

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: "YOU CAN'T SEE ME BY LOOKING AT ME": BLACK GIRLS' ARTS-BASED PRACTICES AS MECHANISMS FOR IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND RESISTANCE

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This dissertation explored how eight adolescent Black girls (co-researchers) used arts-based practices in a virtual summer program as mechanisms for identity construction and resistance. Theoretically grounded in Black Feminist Thought, Black Girlhood, and Black Performance Theory, I designed and implemented a virtual summer art program aimed at co-creating a healing-centered space to engage in critical explorations of history, storytelling, and social justice with Black girls. The co-research team participated in the 5-week Black Girls S.O.A.R. (Scholarship, Organizing, Arts, Resistance) program as part of the study. At the end of the program, co-researchers took themes from the sessions and created artwork to present a Community Arts Showcase to their loved ones.

I combined performance ethnography (Denzin, 2008; Soyini Madison, 2006) and integrated aspects of youth participatory action research to answer the following research

questions: 1) How, if at all, do Black girls use arts-based practices as mechanisms for resistance and identity construction? and 2) What specific attributes of Black girls' involvement in arts-based programs foster identity construction and acts of resistance? This study employed "two-tiered" (Brown, 2010) qualitative data collection. For the first component, co-researchers and I collected our conversation transcripts from the sessions to create a collaborative artistic production. The second component included my concurrent collection of session observations, field notes, pre-and-post interviews, and artwork to document the co-researchers' experiences in the program.

The data showed that Black girls used arts-based practices to 1) rewrite singular historical narratives of Black history in the standard curriculum; 2) share counter-narratives; 3) heal in and build community out; and 4) dream a better world into existence. Additionally, Black girls named 1) showcasing their work to loved ones; 2) being supported by other Black girls; 3) learning about self and communal care; and 4) reexamining history by centering Black women's resistance as specific attributes of their involvement in the program that contributed to their identity construction and resistance. This study offers much-needed data on the power and potential of culturally-sustaining, arts-based pedagogy in virtual educational spaces, as well as contributes to the growing body of literature that centers Black girls' epistemologies in education research.

"YOU CAN'T SEE ME BY LOOKING AT ME": BLACK GIRLS' ARTS-BASED
PRACTICES AS MECHANISMS FOR IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND RESISTANCE

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the first Black Girls S.O.A.R. co-researcher cohort who this work would not be possible without. Thank you for sharing and entrusting your stories and your art with me and each other. Your brilliance and expertise shines a light forward -- I am so grateful for you all. Thank you also to the Black Girls S.O.A.R co-researchers' loved ones for trusting me to hold this space with your daughters.

To all of the students I have had the blessing and privilege of learning alongside, past and present, thank you. I do not take for granted or take lightly all that I have learned from you. Your grace, energy, and wisdom are embedded all throughout this work.

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Ubuntu. I am because we are. Dreaming, conceptualizing, and writing the dissertation was shaped by the influence and impact of so many.

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To my parents, thank you for always creating a way for me to pursue my dreams and goals. You ignited in me the constant pursuit of knowledge, you've taught me to always speak up for myself, and have literally and figuratively stood by me in both moments of both weakness and strength.

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Black is ignorance and it is laziness.

Black is a ghetto mess and a whole lot of trouble.
Blackness is a threat and it is something you should fear.
To be Black is to be the worst version of a human being.

I'm sorry, I fear I was mistaken before.

To be Black is everything.
Blackness is power and knowledge.
It is beauty and strength.
To be Black is a blessing because Blackness is greatness.
I rewrote their story and you can too.

Be proud of your Blackness and all of its glory because Blackness is a part of you.

Olivia, age 16, Black Girls S.O.A.R Co-researcher

“Art can give this world hell.”

Bettina Love

“If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies of me and eaten alive.”

Audre Lorde

“Social movements are a form of collective artmaking.”

Mariame Kaba

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My Story

I always loved to learn. Growing up I found immense joy in tearing through the fragile pages of a paperback, uncovering new worlds, and encountering introductions to characters I would only ever meet in between the lines of a story. I eagerly craved to know more about historical moments, feeling intuitively that so much had been left out of our classroom conversations. I could often be found in the county library with a stack of books. I kept many notebooks and jotted down my thoughts and observations about the world around me.

As a curious and adventurous child, I was eager to raise my hand and offer gentle probing questions, “But why is that like that? Why does this equal this? How did that happen?” I was never quite satisfied with simple explanations. I wanted to see every angle, challenge information presented as fact, and pose hypotheses about the implications of taking multiple viewpoints when examining a phenomenon. While in some cases my curiosity was celebrated as I was tracked into the gifted and talented program -- leading into honors and AP courses in high school--, many other times the curiosity was stifled. I was asked to not raise my hand as much, to be mindful of how vocal I was, and teachers even resorted to ignoring my outstretched hand. I began to internalize these messages -- the more I physically made myself larger in the classroom, both taking up space with my voice and my body, the more I was taught that as a Black girl in society, my presence would be subject to public ridicule and my voice quieted.

