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# A METHODOLOGY FOR BLACK GEOGRAPHIES

By

KARLYN HARRIS

Under the Direction of Katherine Hankins, Ph.D.

## ABSTRACT

This methodology was created to investigate the relationship between Black spatial imaginaries and Black identities to explore the impact of these imaginaries on place-making in Atlanta, Georgia. I utilize a number of frameworks that center Blackness, humanness, and critical race studies in order to collect qualitative data that privileges space alongside the lived experiences of the participants. In this paper, I make a case for the consideration and development of new methodologies that center Blackness within the context of a Black geographic frameworks and study around cultivating empathy and vulnerability, emplacement, and understanding tensions and negotiations between Blackness and sense of place. The centering of Blackness in this methodology is emphasized in order to dismantle the white spatial gaze and white supremacist practices that often occur within research methodologies where the participants are not white.

INDEX WORDS: Race, Blackness, Middle-classness, Intersectionality, Millennials, Atlanta,  
Methodology, Mobility, Interview, Humanistic geography

A METHODOLOGY FOR BLACK GEOGRAPHIES

by

KARLYN HARRIS

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

Master of Science

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2019

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2019

A METHODOLOGY FOR BLACK GEOGRAPHIES

by

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May 2019

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to my parents, Michelle Brown and Terry Harris, who have always encouraged my unique individual expression and way of thinking. I am eternally grateful for how they nurtured my curiosity as a child, patiently answering most of my questions, as I inquired incessantly about the world around me. Mama, I made it! Happy Mother's Day 2019. To my friends who have continually provided me safe spaces to verbally process new ideas: thank you for your willingness and patience to ask questions and learn with me, even when you weren't always sure of what I was talking. Special thanks to my best and closest friends: Tamirah, Desmond, Suzanne, Jessie, and Holly—you all have given me a shoulder to cry on, you fortify me when self-doubt clouds my vision, and remind me of my purpose. And to my partner, Reyhahn, thank you for your never-ending love, affirmation, and support. I dedicate this also to my Renovation Church family, many of who reminded me to rest and made sure I ate when I was too busy or too broke. Thank you all for your prayers, generosity, and hospitality. I want to honor my grandparents: Texas and Eva Harris and George and Leotine Brown. You have been my biggest cheerleaders in both presence and spirit and a constant reminder of the cloth from which I have been cut. Because of you, I am a strong, persevering, and intelligent Black woman. Your support, even when you were confused or disagreed with my decisions, gave me space and the freedom to endure the process of learning how and who I want to become. Your boldness to stand on your beliefs has afforded me the opportunity and the agency to take a stand for mine.

Finally, I would like to thank God for breathing newness into my being every day, for wisdom and comfort, and for giving me a sense of purpose. Thank You, Jesus, for always fighting on the side of the marginalized, concealed, displaced, and forgotten. It is through this project that I've grown to appreciate You giving me Your heart for justice and equity.

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Finally, thank you to my colleagues and friends, in and proximate to my program, who have advised me and shared literature recommendations, thoughts, critiques, and encouragement of my ideas and of my work. Special thanks to my friend, Angie Luvarra, for her listening ear and her always-sound advice in self-care reminders and helping me navigate how to maintain a sense of self and place in academia.



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

*“The material landscape itself, as it is produced by the Black subject and mapped as unimaginably Black, must be rewritten into Black, and arguably human, existence on different terms... First, by recognizing the ways in which the social production of space is inextricably tied up with the differential placement of racial bodies. And second, through signaling a different sense of place, one which does not exactly duplicate the traditional features of geographic ownership that we seem to value so much.”*

Katherine McKittrick, 2006:5

Scholars of Black geographies activate conversations around the ways and practices that Blackness is experienced, negotiated, and shaped in and through space and place, with the foreknowledge that these landscapes are “shaped by the histories of colonialism, transatlantic slavery, contemporary practices of racism, and resistances to white supremacy” (McKittrick, 2011: vi). Black geographies are characterized as being alterable, transnational, dialogical, materially (or economically) related to racial capitalism<sup>1</sup>, and they accentuate Black people and Black culture (McKittrick, 2006; Robinson, 1983; Woods, 1998; Buroway, 1998; McKittrick, Ed., 2015). These characteristics challenge ontologies and epistemologies of Eurocentric, ahistorical, and white supremacist ways of learning, teaching, and creating new knowledges, without pathologizing both Blackness and how it is operationalized within spatial processes (McKittrick, 2006; McKittrick and Woods, 2007; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002; Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, 2008). The question remains on the necessity to create and alter methodologies in a way that aligns with the overall foci of Black geographic research and its ability to challenge data collected by way of a white normative gaze and/or white supremacist epistemologies. In the research that has inspired the formation of this Black geographical methodology, I seek to build

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<sup>1</sup> In *Black Marxism* (1983), Cedric Robinson describes the inextricable link between racism and capitalism predicated on the American racial caste system. Knowing this, it is crucial that scholars root Black studies within the historical grounding that contextualizes Blackness within capitalism's class hierarchical structuring along the spectrum of Blackness, the nuance of class, and the contours of Black-classness across time and place.

grounded theory by discovering the lesser-known epistemologies nestled within the counter-narratives<sup>2</sup> of my research participants, in order to best examine the relationship between Black millennial intersectional identities<sup>3</sup> and their spatial practices and behaviors. If “Black matters are spatial matters” (McKittrick, 2006: vi), I situate this line of inquiry around Atlanta’s rapidly-changing racial, political, and urban landscape, drawing upon my own cultural intuition and sensitivity (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001:12) as a Black, college-educated, childless millennial living in Atlanta for a decade. In order to answer this question, I make a case for a Black geographical methodology as a means to understand 1) the relational nature of Blackness and space as pertinent to understanding the ways in which Black millennials engage in the production of space, 2) how Black spaces are produced within a changing socio-spatial landscape, and 3) how we can imagine Black spatial futures that are not limited to urbanity, but related to it. This paper is not about the findings of the research but rather a contribution to methodologies in Black geographies that center Blackness and the role of Blacknesses<sup>4</sup> in navigating, interpreting, and participating in the contestation of space, while disrupting white interpretations of America’s racialized landscape. Applying a methodology specifically developed with Black geographies in mind has a unique potential to contribute greatly to the process of understanding the ways that Black folks are creating, maintaining, or altering the physical and conceptual places in which they live.

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<sup>2</sup> Solórzano and Yosso (2002) describe counter-narratives as a form of resistance within a critical race methodological context—a means of challenging a monolithic, more well-known narrative by sharing the stories that have either been concealed, erased, or not yet told (32).

<sup>3</sup> “Intersectionality,” coined by Black feminist and antiracist political scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, is an anti-discrimination framework used to deconstruct oppression and de-marginalize the intersections of race, sexuality, disability, class—with the particular understanding that intersections are additive, which can leave an abundance of untilled ground for future studies and innovative methodological applications (Crenshaw, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> I intentionally pluralize “Blacknesses” to emphasize the varying, yet collective identities that exist with Black expression.

