ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: SKYRISE: BLACK GIRLS 'ARCHITEXTING'
                              YOUTHTOPIAS

                              *Alexis Morgan Young, Doctor of Philosophy,
                              2023*

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This dissertation illustrates the utility of Black girls' imaginations in liberatory

projects, particularly in the (re)imagining of education. As this biophysical world continues

to reveal the insidiousness of current systems of power, now, more than ever, people are

exploring the (im)possibilities of abolition. Central to the project of abolition is imagining

otherwise ways of being and living; thus, those committed to actualizing liberated futures

for Black girls must make sure their voices are amplified in world-making projects. This

project examines a six-week extracurricular program, Astronomy Club, that serves as

homeplace (hooks, 1990) for six preadolescent Black girls. During the program, Black girls

engaged in architexture, the hybrid approach of melding principles of architecture and

literature to document their speculations of a youthtopian future. Grounded in Black

Feminist Futurity (Campt, 2017), Black Quantum Futurism (Phillips, 2015); Black Critical

Theory (Dumas & ross, 2016); the overarching question of this qualitative study asks: *In a*

literacy program designed for and with them, how do Black girls 'architext' their

imaginations of Black girl-centered educational futures? Data sources include interviews

video-recorded observations of program sessions and multimodal program artifacts,

analyzed through a grammar of Black futurity as modeled in Campt's (2017) *Listening to*

Images.

Study findings indicate that when the Black girls in this study dream of freer

educational futures, they: (1) dream in the dark, (2) dream in community, and (3) dream of

a world full of justice. Furthermore, they provided directives for constructing youthtopian

learning environments and described them as sites that: (1) center Black life and Black

girlhood in the curriculum, (2) tend to their identities and socioemotional positions, and

(3) nourish their body, mind, and soul.

This study adds to the continued project of creating a new world for and

documenting the revolutionary ideologies of Black girls. This dissertation is an invitation to

improve the educational conditions of Black girls through their analyses of present schools

and their fantasies for schools they desire in the future.

SKYRISE: BLACK GIRLS 'ARCHITEXTING' YOUTHTOPIAS

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2023

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Dedication

Hudson and Wesley, my moon and my stars. My sweet girls, this work is for you.
I'm in pursuit of a world that deserves you. I may never see it actualized but I will die
trying. Hudson, you were born just two weeks before I started this program; you've
been rockin' with mama through this whole process. Thank you for sacrificing time with
me during this final sprint! If it weren't for you, I don't know what this work would look
like. It was you who led me on the quest of learning other Black girls as I learn you.
Wesley, you joined our family at the end of this marathon. Thank you for reminding
breathing new life into me. I love you both with my whole heart.

Family and friends, thank y'all for your unbound support. I appreciate all the

check-ins, phone calls, random cards, and reminders that I can do this. I love y'all deep!

Stellar
(Jamilla Woods, 2017)

Meet me in outer space, we could spend the night

I've grown tired of this place, we could start again

When you look at me what do you see?

What do you see in my place?

I've been awake for 9, 274 days

Your plastic pictures, tinted mirrors

Tell me nothing 'bout myself

I've been complacent with the stories

And the lies you tell my heart

So I'm leaving on a jet plane

Don't know if I'll be back again

Meet me in outer space

We could spend the night

I've grown tired of this place

We could start again

Meet me in outer space (meet me in outer space, baby)

We could spend the night (we could spend the whole night up there)

I've grown tired of this place (I can't breathe, I can't speak down here)

We could start again (we could start all over again

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Introduction

In third grade, we moved into a new house on Kenosha Street in Oak Park, Michigan. Our new home was a one-story ranch with bricks the color of sand, three bedrooms (one for my mom, one for my grandma, and one that was all mine), and a basement that, to this day, gives me an eerie feeling. The kitchen (that caught on fire my senior year of high school) and dining room (which had a giant picture of Black Jesus at the Last Supper throughout my childhood) is located between the family room in the front, which I could never play in because it had our "good" furniture and the den in the back where our family gathered to share meals and watch Family Feud (only the episodes Steve Harvey hosts). The den was where I received my first lessons in political education and Black feminism—though these were not the terms employed in my family's pursuit to teach me to navigate the world.

On Kenosha Street, I could be whomever I wanted to be on any particular day. The dreams I dreamt within those walls undoubtedly shaped me into the former Black girl, woman, wife, and mother that I am today. Sometimes this looked like me plucking plants from my mother's garden in our backyard to make "potions" that I attempted to sell to neighbors or packing my backpack because I was going to drive my Barbie Jeep to Disney World. It looked like me stuffing a fanny pack with the gear I learned as a Girl Scout would help me adventure the "woods" located a couple of blocks away from my home. This imagination demonstrated itself in me wearing a black leotard with a bold purple stripe through the entirety of the summer 2000 Olympic Games that somehow took place both in

Sydney, Australia, and our den simultaneously. I changed my name weekly for a year, often prompting my family to ask me, "who do you want to be this week?", free of judgment and full of genuine interest and affirmation—I exclusively answered to the name "Leaf" the summer before eighth grade. At home, I dreamed, I imagined, I created, I loved, and was loved.

I am the daughter of Crystal, born at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and who is currently unlearning the politics of Black respectability socialized into many Black folks of her generation. I am the first-born granddaughter of Claudean, who attended segregated schools in Georgia. She recently left this biophysical world, but her indelible mark on me through her affirmations of my enoughness sustains me. I am now the wife of a Black man, Taurean, and the mother of two Black daughters, Hudson and Wesley, who, by simply existing, force me to reexamine the world. With each second that passes, I am reminded that they were birthed into a world where their humanity is contested (Hartman, 2019; Jackson, 2020). Their "aliveness" (Quashie, 2021) has been the single most important catalyst in my pursuit to co-create freer futures for Black children, particularly those who identify as girls. The clarity I am gaining of who I am as a Black woman stands on the foundation of the girlhood my family tried to safeguard from being stolen anywhere, but especially on Kenosha Street.

I have such fond memories of growing up on Kenosha Street, which was, and still is, the gathering place of my family—at any moment, someone uses their key to come in and get respite from the world, physical or spiritual food, a good laugh, or a good cry. When I think of home, I think of the sounds of the women in my family making plans for the future,

discussing the latest communal happenings and church gossip, affirming and challenging each other— all over neo-soul or gospel music playing quietly in the background. I think of the smell of Pine Sol, the incense my mom burned (despite my grandma's dislike of the fragrance), the meals my mom prepared for breakfast, and the dinner my grandma brought home from her job cooking in the church kitchen. When I think of home, I imagine the smell of the menthol salves my grandma used to soothe the pain in her knees caused by her time as a mail carrier. When I close my eyes, I can still picture my mom requesting me to do the latest trick I learned at school for one of the ladies whose hair she sometimes braided in the evenings as a means of additional income to supplement her work as a social worker. I think of playing games on the powder blue folding card table, reading books on the front porch—but most of all, I recall the incredible amounts of refuge I felt.

Growing up, I was the darkest person in my family. Because of this, my family made sure to affirm the beauty and brilliance of Blackness and worked to combat the negative self-image that can result from the insidiousness of colorism (Abrams et al., 2020; Baxley, 2014, 2017; Bell & McGhee, 2021; Rosario et al., 2021; Townsend et al., 2010; Ward & Robinson-Wood, 2016). I was the pride of my family, actively involved in activities in our large Baptist church, and had friends from my involvement in various extracurricular activities and the neighborhood. Our house on Kenosha was the "Kool-Aid house," which meant that the neighborhood children would often stop by for a cool beverage and a snack, During my childhood, not only was Kenosha a site of community for my family, but it demonstrated to me how 'home' could manifest beyond the physical structure itself. My home provided examples of a praxis of love, care, and protection that was not restricted to

the people in our home. My home also demonstrated the multitude of ways love can be practiced within various communities. The same ways my mom and grandmother provided othermothering (Edwards, 2000) to children in the neighborhood, I also received othermothering from a host of adult women I felt accountable to, with whom I was in community.

On Saturday mornings, I usually woke up to my mom standing over my bed singing a tune she'd just made up about the sun and a new day. Saturdays were always long days, full of various extracurricular activities. My mom presented me with possibilities of what could be through exposure to alternate ways of being through my involvement in extracurricular activities. In some programs, more than others, I was able to identify things in these spaces that reminded me of playing with my friends in the den on Kenosha. Most of note was the time I spent in the Girl Scouts of America.

I was a Girl Scout for twelve years in all Black troops led by all Black women, including my mother, for a number of years. Scouting introduced me to ways of being and knowing housed within and beyond communities I called my own. Volunteering at homeless shelters, like the one Aimee Meredith Cox studied in her Black girl ethnography *Shapeshifters: Black girls and the choreography of citizenship* (2015), illustrated how people, like the girls in Cox's text, can both live in conditions of indigence and elation simultaneously. We learned of the transformative power of the arts at Detroit's Hitsville Museum, the Detroit Institute of Art, performances at the Fox Theatre, and the Detroit Opera House. We also *literally* saw the transformation of a neighborhood at Detroit's Heidelberg Project, whose vision states that "all citizens, from all cultures, have the right to

grow and flourish in their communities'' (The Heidelberg Project, 2021). We visited

mosques and synagogues to witness otherways of knowing, loving, and serving, who I have

come to know as God—but others may call by a different name. These rich windows,

mirrors, and telescopes (Bishop, 1990; James, 2015; Toliver, 2018; 2020a) contributed to

how I read the world and began shaping my ideas of my place in the world. These

experiences helped me to define *home* and question how to build new ones.

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Skyrise for Black Girls

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Cranes in the Sky (2016) is a Grammy award-winning song written and performed

by Solange Knowles. The song, largely colloquially credited for being the first in the R&B

genre to delve into the mental health of Black femmes, chronicles the task of rebuilding

oneself after a tumultuous season of being. The cranes mentioned in the song's refrain are

not in reference to birds by the same name; instead, they are the large machines used to lift

and lower heavy items and materials during the process of constructing or destroying

structures. Knowles' (2016) song is just one contemporary example of Black femmes

demonstrating the usefulness of architecture as a world-building tool. As exhibited in the

song, cranes have the capacity to aid in the architecting of new dwellings to provide

protection from "metal clouds" (Knowles, 2016) that may loom above the heads of Black

women and girls living in a society that often denies them peace, safety, and rest—a society

that attempts to deny Black women and girls homes. Cranes can aid in constructing

alternate possibilities of the concepts of safety, home, and freedom. Cranes have the

potential to help architect new ways of living, such as those proposed in the Skyrise for

Harlem project (Jordan & Fuller, 1965).

In the panel, *Skyrise: June Jordan's Architectural Imaginary* (2021), hosted by the Department of African American Studies at UC Berkeley, the audience was presented with the opportunity to (re)learn about June Jordan's proclivities toward architexture; the hybrid approach of melding principles of architecture and literature (Davis, 2013; Fish, 2007). Before departing the Earth in 2002, Jordan was a Black feminist thought leader, scholar, poet, teacher, activist, and to some, an architect (Fish, 2007; Savonick, 2018). During the panel, Dr. Leigh Raiford (2021) asserted with admiration that "one area where June Jordan was ahead of time was in her attention to architecture as a site of *world-building and freedom dreaming* [8:40]."

Having internalized the notion of architecture as a tool to create otherwise worlds, I began to meditate on the relationships between space, imagination, home, and futurity. This idea called me to reflect on June Jordan's architectural project and its application to the fields of education and Black girlhood studies. The project in discussion, *Skyrise for Harlem* (Jordan & Fuller, 1965), is perhaps the most striking and most uncredited example of Jordan's commitment to employing architecture as a mode of seeking new modes of living for Black people and the liberatory praxis located within space and place-making.

Figure 1. Photo of the "Skyrise for Harlem" project. (Jordan & Fuller, 1965)

Skyrise for Harlem (Jordan & Fuller, 1965) was a *architextual* project generated by a

collaboration between June Jordan and R. Buckminster Fuller. It was a radical reimagining

of Harlem centering the needs and desires of Harlem's existing Black residents. Having

identified the suffering of the residents, the project was curated to respond to the antiblack

terror being inflicted on Black folks in Harlem (Fish, 2007) by (re)imagining the geospatial

landscape. Jordan employed architecture as a means of tangibly creating new ways of

living. Jordan was not a trained architect and, as such, pursued Fuller, whom Schwartz

(2020) refers to as "a visionary of affordable, sustainable housing" (para 3), due to his

reputation for thinking about the future and temporality in his architectural designs (Fish,

2007). Fuller would later get the credit for the plan as Jordan's contributions were erased

by *Esquire*, who renamed the piece, *Instant Slum Clearance* (Cervantes & Xu, 2020; Davis,

2013; Fish, 2007; Raiford, 2021; Schwartz, 2020). Nevertheless, *Skyrise for Harlem* exemplified Jordan's commitment to centering love in her approach to activism, liberatory ideology, and her sincere belief in the possibility of otherwise presents and futures.

As described by Davis (2013), Fish (2007), and Cervantes & Xu (2020), the plan featured fourteen cylindrical towers built atop the existing housing projects to avoid resident displacement during the construction, providing an opportunity for them to 'move up' in society, both symbolically and practically. Each tower could also contain shops, markets, and ramps to control traffic flow. Each apartment had a large window and conveniently located parking. Additionally, the project called for the expansion of social services, increased access to public resources, and shared community amenities. Aware of the environmental injustice, the plan boasted large green spaces and technologically advanced modes of transportation such as bridges between the cylinders.

Although the plans developed for *Skyrise for Harlem* were never actualized, the project provided a tangible example of what home could and should look like for Harlem residents. *Skyrise* contends with what is owed to Black folks and what places and spaces could look like if they are intentionally created with love (Savonick, 2018). Access to green spaces, safety, and leisure should not be solely relegated to the white, wealthy elite. Black residents of Harlem must have access to these conditions as a norm. Like *Skyrises*' reimagining of homes for the residents of Harlem, I wonder what this type of reimagining would look like for Black girls. When constructed explicitly to serve Black girls, I wonder what safety, care, protection, and home look like.

Increasingly, Black girlhood scholars are turning towards hooks' (1990) theorization of the homeplace to describe spaces in which the needs of Black girls are addressed and their desires are prioritized (Greenlee, 2019; Kelly, 2020; Player et al., 2021; Reynolds, 2019). There is a wealth of scholarship discussing the harm done to Black girls in schools (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Gholson & Martin, 2019; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andews, 2020; Martin & Smith, 2017; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016a, 2016b, 2018), making them "hostile institutions" (Ray, 2022, p. 88) and "site[s] of suffering" (Dumas, 2014, pg. 3). As a form of respite to schooling and society, writ large, Black women are seeking to mitigate this harm through extracurricular programming designed explicitly for Black girls. These programs, with goals such as elucidating Black girls' multifaceted literacies (Griffin, 2020; Price-Dennis et al., 2017; Toliver, 2020b), providing educational fugitive spaces (Greenlee, 2019; Kelly, 2020; Lane, 2017; Reynolds, 2019), improving academic outcomes (Lane & Id-Deen, 2017), and creating opportunities for creative expression (Brown, 2009, 2013; Dando et al., 2019; Kaler-Jones, 2021), all center Black girls and their ways of knowing and being. Each of these programs make room for Black girls to just be.

I have argued for the explicit inclusion of Black girls' liberatory imaginations of otherwise worlds as we engage in the task of theorizing a world post-antiblackness (Young, 2021). To do so, researchers and practitioners must create places where girls are safe enough to continue the development of their liberatory fantasies and where girls trust the protection of the space to articulate their revolutionary ideas. hooks (1990) described *homeplaces* as sites— maintained and protected by Black women— where Black people can meet. One of the functions of the homeplace is to create a place where Black people can

discuss their liberatory imaginations for Black freedom. In this context, I borrow from

Davis' (2022) theorization of Black girl imagination which contends,

> Black girl imagination emerges when Black girls are able to be children
>
> uninterruptedly, when their critical views of the world are honored and welcomed,
>
> and when they are given space to express themselves creatively. I argue that
>
> investing in Black girl imagination means to invest in three key components of Black
>
> girls' lived realities: (1) recognizing and protecting Black girl childhoodness; (2)
>
> legitimizing Black girls' criticality; and (3) elevating Black girls' creativity (p. 76).

As such, I contend that homeplaces can serve as sites for Black girls to engage in world-making projects, such as Skyrise for Harlem.

One may question why world-making is a liberatory endeavor. To answer this question, I rely on a call outlined in the novel *Raybearer* (Ifueko, 2020), in which the Black girl protagonist is prompted, "Do not ask how many people you will save. Ask, To what world will you save them? [...] What world, Wuraola, is worth surviving in?" (p. 624). Many individuals committed to the liberation of Black girls certainly would not argue that this current world is worth saving. Research has shown that Black girls are acutely aware of the insidiousness of antiBlackness, misogynoir, and ageism (Smith-Purviance, 2021). They are also apprised of the "anti-Black girl violence" (Smith-Purviance, 2021, p. 167) both inside and outside of the schooling context. This world has failed Black girls and, therefore, this world must end.

Currently, there are camps of scholars, practitioners, and activists working to make living and learning in this world more bearable. Others are making plans for the

possibilities of an otherwise world. However, the perspectives of Black girls are notably absent from both types of world-making projects, with few exceptions. Black girls know the world is in chaos and that people in power did not create the current education system for them (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Kelly, 2018, 2020; Morris, 2007; Shange, 2019). It is essential that their liberatory literacies are included in the blueprints for what comes next in society at large and in education, specifically. As such, this project ultimately seeks to elucidate Black girls' imaginations and liberatory fantasies regarding education to examine the tensions between the way schooling currently functions and the ways Black girls would design it themselves. This inquiry encourages those concerned with the educational futures of Black girls to create educational interventions "in the meantime, in-between time" (ross et al., 2020, p. 20) until we reach a future world on the other side of antiBlackness.

As introduced to me by Dr. Justin Coles in a virtual classroom visit, the poem "Dear White America," Danez Smith (2014) highlights the wickedness of the manifestations of white supremacy in America by providing examples of anti-Black terror. As a resolution, he abandons the world as we know it. Smith muses:

I've left Earth to find a place where my kin can be safe, where Black people ain't but people the same color as the good, wet earth, until that means something, until then i bid you well, I bid you war, I bid you our lives to gamble with no more. I've left Earth & I am touching everything you beg your telescopes to show you. I'm giving the stars their right names. & this life, this new story & history you cannot steal or sell or cast overboard or hang or beat or drown or own or redline or shackle or

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silence or cheat or choke or cover-up or jail or shoot or jail or shoot or jail or shoot or ruin this, if only this one, is ours [2:38].

This quest of pursuit was echoed by Afrofuturist composer, SunRa. About him Zamalin (2019) writes, "Ra's provocative suggestion was not that black people needed to immigrate or assimilate, but that they needed to undertake space travel in search of a new planet" (p. 96). I join Smith and SunRa on their journeys through the universe in an attempt to find a world worth living in—a world worthy of Black girls. I am not naive in the sense that I believe there will be a mass exodus of Black folks from Earth. As Black feminist astrophysicist Chanda Prescod-Weinstein reminds us in the podcast, *For the Wild*, we should be wary of colonizing space when we have yet to learn to live with the biophysical world we have available. However, I believe we can and should learn to live beyond the enclosures of the ontological world. Brown (2021) teaches us,

> Dominant social formations have denied African diasporans the rights and
> freedoms associated with being defined as human. My claim is that because black
> people have been excluded from the category human, we have a particular
> epistemic and ontological mobility. Unburdened by investments in belonging to a
> system created to exclude us in the first place, we develop marvelous modes of
> being in and perceiving the universe. I am claiming that there is real power to be
> found in such an untethered state the power to destabilize the very idea of human
> supremacy and allow for entirely new ways to relate to each other and to the
> postapocalyptic ecologies, both organic and inorganic, in which we are enmeshed. I
> argue that those of us who are dislocated on the planet are perfectly positioned to

break open the stubborn epistemological logics of human domination. To imagine

as best we can outside these epistemological and ontological circumscriptions does

not mean we save the human race, at least not that race as we know it. Salvage may

not be possible at this point, although this is not necessarily a catastrophe. The

untethered state does allow for the possibility of real change on a vast inhuman

scale (p. 7).

In concert with Fikile Nxumalo (2021), who references Sharpe (2016), I too am

interested in inquiry that "foregrounds speculative, fugitive, and creative ways that young

children, educators, and researchers can make new worlds—worldmaking that envisions

emancipatory Black futures, despite the overwhelming climate of antiBlackness" (Nxumalo,

2021, p. 1192). As such, this dissertation aims to illustrate the utility of Black girls'

imaginations in liberatory projects, particularly in the (re)imagining of education.

Statement of the Problem

The research is clear; Black girls are acutely aware of their societal positioning and

the discrimination present in schools (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Kelly, 2018, 2020; Morris,

2007; Shange, 2019). Schools are dangerous sites of suffering for Black girls, as evidenced

by the spirit murdering along with the racial and gendered violence they regularly

experience in these spaces (Baker-Bell, 2020; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Dumas, 2014;

Johnson, 2018; Johnson et al., 2017; Kelly, 2018, 2020; Love, 2016; Muhammad & Haddix,

2016; Mustaffa, 2021; Nyachae & Ohito, 2019; Sealey-Ruiz, 2016; Toliver, 2021; Woodson,

2021). Despite the harm occurring in schools, Black girls are not passive actors in their

education, and they have clear ideas about improving their conditions (Carter, 2008;

Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Evans-Winters, 2005; Kelley, 2018). However, researchers, practitioners, abolitionists, and policy-makers too often ignore the expertise of Black girls when their ideas should be catalysts for ushering in new ways of learning (Edwards et al., 2016; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Young, 2021). It is not up to adults to decide what Black youthtopian education (Akom et al., 2008) — youth-led education spaces outside of white norms — can and should be. In the following section, I provide an overview of the current state of Black girls in U.S. schooling contexts to demonstrate the urgency of including preadolescent Black girls in the (re)imagining of how we do education.

Black girls and antiBlack violence in schools

In 2014, Dumas theorized that schools are "sites of suffering" (p. 2) for Black students, wherein their "identities are under attack" (p. 6). This perspective, coupled with the notion that "spirit murdering" (Love, 2016, p.2; Mustaffa, 2021) of Black children occurs daily in schooling spaces demonstrates the effects of anti-Black violence on Black students in schools. We learn from Love (2016) that "it is thus fundamental to call attention to the fact that our education system, built on White supremacy and enforced by physical violence, is invested in murdering the souls of Black children, even if they are not physically taken" (p. 3). This anti-Black violence manifests through micro-assaults, micro-insults, and micro-invalidations, in addition to physical violence (Ighodaro and Wiggan, 2011). Because schools are white institutional spaces (Embrick et al., 2022), Black girls, in particular, experience them in distinctly harmful ways due to the "double-bind" of being both Black and female (Ford et al., 2018). Despite this double-bind, Black girls continue to meet traditional markers of academic success every day (Carter, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2005,

2014). Despite the layered structural and social oppressions they encounter, such as being subject to harsh disciplinary measures (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris, 2016), being underrepresented in gifted and talented programs (Evans-Winters, 2014; Ford et al., 2018), rendered "invisible" in classrooms and academic literature (Chavous, T., & Cogburn, 2007; Ford et al., 2018), and learning in sterile, prison-like classrooms (Hines & Young, 2020), Black girls can and do exhibit academic resilience in school spaces (Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2014), although resiliency should not be a requirement for academic success and protection against violence.

Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein (2012) report that Black girls are largely unhappy with the inequalities they experience in school settings and are mostly distrustful and skeptical of schools and teachers. Many of these girls are aware of unfair discipline policies, teacher bias, and harmful stereotypes (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Carter, 2008; Datnow & Cooper, 2007; Kelly, 2018; Morris, 2007; M. Morris, 2016). They know school policies work to their detriment and not their success. However, for many Black girls, knowledge of these challenges does not thwart their academic success. Research illuminates examples of Black girls using their voices to demand equitable policies, practices, and diverse school personnel (Carter, 2008; Datnow & Cooper, 2007; Kelly, 2018; Morris, 2007). Chavous & Cogburn (2007) echo the sentiments of these studies, arguing that Black girls can resist the oppression of white institutional spaces without compromising their academic outcomes. However, at present, much of this work on Black girls' perceptions of schooling is at the high school level.

Perspectives of young Black girls are missing

As evidenced above, Black girls are not unaware of systemic inequalities in education, and they often contest and actively work against them. However, research on Black girls' resistance to educational inequalities rarely centers the experiences of elementary and middle school-aged girls. More work on these younger girls' experiences is imperative, especially because Black girls often are subject to adultification (Epstein et al., 2017). That is, they are perceived to be older than they are, and they are held to expectations that are not appropriate for their age (Epstein et al., 2017). Consequently, adultification interrupts Black girls' childhoods, exposes them to harsher disciplinary practices than those used with white girls, and diminishes their access to protection in schools (Epstein et al., 2017; Wun, 2016).

The erasure of childhood among Black girls is not limited to school practices. It also presents itself in educational research, as evidenced by the paucity of studies that center the unique educational needs of Black girls (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Evans-Winters, 2014; Rollock, 2007). Moreover, in the research that does exist on this topic, there is limited information on Black girls in elementary and middle schools. As Black girls are not a homogeneous group, there is a need for a more in-depth examination of within-group variation among Black girls, including age. (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; O'Connor, 1999). To map the full educational landscape of the lived experiences of Black girls in schools, it is essential to evaluate their experiences at various points in their educational experiences.

More research on elementary and middle school-aged Black girls will lead to a deeper understanding of the ways in which early school experiences influence their perceptions of schooling and its function. Moreover, studies of elementary and middle school girls' perceptions of school will help researchers, practitioners, and policymakers better serve this population.

"The imagination gap"

Before building a new world, we must first imagine new modes of being. However, to do so, the problems of the imagination gap must first be solved. The imagination gap refers to the "gap between what we think about, the kind of impact we try to have, and what we could conceivably achieve" (Manu, 2017, p. xi). In her award-winning text, *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (2019), Ebony Elizabeth Thomas nuances the imagination gap by illuminating how, for Black people, whiteness is a leading contributor to their limitations in imagining new possibilities. Thomas (2019), using fantasy texts to illustrate her point, identifies how by setting whiteness as the default, Black youth, who in turn become adults, are denied access to opportunities to envision themselves in the fantastic which refers to "A sense of the infinite possibilities inherent in fairy tales, fantasy, science fiction, comics, and graphic novels draws children, teens, and adults from all backgrounds to speculative fiction" (Thomas, 2018, p. 1). Although Thomas' (2019) exploration is situated in literary studies, other Black scholars have taken up the imagination gap as a point of entry to their inquiries. For example, Coleman (2020) employed the imagination gap to aid in his analysis of queer histories and how they can be restored.

Drawing on her experience bearing witness to the imaginations of children she has been in community with, Thomas (2019) emphasizes that the imagination gap is not a critique of children but, rather, the manifestation of exclusion in adults. I think in concert with Thomas in many ways, including her love for Detroit, her passion for teaching young people, and her endearment with the fantastic. I also agree with her that Black youth, in this particular instance, use their imaginations creatively even in worlds that do not include them. However, I concur with Davis' (2022) argument that, "Black girl imagination is always present wherever Black girls are, but there are certain environments that can stifle it" (p. 79). Relatedly, Thomas (2019) argues ,"[e]ven the very act of dreaming of worlds-that-never-were can be challenging when the known world does not provide many liberating spaces" (p. 2). Putting Davis' (2022) conclusion about Black girl imaginative spaces in concert with Thomas' (2019) observation about the lack of liberatory spaces, reinforces that Black girls are not lacking imagination; rather, they are being denied access to spaces that make it safe to dream. As such, this project contends that although the concept of the imagination gap was created with adults at the center of its' development, a similar imagination gap presents itself in services, research, and spaces available for Black girls.

Furthermore, as Toliver (2018), citing Myers (2014) reminds us, "the boundaries imposed upon the imaginations of children of color force them to limit their dreams to what they can perceive" (p. 14). However, Toliver (2018) extends this argument and writes, "However, imagining new hopescapes requires the imagination to be unlocked. It requires that Black girls are given the chance to color outside the lines and create new

representations of Black girlhood. It ensures that Black girls are able to imagine what they want from the world and to create new ways to make their dreams a reality, rather than being forced to use the tools that the realistic world provides" (Toliver, 2018, p. 19). The previous quote reinforces the urgency of providing Black girls with spaces to dream of otherwise worlds and imaginative tools to build them. There is a dire need for Black girls to have access to sites created explicitly for them to imagine and reify liberatory fantasies.

Rationale

This project centers both the quotidian and extraordinary desires of Black girls in the context of their imagined futures and hopes to reveal how their fantasies of future youthtopian spaces can inform present learning conditions for them. hooks (2014) teaches us that, "to be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality" (p. 110). As such, until schools as we know them are abolished, the voices and perspectives of youth —particularly Black girls due to their societal positioning—must be included in school initiatives to improve the education they receive "in the meantime, in-between time" (ross et al., 2020), p. 20). Further, extant research's more narrow focus on older adolescent Black girls and harmful school practices and policies has not fostered a fuller understanding of young girls' imaginations and their recommendations for learning contexts that meet their needs and desires.

I anticipate that linking the data to tell the stories of revolutionary or "loud" fantasies of freedom and education will be a more straightforward pursuit than narrating the girls' quiet dreams. I am aware that asking young Black girls to articulate radical visions

of liberated futures in the same ways that adults do/can is a formidable task. I also know

that revolutionary praxis and ideologies reside in the ordinary, normal, and "quiet

soundings" (Campt, 2017) of what Black girls do, say, and create as well. On the concept of

quiet, Campt (2017) writes:

Quiet is a modality that surrounds and infuses sound with impact and affect, which creates

the possibility for it to register as meaningful. At the same time, the quotidian must be

understood as a practice rather than an act/ion. It is a practice honed by the dispossessed in

the struggle to create possibility within the constraints of everyday life. For blacks in diaspora,

both quiet and the quotidian are mobilized as everyday practices of refusal (p. 4).

Furthermore, I think of the panel *SOLIDARITIES: Black Girlhood Conversations*

(2022), in which Annette Joseph-Gabriel discusses her project of reading letters written by

Black girls who lived through chattel slavery or adjacent to it, to understand how

personhood was constructed through writing in and beyond the context of slavery. In

particular, she reads over 100 letters written by a Black girl, Euphemie Toussaint. In her

analysis of the letters, Joseph-Gabriel states:

> Not only does she offer no radical politics, which is perhaps a tall order for a seven-
>
> year-old, but she also makes no radical demands. It is this ordinariness, the very
>
> quotidian distractions that make up her life, that I find productively unsettling.
>
> Toussaint nudges us beyond the frames of resistance and struggle to see Black girls
>
> just being without restraint. So to translate this into the language of our present
>
> moment, yes, Black girls are magic and Black girls just are. So once I shed the weight
>
> of the expectations of Black girls' extraordinariness Toussaint's letters reveal that

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elusive being without restraint that we miss when we look solely for how a black

girl is navigating weighty matters like racism and slavery in her time [46:17].

In concert with Campt (2017) and Joseph-Gabriel (2022), this project aims to

extrapolate from not only the revolutionary ideas Black girls may trust me with but also

their mundane desires. Like Brown's (2021) text, this project "seek[s] out black quotidian

practices and visions of communality, sociality, and kinship already operating outside the

bounds of normalizing imperatives" (p. 10) by centering a fugitive educational space (ross,

2021) explicitly created to loudly and quietly hone the speculative practices of the girls in

this study. By acknowledging the various frequencies of Black girls' imaginations of

youthtopian learning, we permit the inclusion of the perspectives of all Black girls, even

those not typically considered extraordinary or wielders of #BlackGirlMagic.

Research Questions

This study examines six Black girls' imaginations and liberatory literacies as they

both conceptualize youthtopian schools and analyze their current schooling contexts.

Specifically, I am interested in how they understand their places in schools, the functions of

schooling, and tensions they perceive between the role of schooling and their desired

futures. I was led to ask consider these topics, dwelling in the gray area between

Afropessimism and Black Futurism, while raising two Black daughters in a failing world.

Thus, the following overarching research question guides this study: *How do Black girls*

architext their imaginations of a Black girl-centered educational future in an out-of-school

learning space designed for them?

Sub-questions include:

- *What are some of the ways Black girls enact liberatory literacies, theorizations of Black Futurity, and place-making practices while engaging in world-making projects?*

- *What are some of the tensions between the ways Black girls describe the current contexts of education and their imagined futures?*

- *In what ways can Black girls' understandings of their present context of education inform an educational future centering the needs and desires of Black girls?*

Research Design

I sought to to understand Black girls' understandings of their geospatial and sociopolitical positionings in schools, I used a qualitative approach employing Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018) to study a Black girl-centered, out-of-school critical literacy program I designed. The program ran during fall semester of 2022 at an all-girls school in a large metropolitan city in the Middle Atlantic region. This study of six preadolescent Black girls focused on the relationship between schooling, youthtopian learning environments, and imagined futures.

Definition of Terms

More comprehensive definitions for terms used in this study are offered in chapters two, three, and four. However, I briefly note how I define and operationalize three important terms here.

Liberatory

This study employs Martin at al.'s (2019) definition of liberation:

However, our purpose is to center a radical departure. We imagine a world in which our ontological relationality is not to Whiteness, antiBlackness, and systemic violence; a world in which we are not defined by a purpose of survival, resistance, and a fight for freedom. We imagine a world in which we define ourselves and desires in infinite multiplicities, all of which has nothing to do with anyone or anything else except Black individual and collective fulfillment (p. 47).

The definition above is in lockstep with the epistemological positioning of this paper which holds that Black people and Black girls in the context of this study, deserve to live lives outside of the enclosures of white supremacy and antiBlackness. The knowledge of Black people, and girls specifically, is full, true, and enough. Of particular importance is the inclusion of self-definition of Black girl desires as they are experts and theorist in their own rights.