These messages followed me throughout my K-12 schooling and there still are moments from K-12 that are seeped into my memory. For example, when I was in the third grade, my gym teacher pulled me to the fence and with a straightforward remark told me, “You need to wear a bra.” That same year I wore my hair in its natural curls for the first time and as my classmates giggled and taunted me, another teacher did not intervene. In middle school, an administrator

reprimanded me for what I was wearing when my white classmates were wearing the same outfits. In all of my schooling experiences, my body was constantly being read like a script, and I was subject to unsolicited feedback. These are just a few examples of how my experiences in school were shaped by the intersections of racism and sexism.

As Thomas (2019) discussed, the Black body is often seen as spectacle. When it shows up in spaces, particularly predominantly white spaces, there is some type of violence enacted onto it. Thomas's (2019) conceptualization is related specifically to Black characters in literature, but here, I apply Thomas's argument to my experiences in school. In my case, being one of just a few Black students in a rural, predominantly white town, subjected me to what Bettina Love (2019) called the "spirit murdering" of Black and Brown children in schools. In essence, hearing the critique and being told to restrain my body and my voice was a form of psychological and emotional violence. The continual critique of both my wonder and my body led me to conform out of the pain by performing an identity that did not quite fit who I really was. I grew quieter and more unsure of myself. The intersections of anti-Black racism and patriarchy were at the helm -- as I questioned authority, I was pushed into conformity.

Coupled with the emotional and psychological stifling of my voice and my body, the school curriculum was void of reflections of my own experiences and in some cases, was weaponized against Black and Brown students. In high school, for example, we read *Huckleberry Finn* aloud as a class, pop-corn style, passing the reading off to another student after reading a few paragraphs each. I remember reading ahead, cringing at a racial slur used to describe Black folks, which appears many times throughout the book. I silently prayed that no one would pass to me at that part. As the class passed the task of reading out loud from one person to another and the racial slur approached, one of my classmates passed it to the one other

Black student. When he got to the word he paused, only to be prompted by the teacher that it was “okay” to say the word aloud because “we’re reading the word in context of the time the book was written.” When he said the word out loud, the class erupted into giggles. I still carry the sting of that moment with me -- the teacher encouraged us to use that term in class and my peers thought it was a laughing matter.

Creative Resistance

Amid the emotional and psychological violence of schooling, I found my solace in dance class. I started dancing in kindergarten and it has been a constant in my life since then. I could come back to my truest self when the last school bell rang and I made my way to the dance studio in my community. While dancing, I could express the words and emotions I did not quite have the vocabulary to name. I could be expansive with my body and I was encouraged to take up space. Dance class was where I could dream, where I could make a statement with the rhythmic contractions of choreography. It was where I rediscovered my intellectual and creative curiosities. Art ultimately became my own mechanism for resistance.

When I was a junior in high school, state-wide budget cuts led my school district to put the arts programs on the Board of Education’s list for elimination. As I watched the board meetings and news coverage, I knew I had to do something. I organized my peers, teacher allies, and community members to write letters and create a social media campaign to put pressure on the Board to keep the arts programs. After years of being discouraged to speak up, I knew I could not remain quiet. I could not wait on the sidelines. I spoke at a Board meeting when they called for public comment and shared how dance transformed my life and what it would mean to attend school without that space. Vocalizing my opinions and speaking up about something I cared

about, backed by data and research in service of advocating for the arts, changed me. A fire was lit in me that day.

Becoming an Educator

These experiences ultimately led me to become a dance educator. I sought to share the transformational power of art with others, but also co-organize dance spaces that encouraged freedom of expression, where Black girls could create art that highlighted their strength, grace, and brilliance. I used art to resist oppressive structures and systems and encouraged my students to harness their talents to fight for a more equitable world.

My students, many of them in middle or high school, came to our classroom right as the school day ended and on weekends. When I greeted each student, asking them about their day and what they learned in school, they often replied with what they did not learn. As the dance season went on, I recognized a pattern in many of the questions they asked me. They inquired with requests such as: “Can we learn about Africa? I haven’t learned anything about Africa at school.” “Can we talk about racism? My teacher told me I couldn’t wear my hair in braids and it’s not right.” “Can we talk about current events? There’s so many things going on in the world and I want to do something to make change.” Alongside these questions were also self-doubts that reflected things they heard back at school, “Miss Cierra, do I talk too much? Am I loud? Does my hair look okay?”

