of hip-hop culture or music? _________
   a. Do you listen to hip-hop music? If so how often would describe (daily, weekly, monthly)? _________
   b. Please list the ways you participate in hip-hop culture (dancing, rapping, singing, linguistics, beatmaking/producing, MCing)? Responses are not limited to examples given. __________________________
8. How would you describe your community (urban/city, suburb, rural)? ________________
9. What is your level of education? ________________
10. Any other information that you would like to include?

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Research Questions:

1. In which ways do Black girls' perform sexuality?
2. How is sexuality used by Black girls' to create and transgress power?
3. What feelings of sexual surveillance emerge during Black girlhood?
4. How is Black girls' performance of sexuality impacted by sexual surveillance?

Interview Guide:

Girlhood
1. Can you tell me about your girlhood?

2. How would you describe your girlhood experience being in the southern U.S?

3. What does being a Black girl mean to you at the intersection of race and gender?

4. How does your Black girlhood as a youth impact your life now?

5. In which ways does/did hip-hop culture impact your girlhood?

**Sexual Performance**

1. Can you tell me about your sexuality/sensuality?

2. How do you feel about your body?

3. What makes you feel sexual/sensual, and how do you express that feeling?

4. In which ways do you see Black women's sexuality represented in hip-hop?

5. What impact does hip-hop culture/music have on your sexuality?

**Sexual Surveillance**

1. Does the definition of sexual surveillance resonate with your experience?

2. What is the first instance of sexual surveillance that you can recall? How did it make you feel?

3. Did you feel differently about your body in various spaces and around certain people i.e. at home, with friends, at work, place of worship?

4. Does the monitoring of your body impact your perception of yourself?

5. How does hip-hop relate to your feelings of sexual surveillance?

**Individual Agency/ Resistance**

1. Does your sexuality make you feel powerful, if so why?

2. Do you resist sexual surveillance, if so then how and does it make you feel?

3. How do you think your sexuality is perceived?

4. In which ways do you affirm your sexuality?

5. Do you think hip-hop culture affirms your sexual expressions? If so in what ways?

**Appendix E: Focus Group Guide**

**Photovoice Activity Questions:**
1. In which ways do you perform sexuality?

2. What feelings of sexual surveillance do you relate to your Black girlhood?

3. How does hip-hop culture make you feel about your sexuality?

**Interview Guide:**

S: What do you see?

H: What is happening in the picture?

O: How does this relate to our lives?

W: Why does this happen?

E: How could this image educate others?

D: What can we do about it?

**Appendix F: Photovoice Guide**

For this activity, you will take three photos (one for each question) responding to the questions below. While as a guide, three photos are required for this activity. However, you can submit more if you would like. Please title and caption each photo (no more than three sentences) describing the image. The pictures you take should not include any self-identifying information such as faces or names of yourself or others.

Photography should respond to each question below:

4. In which ways do you perform sexuality?

5. What feelings of sexual surveillance do you relate to your Black girlhood?

6. How does hip-hop culture make you feel about your sexuality?
1. “Hair Love”

the ways in which I perform sexuality would be by having self care says. Whenever I get my hair done, I feel very sensual and at peace because I am taking care of myself.
2. “Sibling Security”

this photo induces feelings of sexual surveillance in my childhood because I was always surrounded by boys. Their critique and comments on women either made me feel guarded, under a microscope or protected. Being closely attached with my brother made me more self-conscious and aware about my autonomy.
3. “Welcome to Atlanta”

hip hop culture makes me feel confident and happy about my sexuality. The picture is of me outside of Mercedes Benz stadium because it’s a place where I have attended to go to Hip of Hop concerts for my favorite artists and felt I could be completely free. I feel a sense of realness and joy whenever I listen to hip hop music.

Ayin
1. “Illusion”

I perform sexuality by showing everything but nothing at all. Sexual activities make me feel mysterious, but so visible at the same time.
2. “Heightened”

The influx of female/lgbtq rappers in Hip-hop culture makes me feel honest and comfortable in my sexuality. I can embrace my sexuality in new ways instead of being ashamed of it.
3. “In Plain Sight”

My parents quickly found themselves in anything labeled 'diary or journal' I began to make my diary look like regular school folders so they would assume I no longer wrote.