Liberatory literacies

Academic research and Black girls' experiences and ways of knowing make it clear that they have a multitude of literacies, whether schools acknowledge them or not (Brown, 2007; Brownell, 2020; Griffin, 2020; Kelly, 2020; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Muhammad & Womack, 2015; Price-Dennis et al., 2017). Black girls have literacies that allow them to "see, name, and interrogate the world not only to make sense of injustice but also to work toward social transformation" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 120). Of particular interest to this study are Black girls' *liberatory literacies*, which I define as Black girls' competencies to identify, analyze, and interpret oppressive structures and develop and communicate plans to rupture them to imagine the world on the other side of antiBlackness. Although Black

girls have liberatory literacies, they do not always have communities and spaces to express them (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 2020; Price-Dennis et al., 2017; Rogers & Butler-Barnes, 2021).

Youthtopias

Of youthtopias, I borrow Akom et al. (2008) definition, which states that they are: traditional and non-traditional educational spaces…where young people depend on one another's skills, perspectives, and experiential knowledge, to generate original, multi-textual, youth-driven cultural products that embody a critique of oppression, a desire for social justice, and ultimately lay the foundation for community empowerment and social change (p. 2).

The concept of youthtopian has been used by scholars in the fields of urban education and critical youth studies to explore the possibilities of social change and activism in youth-centered spaces with an explicit focus on justice and freedom (Coles, 2021a, 2021b; Feixa et al., 2016; Wilkinson, 2015). Coles' (2021a, 2021b) work engages the concept of youthtopias with Black youth in out-of-school contexts to examine and reject antiBlackness. In the context of this paper, youthtopias are a particular type of homeplace (hooks, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study draws from Black Critical Theory (Dumas & Ross, 2016), Black Feminist Futurity (Campt, 2017), and Black Quantum Futurism (Phillips, 2015; 2019) to examine and understand Black girls' imaginations about otherwise ways of learning and liberation. Taken together, these concepts help to explain the insidiousness of antiBlackness in the present, the urgency of thinking through

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liberatory plans through the future conditional tense, and how the imaginations of Black girls are sites of world-making. Chapter three of this proposal broadens and extends this brief description of the conceptual framework used in this research.

Scope of Study

Although this project is intended to amplify the voices of young Black girls, I am aware that gender paradigms and definitions are shifting. I acknowledge that girlhood itself is a fluid category with no universally accepted criteria for who is given or gives themselves membership. Through this project, I aim to amplify the voices of those living at the intersection of race, gender, and age-based oppression. With this in mind, to participate in the study, the intellectual contributors had to self-identify as a girl. Noting the need for them to obtain signed consent from a parent or guardian, as mandated by the Institutional Review Board, I am keenly aware that this may have, unfortunately, led to the exclusion of gender-expansive youth.

Significance of Study

The significance of this qualitative study is multilayered. The adultification of Black girls is well documented (Epstein et al., 2017), as a result of Black girls' denied childhoods and a hyper-emphasis on the suffering they experience, there is limited information available about the ways Black girls use their imaginations in both their academic pursuits and their non-career related future aspirations.

As such, this project contributes to the fields of Black girlhood studies and urban education by expanding what we know about Black girls' imaginations and liberatory literacies. This project expands on what researchers in Black girlhood studies know about

preadolescent Black girls, who are underrepresented in the current research literature. Furthermore, this study will illuminate how Black girls contextualize schooling and its functions and lend their perspectives to the project of making schools a place worthy of their varying forms of genius. By providing Black girls opportunities to use their voices to name their conditions and imagine future possibilities, those who love Black girls will get the chance to learn how to serve them better.

Chapter 2: Between Starshine and Clay

Literature Review

The novels, *Children of Blood and Bones* (Adeyemi, 2018) and its sequel, *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (Adeyemi, 2019), chronicles the protagonist Zélie Adebol, a teenage girl born into the Maji clan, as she pursues a quest to topple the structures and regimes that have oppressed her people—those born with magic. Readers witness Zélie's critical consciousness development through the books as she deepens her analysis of the world around her. Shaped by community and mentorship, but mostly her lived experiences, Zélie demonstrates her liberatory literacies by first recognizing the systems around her that were developed to maintain societal oppression, engaging in various loud and quiet oppositions, and making future plans for a liberated Orïsha. Like the Maji people living in Orïsha, who are persecuted based on their identities, so, too, are Black girls. Like the monarchy in the text, schools in the United States systemically build and maintain power for a ruling class of people while relegating others to slave status (Hartman, 1997; Sharpe, 2016). However, Black girls see this, resist it, and make plans to live freely otherwise.

In this chapter, I review prior scholarly work to provide context to processes and ideologies that contribute to Black girls' liberatory literacies and how their thinking about youthtopias can inform new modes of existing, similar to how Zélie imagined reorganizing Orïsha. I situate this project within the existing literature by examining the ways Black girls have demonstrated resistance to antiBlack and white supremacist ideologies through various embodied and literacy-based methods. Following this, I shift my attention to utopias to better understand how conceiving them can improve our current conditions and

aid in a quest to build new ways of being. I close this conversation by considering how scholarly texts aid me in conceptualizing a Black girl sense of (home)place.

Black Girl Resistance

Black women and girls are not strangers to engaging in activism and advocacy work aimed at improving the conditions of their lives (Kaler-Jones et al., 2020; McArthur, 2021). Both historically and contemporarily, Black girls have used their lived experiences and various forms of literacy to resist the terrors of white supremacy and antiBlackness (Jean & McCalla, 2020; Kaler-Jones et al., 2020; Muhammad & Womack, 2015). There is an essential body of educational research committed to telling stories about Black girls' resilience in oppressive contexts. However, I stand in ranks with scholars turning away from resilience research, due to its tendency to focus on the individual and not the systems to which Black girls respond (Reynolds, 2019). This shift in the field reminds us that Black girls should not have to be resilient as they should not have to live in a world committed to their suffering. Instead, standing in solidarity with Black girls who recognize harm, in whatever ways they name it, this section of the literature review investigates the ways Black girls stand in opposition to and resist antiBlackness and its consequences. I am specifically interested in how Black girls use their liberatory literacies to participate in "girl-fueled activism," which Brown (2016) defines as "the opportunity to identify a problem, work in coalition, leverage allies and energize people, think critically, listen well, speak up, stand up, and take calculated risks" (p. 28). As such, I examined literature that helped me better understand the ways girls participate in girl-fueled activism and resistance.

Rogers (2018) defines resistance as "the multiple ways that individuals engage with and respond to societal narratives, norms, and stereotypes presented to them within a particular sociohistorical context and political moment" (p. 288). AntiBlack ideologies have assigned stereotypes with negative connotations to Black girls, such as loud, violent, and hypersexual. Rosario et al. (2021), drawing from Robinson & Ward (1991), further contextualize resistance in the context of their paper with their argument that "Resistance involves confronting and rejecting pejorative evaluations of blackness and femaleness, adopting instead a sense of self that is self-affirming and self-valuing" (p. 507). The definitions provided by Rogers et al. (2018) and Rosario et al. (2021) work in concert for this inquiry to understand black girl resistance. Rogers et al.'s (2018) definition of resistance provides historical and social contexts for how individuals interact with harmful stereotypes. In contrast, Rosario et al. (2021) definition adds racialized and gendered specificity while highlighting acts of rejection, self-affirmation, and self-valuing. Together, these definitions help us understand how Black girls analyze, reject, and respond to stereotypes that do not align with the ways they define themselves. Black girls use their voices and actions to resist antiBlackness and white supremacy inside and outside of schooling contexts. Following is an examination of some of the explicit resistance strategies Black girls deploy.

Embodied resistance

There is cultural disgust for Blackness and the phenotypes of Black bodies (Dumas, 2016; Ringer, 2016). Despite being aware of the negative societal structures that come with being both racialized as Black (antiBlackness/white supremacy) and gendered female

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(misogynoir/patriarchy) (Rogers et al., 2018; Rosario et al., 2021), Black girls resist this disdain for their bodies through various embodied modes of resistance. Consequently, racial identity and racial identity development, particularly in the context of resistance exhibited by Black girls, have garnered increased attention in academic research. Black girls demonstrate their resistance by engaging with their hair, skin complexion, and speech, among other ways.

Hair

Black hair is beautiful—that should not be up for debate; however, living in a world that privileges whiteness as the standard for beauty and professionalism has rendered Black hair contentious. Black girls are bombarded by countless disparaging messages about Black hair through mainstream and social media (Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016). Despite these messages, hair-based discrimination (Macon, 2014), and the hair harassment— "direct or indirect unwanted, unwelcomed, and offensive behavior made either explicitly or implicitly typically towards women or girls of African descent, based on the texture, look, or subjective assumptions of their hair" (O'Brien-Richardson, 2019, p. 523) —they experience, Black girls and women still engage in hair practices that challenge majoritarian ways of being.

Like their bodies, Black girls' hair is policed, and failure to comply with white norms regularly results in varying forms of punishment and symbolic violence (Kaler-Jones, 2020; Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016, Rogers et al., 2022). Penalties for refusal to conform with society's rules regarding the expectations for Black hair extends to schools wherein Black girls are subject to disciplinary action and other consequences (Kaler-Jones, 2020; Phelps-

Ward & Laura, 2016, Rogers et al., 2022). However, Black girls can and do use their hair as a tool of resistance against these antiBlack norms and policies. In fact, Kaler-Jones (2020) argues that for Black girls, hair "is an arts-based practice and form of resistance" (p. 61). Building on prior research, she incorporated contemporary examples of Black girls using their hair to refuse and protest the policing of their hair through a historical review of Black hair over time. Her layered analysis demonstrates how Black girls' hair has become politicized and how society has attempted to use Black girls' hair as a tool for conforming to white beauty standards and norms. Kaler-Jones (2020) teaches us that whiteness has contested Black girls' hair throughout time, and time and time again, they fight back.

Empirical studies have also exhibited Black girls' relationships with hair and society's messages. For instance, Phelps-Ward and Laura (2016) investigated the YouTube hair vlogs of Black girls to better understand how they interacted with dominant narratives about Black hair and their self-talk. They found evidence that Black girls are aware of the prevailing discourse about Black girls' hair, and they viewed the girls' decisions about whether or not to concede to them as acts of liberatory agency. For instance, they shared the experience of 17-year-old Free.U, who described wearing her natural hair as "revolutionary" (Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016, p. 817).

Relatedly, Rogers etal. (2022) conducted a study wherein they interviewed 60 high school Black girls to gain insights into the relationship between hair and racial identity development. According to the study findings, most girls recounted instances of resistance through their hair in various forms (such as expressing Black pride, rejecting stereotypes, and celebrating the diversity of Black culture). However, a small fraction (12%) of

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participants assumed a more accommodating position, which the authors saw as an indictment on society and not on the girls themselves. As such, Black girls' decisions about their hair and how they choose to wear it can be seen as acts of defiance and celebration of the diversity of Black culture. Prior research suggests most Black girls enact resistance through their hair, and far fewer adopt an accommodating position, due to societal pressures rather than to lack of agency on their part.

Complexion

Hair is not the only form of embodied resistance Black girls deploy and is not the only Black phenotype policed by systems of antiBlackness, patriarchy, and misogynoir. Research demonstrates that Black girls' skin tones are also a contested site in schools and society at large, which manifests through colorism (Abrams et al., 2020; Baxley, 2017; Bell & McGhee, 2021; Rosario et al., 2021; Townsend et al., 2010; Ward & Robinson-Wood, 2016). Colorism refers to discriminatory treatment, either in favor or against individuals of the same race, solely based on skin color (Walker, 1983). Black girls are certainly not immune to the adverse effects of colorism. Baxley (2014) explored the relationship between colorism and Black girls and concluded:

> The intraracial discrimination and privilege system based on skin color (and other phenotypical characteristics such as hair texture, broadness of nose, and lip thickness) (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992), is regarded in the Black community as commonplace and continues to divide and impact the identity and self-esteem of Black girls (p. 21).

Although studies show that some Black girls internalize negative messages they receive based on skin color (Abrams et al., 2020), there is evidence that many Black girls refuse these narratives. Rosario et al. (2021) demonstrate this regulation in their exploration of the skin color-based privilege system in their study detailing how 59 Black girls in the same all-girls high school described their resistance to colorism in their own words. For instance, one study participant named Alexis viewed being dark-skinned as beautiful, directly resisting white feminine standards of beauty. She stated:

> Uh, I love that I'm darker first because everybody just tell me like oh you so pretty and got this pretty brown skin and you dress nice and your smile is so pretty and it just make, even though, even if they don't tell me that, I can look in my mirror every day at myself and just say like I'm so pretty like, I don't know, it's just a good feelin'. I wouldn't have a problem with bein any other skin color but I'm glad that I got chosen to be this color I'd say (Rosario et al., 2021, p. 521).

To gain a deeper understanding of the study conducted by Rosario et al. (2021), it may be beneficial to examine the specific findings reported by Townsend et al. (2010) in their research investigating the relationship between stereotypes, beauty standards, and colorism and their influence on the self-images of young Black girls. Through the analysis of survey data collected from 270 Black girls between the ages of 10-15, Townsend et al. discovered a strong correlation between stereotypical representations, beauty ideals, and colorism. In particular, their study revealed that girls who held positive self-concepts and academic beliefs were more likely to reject colorist beauty standards and, instead, demonstrate a preference for Black phenotypes. This information can serve as a valuable

reference point for interpreting the results of Rosario et al.'s (2021) study, adding depth and nuance to our understanding of the complex interactions between race, beauty, and identity.

Although researchers agree that colorism has profoundly negative impacts on students in classrooms, there is relatively little information on this issue from the perspectives of Black girls. Most studies on colorism in learning spaces centers the lived experiences of Black women. However, although thin, the literature in this section provides empirical evidence that Black girls recognize colorism and actively resist it.

Speech

Black girls are commonly assigned the labels of "loud" and "boisterous" and thought to be too assertive and opinionated (Kaler-Jones et al., 2020; Morris, 2007). Additionally, they are assumed to take oppositional stances and speak with attitudes— or tones that denote resistance to authority. (Annamma et al., 2019; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Koonce, 2012; Morris, 2007; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Sutherland, 2005). Although many people use these labels as pejoratives, Black girls and the scholars who love them demonstrate the power of talking back (hooks, 1989). In Koonce's (2012) phenomenological study of two Black girls "talking with attitude (TWA)," she surmises that Black girls TWA to resist hostile school environments and respond to perceived disrespect and unmet expectations. One striking example of this comes from an encounter with a teacher described by one of the participants, Olivia. She lamented:

C]ause I remember he had said something, and he was just yelling at me like I was stupid. And, he actually called the students stupid before. He's like, 'YOU GUYS ARE

SO STUPID!' or whatever—We didn't even do anything—I was like, '*You don't have to yell at me.*'" Again, Olivia used TWA (see italics) to defend herself because of behavior that offended her. She continued, "Cause I don't like being yelled at. I really don't…you got to consider people's feelings because you don't know what they've been through or whatever." In this quote, Olivia used TWA with the teacher to assert herself (Koonce, 2012, p. 42).

Koonce's (2012) findings are consistent with Morris' (2007) ethnographic study of a public middle school. Although teachers were the primary focus of the study, Morris observed that Black girls resisted scripts of femineity and deficit views in schools, even though this was not welcomed by the teachers and often led to "unequal consequences" (Koonce, 2012, p. 512) for Black girls, as compared to their non-Black girl peers.

It is also important to highlight examples of Black girls using their voices to resist the harms of antiBlackness, white supremacy, and the patriarchy beyond the enclosures of schooling spaces. For example, in a New York Times article Bennet (2020), profiled four Black girls — Brianna Chandler, 19; Tiana Day, 17; Zee Thomas, 15; Shayla Turner, 18 — who have all been vocal in the movement for Black lives. The journalist talked to the girls about their strategies for using their voices to protest, organize, and sustain themselves during the 2020 racial uprisings and climate justice protests. When one of the girls, Shayla, was asked about her desires for the movement going forward, she replied, "I want to see an entire revolution led by youth. I feel like we are definitely capable of that. We have the power and we have the voices" (Bennet, 2020, para 46). There are other examples, such as Amariyanna Copeny, 14, also known as 'Little Miss Flint,' who has been using her voice for

racial and climate justice since 2007 and has been featured in numerous publications and television shows doing advocacy work.

Black girls are frequently branded as noisy, rowdy, and excessively forceful, resulting in their being perceived unfavorably and mistreated in society. Nonetheless, Black girls and scholars who study their experiences showcase the potency of how these girls use their voices to challenge hostile settings and defend themselves. By resisting prescribed notions of femininity and inadequacy in educational institutions, Black girls engage in acts of rebellion that are often punished.

Recorded resistance

This section expands on the ideas presented by Price-Dennis et al. (2016), who define Black girl literacies as specific actions that involve reading, writing, speaking, moving, and creating to affirm themselves, their worlds, and the complex nature of young Black womanhood and/or Black girlhood (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016, p. 5). Black girls have always been storytellers, using counterstories to resist and challenge anti-Black ideologies and actively writing the change they wish to see in society, as highlighted by Davis (2022), Griffin (2020), Kaler-Jones et al. (2020), McArthur (2016), Muhammad & Haddix (2016), and Toliver (2020c). Therefore, literacy, in various forms, empowers Black girls to "use their words to invoke change in themselves and others" (Winn, 2010, p. 427) and an "essential component of social transformation" (Kelly, 2020, p. 457). As demonstrated in the section above exploring how Black girls show embodied resistance, a form of literacy in and of itself, this section explores literature on the written records of resistance that Black girls offer.

Writing

Writing has the potential to function as a potent tool of resistance, enabling individuals and communities to express divergent views, contest prevailing narratives, amplify marginalized perspectives, and promote social change. Additionally, writing facilitates the documentation of personal experiences, the preservation of culture and history, and the creation of counter-narratives that reject deficit discourses (Muhammad, 2012). Black girls have inherited a legacy of literacy practices from their ancestors, including writing, which they use as a form of resistance (Griffin, 2020; Muhammad, 2012).

A number of studies have investigated the ways Black girls in writing programs use writing as a vehicle for social transformation. For instance, Muhammad (2012, 2014) discussed the girls in a four-week writing institute she facilitated and documented their compelling need to articulate themselves freely and boldly, using their pens to challenge distorted representations of Black girls and women. Bringing attention to a group of Black girls rarely acknowledged in academic literature, Black Muslim girls, McArthur and Muhammad (2017) conducted a four-week literacy program investigating how Black girls use letter-writing to talk to a future generation of Black girls. The authors reported that in over half of the letters written by the participants, they used language that encouraged themselves and other Black Muslim girls to stand up to injustices.

Winn's (2010) study, in which she facilitated a playwriting program for incarcerated Black girls—a group all too familiar with injustice— is another example of girls using writing as a tool of resistance. Winn (2010) found that writing was a transformative mechanism the girls used to (re)story their worlds. Winn writes,

The playwriting and performance process, in the case of Sanaa, was a vehicle to

transport her to a free space she did not believe was possible in jail. Once Sanaa

experienced this moment of freedom, she was determined to achieve it within the

confines of the RYDC and beyond. Comparing the experience of writing and

performing to 'the open world', Sanaa was able to re-imagine what her life could be

like given the new language she was acquiring through theatre (p. 438).

As Sanaa used writing to interrogate worlds, I am particularly intrigued by the notion of

using writing to reimagine what worlds can be. For example, Toliver's (2021) *Recovering*

Black storytelling in qualitative research: Endarkened storywork, tells the story of Black girls

in a literacy program taking up science fiction to write radical new worlds into existence as

an act of refusal of this world.

Digital

Black girls also resist disparaging tropes through counter storytelling on social

media. In Muhammad & Haddix's (2019) study of how Black girls use their multiple

literacies to engage in storytelling, one participant, Crane, discussed using social media to

post images of her debate team's accomplishments—a sport from which Black girls are

typically excluded. Crane is not alone in her employment of social media as a space to

write counterstories to resist deficit thinking about Black girls. Another example of Black

girls engaging in online activism is through the use of the hashtag #BlackGirlMagic

originated by Cashsawn Thompson (Mason, 2021; Rogers et al., 2021). As explained by

Toliver (2019), although #Blackgirlmagic was conceptualized to celebrate positive aspects

of Black girlhood, "critics have contested the use of the term, stating that the phrase

further dehumanizes Black girls, as it insinuates a lack of humanity and a focus on superhuman resiliency" (Chavers, 2016, p. 2). Despite this critique, many Black girls still rely on the concept of #BlackGirlMagic as a mode of storytelling and resistance.

Black girls have also demonstrated an awareness of the utility of using social and digital media spaces to call for social transformation and resist oppression without the hashtag. For example, in Kelly's (2018) study of Black girls' engagement with social media activism at a predominately white high school, all seven of the participants expressed that social change required individual action and that they felt comfortable speaking out against injustices at their school. One way they spoke out was through the social media network Snapchat. However, school personnel punished some of the participants because of their social media activism through, for example, in-school suspension. Another online vehicle for resistance is the social media video platform YouTube. On YouTube, Black girls create vlogs, or video blogs, to resist mainstream discourses. Further, Phelps-Ward and Laura (2016) discuss the ways that Black girls employ their YouTube platforms to engage in practices of self-love which is a form of resistance because when you live "in a society that profits from yourself doubt, liking yourself is a rebellious act" (Brown, 2016, para. 3).

Multimodality

Black girls use multimodal practices to time travel and reimagine this dystopian world while creating texts that are strongly related to their lives (Gibbs-Grey et al., in press; Muhammad & Womack, 2015). The critical multimodal practices of Black girls have been passed down intergenerationally through the teachings and examples set by their foremothers (Griffin, 2020). Griffin (2020) asserts that Black girls' literacies have

"historically been critical and multimodal in nature, allowing them to write and create spaces in opposition to the oppressive worlds in which they live. Black girls' literacies live far beyond the confines of any page" (p. 14). Bolstering this line of thinking, Kelly (2020) argues that "exploring the multimodal literacy development of Black girls is thus necessary for understanding how they analyze and act upon their social worlds, including how they develop subversive forms of resistance through mediums such as art and poetry" (p. 458). Black girls' multimodal practices help them push back against majoritarian narratives about them, which helps them to "move beyond negative stereotypes to maintain their creativity and manifest the present and future lives they desire and so deeply deserve (Griffin & Tuner, 2021, p. 422). In tandem, Griffin (2020), Griffin and Turner (2021), and Kelly (2020) underscore how Black girls' multimodal literacies are the manifestation of Black girls' understandings of the ways society positions them, a cultural legacy, and a tool for resisting subjugation. Together, the scholarship of these researchers demonstrates how Black girls' multimodal practices are sites of resistance that engage with the past, present, and future.

Black girls use multimodal practices to resist majoritarian narratives told about them. In their study of the ways Black girls engage in two online multimodal platforms, Prezi and Pinterest, Muhammad and Womack (2015) found that participants used these platforms to resist the misogynoir Black girls experience in society. They used multimodality to "to reframe public perceptions" (p. 36) of Black girls, particularly as they pertained to physical beauty, sexualizing and objectification, and education. An additional noteworthy finding from this study is that both traditional and nontraditional forms of

writing proved to be beneficial in helping the girls to acquire and express self-knowledge. Relatedly, in Griffin's (2020, 2021) work with nine adolescent Black girls, these co-researchers created a website that was a refusal of white ways of knowing Black girls. The girls used their multimodal literacies to challenge who gets to be considered a knowledge maker. They curated a platform that employed quotes, pictures, and graphics to reorient Black girls' position in society, refuse stereotypes, challenge authority, and expose the insidiousness of colorism.

Another type of multimodal composition Black girls use as a tool of resistance are internet memes. Internet memes are "a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" and are typically composed of an image with text over it (Davidson, 2012, p. 122). Employing Black Feminist Critical Literacy as an analytical lens, Tankley (2016) conducted an analysis of the ways Black girls employed memes as a way of resisting what they identified as prevalent misrepresentations of themselves online. The memes both "challenged norms of Black girl incompetency" and "challenged normative ideas of beauty" (p. 247). Their multimodal practices aided them in communication, self-expression, and their ability to critically analyze their surroundings to survive in a society that is both anti-Black and patriarchal.

Between Starshine and Clay

"won't you celebrate with me?"
(Clifton, 1993, p.25)

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed. (p. 25)

Architecture refers to the practice of designing and constructing physical structures such as buildings and homes, often within the parameters of a particular aesthetic. Scholars who take up architecture as a field of study often have a more nuanced perspective which sometimes results in difficulty establishing clear disciplinary boundaries due to the complexity of the field (Pérez-Gomez, 1987). One particularly salient definition of architecture comes from Alberto Pérez-Gomez (1987) who argues that architecture is embodied knowledge and writes, "architecture is not the embodiment of information; it is the embodiment of meaning. It has as much to do with the opposition which the world presents to humanity as it does with the 'resultion [sic] of humanity's material needs'" (p. 57). I am drawn to this idea of "architecture as embodied knowledge" as it operationalizes architecture as a tool of opposition and abolition.

Architects analyze the ways people engage with the world and create physical structures that respond to their needs and desires—Black girls and women do the same with their literacy and resistance practices. Situated on a structure that Black feminist poet Lucille Clifton identified as "a bridge between starshine and clay" (1993), Black girls' liberatory literacies and imaginations contend with the possibilities of otherwise (starshine) and the realities of their existing physical and sociopolitical worlds (clay).

Clifton's (1993) poem itself functions as a "resultion [sic] of humanity's material needs" (Pérez-Gomez p. 57), and as such, becomes a tool of world-making which is a utopian endeavor. Just as architects and designers create physical structures that shape the physical environment, utopian thinkers and visionaries imagine social structures and systems that can transform society. As Levitas (2013) suggests, "Utopia as architecture is both less and more than a model or blueprint. Less, in being a provisional hypothesis about how society might be, offered as part of a dialogue, neither intending nor constituting a forecast, recognizing itself as in part a present future" (p. 198). In other words, utopia as architecture is not intended to be a prediction of the future, but rather an invitation to engage in a conversation about what could be possible. It is vital to invite Black girls into the conversation about the (im)possibilities of this world and others (Young, 2021).

The concept of utopia as architecture offers a nuanced vision of a better future that is both contingent and hopeful. It is an in-progress blueprint based on a hypothesis about the future informed by what is understood to be true about the present. Utopia as architecture offers a cautiously optimistic call to imagine and create a more just, equitable,

and sustainable society through radical hope and imagination of a world that does no harm.

The concept of utopia as architecture is highly relevant to the experiences of Black girls who resist oppression and work to build new worlds through literacy and other practices. Due to their peculiar positioning in society, they have been forced to use an ethnographic lens to constantly survey and assess their surroundings (Turner et al., forthcoming) equipping them with a data-informed interpretation of the ails of society and lay of the land. They also have ideas about how to improve society and their place within it. As such, Black girls who resist oppression and build new worlds are akin to architects, envisioning and creating new social structures and systems. They are well equipped to construct freer futures using their lived experiences as vehicles for transformation and (re)imagining the world (Brownell, 2020). Overall, the concept of utopia as architecture offers a framework for Black girls to imagine and create new possibilities for themselves and freer futures. As such, I argue that, for Black girls, engaging in the practice of architexture and imagining educational futures is a utopian undertaking.

During the panel, *Skyrise: June Jordan's Architectural Imaginary*, Wilson (2021) asserted that the Black imagination can bring forth new worlds as exemplified in Jordan's (1965) reimagining of humanizing homes for the Black residents of Harlem. I wonder where and how this same commitment to homes specifically for Black girls to reimagine Black life can present itself in academic research. In pursuit of co-constructing homeplaces for Black girls to learn more about their liberatory literacies, engagement with Black futurity, and placemaking, I turn to bell hooks.

Building homeplace

In 1990 bell hooks invited us into her grandmother's home as she introduced her theorization of homeplace. Simultaneously symbolic and physical, homeplaces are sites of resistance and respite where Black women and girls "could freely confront the issue of humanization" (p. 42), absent of the white gaze as they are "spaces of care and nurturance in the face of the brutal harsh reality" (p. 42). Like my childhood home, her grandmother's home was where she was not only able to feel safe, loved, and protected—but was the place where she received her first lessons in political education and Black Feminism. As hooks (1990) reminds us, homeplaces are "... not simply a matter of black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination" (p. 384). Extending hooks' work, (Cahill, 2021) provides specificity to the utility of homeplace for Black girls; she writes: "in the homeplace, Blackgirls are the standard, the norm, and the model by which all other things are measured. Homeplace is a space that is continuously forming and where roles and identities are chosen rather than assigned" (para. 3). Perhaps one of the most useful applications of hooks' (year) writing about the homeplace and thinking about Black futurity lies in her claim that Black women throughout history have constructed spaces that provide the safety for resistance to oppression, protection against white supremacy, and "revolutionary visions of Black imagination" (p. 46).

Homeplaces, by their nature, have the potential to serve as safe spaces for Black girls to engage in modes of futurity absent of the white gaze. I have heard the phrase "there are white people in the room, even when there are no white people in the room" to

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acknowledge the gross pervasiveness of white supremacy, but what if we refuse this? Dwellings specifically created for refuge, both biophysically and in research, that meet the needs of Black girls, like the *Skyrise* project dream for the residents of Harlem, can provide safe conditions for Black girls to imagine otherwise.

I continuously meditate on the poem "Revolutionary Dreams" (Giovanni, 2009, p. 106), in which poet Nikki Giovanni challenges us to rethink our notions about radical imagination and contend with what dreaming and resistance truly looks like for the Black femme.

<div style="text-align:center">

I used to dream militant dreams
of taking over america to show
these white folks
how it should be done

I used to dream radical dreams
of blowing everyone away
with my perceptive powers
of correct analysis

I even used to think I'd be the one
to stop the riot and
negotiate the peace

then I awoke and dug
that if I dreamed natural
dreams of being a natural
woman doing what a woman
does when she's natural
I would have a revolution.

</div>

I am particularly drawn to the final stanza of this poem. I acknowledge the socio-political contexts associated with the term "natural woman." However, I understand these lines as a call to action for we who do not benefit from patriarchy—Black girls, women, and gender-expansive individuals—to use our radical imaginations and dream of what we would do if

we were living outside the unnatural constraints of antiBlackness. This poem serves as a

reminder that revolution must take place outside of the "white gaze" (Morrison, 1998,

[29:17]) and center our desires above all else. As such, the dreams of a Black girl, whether

revolutionary or quotidian, detail the necessary conditions to live a liberated life.

Previously, I argued that the imaginations of Black girls are sacred places and that

their conceptualizations of liberation are central to the project of liberation for all Black

people in the future (Young, 2021). I also asserted that Black girls should be protected as

they dream, and only adults who truly love them and who have made ethical commitments

to them should have access to their dreams (Young, 2021). Here, I extend those arguments

by asserting that Black girls' advocates—be they researchers, practitioners, or community

members—should create Earthly dream places for Black girls to dream their revolutionary

dreams and help usher them into reality. As such, I suggest that creating homeplaces as

sites of resistance can help those who love Black girls create sites of imagination.

hooks (1990) argues that "[o]pposition is not enough. In that vacant space after one

has resisted, there is still the necessity to become. To make oneself anew" (p. 52). I

understand the previous sentence to mean that dismantling the world as we know it is not

the only goal of abolition; after the collapse of the current state, explicit consideration must

be given to erecting a new, just way of living. hooks' (1990) argument is in lockstep with a

statement Stovall (2021) made in the R. Freeman Butts Lecture at the American

Educational Studies Association, in which he asserted with urgency that the goal of

abolition is rebuilding a new world and not merely the destruction of the current one. As

such, as we continue our quest toward Black liberation, a central focus must be architecting a world in which Black girls would want to live.

As I contemplate how homeplaces can be constructed with Black girls, it is also essential to consider how physical places for Black girls' dreaming can and should be created; it is necessary to clarify what a sense of place means in the context of this paper. Researchers in the social sciences have been increasingly interested in place and place-making (Logan, 2012; Pink, 2008; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014). Tuck and McKenzie (2014) help explain this growing attentiveness in their text, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods*, in which they argue that place is an inextricable aspect of social science research as participants are located in particular places in the biophysical world. They remind us that "research in the social sciences is always concerned with epistemologies, questions, and methods that impact place and land, and the human and natural communities that inhabit them" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 1). As such, understanding physical places helps researchers add important context to their attempts to understand a group's ways of being, knowing, and living.

Located in the expanding field of Black geographies, which, as a field, "helps scholars examine how Black spatial experiences and expressions critique antiBlack socio-spatial violence and (under)development, as well as analyze how Black life flourishes in settings designed to capture or subdue it" (Moulton, 2020, para. 4), thinkers such as Kathrine McKittrick, Ashanté M. Reese, and Adam Bledsoe analyze the relationship between Blackness and spatiality. Returning to the *Skyrise: June Jordan's Architectural Imaginary* (2021), which also interrogates the relationship between Blackness and spatiality, the

panelists discuss the displeasure Jordan expressed with the fact that the *Skyrise for Harlem* was boasted as a futuristic and utopian project as her goal was to create a solution for the people in the present. This positioning of *Skyrise* provides a haughty example of the fact that antiBlackness renders the idea of pleasurable homes for Black people inconceivable. As such, it is crucial to guide our inquiry toward the specificity of a Black sense of place: "an understanding of place that is tied to Black experiences in the very places that are often deemed uninhabitable or unfit for human habitation" (Moulton, 2020, para. 4). As McKittrick (2011) writes,

> A black sense of place draws attention to geographic processes that emerged from plantation slavery and its attendant racial violences yet cannot be contained by the logics of white supremacy. A black sense of place is not a standpoint or a situated knowledge; it is a location of difficult encounter and relationality. A black sense of place is not individualized knowledge—it is collaborative praxis. It assumes that our collective assertions of life are always in tandem with other ways of being (including those ways of being we cannot bear (p. 105).

In Annelise Morris' (2017) article, *Materialities of Homeplace,* she clarifies how homeplace works in tandem with a Black sense of place and argues that the concept of homeplace is crucial to understanding how Black communities create their own ways of being. Morris draws on the scholarship of Keith Basso and writes:

> I draw here on Keith Basso's (1996) concepts of placemaking and place worlds in thinking about the existential importance of the homeplace in Black American life. Basso describes place-making as "a universal tool of the historical imagination" and

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asserts "place-making involves multiple acts of remembering and imagining which inform each other in complex ways" (Basso, 1996, p. 5). It is this remembering and imagining that I assert is active and key in an archaeology of the homeplace; it is memory and its processes that create the homeplace as a sacred place with a deep past, but also project its historical trajectory onto the future (p. 37).