My students were not only asking thoughtful questions that highlighted the depth and nuance of their perspectives and experiences, but they were also expressing their frustrations and pains. They would erupt in giggles during silly moments in class and then hit the stage with fierce concentration. The multiplicity of their identities and ways of sharing their emotions was beautifully unique. Yet, the more I read in the news and in research about Black girls, the more I

recognized that my students' stories -- stories of the full expression of their humanity, their wonder, their power -- were not included.

My students were not only curious about the education they deserve, but they actively demanded it. As I adapted my dance lessons to respond to their questions, I realized that I, too, was denied the learning about my ancestors and my own history. I was full of righteous rage that the school system failed my students and continued to fail Black students by denying them a curriculum centered on the rich history of their ancestors.

Together, my students and I explored Black history, uncovering stories we did not learn in school. We took those stories and shared them widely through our conversations with loved ones and our choreography -- our multiple ways of truth-telling. I soon found out that my students were sharing these stories with their schoolteachers and administrators, asking them critical questions about why they were not learning about *their* history. We remembered our history and our ancestry, despite colonialism and enslavement attempting to strip us from the memory of resistance. While schools have long functioned as sites of forgetting, remembering through art was our collective form of resistance as we tapped into our ancestral knowledge and wisdom.

My time with my students brings me to this dissertation, as I continue to search for answers to their and my questions: *Where do Black girls turn to express their frustrations when school fails to teach their history and recognize their brilliance? How do Black girls tap into their strongest sense of self to refute negative messages, while simultaneously fighting for the world they deserve? How can we co-create spaces with Black girls rooted in justice, joy, creativity, and love?*

Reflection

The experiences detailed in the aforementioned stories led me to two reflections that situate the context and rationale for this study. Black girls, regardless of age, need a place to express their fullest selves given how many institutions are places that replicate and maintain systems of oppression. State institutions, such as schools, operate to reproduce social inequities (Crenshaw, 2011). Black girls often experience formal educational spaces as sites of oppression, which is evidenced through school policies, curriculum, and pedagogical practices that work to suppress their cultures and languages (Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity, 2017; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017). Further, when Black girls and their unique experiences are not highlighted in the classroom or in texts, Black girls “face modern-day forms of educational enslavement” (Young, Foster, & Hines, 2018, p. 102). My students and I were invisible in the curriculum, yet hypervisible in how we were allowed to, or not allowed to, express ourselves.

At even the beginning stages of development, schools are stifling Black girls’ means and mechanisms for expression. When schools fail to provide a space for Black girls to explore their multiple identities and their histories, express their frustrations and their joy, out-of-school programming can be a space where they can negotiate their identities, develop a positive sense of self, and be encouraged to resist the oppressive nature of schooling. Even further, out-of-school programming can serve as a potential site where culturally-sustaining pedagogy can be developed, enacted, and preserved (Paris & Alim, 2014). There is much that can be learned from out-of-school and community-based programs that do not often get explored in conversations about education policies, practices, and research.

Secondly, Black girls are brilliantly posing solutions to the injustices they experience and ask for the education they deserve, but often do not get highlighted from asset-based perspectives

in research. Conventionally, research focused on how they are policed and punished for their actions, showed them in comparison to white girls or Black boys, or did not include their perspectives. My dance students were and are incredibly talented and hard-working, yet their stories, voices, and artwork are not well-represented in education literature. While there is a growing body of literature and an incredible network of Black girlhood scholars, there is still work to be done to counteract decades of harmful narratives and deficit-based research.

As evidenced by my students' frustrations with the current curriculum, we must bridge research with practice and seek to build coalitions of K-12 educators, community-based educators, communities, families, and researchers dedicated to highlighting and honoring Black girls' diverse experiences.

This dissertation is dedicated to highlighting Black girls' brilliance. My students taught me that I am a work in progress and that I must approach my work, my teaching, and my research with intentional love and humility. As I write and share this dissertation, I am still unpacking, understanding, and deepening my sense of identity. I am still critically examining my own role in the revolution. Righteous rage and unwavering curiosity fuel this dissertation. Inspiration and all that I have been fortunate enough to learn from Black girls sustain this work.

Statement of the Problem

In 2018, 11-year-old Naomi Wadler stood in front of a crowd of thousands at the March for Our Lives and shared, "I am here today to acknowledge and represent the African American girls whose stories don't make the front page of every national newspaper, whose stories don't lead on the evening news. I represent the African American women who are victims of gun violence, who are simply statistics instead of vibrant, beautiful girls full of potential" (NBC News, 2018). As Wadler eloquently and powerfully shared in her speech, Black girls often do

not get the chance to share their stories. Our voices are silenced, diminished, erased, and distorted, yet they continue to powerfully speak their truths. In her speech, Wadler brought national attention to the fact that Black girls are still largely unprotected and neglected in the media, policy efforts, philanthropic interventions, research, and in education policy and practice.