Geographers have utilized the term, “place-making,”<sup>5</sup> for decades and describe it as a process which involves enacting, performing, engaging in practices that shape how people experience and relate to place. It is imperative to articulate place-making practices across identity intersections, thus inspiring methodologies devoted to examining Black geographies. If spaces consist of multiple and varying socio-cultural spheres (Fraser, 1990), it is vital for scholars to move beyond scholarship based on a white “sense of place,” or in other words, a white valuation and interpretation of space, that dominates some socio-spatial theories and renderings of spatial relationality and realities. An alterable, multi-spheric, and humanistic approach to studying Black geographies suggests that scholars explore the ways in which space and place are being altered and how Black folks are reforming and refining our interpretations of contemporary spatial theories, practices, and praxis within a Black geographic framework.

In this paper, I make a case for creating Black geographic methodologies based on one that I created in order to answer my research question. First, I explain the project that necessitated the need for a Black geographic methodology. Second, I examine how scholars have conceptualized the relationship between race and place, and how I developed this methodology. This will include key insights on which the entire methodology is founded, demonstrating how I crafted this methodology using a Black geographic framework as a praxis for humanistic geographical qualitative research. Finally, I conclude by describing my positionality in relation to the research, sharing personal insights that both informed and greatly impacted how I used this methodology for the data collection and analytic process.

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<sup>5</sup> Place-making is a term used to describe how a place is relational to multiple social actors and stakeholders, their intentionality around changing a place, and the results in the reshaping of a community socio-culturally, economically, politically, or environmentally (Hankins and Walter, 2012)

## 2 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH PROJECT

In my broader research project, the goal was to understand the ways in which a subset of Atlanta residents identify themselves within the collective Black and Atlantan place-identity narrative, as a means to understand the relational nature of Blackness, class, and place. If whiteness operates in and through space in dominating and particular ways, how then does Blackness operate in and through white and whitening contested landscapes, especially as the city of Atlanta experiences intensifying (and whitening) gentrification processes? In what follows, I elucidate the methodology I employed to answer the research question. With strong attention given to centering Black spatial narratives, it is glaringly clear that creating a methodology different from that which currently exists was critical to this project.

### 2.1 Frameworks for a Black Geography Methodology

*“Space is more abstract than ‘place.’ What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value...From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space and vice versa...Objects and places are centers of value. They attract or repel in finely shaded degrees.”*

Yu-Fi Tuan, 1977:6, 18

At the start of this paper, I outlined the importance of Black geographies, which undergirds my research and proposal for a Black geographic methodology that employs a series of frameworks and methods, with attention to reflexivity of the researcher. My approach draws from Black feminist, humanistic, and critical race frameworks that reveal counter-narratives across contours of the lived Black experiences, class stratifications, and generational difference. Following Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick’s example from *On Being Human as Praxis* (2015), I conceptualize a human-racial-class relationality, employing a specific approach that suggests “Blackness as praxis.” Gaps within library stocks of texts also suggest the necessity of

Black geographic study and Black mobilities that galvanize a new way to study the urban and its inhabitants in “narratives that think through and across humanness, location, and knowledge” (McKittrick, Ed., 2015: 12). In this collaborative work, Wynter suggests that scholarship, rooted in the relationality of humanness, has the ability to capture the complexities of and within the collective and the individual narrative. Thus, spaces of knowledge production and articulation are desperately in need of assistance in de-nebulizing Blackness (read: *Blacknesses*) and middle-classness and in considering how a multiplicity of identities intersect one another within and across spaces. Wynter’s theory of being human as praxis aligns with Soja’s (1980) theory that the social and the spatial are dialectical. The relational nature of the social, spatial, and human (behaviors, motivation, emotions, symbols, etc.) is essential to discovering the depths and multiplicities of urban actors within an ever-changing urbanizing society that is both fixed and fluid. Bearing this in mind, my Black geographical methodology situates Black humanity and Black spatial and aspirational imaginaries within the milieu of Black place-making practices, across multiple and additive identity intersections. A humanistic geographical approach is pertinent to keep from continuing practices that dehumanize already contested and historically marginalized bodies by over-emphasizing discussion on space and place. This framework is integral to shedding light on how coming-of-age Black millennial adults are affecting the perception, production, and engagement of place in Atlanta.

To begin to problematize and reveal the tensions within and across Blackness, identity, and place, the following frameworks provincialize this study, while grounding it within a critical race and extended case methodology. These frameworks not only recognize both past and present geographies as connective sites of struggle (McKittrick, 2006), but they also argue the importance of relying on phenomenological approaches to collect and analyze counter-narrative

data that are embedded within cross-generational stories and aspirations within a racialized landscape.

In order to ensure that human geography remains human-centered in this project, a humanistic geography approach is imperative not only in the creation of data collection protocols and analysis, but also in the thought, preparation, and practice of research conducted across cognitive, relational, emotional, logical, sensory, symbolic, and behavioral dimensions of humanity (Sapkota, 2017). Humanistic geographers focus on humans and relationality, and must be careful not to objectify the humanity of the participant by reducing the person or the data to just an “abstract study of space and structures” (125). Sapkota (2017) describes “sense of place” as the nexus where behavior, motivations, belongings/unbelonging and spatial practice collide: “...an individual awareness of the ‘spirit’ or identity of a place” (24). This idea about sense of place coincides with Tuan’s point that place is materialized out of space based on familiarity and valuation (1977:6, 18), making it possible for white supremacist structures to infringe on non-white senses of place that do not align with an inherent cultivation of white placefulness and/or Black placelessness (McKittrick, 2006). Black placelessness is diasporic in its foundation through centuries of race projects of displacement, concealment, and marginalization that seek to render the Black body as “ungeographic” (McKittrick, 2006: x): from the international slave trade to redlining to mass incarceration of Black and Brown bodies. This paper operates as an

intervention to the white spatial and theoretical gaze, focusing on Black-*placefulness* to show how Blackness is integral in the production of space.<sup>6</sup>

Counter-narratives and histories play a poignant role in the dismantling of white epistemological approaches in the study of people, place, and history. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) term “critical race methodology” as an applied mechanism of critical race theory. This methodology centers the study of race, gender, class, etc. in scholarship, with the intention of destabilizing racist, classist, and sexist oppressive societal structures by prioritizing personal experience and knowledge of people of color within critical race scholarship (25). By centering the lived experience of people of color and their identities with regard to their individual and collective history, critical race methodology recognizes these stories as theoretical, methodological and pedagogical tools to challenge institutional practices and ideologies that support racism, classism, sexism, and other intersections (26). Michelle V. Rowley (2013) further supports the importance of narratives—specifically genealogical narratives—that create a sense of belonging for the narrator and also illustrate how genealogies transcend time and space (78). Making space for counter-narrative data was an important part of the development of this methodology, as counter-narrative data not only has the potential to reflect spatiality, but can also connect spatially-embedded collection practices to behaviors, identity formation, and renderings of various types of Blackness.