Still needing to add more specificity to a Black sense of place in pursuit of understanding how physical spaces for Black girls to dream can be erected, sustained, and protected, perhaps the notion of place and place-making most applicable to this paper can be located in Tamara T. Butler's (2018) *Black Girl Cartography: Black Girlhood and Place-Making in Education Research*. Situated at the intersection of Black girlhood studies, Black geographies, and education, Butler introduces a praxis-oriented framework that calls for researchers who identify as Black women to conduct work with and for Black girls that explicitly centers their liberation and accounts for their place-making practices. The framework requires direct attention to both their sociopolitical and geospatial orientations. Like traditional cartographers, Black women and girls who choose to employ this framework are committed to using mapping as a framework to chart and document the intersectional oppressions to which these girls are subject and how they unpack them. It holds as a truth that schools are racist, heteronormative, patriarchal institutions that further perpetuate inequality. Black Girl Cartography will be further examined in Chapter 4; however, this explicit attention to place leads me to question where we should build homeplaces.

(UN)earthing utopia

Dreaming in terms of utopia invokes an archive of black alternative worldmaking.
(Brown, 2021, p. 7)

What kind of world do girls want to build their homes in? In pursuit of the answer to this question, I am called in by Ohito's (2020) mediation on her revolutionary fantasy in which she states, "In the fantasies that I dream to escape the anti-Black dysmorphia of this dystopia, I, too, create another world where, at a bare minimum, Blackness is everything— ya dig?" (p. 216). Black girls are currently living and learning in a dystopian world (Gibbs-Grey et al., forthcoming) that perpetuates wanton antiBlackness and suffering. Watkins (2022) reminds us that, "For certain groups, particularly the disprivileged, the apocalypse is not something to anticipate and fear—an imagined future event—but something that has already happened or continues to happen" (p. 1). Those who are consumers of Black music may have seen this sentiment exemplified in the works of Janelle Monae and Missy Elliot. The previous quotes offered by Ohito (2020) and Watkins (2022), coupled with Zamalin's (2019) assertion that "[B]lack American life has been nothing short of dystopian" (p. 6), suggest that the end of this ontological world would not be as perilous for Black folks as some may assume. Brown (2021) seemingly confirms this assertion when she writes, "But apocalypse holds awful promise; times of crisis open up possibility. A crisis could mean a total paradigmatic break, and imagining such a break is an opportunity for expansive speculation" (p. 87). Relatedly, Watkins (2022) argues, "Utopian possibility after an apocalyptic event means not only acknowledging pain and violence but also building on those cultural traditions that speak of resistance and resilience" (p. 1). Meditating on Brown (2021) and Watkins (2022) in tandem, positions me to consider what it means to be

living in a dystopian world, anticipating apocalypse, and questioning what hope, liberation, and future making looks like at the end of the world.

Although the idea of the end of the world is typically met with fear and negative associations, it can also be viewed through a lens of hope for creating new societies and ways of learning, absent the insidiousness of current systems of oppression, including antiBlackness and patriarchy. In her 2021 book, *Black Utopias: Speculative Life and the Music of Other Worlds,* Brown's concept of utopia is located outside of the dimensions of recognizable spatiotemporally in a dimension post the end of this world which allows for speculation about the possibilities and limitations of a world beyond the ontological enclosures of this world.

As Levitas (2013) writes, "[t]he core of utopia is the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively" (p. xi). Colloquially, utopia is commonly used to denote the idea of living in perfect worlds and societies. However, when employed by those engaged with utopian thought as a scholarly pursuit, it is typically more nuanced. Zamalin (2019) argues that "...what unites virtually all utopian thought is the conviction in an ideal society that diminishes suffering, fully realizes human potential, and pushes the boundaries of what seems possible" (p. 5). A critical subset of utopianism is the study of Black utopias. Again, in thinking of utopia as a society where Black people have their needs and desires met, Black utopias serve as liberated worlds for Black folks. This is in lockstep with Zamalin's (2022) assertion that Black utopias are places for "fugitivity, escape, and reconstruction" (Zamalin, 2022, 40:05). In his dissertation, *Fugitive Time: Black*

Culture and Utopian Desire, Omelsky (2018) expounds on the connection between the legacy of slavery and Black utopian thought:

> Emerging, then, from the dialectic in these slave narratives of claimed liberal subjectivity and perpetual black precariousness (for free and enslaved alike), I propose, is an intimated utopian desire for another world. That is, a longing for a black social life outside the coordinates of what Elaine Hadley calls the "cognitive practices" of liberalism, outside the "frame of mind" of self regulation, moral grounding, and disinterestedness" (p. 4).

Some detractors argue that the study of utopias is immature, escapist, and totalitarian (Brown, 2022; Levitas, 2013; Vieira, 2010; Zamalin, 2019). However, Levitas (2013) reminds us that utopianism is a form of critique of the present state of the world. By elucidating our utmost desires for a just world, we expose exactly where the world is failing. As such, fantasizing about the (im)possibilities of a world free of harm, particularly for Black girls, provides an opportunity to analyze the present world and define the conditions of a future world in response. Of interest to this project are the capacities of utopian thoughts to help architect new landscapes and worlds.

Chapter Three: To Infinity and Beyond

Conceptual & Pedagogical Frameworks

Where in space and time can Black girls live freely? Nxumalo (2021) boldly asserts that we are "drowning in antiBlackness" (p. 1191). Contextualizing her argument in early childhood studies, she uses Black futurity and Black refusal as theoretical and methodological concepts to draw attention to the necessity of conducting research that affirms Black childhoods and imagines new ways of being. She writes about the duality of acknowledging the need to document the pervasiveness of white supremacy while simultaneously worrying that archiving harm may inadvertently contribute to the continued pathologizing of Black children. I, too, have felt this tension in my pursuit of elucidating the freedom and futures of Black girls.

McKittrick's (2011) question, "What if our analytical questions did not demand answers that replicate racial violence?" (p. 950) is in lockstep with Nxumalo's (2021) call for her field to denormalize the suffering of Black children and her assertion that early childhood research is a site for "reimagining and materializing new livable worlds" (p. 1192). Nxumalo's (2021) declaration is based in early childhood studies, but the same is true for the study of Black girls across fields. This denormalization of suffering does not mean it should go unacknowledged—quite the opposite. Dumas (2018) argues that we must begin and end our meditations on relationships between Black students and racial justice with Black suffering to gain an increased liberatory imagination about "possibilities of total disorder of the system which produces so much antiblack terror" (p.

43). McKittrick's (2011, 2021) thinking about racial violence and antiBlackness is in concert with Dumas' (2018) and Nxumalo's (2021) ruminations about the placement, considerations, and implications of centering antiBlack violence in research and inquiry. There is power in naming the antiBlackness conditions in which Black girls live, acknowledging the suffering of Black girls, and allowing them to identify and (re)imagine the systems and structures causing them harm. Beginning and ending with Black suffering provides opportunities to call out and refute the egregiousness of antiBlackness and misogynoir (Bailey, 2013; Bailey & Trudy, 2018). As such, this study requires a conceptual framework that lives in the shadows between this world and the next one.

This chapter serves a dual purpose. First, I introduce the conceptual framework that serves as the theoretical foundation of this study, which informs my political and philosophical assumptions and guides my analyses of the data. The framework employed in this study builds from a framework I previously developed to conceptualize the imaginations of Black girls. The original framework relied on the complementary frameworks Black Feminist Futurity (Campt, 2017) and Black Quantum Futurism (Phillips, 2015) which I will explain briefly below. The expanded framework employed in this study incorporates the tenets of Black Critical Theory (Dumas & Ross, 2016), in concert with Black Feminist Futurity (Campt, 2017) and Black Quantum Futurism (Phillips, 2015) to help me explain the urgency of attending to Black girls' desires for the future *now*. In the following section, I discuss each of these theories separately followed by a discussion of how they work in tandem to serve as the frame of analysis for this work.

In this chapter, I also explain the pedagogical framework used to facilitate my time in community with the girls who informed this study. This study employed Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) as a pedagogical guide, which allowed me to center Black girls' world-making expertise and liberatory literacies. Doing so places the expertise of the future into the imagination of the girls which ultimately makes room for them to chart the path to new worlds.

Conceptual Framework

Black Feminist Futurity

Futurity refers to "theorizing or envisioning possible, probable, and preferable future(s)" and is not only concerned about theorizing and envisioning futures that are "possible, probable, and preferable" while systematically seeking to make predictions about not only "what is to come, but to understand what about the world is likely to continue, and what about the world could plausibly change" (Phillips, 2015, p. 14). More specifically, Black futurity attends to the idea of centering the futures of Black lives in the present and the practice of realizing and theorizing a Black future that does not yet exist. In his 2015 talk, "Antiblackness and Black Futurity in Research on Urban Communities and Schooling," Michael Dumas conceptualized Black futurity as "speak[ing] to a Black possibility, a Black imagination, a Black freedom in the midst of in spite of and against antiBlackness" [3:38]. He states that Black futurity is a "theoretical and political sense of the future of Blackness" that is "an insistence of Black life and Black life going on" (Dumas, 2015). In concert with Dumas, Keeling (2019) defines futurity as both "a promise and a wish" (p. 84). Taken together, these definitions articulate Black futurity's commitment to

Black liberation and insistence on thinking and creating worlds that we have yet to see come to pass using linear notions of time.

Bringing specificity to the speculations of the future, Tina Campt (2017) theorized Black feminist futurity, which gives us a grammar with which to analyze the tenses of being both Black and gendered female. Black feminist futurity begins with the question, "What does it mean for a black feminist to think about, consider, or concede the concept of futurity" (p. 15)? Her response to this inquiry could be best understood through a Black feminist grammar of futurity specifically located in what grammarians would define as the future conditional tense of the now. Campt writes,

> The grammar of black feminist futurity that I propose here is a grammar of possibility that moves beyond a simple definition of the future tense as *what will be* in the future. It moves beyond the future perfect tense of *that which will have happened* prior to a reference point in the future. It strives for the tense of possibility that grammarians refer to as the future real conditional or *that which will have **had to** happen*. The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not, but must be. It's a politics of pre-figuration that involves living the future *now*—as imperative rather than subjunctive—as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present (p. 17, emphasis in original text).

Campt (2017) begins the work of pulling the future into the present through her employment of the "future anterior sense of now" as she argues that we move beyond simply defining the future as "*what will be* in the future" and instead concern ourselves with "the future real conditional or *that which will have had to happen*" (p. 17) as we begin striving toward freedom. Essentially, this theoretical offering provides a directive to start doing the work for the future in the present, to begin operating as if the future is now, and to interrupt the notion that the future is predetermined. Of Black feminist futurity, Caitlyn Gunn (2019) contributes that "to imagine a world where black women are free is a critical futurist praxis that forms the foundation of black feminist activism" (p. 16) and that "black feminism is futurist work" (p. 18). This conceptual context provides a lens through which we can begin analyzing the practices and dreams Black girls use to live the future now. Campt's (2017) and Gunn's (2019) thinking about Black feminist futurity are in conversation with each other because both scholars are concerned with taking actionable steps now to demand freer futures. There is action in Black feminist futurity in which Campt refers to as a "performance":

> The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not but must be (p. 34).

Black Quantum Futurism

Black feminist futurity begins to contend with temporality, which may inspire one to ask the question: What would happen if we decided to abandon notions of western time

and disrupt the dominant discourse of linear time progression altogether? Black feminist and queer scholars answer this question through their analyses of temporality. Seeking to decouple colonial frameworks of spacetime, the Black Quantum Futurism Collective further articulate the intersections of blackness and temporality in their theorization of Black Quantum Futurism (BQF) (Phillips, 2011, 2015). The Black Quantum Futurism Collective (year) defines BQF as:

> a new approach to living and experiencing reality by way of the manipulation of space-time in order to see into possible futures, and/or collapse space-time into a desired future in order to bring about that future's reality. This vision and practice derives its facets, tenets, and qualities from quantum physics and Black/African cultural traditions of consciousness, time, and space. Under a BQF intersectional time orientation, the past and future are not cut off from the present - both dimensions have influence over the whole of our lives, who we are and who we become at any particular point in space-time (para one).

Phillips (2019) further defines BGF as:

> a very specific thing. It's [about] thinking about speculation, the futures and how we bring in our cultural traditions into this temporal domain of the future and what that means in terms of naturally connecting to the past, naturally connecting to the present and the now, and how our cultural traditions have always connected with and supported that (p.18).

In short, BQF uses the future as an analytical lens through which to reframe the past and speculate on possible futures through an amalgamation of "Black/African cultural traditions of consciousness, time and space" (Phillips 2015, p. 11).

Figure 2. A Conceptualization of Black Girl Imagination (Young, 2021)
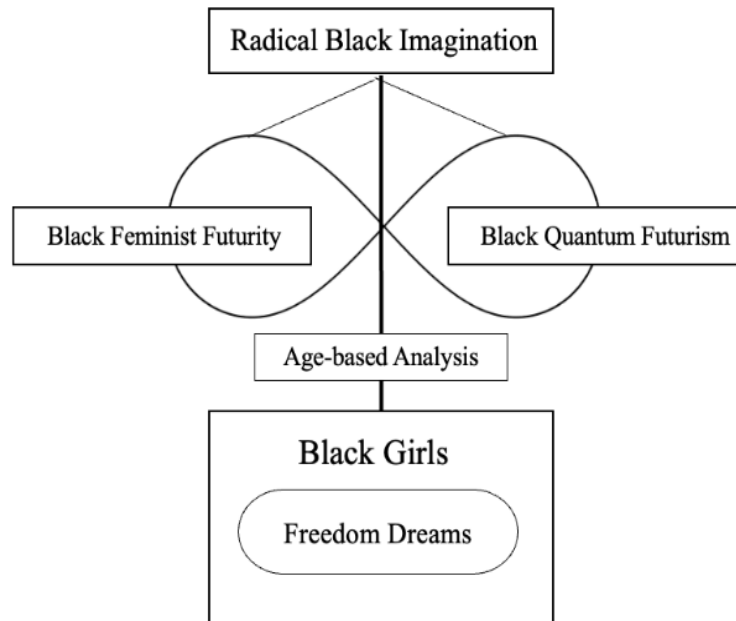
Out of Black radical imagination emerges notions of Black Quantum Futurism and Black feminist futurity. Radical Black Imagination is where we plan the future and/but modes of Black futurity are where we actualize them. Black Quantum Futurism and Black feminist futurity explicitly center Black folks and a desire to reduce the suffering they experience as a result of antiblackness, capitalism, heteronormativity, the patriarchy, and white supremacy, writ large. Taken together, Black Quantum Futurism and Black feminist futurity have the potential to serve as forceful frameworks to better understand and annotate Black girls' dreams, demands, and desires for the future. The previous coupling is

demonstrated by the infinity sign in Figure One. The obvious way these lenses are in concert with one another is their attention to future-making as radical, liberatory praxis. Campt (2017) and Phillips (2015) are very clear about implementing radical interventions for Black life in the future—whether that future be distant years or a few seconds from the time this sentence is written—in the present. While both theories address concerns of the future, they depart from each other with their principal focuses. Campt's (2017) work largely concerns itself with the lived experiences of women, whereas the primary focus of Phillips' (2015) work is rooted in disrupting dominant notions of time and space.

To further understand the radical imaginations of Black girls, an analysis of both temporality and gender, situated within the contexts race and racism, is needed. Attending to temporality helps us shatter the limitations of a fixed future for Black girls by dismantling the conditions predetermined by the present. A reliance on chronological time causes oppressed classes, i.e., Black girls, to "become stuck planning for the present while the society around them speeds forward in illusory, linear progress" (Phillips, 2019, p. 437). Adjusting white Western preconceptions of time and abandoning them for radical (re)imaginations of space and time allows for new possibilities. Likewise, Black youth living in girl-identified bodies have explicit, specific needs in the future, and Black feminist futurity helps us attend specifically to this distinction.

A visible limitation, however, to employing Black feminist futurity and Black Quantum Futurism is that neither concept provides an age-based analysis. Evans-Winters (2011) argues that, "much of what we know about young Black girls consists of bits and pieces of fragmented knowledge" (p. 9). As such, research must take theoretical and

methodological stances to ensure that distinctions between Black women and girls are evident. While they certainly have some parallel experiences, Black girls are not women, and it is critical that researchers and those who work in solidarity with them acknowledge this (McPherson, 2020; Smith, 2019). Failure to recognize Black girls as children perpetuates *adultification*—the tendency to view and treat Black girls as more mature and less innocent than their non-Black peers (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2007; Toliver, 2018)—by positioning them as women in theoretical considerations (Smith, 2019).

Adding to the pervasiveness of adultification is the undefined transition between girlhood and womanhood, which is fluid (Brown, 2009; Hill, 2018). In thinking of the progression from girlhood to womanhood as undefined, Chatelain (2015) describes the adultification that Black girls living in Chicago during the first Great Migration experienced as "an impossible ideological place between adulthood and innocence" (p. 38). A deeper analysis of the distinction between girlhood and womanhood may help illuminate the specific needs of Black girlhood freedom dreams. As a result of the legacy of chattel slavery and antiblackness, Black childhood is "implausible" and "unimagined" (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). Similarly, Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) suggests Black girls have been denied childhoods. To continue the fight for Black girls to be free enough to experience wholeness, we must understand what has been stolen from them. Dumas and Nelson (2016) argue that "a critical framework allows for, and even insists that we pose, research questions that help us capture the meaningfulness of childhood in, of, and for itself" (p.39). It is critical that the field of Black girlhood studies continues to strive toward defining Black girlhood to create free Black girlhoods. Additionally, a specific understanding of Black girl childhood may give

those who work with Black girls tangible language to understand the specific experiences of Black girls in schools and society. As such, new theoretical interventions for studying the imaginations and implementing the freedom dreams of Black girls are necessary. There must be an age-based analysis as demonstrated by the line intervening in the infinity sign in Figure Three.

Figure 3. Conceptualizing Black Girls' Imaginations in Context
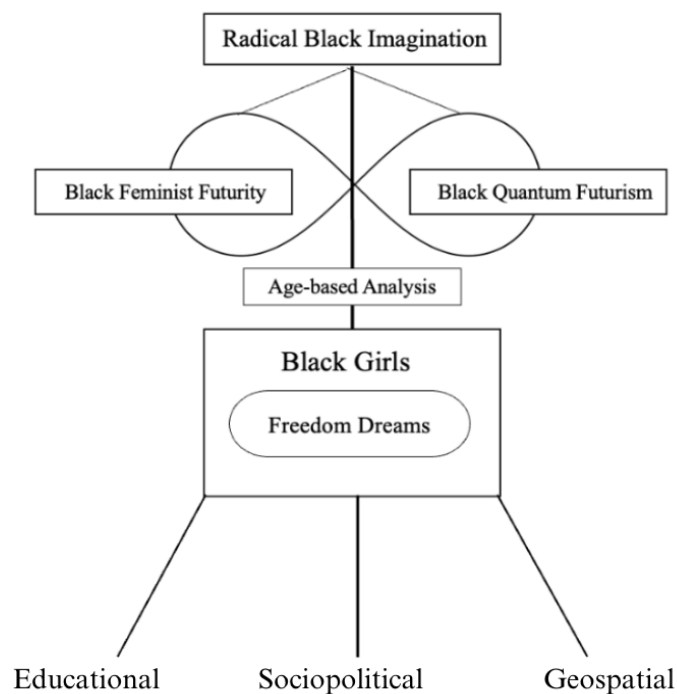
Conceptualizing Black Girls' Imaginations in Context

To fully understand Black girls' liberatory literacies, it is important to have a working conceptualization of their imaginations, which was the utility of the original framework (Figure One). However, to begin actualizing these plans, it is important to be able to ground them in specific contexts. As such, this study aims to better understand

Black girls' imaginations about possible futures in three specific domains: societal, educational, and interpersonal. To aid in this pursuit, I include Black Critical Theory as a theoretical framing.

Furthermore, it is also important to highlight the that literacy and imagination are inextricably linked. Friere (1983) teaches us that,

> Reading is not exhausted merely by decoding the written word or written language, but rather anticipated by and extending into knowledge of the world. Reading the world precedes reading the word, and the subsequent reading of the word cannot dispense with continually reading the world (p. 5).

Employing the Black Radical Imagination can be understood as a way reading the world that is informed by an understanding of the historical context of Blackness in the US context, and analysis of contemporary oppression and movements toward liberation, dreams of the future, and communication of all of these elements. As such, freedom dreams are a type of liberatory literacy as they are composed of information taken in, analyzed, and communicated of what the future can and should look like. Imagination is a way of knowing, practice, existing, and being.

Black Critical Theory

In 2016, Michael Dumas and kihanna ross introduced Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) as an extension of Critical Race Theory in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), providing a means to examine white supremacy and racism. They emphasized the need for a theoretical framework that focuses specifically on Blackness and anti-Blackness to identify and articulate the suffering of Black individuals. They argued that relying solely

on Critical Race Theory may not adequately address the "specificity of the Black" (Wynter, 1989 in Dumas and ross, 2016). Thinking with Gordon (1997) and Wilderson (2010), they argue,

> only critical theorization of blackness confronts the specificity of antiblackness, as a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself (but not person for herself or himself) in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and White (Dumas and ross, 2016, p. 417).

In education specifically, BlackCrit helps to explain the anti-Black terror sustained, perpetuated, and informed by school practices and policies.

BlackCrit is comprised of three foundational tenets:

1. "Antiblackness is endemic to, and is central to how all of us make sense of the social, economic, historical, and cultural dimensions of human life" (p. 429);

2. "Blackness exists in tension with the neoliberal-multicultural imagination" (p. 430); and

3. "BlackCrit should create space for Black liberatory fantasy, and resist a revisionist history that supports dangerous majoritarian stories that disappear Whites from a history of racial dominance (Leonardo, 2004), rape, mutilation, brutality, and murder" (Bell, 1987, p. 431).

These three framings aid me in explaining Black girls' geospatial and sociopolitical positionings in contemporary schooling and their imaginations of sites of learning in the future. They also help me analyze the ways the girls understand the functions of schools

and their lived experiences within them. Of particular service to this study is the third tenet, which emphasizes the utility of liberatory fantasy, as this study seeks to elucidate Black girls' visions of an educational future where their needs are met and their desires are fulfilled.

The Parable as Praxis: Pedagogical Framework

In chapter five of the Parable of the Sower (Butler, 1993), Lauren and her friend Joanne talk after a funeral. During this conversation, Lauren attempts to communicate the dangers of complacency, and the "illusion of security" (p. 118) with their current situation and encourages Joana to join in her pursuits of disaster preparedness and "using her imagination" (p. 68) to get ready for life outside of the walls. Here, Lauren demonstrates the necessity of using one's imagination to make plans for life beyond the enclosures of this world. During this conversation, Lauren analyzes the current conditions of the world by outlining explicit safety concerns such as murder, climate disasters, people addicted to the drug 'pyro', and gross environmental injustice. She offers Joanne various books detailing how to survive off the land, a summary of her new religion, and how to make an emergency pack. Joanne reminds Lauren that they are only fifteen and helplessly asks what they can do about the future Lauren is predicting, to which Lauren responds,

> We can get ready. That's what we've got to do now. Get ready for what's going to happen, get ready to survive it, get ready to make a life afterward. Get focused on arranging to survive so that we can do more than just get batted around by crazy people, desperate people, thugs, and leaders who don't know what they're doing! (Butler, 1993, p. 64).

As Lauren is relaying the urgency of fleeing their enclosure and imagining other ways of living, Joanna exclaims, "You don't know that! You can't read the future. No one can." to which Lauren responds, "You can…if you want to. It's scary, but once you get past the fear, it's easy" (Butler, 1993, p. 64).

In the next chapter, readers find out that Joanna shared Lauren's survival plans with her family because she was scared. When confronted by her father, he asked her if she thought the world was coming to an end, to which she internally replied, "No, I think *your* world is coming to an end, and maybe you with it" (Author, year p. 72). During the course of the conversation, Lauren shared a weakened version of her plans with her father, careful to leave out any mention of her new religion, Earthseed. He told her not to share these plans so as not to scare anyone else and so that she does not "make decisions for this community" (Author, year, p. 75).

The summaries of the two conversations above highlight Black girls' intellectual positioning in society. Lauren demonstrates multiple forms of literacy and a clear analysis of their current condition. Despite both outlining the problem and offering a solution, she is silenced, as evidenced by Lauren's father attempting to persuade her to stop speaking to other members of the community about plans for safety and preparing for the future. She is told she doesn't know what she's doing. This silencing is further exemplified by Joanne, who uses their age as a reason why Lauren should not engage in world-making activities. I wonder how Lauren's plans would have been actualized had the people she trusted seriously listened to her analysis of the world and helped her to actualize her plans. As such, facilitating the Astronomy Club and employing Parable of the Sower (Butler, 1993) as

a pedagogical approach will aid me in providing the girls with opportunities to examine their current world and chart alternate futures.

The pedagogical approach for this study borrowed from Octavia Butler's (1993) science fiction novel, *Parable of the Sower.* I discuss the vitality of employing *Parable Praxis* when creating a space that values Black girls' analysis of their current conditions and their recommendations for the future. As it becomes more apparent that the world is ending, a *Parable Praxis* is required when Black girls allow us to be in community with them as they, like the North Star, guide us toward freedom.

Praxis is both practice and theory operationalized to transform conditions—a set of practices that combine theory and action to address and dismantle oppressive structures (Tuck et al., 2010). My understanding of praxis is further influenced by Marin (2011), who reflects on her practices and shares that praxis is something she "[does] on purpose and not in happenstance and passing" [9: 21]. I take this to mean that praxis requires intentionality. Similarly, McNiff and Whitehead (2011) teach us that praxis is a "morally committed practice" (p. 20). Their inclusion of the idea of moral commitment is in line with James' (2021) incorporation of values in her definition. She says in season two, episode eight of the podcast *Zora's Daughter*,

> *I understand praxis as theory plus practice plus values... I think praxis is often understood as thoughtful action, a practice that is reflexive, responsive, and theoretically informed. When we incorporate values, we also consider what it is that we're committed to, specifically how we want the world to change on account of our action. So, how ought the world look on account of my theorizing and my action?*

Praxis, then, is also ethical and accountable action. To whom are you accountable?

These communities may not be the same communities that you are already a member

of [00:07:41].

As such, I have come to understand praxis as the amalgamation of theory, practice, transformation, intention, commitment, and accountability. These characteristics guide the praxis that is indispensable when in community with Black girls dreaming. These components, along with the lessons taken from Lauren, suggests that a Parable Praxis requires the adults in community with Black girls to:

1. Position them as theorists,

2. Yield authority to them,

3. Engage in reciprocity and provide material benefits,

4. Set out to co-create spaces explicitly for them ,

5. Show up for them unwaveringly, and

6. Share their knowledge in ways they would be proud of.

<h1 style="text-align:center">Chapter Four: Charting the Cosmic Course</h1>

<h2 style="text-align:center">Methodology</h2>

This chapter describes the traditions that situate this study, the data sources, and the analytic processes I used to answer the research questions. The present study amplifies Black girls' liberatory literacy practices and existing tensions between their contemporary educational experiences and their imagined future worlds and ways of learning. I employ Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018) as a methodological approach to better understand the perceptions, experiences, and imaginings of the six Black girls in the study. Below, I describe Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018), the way it will be used for this study, and how I have extended it to Black Girl Astronomy. I then provide a synopsis of the study context, including a program overview and description of the research site. Next, I discuss my data collection and analysis strategies before addressing validity. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of my positionality.

Research Design

Black Girl Cartography

As I seek to create spaces with and for Black girls, I am called to Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018) as a mode of inquiry. This approach allowed me to witness Black girls' place-making practices as they architexted their visions of a Black girl-centered educational future. Tamara Butler (2018) provided an intervention into the dehumanizing theoretical and methodological treatment of Black girls in the field of education research through her groundbreaking conceptual chapter, *Black Girl Cartography: Black Girlhood and Place-Making in Education Research*. In the chapter, she introduced a praxis-oriented

framework to offer education researchers and Black Girl Cartographers guidance in engaging in liberatory research with and for Black girls. Black Girl Cartography is "the study of how and where Black girls are physically and sociopolitically mapped in education" (Butler, 2018, p. 29).

Like traditional cartographers, Black women who employ this framework are committed to using mapping as a method to chart and document the intersectional oppressions facing Black girls and how they understand and respond to them. Black Girl Cartography asserts that schools are racist, heteronormative, patriarchal institutions that perpetuate harm to Black girls, and it examines how Black girls exist, learn, and resist oppression in schools. Furthermore, Black women committed to Black Girl Cartography engage in reflexivity regarding their positionality and their research methods and motivations (Butler, 2018).

Black Girl Cartography allowed me to chart Black girls' sociopolitical and geographical positioning in schools as we know them and document their practices as they conceived of the worlds that can rise from their ashes. Using this methodological approach aided me in elucidating Black girls' place-making practices as they architexted their utopian fantasies of a Black girl-centered educational future. However, Butler suggests that Black Girl Cartography is "in-flux and in-progress" (p. 41) and is constantly being influenced by different modes of Black girlhood, spatiality, and temporality. As such, I offer Black Girl Astronomy as an extension of Black Girl Cartography.

Black Girl Astronomy

Akin to Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018), Black Girl Astronomy honors Black girls' knowledge as instrumental in liberation projects for Black folks. Furthermore, they both acknowledge the importance of studying the physical and sociopolitical positioning of Black girls with the ultimate goal of their liberation. Fundamental to Black Girl Cartography is its attention to place, gender, and age. As such, Black Girl Cartography and Black Girl Astronomy are aligned in their analysis of gender and age; where they depart begins with where they locate place.

While Black Girl Cartography helps conceptualize Black girls' positioning in the past, present, and future of *this* world, Black Girl Astronomy helps its practitioners understand how Black girls position themselves outside this world after it has ended, or in a world *otherwise*. Black Girl Astronomy helps to document freedom dreams and liberatory literacies—both radical and quotidian— by holding the foundational assumption that while racism is permanent in this world (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sharpe, 2016; Moten, 2013), there are opportunities for otherwise ways of existing outside of it in a world that is completely new.

Furthermore, Black Girl Astronomy is a framework that requires its practitioners to speculate about imagined and utopian worlds at the crux of their methodological, theoretical, and pedagogical interventions. As suggested by Brown (2021),

> With black speculation as my methodology, I use the term utopia to signal the
> (im)possibilities for forms of subjectivity outside a recognizable ontological
> framework, and modes of existence conceived of in unfamiliar epistemes. These

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(im)possibilities open up where the human has abandoned us and onto a much

bigger universe, when we jump into the unknowable (p. 6).

As such, I contend that Black Girl Astronomy is useful when attempting to understand how

Black girls conceptualize youthtopias. As Levitas (2013) reminds us, "[t]he core of utopia

is the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively

(Levitas, 2013, p. xi)".

Research Context

The Astronomy Club

In effort to create a homeplace (hooks, 1990) for Black girls to engage in articulating

and visually constructing their plans for otherwise ways of living and learning, I

conceptualized the Astronomy Club. The Astronomy Club was a six-week critical literacy

program aimed at providing Black elementary and middle school girls with a space to

enrich their literacy skills and to facilitate positive racial identity and critical consciousness

development through a series of creative activities. The purpose of the Astronomy Club

was to provide a space for preadolescent Black girls to express, employ, and continue to

develop their understandings of Black futurity and world-making. Black girls were the *sun*

in this space, meaning this entire program revolved around their needs and desires. As

such, this program centered the lived experiences, knowledge, and expertise of the girls

who joined the community.

Each week, the project-based sessions were based on a different astronomical

concept to anchor the activities and our discussions about their ideal educational futures.

Through multimodal art projects, written composition, and map-making, the girls used

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architexture—the melding of architecture and storytelling—to construct an imagined world and education system informed by the needs, dreams, and desires of Black girls. This program sought to provide Black girls with tangible ways to visualize and write themselves into the future and opportunities to examine their current world and chart new ones.

Program design

I facilitated each two-hour meeting of the Astronomy Club. As a former elementary and middle school teacher, I brought my classroom experience and my training in teaching and curriculum development to the Astronomy Club. I iteratively developed the curriculum, and based on information I gathered from the participants during pre-program interviews, some of the weekly content changed based on their desires. The weekly sessions consisted of four recurring segments: (1) Cosmic Connections, (2) Galaxy Girl Time, (3) Constellation Creation, and (4) Solar Sister Circles.

Black feminist astrophysicist Chandra Prescod-Weinstein (2021) reminds us in her text *The Disordered Cosmos*:

> Every community has a cosmology in part because it plays a role in our social ordering; every community also has a cosmology because we want to connect the places we are from with the world we witness into the greater cosmic timeline (p. 262).

With this framing, each Astronomy Club meeting began with a segment titled 'Cosmic Connection' to establish community within the group. I had initially planned that during this portion of the meeting, we would start with a connection question meant to open up dialogue in the group and orient the girls to thinking about the day's topic. Additionally,

during this portion of the program, the girls would be (re)introduced to the 'Astronomer of the Week'—a Black woman or Black girl who exhibits a liberatory praxis from which the girls could learn. However, the girls changed the course of this time together, which will be discussed in chapter 5.

Next, the girls participated in Galaxy Girl Time. This program segment aimed to provide space for critical consciousness and racial identity enrichment. During this portion, the girls engaged in social and literacy activities grounded in discussions of race and identity. I adapted a number of these activities from the organization, Facing History and Ourselves, whose mission is to "use lessons of history to challenge teachers and their students to stand up to bigotry and hate" (facinghistory.org, 2022). In one of the activities, for example, the girls each created as mask that represented parts of themselves that often go unnoticed and highlighted things they wish others knew about them. This mask was an extension of a biopoem activity they completed a couple of sessions prior. This activity culminated with a gallery walk, in which the girls left 'fan notes' in affirmation of their peers.

After Galaxy Girl Time, the Constellation Creation segment commenced. During this portion of the program, the girls engaged in imaginative work time. Guided by the weekly themes, the girls participated in a variety of creative activities such as map-making and collages to architext their ideal learning spaces.