The invisibility of Black girls is referenced in many historical examples. On May 22nd, 1962, Malcolm X notably gave a speech to a congregation in Los Angeles, California where he famously stated, "The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman." Anna Julia Cooper (1988) made a similar declaration in *A Voice from the South*, where she evoked imagery that described the treatment of Black women in society as the body with a bandage over one eye. She equated the body as a metaphor for a society that does not see, protect, or honor Black women. When the bandage is removed, the metaphorical body is "filled with light" and is more complete (Cooper, 1988, p. 122).

When society refuses to see the brilliance of Black women, alongside the multiple forms of oppression, it denies the true freedom that this nation claimed it was built to protect. As a nation, we cannot achieve "liberty and justice for all" without Black women. The Combahee River Collective (1977) wrote in their statement, "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression." Black women's freedom would mean the dismantling of heteropatriarchy, racism, sexism, capitalism, and other forms of oppression, including classism, ableism, and homophobia.

Academic literature contributes to the bandage, the invisibility, that Anna Julia Cooper warned about. As evidenced through research, one thing is clear – Black girls are understudied

(Annamma et al., 2016; Jordan-Zachery & Harris, 2019; Lindsay-Dennis, 2010). Historically when they were studied, it has often been from a deficit-based perspective or without mentioning the complexities of the oppression they face at the intersection of their multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, terms such as ‘at-risk,’ ‘underperforming,’ and ‘achievement gap’ place a negative emphasis on the girls themselves, rather than discussing the many ways systems and structures, such as schools, oppress them.

Multiple theoretical models and deficit-based perspectives have been historically based on the experiences and perspectives of “white girls in suburban, middle-class settings” (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016, p. 97; also see Lindsay-Dennis, 2010). The research and theoretical perspectives that are only centered on white girls’ experiences falsely assume that Black girls have the same challenges as white girls, thus rendering their realities unperceivable.

Schools function as a microcosm of society, in that they reproduce hierarchies as well as pass on societal ideals through the education of the masses (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Because of the field of education’s unique position in society and its capacity to reinforce the status quo, it warrants in-depth analysis, particularly for its treatment of Black girls. We must be critical, thoughtful, and intentional in centering Black girls’ experiences in education research.

To remove the bandage and ensure humanizing research about and with Black girls, Evans-Winters (2015) calls for more Black women scholars to study the educational experiences of Black girls. Edwards et al. (2016) also call for research that “affirm(s) and support(s) Black girls while simultaneously rejecting over-simplified, decontextualized, and reductionist views of the Black girl experience” (p. 437). This dissertation builds on the work of scholars, particularly Black women scholars, who study and center Black girls’ experiences. Recognizing no work is comprehensive enough to capture the complexity of Black women’s experiences, more work

must be done to understand Black girls' multiple experiences and realities (Patton, Haynes, & Croom, 2017). Black girls are not a monolith and how Black girlhood is expressed is influenced by geographic context, school type, familial structure, community opportunities, and other life experiences. Through this dissertation, I answer the call to make a scholarly commitment to highlighting and amplifying the many voices of Black girls and their varied educational experiences.

Rationale

Schools serve as socializing agents for youth, in that they often communicate, replicate, and reproduce the norms of the dominant society (Giroux, 1983). Schools, coupled with the sociocultural knowledge that young people gain from popular media (e.g. internet, magazine, television, film, and music) tell a distinct story about how society operates and what Black girls' roles are. Unfortunately, many of the images of Black girls include stereotypes like "Ratchet women," "Baby Mamas," and "Black Barbies" (Walton, 2013). Schools can be spaces where Black girls critique those images. Oftentimes, however, students are often not given opportunities to actively critique stereotypes and engage in social justice work (McLaren, 2003). This is why we must look to community-based programming to fill the gap.

The Adultification of Black Girls

Black girls are perceived in many harmful ways, including that they are strong, adult-like, sexual, loud and outspoken, and as a physical threat (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; Morris, 2007). A 2017 report produced by the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality showed that adults, in general, see Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers at almost all stages of development, starting at age 5 and peaking from ages 10 to 14 (Epstein et al., 2017). The authors coined this phenomenon as the *adultification* of

Black girls, which has adverse effects on their experiences in classrooms and other indicators of well-being (e.g., school push-out, mental health, trauma, and under-representation in school curriculum) (Annamma, 2017; Crenshaw, K., et al., 2015; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016).

When society regards Black girls as *adult-like*, it denies them the creative freedom of expression, joy, and exploration that is afforded in childhood. To illustrate, four middle school-aged Black and Brown girls in Binghamton, New York were strip-searched, harassed, and humiliated at school because the principal saw them giggling while walking down the hallway and accused them of being under the influence of drugs because they were “hyper” and “giddy” (Ortiz, 2019). The girls’ form of expressing their childhood glee led the principal to punish them, which was further exacerbated by the nurse conducting a strip search and making inappropriate comments about their bodies. At 12-years old, during a pivotal year of their adolescent development and girlhood, the girls were taught, through humiliation, that expressing joy and giddiness would result in the physical violation of their bodies. All too frequent incidents like this one teach girls that they cannot show excitement or positive expression of emotion without negative repercussions.