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<sup>6</sup> The idea of “making place” draws from Henri Lefebvre (1974), who uses the term to explain the multi-faceted character of space. Space is then, not solely physical or a vacuum of random processes but suffused with social and cultural norms, intentionally and unintentionally constructed by the production and consumption of space by its inhabitants and structures of power. These social constructs, superimposed onto the physical and conceptual landscape, have the potential to be used by institutions of power to propagate ideological frameworks that alter spaces in favor of hegemonic norms. For example, centuries of Black discrimination and violence have stereotypically characterized Black people as lazy, poor, violent, unintelligent, hyper- or de-sexualized--all subjugating the Black body as inhuman. Within ideological projects, this mechanization of influence cannot only set and cement these denigrating ideologies onto a place, but it can also simultaneously silence and conceal Black and Brown bodies that have been pushed to the margins.



Extended case methodology builds on this critical race methodology in its focus on the phenomenological, allowing the researcher to connect participants' lived experiences—observations, interviews, ethnographic data—through content analysis, and it situates the context of the research and analysis within historical and structural contexts (Buroway, 1998). This reflexive methodological approach is both dialogical and scientific, as phenomenological data not only recovers situational knowledge at a multi-scalar, micro-macro level, but also serves to acknowledge the relationship and positionality of the researcher to her work and to the research participants. This knowledge is situated in spheres of multiple epistemologies to examine the deeper socio-spatial processes within the data (15).

### **3 DEVELOPING A BLACK GEOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY**

My personal theoretical sensitivity and cultural intuition of the subject matter (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Bernal, 1998) have greatly influenced how I have developed this qualitative Black geographical methodology. I interviewed twelve Black, college- and trade-school educated millennials who own or rent within the I-285 boundary that encircles the city of Atlanta,<sup>7</sup> and each interview consisted of two-parts: one in-home interview and one roving interview immediately following the in-home interview. The roving interview included additional activities around emplacement that draw from humanistic approaches [that focuses on place] of not only

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<sup>7</sup> At the onset of this project, I used very technical but confusing spatial definition of Atlanta's boundaries and found that when vetting participants for my study, I struggled to explain these boundaries and the terms like "Metro Atlanta" were often interpreted by personal cognitive definitions. In order to quell the confusion, I used a local and widely accepted demarcation of Atlanta's boundaries, in the I-285 perimeter or "ITP" and outside the I-285 perimeter or "OTP," both terms that cognitively delineate between urban and suburban, livability, and desirability by using the I-285 boundary.

studying relationality and place, but also being informed by feelings, ideas, and experiences of the participant as they moved through the interviews.

Participants were selected by snowball method—more specifically, they were selected from my immediate social networks as well as those in my extended networks—through word-of-mouth recommendations and social media such as Instagram. Instagram is of particular value in this project, as this social media platform is often the visual embodiment of a user's identity or self-representation—be it actual or aspirational—rendering it useful to discover how participants view themselves within the process of observing, experiencing, and creating place within the city of Atlanta.

### **3.1 Foundational Literature**

Generally accepted by critical human geographers is the understanding that 1) sociality and space are dialectical (Soja, 1980) and 2) space, a product of interconnectedness, cannot exist prior to relations and identities that are all in a constant state of co-construction (D. Massey, 2005: 10-11). Where the idea of “interconnectedness” and “co-construction” can elicit ideals around unity and cohesion within space, W.E.B. Dubois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, (1903) describes certain complications of interconnectedness within America’s racialized society as a “double-consciousness,” or the multiplicitous pressures experienced by Black folks that create tensions between a sense of self and place, experienced through the bounds and limitations set by whiteness:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world— a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar

sensation, this double-consciousness,<sup>8</sup> this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness— an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (W.E.B. DuBois, 1903:9).

This theme of “double or multiple-consciousness” was prominent in all of my interviews and often times, played out across place. Thirty-six year old xennial,<sup>9</sup> Sekou, explained his tension in a narrative about running in his neighborhood:

Sekou: I would say overall I feel pretty comfortable, but I guess my Blackness is something that I'm always conscious of... the people who own homes in this area, I would say, are probably majority white. And I think there's still a component of that to where they're very used to seeing other white people. They're used to seeing other Hispanic people, and I think Black people, only... a bit. So, I think there's a component of maybe them feeling like I'm invading *their* space.

Karlynn: Has there been an instance that made you feel like they feel like you're invading? Or is it just like glances? Or maybe someone not being as friendly?

Sekou: Yeah. I don't, I don't even think there's been any specific instances. I think it's just, being used to being in areas where [pause] I don't see a lot of people like myself. So, I can't say I've been treated in any specific way, it's just something I'm very conscious of all the time. I work out and I'll go run around the area and instances will come up where I'll be running and there will be a white woman in front of me, and I seriously will consider, like, am I more threatening to her? Or, like, I'll think about, is she aware? How would she feel about a Black man being behind her? And maybe she's not thinking anything of it and maybe I'm the only one, but it's something that makes me hyper vigilant, right? Like, I'm aware of that because I don't want her to feel threatened, and she may not feel threatened at all. But it's just the fact that I'll

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<sup>8</sup> Note that with the additional gender or other additive intersections, the concept of “triple or multiple consciousnesses” is a compounded definition of what Dubois describes here. See King (1988: 47) for more on multiple consciousness.

<sup>9</sup> This term describes a microgeneration within the millennial generation of individuals who are on the cusp of Generation X and the Millennial generation.

be in that situation now, and it will come to mind. I just don't know what other people's rationale.

Karlyn: So you don't want her to feel threatened why? Because she might call the police or?

Sekou: Yeah. you know, I feel like there are enough stories ... I think there are two factors at play: there's just the man factor and there's the Black factor, right? Like, I don't think I would feel that if I was running behind a Black woman. It probably would come to mind only because, like, oh wow, she might feel threatened because it's getting dark, and she's alone, and there is a man behind her and she doesn't know what could happen in this situation and I get that. The race part of it is a little bit tougher and again, I think it's just something that Black men, in general, have to have to deal with. The fact that [pause] like it or not, there are many people who will just feel threatened by us for, I would say, no reason. But you don't know what's going on in people's minds and what they've experienced.

Karlyn: But they don't know what's gone on in your life?

Sekou: I mean it's true... I feel like I could go on and on about different experiences like that, but that is something that I consider here. If I see a young or older white woman running or somewhere out in public, my mind will wonder if in some way, is she feels threatened.

Karlyn: And you feel like that often?

Sekou: Yeah. I mean, around here, pretty much wherever I go.