Finally, the sessions concluded with Solar Sister Circles, which functioned as a hybrid between a sister circle and creators' workshop, in a continued effort to cultivate and sustain community within the club. Although the scholarship about sister circles at the K-

12 level is limited, there is evidence that sister circles foster community and healing spaces for Black girls (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). The Solar Sister Circles served as a space for the girls to discuss their multimodal compositions as well as their general feelings about the theme of the session. This time was governed by norms established by the girls during the first meeting.

Selection and description of research site

Butler (2018) argues that "Black girl research relies on the social geography—frequency of movement, entering and exiting, spaces of inclusion and exclusion—of Black girls" (p. 32). As such, it is vital that I provide a rich description of the site where I facilitated the Astronomy Club, particularly because schools serve as both spaces of inclusion, but mostly exclusion, for Black girls. Mae Jemison Academy *(pseudonym)* is a Title 1, all-girls public charter school located in a major city in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The school's fate is unknown as it goes up for reauthorization in 2023, and the standardized test scores have not inspired confidence from the charter's authorizer. At the time of the study, Mae Jemison Academy served just over 200 students in grades 5-8. According to the school's records, the majority of the students identified as Black/African American. Furthermore, school records identified all students as female, although some self-identified as non-binary or gender non-conforming.

Mae Jemison is located in a portion of the city that has been largely suffering from urban blight as a result of local and state government disinvestment. The school's exterior stands in striking contrast to the neighborhood where it is housed. However, many of the girls who attend Mae Jemison Academy live in that neighborhood and take pride in it. Pride

in communities deemed as undesirable by outsiders is a feeling I know intimately as a Detroiter. I grew up hearing non-residents talk disparagingly about the city and the people whom I loved. However, I stand in alignment with Mustaffa (2021), who reflects:

> Across my scholarship, I found the Black neighborhoods, often thought of as places one needs to escape from, as the infrastructure of lifemaking. These sites sustain and hold the networks, activism, mutual aid, and social organizations that Black people create as alternatives models of being. As these examples show, Black lifemaking redirects our focus to what Black people do, think, and create about their livelihoods and treats lifework as a body of knowledge (p. 78).

As such, after the initial program site ceased operations for the summer unexpectedly, I blindly contacted the director of operations and the volunteer coordinator at Mae Jemison through email. Seeking to be in a school that served the girls I love in a city that reminds me of my own, I sent the program overview flyer **(Appendix A)** which provided a brief overview of the program, a short, evidence-based rationale, and participant benefits. My email was forwarded to the Board of Directors, prompting the school's president and founder to contact me via phone for an exploratory conversation. This led to provisional approval pending agreement from the school's principal and director of operations.

I met with the director of operations, Mrs. Jones (*pseudonym*), for a tour of the school and a more detailed conversation about the purpose of the program and the reasons I reached out to their school to host the program. We discussed my line of scholarship and the work I hope to conduct in the future in service to Black girls, Black girl agency, and how

schools constrain Black girls' imaginations. She was very transparent about some of the challenges the school was experiencing concerning both the climate and curriculum.

During the tour, I observed several murals featuring images of Black girls and women. We talked about the performative nature of representation and how images of Blackness and "Black girl magic" shirts were not enough to inspire, cultivate, and continue to develop Black girl genius. During the tour, I also had the opportunity to meet several students and learn more about some of the resources available to them, including a maker's lab, dance studio, and photography studio. Mrs. Jones was also proud to show me the school's "restoration room," which the school uses as the first step in disciplinary matters. We ended the tour in her office, where we went over the logistics of the club and ideas for the community service I pledged to do for the school community at large. After exchanging hugs and phone numbers, the Astronomy Club officially had a home.

Participants and recruitment

This study was informed by the insights of six participants who self-identified as: (1) girls, (2) Black and/or African American, and (3) were between 11 and 13. I selected this age range due to the need for researchers and practitioners to better understand the lived experiences of young Black girls to improve the conditions of their lives. Although Black girls have increasingly gained attention in academic scholarship over the past decade, most girls who inform this scholarship are in high school. As such, I soughts to expand what is known about Black girls by working with girls in an age range that is seldom consulted for their expertise.

To recruit girls at Mae Jemison Academy, I created a flyer **(Appendix B)** which Mrs.

Jones circulated to the parent listserv; this yielded six participants. Mae Jemison has a

robust afterschool programming roster and hosts multiple afterschool programs, clubs, and

movement activities daily. As such, girls would commonly visit the Astronomy Club at the

beginning of our sessions but leave to go to programs that lasted the entire semester or

met multiple times weekly, which was more attractive to parents. However, the girls who

did enroll in the Astronomy Club were consistent with their attendance, with only two

participants missing a single session: one due to illness and the other a school trip.

Participant consent and confidentiality

Informed, voluntary consent was obtained through parental consent and minor

assent forms for each girl in the study, as they were under the age of 18 **(Appendices C**

and D). All participants and their parents received a copy of the consent and assent form

for their own records. The consent process took place before any data collection and did

not involve any deception. Digitally signed consent forms are stored on a password-

protected computer, and physical copies are stored in a locked file cabinet. I frequently

checked in with the girls to ensure they wanted to continue participating in the Astronomy

Club.

During the initial session of the Astronomy Club, the girls were informed about the

nature and purpose of the study, how the data would be used, and what would be expected

of them if they chose to continue membership in the club. They were encouraged to ask me

questions about the study, the program, and what I would be doing with the data I would

be collecting. Many of them were excited to hear that they would be helping me "write a

book" and would be choosing their own "fake names" as I shared what I learned from our time together. I was sure to remind them during the initial session, and during all those that followed, that although I wanted them to be there, if anytime they wanted to withdraw participation for any reason, they could do so without penalty and would still receive the Astronomy Club bundle which I describe in the following section.

The confidentiality of the school and the participants was addressed in several ways. The name and location of the school site were replaced with a pseudonym and general descriptor (an all-girls school in a major city in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States). Toliver (2022) reminds us that naming the specific location of the research sites would allow me to "to map the location of the workshop while also holding myself accountable to the people with whom I work" (p. 22), a practice that upholds Black Girl Cartographies emphasis on charting location. However, due to the limited number of creative arts studios and all-girls schools in the city where the Astronomy Club was hosted, along with requirements from my institution's IRB, I have chosen to employ pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Participants were reminded to sign their work with their self-selected pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The self-selection of pseudonyms has "psychological meaning to both the participants and the content and process of the research" (Allen & Wiles, 2016, p. 1). Furthermore, the familiar adage, "there is power in naming," has theoretical significance in Black Girl Cartography and Black Geographies (Butler, 2018; Morrison et al., 2018). Finally, Black Feminist Thought speaks to the power of self-definition. Collins (1986) asserts that "the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as

human subjects" (p. 517). This practice of having the participants select their own pseudonyms is a small but meaningful act toward honoring the girls' ideas about themselves and humanizing the research process.

Table 1. Members of the Astronomy Club.

NAME	AGE	GRADE	YEARS AT PROGRAM SITE
Cat	11	7th	2
Jade	12	8th	3
Jakauna	12	6th	1
Phoebe	12	7th	1
Rodneisha	13	7th	2
Zariana	12	7th	1

Like Toliver (2022) and other Black girl cartographers, I acknowledge that identity is not immutable and varies depending on time, space, and circumstance. Who the girls reported and demonstrated themselves to be at the time of the study may be different from who they were at the time these words were written. Thus, the vignettes of the participants and the pictures of their masks, below, represent aspects of their identities they chose to share during their time in the Astronomy Club.

Cat

Figure 4. Cat's Identity mask.
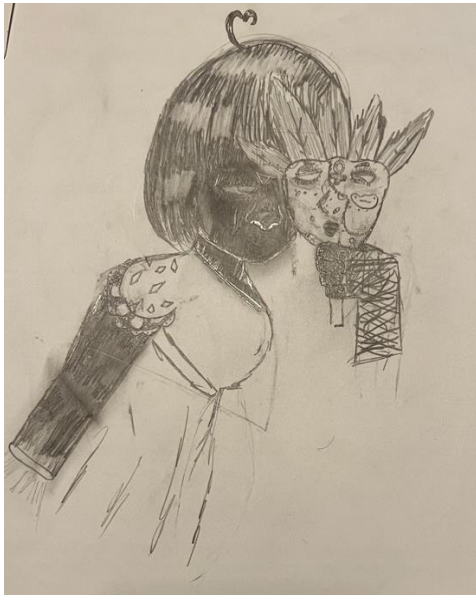
Cat was a markedly talented creative individual with bright green hair and a self-described "dino nugget" (self-inventory worksheet). She was a skilled artist who was passionate about drawing and particularly enjoyed illustrating anime characters. She was accepted into a selective creative arts program. She was the youngest in age, physically the smallest, and was considered to be "the baby" of the Astronomy Club, a designation she reveled in. For instance, when it was her turn to DJ a session, she primarily played songs from *The Backyardigans*, a show catered toward a preschool audience, and the rest of the girls loved it. Cat also has a strong literacy identity and enjoys reading and writing, but absolutely loathes poetry. Initially, I thought Cat was quiet but the more comfortable she got, the more boisterous she became. At the time of the program, Cat was in her second year at Mae Jemison.

Jade

Figure 5. Jade's Identity Mask.

Jade did not like what she perceives as non-sense. She communicated her boundaries clearly and had no shame in holding them, even when those she considers to be her friends were involved. She was very selective about what she shared and the company in which she revealed intimate

details about herself. She had stated that she was often described as "emo," (a subculture known for outward displays of emotion, typically associated with sadness and punk culture). We bonded over the fact that we both had a good cry as a form of self-care at least once a week—an activity her father and grandmother (her guardians) sometimes did not understand. Despite not always being understood by those closest to her, Jade still tried her best to show up as herself, although she sometimes "wore a bubbly mask." Jade had told us early in the program that she did not like to talk about racism and discrimination because it made her feel bad. She was an avid K-Pop and Billie Eilish fan and enjoyed crocheting, dancing, and watching YouTube tutorials. At the time of the program, Jade was in her third year at Mae Jemison.

Jakauna

Figure 6. Jakuana's Identity Mask.

Jakuana had a dark sense of humor. Whenever I think of her, I am reminded of a quote by Prescod-Weinstein (2021) which stated, "Access to a dark night sky—to see and be inspired by the universe as it really is—should be a human right, not a luxury for the chosen few" (p. 165). While I do not believe everyone should have access to her ways of knowing and being, having the honor to be in community with her was most certainly a divine privilege. She found ways to incorporate the genres of horror and paranormal activity into any conversation in the most benign ways. Though her interests were the same subjects that frightened me, I was not scared of her; in fact, I, too, was constantly inspired by her ability to

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think in ways that pushed boundaries—ways of seeing the world "as it really is" (final interview). Jakuana, a firstborn daughter, had much responsibility at home and took great pride in her role as big sister—often citing various modes of protection she had devised. At the time of the program, Jakuana was in her first year at Mae Jemison.

Phoebe

Figure 7. Phoebe's Identity Mask.

Phoebe was the only girl who participated in the program who was not born in the United States. Originally from Ghana, she and her peers talked openly about some of the challenges she experienced acclimating to schooling in the U.S. She had arrived in the United States just two months before joining the Astronomy Club and had been experiencing mistreatment by some of her peers. Traveling was a large part of her identity, and she was proud to talk about her travels, particularly to Russia, China, and Turkey. Additionally, Phoebe enjoyed music and likes singing and listening to K-Pop. Furthermore, she took great pride in her academic achievements and often boasted about them in the group and garnered lots of support and admiration from her peers. At the time of the program, Phoebe was in her first year at Mae Jemison.

Rodneisha

Figure 8. Rodneisha's Identity Map. Rodneisha is the only participant who identified as biracial, and she talked openly about her struggles navigating her racial identity. She was a fiercely loyal friend who was protective of those she loves, particularly Phoebe. The girls appointed her as the "mama" of the group early on due to her no-nonsense attitude regarding adhering to the norms established by the group. Rodneisha was a practical thinker and had to be reminded often that the Astronomy Club was a space where she did not have to adhere to traditional logics. However, her analytical skills were transparently displayed in the way she theorized Black girlhood and Black girls' friendships. Rodneisha was a gifted writer and a talented storyteller. At the time of the program, Rodneisha was in her second year at Mae Jemison.
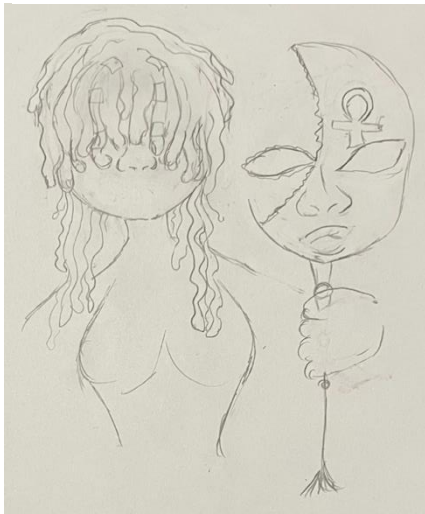
Zariana

Figure 9. Zariana's Idenity Map.

Zariana has a big personality and she knows it. She describes herself as popular and says that "everybody loves her" (session one). She is unashamed to take up space in a room and make her presence known. She is a natural leader and commands attention when she speaks. Members of the school community, students and staff alike, dropped into Astronomy Club sessions to visit her.

This is her first year at Mae Jemison, and all of the teachers and students know her name. While Zariana showed up to the sessions and mostly participated, she was sometimes "opaque on purpose" (Shange, 2019, p. 16). Zariana enjoys TikTok dances and will break into movement without notice at any second. She is a free spirit who was described by her teachers as being "too much." I hope she continues pushing back and not letting the school system break her spirit. At the time of the program, Zariana was in her first year at Mae Jemison.

Risks and Benefits

There were some potential risks in this study. The girls disclosed personal and sensitive information (e.g., stories and personal anecdotes) related to their experiences in school and their personal lives. To address this, in the first session, we established that the Astronomy Club should function as a safe space where they could talk and share freely, without concern about the discussions leaving the boundary of our space. I reminded them that it was their responsibility to maintain trust in the group. I also emphasized that they could trust that I would not report anything to parents, school staff, or administration unless they shared that they were in danger or at risk of harming themselves or someone else because I was a mandated reporter. Furthermore, I consistently assured them that they could "opt out" and never had to share anything or answer any question they did not want to. This included participating in our check-ins and closing activities.

There were also benefits to participation. Benefits to the girls included gaining a sharpened critical lens to examine schools and society at large, a closer connection to a

community of peers, and opportunities to demonstrate their literacy skills. To compensate

Figure 10. Photo of an Astronomy Club bundle.

the girls for their intellectual and artistic contributions to the project, they were each provided with an Astronomy Club bundle. The bundles consisted of

- A customized water bottle,
- A customized Astronomy Club t-shirt,
- A journal,
- A handwritten card,
- A Squishmellow stuffed animal,
- A pair of fuzzy socks,
- A loofah,
- A set of Bath & Body Works lotion, body wash, and hand sanitizer, and a
- $20 Target gift card

Initially, the bundle included a Barnes & Noble gift card. However, prior to my arrival one day, Zariana took a poll where the girls indicated that they preferred a gift card from either Amazon or Target. Furthermore, I provided a light meal during each session, as the club met between 4:00 PM and 6:00 PM. During the first session, we had pizza, chips, fruit snacks, and juice. The girls selected the food for the subsequent sessions which I will talk about in more detail in chapter 5.

Data Collection

I collected data for this project for six weeks during fall of 2022. Data sources for this study include (1) individual interviews, (2) program observations, (3) a semi-structured focus group, and (4) the girls' program artifacts.

Individual interviews

After the conclusion of the program, I returned to the program site to conduct individual interviews with the members of the Astronomy Club. The interviews lasted between 18 and 42 minutes and took place in an empty conference room at the program site. During the interviews, I asked the girls questions relating to their liberatory literacies, Black Futurity, imagination, and place-making based on an interview protocol **(Appendix E)** designed to learn about how the girls' current realities may be at odds with their ideal futures. The interviews were semi-structured to leave flexibility for additional clarification. When relevant, I shared anecdotes from my Black girlhood to acknowledge both my insider and outsider relationship (Siddle-Walker, 2005) with Black girlhood and, hopefully, make the girls feel more comfortable.

Observations and field notes

I conducted in-person observations during the six program sessions, and reviewed video recordings of each meeting. I looked for the ways in which the girls engaged with the Astronomy Club community and their approaches to the activities and tasks. As I attempted to make meaningful observations, I operationalized the act of witnessing to recognize truth, power, and oppression in the research setting (Butler, 2017; Toliver, 2018; Winn & Ubiles, 2011).

Each of the sessions was audio and video recorded to ensure that I was fully present with the girls. Boylorn (2008) asserts that "autoethnographers look in (at themselves) and out (at the world) connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 1). As such, I also took autoethnographic field notes, which allowed me to engage in the reflectivity

mandated by Black Girl Cartography and Black Girl Astronomy. Looking in and out at myself required that I take note of how I engaged with the space and the girls, which also allowed me to evaluate my facilitation of the sessions and ensured I was serving the girls in the program and not my inner girl child (bitts-ward, 2022). I originally planned to record field notes during the sessions but quickly abandoned that practice and instead jotted down quick notes in the car after sessions. The video recordings allowed me to observe interactions and conversations between particular girls that I missed while engaged with other girls.

Documents and artifacts

This project was also informed by various artifacts from the girls' intellectual contributions, including multimodal renderings of their youthtopian futures, written compositions, and other artistic renderings According to Saldaña (2016), documents are not neutral but rather social constructs that require critical examination since they represent the biases and viewpoints of their authors and may contain implicit values and ideologies. Saldaña highlights the need to approach documents with a critical lens to fully understand the underlying messages and implications they may carry. I understand this to mean that the artifacts produced during the Astronomy Club sessions provide incredible insight into how the Black girls interpreted, responded to, and imagined change in the world around them. For example, in this project, I was particularly interested in the girls' architextual renderings of youthtopias and imagined futures. Together with their other creations, these multimodal pieces allowed the girls to represent their imagined futures and explain their various facets.

Artifact	Purpose
Biopoems	• Documented the girls describing themselves in their own words
Future Selves Collage	• Documented how girls visualize themselves in the future
Journal Entries	• Documented insights into the ways the girls were thinking about various topics such as Black girlhood and freedom.
Map One: Perfect Site of Learning	• Documented their initial visualizations of youthtopias at the beginning of the Astronomy Club.
Map Two: Perfect ELA Learning Site	• Document their initial visualizations of ideal ELA spaces.
Map Three: Perfect Site of Learning	• Document their initial visualizations of youthtopias at the conclusion of the Astronomy Club.
Masks	• Documented what the girls want people to know about them.
Self-Inventory Worksheet	• Documented biographical data • Documented the ways the girl self-described themselves

Semi-structured focus group interview

To create a space for the girls to collectively engage in conversation about freer futures and youthtopian education spaces, the final session of Astronomy Club culminated in a focus group discussion. I chose not to video record the conversation to create a sense of privacy and intimacy in the discussion. Overarching goals of the focus group were: (1) to better understand the girls' experiences and perceptions of the value of the Astronomy Club, (2) to assess if their ideas about the future and function of education changed during our time together, (3) to elucidate more examples of Black girls' liberatory literacies and theorization of Black futurity, and (4) to make space for the girls to hear their peers'

perspectives of Black-girl centered futures. I chose to conduct a focus group interview to give the girls an opportunity to share their thoughts with both me and their peers and to end our time together in meaningful reflection. I asked questions such as: "If ever, when did you feel like you had "power" during our time together"? The complete focus group interview protocol can be found in **(Appendix F)**.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is organized around each sub-research question.

Sub-question #1

What are some of the ways Black girls enact their liberatory literacies, theorizations of Black Futurity, and place-making practices while engaging in world-making projects?

Step One

To answer this question, I began by analyzing my observations, field notes, and session transcripts to understand how the girls verbally and physically exhibited place-making practices in the context of the Astronomy Club. To do so, I watched the video-recordings of the program sessions and took analytic memos. I then deductively coded the video observation notes, field note write-ups, and session transcripts for evidence of liberatory literacies, Black Futurity, and place-making. As dictated by Black Girl Cartography and my conceptual framework, I also looked for evidence of how the girls talked about their geospatial and sociopolitical positionings both inside and outside of learning environments. I also looked for examples of how these positionings may be related to race, gender, and age.

Step Two

In the second step of analysis for this question, I employed a Black gaze to analyze the girls' program documents and artifacts. This allowed me to engage in "a spectatorial mediation that demands particularly active modes of watching, listening, and witnessing" (Campt, 2021, p. 43) of their written and artistic renderings. Viewing the girls' work through a Black gaze is not an attempt to transpose the white gaze; rather, it is a lens that emphasizes my connectedness with (anti)Blackness and requires that I ethically care for, am accountable to, and "look alongside" the rendering of Black girls [Campt, 2021; Campt & Neal, 2021, [2:58]). To do this effectively, as I listened to their renderings, I consistently reflected on my positionality, as a means of confronting my biases, privileges, and desires— required by both the Black gaze and Black Girl Astronomy (Campt, 2021).

Further inspired by Campt's (2017) work, which analyzes Black lives and futures through art, I "listened" to the girls' renderings, as discussed in the introduction. Similar to the first step of analysis, I listened for how their writing and multimodal compositions evidenced liberatory literacies, Black Futurity, and place-making directed by my conceptual framework. Listening to the data provided a special intimacy with their work and the challenge of understanding the stories the girls were trying to tell me beyond what I could see on their papers (Campt, 2021). I also looked for and sought to explain discrepant data or evidence that diverged from emergent patterns.

Step Three

In the third step of analysis, I identified patterns in the data, across the participants and various forms of data to develop themes significant to liberatory literacy, Black

Futurity, and place-making and how the girls engaged in them while in the program. While doing so, I paid attention to how these ideas related to their educations, sociopolitical locations, and their physical locations as mandated by Black Girl Astronomy and my conceptual framework (Young, 2021). I also created analytic memos to document my interpretations, reactions, confirmations, and surprises that arose as I analyzed the data.

Sub-question #2

How do Black girls describe the current contexts of education and their imagined futures, and what differences exist between them?

Step One

I began answering sub-question two by analyzing the transcripts from the individual interviews to understand how the girls described the educational contexts of Black girls broadly, in addition to their own. I verified the accuracy of the transcriptions by reading the transcripts while listening to the recorded audio, which allowed me to re-familiarize myself with the data. Rogers and Versey (2021) remind researchers that, "Verbatim verification is an essential analytic step in hearing Black girls in their own words, attending to language and phrases that characterize Black girls' voices beyond the white-centric ways of speaking and hearing" (p. 8). I also wrote analytic memos while listening to the transcripts, noting how I made sense of, and thought reflexively about, the data as mandated by my methodological approach (Campt, 2017; Saldaña, 2021). Then, I uploaded the transcripts as individual cases into ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software, which I used to code and manage the data.

During the first cycle of coding, I coded inductively, employing elemental coding strategies to "build a foundation for future coding cycles" (Saldaña, p. 97). I began with In Vivo codes which are particularly useful in "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2015, p.92), as well as descriptive codes. With the research questions in mind, I conducted a second cycle of coding using affective coding to capture participants' "values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 110). Directed by the research questions, theoretical framework, and findings from prior research, I organized the codes into themes.

Furthermore, audio-recording from the semi-structured focus group was transcribed by Rev.com, a secure, professional transcription service. I verified the accuracy of the Rev transcriptions by reading the transcripts while listening to the recorded audio, which, again, allowed me to re-familiarize myself with the data. I repeated the same coding methods for the semi-structured interviews as I did for the individual interviews.

Step Two

During the second step of analysis, I looked for patterns among the coded data within and across participants seeking to identify their curricular, sociopolitical, and physical locations in current and future schools. I looked for experiences and perceptions that seemed to hold true across participants, as well as those specific to individual girls. I paid close attention to recurring codes that exhibited the girls' ideas about the current context of schooling and education and their thinking about ideal educational futures that center their needs and desires. Doing so, helped me to identify similarities and differences

between how the girls discuss contemporary schooling and their imagined futures. In this step of data analysis, the ultimate goal was to understand how the girls perceived schooling as it presently functioned and their perceptions of how it does or does not align with the futures they desire in a youthtopian world.

Step Three

In the third step of analysis for this question, I returned to the girls' program documents and artifacts. I replicated the analysis methods used in step two of sub-question one. However, during this round of analysis, I employed Post-It notes to reference the codes utilized in step two while examining their visual representations. I looked and listened for how their writing and multimodal compositions provided evidence or their current schooling conditions, their imagined futures, and areas of similarity and tensions between the two.

Step Four

As the last step of analysis for this question, I triangulated the data I identified in the prior three steps to develop themes that captured how girls described the current context of education and their imagined futures. Creswell & Miller (2000) argue that triangulation requires researchers to systematically "rely on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study" (p. 127). My goal was to identify themes that contribute to broader understandings of the ways the girls perceived the nature and functioning of schooling, as experienced by themselves and Black girls, more broadly.

Sub-question #3

In what ways can Black girls' understandings of the present context of education inform an educational future centering their recommendations?

Step One
To answer this question, I began by synthesizing what I learned about the girls' liberatory literacies, their understandings and experiences with contemporary education, and their youthtopian dreams for educational futures. To do so, I returned to my analyses of sub-questions #1 and 2, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how they defined current and future education. This helped me explore relationships between their perception of current contexts of schooling desires for their future, and tangible steps that stakeholders who care about Black girls' educational futures can implement to reduce Black girls' suffering in the present until we reach a new world.

Step Two
Next, I compared and contrasted data and findings from sub-questions #1 and #2 to draw relationships between these various findings (e.g., patterns, categories, themes I developed). In doing so, I asked three simple questions: (1) How are the girls describing schools; (2) How do they want schools to be; and (3) What are the similarities and differences between the two? Thus, I returned to the conceptual framework and relied on evidence uncovered during the analysis of sub-questions #1 and #2 to organize the data to specifically attend to their curricular, sociopolitical, and physical locations in current and imagined schools. Additionally, during this step of analysis I composed analytic memos.

Step Three

In the final stage of analysis, I began by refamiliarizing myself with the themes illuminated in step two. Using those themes, and the same categories of curricular, sociopolitical, and physical locations, I coded for the girls' direct recommendations and looked for patterns among them that fit within the conceptual framework. From these patterns, I identified broader themes and recommendations about the ways schools in the present can be improved based on the recommendations of the girls in the study. In this stage, I also coded for direct recommendations the girls offered for improving education in the present and their imaginings of how schooling could look in a new world.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity requires "determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). This particular study is accountable to Black girls and seeks their validation above all else. As such, iteratively screening for catalytic validity and dialogic validity was imperative throughout the research process. One of the ways I did so was by engaging in formal and informal member checks.

I also relied on triangulation as a validity procedure. Creswell and Miller (2000) explain that "as a validity procedure, triangulation is a step taken by researchers employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas" (p. 127). However, since triangulation was a process that occurred independent of the girls, it was imperative that I remained keenly aware of my positionality to assure the girls' renderings of freer worlds

were communicated in the findings and not my own desires — particularly because researcher reflexivity is integral in qualitative research validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Researcher Positionality

Foote and Bartell (2011) argue that "life experiences impact the positionality we bring to our work—they inform the questions we ask, the data we choose to gather, and the interpretations we draw" (p. 63). Therefore, it is vital to explain my own positionality, especially how my own gender, racial identity, and experiences with out-of-school programming informs my interpretations of participant responses. Growing up, I was a latchkey kid. Being raised by a mother and grandmother who both held full-time employment, school served as a site of education and safety until a trusted adult could retrieve me. As such, extracurricular programs became a source of entertainment, academic enrichment, and accountability to other adults as I matriculated through elementary and middle school. I participated in academic extracurricular activities, such as academic games and Spanish club; arts programs such as symphony orchestra and ballet; activities meant to expose me to career pathways such as the Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering Program and YouthWorks; and programs that fostered a love for the community such as the Girl Scouts of America troop, which was hosted by my church. Being educated in and attending extracurricular programs in Detroit, Michigan, also meant I was enveloped in Blackness. I did not have to look far to bear witness to Black people living in different ways. Many of these programs felt like homeplaces (hooks, 1990); my Blackness was affirmed, and I felt secure enough to participate.

I leaned on my experiences as a participant to shape my opinions on the relationships between non-familial adults and children and used them as a catalyst to pursuit a career where I could aid in the creation of homeplaces. As a teacher in a Detroit charter school district, my participation in extracurricular programming shifted to that of a facilitator. I did not enjoy my time facilitating these spaces despite my commitment to my students. Teaching in a school with a double-extended school day—one extension mandated by the state of Michigan, the other required by the charter authorizer—the school day had nine hours of instruction daily, not including recess or lunch. This schedule left me feeling tired at the end of the day and less than enthusiastic about "mandatory service." However, I also have experience facilitating a program out of desire and not forced duty.

While an undergraduate, I volunteered weekly at an art center that ran a program for teenagers. Volunteering at the art center brings back such fond memories. I formed meaningful relationships with the young people that extended beyond the program. Most influential was my relationship with a Black girl who had a contentious disposition towards school, whom I treated to pedicures after passing various exams. I have now come to understand that she was being pushed out of school and that her behavior may have been a demonstration of refusal (Gholson & Martin, 2019; M. Morris, 2016; Shange, 2019). I did not have the words to articulate that schools were inherently anti-Black and functioned as sites of suffering (Dumas, 2014). Looking back, I realize I was attempting to provide her with rewards as a means of reducing the harm she experienced by an arm of an antiblack state.

I am in pursuit of reprieve for Black girls in the "in the meantime, in-between time" (ross et al., 2020, p. 20) as we (im)patiently wait for the impending apocalypse. Recognizing the permanence of racism in society and schools, as articulated by critical race scholars (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Ladson-Billings 2009, 2021; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016) I often meditate on what to do with my belief that the education industrial complex needs to be dismantled, as this is in tension with my unwillingness to abandon Black girls until all of them have divested. As the mother of a young Black girl, I am desperate to find and create fugitive spaces for her critical conscious development outside of the white gaze. Although Kaba (2021) teaches us that there is no such thing as a world without harm, abolitionist aspirations require us to make plans for worlds that eliminate the conditions that cause harm to manifest. My daughter, Hudson, is my world, and as such, I have to engage in the task of seeking out and co-creating worlds in which her needs, and other Black girls', are the central foci.

I recognize that the culmination of my experiences undoubtedly impacts how I showed up as a facilitator in a homeplace created for Black girls to raise up new modes of living. My experiences in extracurricular programs informed how I made a space engaging and affirming for Black girls in the pre-planning phase of the Astronomy Club sessions. I recognize that some of my urgency for creating these spaces are an attempt to tend to the desires of my inner girl-child. As such, I devoted myself to constant check-ins to ensure that I valued the girls' voices at all times. Furthermore, I recognize that while I was a Black girl who participated in extracurricular programs, my life experiences may vary significantly from those participating in the Astronomy Club.

Chapter 5: Dreaming in the Dark

Findings

Any revolution must begin with thought, with how we imagine a New World, with how we reconstruct our social and individual relationships, with unleashing our desire and unfolding a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality.
(Kelley, 2002, p.193)

I invoke the words of Kelley (2002) in this chapter as I present, with permission from the girls in Astronomy Club, their dreams for a freer future which were illuminated during our time together. These dreams, taking the form of themes, are organized into three sections corresponding to their liberatory literacies, theorizations of Black futurity, and place-making practices. The findings in this chapter take root in Prescod-Weinstein's (2021) admiration of the night sky. She muses that "Freedom looks like the dark night sky and everyone having a chance to look at it, wonder about it, and know it" (p. 268). What, then, does it mean for one to look at a Black girl's imagination as the night sky? What lessons would this adjacency to darkness teach us about their pursuit of worlds where they have the freedom to fully exist? What happens when they dream of new futures in the dark?

Sulwe, by Lupita Nyong'o (2019), is one of my oldest daughter Hudson's very favorite books. When her father, grandmother, or I read it out loud to her, she listens attentively, and stays seated nearly the entire time before having to get a wiggle out. Illustrated with rich, bold colors and Black characters of all shapes and complexions, the book tells the story of a little Black girl, Sulwe, "who was born the color of midnight" (p. 1) —as she explores her relationship with the dark. Experiencing the hideousness of colorism,

we witness Sulwe's struggle with self-confidence due to her dark skin. She dreams of "waking up as bright as the sun in the sky" (p. 87). When this fantasy does not come to pass, and Sulwe is upset, a star comes to tell her a story of when Night went away due to being treated badly. In her absence, the people suffered and rejoiced upon her return. This text, a restorying of the narratives about dark and night being dangerous and scary, teaches young readers the power and beauty of darkness. The stars in the book teach us that "Brightness isn't just for daylight. Light comes in all colors, and some light can only be seen in the dark" (p. 30). What then happens when Black girls are given dark places to dream? What light will we then witness? What will they teach us about the current state of education and how it would be in a perfect world? What recommendations will they give us for improving schools on our journey to otherwise?

In this chapter, I note how the girls both built and demolished systems and structures and ways of knowing them by dreaming in the dark. We will bear witness to the girls' dreams of living and learning in a world that sees them fully as I answer the first research question: *What are some of the ways Black girls enact their liberatory literacies, theorizations of Black Futurity, and place-making practices while engaging in world-making projects?* My findings indicate that the girls in the study enacted their liberatory literacies, theorizations of Black Futurity, and place-making practices while engaging in world-making projects by dreaming in three distinct ways. While enacting their liberatory literacies, they dream in the dark; while theorizing Black futurity, they dream of worlds full of justice, and while carrying out their placemaking practices, they dream in community.

In concert, their evaluations of current ways of learning and the conditions they would prefer serve as the answers to research questions two and three; *What are some of the tensions between the ways Black girls describe the current contexts of education and their imagined futures* and *In what ways can Black girls' understandings of their present context of education inform an educational future centering the needs and desires of Black girls"?* Findings suggest that while these Black girls were acutely aware of the racial and gendered discrimination they experienced in schools, they had both quotidian and radical fantasies for educational futures that demonstrated hope for a world that loves Black girls.