Collins (1986) discussed the outsider-within mentality. When Black women hold positions of power, or when they gain access to spaces they were previously denied entry to, the dominant culture still does not fully accept them. In many ways, Black women are cast as outsiders, even when they are within an institution. The violence against Black girls in educational settings are “reflective of the problematic ways in which their humanity and adolescence escape the white imagination” (Hardaway, et. al, 2019, p. 34). In other words, violence against Black girls in schools occurs because of historical practices and policies that dehumanize them and the research that simply places them in comparison to white girls. Black

girls are an outsider within the school system and are constantly reminded of their outsider status.

Even when Black girls succeed in school, they are not fully accepted. Their physical presence is not always wanted and they are unfairly punished. In a 2016 study on the criminalization of Black girls in school, a 15-year old Black girl was described as being physically assaulted as she was pushed to the ground and handcuffed by a police officer for shouting (Wun, 2016). This is, unfortunately, not unusual. Black girls are formally disciplined for talking back, getting up to throw away trash, and not listening to the teacher, which are characterized as obstructions to the learning environment (Henry, 1998). Black girls are not only being physically violated, but also being spirit murdered (Love, 2019) through tracking (Neal-Jackson, 2018; Oakes, 1985), disproportionate punishment (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016), racist and sexist dress codes (Brodsky et al., 2018), and lack of culturally-affirming curricula (Evans-Winters, 2005; Young, Foster, & Hines, 2018).

To counteract the racism and anti-Blackness manifested in the adultification of Black girls, this study used art not only as a healing practice, but also as a tool to assert counter-narratives that directly spoke back to the one-dimensional, inhibiting stereotypes that are too often pushed onto Black girls.

The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood

Art for Black girls has historically been a positive mechanism for expression and resistance. When Black girls take up space and express themselves in places not built for them, they resist the oppressive forces that often take away the joy and fun of learning. As an example, in *Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls*, Morris (2019) shared a vignette from Tanisha “Wakumi” Douglas, co-founder of S.O.U.L Sisters

Leadership Collective, an organization that teaches Black and Brown girls and transgender, non-conforming youth of color to become organizers. In the vignette Douglas shared, “I think dance is my spirit language. It’s how I communicate that which I’ve been told is not okay to communicate. So, for me, it’s always been a space where I feel free.” (p. 140)

While discussing one of S.O.U.L Sisters’ programs on sexual and reproductive health, Douglas also pointed out, “...they [Black girls] want to change things that are going on in the schools, but they also want to have fun and be free – and that’s also radical and revolutionary for them.” (Morris, 2019, p. 140) As Douglas discussed, art is a practice of imagining and enacting freedom. It is a practice where Black girls can (re)member Black girl epistemologies, ways of knowing and being, and their ancestors’ resistance. As Carney et al. (2016) stated, “Art is the dialogue that occurs in response to the happenings of the space... Ultimately, art is what we make—in the space, of the space, in remembering the space. Art is the present, and art is also memory.” (p. 423) Art is a place where Black girls can return to self, tell their full truths when society stereotypes them, and remember who they are. Art-making is a naming practice, where artists name themselves, rather than be named by society. Art expresses the “inner lives” of Black girls -- their innermost, vulnerable truths and emotions that rarely are explored in school spaces (Berry & Gross, 2020; Hine, 1989; Simmons, 2015).

The freedom to express joy for Black girls can be a form of resistance. Lu & Steele (2019) studied how Black joy is captured in online outlets like Twitter and Vine, where Black people use the historical oral traditions of their culture to capture verbalizations of happiness, draw on humor, and challenge dominant narratives that demean and dehumanize Black people. It creates a new world, another reality that is centered in their experiences. Bettina Love (2019) noted that art frees up space for creativity, which is necessary in imagining and creating a world

rooted in justice. In other words, Black girls expressing joy, even though violence has been enacted on them, is resisting the oppressive nature of schooling and of the world by constructing spaces that are joyful and an escape from oppression.

What does resistance look like for a Black girl to take up space and be joyful in a society that denies and punishes her existence? What does it look like to center Black girl's joys, dreams, and artistic talents, rid of colonialist influences and decentering white femininity as the standard and norm? It looks like committing to a world free from policing, punishment, and shame that positions Black girl identity as multi-layered and complex as a method of humanization in a society that enacts dehumanization, so that Black girls can reclaim childhood joy. It looks like moving from the adultification of Black girls to their incommensurable creative potential (Brown, 2013).