This exchange with Sekou reveals the conflict that Sekou had with establishing a Black sense of place and the constant tension of negotiating his sense of place with this “other world” (read: whiteness) and his sense of self. Another theme that surfaces from this interview is how the cultural landscape is both a thing and a process to be analyzed (Schein, 1997) and there are a number of processes going on within this landscape that were initially described as “pretty comfortable” until the tension arises again. Omi and Winant (1994) support Dubois's assessment

of the pervasive nature of white supremacy by arguing that race is the master category that undergirds and drives the racial caste system. Since whiteness is central to American racialized identity (Dwyer and Jones, 2000), Cedric Robinson's (1983) *Black Marxism*, argues that American capitalism is predicated on a racial caste system that survives on the continued racialization and denigration of the Black and Brown body. Racial capitalism is spatialized as mode of production utilizes space and place to reproduce itself (Soja, 1980) while creating social and spatial difference through valuation and devaluation (Harvey, 1978) of non-white bodies (Pulido, 2016: 4). This racialized, class consciousness, extending beyond sociality into the organization of space and the destruction and resistances that arise when one's sense of place is threatened. A Black geographical roving methodology requires scholars to move towards a more nuanced understanding of space in order to unsettle the coloniality in how space is conceptualized (McKittrick, 2011) and produced, while continuously subverting the white spatial gaze. The following methods used to collect and analyze my data seek to comprehend space by the alternative spatial narratives that are often concealed without the use of theoretical critical race methods. In this way, the narratives, cognitive maps, and imaginaries that emerge from this data are not merely a bundle of codes, flows, and movements, but they also reveal the processes by which genealogies of the past and present contribute to the constant renegotiation of social and spatial practices.

### **3.2 Key Insights of this Black Geography Roving Interview Methodology**

I have developed three key insights with regard to the development of Black geographical methodologies: 1) Cultivating a conceptual space of safety, vulnerability, and comfortability, 2) creating qualitative activities around emplacement, and 3) asking specific questions that connect

the Black self to a Black sense of place within a context of forging, protecting, and maintaining Black spaces in Atlanta.

### *3.2.1 Cultivating Safety, Vulnerability, and Comfortability in Interviews*

It became clear to me during the interview process, when I asked questions like “Do you feel safe to be yourself in your neighborhood?” the participant and I would often have to have a clarifying discussion of what “safety” meant, because often times, using the word “safety” elicited varying interpretations and responses. This differentiation between what I call “social safety” versus “physical safety” is an important concern for a methodology for Black geographies that is contextualized within a racialized, Eurocentric, patriarchal society (Dwyer and Jones, 2000; Omi and Winant, 1994). For academics, it is important that we do not view intersectional identity study methods as objective research tools, but instead that we would see the social construction of these intersections, like race, as more than a number but as the narrative of a very complex lived experience (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, 2008). By viewing research across identity-intersections objectively, researchers run the risk of ignoring the effects of prolonged racial and gendered violence that conceal, dispose of, and marginalize Black-other communities of color, and how these people situate themselves in place.

Considerations around safety and vulnerability were at the forefront of my data collection process in a number of ways. The entire two hour interview was broken into a double interview that started out with an in-home interview ranging between 60-90 minutes, immediately followed by a 30-60 minute roving interview. I intentionally conducted the in-home interview first for three reasons: to build trust and empathy by understanding the personal narrative of the participant, to make space to discuss and process through generational trauma, Black violence, Black resilience, and Black joy, and to “warm up” the participant for the roving interview so that

she would begin to think through how her identity connects with her sense of place (because we are not all human geographers who automatically look for socio-spatial patterns in the wild!). The walking interview methodology employed and articulated by Evans and Jones (2011) warned against this idea of a double interview for fear that the participant would run out of things to say (852), but this was never the case in any of the twelve interviews, as the roving portion was an extension of the experiential and behavioral in-home interviews. In fact, in almost all of the interviews, and with the consent of the participant, both portions of the interviews often ran over the allotted time limit. Each in-home interview began with asking about the personal and familial background and upbringing and this not only built empathy but was particularly effective in gathering insights on the participant's spatial imaginaries and identity, as contextualized in their personal history. In one interview, Jessica, a creative designer who identifies as Black and Afro-Latina, told me about a story her mother recently shared about why she moved the family from Tucson, Arizona, to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, when Jessica was a child:

Jessica: My mom is Mexican, she's this tall, green-eyed, barely-tan skinned lady who like, loves Black men, and my grandmother initially had a big problem with that because of what that could mean. My mom was born in '51 so she started dating in the 60s/70s when that was still an issue. My grandfather would say 'I don't give a fuck who you love, but I just want you to understand the implications of what that will be for you and your family and the family that you'll be building'... There's this story that she [Jessica's mom] tells whenever I start to ask her questions about this: I was a baby and my sisters were young and they were on this playground and my mom was on the playground with them, sitting on the side with her best friend Sylvia. My sisters were on the swings and they were playing. Then these white kids came up to them, well, it was a white kid and a Mexican kid, and they started calling my sisters "nigger." And my mom was like "What?!" and she was [realized] "Oh, like, this is not a place for them." And, in my mom's words: "I knew that I had to live in a place where these Black women could thrive"... She was, like, "I have to put them in a place where they can thrive... this is

obviously not the place for them. I need to do a better job, as a mother, by putting them in a place where they can see visions of themselves.” And so... that's how we moved to Florida.

This story, though Jessica was told about it as an adult, illustrates the importance of space and forging Black spaces as a means of social and physical safety. Jessica sharing this intimate portrait of her life also sheds light on the ways that her mom's story impacts her own Black sense of place in her apartment in Midtown Atlanta, where she currently resides.

The interviews were conversational and semi-formal—I had four sections of questions ranging from personal history, individual and collective Black narratives, generational narratives, and in the roving portion, I ask about spatial imaginaries. I made sure to maintain an attentiveness to the emotional needs of the participant as we discussed topics that delved deep into views of race and racial violence, self, Blackness individually and collectively, family, and class tensions. Of the twelve interviews, six participants mentioned having feelings of catharsis after being able to speak freely and candidly in response to questions about their Blackness, the whitening of Atlanta, the Black community, and dealing with multiple consciousnesses as a person of color. Additionally, in order to speak more candidly, most of the respondents used a pseudonym or name that they chose for themselves.

In their article on roving focus groups, Inwood and Martin (2008) set out to show how the concealment of Black history on the University of Georgia's North Campus area connected to Black student identities on campus. In an effort to forge common understanding in an environment where Black students are a hyper-minority, this seemed appropriate. However, for my project I opted to go with a solo interview, giving the option for the participant to choose to bring a spouse or partner or friend, even though all of the interviews ended up participating on their own. This ended up being effective, considering that my goal was to hear about the



individual Black experience. My concern with adding any additional people to the interview was that there would be less comfort with making any unpopular admissions, or that the thoughts or personality of another person would influence the other's responses. During recruitment, I told the participant that the purpose of this interview was to "hear their story" and by asking clarifying questions, I was able to delve deeper into the connections participants experienced and made in their upbringing, life stage, and Blackness. Unsurprisingly, the conversations evolved to talking about place, because Blackness and place are inextricably linked. Overall, I had to be attentive to the interactions present in the interview, beyond just the semi-formal interview structure, and it was in practice that I had to think of ways to cultivate a safe space for participant to feel comfortable and make space for vulnerability.

### ***3.2.2 Creating Qualitative Activities Around Emplacement***

In addition to forging common ground and a sense of safety in the interview, I included activities in this interaction that focused on situating the thoughts and physical body of the participant in place. I employed three approaches to cultivate emplacement: 1) the in-home interview, 2) the roving interview, and 3) the use of photography.