Dreaming in Community | Place-making practices

When exploring their place-making practices, I consistently meditated on the questions, "In what ways are the girls showing up as themselves?" and "In what ways are they making the space their own?" In doing so, I was able to observe not only what they were saying, but the ways in which their behaviors demonstrated place-making. The data indicate that the girls demonstrated their place-making practices in two main ways: (1) by asserting their authority in the space and (2) through peer mentorship and relationship building.

Astronomical authority

The girls in the Astronomy Club had confidence in the ability of Black girls to usher in new ways of living and learning. They communicated their ideas about world-making in several ways; some predetermined by the day's agenda and others that emerged organically and became norms for the space. For example, after the first week, the opening format of the sessions changed. In the outline I designed for the sessions, they would each

begin with the "astronaut of the week" and an opening question. However, I learned that we would not have time to get through the entire agenda because I had not scheduled for us to eat in sessions beyond the first one. The girls made it very clear that communing together would be part of the culture of our group; as Jade put it, "food is our love language." As such, moving forward, we opened our sessions by breaking bread together and informally discussing modified versions of the opening questions. Zariana presented me with a list of options she gathered by polling the others such as Chick-Fil-A, wings, and pizza; some I was able to easily oblige and others I loudly questioned, "who got money for that?!" although I was ultimately able to secure funding to rotate through all their food choices. Quickly, the girls located themselves in positions of authority in the space.

Additionally, the girls created other norms for the space. In addition to making food a permanent part of our agenda, the girls also reshaped the ways I had originally anticipated using music in the space. During planning, I imagined I would play lo-fi music— a music genre popular for producing relaxing "study" music (Flores, 2021; Wang, 2020)— while we were writing together. However, in session one, Zariana seized control of my laptop and changed the music to songs by SZA and Summer Walker, two well-known R&B singers. From that point on, the girls rotated selecting the music, with the exception of Rodneisha, who declined. The girls' choices showcased their diverse tastes in music which included K-Pop, show tunes, R&B, and theme songs from their favorite cartoons. The multiplicity of their tastes again, once again, reinforces the fact that the girls in Astronomy Club were not a monolith, and neither are Black girls, writ large.

Constellations of relations

Another way the girls' positioned themselves as authorities in the space and made it their own was through sisterhood and accountability. When describing her visions for an ideal future Jade stated, "We'll have more sisterhood." Although Jade wished for more sisterhood, there was evidence of it in the Astronomy Club; for example, the girls started calling one another "sister" during the sessions. Admittedly, I did not pick up on this during the sessions and noticed this form of affection while reviewing sessions transcripts. However, they certainly demonstrated behavior indicative of common ways of understanding sisterhood such as positive touch (e.g., hugging, fixing each other's hair), assuming protective positions over one another, and sharing secrets, whispers, and giggles. Furthermore, the girls in the Astronomy Club frequently gave each other verbal positive affirmations. I can recall during the third Solar Sister Circle, Cat shouting at Zariana to "shine!" before she spoke. They admired each other's work regularly, complemented each other's appearances, and reminded each other that they belonged in the group. Additionally, they used the shaka hand gesture regularly, which is used to symbolize agreement.

During the program, the girls took responsibility for both themselves and each other. They checked in with each other about their weekly attendance and were sure to communicate any changes with me on their peers' behalf. For example, Jade missed session five due to a class trip to see the play, *Hamilton*. She never told me where she was going or addressed it afterward, because she knew that her peers would pass the message along to me. Additionally, they governed each other and held one another accountable to the norms

of the space. For example, Zariana entered and exited our shared space several times during the first session. In jest, Rodneisha exclaimed, "She not getting no pizza next time! She won't keep acting like this." Supervising each other was not the only way they stayed in the community as a group.

During their time in the Astronomy Club, the girls strengthened their friendships. During the sessions, most of them made connections with girls they were not in community with. For example, Jakuana was the only member of the Astronomy Club in the 6th grade, which placed her in a different location in the school building. As such, the only interactions she had with the other members were during our session. The girls who were in closer proximity to each other at the school fortified their relationships as well. This was primarily evident with Phoebe and Rodneisha. During the first session, Rodneisha expressed displeasure with the treatment Phoebe was receiving from many of her peers. Over the course of the program, I witnessed them become nearly inseparable and heard stories of the ways Rodneisha advocated for Phoebe among her peers. During the final interview, Rodneisha confirmed the impact of the Astronomy Club on their friendship when she shared:

> And honestly, I didn't know if I was gonna actually be friends with her cuz like I was talking to her for a bit then I stopped talking to her cause I was talking to other friends. But then I started talking to her again, and I just say we just grew closer. Yeah. And Astronomy Club, I think, grew us even more closer. Because we got to talk more, and she told me things and stuff. And it was just like she was an actual, really good person. Yeah.

Dreaming in the Dark | Liberatory Literacies

"We dream of a brand new start, but we dream in the dark for the most part."
-Miranda, 2015

I began the first session of the Astronomy Club by introducing myself as a mother of Black girls, a former teacher, and someone who was raised in a household with both my mom and grandma. I also told them I am a doctoral student that is trying to figure out how to work with Black girls to create spaces of learning that they want and deserve. I made it clear that I was there not only to be in community with them, but also to hear and learn from them. I shared that I was working on a project where I would tell others about their recommendations for better schools and a better world for Black girls.

I told the girls that I was there to listen and reminded them that I would be sharing their stories, although some conversations would be held in confidentiality. The girls were assured that they could tell me anything in confidence, however, if they shared plans to harm themselves or others, I was obligated to ensure their safety. Also of importance, I told them that I think Black girls are geniuses in so many ways. As I shared my ontological orientations regarding Black girls and Black girlhood, the girls met me with a chorus of verbal agreements, such as, "facts" and "period't" which confirmed that I was nt telling them anything about being a Black girl that they did not already know. Following, I will tell the stories of how the girls demonstrated their liberatory literacies in two ways: (re)storying Black girlhood and discernment in communicating their liberatory fantasies.

Intersectional analysis

"To be a black girl ***doesn't just mean*** to be deprived of the very thing that makes you a human, which is your race and your gender. That's all I got" [emphasis added] - Phoebe.

I open this section with a statement Phoebe recorded in her journal during the first session of the Astronomy Club, as and example of the ways in which the girls were able to think critically about racial and gendered oppression. In her writing, Phoebe points to race and gender as foundational to being defined as human, while simultaneously acknowledging constraints attached to these identity markers. However, she expanded the constraints of the imposed boundaries prescribed to Black girlhood by writing, "doesn't just mean." In that declaration, she challenged the idea that oppression is all-encompassing of the experience that is Black girlhood. Had Phoebe said, "To be a black girl **means** to be deprived of the very thing that makes you a human, which is your race and your gender," she would have implied a fixed definition of a Black girl while simultaneously imposing limits on its prospects. However, by employing the open-ended phrase, "doesn't just mean," Phoebe had already decided to reject the implication that Black girls are forever burdened by deficit, and she, instead, pointed to the multiplicity of their ways of being.

Phoebe and the other members of the Astronomy Club consistently demonstrated this analysis throughout the program. The girls quickly confirmed the undergirding assumption that grounds this study; they have and employ liberatory literacies. One way they did this was by identifying and critiquing systems and sites of oppression. Corroborating findings from existing scholarship, the girls in Astronomy Club were well

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aware of the deficit stories society tells about them and the subsequent positioning that follows. However, they had their own stories to tell, which they did through writing, multimodal renderings, spoken words, and in the educational futures they architexted. The girls re-storied Black girlhood by simultaneously presenting counterstories and writing Black girl futures into the present.

We spent a substantial amount of time talking about the intersections of race, gender, and other identity markers during our program sessions. Unsurprisingly, the girls each experienced harm connected to aspects parts of their identities, for example, through homophobia and colorism; however, gender and race were the two most commonly discussed. For instance, when defining Black girlhood in session one, Jakuana stated:

Um, I said that it has, its like ups and downs. It's like one of its ups is like you have other people to support you, to be around, to love on you, to love on them. But sometimes its downs can be like just some people hating on you. Cause you just, the color, your religion, and it's just you have ups and downs, and it can be challenging.

Here, Jakuana juxtaposes love and hate to point to the triumphs and tragedies of Black girlhood. Jakuana reinscribed this when she stated in her interview, "Some people just don't respect [Black girls] for their color or just because they're girls. So just treat, just treat them with respect." Her statement highlights the mistreatment Black girls experience due to the intersections between racial and gender discrimination. Phoebe highlighted this intersection in her journal when she wrote:

I think that the biggest issue that black girls face might be the fact that they can't be allowed to do certain things that men or boys are allowed to do. And it's not that

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they can't even do it, that they're not allowed to do it or supposed to. And if

society's influence on them does not really help. I also think that if society just

apply them theirself, women can and will do better than men and boys.

Together, Jakuana and Phoebe exposed the ways in which their experiences of being

racialized as Black and gendered as female were accompanied by implicit biases that

imposed boundaries on what they could, or should, be able to do. As evidenced by

discussions, their journal entries, and artistic compositions; the girls were able to use their

liberatory literacies to read the world to understand, analyze, and dispel tropes about Black

girls in society. They applied racialized and gendered analyses to their learning. For

example, in her journal, Zariana wrote:

> I feel like the biggest issue that Black girls experience in schools is the education. I
>
> feel this way because some black girls don't get that black on black learning [*sic*].
>
> Another experience, I think, is learning about black women instead of learning
>
> about men or white people.

In this journal entry, Zariana communicates that racial and gendered exclusion is present in

society, broadly, and it is also manifest in the curriculums presented to Black girls in

schools.

In the Astronomy Club, we co-created an environment where the girls spoke freely

about their experiences with education. Before discussing their critiques of education and

schooling, I should note the girls' relationship with the host site. It was three of the

participants'—Jakuana, Phoebe, and Zariana—first year attending Mae Jemison. Two

students, Cat and Rodneisha, had been there for two years. Jade, the only eighth grader,

spent her entire middle-school career there. As noted in the site description, Mae Jemison exclusively serves middle schoolers, and all the students reported having attended at least one other school before their enrollment. As such, the girls' views about schooling were a composite of their different engagements with formal schooling.

To that end, the girls had a lot to say about the types of education they had received thus far. They had clear ideas about what they believed should be included in and omitted from curriculums in a perfect educational future for Black girls. They paid attention to both the stories told and untold in the instruction they received—particularly in the texts employed in English language arts and history classrooms. They cited the hyperfocus on white males as their principle critique of curriculums. The first evidence of this occurred less than ten minutes into our initial meeting. While they were eating, I gave an overview of the program. I shared with them that any texts we engaged with would be about Black girls and written by a Black woman or girl, to which Zariana joined the conversation:

Zariana: At my other school... Like we was learning about, you know, like, what's his name? Like the George, like Washington.

Alexis: Mm-hmm.

Rodneisha: And then the George—what's the other George? Like the King George. And we was learning about them two on Black History Month, during Black History Month.

Zariana: Man, yes! In my old school, not here at my old school. At my old school, it was a lot of white teachers. Well, it wasn't a lot of white teachers...it was like a couple white teachers. And the ELA teacher was white, so she was like, we never

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talked about Black history that much. Mm-hmm. We talked about, like sometimes, we really never talked about it. And I went to a private school!

In the example above, Rodneisha and Zariana confirm extant research highlighting the saturation of white males in curriculums. Zariana further substantiated this claim when she pointed out, "another experience I think is we should be learning about Black women instead of about men or white people." Here, she charts the intersectional lack of inclusion of both gender and race, as she emphasizes her desires to learn about Black women specifically. Interestingly, she did not say they should be learning about Black girls, which may signal that the combination of racism, sexism, and ageism suggested to her that Black girls should not be positioned as experts in curriculums.

In her interview, Zariana explained that Black girls would have "the ability to talk about black people. I think the, like black history outside of just February, you know" in her ideal school. She assessed what she was being taught in the present to make an informed suggestion about what she viewed as more relevant content. However, Zariana was not the only Astronomy Club member who articulated a need to include Black narratives in schools. For example, in Jakuana's map of her ideal English Language Arts learning environment **(Figure 10)**, she dedicated a significant amount of space to books about Black history.

Figure 11. Jakuana's map of an ideal ELA learning space.
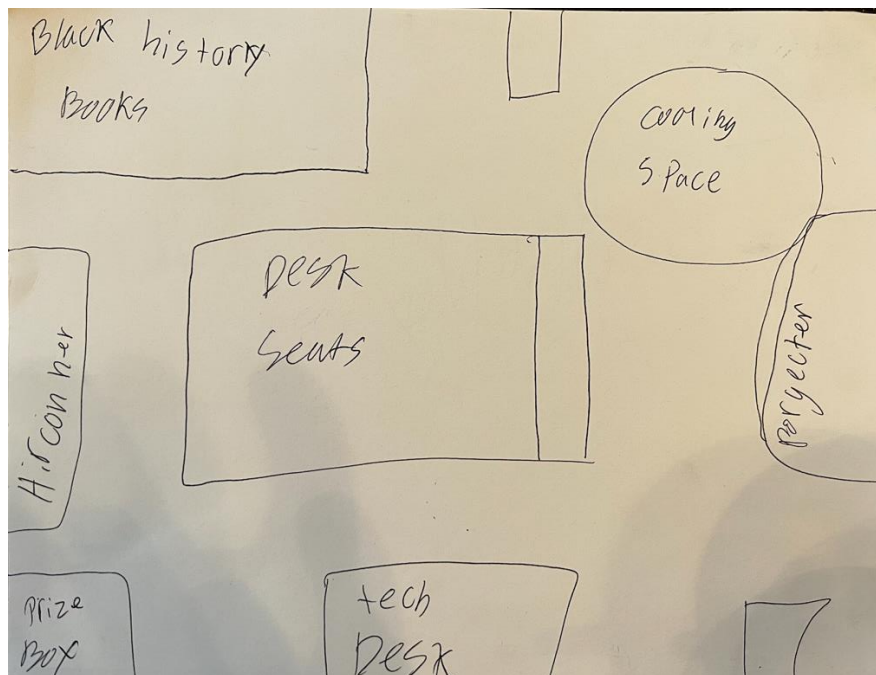
Radical Restorying

Speaking Truth to Power

By nature, Black girls are narrative researchers and critical ethnographers. They hold a peculiar positioning in society, as they live in bodies that are both Black and female. Black girls do not have the security to move through the world without constantly monitoring their surroundings and assessing how to navigate them in ways that cause the least harm. Thus, they demonstrate their liberatory literacies by using their evidence-based analyses—informed by their lived experiences—to restory both the narratives told about them and the education they receive. As such, the girls' intersectional analyses recognized attempted enclosures on Black girlhoods and their education. In response, they restoried Black girlhood and schools alike by refusing, reorganizing, and reimagining Black girlhood and their educational futures.

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The girls in the study believed in their abilities to meet traditional markers of success and imagined futures where they had power. Many of them pictured lives where they would have careers that would allow them to meet and/or exceed their material needs. For instance, Jade shared that in her perfect world, "people will have like different businesses, like that're owned by black girls or have different businesses." In this example, Jade positions Black girls as business owners, which in today's capitalist society, is an indicator of success (Driver, 2012). Phoebe and Zariana's vision boards below **(Figure 11)** also indicate aspirations of traditional success. In their multimodal renderings, Phoebe and Zariana wrote themselves into futures full of wealth and abundance. Phoebe asserted to the group that she would continue traveling the world in the future and aspired to do so on a yacht. She also asserted that she would be a wealthy business owner and longed for a big, loving family, unlike her own. Phoebe often discussed how "money does not buy happiness" and her displeasure with the amount of time her parents spent outside of their home, working. Additionally, Zariana shared that she wants to be a rich pediatrician with multiple homes in Los Angeles.

The girls in Astronomy Club were confident in their abilities to attain the privileges that come along with achieving traditional markers of success such as wealth, power, and the ability to travel. None of the girls in the study imagined futures marked by poverty. These aspirations reflected a desire to break through societal barriers and carve out a place for themselves in a world that has historically marginalized, undervalued, and caused them to suffer.

Figure 12. Phoebe and Zariana's Vision Boards.

Despite this belief in themselves, the girls in Astronomy Club recognized that society and schools would not be as quick to recognize their brilliance and would impose obstacles to thwart their progression toward their aspirations. For example, Jakuana cited the material consequences of the boundaries assigned to Black girlhood:

Like, like certain job opportunities. Okay. Like maybe it'd be a bit harder to become maybe like the president or like the, like an astronaut. Yeah. Or like one of those big major broken jobs than it is to be like, become like a store manager. Mm-hmm. So like that a little like give them more like an equal opportunity. Like what? Like the white people could, like what the white people can do. We can do. Mm-hmm. just as equals and not make it so hard for us. Like mm-hmm. Have to just like be effort, extra hard just to get to a dream or whatever. Mm-hmm.

Furthermore, the girls in this study used their liberatory literacies to expose society's stories and narratives about Black girls. For example, in Rodneisha's interview, she argued:

Like there's a lot of things. I'm sorry. There's a lot of things that people say that us [Black girls] we can do but just prove 'em wrong because if people wrong they like dang. Um, they can't do like certain things like, uh, there's a lot of things...But there's a lot of things that they tell black girls that they can't do.

Joining her, Jakuana also acknowledged the fact that Black girls' abilities and accomplishments are often rendered invisible. She took her analysis a step further and restoried the narrative that Black girls lack the ability to be great by providing a recommendation. She stated:

I probably say maybe give girls like a bit more credit for what they do. Yeah. Because I feel like they're under like misunderstood and just don't get the credit they deserve because like sometimes you honestly wouldn't even be here without your mother. So yeah, sometimes it's giving the girls your credit. Mm-hmm.

The girls had an acute awareness of their societal positioning. However, they also believed in their ability to resist and "talk back" (hooks, 1986) to systems and stereotypes attempting to oppress them. For example, in the image below **(Figure 13)**, taken from Phoebe's third map of a youthtopian school, she named the narrative of Black girls being "ghetto" and pushed back against it with another mode of Black girlhood, creativity. It is also important to note that Phoebe resisted the common narrative associated with the word 'ghetto' and instead used it as a mirror to reveal society's inability to recognize there

is nothing inherently wrong with being different. She challenged the word 'ghetto' rather than persons associated with the label. She highlighted that there are multiple ways to demonstrate Black girlhood, and they all matter.

Figure 13. Excerpt from Phoebe's third map.

The reasen they the School was very art because its shaws black girls can be cut Side the box with being called "ghetto" or bad name for being different.
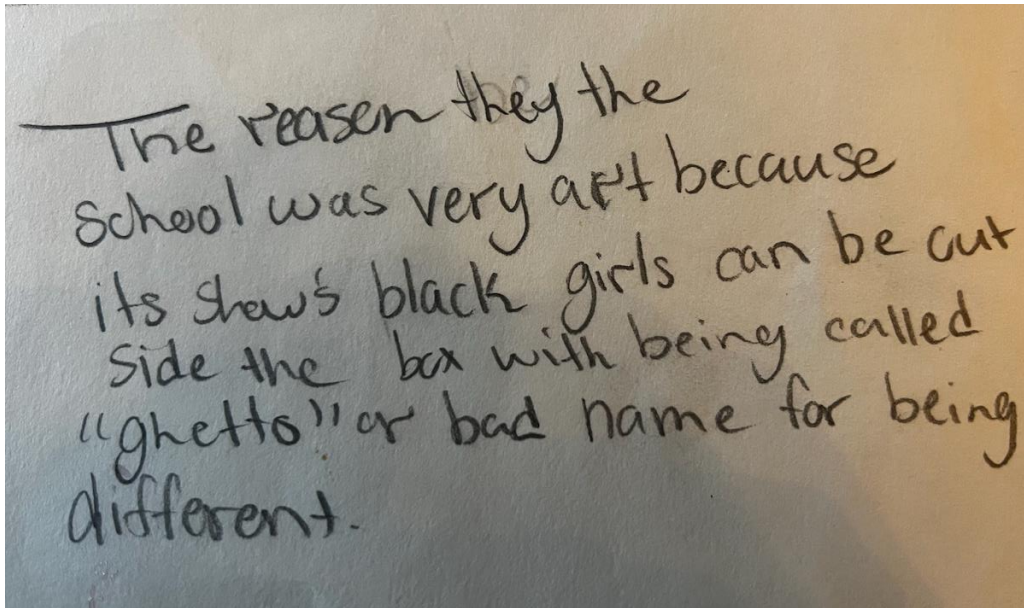
Although clearly articulating the double bind of Black girlhood (Ford et al., 2018), most Astronomy Club members located themselves in positions of power in the present and future. Being "different" from society's standards did not delimit their definitions of Black girlhood. They regularly talked about being queens and referred to themselves as such. In session three, Phoebe asserted that she wanted to "fight for [her] royalty." Phoebe exemplifies this in her first map of a youthtopian school, the "Princess Academy for the Gifted." In this rendering, Phoebe depicts education taking place in a castle because "Black girls are queens."

Figure 14. Phoebe's First Map of a Youthtopian School.
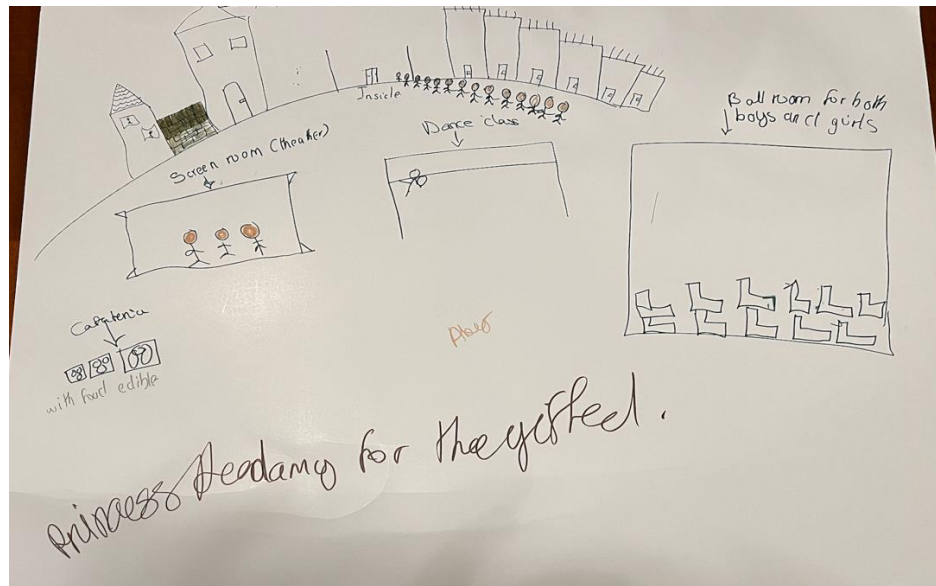
Phoebe was not alone in her effort to turn deficit notions of Black girlhood on their heads. In defining Black girlhood Black girls, Cat said, "they can accomplish things that as young, intelligent, embraced, perfection. Empowered, beautiful. And accomplishing young age woman." Rodneisha described the beauty of Black girlhood through the use of a flower as a metaphor; she teaches us:

> **Rodneisha:** So like, being a black girl is like a flower. A flower needs sunlight, water, and soil. So the sun is our love, our hope with another person, person in your zone. It helps you rise. It helps you bloom. The soil is standing ground. It's our sisterhood.
>
> **Pheobe:** Dang
>
> **Rodneisha:** It's our support. Someone who could help you. Our water is our thrive. Our, yeah. And then the weeds take you down. Those people who don't wanna support you and wanna hate on you for no reason.

The girls in the Astronomy Club refused deficit notions of Black girlhood and instead offered new representations where it bloomed in both the present and future. This indicates that that Black girls in this study located themselves in positive sociocultural locations. They demonstrated that they knew who they were and were committed to making sure others did as well.

Editing Imagination

A hallmark of the Astronomy Club was its emphasis on providing a space for Black girls to use their imaginations to dream of other worlds. When conceptualizing the program, I did so with the assumption that if Black girls were provided the opportunity to architext youthtopias, they would do so without question. My tenure as a preschool, elementary, and middle school teacher in various appointments and across multiple contexts afforded me the opportunity to know and love many Black girls, all of whom I witnessed using their imaginations in one way or another. This made me confident that the girls would be excited to share their creative thoughts about otherwise. However, I found the girls did not think school was necessarily a place where their imaginations were welcome.

There were times where some girls were reluctant to use their imaginations, particularly concerning ideas that they did not deem reasonable or logical. These moments oftentimes reminded me that Black girls are not a monolith. For instance, during the initial session, I explained that the first activity involved creating a map of their ideal learning spaces–even if it was outside of a classroom. I informed them that they should use their imaginations and encouraged them to include whatever they would like. Rodneisha

responded to this by reminding the group to "be logical." I replied, "The world is yours. That's the whole point here. You don't have to be logical. Use your imagination." Here, we see Rodneisha provided the group with the directive to create youthtopian classrooms that are legible within traditional ways of knowing and learning.

As I further explained the nature of the activity, I asked, "If you were in charge of making the perfect school, who would be there? How would it look? What kinds of things would it have?" I began modeling the activity by creating the learning space I wish I could have had as a girl. As I was creating my map, I drew a prominent door and told the girls that it represented the ability to enter and exit the classroom as girls saw fit.

Alexis: Ooh! Um, I'm gonna put this door here. Cause you can leave whenever you want to.

Rodneisha: What?!

Alexis: Yeah!

Rodneisha: At the school?!

Alexis: Yeah.

Rodneisha: Nah. How they gonna get the education?

Alexis: It's, it's multiple ways to learn. Who said that sitting in the classroom all day is the best way to learn?

Rodneisha: What's another way? I wanna know a best way to learn.

Rodneisha was one of the girls who met the idea of youthtopian schools with skepticism initially and, at times, refusal. In another instance, as we reached the end of the Astronomy Club, we held a focus group; Zariana put her hood and headphones on and proceeded to

stream a video. Rodneisha reminded her of the norms of the space. However, Zariana rejected the notion of speculating about the future with us.

In a related example, in session three, Jade questioned the utility of imagining other worlds, once again.

Jade: What exactly do you mean by perfect future?

Alexis: Yeah, if you can, if you could get in a time machine and go to a world a hundred years from now and, and it's just perfect. Everything is the way, exactly the way you would want it to be?

Jade: then something's wrong.

Cat: A better [redacted].

Jade: Something's wrong.

Alexis: Yeah? Maybe? Maybe not?

Jade: Something's wrong because that's not reality.

Phoebe: Because there's always a price to pay.

Jade: Something's wrong

Alexis: this is a time to use your imagination.

Jade: I felt like you shouldn't tell me that.

Alexis: Go for it

Jade: There will be food everywhere

Here, we see initial reluctance from Jade. To her, the idea of a perfect future was so inconceivable, she coded it as "wrong." Phoebe echoed this reluctance to engage. However, when she finally decided to dream of a fantastical future, Jade requested food. In her

wildest dreams, food, a basic need, is what she conjures. To attain this dream, whether it is perceived as loud or quiet, requires a world where needs are readily met. As Phoebe reminded us with her declaration, "there's always a price to pay"— freedom ain't free.

Citing Citizenship

Black girls are denied the benefits, protections, privileges, and power that comes along with citizenship (Dumas, 2016). However, the girls in the Astronomy Club refused to accept this denial of access to citizenship and power and claimed it for themselves. Cat provided an example of claiming power for Black girls. In **(Figure 14)** she depicts herself standing in front of the American flag with a raised fist, a gesture known as the *Black power salute* (Brown, 2018). In this illustration, she positions herself in front of the flag. However, her back is turned away from the flag as an act of defiance. In contrast, under the biographical information portion of a pre-activity handout, she, and four other girls, listed "American" as a primary identity. Although the United States attempts to deny Black people (including Black girls) full citizenship (Dumas, 2016), they take it and claim it for themselves.

Figure 15. A self-portrait by Cat.
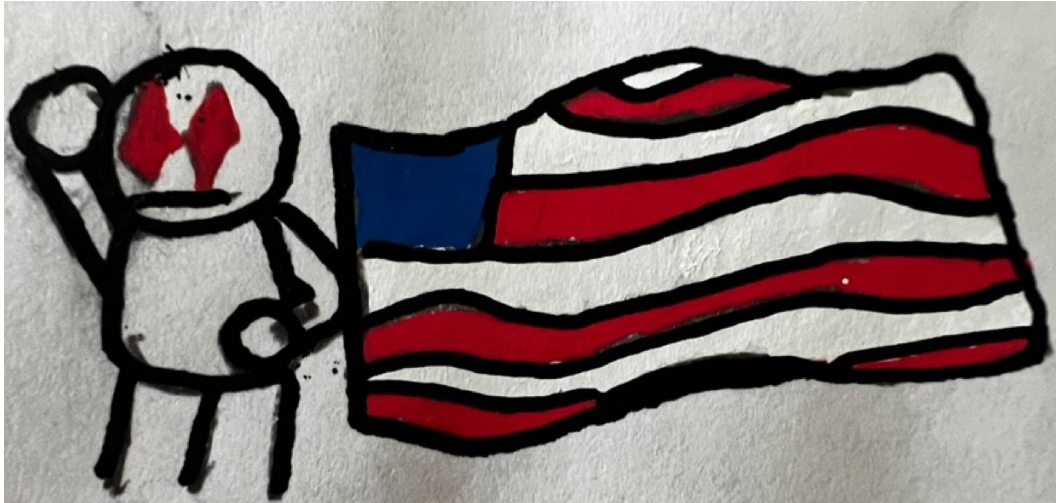
Although this study was set in the United States, the girls recognized that racial

discrimination was not unique to this country. For example, Cat shared her interest in

relocating to Japan one day, to which Zariana responded, "You wanna live, live in Japan?

Some of them are kinda racist. I'm saying some of them do not like us black, black kids.

Some of them just don't like us." In her reply, Zariana demonstrated an understanding of

the global pervasiveness of antiBlackness and rejected Cat's attempt to position herself in a

non-Black geospatial context. She summoned her knowledge of the stories other people tell

about Black girls in an attempt to redirect Cat's idealism about living abroad.

Zariana's mask **(Figure 9)**, adds additional nuance to the notions of power and

citizenship. During the mask preparation activity, when asked which aspects of her identity

she would like to present to others, she provided a one-word answer—American. This

American identity is demonstrated again in the mask itself, which prominently displays

bold red, white, and blue stripes. Given her vocal critiques of the U.S. government, I was

initially surprised that this is how Zariana chose to represent herself. However, returning

to the practice of restorying Black girlhood, we can surmise that Zariana has rewritten what it means to be an American, thus rejecting other people's attempts to tell her what she was and what she was not by refusing the notion that she was not American.

The freedom of Black girls is contested in the United States. Nevertheless, Black girls still aspire for, and deserve, a liberated world. The girls in the Astronomy Club are certainly no exception to this, as they use their liberatory literacies to define freedom. Self-determination appeared integral to the ways in which some of the girl's conceptualized freedom. For example, Jade defined freedom as, "being able to express yourself the way you want to and not how everyone else wants you to express yourself." Jade's conceptualization of freedom was in lockstep with Rodneisha's definition of freedom:

> So freedom is you being yourself in your own area. Having your own bubble without anybody judging you. You are not strapped down somewhere by somebody. You're not doing something for like somebody against your will. You are just like there, like you can live, you can be free. Whoever you wanna be. You could be, yeah. You could be whoever you wanna be. You could be free with anybody and no one can really judge you. Cuz you're just like there like, okay, you're in that moment. Like, whatever you want without anybody like telling you, no, you can't do that. You gotta work for me. Like, no.

Together, Jade and Rodneisha suggested that freedom is yoked to agency and the ability to express oneself across a range of different ways of being.

The girls, on the whole, felt that they had conditional freedom. Of the six girls, only Cat felt Black girls had full access to freedom, which she defined as the ability to "to live

your own life." The other girls cited limits on how close they could get to true freedom. This showed up when Rodneisha said, "Well I have freedom but I got something that just, I know it's gonna stop me if I do too much freedom." Jakuana also included a rigid boundary in her definition of freedom. She suggested, "you can like you can be what you want and do what you want with restrictions. Like you can do certain things... You can like do anything but you just have to follow the rules within it." Taken together, these definitions demonstrate the girls' understandings that their freedom is not self-determined.

Dreaming of a World Full of Justice | Theorizations of Black Futurity

> *Alexis: What are some of the things wrong with this world?*
> *Rodneisha: Everything.*

In our time together, the girls identified social services and social justice as hallmarks of an ideal future. Their imaginations of youthtopian schools and societies reveal that they conceptualized food security, community improvement, access to housing, quality education, tax elimination, and fair wages as essential elements of a world that meets their needs.