Research Questions

I explored Black adolescent (ages 14-17) girls' meaning-making processes as they conceptualized and acted on the influences that arts-based practices (e.g. movement, music, and hair) have on their identity construction and resistance. Specifically, I examined how they used arts-based practices in a virtual summer program to construct their identities and resist the negative stereotypes they often face and in society. The following questions guided the research study:

1. How, if at all, do Black girls use arts-based practices as mechanisms of identity construction and resistance?
2. What specific attributes of Black girls' involvement in art programs foster identity construction and acts of resistance?

Conceptual Framework

This study employed Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1989), Black girlhood (Brown, 2009; 2013), and Black Performance Theory (DeFrantz & Gonzalez, 2014). Black Feminist Thought places Black women at the center of analysis as experts of their own experiences at the intersections of Blackness and womanhood. Particularly, Black Feminist Thought examines the interlocking systems of oppression that impact Black girls, which provides a foundation to analyze how systems (e.g. education) affect Black girls' understandings of identity and actions of resistance. Black girlhood expands my analysis of Black Feminist Thought to be inclusive of girlhood, or childhood, that, as evidenced by research, is often denied to Black girls (Epstein et al., 2017). When Black girls are not seen by society as children, the repercussions can have adverse effects on the way Black girls view themselves and their identity construction. Ruth Nicole Brown's (2009) definition of Black girlhood also incorporated the importance of studying Black girls' arts practices because of the historical and cultural significance that art plays in their racial identity development.

Lastly, Black Performance Theory (DeFrantz & Gonzalez, 2014) provides a frame to study the everyday arts practices of Black girls that are not always encompassed in traditional understandings of art (e.g. dance, visual arts, theatre, music). Together, these three theoretical frameworks center the importance of studying Black girls' experiences, perspectives, and expressions that are not commonly emphasized in classroom practices and assessments. The conceptual framework provided a grounding for data collection and analysis that highlighted Black girls' participation and co-construction of the research and learning process.

The Program: Black Girls S.O.A.R.

To conduct this research, I developed an arts-based virtual program called Black Girls S.O.A.R. (Scholarship, Organizing, Arts, and Resistance). The virtual program was designed for high school-aged Black girls to engage in arts-based activities to learn about Black Feminist Theory, Black history, leadership, activism, social change, and community organizing through a healing-centered lens. We used art, such as dance, visual art, animation, poetry, and more, to process, reflect, and express our thoughts, ideas, and emotions. We explored the work of Black women artists and activists like Ella Baker, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler, and more. In the middle of the program (week 3), I trained co-researchers in coding and analyzing qualitative data. From our analysis, the co-researchers decided how to best represent the data through a performance, as experts of their own experience. For example, data was represented through self-portraits, animations that detailed historical moments, and spoken word poetry. At the performance, the co-researchers had a *talk back* with the audience to share how they came up with the works of art and the meaning and themes behind how they expressed the data, what they learned, and a call-to-action.

I designed the curriculum and structure of this program for the purpose of this dissertation and have been facilitating similar arts-based programs for girls since 2013. I used a pedagogical framework that included culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), Black Feminist Pedagogy (Omolade, 1987), and Abolitionist Teaching (Love, 2019). Taken together, these pedagogical frameworks grounded me in lifting up Black students' cultures and expertise, as well as centered my pedagogy in the recognition that teaching is a political act. In this, I use the term facilitator throughout the dissertation to emphasize my role in

creating space for conversation and learning alongside co-researchers, rather than regarding myself as an educator in this particular learning space.

The program met for five sessions (two-hours each), including the culminating performance, where the girls were active participants in the program and in the research process. Each session started with a community-building exercise, called Ubuntu, which translates to “I am because we are” in Zulu. Community building exercises included games and icebreakers, such as “What is your superpower?” Then, there was a group discussion about the topic of the day, such as history, self-care, and Afrofuturism. After the discussion, there was an interactive activity or prompt that corresponded with the topic of the day. As an example, one of the activities was called *What My Hands Hold*, where we traced our hands and inside the hands we drew the societal problems we are passionate about and wish to solve. These activities were specifically chosen to highlight Black women’s contributions and for Black girls to not only see themselves as consumers of knowledge, but critical producers of knowledge.

To close the session each day, we engaged in a sisterhood circle, which took a traditional healing circle adapted to a virtual format. Throughout the circle process, participants were encouraged to express their thoughts and emotions through their chosen medium (e.g. writing, speaking, dancing, drawing). Sisterhood circles are culturally-based groups that are centered in mutual support and reciprocity (McDonald, 2007).

At the end of the workshop, the co-researchers produced and performed in a Community Arts Showcase that made the data accessible to an audience outside of academia. They shared artwork such as animations, spoken word poetry, song, and instrumental performances to share their joy, their counternarratives, and their power with the audience.