Elwood and Martin (2004) posit that qualitative researchers should take more consideration in choosing appropriate sites for conducting interviews, viewing them as "'micro-geographies' of spatial relations and meaning, where multiple scales of social relations intersect in the research interview" (649). Additionally, positionality and researcher-participant power dynamics are affected by where an interview takes place. Thus, much of how I conducted these interviews involved mitigating the researcher power dynamics and building a sense of comfort (652).

One of the requirements to participate in my research project was that the first part of the interview had to be conducted in the home of the interviewer. Since in this research project I inquire about the production of Black places, a part of understanding the spatial imaginaries of the participants began with understanding the micro-geography of their home: its location, a vision for the place-futures, decor, and the insights that come from having the ability to create *one's own* sense of place within one's home. For example, a bike mounted on the wall of a family room indicates the participant's relationship and attachments to place, while also offering insights into their behaviors, mobilities, desires, tensions, motivations, and various imaginaries that link self to place both in and outside of the home. In one of my interviews, "Chip," a tech sales executive, new homeowner and recent Oakland, California, transplant, was *very* excited to show me his new condo in the heart of Atlanta's downtown near Five Points MARTA Station. In most interviews, I may have passed through the kitchen to get to the interview area (usually the living room or main room), or I was shown where the bathroom was. I did not enter into any bedrooms unless the participant wanted to give me a tour, and this was uncommon (I was also raised to never enter anyone's bedroom without either being invited in or asking for a tour). I did not ask for tours during the in-home interviews and instead, left that up to the participant. Chip showed me his entire house, led me past his pool table and commented on his large television. He told me the stories behind the art on his walls (some depicting vintage photos of family) and his desires to eventually update the bathroom because he "hated" what the previous owners did to it. This vulnerability in allowing me this level of access could have been attributed to being a recent first-time homeowner, but it also revealed 1) his level of comfortability, 2) his sense of place and desires for place, and 3) his interests as linked to his identity, his upbringing, and personal and spatial futures. Conducting the interview in his space gave him the ability to give

me the tour of his place and share his story while drinking a few beers. He, too, expressed a sense of catharsis after the in-home interview and referenced the stories of his family and upbringing during the roving interview, sharing his desires to see his neighborhood “take off” because “the people around [here] aren’t doing anything. It’s sad. They just stand around waiting for a handout.”

In another example, “Sydney,” a serial entrepreneur with a penchant for real estate investment, has strong ties to creating a sense of place with and outside of her home. By day, she works a flexible schedule as a nonprofit community director, specializing in helping low-income families prepare for homeownership. She owns a condominium in the historic West End neighborhood in addition to an Airbnb investment property that she rents out in College Park, which is a few miles south of downtown Atlanta. She did not offer a tour of her place during the in-home interview but discussed a lot about the relationship between her condo, her sense of self and her aspirations for wealth-building through real estate investment, and how she experiences the community that she lives in. She appreciated that she found the neighborhood to be “hella Black,” but struggled with the dearth of amenities compared to other “up and coming” (read: gentrifying) in-town neighborhoods alongside an over-abundance of nail shops, dollar stores, and quick loans storefronts. Conceptually, owning a home is a means of financial freedom, something that did not exist for her parents, she later recognized. Her desire to invest in properties is directly related to her position vis-à-vis the utility of place, her ability to accrue passive income, with the ultimate desire to rent wherever she wants with the funding from her investment properties:

Sydney: I think my work has changed my perception of homeownership so I have no emotional attachment to being a homeowner. I don't have a dream, like... It's been very demystified for me. It's very hard. It's a lot of work. It is nice to have the freedom, you know, to own a home, but I don't need it. When,

for example, I have also, thought if my condo appreciates to a certain point where I would sell, I would sell, buy two houses and rent them out, and then I would probably use all the income to go rent somewhere. I like not having to take care of property and land. It's a lot work of that I don't want to do. I'd rather spend my time doing other things.

Sydney's desire for personal autonomy is directly related to how she produces, engages in, and maintains her sense of place.

A key innovation of this work where I ask questions about place and place-making was the roving interview. Scholars who study and have developed mobile methodologies are often activated by the desire to discover incidents and feelings about the physical landscapes in which they live (Anderson, 2004). Employing a mobile method with questions framed by 'place' is effective in understanding individual and community attachments to space (Evans and Jones, 2011) and within the context of a Black geographic methodology, this approach to place is vital to recover and protect Black placefulness. Mobile methods are a means to connect place to self, but they are not created or applied equally. This paper does not make a distinction between "mobile methods" and "sedentary methods in motion" (Evans and Jones, 2011: 850) for a number of reasons. First, the act of walking can pose issues for those who are unable to or have trouble walking. Second, unpredictable weather patterns (heavy rain and general frigid temperatures around 40 degrees Fahrenheit for us in Atlanta in the winter) often impacted the ability to walk during a most of the roving interviews, and in an effort to not reschedule and conduct both interviews within one appointment, I again amended the methodology to accommodate the unforeseen. Third, depending on the amount of space that would be covered during the interview, this might impact interview time constraints, especially considering that not all areas are walkable with regard to safety (sidewalks, crime, etc.) or sprawl. For example, Khadijah, a resident of the very walkable and accessible Old Fourth Ward, is close to a lot of

amenities: places to eat, grocery stores, the BeltLine trail<sup>10</sup> (making it easier and safer to walk or even bring her dog along), parks, etc. It was fairly easy to take forty-five minutes to visit the sites that weighed on her sense of place. In contrast, ten of the twelve participants did not have access to amenities or did not chose sites in their areas within a reasonable walking distance. Some sites were sometimes a five- to ten-minute drive away, which led me to further develop this methodology to accommodate the participant and the two to three sites they chose for our roving “neighborhood tour” interview. Many of the roving interviews were conducted while driving, and a few specific considerations were made to continue the empathy-building process, mitigating the power dynamics of data collection in an effort to make space for the participant to be immersed in the experience of, maybe for the first time, being in the passenger seat while looking deeply into the social and physical landscapes of areas they call “home.” The first consideration when driving was that I would be the driver. The reasons being 1) outside of giving me directions, the participant was encouraged to completely focus on sharing the knowledge of their neighborhood with me. I drove so they wouldn’t have to think about focusing on the road while also trying to focus on sharing and processing sites and stories of their sense of place and also take photos; 2) the idea of this methodology recognizes that the participant is the expert when it comes to *their* sense of place and how they experience it; 3) because we began with an in-home interview and transitioned to a roving interview, it was imperative that I leave space for inspiration and “on the fly” changes. This happened during my interview with Rober, a freelance videographer who is originally from Neptune, New Jersey, and a five-year resident of

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<sup>10</sup> The BeltLine trail is a revitalization project—a planned 22-mile loop of trails, parks, and other types of transportation connectivity that follows the tracks of an old railroad corridor that used to encircle the city. The 22-miles is being completed in sections referred to in this paper as “extensions.” The BeltLine has recently been the source of much tension within the city with regard to gentrification, rising rent prices, and affordable housing, with the creator of the initiative leaving the project in 2016, citing the lack of progress in delivering on the affordable housing promise of the BeltLine.