Figure 16. A sketch Zariana drew on a piece of scrap paper.
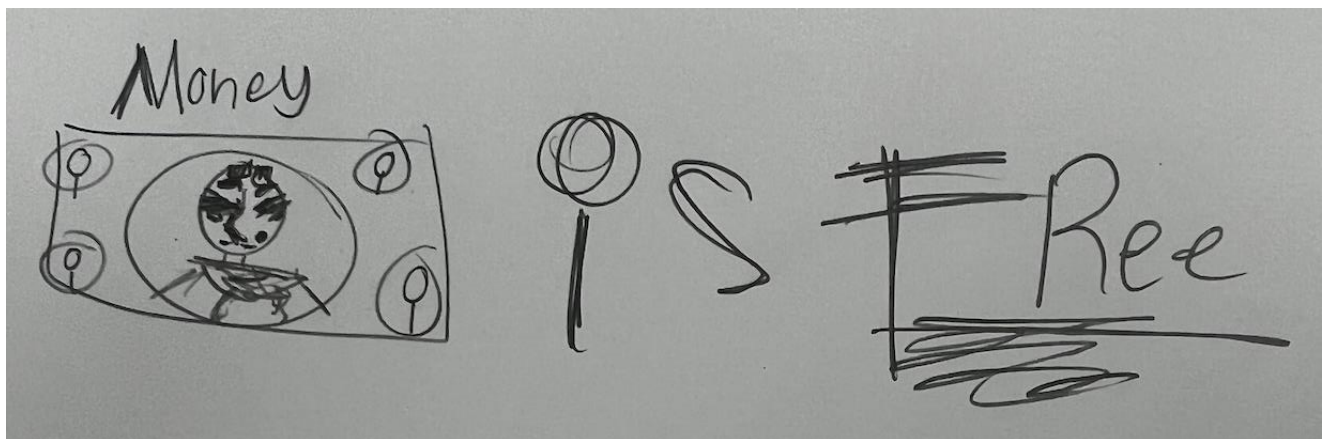
Social justice

During our fourth session, we participated in a poetry workshop, where we focused on a poem entitled, "The Hill We Climb" (2021), written by Amanda Gorman, a young, Black, female poet. We started with a guided reading of the poem. Then, we watched a video of Gorman reciting the poem while we read along with a printed copy, taking note of Gorman's repeated use of the word "we," which appears 32 times. As a group, we discussed Gorman's use of the word "we," delving into the meaning behind the collective term and considering the idea of collective futures. In the poem, Gorman queries, "So while we once asked, how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe? Now we assert, how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us" (2021, [3:47]). Shortly after, I facilitated a conversation with the girls centering the questions: "What 'catastrophes' might Gorman be referencing in this section of the poem? How have, if at all, any of these catastrophes impacted you, your family, or your community" ("Reflecting on Amanda Gorman's "The Hill We Climb", 2021)? The following conversation took place:

> **Zariana:** Yeah.. Kind of like, they should use it as like little, they should the home, the unused homes, the abandoned homes downtown to like make it for like homeless people. Like shelter because it's a whole, it's like a lot of homes that's not being used and we're not doing anything about it. And there's people on the side of the street that's just sitting there waiting for homes.
>
> **Phoebe:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.
>
> **Zariana:** No food, shelter, no money.
>
> **Phoebe:** And it is really cold too, right?

Zariana: So, they should have, they should be able to have heating, have heating crops, have cool crops. These blankets just have like, right at least blankets.

Pheobe: At least make them work for it.

Destiny: Or at least, or at least make these little, like cat at least just lock, knock down all day and just make it to one big hotel. And the feed all the people.

Jade: Because some people actually be desperate enough to actually work for like, every little thing that they get.

Alexis: Like, should we have to work for every little thing?

The conversation above reveals the girls' awareness of a number of societal ills. It also illuminates how Black girls can analyze how present conditions are caused by the disregard for sustainable life and the pursuit of acquiring and exploiting resources. In this dialogue, Zariana not only pointed to the lack of resources needed to sustain a bearable living—such as access to food, shelter, and capital—she also offered a dream for a world where unused resources are redirected to meet the needs of those rendered vulnerable.

This conversation also prompted an unplanned discussion about capitalism. Capitalism was a topic I was still debating if I was going to explicitly bring up myself or let it emerge naturally during conversation. Prompted by Phoebe's assertion that when giving resources to people who lack them, we should "[a]t least make them work for it," I decided this conversation would be a good time to initiate a discussion about work, scarcity, and resources. Although our talk occurred without as much preparation as I would have liked, I knew it was necessary, as we'd had several conversations about scarcity. When thinking of Black futures, where the world meets everyone's needs, the girls frequently came back to

the idea of the depletion of resources. Take, for instance, the conversation I had with Jade below:

> **Alexis:** There's enough for everybody. So, um, there's this idea, some people think like, "oh, if everything is free, people will take advantage of it." But what if we just trusted that if everybody had enough food, people would take what they needed? Right? So, you would not have to hoard the resources.

> **Jade:** It's really greedy people out there. They'll just be like, Ooh, there's more stuff. Let me just put that in my house too.

Cat had similar sentiments:

> **Cat:** So, if we wanted to make it free, then everybody's gonna take everything and then it, it won't be any left.

Above, we observe Cat and Jade's wariness about the sustainability of a life without capitalism. In the conversation, they rejected the idea that people will take only what they need, which suggests that for some Black girls, their circumstances and liberatory literacies reinforce the capitalist message that we must work to live (Till, 2014). This was substantiated by Phoebe's assessment of Zariana's plans for distributing resources when she interjected, "At least make them work for it." Here, both girls made cases for labor as a prerequisite for the right to have basic necessities—even in perfect futures. More research on the ways Black girls in urban environments view scarcity and the distribution of resources may lead to a deeper understanding of the ways they conceptualize their rights to have their needs met.

Environmental justice

The girls also considered the state of our biophysical world to be a catastrophe and raised many concerns about the state of the environment. During our time together, the girls frequently remarked on the frequency of littering in their neighborhoods, unsafe drinking water in local homes, and pollution. However, the girls dreamed of worlds and imagined a future where humans were good stewards of the Earth we occupy. An entry in Cat's journal provides an example of the ways in which Black girls' imagined futures are, at times, in tension with their lived realities. Cat asked to draw her response to our guided question, "Describe a perfect future, right? As you're thinking about the perfect future, what are you doing? What are other Black girls doing?"

Figure 17. Illustration juxtaposing the future and present from Cat's journal.
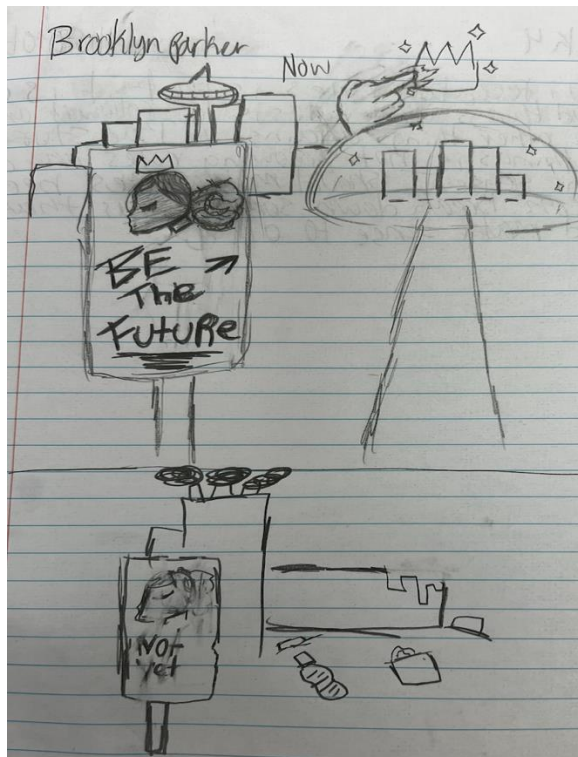
In her illustration **(Figure 16)**, Cat depicts an imagined future at the top and juxtaposes it with a drawing of how she perceives the present directly below it. She described her imagined future as "all clean, not like this world." In the drawing, humans live in a dome meant to clean and protect the air, while the bottom image depicts dark, billowing clouds of pollution from a factory. This attention to atmosphere and air quality was mirrored in conversations. During session four, Zariana commented on the diminishing quality of the atmosphere and stated:

> In order for Earth to be like, like the most common place for everybody to live, then we as humans have to live on Earth. Not, it's just like we planning don't have the, it's like we need the atmosphere. The atmosphere helps us breathe. Yeah. So if there's no atmosphere, then there's no life. So if there's no atmosphere in the entire universe and there's nobody, no, nobody.

Like Cat, Zariana recognized that the world is in danger due to society's apathy towards air pollution. Phoebe offered us her lived experience and shared that there were huge landfills in her home country. She then showed the group an image (*figure x*) of a heaping garbage pit that she retrieved from Google. Phoebe shared her observations of the United States and its focus on air pollution, as opposed to the problem of growing landfills.

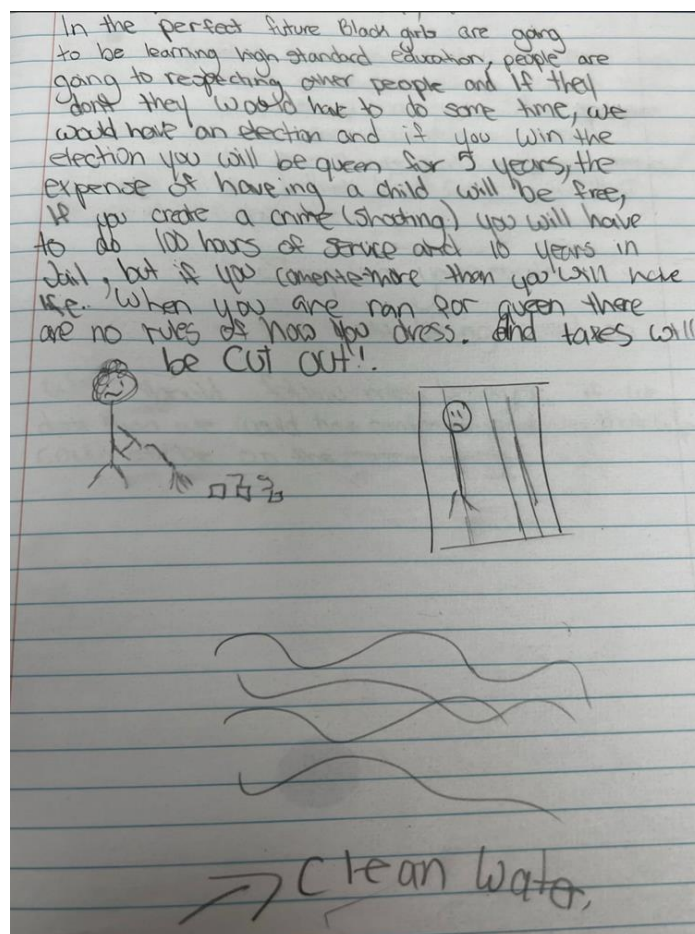**Figure 18. Photo Phoebe shared of pollution in her home country.**

Cat's image of trash on the ground juxtaposed the importance Phoebe placed on addressing air pollution in the United States. Beyond this, in her interview, Cat noted, "There [is] like trash everywhere outside and it affects the whole community and environment in this whole entire planet." Zariana regularly disparaged people who littered, and once she declared, "I don't like, I don't understand how it was so hard. Just not just throw your stuff in the trash!" Jade co-signed this sentiment by assigning those who litter the label "trifling" when she stated, "just trifling on purpose. You just throw it in the trash."

The girls were also concerned about access to clean drinking water. At one point during the Astronomy Club, the drinking water in the city in which Mae Jemison was located was declared unsafe to drink. An impromptu conversation about the drinking water occurred during their creative work time. Their concern about water extended beyond the boundaries of their city, as they also expressed worry about the conditions of the ocean. They frequently remarked on the danger that animals living in the ocean were experiencing. For example, in session three, we discussed the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.

Cat remarked on the impacts of this ocean-based pollution and exclaimed, "[t]hese are rubber bands around a turtle. Turtles…turtles! People are just…Okay. All people are just so cruel."

Throughout the Astronomy Club, when asked how to make sites of learning and the world, in general, more suited to serving Black girls, they frequently cited cleanliness and environmental sustainability as pillars of a perfect future. One example of this desire for a greener future is found in Zariana's journal entry, where she responded to a prompt about the perfect future for Black girls. Although she did not write anything about the environment specifically, she drew and labeled clean water.

Figure 19. Excerpt from Zariana's journal.

> In the perfect future Black girls are going to be learning high standard education, people are going to respecting other people and if they don't they would have to do some time, we would have an election and if you win the election you will be queen for 5 years, the expence of haveing a child will be free, if you create a crime (shooting) you will have to do 100 hours of service and 10 years in Jail, but if you comente more than you will have life. When you are ran for queen there are no rules of how you dress. And takes will be cut out!.

> Clean Water

Racial justice

Embodying the adage "climate justice is racial justice" (Kaplan et al., 2021), the girls in the study also remarked on their dreams for racial justice. Although BlackCrit is not formally taught in schools, their experiential knowledge is congruent with the foundational premise that antiBlackness is a permanent fixture in this world. Through conversation, interviews, and journal entries, the girls made it clear that they was wary, but hopeful about the prospects of racial justice. For example, although the girls talked about the value of Black teachers, Jade's ideal English Language Arts teacher would be Korean —a K-Pop star to be specific. She cited learning to speak Korean and increasing her knowledge of Korean culture as motivations for this desire.

Figure 20. An excerpt from Jade's second map.
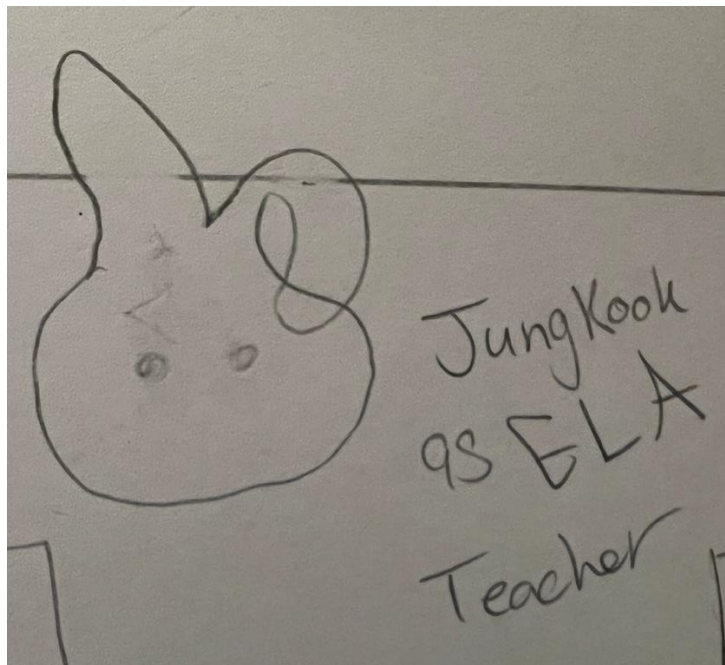
All the girls in the Astronomy Club acknowledged the presence of racism in contemporary schools and society. There was no consensus, however, about the belief that racism could be eradicated completely. With the exception of Cat, who took a more color-blind (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011) approach to discussing race, the girls acknowledged that although the racism of the past manifests differently in the present, racism would still exist in the future. For example, when I asked Jade if there would still be racial and gender oppression in the future, she remarked,

> **Jade:** Well, I feel like in general, it's just gonna be like violence in general. But like for that part I feel like it probably would change, but there would still be like still lingering of it. Like it's not gonna fully go away. Of course.

> **Alexis:** What would it take for all that to fully go away? Is that even possible?

> **Jade:** I...No, because people have their own thoughts and you like can't go inside a person's brain and be like, all right, you're gonna not be this way anymore. Sure. Like people, like if they're older, they're not gonna change what they think about things. Okay. They're going to stick with that. Sure. For a younger person, they might be able to like, switch their brains unless they're like extremely stubborn.

In this conversation, Jade maked it clear that there is no possibility of a world without racism. She asserted that "of course" there would be racial and gender oppression and dismissed the possibility of people, especially "older" ones, abandoning racist logic. When asked the same question, Rodneisha responded:

> **Rodneisha:** Cause there's like things I could say but like you can't really change 'em just by saying... It's a long process.

Alexis: Okay. But who says the process can't start now?

Rodneisha: Like, I would say the hate…Okay… Because like some people just be like racist toward Us. Okay. But like, you can't stop like people from being racist. Like that's just something that they learn from their parents or something.

Importantly, both girls also talk about racism at an individual level. None of the girls in the Astronomy Club explicitly discussed institutionalized or systemic racism. They acknowledged actors in systems (e.g., racist teachers in schools) but did not directly challenge systems themselves. In future research, it would be beneficial to gain a better understanding of how Black girls conceptualize racism at a systemic level.
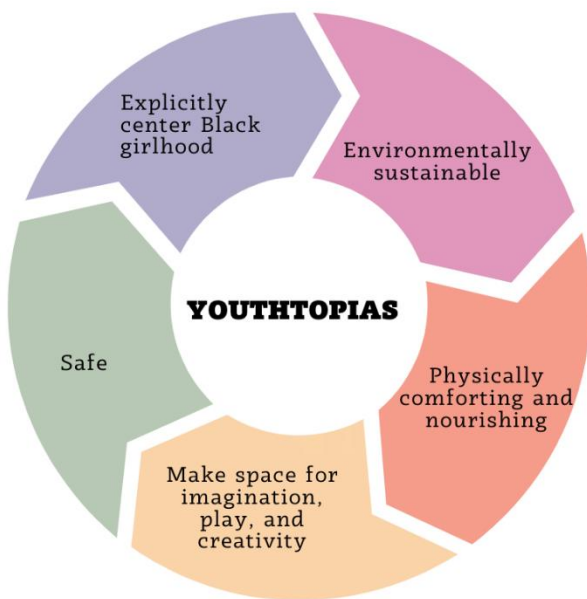
Youthtopia Rising

The girls in the Astronomy Club gifted us with a wealth of guidance on how to build youthtopias to better serve them. I organized their recurring desires for Black girl youthtopias into the following categories: curriculum and discipline, sociopolitical location, and physical location.

Curriculum and discipline

PRESENT SCHOOLS	VS	YOUTHTOPIAS
Tell the stories of white men		Center the experience of Black people
Too much reliance on technology		"Teachers who actually teach"
Limited curricular telescopes		Extracurricular activities that align with interest
Limited agency over what they learn		Student led education

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed the Astronomy Club girls' intersectional analyses of schools' curriculums. This section of the study evokes Zariana's call to action: "[w]e gotta fight for our kids' education. That's what we gotta fight. We do gotta fight for our kids' education." Zariana also shared that "in the perfect future, Black girls are going to be learning, be learning high standard education." The girls have already explained how schools continue to reinscribe white supremacy and patriarchy. Additionally, they highlighted and made recommendations concerning other aspects of formal schooling. The girls provided educational directives for building Black girl youthtopias, including reimagining electives, the explicit inclusion of Black girls and women, and rethinking discipline and rules.

The girls in the Astronomy Club had visions for the type of work they wanted to do when they got older. However, they did not see school as a direct pathway to pursuing those aspirations. As such, the knowledge they shared in the Astronomy Club suggest some Black girls see informal learning spaces as prime opportunities to learn about topics

aligned with their desired futures. For instance, Zariana shared, "In the future, I'm gonna be a doctor. A cardiologist. Something like that, the school should make a club for whatever you want to be when you grow up and you can study for it." The girls demonstrated the necessity of opportunities to begin authoring their futures and assurance that their aspirations were attainable. For instance, when I asked Rodneisha what she wanted to be in the future, she responded with "I'm not lady luck," meaning that her dreams were out of her reach. While Zariana proposed this telescopic learning within the scope of her career aspirations, Rodneisha pictured these spaces tending to the exploration of Black girlhood and womanhood. She saw this learning being operationalized through her conceptualization of what she called "Sister Sister Education" **(Figure 20)**. She explained:

It's basically about how like people from like older grades, or like people from any grades…can go ahead and talk about their experiences and how they can help each other. People from other schools could probably do it too. Can come in and talk about what's it like being a Black woman, a mixed woman, a light-skinned woman, any type of woman because its equality over here, right? Or what's it like to be that color. What it's like to be a young girl. And it could help them, like, if their parents haven't taught them a proper way to use like period products….like, a way to you know, be more feminine.

Rodneisha's conceptualization of Sister Sister Education was congruent with existing literature on colorism and other negative perceptions of Black phenotypes, and particularly, their deleterious impact on Black girls in schools (Abrams et al., 2020; Baxley, 2017; Bell & McGhee, 2021; O'Brien-Richardson, 2019; Rosario et al., 2021; Townsend et

al., 2010; Ward & Robinson-Wood, 2016). In her interview, Rodneisha shared that she did

not have anywhere to talk about her racial identity. Throughout her participation in the

Astronomy Club, however, she frequently remarked on not being perceived as being "Black

enough" because she had a white mother. She felt safe discussing her racial identity in the

Astronomy Club because the girls generally got along with each other, addressed

differences in opinion "respectfully," and were blatantly asked about race—thus,

reinscribing the urgency of creating spaces for Black girls to explore the intersectionality of

being both Black and gendered female.

Figure 21. Figure X. Excerpts from Rodneisha's first map depicting Sister Sister Education.
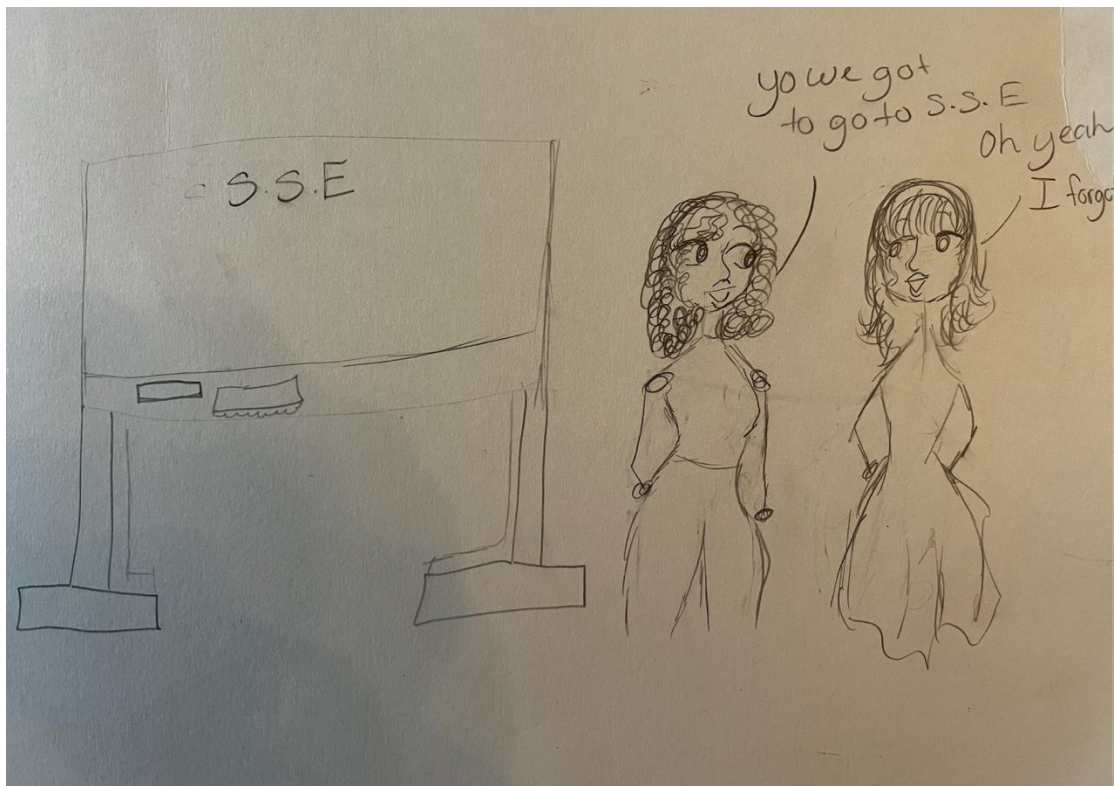

The conversations the girls had in the Astronomy Club confirm existing scholarship

concerned with the egregiousness of school discipline policies and the negative ways in

which they impact Black girls (Annamma et al., 2019; Carter, 2008; Love, 2016; Morris, 2016). They provided examples of both emotional and physical violence, which were justified under the guise of school discipline. For example, in one session, Phoebe shared that an administrator at her previous school (outside of the United States) had cut her hair. This incident illuminates the contention that antiBlackness is a global phenomenon, and girls are not safe anywhere in this world (Busey & Dewey-Chin, 2021). This is also congruent with existing research that exposes the ways in which Black girls are in physical danger in schools (Gholson & Martin, 2019).

The girls were not calling for an end to rules and expectations in ideal learning spaces—quite the opposite, actually. For example, on Zariana's first two maps of youthtopian schools, she included a list of codes, consequences, and expectations **(Figure 21)**. The rules, at first glance, mirror existing, normative school rules and included harsh punitive measures such as suspension. During my conversation with her, I understood that the main difference between the rules Zariana envisioned for ideal schools and those that currently exist was not the rules themselves, but in the ways they were enforced: ways that were fair and equitable or unfair and inequitable.

Figure 22. Excerpts from Zariana's first (left) and second (right) maps.
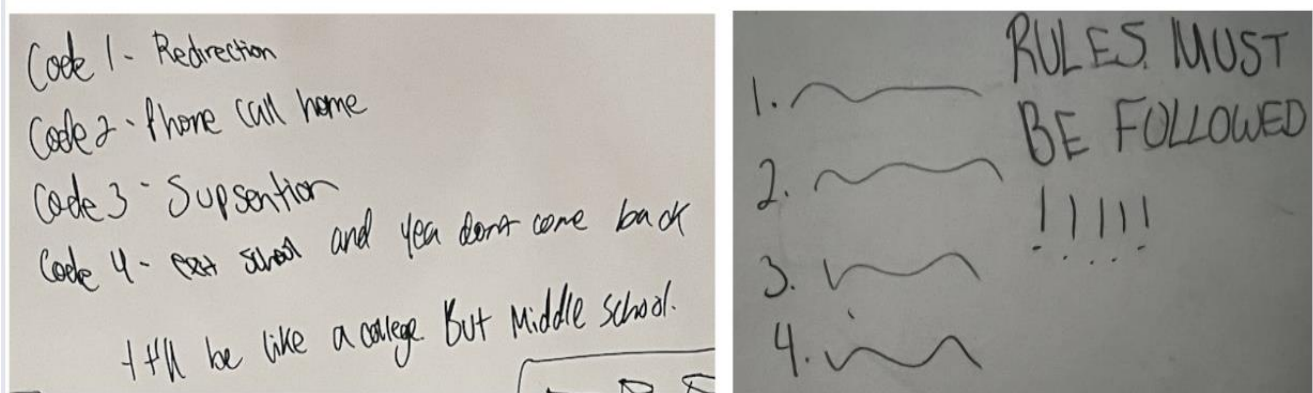
My interest was piqued by Zariana's illustrations because I assumed the girls would eliminate rules in a youthtopian school since they are harmed by them in the present. However, Zariana's artifacts and conversations with the other girls demonstrated that the girls valued rules when they were enforced by people whom they trusted and who treated them with respect. For instance, during a conversation about whether or not girls should be able to have cell phones in learning environments, Rodneisha stated that they should not because "then they not gonna learn nothing and they just gonna be like some all day... the learning, plus two and they're still okay." For her, rules were a way to ensure that students stayed focused on learning objectives. There were rules, however, that the girls did not value, particularly those they perceived as groundless or racist. Jade demonstrated this when she defined *bad rules*:

> Or when our rule is bad and when our rule is feel they don't make sense. I feel like I write that that's a bad rule. If it don't make sense. Like racist rules. Yeah. If it racist. I feel like, I feel like when somebody says, when a teacher says the bell doesn't dismiss you. Oh yeah, I do. I feel like that's like something that you can't control. Cause then what is the point of the bell?

Rodneisha echoed these sentiments:

> Okay. I feel that rules are fine as long as they don't harm anyone a bad. I feel like a bad rule is if it takes away the rights in, takes away the rights of others and gives other people power over the, the other people. Um, a good rule is when it gives equal power to everyone.

Despite recognizing the importance of rules in shaping behavior and defining norms in space, Jade and Rodneisha's both grappled with the limitations and potential abuses of power that can arise from their implementation. In concert, they demonstrated an analysis of power hierarchies and exposed how rules can be used as tools of oppression that harm those whom they govern.

Jakuana provided an example of the material consequences of disciplinary policies and complained about school rules being vague. Jakuana shared with the group that her previous school used raffles as incentives for positive behavior. She said,

> And then at my old school, it was like a dominant white school. So, there was very few Black people in my class. Okay. And then we never really got picked for, we never really got picked for. Um, like Right. Like for the raffle, food, and stuff. I, I usually, I did get it once, but I feel like that was outta luck because I only put like two in it. So, I was like the only one who was doing it, turning my work in. But the white kids still had more tickets.

Jakuana used this past experience to make a recommendation for the future. In her interview, she theorized that a youthtopian school for Black girls would have raffles and prize boxes. This inclusion further reinforced that Jakuana did not think school discipline and incentive policies were inherently wrong, but rather, their racist implementation was the problem. When executed with fidelity and fairness, she recognized these policies as a positive asset in a learning environment.

Rodneisha also reimagined what school discipline could look like. There are parallels between restorative justice and the approach she recommended:

So, it's like a program where it's like inside school and outside school. Okay. And it's basically where, um, so like, it's like a place for black girls to go when they're going through troubles. Like, cuz you know, some of us got some anger issues. Oh yeah. Yeah. And some of us really want to like, get out the situation cuz we know better, but we can't. So, this is a place where you put people in instead of them like, yeah. Put people in so they can calm down, then they can go back to class. Or they can stay here and do their work here.

Jakuana and Rodneisha both demonstrated a willingness to imagine and create new, more inclusive approaches to learning and school discipline. Jakuana recognized that discipline and incentive policies could be beneficial in a learning environment, but only if implemented without racial bias. Her recommendation for a youthtopian school for Black girls, complete with raffles and prize boxes, showed her commitment to creating a positive learning environment that acknowledged the unique experiences of Black girls. Similarly, Rodneisha's recommendation for a program that provides safe spaces for Black girls to work through their emotions and overcome their anger issues indicated a commitment to restorative justice and an understanding of the unique challenges faced by Black girls in the school system.

Sociopolitical

PRESENT SCHOOLS	VS	YOUTHTOPIAS
(Un)seen and (un)supported		Treated with love, support, and encouragement
Silent partners		Ability to make choices
Embodied stereotypes		Expansive identities
Limited mental health support		Commitment to practices of therapy, restorative justice, and meditation

Having the opportunity to co-create a community with the girls in the Astronomy Club, where they could show up as their authentic selves, was truly, one of the greatest honors of my adult life. During our time together, the girls often stated that the Astronomy Club was a safe space for them. One of the most striking confirmations of the security the girls felt in our space came from a line in Phoebe's journal where she wrote, "I feel so much freedom when I am in the Astronomy Club!" The safety they felt during our time together led to the girls being vulnerable and sharing their truths. As such, listening to the wisdom of the girls in the Astronomy Club reveals that in Black girl youthtopias, Black girls and their multitude of identities are seen fully, their socioemotional needs are tended to, and they have the ability to make meaningful decisions.

The girls in the Astronomy Club undoubtedly confirmed that Black girls are not a monolith. The members of the Astronomy Club had diverse tastes in music, hairstyles, and future aspirations. The girls also came with a host of background experiences, identities, and desires—some accepted by schools and society more than others. For instance, Jade

described herself as "emo," a term typically identified with a subculture but has increasingly gained traction as a way to identify as being extremely emotional (Cruz, 2020). This label is not generally associated with Black girls, instead commonly associated with middle-class white youth (Cruz, 2020). Jade shared that she often felt misunderstood and, in response, "wears a bubbly mask" to appear happier and more optimistic. She also remarked that she admired the jewelry typically associated with those who identify as emo, such as spiked chokers, but did not feel brave enough to wear them to school.

Jade was not alone in her experience of challenges in navigating her identity, as other members of the Astronomy Club disclosed feeling unsafe in presenting their authentic selves to the larger school community and society, at large. During the future selves collage activity, Cat and Jakuana revealed that they were members of the LGBTQIA+ community **(Figure 22).** Cat's collage featured both a same-sex couple and heterosexual couple, representative of the ways in which she was actively exploring her sexual identity. I reminded her that she did not have to know yet and would gain more clarity as she learned more about herself. In contrast, Jakuana's map featured a single same-sex couple with a large Pride flag to signal that she pictured being in a same-sex relationship in her future.

While Jakuana shared that she had a girlfriend with the group, this was Cat's first time revealing this part of herself to anyone else. I was the only adult who knew both girls did not identify as heterosexual. As Cat and Jakuana entrusted us with their truths, I made sure to emphasize the norms of our community, reminding the other girls to hold information shared in the space as sacred. The girls understood and agreed that it was Cat's and Jakuana's decision to share their identities when, or if, they wanted. Jade also

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understood that adults might not handle these identities with care. Sharing a friend's story, she illuminated how some identities go both unacknowledged and unsupported. Jade told us about a friend she had at school who identified as non-binary and used they/them pronouns. However, since it is designated as a girls-only school, many teachers and staff refused to use their pronouns and instead referred to them as "she." The other girls confirmed that this happens frequently. I also witnessed staff refer to a masculine presenting student as "miss," despite their protest. Much to their dissatisfaction, the girls' experiences mirrored scholarship that cites the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in schools (Love, 2017; Quinn, 2007; Toomey et al., 2012).

Figure 23. Jakuana (left) and Cat's (right) future selves collages.

In addition to having various parts of their identities normalized and accepted, the girls also wanted their feelings and mental health acknowledged. During our opening meal in session two, I casually mentioned that I had a therapy appointment the next day. The girls were shocked by what seemed like a confession to them. I disclosed that I loved going to therapy, as it has helped my mental health. Once I shared my relationship with therapy,

so did some of the girls—thus, sparking a culture where we openly talked about mental health and feelings.

During our time together, the girls expressed a desire for more emotional support; but at the root of it all, the girls just wanted to be heard. Frequently, the girls in the Astronomy Club remarked that they enjoyed our time together because they were able to talk freely about issues impacting them and the world around them. They knew I took a nonjudgmental stance, regardless of how they chose to express themselves. Unfortunately, they did not feel heard by all the adults charged with taking care of them, as highlighted by Jakuana during her interview:

Alexis: Do you feel like adults listen to you?

Jakuana: Um, sometimes. Sometimes not. Like, they'll listen to me when they have to, but if they want to, depending on the situation, like if I'm just talking just because they need listening a little bit just to hear what I gotta say. But then it's like you start tuning me out. Cause then I feel like you're not listening to me when you keep looking away or when you're doing something else.

The girls in Astronomy Club cited other examples of the adults in their school failing to heed their concerns, silencing them, and assuming negative intentions when they spoke up. They often summarized these incidents as "disrespectful." For example, Rodneisha shared an incident where her physical belongings were thrown by another student. She recalled her attempt to get help from a teacher, saying, "I was trying to tell Ms. Clark and she wasn't... she walked away from me when I was trying to talk to her!" Students are often told to report problems to adults. In this case, when Rodneisha attempted to follow school

procedures, she was ignored. Not only were her belongings in jeopardy, but so was her socioemotional well-being. Zariana shared a similar frustrating occurrence with a teacher:

Zariana: Tell me why. When we was in crew, my crew leader really made me mad because I was sitting right. I was sitting, I was sitting right there

Alexis: Uhhuh.