Research Design

The study took place from July 2020-September 2020. This study combined performance ethnography¹ and integrated youth participatory action research² (YPAR) as methodology (Denzin, 2003; 2009). Performance ethnography provides “a vocabulary for exploring the expressive elements of culture, a focus on embodiment as a crucial component of cultural analysis and a tool for representing scholarly engagement, and a critical, interventionist commitment to theory in/as practice” (Madison, 2006, p. 318). In other words, performance ethnography allows researchers to better understand how culture --in this case the intersections of Blackness and girlhood-- are performed in daily acts and as expressions of collective or individual artistic practices. It takes the human experience and performs the expressions of culture as a way of speaking back against deficit and negative narratives.

The study employed arts-based and participatory methodology to provide an outlet for Black girls to best share their stories. Performance ethnography provided a foundation for the co-researchers to turn the data into art, while integrated YPAR offered a methodology that incorporates participants as researchers of their own experiences. Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) described the importance of using arts-based methodology in centering Black girl experience as a practice that “wholly deconstructs objectivity, methodology, and, certainly, what is considered knowledge” (p. 28). For Black girls, this means that their ways of expressing knowledge, even if not typically studied or understood, are valid and valuable.

¹ It is important to note that although performance ethnography draws from the traditions of cultural anthropology, there are some differences that are reflected in this dissertation study. See Chapter 3 for more details on methodology.

² While this study draws on inspiration from youth participatory action research, I want to note that this dissertation integrates elements of youth participatory action research, but does not incorporate all of the traditional aspects of youth participatory action research. See Chapter 4 for more details on methodology.

Co-researchers included eight Black adolescents who identify as girls and are high school students ages 14-17 in the Washington, D.C. and Columbia, South Carolina areas. Recognizing the role of language in dismantling and reinforcing hierarchies, participants and I referred to one another as co-researchers to disrupt the dominant teacher/student dichotomy. We³ researched alongside one another.

To gather data, I used “two-tiered” (Brown, 2010) qualitative data collection. For the first tier, co-researchers and I collected oral history testimonies from loved ones and our session conversation transcripts. The second tier was my concurrent collection of pre-and-post interview data with co-researchers, transcripts from session conversations, field observations of the virtual summer program, and artifacts from arts-based projects completed during the program.

Significance of Study

First, the study expands the body of literature that centers Black girls’ experiences by sharing their perspectives and experiences to counteract stereotypes that are commonly upheld in academia and education literature. It adds to the literature in the emerging field of Black girlhood studies by examining the intersections of Blackness, womanhood, and childhood through the lens of Black girls themselves. While education research has historically left out the experiences of Black girls or only discussed Black girls through a deficit-based perspective, this study centers Black girl power, creativity, and humanity.

Secondly, the study employs arts-based methodology to provide an outlet for Black girls to best share their stories. By recognizing the varied ways in which Black girls express

³ I use the term “we” throughout the dissertation to emphasize that I viewed myself as researching alongside the co-researchers.

themselves that cannot be fully captured through other research methods, creative and alternative methodology has promise for studying the nuances and complexities of Black girlhood.

Third, Black girls are able to talk about and analyze their experiences in school and their communities in an out-of-school setting, which can contribute to the growing body of literature on culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014). Out-of-school and out-of-classroom programs for Black girls have many benefits, including helping Black girls develop positive relationships with other Black girls and adult figures, aiding in building a positive sense of identity construction, and fostering other dimensions of social-emotional development (e.g. self-awareness, relationship-building). Communal spaces for Black girls create spaces for self-affirmation, growth, and healing (hooks, 1993). These spaces also serve as “homeplaces” or “homespaces,” where Black girls can come together to celebrate themselves and each other (hooks, 1993; Jacobs, 2016). Particularly, the program took place amid the COVID-19 global pandemic, the 45th presidential administration, and national uprisings against continued racial injustice. This made community-building and healing-centered approaches in the program even more imperative.

This study bridges the literature from art education research, Black girl literacies, community-based and extra-curricular programming, Black girlhood studies, sociology, and women’s and gender studies to provide both an examination of a curriculum that affirms Black girls and Black girls’ experiences with that curriculum. By building on these understandings of Black girls’ arts-based practices and how out-of-school learning spaces can benefit Black girls’ positive development, researchers, educators, and administrators can glean insights on how to apply an intersectional framework to engage Black girls in school.

Definition of Terms

Black - For the purpose of this dissertation, I use Paul's (2003) definition of Black:

In referring to "the Black community," I use the term (in a discerning fashion) to reflect those who share a common culture, common concerns, and common modes of survival, without contending that U.S. Blacks [people] should be viewed as a monolith. (p. 3)

Race. I use McChesney's (2015) definition of race, which acknowledges that race is a social construct rooted in historical, political, and economic influences.