Atlanta. Prior to us meeting, I asked him to choose two to three sites that he wanted to take me to, but on the way to the second location, as we passed by a federal penitentiary, he changed his mind. He asked me to pull over so that he could take a photo and upon getting back in the car, he remarked with a somber tone on how unsettling it is that the penitentiary is located in a predominately Black and Brown neighborhood: “they would never put this in a white neighborhood.”

Karlyn: So why did you want those pictures of the penitentiary?

Rober: Because, you wouldn't see- [interrupts self, gestures with hands to surrounding areas] this is where you put a penitentiary. Like, people that pay high taxes and all that type of stuff, they would have protested against this a long time ago. Like, you don't see that type of stuff in the quote-unquote upper echelon of neighborhoods.

This observation drew a bit from our earlier conversation where Rober talked about feeling physically and socially safe from white police and white people in his predominantly Black neighborhood of Lakewood Heights: “If I get pulled over while I'm over here, I know it won't likely be because I'm Black, because *everyone* over here is Black.” In this same conversation, Rober alluded to the struggle in reconciling tensions between his safety, not feeling a sense of home in both the house he rents and in the city of Atlanta, leading up to his desire to eventually move outside of the I-285 perimeter. Despite this longing for home and a sense of place, you could tell how his sense of collective Blackness coincided with his sense of place in the comment about the federal penitentiary.

The final intervention in the emplacement process was the use of photography. I assigned this activity in order to get a literal snapshot of the things that catch the eye of participant, giving insights into their space production and spatial imaginary processes. The other reason for using this method was practical and similar to my own process of taking notes; note-taking often helps

me to better focus on information that I receive while quieting distractions, and it also aids in helping me to make connections to other patterns and themes. In the roving interview, if a time of silence came up or a participant was using visual cues to process their spatial experiences, the camera was an additional intervention to jumpstart thoughts and discussion, as well as serving me in photo-cataloging the relationship between the participant and their understanding of place.

In my research project, Derrick directed me to a large empty field a short walk from his Gresham Park home. Derrick, newly engaged, has owned his first home for three years and is a long-time Atlanta resident who works in business management consulting. The first stop on our roving neighborhood tour was a few blocks away from his house--an empty lot that used to be an elementary school. When we arrived, he got out of the car to take a photo, and he started to explain the vision that he has for what he described as a space for possibility, revealing both his spatial imaginaries and his desire for a sense of place his neighborhood that extended beyond his house:

Derrick: So, when you talk about what this will be in ten years, my hope is that this clearing would not be a park. Would not be more houses or apartments. My hope is that they would put, I wanna say a grocery store, but I don't necessarily want it to be like, a Walmart or not even a mini-Walmart but some sort of market where groceries are available at relatively good pricing. And then some other small, locally-themed eateries or whatever. So like, a market and then like a coffee shop or a sandwich shop like that. Really simple where I can like, chill at, but it's not, like, OHHH it's poppin' over here. To me, something that's very neighborhood-friendly, and those are the types of things that I think would be neighborhood-friendly. You saw how quickly we got here... So if that were here, I would love that. And I know it would bring a ton of value to every house in the neighborhood, like, so much value. Value in terms of your day-to-day experience would be nice but also value in terms of monetarily... So I don't see this being a supermarket. Mostly food and maybe like other household things you might need: office supplies, etc.

Karlyn: So you're talking about a corner store?

Derrick: Nah, nah, nah. Not a bodega... maybe this is marketing-speak but it would be more like, fresh fruits, a hefty selection of fruits and vegetables. [I don't live in a] food desert because Wal-mart is fairly close, but like, if you didn't have a car, it would be kinda hard to get there.

Requesting that the participants to take photos while also asking about the significance of and inspiration behind the pictures helps me to know how a person is experiencing and envisioning her space beyond the three sites that were chosen for the interview.

To make one final case for the importance of a Black geographical methodology around the practices of emplacement, Leitner and Sheppard (2015) argue that geographers and scholars of place *must* provincialize their studies. The authors call for a “local epistemology” that can better assess the practices of hegemonic institutions within the proper geographical and social context (230), and my methodology narrows this idea by calling for a focus on racialized local epistemologies that are rooted in emplacement practices like a roving interview, since race and capitalism structure spatial organization. Provincialization transcends the notion of a single urban theory with the means to “challenge hegemonic, monist accounts by highlighting how they are shaped by ‘local’ origins” (230). It is in this way that scholars are able to better situate a broader understanding of place and the many knowledges of the people within these places that go beyond white normative renderings of space and place. Overall, this roving “neighborhood tour” methodology gathers the narratives of the humans that inhabit these spaces, their imaginaries alongside their realities, and it proves an opportunity to see people define and redefine their “placeness” and their view of place as they are intentionally and consciously steeped in ‘place.’ This shows us how Black folks feel “out of place” and how they feel “at home” and the ways that we structure our lives and practices to feel “in place” again.



### 3.2.3 *The Black Self and Protecting a Black Sense of Place*

As Blackness and place cannot be uncoupled, it is important to acknowledge the weight that forging a ‘sense of place’ has on the Black self and the Black community. By employing methods that are empathetic and by engaging and creating activities around emplacement, I am able to uncover the ways that Black childless millennials in Atlanta are constructing and maintaining ‘place.’ To acknowledge only the contestation of place and the origins of concealment, disposal, and displacement of Black and Brown bodies takes away from the nuanced humanity that underpins the experience of place. In this section, I seek to detail moments of resistance and reflections of joy that seek to counteract the spatial marginalization of Atlanta’s Black spaces. A number of interview participants in my project exhibited concern for the future of Black Atlanta that was not entirely separated from spatial practices of hope, joy, resilience, and resistance.

Cameron, a welder and new homeowner in Southwest Atlanta’s Pittsburgh neighborhood, expressed the importance for him to move into a neighborhood that was affordable and also very Black:

Cameron: If you come off University Drive down and McDaniel [Street], there's just boarded-up houses and boarded-up houses. So, obviously, there's not a lot of people here, but there's still a community, and I love the community here. One of the things that attracted me: when I pulled up—when I came to look at this house, my mom was my real estate agent. It was me, her, and my dad. We pull up to the house and we see about five dudes on the block right here. Actually... it was a little more than five, maybe like nine dudes... Everybody's bundled up, they're playing cards, smoking blunts or whatever they doin,' and we walked through the house and everything and I was like ‘I like the house’ and my mom was like ‘Is this where you wanna live? Are you sure this is where you wanna live?’ I'm like ‘This looks like where you grew up!’ [laughs]

Karlyn: Why was she apprehensive, do you think?

Cameron: So her words exactly were, ‘You work so hard to get your family out of the hood, and your son wants to move right back in it. That’s crazy.’ And I just said to her ‘Well, as you know, things are changing, and it won’t always be like this,’ but to me living around other Black people was so important. Like, that was a big draw for me. I could’ve lived in some parts of the Eastside-- I didn’t wanna live in Kirkwood. Kirkwood isn’t the same Kirkwood that it used to be. I don’t wanna walk outside and see Stephanie walking her Pomeranian every day. I like walking out the door and seeing my boys out there playing dice, doing whatever they do, you know. They look after the house for me...