Zariana: Then she gonna tell me, be quiet. And I said, I was like, I'm asking no question about the work. Then she gonna be like, "are you still talking?" I'm like, yes. Cause I'm trying to ask a question about my assignment to my ...Um, the other girl, that's in my class. Then two seconds later we all could talk. I don't like that lady. Then I was coming down from class and she gone say "Zariana, they called you on the microphone". And I was like yeah, cause I was getting my work from my math teacher. Then she gone say, "Nobody should be calling you on the intercom." I just told her I was getting my work cause I'm tryna make sure my grades are good. Now she gone say. "Oh, so now you're worried about your grades"and I'm like, "I been worried about my grades." She was being disrespectful about my grades, cause she can't tell me how I feel about my grades; only I can!

In Zariana's example, she was reprimanded for talking and was frustrated because she felt talking in that particular instance was justified. Her exasperation was compounded when she felt like the expectations suddenly shifted, allowing others to talk. Further exacerbating the chain of events, Zariana reported being called out by that same teacher and belittled over her grades. Zariana's experience was not unique, as many the girls reported feelinfs frustrated when they believed that they were being unfairly reprimanded

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and their voices were not being heard, and this is why Rodneisha provided the directive:

"So listen, listen to the children. Yes. Very simple. Yes. That's a very simple instruction."

Figure 24. An excerpt from Rodneisha's map of an ideal ELA learning environment that reads "support system from the teacher and the teacher can listen to the kids.
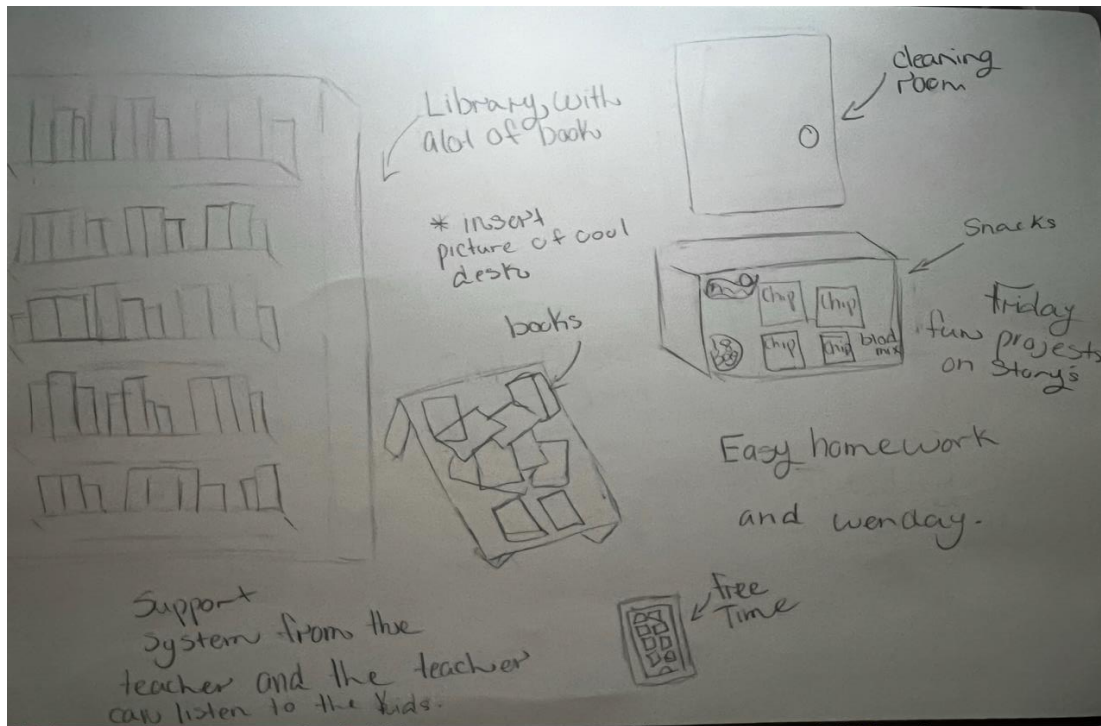
Physical

PRESENT SCHOOLS	VS	YOUTHTOPIAS
"ugly"		Sites of peace & beauty
Not well maintained		Environmentally sustainable
Traditional furniture and cramped spaces		Physically comfortable & nourishing
Create physical boundaries		Make space for imagination, play, and creativity
Threats of violence		Safe

My study suggests Black girls are excited about and willing to engage possibilities for learning outside of the traditional confines of physical schools as we know them. The girls' reimagining of sites of learning were both loud and quiet (Campt, 2017). According the girls in this study, youthtopian learning spaces for Black girls are physically clean and safe, aesthetically pleasing, and nourishing to their mind and bodies. Jakuana summarized these desires when describing her ideal school:

> I feel like certain schools has like boring old door to door, no decorations. Because I feel like my school, my school would still kind of be like that, but it'll have like safe places. Sure. So like, people to go in and need to and not just be so cooped up and have to feel like they have to hide their feelings.

Jakuana and others expressed a desire for physical locations within ideal schools that attended to their emotional safety. These spaces included areas explicitly for meditation and reflection, such as the reflection corner on Zariana's third map **(Figure 24)**.

Figure 25. A reflection corner from Zariana's third map.
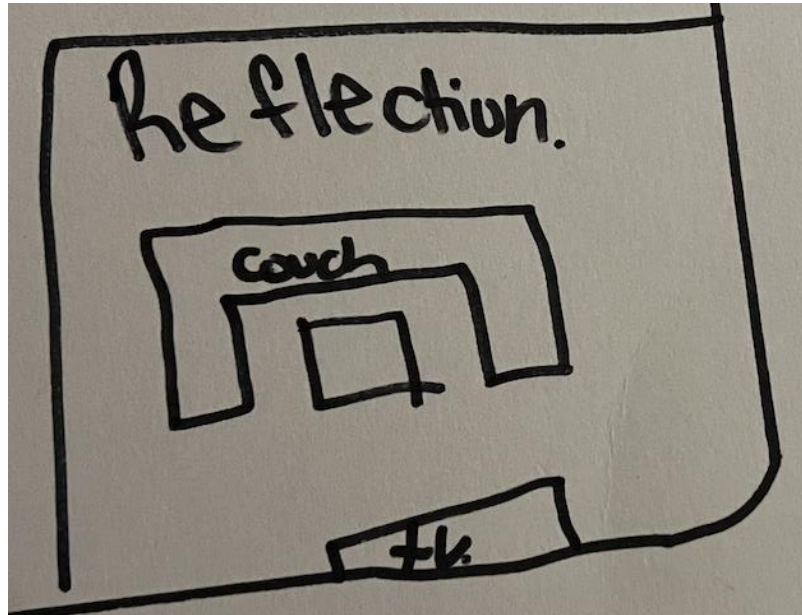
All the girls in the Astronomy Club believed that learning should still occur in physical locations; they thought my idea of completely abandoning the practice of "going to school" in favor of on-site apprenticeships was ridiculous. The physical structures they designed varied. For example, Phoebe's school, which she called, "Princess Academy for the Gifted," was housed in a castle. Zariana's "Pink Water Rivers School" featured hallmarks of a traditional school, as evidenced by the classroom arrangement, but also incorporated separate buildings for grade levels, which were only accessible by boat **(Figure X)**.

Figure 26. Zariana's third map of a youthtopian school.
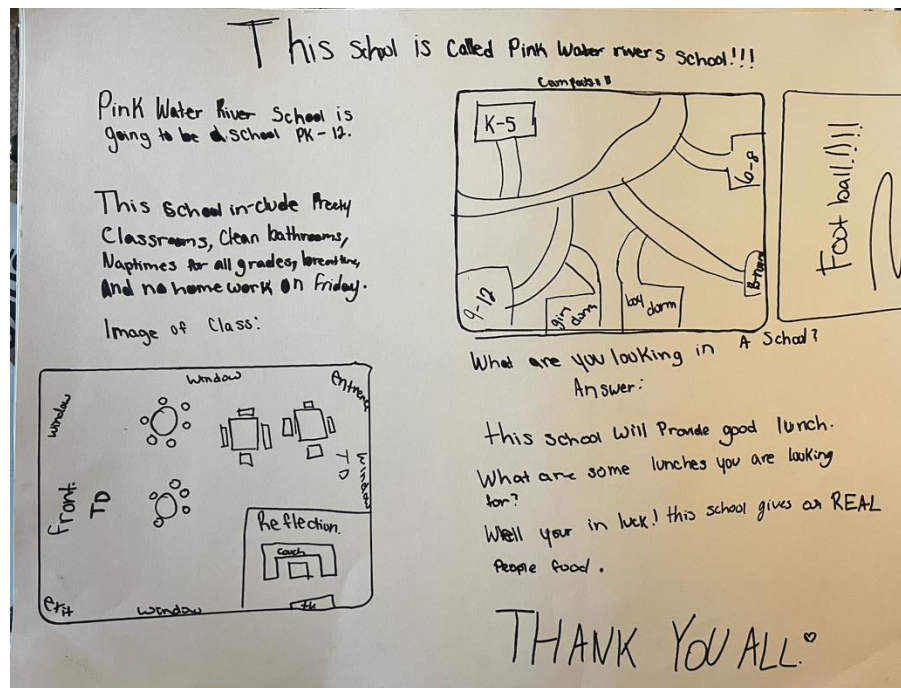
The members of the Astronomy Club called for changes in the ways schools are maintained, comparing the current situation unfavorably to their vision of youthtopian schools. The group envisioned youthtopian schools that prioritize cleanliness and proper upkeep, a stark contrast to the current state of affairs. They took particular issue with the maintenance of school bathrooms and cafeterias, which they believed were not kept up to acceptable standards. Furthermore, they were dissatisfied with the cleanliness of their classrooms and imagined youthtopian learning spaces as being clean and having the proper tools on hand to make sure everyone could contribute to their upkeep.

Figure 27. Rodneisha's map of an ideal ELA learning environment which includes a cleaning room.
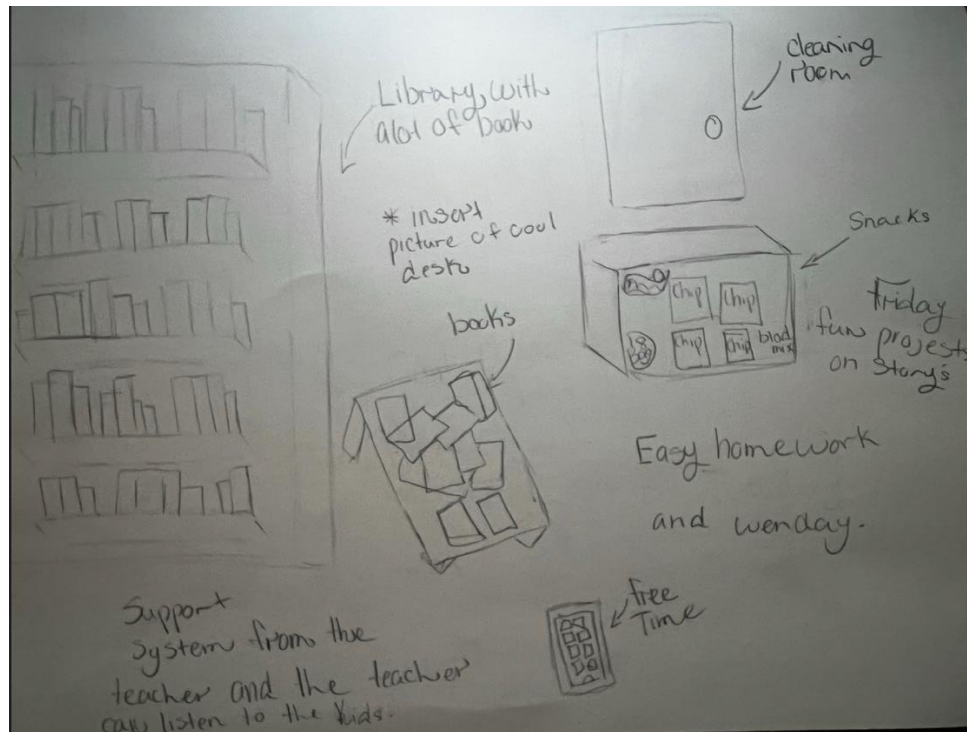
The girls were also concerned about the exterior of the school. Litter and improper trash disposal were a regular topic of conversation, as demonstrated in the dialogue between Zariana and Rodneisha below:

Zariana: Um, like if they, no one wants to come to a school where it's trashy. Some of these kids don't pick up their trash cause they lazy and they think it's cute and I'm just like, pick up your trash. Like it's not that hard. Okay.

Rodneisha: And then they gonna grow being adults like that. That's why [redacted] so dirty.

In her first map, Cat attempted to rectify the problem of schools being "dirty" and not environmentally sustainable **(Figure 27)**. Cat situated the school she architexted during our first session within an environment that fosters a teacher's "growth mindset about

Black girls," as represented by the cloud. Her imagined school featured an elaborate water

filtration system and lush trees that facilitated the circulation of fresh oxygen throughout

the premises.

Figure 28. Cat's first map of a youthtopian school.

Cat, Rodneisha, and Zariana expressed their concerns about the cleanliness of the school

and the importance of environmental sustainability which indicated their desires to learn

in a clean, safe, and healthy environment. Jade and Jakuana also shared this yearning for a

school environment free from harm, albeit in a different context as demonstrated below.

The girls in the Astronomy Club were keenly aware of the widespread gun violence

prevalent in the United States. Moreover, their school was situated in a city that had a well-

documented history of gun violence and police brutality, which caused the girls to be

anxious about their safety while in school. In response to the question, "What's wrong with

this world?", Rodneisha answered, "Killing. People really shooting up schools and all that. Like, what you doing to the kids? The kids ain't do nothing to you. They barely know you." Rodneisha expressed concerns about the killing of innocent people, particularly in schools, acknowledging that children were being targeted without reason. Jade echoed these concerns and addressed them by architexting a "camouflaged panic room" for protection against mass shooters on her second map of a perfect English Language Arts learning space.

Figure 29. An illustration of a panic room on Jade's second map.
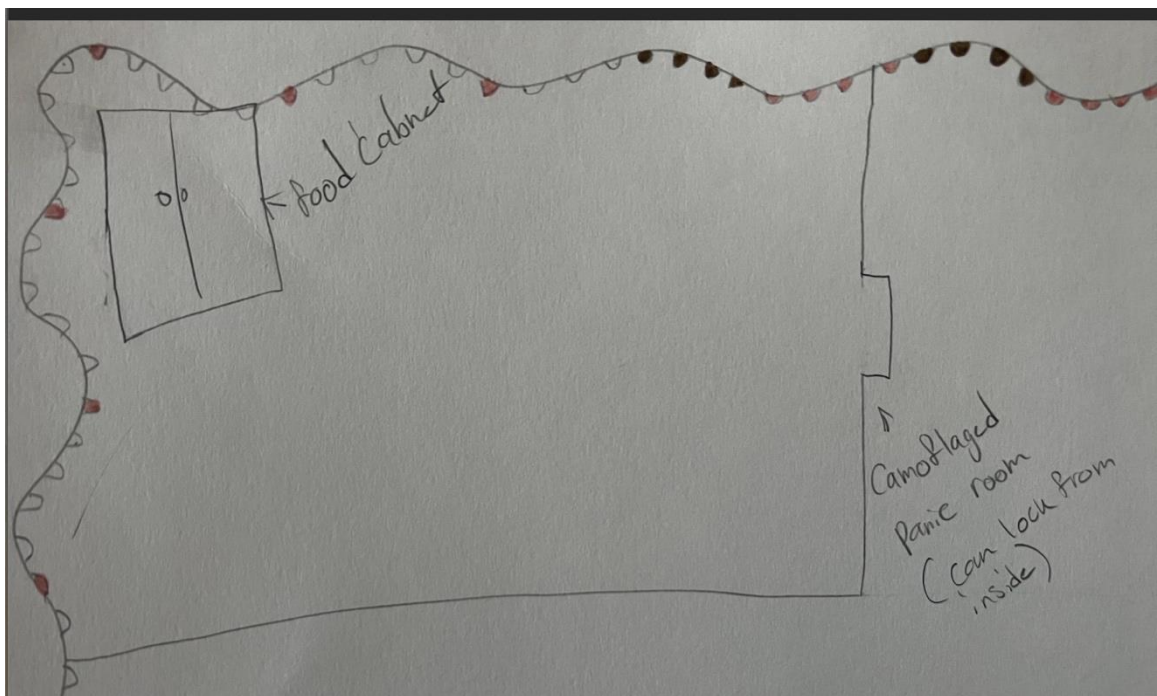
In addition to desiring clean and physically safe learning environments, the girls expressed a yearning for visually appealing spaces. Most believed that schools, in general, are unattractive. Zariana described them as "ugly." Although Mae Jamison Academy features numerous murals, empowering affirmations, and depictions of Black girls and women throughout the building, these elements were not mentioned by the girls in their

conversations about their ideal schools. This may indicate that these aesthetic features reflected adult preferences, as opposed to the young girls who would occupied the space and that the students may not have been involved in the school's decoration process. However, they girls did have innovative ideas for creating youthtopias that fit their aesthetics. Phoebe exemplified this pursuit of beauty in her final map of an ideal learning environment by illustrating a crystal hallway and a painting **(Figure 29)**.

Figure 30. Phoebe's third map of an ideal learning environment.
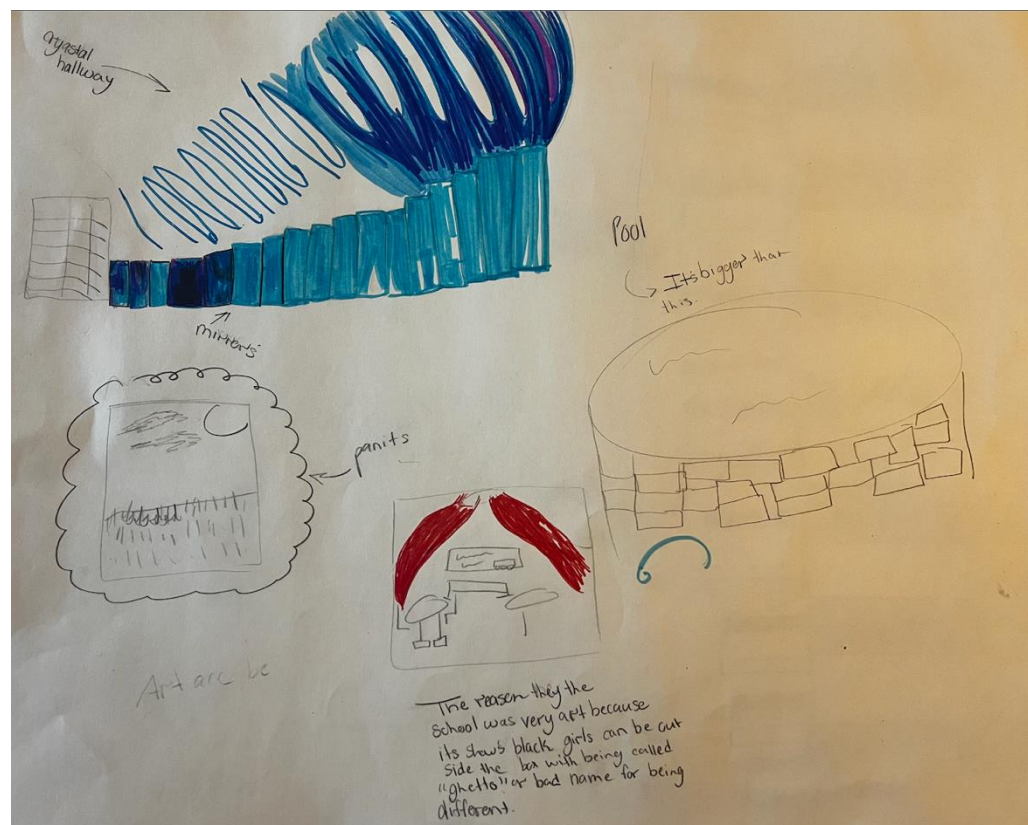
The girls did not only want their youthtopias to look good, but they also wanted them to feel good. The members of the Astronomy Club imagined sites of learning that were comfortable and provided opportunities for physical activity. Although many of the girls' maps contained standard classroom furniture, such as round tables and desks, they

also included flexible and alternative seating. Flexible seating permits young people to move freely through learning spaces, as long as it does not impede their learning, whereas alternative seating (e.g., rockers and beans bags) allows students to move their bodies while they work, with the goal of creating autonomy and conditions where students are physically stimulated (Jimenez, 2016). One example of rethinking classroom furniture was found on Zariana's first map (**Figure 30, left**) where she illustrated a rocking chair with colorful throw pillows. She wrote, "I think we should have comfy seats so we can feel like we are at home." Zariana was not the only Astronomy Club envisioning more comfort in her physical environment. Jade's map of a youthtopian ELA space featured a "cozy corner" that contained both pull-out and blow-up beds (**Figure 30, right**)

Figure 31. (Left) An illustration of alternative seating from Zariana's first map; (Right) Jade's pull out and blow-up beds from her second map.
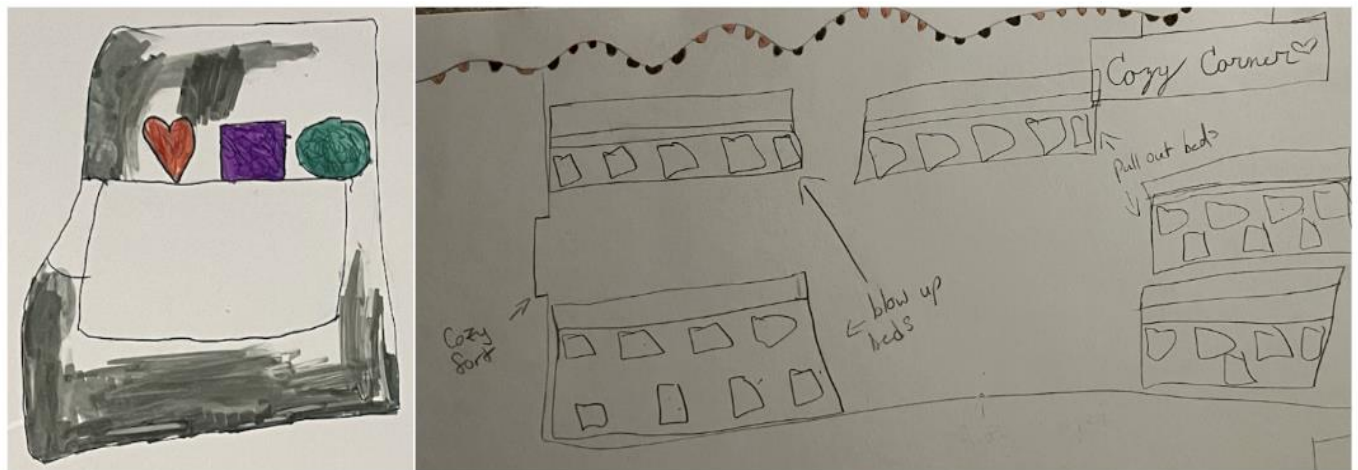
The girls also yearned for opportunities to be physically engaged in school. For example, Rodneisha drew a basketball court and expressed interest in exercising more. Additionally, they imagined schools where they would have more outdoor spaces and room for recess. Relatedly, both Phoebe's first and third maps contained swimming pools.

Phoebe's first map also had a ballroom. Together, Rodneisha and Phoebe identified diverse ways in which the members of the Astronomy Club recommended moving their bodies while in learning spaces. In short, physical locations that house Black girl youthtopias take care of their bodies, minds, and souls.

Conclusion

Rodneisha: So, my mother, she was telling me about something about how the maps could be wrong, saying that they're not probably sketched right. Because you know, Europe is like big, and she showed me this thing where it is saying that Europe is actually very small, 'cause Africa is more huge. Africa's huge! So, Europe is not that big. So, they showed an actual correct map of it and Europe was actually pretty small compared to Africa. And Africa was bigger. Yeah, so that's saying that Europeans changed the map because they wanted to seem like they were bigger. They wanted to seem like they had more power.

Rodneisha identified that whiteness changed maps of the world. She informed the group of the ways in which whiteness can bend and shift narratives in ways that sustain it, while projecting and reifying false notions about those living beyond its barriers. She helped the group identify and discuss how geography and place are not absolute truths and can be manipulated to benefit some people, while simultaneously oppressing others. By illuminating this duality, Rodneisha demonstrated the potential of maps and their cartographers as tools of domination. This suggests that they can also be used as tools of liberation. The girls in the Astronomy Club exemplified how maps can be used to chart new worlds and ways of being and taught us a lot about learning along the way.

In general, my study findings substantiated a fundamental premise of this inquiry: Black girls possess the ability to actively engage in conceptualizing their placements within liberated futures. Although these theorizations range in sonic frequency between loud and quiet soundings (Campt, 2017), with some being categorized as radical and others

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mundane, the findings from this study demonstrate that the girls used their imaginations to dream of freer futures while simultaneously critiquing the world we currently occupy. Maybe if we heed their recommendations, we can get closer to something that feels like freedom and somewhere that feels like home.

Chapter 6: Letters to the North Star(s)

Conclusion

The North Star is often used as a symbol of hope for Black people living under the tyranny of oppression. It is commonly used metaphorically as a symbol of freedom. In the United States specifically, it served as a beacon of freedom and a map that helped our ancestors navigate to life beyond the bondage of chattel slavery. Today, the North Star continues to serve as a reminder to dream of freedom using our radical imaginations and to pursue a world worth living in—a world worthy of Black girls.

Black girls are not new to dreaming of new worlds. Oral histories, academic scholarship, and literary texts have provided rich evidence that Black girls throughout the ages have used their liberatory literacies and radical imaginations to *freedom dream* (Kelly, 2020; Young, 2021). Freedom dreaming is a practice that requires individuals to imagine and make plans for a world that has abandoned oppression and injustice in their totality (Kelly, 2002). Black girls' freedom dreams are essential to the aim of reaching these new worlds, free of systemic harm. Black girls' imaginations are the North Star, and if we let them, they can illuminate the way to safety and direct us home.

In the Astronomy Club, Cat, Jade, Jakuana, Phoebe, Rodneisha, and Zariana's imaginations were used as the North Star to envision living in a place beyond the ontological enclosures of this world. They imagined worlds where Black lives matter, everyone has access to the resources they need to live well, and the love of Black girls is woven into the fabric of society. During our six weeks together, the girls' used their

liberatory literacies to architext youthtopias where their personhood was valued, cherished, and honored.

The girls in this Astronomy Club stand in the ranks with other Black girl luminaries who have created blueprints for "paradise" (Butler, 1998, p. 131). Following the North Star toward Black girl youthtopias, I asked the overarching question: *How do Black girls architext their imaginations of a Black girl-centered educational future in an out-of-school learning space designed for them?* In pursuit of an answer, I began chapter five by discussing how the girls in the Astronomy Club dreamed in the dark. I situated their imaginations in the night sky as I answered one of the secondary questions: *What are some of the ways Black girls enact liberatory literacies, theorizations of Black Futurity, and place-making practices while engaging in world-making projects?*

The sections below detail the answers to these questions, illuminated by the girls in this study. I begin with a discussion with a discussion of the data. Then, in pursuit of consistently centering and staying accountable to the girls who informed this work, I turn my writing toward them. I marry a theme to each member of the Astronomy Club as I discuss what I learned from their ideas about freer futures. I also tell them what teachers and researchers can learn from the revelations they illuminated while they dreamed of youthtopias in the dark.

Discussion

The girls drew from their present experiences to construct Black girl youthtopias through multiple literacy practices including oral storytelling, journaling, and multimodal art projects. Utopia, as a concept, invites us to consider multiple pathways toward

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otherwise ways of living and learning. Architexture lends itself to the construction of some of these possibilities for living and learning. In the Astronomy Club, architexture served as a tool for world-making and provided the girls with an invitation to *literally* create new worlds and ways of learning. Analogous to June Jordan's *Skyrise for Harlem* (1965), the girls mapped systems, structures, and institutions to meet their needs in life-affirming ways. Their multimodal architextual renderings provide the opportunities for us to witness the ways they used their imaginations to challenge existing power structures by designing spaces and systems in direct opposition to them. As such, girls' maps and accompanying stories and descriptions of them provide tangibles example of how they (re)organized both the present and future and visualized portions of their liberatory fantasies.

The girls in this study were cautiously optimistic about the (im)possibilities of reimagining education and liberation. While they hoped for schools and worlds free from the horrors of oppression and suffering, their lived experiences had yet to provide them with evidence that such a future is obtainable. In response, the girls were sometimes reluctant to share their liberatory fantasies and plans for the future, which is "indicative of her [a Black girl's] learned sensibility to keep her ideas and identities private" (Kelly, 2020, p. 457). The girls' dispositions and inclinations toward incremental change to reduce suffering suggests they already learned that racism is a permanent fixture in this planet's ecosystem and antiBlackness is in the soil (Dumas & ross, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sharpe, 2016; Moten, 2013). Schools are not exempt from this suffering; in fact, Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) assert that mainstream educational institutions in the US subject Black girls to various forms of exclusion and violence due to racism, sexism, and

class oppression. The girls in the Astronomy Club already understood the pervasiveness of gendered racism in education, confirming prior research that identifies Black girls' awareness of this intersectional harm (Evans-Winters, 2005; Greene, 2016; Kelly, 2018, 2020; Jacobs, 2016; McArthur, 2016; Rogers & Butler-Barnes, 2022).

The girls in the Astronomy Club acknowledged the dominance of the white male perspective and questioned the absence of educational resources and opportunities that center Black life and Black girlhood. Their longing for curriculum materials that explicitly focus on Black girlhood and race mirror those of the co-researchers in Griffin's (2020, 2022) work with high-school aged Black girls who also observed the prevalence of the cis-white male perspective and refused it through multimodal methods. This observation is particularly important because most studies detailing Black girls' perceptions of curriculum is located in STEM research (Apugo et al., 2022). Experts like Thomas (2018, 2019) and Toliver (2021) highlight the necessity of Black girls' access to learning materials, books specifically, that allow them to see themselves in the fantastic and in the future. However, despite their awareness of gendered racism in schools and the absence of their perspectives and stories in curriculums, Black girls in this study and others still perceive education as a gateway to social mobility and lives where their needs are met (Honora, 2002; Evans-Winters, 2005).

Despite their curricular exclusion, Black girls can and do perform well in schools according to traditional indicators of academic success (Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2014). However, even when they do well in school, Black girls still experience microaggressions, racial ignoring, and curricular violence (Jones, 2020). Despite a desire to

well the girls in the study still encountered adverse school circumstances. Through their recollections, the girls demonstrated how academic success and the desire to obtain it are not protective barriers against the conditions of schooling that harm them. As such, the girls doing well in school despite being mistreated support the case for academic resilience (Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2014). It is the "despite" that is that cause for concern, Black girls should not have to be resilient as they should not be learning in contexts that harm them. Reynolds (2019) uses this "despite" as the basis for her argument calling for a shift to studying Black girl resistance. However, the girls in the Astronomy Club still aspired to meet the traditional success markers of school and rejected the notion of completely abandoning them suggesting that they do not resist schooling, rather, the harm associated with it. The girls in the Astronomy Club trouble both the concepts of resilience and resistance which suggests that perhaps the fields of Black girlhood studies and urban education should turn to the study of how Black girls reimagine learning.

The poor treatment the girls in the Astronomy Club reported is not unique to them. According to Neal-Jackson (2018), educators often construct "master narratives" (p. 508) about Black girls and young women, perceiving them as unapproachable, difficult to teach, and entirely accountable for their restricted academic prospects. As a result, Black girls and young women receive limited socioemotional and academic support in formal educational institutions. Consistent with existing scholarship, being labeled as "loud," being ignored in classrooms, and talked down to were common experiences (Carter, 2012, Koonce, 2012; Lei, 2003; E. Morris, 2007; M. Morris, 2016).

Given the many ways they were poorly treated, the girls in this study identified a need for spaces exclusively for Black girls. They called for spaces that allowed them to interrogate Black lives, Black presents, and Black futures outside of the surveillance of white logic and the white gaze—they were requesting *Black girl spaces*. Rogers and Butler-Barnes (2022) define Black girl space as a "context that exists to serve Black girls and [are] designed to intentionally pull them in rather than push them out" (p. 52). The girls in the Astronomy Club argued that Black girls need spaces, both inside and outside of formal education, to be in community with those who understand their lived experiences and where they can talk candidly about the realities of being both Black and girl.

Instead of altogether abandoning the concept of schooling, the girls in this study reimagined schools and how they functioned were gracious enough to share their visions of youthopias. They identified specific ways these spaces should cater to them and their educational needs. They also desired ways to learn that directly aligned with their future aspirations, and they wanted to be taught by adults who respected them. For them, evidence of respect also included fair and consistent discipline policies and practices and safe, clean, and environmentally sustaining learning environments. As they continued to construct their idealized visions of youthtopias, the girls in the Astronomy Club shared their insights on their current socio-political positioning in schools as well as their envisioned positions. They called for their identities to be seen, respected, and (re)framed as worthy of protection and support from adults.

The girls were sometimes reluctant to share their dreams of otherwise and sometimes resisted imagining realities that seemed "illogical," they allowed themselves to

indulge in the practice of imagining utopia, and they built truly transformative worlds. Their renderings contribute to research in Black girlhood studies and urban education by explicating conditions in which Black girls would like to learn, in a perfect world. At present, there is little, if any, existing scholarship that documents the ways Black girls conceptualize schools on the otherside of antiBlackness. This limitation points to methodological lessons researchers might learn from this study.

(Re)Imagining Research with Black Girls

When conceptualizing this study, I made an effort to (re)imagine what it means to conduct research that centers Black girls. As I joined ranks with other scholars (re)imagining the world with Black girls, it was immediately clear that my methodology must lend itself to creating conditions where Black girls could dream, and I could learn from these dreams. As such, I turned to Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018), a methodology that is well established and respected in the field of Black girlhood studies and has guided me throughout my doctoral studies. However, although Black Girl Cartography leaves room for the investigation of the past, present, and future, it was created to map the geospatial and sociological locations in *this* world whereas the purpose of the Astronomy Club was to chart those locations in a new world. Therefore, I conceptualized a derivation of Black Girl Cartography, Black Girl Astronomy, with three goals: (1) to disrupt traditional power hierarchies, (2) to center and defer to the perspectives and desires of Black girls, and (3) to focus on their desired/imagined futures.