Brooke
1. “Intimacy with self”

I perform sexuality with my partner and with myself in many ways. Over the years, expressing sexuality for and with myself has become more important to me as I am exploring this part of my being and health. Yoga has been a transformative practice that has allowed me to connect with my body and spirit in ways I was never taught. Yoga makes me feel unburdened, light, free, in touch, feminine, and in love with myself. It makes me confront and take care of myself.
2. “The Color of Girlhood”

_The Color of Girlhood_: Words that come to mind when I think of sexual surveillance that permeates in the Black community, particularly in the South are "fast," "innocent," "virtuous," and "chaste." Although these words were not really used to describe me (to my knowledge), they were part of the vocabulary of some people around me in both girlhood and adulthood. People are eager to label or demonize Black girls for exploring love, lust, infatuation, and sexuality. I chose this photo because the white dress and flowers remind me of every special occasion or event I was apart of or witnessed from girlhood until now. Girls are always dressed in white and given red flowers. White is the color of "purity"...see religious ceremonies, religious school graduations, debutante balls, weddings, baptisms, christenings, i.e.
3. “Covered”

This picture is from a night out I had with a friend about 4 years ago. We were spending the night out at a Buckhead bar then hanging out with a music producer and his friend. The friend I had gone out with embraced her sexuality and body. Many of the friends I went to clubs and lounges with did/do. I noticed that I was always 1 of 2 people who would wear dark colors and cover up more, opting for less "sexy" outfits. I realized that I hated the even more aggressive attention it brought me from men who frequent these places which is how I feel about hip hop. The overwhelming majority of male rappers have nothing but demeaning things to promote about Black women's sexuality. The female rappers that have gained popularity over the past few years have reclaimed Black women's sexuality through their music. It can be empowering at times, but I still question why it ties so much of a woman's value into her sexuality and emphasizes dominance over men and women (i.e. competition).

Elle
1. “Moving with the Sun”

like these plants I’m constantly learning and growing into my sexuality and what that means to me.
2. “Path less traveled”

looking back and even sometimes now, in my girlhood, I could always remember multiple points of feeling alone. But that isolation meant that I had to figure out a lot on my own. Trying to figure out my body changes. Like it’s just me feeling this way or gone through this. Like it’s just me trying to figure out this life thing.
3. “Distorted Views”

*I feel like hip hop culture makes things blurry. Like the perception that everything and everyone is perfect and peachy with their perfect lives and bodies. That once you figure out your sexuality that everything else around you will fall in line. When really it’s all complex and intricate and can never be tied in a bow.*

Sarah
1. “Rest”

not much thinking, mostly doing.
2. “Anxious”

washing them on hand to hide it. whatever that meant

3. “Outside”

Confident enough to express myself, adding not lessening
Barbara
1. “Embracing Me”

To perform my sexuality I enjoy dressing in clothing that accentuates my assets. With that, another why I perform my sexuality (not in a physical manner), is to grow in my Black womanhood. I do this by constantly reading works by Black female authors, who stress the beauty of Black features.

2. “Culture and Dress Code”
When my sexuality is being surveillance, I feel insecure and inferior. I feel as if I am acting in an egregious manner to the outside world.
3. “Main Female Protagonist”
When asked this question Nicki Minaj’s song Chun Li instantly came to mind. I feel a sense of empowerment, control, and strength. It allows me to embrace myself and explore my sexuality and expression.

Adele

1. “untitled”

This one photo is compiled with items from my old bedroom I grew up in so every item is representative of what we discussed. I included my cast that I wore at 6 months old (that pretty much determined the remainder of my girlhood in life, period), as well as some panties with some white smears that I made the smears with flour. I wanted to blurr the underwear part where the white is but I have no fancy tech to be able to do it. And last but not least is the music and literature that helped me feel represented during my time growing up.
1. “STAINED”

I’m remembering taking a photo in the church restroom—a mirror picture with my middle finger on display—and church mentors became aware of it (someone snitched!). I didn’t even realize how taboo it would be to flip off the camera while photographed in the church facility. Even in intimate spaces, other’s morality and disposition always crept through.
2. “ONLOOKING”

Cultural staples are to tell us about the things we share, inherit, embrace. These photos translate homegoing, beauty, baptism as a fixture in life and community. Seeing them on the wall, told me as a young girl that they knew so much about me than what I could tell. They came down, we moved homes, and they remain with us.
3. “CONCEAL”

Makeup was everything to conveying and presenting myself to the world, as well as, learning about the colors and looks that suit me. I did not think much about my sexual performance, but for all the ways wearing makeup as young as the fifth grade said as much on the matter, it was too advanced.