[We soon got to Cameron’s views on Black investment in Black neighborhoods]

Karlyn: So you said you moved into this home for investment. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not at all and 10 being “right away” how much were you considering owning a home?

Cameron: So I had a lot of interest in owning a home... one of my big things with buying here, in the city of Atlanta, I continued to watch the gentrification happening on the East Side, and I was like ‘We, Black people, we have to buy back the block.’ Because we will continue to get run out of these neighborhoods if we’re not buying... If you can afford rent, you can afford a mortgage... The money that you’re not paying in rent? Put that aside for when your washing machine breaks. That’s what I do... But more Black people should be buying in these neighborhoods. That’s how we can change the quality of that neighborhood. If you’re upwardly mobile, *you* can change the situation in your neighborhood just by your presence being there and the things you’ll want being there. Like, I want a Whole Foods. I’m pissed that I don’t have a Publix over here. That is upsetting to me; I have to go to Midtown or East Lake just for a Pub-Sub [Publix sub sandwich].

Around the corner from his home is a large development that has recently broken ground:

Pittsburgh Yards, an Annie E. Casey development that boasts itself as “pioneering and community-led” (Green, October 3, 2018). Its presence in the neighborhood has raised concerns about the gentrification and whitening of the area. Cameron expressed his desire to be on the front lines by investing both in homeownership and building relationships with folks in the

neighborhood who look like him. On our roving tour, Cameron directed me about two miles away from his home to a local place that he frequents, and he specifically requested I not mention the name of the place in this paper so as to preserve this safe Black space:

Cameron: You know, we're going to be in my favorite spot to get a drink in the neighborhood. I don't want to say their name, because I'm there often... I can't have everyone finding out about my spot... It's not a boujee atmosphere... I come here when I get off work. This [place] is like my "Cheers" [in reference to popular 90s television show, Cheers].

Cameron's secrecy around not revealing his favorite neighborhood spot is a means of protecting this Black space and his sense of place, which gives me deeper insight on how he experiences place while also safeguarding it, making sure that it continues to be a safe place for him.

In another interview, Kim mentioned how important it was for her to be a part of and maintain a Black sense of place by purchasing a house in a predominantly Black neighborhood. Shortly after moving to her West End neighborhood, the BeltLine trail extension broke ground, bringing developers and speculative buyers trying to get in on the trail-side deals while homes were still relatively affordable. Prior to the BeltLine construction, Kim was a prominent member of her neighborhood association before stepping down due to not wanting to deal with the demands and opinions of the now, mostly white residents moving in. Rather than getting more involved in her neighborhood politics, she views the encroaching gentrification of her neighborhood as inevitable and expressed that she is unsure if she will want to stay in the neighborhood for the next three years, because it's turning into a place that doesn't fit into her imaginary of living in a quiet, modest, older Black neighborhood:

Karlyn: So you moved here because it's quiet and it's quite off the beaten path?

Kim: It's very quiet.

Karlyn: And now three years later you're like ...

Kim: This might be too much for me, yeah. I mean, it's fine now, but in the back of my head I know I don't know that I can live out my days here. I think eventually it'll be very, very congested, very dense. You know, they're looking at very dense housing... How I would describe [my neighborhood] today is it's a changing, evolving, what they call "developing," neighborhood. There's always construction going on. Like I said, the home prices have tripled and sometimes quadrupled. So on the one hand, I'm fortunate in that I made a really good investment and that I can breathe financially for that, but it doesn't have the same sense of community. You know, I didn't move here for that reason—to make a lot of money—I moved here because I wanted a sense of community, and right now the sense of community seems fractured. There's the brewery group—you know the crowd. We have now two or three breweries that they gather. I mean, on Sunday afternoon you go into Monday Night Brewery or the Lean Draft House, and it's like a whole different world. I walk in and I'm the only Black person in a room of 100 or so people, but you're in there middle of a historically Black neighborhood. So it just feels like we're on the cusp of a cultural clash or divide. I don't know how it'll pan out... it just feels like there's a class divide now. There's the haves versus the have-nots. And the haves are more vocal, more connected, can get things done... I hate to divide everything around racial lines but it's how it seems to naturally fall, only because I feel like for years and years there were affluent Blacks who lived in this neighborhood, and they had an appreciation that, yeah, this is a safe place to live. It's a little sketch, and you stay away from certain houses where you know there's drug activity. If you keep your nose clean, you'll be fine. And that's what I was saying. I'm like, yeah, I don't feel unsafe here. I'm not involved in drugs, there's no reason for somebody to kick down my door, I don't feel unsafe.

With regard to maintaining space Black spaces, another key insight from a few of the interviews was the conscientiousness of encroaching on other Black senses of place vis-à-vis the use of photography for this methodology. For instance, during Kim's neighborhood tour she directed me to drive past what those in her neighborhood refer to as the "Party Lot," a specifically Black space in an empty lot in the midst of a residential area surrounded by other homes. There are tables and chairs set up and (on the day of the tour) about five to seven Black men were gathered

together and looked to be playing some card games or dominoes, having a few drinks, and hanging out. During the in-home interview, Kim also said that she has attended neighborhood parties (graduations, seasonal parties, cookouts, etc.) and hosted residents and friends of the Party Lot. As we passed by during the roving tour, it was immediately apparent to both of us that it would be highly inappropriate and voyeuristic to photograph the Party Lot, especially while there were residents actively hanging out in the lot:

Karlyn: So what's the significance of the party lot? Are people trying to get rid of the party lot? Do you think the party lot will sustain? [we pull up to the Party Lot]

Kim: Yeah, so this is the party lot. And there are actually people out there. [apprehensive tone]

Karlyn: Okay, well we won't take pictures of them... So for the record so I know later on when I listen to this, we couldn't get a picture of the party lot because there were people partying in the party lot.

Kim: Yeah and I will say that I've heard comments from people about, because you know, we've had BeltLine tours here, and people snapping photos of people. There's been some sensitivity around busing in what looks like a bus full of white people taking pictures.

Taking photos of this would not only risk identifying the location of the Party Lot to the readers of my study but even the sighting of a drive-by photographer by one of the Party Lot attendees could greatly endanger the sense of place that frequenters of the Party Lot have cultivated over the years, which is already in danger due to BeltLine tours busing in spectators. This is a vital consideration to both the photography emplacement activity and making sure that this project does not further contribute to the violence of overstepping boundaries when it comes to Black spaces.