During the Astronomy Club I was intentional about rejecting traditional power hierarchies to the best of my ability. As the adult in the space, I was ultimately responsible

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for the safety of the girls. However, prior research demonstrates the that childism diminishes young people's agency and prevents them from assuming authority (Akom et al., 2008; Quijada Cerecer et al., 2013). In effort to avoid this, I attempted to flatten my role as the adult in the space in several ways. I asked the girls to call me by my first name, and I consulted them about and included them programmatic decisions. As discussed in chapter five, the girls completely reorganized the program structure, implemented food as a staple, and governed each other. When permitted and trusted, they assumed authority over the space in a humanizing way that affirmed the wholeness of Black girlhood. By assuming that Black girls deserve to have power and agency over their time and space, we co-created a homeplace where the girls maintained the space and maintained it well.

Furthermore, recognizing the exploitative nature of academic research, my methodology centered the perspectives and desires of the girls in the Astronomy Club, which in fact, was the central purpose of the study. This project and methodology joins rank with scholarships that prioritizes building community with Black girls over the "traditions" of the academy. In practice, this meant I believed the girls without question when they reported their experiences; I advocated for them with school administrators; and I sometimes abandoning the planned activities because they were tired and just wanted to talk.

As such, I contend that Black Girl Astronomy is useful in building understandings of how Black girls conceptualize youthtopias, as an approach to research that centers their perspectives, lived experiences, and imaginings. As Levitas (2013) reminds us, "[t]he core of utopia is the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and

objectively (Levitas, 2013, p. xi)". Therefore, if researchers who seek to better understand the desire to live otherwise must employ research methods committed to speculating about otherwise with the community.

To understand what I was witnessing, I needed a theoretical framework that centered Black life in the present and in the future. BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016) helped me make sense of the ways the girls viewed their present conditions. Of particular importance to this study was BlackCrits third foundational premised which simultaneously calls for creating space for Black liberatory imagination and rejecting reproduction versions of history that absolves the terror of white supremacy. This theoretical underpinning helped to support the argument for the necessity of the Astronomy Club's objective to better understand Black girls' liberatory literacy and justified the rejection of deficit, majoritarian narratives and ways of knowing Black girls. Furthermore, BlackCrit positions antiBlackness as a starting point meaning that meaning that I did not have to spend time proving that Black girls suffer from a particular form of racism to rationalize their experiences.

The concept of Black futurity, which posits with certainty that Black individuals will continue to exist in the future, served as a theoretical lens for examining the girls' visions of otherwise. The girls in the study reinforced this theoretical assumption by expressing their belief in a future where they existed and would meet their goals. Black futurity also helps to explain the ways the girls in the study bent time to bring the future into the present. They did so by layering their desires for the future onto their analysis of the present, thus creating intertemporal recommendations. As Black Feminist Futurity (Campt, 2017) and

Black Quantum Futurism (Phillips, 2015) assert, we need to usher the future in now, which requires setting the terms for the future by reorganizing the present. The girls in the Astronomy Club reorganized the present by calling for youthtopias that see them as whole and deserving of care.

Letters to the North Star(s)

Cat, Jade, Jakuana, Phoebe, Rodneisha, and Zariana—thank you for guiding us to somewhere that is a little closer to safety. A little closer to home. A little closer to freedom. You have provided blueprints for those who love you to use in the pursuit of constructing the world you deserve. Teachers and researchers have so much to learn from the truths you shared about your lives, your analyses of this world, and theorizations for ways of living otherwise. As a token of my gratitude, I would like to share with you some of the enlightenment I gained from being in your orbits. Thank you for teaching us, sweet loves. Thank you for being the North Star(s).

Dear Zariana,

I wanted to take a moment to let you know how much I admire your unwillingness to compromise who you are. I learned so much about Black girl place-making practices from you and your peers, particularly the ways you all assert your authority in the Astronomy Club and the ways that you all fortified friendships. Thank you for teaching me important lessons about the ways you all dream in community.

From our very first interaction, it was clear to me that you were bold and brilliant. I knew instantly that you were not afraid to speak your mind. Let your voice continue to serve as a technology that improves the conditions of your life and the lives of those around

you. Although society has assigned you the label of "loud" (Lei, 2003; Morris, 2007), as if loudness is bad, I pray that you will continue to turn up the volume. You are not alone in your refusal to be quiet. Scholars have identified other Black girls that raise their voices in a world that tries to silence you and other Black girls (McArthur, 2021; Griffin, 2020, 2022; Kaler-Jones, 2021; Kelly, 2020; Jacobs, 2016; Williams, 2015). Your voice, along with the other girls' voices, helped me to see how you all demonstrated your place-making practices in a dream space created just for you.

You entered the space as if it was yours—and it was. Thank you for the reminder. Being in community with you required me to constantly check in with myself about what it truly means to relinquish hierarchical power when co-creating spaces with young people (Garnett et al., 2019; Lyiscott et al., 2020). You challenged me to truly "walk the walk", and not just "talk the talk," as you unashamedly assumed the authority that adults typically take in a space and encouraged the other girls to join you. You modeled how Black girls lead and make their places in spaces where they are not constrained from doing so.

Zariana, you completely shifted our program structure. You rallied your peers to advocate for food in every session and took it upon yourself to help set the menu. It was during our meals together that you all began discussing how the quality of food in schools did not meet your expectations, and I learned that food was an integral part of youthtopias, which in turn, became an integral part of our time together. We abandoned the "Astronaut of the Week" and the original structure of "Cosmic Connections". Instead, we made this an informal talking time. You all used this portion of our time together to nourish your bodies

and decompress. I learned the most about how you all valued peer relationships during our meals together.

I was also able to take note of our group dynamics and the relationships that were forming. I watched how you cared for each other by sharing snacks, braiding each other's hair, and showering one another with affirmations. You also corrected each other with care. You governed each other without policing one another: a skill most adults could benefit from (re)learning. This self-governing is particularly useful in youthtopian spaces as you all identified how you were subject to unfair discipline policies, a phenomenon that has been well-researched among Black girls (Annamma et al., 2019; Morris, 2016). You valued relationships and leaned on one another for emotional support, which is consistent with Watson's (2016) study that identified that Black girls were more likely to seek mental health support from peers than adults. This should be a wake-up call for practitioners to evaluate their practices to determine how they could serve as a refuge for Black girls' emotional well-being.

Your placemaking practices have important implications for adults in proximity to you. In collaboration with your sisters, you demonstrated the necessity of honoring Black girls' voices and acknowledging their authority in learning spaces. You, your peers, and I had similar experiences in school—feeling dismissed and unheard. As Muhammad and Haddix (2016) wrote, "Black girls can know; simply stated, they have a voice" (p. 304). Like you all, scholars have identified the necessity of Black girl voices in educational spaces (Carter, 2008; Datnow & Cooper, 2007; Kelly, 2018; Morris, 2007; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016).

In the Astronomy Club, you all demonstrated how speaking out and using your voice can change your material conditions and how a space responds to your needs. You also illuminated how, when positioned as authorities in a space created for you, Black girls will hold each other accountable, a practice that is supported by the relationships you created with each other. As such, you all have demonstrated that teachers and other education stakeholders, including researchers and policy makers, must include Black girls in decision making processes, consult your expertise in the reimagining of schools, and trust that you know best how to govern the spaces you occupy.

Dear Jakuana,

I wanted to let you know how much I admire your incredible analyses of race, gender, and society. Your critical consciousness is a beacon of hope in an oppressive world, and I am honored to have had the opportunity to know you. I learned so much about Black girls' liberatory literacies from you and your peers, particularly how you employ an intersectional analysis of the world and restory dominant narratives about Black girls.

While facilitating the Astronomy Club, I saw your ability to assess and question the social and political forces that influence how the world engages with Black girls and Black people, generally. I discovered early during our time together that you could, and frequently did, think outside of the box the world attempts to place you in. For instance, you expressed your desire to start a cult and seemed to find a way to talk about horror movies in any conversation. However, you used this same analytical lens to point out the terrors of the world we are living in.

Jakuana, you have very clear ideas about the ways in which race and racism work in society and used this information to highlight oppression at the intersection of being both Black and a girl. When you all began examining this world, you quickly arrived at an intersectional analysis that contended with the interconnectedness between race and gender. You, specifically, called out this dynamic when discussing the lack of respect society has for Black girls and the ways in which you and other Black girls face barriers to your success that others do not face. When did you figure this out? Doucet et al. (2018) assert that many Black parents begin talking to their children about racial pride and the barriers of racism in preschool. This was my experience; was it yours too? I wish I had asked you. Nevertheless, you communicated the limitations society tries to impose on Black girls' academic and career success; however, you and other girls are clearly resisting these constraints.

In the Astronomy Club, you taught me more about Black girls' resistance and girl-fueled activism (Brown, 2016). You and your peers demonstrated embodied opposition to the story's society tells about Black girls in multiple ways and refused to adhere to the norms of respectability politics, or the attempts of marginalized groups to police the appearance, behavior, and speech of their members to navigate mainstream society and achieve success based on dominant cultural ideals (Nyachae & Ohito, 2019). Some of the embodied methods included colorful hair and refusal to be quietly accept unfair treatment. Chapter 2 of my dissertation identifies how Black girls use embodied resistance primarily through hair, colorism, and speech—without a doubt, your proclamations are in lockstep with the literature.

Jakuana, you and Cat both fearlessly wore bold hair colors that defied the dress code in school. Rodneisha sported faux locs that hung down to her waist. Zariana wore cornrows with intricate designs created by her mother. Phoebe and Jade wore a new hairstyle weekly. Your choices to wear your hair in natural styles and styles that are considered synonymous with Blackness were certainly acts of resistance. As Lindsey (2013) teaches, these choices required you to "confront the possibility of being ostracized and marginalized from prevailing standards of beauty that uphold long, straight hair as a universal ideal and of being stereotyped as militant and aggressive" (p. 27). You all found creative ways to personalize your mandated uniforms, such as wearing pins, big purses, hoodies, and long-sleeved t-shirts. You supported Rodneisha and listened to the challenges she experiences with her biracial identity. We learned that she struggled with others' perceptions of her "being white" and together, you all asserted the necessity to have explicit conversations about race and racism. You also used your voices to "talk back" (hooks, 1986) to school policies, practices, and personnel you deemed unfair or racist. I also noted the ways you all countered deficit stories of Black girlhood through your words, actions, and work samples.

You used your liberatory literacy to help the group understand the power of restorying. As a reminder, restorying is "a process by which young people reshape narratives to reflect perspectives and experiences that have been routinely marginalized or silenced" (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2018, p. 346). You troubled stereotypes about Black girls and refused to let majoritarian narratives remain unchallenged. You and the other girls certainly believed you could meet society's traditional markers of success, and you used your grades and academic abilities as evidence. I'm sorry that you live in a world and

go to schools where stereotypes about Black girls are pervasive and "shape school officials' views of Black girls in a critically harmful way" (Onyeka-Crawford et al., 2017, p. 3). Despite the challenges you encounter, your determination to dream of a future that you have no evidence will come to pass—and to articulate these dreams out loud—is confirmation that you will write your own story.

Jakuana, I wonder if you were surprised that sometimes your peers favored logic over imagination—I should have asked you. Your imagination is boundless, and you used it in every Astronomy Club meeting. Sometimes you were dreaming of topics outside of the topics of the day, and that was your choice in your space. I was surprised, however, that some of you, at times, were reluctant to dream with me. Is this because Black girls are adultified, forced to grow up too quickly, and denied access to the playfulness central to childhood (Epstein et al., 2017)? Or is it because school curriculums in urban areas emphasize teaching skills that will help students pass standardized tests instead of prioritizing creative thinking and imaginative problem-solving (Laughter, 2016)? Maybe it is both. Do you feel safe enough to dream? hooks (2000) reminds us that, "to be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality" (p. 110). All of you did just that and, despite your initial reluctance, each of you joined me on the journey of analyzing this world while architexting new ones.

Dear Cat,

I admire your incredible creativity and attentiveness to the urgency of social

transformation in the world around you. What does it feel like to have a mind that thinks in

illustrations? I was constantly intrigued by your decision to respond to prompts with

pictures. I am blown away by your ability to bring your ideas to life through your artwork,

your writing, and your participation in our conversations. I learned so much from you and

the other girls in the Astronomy Club about the ways you dream of justice in Black futures

through your artwork.

As I was once a Black girl such as yourself, I know how important it is to see

ourselves represented in all areas of life, including the arts. *You* are art, Cat. You are quirky,

kind, and a reminder for us to be ourselves just a little bit more. I only wish I had the

bravery to live a life untethered to societal norms and definitions about Black girlhood as

you when I was your age. That's why your unique and innovative ideas have been so

inspiring to me. Your mastery of drawing and conceiving new ideas has demonstrated the

importance of creating spaces where Black girls are free to engage in various modes of

expression, including the arts.

Throughout history, artistic expression has been a staple in social movements that

advocate for change in the conditions of Black life. Did you know there was once a Black

Arts Movement largely led by women (Forsgren, 2005)? However, I learned from you and

your peers just how deep the connection between arts and social justice runs. As explained

by Bell and Desai (2011),

The arts can help us remember, imagine, create, and transform the practices

that sustain oppression as it endures across history and locality. When tuned to that

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purpose, the arts play a vital role in making visible the stories, voices, and experiences of people who are rendered invisible by structures of dominance (p. 288).

That's just what art did for you and the other members of the Astronomy Club. Through your multimodal and literary expressions, I was able to bear witness to the ways in which you dreamed of futures that meet your needs and the needs of others. Witnessing how you engaged in world-making and called for social justice through arts helped me to better understand extant research on how Black girls use the arts as resistance in action (Kaler-Jones ,2021; Kelly ,2020). You and the other girls architected youthopias and had conversations demanding futures that did not harm yourselves or others.

You, specifically, were essential to helping me reimage an environmentally just world. Your unique perspective and innovative ideas shed light on the complexities of environmental justice and their impact on our communities. You challenged us to consider the effects of pollution, which prompted other members of the Astronomy Club to do the same. In doing so, you all reimagined a world without litter and environmentally sustainable learning environments. Your creativity extends beyond drawing and into world-making.

You all also dreamed of a world that was racially just. Cat, you were the only girl in the Astronomy Club who had full confidence that racism would be eradicated in the future; the rest of your peers did not share your optimism. Your peers, however, relied on evidence of the failures of incremental change and the ever-evolving nature of racism as indications that racism would indefinitely affect their lives. Additionally, they

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demonstrated a deep understanding of the intergenerational pervasiveness of racism, citing the ways young people inherit racist ideas from their elders. You did not agree that racism is a permanent fixture in this world. I'm not surprised! You often expressed dreams full of radical hope—may your optimism for this world help guide us in the next one.

Dear Rodneisha,

I wanted to acknowledge how much I admire your commitment to logic and learning. I gained so much knowledge from you and the other girls about the ways in which curriculum would function in a world of your own creation. You read the world and your surroundings and made decisions that felt safest to you. You seek refuge in the familiar and attempt to shield yourself and others from the disappointment that can come with hoping for a future you have no evidence to believe could ever come to pass. However, when you trusted us enough to join us in otherwise dreaming, your skills in analyzing this world guided you to radically reimagine schools and their curriculums.

You and the other members of the Astronomy Club articulated how to improve the content of curriculums and the ways in which they are delivered. Consistent with existing research, you did not see Black girls or their futures reflected in curriculum (Honora, 2002; Morris, 2016,). You felt dismissed and belittled by teachers (Morris, 2007; Young & Turner, forthcoming) and you did not feel as though your voices were being heard (Opara et al., 2022). In response, you all used art and storytelling to present alternatives.

In many instances, you and others identified how society, and curriculums, are centered around white men. You all noticed this phenomenon in education, as illuminated by the conversation about George Washington in chapter five. You were testimony to

Muhhamad and Haddix's (2016) assertion that, "Black girls are generators and producers of knowledge, but this knowledge has been historically silenced by a dominant, White patriarchal discourse" (p. 304)

You all expressed dissatisfaction with how frequently your curriculums include the stories and histories of white men and how infrequently your own narratives are shared, particularly in English Language Arts spaces. Education researchers have noticed this too (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014; Christ & Sharma, 2018; Coles, 2013; Dyches, 2017; Johnson, 2018). You all specifically requested the inclusion of the stories of Black women and girls, which is something I, too, craved as a girl. To obtain this, you created Sister Sister Education and asserted the necessity of spaces exclusively for Black girls.

As such, teachers who have the honor of instructing you all should critically assess the curriculum materials they use to evaluate whose stories are being told and employ them to challenge stereotypes and biases. Furthermore, to serve you well, teachers ought to employ Black girl curricula which "help[s] Black girls develop strong sense of self, community, and vision for future possibilities" (Butler, 2018, p. 39). They should also be working to affirm the wholeness of Black girlhood and providing opportunities for you and other Black girls to interrogate the world and predict and actualize your places in freer futures by providing curricular telescopes (Toliver, 2021). The need for Black girls to have access to telescopes is vital for girls to dream of futures, particularly when they are bombarded with reasons why they cannot achieve their imagined futures.

How did you become such a good storyteller, Rodneisha? You are gifted at making people see new ways of being through your writing and your words. You naturally

captivate audiences with the ways you blend words and create pictures in our minds. You are the perfect blend of thoughtful, creative, and imaginative, which lends itself to you weaving new worlds with your words. I challenge you to give yourself more permission to picture yourself in a world worthy of learning from you.

Dear Jade,

I wanted to express my admiration for you and the vulnerability that you showed during our time together in the Astronomy Club. You have such a sensitive soul. You feel so big and love so hard, which means you often get your heart broken too. It is not always easy to be vulnerable, especially in a world that is regularly harsh and unforgiving to Black girls. You have shown that vulnerability is a strength, not a weakness, although it is often misunderstood by those closest to you. Your willingness to share your thoughts and feelings with others is a beautiful thing, and it has made a positive impact on those around you. From you, researchers and practitioners can learn a great deal about Black girls' sociopolitical positioning and the necessity of fostering spaces that cultivate emotional safety.

You greatly contributed to creating a safe space for others to be vulnerable as well, and that is such a precious gift. Your openness and honesty have inspired me to be more vulnerable in my own life and research. You reminded me to show up as myself fully in every space I occupy, including scholarship. Because of the model you set regarding being open and transparent, so too was I. Without you, I would not have disclosed in a research setting where I was serving as a facilitator that I had challenges with my mental health that led me to seek therapy, especially so early on in the program. I am glad I did so because it

contributed to a culture where others felt safe enough to share their interior lives within the Astronomy Club.

One particular salient thing you shared that stuck with me is that you do not like to talk about the pursuit of freedom because it makes you feel sad. I understand. Getting our hopes up for something that seems like it will never be actualized can feel like a daunting task. Do you hesitate to involve yourself in conversations about liberation because of the racial battle fatigue (Neal-Jackson, 2018) or is because challenging power can come with material consequences for Black girls so you used silence as a means of survival (Carter-Andrews, 2012; Kaler-Jones et al., 2020; Kelly, 2020)? Thinking about you makes me think of the passage below:

> Each of these examples reveals how Layla's and Aaliyah's efforts to challenge racial oppression and foster racial literacy in school resulted in resistance from peers and administrators as well as punitive disciplinary action for both girls. Unsurprisingly, one of the lessons that they took away from these instances is that within their school environment, *speaking up proved to be more harmful than remaining silent*. (Emphasis added, Kelly, 2020, p. 471)

Whatever the case may be, let this serve as your reminder that it is not your responsibility to save the world or create new ones. You are a child, I see your girlhood and do not expect you to labor. I invite you to guide those who love you in creating the world you want to live in by telling us your expectations of it, but if not, that is fine too. You still belong in the Astronomy Club. But can I tell you a secret? When you let your guard down I see that you are a revolutionary, even if you do not yet give yourself that label.

Dear Phoebe,

I wanted to take a moment to let you know how much I admire your incredible attention to detail in the spaces you occupy. Your worldly pursuits have also equipped you with the ability to discern where you are safe quickly. I learned so much from you and the other members of the Astronomy Club about the ways that physical locations function in Black girl youthtopias. You all have made it clear that Black girl youthtopias attend to the wholeness of your entire being—body, mind, and soul.

Phoebe, you have seen and experienced so much. You have been exposed to other cultures of ways of being, which has affirmed to you that you can achieve success. You take pride in your grades and aspire to meet traditional markers of academic achievement despite having experienced gross violence against your body in schooling spaces. I wonder if any of the pressure you put on yourself about your grades stems from teachers' tendencies to assume that even high-achieving students who have immigrated from Africa are "intellectually inferior" (The Immigrant Learning Center, 2020, para. 5)? You prove them wrong even though it is not your responsibility. Your dedication to doing well in school reflects the academic resilience that Black girls have (Evans-Winters, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2014) and is a reminder that you should not have to be educated in harmful conditions (Reynolds, 2019). Although they harm you all, you and your peers decided that schools are redeemable and should not be completely abandoned. From you and your peers, those who listen to Black girls can learn more about how these physical sites of learning should function.

Phoebe, you have been to many places and love to teach us about them. From your experiences traveling, you have become accustomed to what some people describe as luxury. You told us all about your experiences riding first class on international flights and about your aspirations to continue traveling the world "in style." This admiration for being physically located in spaces that looked and felt good revealed itself in your conceptualizations of youthtopian spaces as well. Phoebe, you aspire for spaces that feel good to you. So do your friends, as evidenced by their desire for classroom environments and furniture that felt good to their bodies. Teachers and policymakers might be interested to know that studies, such as Jimenez (2016), have provided evidence that flexible and alternative seating improves students' academic outcomes, as measured by traditional indicators.

Additionally, you suggested various spaces for relaxation and meditation, including cool-down corners, comfort forts, and zones equipped with music, TV, and video games. These areas were not only intended for unwinding, but they also served as a means of decompression from the stressors that come along with being both Black and girl. With the exception of Cat, you all confirmed the necessity of spaces explicitly for Black girls. Other studies such as Griffin (2020), Kaler-Jones (2021), Kelly (2018), Price-Dennis et al. (2017), Reynolds (2019), among others, have evidenced the utility of spaces and explicitly for Black girls.

I am so glad that the Astronomy Club was a space where you felt freedom, I hope you felt refuge as well. Thank you for your intellectual contributions to our space and willingness to do the tough work of starting a new school in a new country and joining a

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club that interrogates the (im)possibilities of freedom at the same time. I know this school year has been a bit tough for you. It can be difficult to adjust to new learning spaces and new cultures, and you are doing both at the same time. I learned so much from you and attempted to head to academic scholarship to learn more about the educational experiences of young Black girls who had recently immigrated to the United States. However, I was unable to locate any literature that attended explicitly to the experiences of preadolescent Black girls who are also immigrants or international students. The Immigrant Learning Center (2020) identified an "invisible intersection" (para. 2) to address the fact that there is limited research on immigrants who are not Latinx, which in turn "ignores [your] existence" (para. 2). This lack of representation in scholarship and research is concerning because one in every ten Black people are immigrants, typically hailing from the Caribbean or Africa (Tamir & Anderson, 2022).

Your worldy experiences have allowed you to see modes of Blackness across the diaspora which has provided you with an analytical lens to know Black life beyond the specific enclosures of the United States. However, as you demonstrated during your time in the Astronomy Club, antiBlackness is a global phenomenon. Phoebe, just as you travel the world, you will change it and create new ones.

Concluding Thoughts

What does it mean for Black girls to demand recognition, belonging, and inclusion in this world? What is the radical potential of abandoning conventional ideas about nation-building and, instead, declaring a commitment to Black girls' lives beyond the ontological enclosures of this world? What happens when Black girls lead the charge toward a living a

life on the otherside of anti-Blackness? This study begins to grapple with the tensions of

living as a Black girl in this world while desperately dreaming of another world and humbly

asks Black girls to lend us their freedom dreams to architext these plans. To engage in this

world-making pursuit, this study asked Black girls to (re)imagine just society and formal

education, in an attempt to create a blueprint for a youthtopia that centers and honors

them and Black people, more generally. The renderings of the Black girls in this study point

to their need for homeplaces that offer researchers and educators reconceptualizations of

how we organize the world and how we can make this world more bearable in the

meantime. Perhaps, if we make the skyrise for Black girls, they will lead us to the sunset of

this current world and map the dawn of a new day.

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership

The Astronomy Club

I, Alexis Morgan Young, a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park, and former elementary and middle school teacher, would be delighted to partner with your school to offer the **Astronomy Club,** a critical literacy program, into its extracurricular programming roster. The Astronomy Club is an eight-week literacy program designed to provide space for preadolescent **Black girls** to imagine and make plans for **the future of education**.

Research has shown that Black girls:
• Use multiple forms of academic, and non-academic, literacies
• Employ literacy practices to dispel negative stereotypes
• Learn about themselves through composition and text
• Develop communities in literacy spaces
• Have ideas about how to "write" the world into a better place
• Benefit from extracurricular literacy programming

The purpose of this program is to provide Black girls in middle school with a space to **enrich their literacy skills** and **facilitate positive racial identity** and **critical consciousness development** through a series of creative activities. Each week, the project-based sessions will be based on a different astronomical concept to anchor participant activities and discussions about their ideal school, community, and society. Through **multimodal art projects**, **written composition**, and **map-making**, the girls will use architexture—the melding of architecture and storytelling, to construct an imagined world, and education system, that is informed by the needs, dreams, and desires of Black girls.

At its core, The Astronomy Club believes the research that shows **Black girls possess a multitude of geniuses and literacies** about how the world works, and as such, should have opportunities to share what they know.

Curriculum Preview:

Session/ Theme	Cosmic Connections (community building)	Galaxy Girl Time (critical consciousness enrichment)	Constellation Creation (imaginative work time)	Solar Sister Circle (creator's workshop)
1 Theme: Black girls are like the North Star.	Connecting Question: If you wrote a book about your life, what would it be called and why? Astronaut of the week: Harriet Tubman Activity: Introductions	Theme: Who am I? Activity: Listening session & read-along of chapter one of The House on Mango Street (Cisneros, 1983) Activity: Whole group collaboration on Esperanza's identity map	Guiding question: Who am I? Activity: Individual identity maps Activity: Creation of map key	Activity: Norm setting of solar sister circles. Activity: Collaboration on a list of workshop prompts Activity: Gallery walk of identity maps

Anticipated Outcomes: By the end of the program 100% of participants will have:
• Read texts selected to enrich their critical thinking
• Composed journal entries and poetry
• Engaged in community building activities
• Created projects incorporating art and writing
• Developed recommendations for ideal ELA classrooms
• Collaborated in forming a literacy community

Recruitment: During the program year, it is my hope that **administrators recruit 6-9 students** to participate in the program. To participate in the program, participants will need to:
- Obtain permission from their parents/guardians
- Identify as Black/African American on official school documentation
- Be identified as a girl on official school documentation
- Be between the ages of 9-14

Here's what I will offer:
- **An 8-week extracurricular program** will support 7-10 students for **two hours weekly**
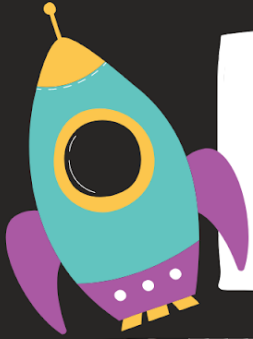
- **5 hours of volunteer service weekly**, in addition to the program, to the **school community at large**
- **A report** of the theme's uncovered during the program and copy of completed dissertation
- At the completion of the program, **each participant will receive an Astronomy Club bundle** including books, journals, a program T-shirt, and other materials valued at $150

Alexis' Contact Information:
Phone number: (313) 415-3532
Email: amjacks@umd.edu

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED: BLACK GIRLS AND EDUCATIONAL FUTURES

DO YOU IDENTIFY AS A BLACK GIRL IN MIDDLE SCHOOL?
If you answered YES you may be eligible to participate in The Astronomy Club, a literacy and arts-based research study!

The purpose of this research is to better understand Black girls' imaginations about the future and their ideal learning environments.

Participation in this study will aid in increasing what the fields of education and Black girlhood studies know about how best to educate Black girls by centering the voices and experiences of Black girls.
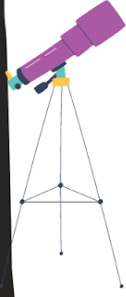
If you volunteer to participate in this study, I will ask you to participate in one Zoom interview and eight workshops during your summer camp.

This study is being conducted by Alexis Morgan Young, a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park under the supervision of Dr. Tara M. Brown.

At the completion of the program, each participant will receive an Astronomy Club bundle including books, journals, a program T-shirt, and other materials valued at $150

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you want to participate in the study or have questions or concerns, please contact Alexis Young at (313) 415-3532 or email (amjacks@umd.edu).

If you call, please leave a voicemail/text! Thank you!

Appendix C: Parental Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Astronomy Club: Black Girls "Architexting New Worlds"
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Alexis Morgan Young at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Black girl who is a student during the academic year. the purpose of this research is to better understand how Black girls think about the future and education.
Procedures	The procedures involved in this study are participating in an interview and eight workshops. In this study, I will first ask your child some questions in an interview to get a better understanding of the ways she thinks about school and how it fits into her future. The interviews will last no more than 45 minutes. I will give her a break halfway through the interview. Then during summer camp, we will meet once a week for two hours for an Astronomy Club workshop. During this time she will participate in literacy activities and art projects. At any time she may end participation in the interview and/or The Astronomy Club.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There are no more than minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Due to the topic of schooling and education, your child may feel minimal amounts of stress recalling your experiences. Your child may take a break, decline to answer a question, or stop the interview or participation in the workshops at any time they wish.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits to your child. I hope that, in the future, other girls might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of how Black girls imagine ideal learning spaces.
Confidentiality	Data collected for this project will be stored on password protected computers. It will only be able to be accessed by the researchers and will be deleted after five years. All data will be de-identified and a pseudonym will be applied. If a report or article about this research project is written, your child's identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your child's information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if your child or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. She may choose not to take part at all. If she decides to participate in this research, she may stop participating at any time. If your child decides*

	not to participate in this study or if she stops participating at any time, she will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If your child decides to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: **Alexis Morgan Young** **3942 Campus Dr, College Park, MD 20740** **(313) 415-3532** **AMJacks@umd.edu**
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 *For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:* https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to your child's participation, please sign your name below.*
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARENT [Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF PARENT	
	NAME OF CHILD	
	DATE	

	I consent to my child being audio recorded. ☐	I do not consent to my child being audio recorded. ☐
	I consent to my child being video recorded with the understanding that no one will see the footage besides the researcher. ☐	I do not consent to my child being video recorded despite the understanding that no one will see the footage besides the researcher. ☐

Appendix D: Minor Assent Form

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Astronomy Club: Black Girls "Architexting New Worlds"
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Alexis Morgan Young at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Black girl who is a student during the academic year. The purpose of this research project is to better understand how Black girls think about the future and education. This form will give you information about the project. We will talk to you about the project and answer any questions you may have. If you do not understand something, please ask us to explain it to you. We will ask you to sign this form to show that you understand the project and agree to take part in it.
Procedures	The procedures involved in this study are participating in an interview and eight workshops. In this study, I will first ask you some questions in an interview to get a better understanding of the ways you think about school and how it fits into your future. The interviews will last no more than 45 minutes. I will give you a break halfway through the interview so that you do not have to sit and talk for too long. Then during summer camp, we will meet once a week for two hours for an Astronomy Club workshop. During this time we will participate in literacy activities and make art projects together. At any time you may start participation in the interview and/or The Astronomy Club.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There is no big risk for you to be in the study. You may feel a little stressed out because we will be talking about schools. If you feel stressed or overwhelmed, please tell me. You may skip a question, take a break, or stop the whole interview if you want to. You may also stop participating in the Astronomy Club at any time.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits to you. We hope that, in the future, other girls might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of how Black girls imagine ideal learning spaces.
Confidentiality	Your identity will remain confidential (a secret) and I will take steps to make sure no one gets your name, school, or any other information about who you are. Your information will be kept on a computer where only I know the password. After 5 years I will delete all information. I will do

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	something called "de-identifying" your data which means that I will make sure that there is no way anyone else can link it to you. If I choose to write a report or article, your name will be changed so that you will not be able to be identified. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Medical Treatment	The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator: ***Alexis Morgan Young*** ***2201 Benjamin Building, University of Maryland*** ***College Park, MD 20742*** ***amjacks@umd.edu*** ***(313) 415-3532***
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Introduction question:
1. If you were to make a TV show about you life, what would ir be called and what would it be about?

Liberatory Literacies:
1. If the president were to call you tomorrow and ask you how to make this country, or world, better for Black girls what would you say?
2. If a 5 year old asked you what what freedom was what would you say?
3. How can Black girls get freedom?
4. What are some of the things right about the world? Wrong about it?
5. What would have to change for in the world for Black girls to be free in the future?

Black Futurity:
1. How is the world going to be different in the future?
2. How can Black girls change the future?
3. How do you want to make money when you're older?
    1. What type of learning would prepare you for that? Have you gotten it in school?

Imagination:
1. How do you feel about using your imagination?
2. When and where do you get to use your imagination?
3. Is school a place where you can use your imagination?

Place:
1. I it important to have spaces with only Black girls?
2. If there was a club made just for you, what would it be like and what would yall do?
3. Best and worst parts about Astronomy Club.

Scenario: Pretend that you are opening up a school, or some kind of place for Black girls to learn. The school is about to open and you're meeting with the adults who will work there? What are five things you're going to tell them about how the school should be?

Appendix F: Focus Group Protocol

Programmatic Questions:
1. Can you talk to me about your experiences in The Astronomy Club?
2. If you were running this program what would you change? Keep the same?
3. When did you feel the most seen during The Astronomy Club? Like your voice was important?
4. If ever, when did you feel like you had "power" during our time together?

Thoughts about Educational Futures:
1. Do you think that one day Black girls will have the power to change schools for the better?
2. How can Black girls use literacy to make the world a better place?
3. In the ideal world, how would Black girls get educated?