## 4 PERSONAL INSIGHTS

### 4.1 The Author's Positionality

I began my study on Atlanta's Black millennials with an entirely different view of my own Black sense of place than I have now. At the outset, I recognized the various spatial practices of other childless, educated Black millennials in Atlanta and noticed differences among all of us. I was not initially interested in owning a home, despite my parents' and grandparents' growing insistence on building wealth via property investment as I have journeyed farther into adulthood. As an older (well, is thirty "older?") student with thousands of dollars owed to Direct Student Loans, homeownership just seemed so far outside of possibility that, perhaps even resentfully, I eschewed the idea of becoming indebted to more loans via the American homeownership model of investment. By the first set of interviews, nevertheless, it became clear to me that 1) homeownership was not as inaccessible to me as I thought, and 2) as I near the end of my master's program with a serious romantic partner, I find myself considering a more secure financial future for my family, both future and present-- preparing for kids and a place to bring my grandmother and/or parents as they age. With regard to my personal engagement of place, I do not consider myself a homebody and I prefer to live close to the areas in which I frequent. I supposed I can be somewhat classified as a "typical millennial" (depending on what article you're reading about us) as one who hates commutes, loathes traffic (and driving, in general), and desires to be "in the mix" in a walkable urban landscape. The emplacement activities that I asked of my participants also added to my perspective of my own Black sense of place, in addition to allowing me a more intimate experience of delving into areas of the city with which I was previously unfamiliar. Through these interviews, it became clearer the various ways Black millennials engage in, produce, and navigate place in Atlanta.

Because the production of space can take many forms and cross a variety of intersections, applying critical study frameworks and centering Blackness revealed counter-narratives of place and how it is experienced and altered. A huge draw for me in conducting this study and creating this methodology was examining Black counter-narratives and practices of resistance in and across place. The lived, experiential narratives that people express reveal stories of socio-spatial injustices and resistance, which can, I argue, contribute to the overall Black socio-spatial narrative and inspire new ways of thinking, imagining, and realizing Black spatial futures. The goal of my Black millennial study is to understand how the intersections of certain Black identities (across race, class, life stage) impose a particular framework on varying Black understandings of space and themselves. This methodology has given way to opportunities that extend beyond just a study of space, and instead connect the human experience to the alterability of place.

#### **4.2 Opportunities and Considerations in Future Research**

There were a number of circumstances, post-research, that arose during the development of this methodology that necessitated extra considerations of use value. One such opportunity was to use a global positioning system (GPS) to track the tour route (Evans and Jones, 2011: 852). I considered the usefulness of this after about the third interview, but later realized that this could become problematic in preserving trust and a Black sense of place. Using GPS to document the route would have complicated my interview with Cameron, the young man that wanted to keep the identity of his favorite local spot a secret. By using GPS and GIS to create a spatial transcript, it is possible (considering the small 1-2 mile radius) that sites mentioned, even in discretionary terms, could be figured out or revealed by those who are familiar with the area. Because I recognized the importance of documenting locations for data collection purposes, I did

so during the roving interview by verbally cataloging cross-streets and landmarks so that in the event that it is useful to reveal a site, I can do so without it being included in a larger rendering of the participant's entire tour, and thus, breaching trust.

Other opportunities emerged when thinking through ways of streamlining data collection processes in order to provide more control and autonomy over the interview to the participant. In the west, we often privilege sight as a top sense of receiving, taking in information, and producing knowledge (Oyěwùmí, 1997; Chapter 1). If my methodology is used outside of a western context, it might be useful to introduce other sensory activities into the emplacement process as a way to lessen western hegemony in the data collection process. Another intervention, given more time, would be to send the interview transcripts back to the participants for review, post-interview, to ensure that they feel properly represented by their own words and subjectivities prior to beginning analysis of the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; 3). Finally, methods within this methodology could be used to further research on how other races, genders, and various identity intersections coincide with the study of humans and place, building empathy and emplacement into the research design.

I conclude this section with a note on conducting research with those of one's own identity group or community. During the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process for my research project on Black millennials, I was questioned by one of the reviewers regarding the validity of my study as an "insider": "*The insider position as a Black female also provides considerable opportunity for bias in recruitment and interpretation. How will this be handled to ensure equity in selection?*" This question was micro-aggressive and inappropriate but indicative of the privilege of whiteness that is pervasive within the knowledge production processes that undergirds academia as a whole. I hesitated to even address this discriminatory question in my



review response but, as not to belabor the approval process, I addressed this question by providing supporting literature (though, I am skeptical in thinking that this question is often asked to white researchers who are conducting research with white participants):

Based on my “insider” position as a Black female, there is tremendous opportunity to leverage my personal theoretical sensitivity and cultural intuition of the subject matter (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Bernal, 1998), allowing a more in-depth and thorough processing of interview content that is vital to the dismantling the nature of critical race theoretical and methodological studies (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2005: 77) within a white epistemological reading of a culture of which they have not experienced personally. By “cultural intuition,” I am referring to Bernal’s (1998) extended concept of Strauss and Corbin (1990) arguing the importance of a counter-epistemology that contests broader white epistemologies, allowing personal experience as an insider to interpret subtleties within data that might not otherwise be given meaning in the analysis process (563). Cultural intuition, employed when studying a marginalized group, also extends beyond personal experience to “collective experience and community memory”—which is lost in the analytical process of one who lacks cultural intuition that cannot comprehend beyond related literature.

My study is largely guided by wanting to understand how identities vary across degrees of Blackness, middle-classness, and life stage. In a study such as this, it is imperative to be able to give meaning to the subtleties of nuanced data that exists in researching a relatively homogenous and purposive sample. When utilizing a relatively homogenous and purposive sample, sample saturation is reached sooner, allowing a deeper subgroup analysis as complex themes are identified (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2005: 76). To ensure “equity” in selection—and because Blackness, middle-class, and gender are not monolithic in nature—participants are selected from my immediate and extended social networks, as well as those in my outlying networks through participant’s networks and social media platforms such as Instagram. Because iterations of Blackness vary from person-to-person and are expressed differently across intersections of identity, I will directly explain to the participants the nature of my study and my reason for focusing on Black, middle class-performing millennials, should they ask, and provide clear questions that distill out complex themes for analysis

## 5 CONCLUSION

In closing, this provincializing and identity-based methodology demonstrates the co-constructive nature of Blacknesses and place across time, which reveals conscious and

subconscious place-making practices—tensions, conflicts, and negotiations that emerge in the counter-narratives of the in-home and roving interviews. I have developed this methodology specifically for asking questions about place and sense of place in Black geographies. The immersive “tours” I have discussed are a means to confront white normativity within space, while also understanding the relationship between Black identity and Black spatiality with regard to practices of resistance, concepts of social and physical safety, and identity construction (individual and collective).

The methodology that I present in this paper provides a means to gain key insights into Black placefulness in and across other identity intersections that surface within the racial and historical fabric of America and, more specifically, in Atlanta, Georgia.

The broader impacts of this paper are to inspire the further questioning of epistemologies and incite more conversations around creating methodologies that actively contrast white normative and white-centered methodologies rooted in white spatial epistemologies. Applying these methods, which center on the overlapping of Black histories, generational traumas, and practices of empathy into the data collection process, is key in building and maintaining trust. This trust not only centers the narrative of the participant to the research, but it also serves as a site of catharsis: the participant is encouraged to and can speak freely about a subject that is often concealed or suppressed, sometimes to protect oneself, one’s peace, and one’s sense of place. This is particularly valuable in a landscape where Black placefulness, individually and collectively, is constantly being altered, navigated, and contested by whiteness.

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