Black girlhood- I use Ruth Nicole Brown's (2009) definition of Black girlhood, which stated that Black girlhood includes "representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming a body marked as youthful, Black, and female" (p. 1). Gender is not binary (boy/girl). A person's gender identity can correlate with their assigned sex but it can also differ from it. According to The Human Rights Campaign, "gender identity is how each person perceives themselves or calls themselves" and it can be regarded as the internal experience of naming our gender. Gender identity has multiple dimensions that are flexible, such as how central gender is to one's identity and self-concept (Halim & Ruble, 2010). Black girlhood, within the context of this study, is how participants choose to name and identify themselves, recognizing that girlhood and Black girlhood are not a monolith.

Arts-based practices - I define arts-based practices as practices in which an individual uses an act of creativity to express an emotion (e.g. joy, frustration) or action (e.g. resistance,

communication). I use arts-based practices, rather than art, as a more inclusive term to not constrict how Black girls may express themselves creatively.

Resistance - Ward (1996) defined resistance as “the development of a critical consciousness that is invoked to counter the myriad distortions, mistruths, and misinformation perpetrated about the lives of Black women and men, their families, and communities” (p. 246). In this case, the affirmation of one’s self and cultural group can be considered an act of resistance in a society that enacts violence onto marginalized groups to suppress their knowledge, celebration, and expression of selfhood. I also use resistance to mean actions taken that directly refute, counter, and/or speak back to oppressive structures and systems (i.e. heteropatriarchy, sexism, racism) and the messages that these structures and systems maintain (e.g. stereotypes, deficit-based narratives).

Identity - Identity is characterized as the sense of who we are and an understanding of the unique attributes and qualities that make us different from others. There are many types of identity: self-identity, social identity, and collective identity. Self-identity is how we define ourselves based on feelings of belonging, while social identity refers to our beliefs about our membership in groups (Tatum, 2000). Henry & Verica (2015) argued that self-identity and social identity continuously work in tandem to create a continuum of how a person can identify at any given time or place. Ethnic identity is one of the main facets of an individual’s social identity (French, et al., 2006). The third type of identity, collective identity, reflects how multiple individuals within a group perceive and understand what that membership means (Friedman & McAdam, 1992; Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014).

I take a sociological perspective of identity and specifically use the term *identity construction* throughout this dissertation, rather than identity development, identity formation, or identity performance. Identity construction emphasizes that an individual can both create their identity through the examination of the question: *Who do I think I am?* (Phinney, 1989) while simultaneously negotiating their multiple identities by understanding the question: *Who do you think I am?* Construction, in this case, emphasizes the power that Black girls have as they build their identities for themselves and then share those identities with the world through art. Identity development and formation do not fully capture or emphasize the girls' role in creating, negotiating, and exploring their identities. While I ground my conceptual framework in Black Performance Theory (DeFrantz & Gonzalez, 2014) to understand how Black girl identity is expressed, or performed, in everyday actions, I am interested in how Black girls *construct* their identities *through* the process of performance. I also do not want the focus to be on performing identity, as that insinuates that they may be performing inauthentic versions of themselves.

Intersectionality theory suggests that identity must be explored through the multiple identities that a person might hold (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). Identity work in this way acknowledges the relationship and delicate dance that multiple identities have with one another, but also recognizes that identity construction is situated within social contexts that communicate who a person “should be” (Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014; Wieland, 2010). Adolescents “try on” different identities and Black girls in particular seek to make sense of and establish self amidst negative public perceptions (Muhammad & Womack, 2015).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I situate my dissertation within prior scholarly work by reviewing research in three main areas: (1) the misconceptions about Black girls and their resilience, resistance, and strength (2) art education and Black girls' arts-based practices (e.g. movement and music, hair) and (3) benefits of out-of-school programs, specifically as they relate to Black girls. From the literature on misconceptions about Black girls, I highlight how conversations about resilience should emphasize *resistance* to recognize the institutional factors that play a role in Black girl resilience.

From the literature on art education and Black girls' arts-based practices, I highlight how art education has not been framed from a culturally-sustaining perspective. When it has been culturally-sustaining, the literature most often focuses on hip hop education, leaving out the diverse ways that Black girls might use art. I also examine Black girls' critical literacies research, which explores how Black girls use reading, writing, language, and embodied literacy (e.g. dance and movement) to "advance and protect themselves and their loved ones in society." (Richardson, 2002, p. 680). This study builds on the foundation set forth by hip hop pedagogy and critical literacies to engage multiple forms of art in an out-of-school setting.

Lastly, from the literature on out-of-school programs, I focus on how these programs can be spaces for culturally-sustaining practices. Particularly, literature on out-of-school educational spaces show that these spaces increase critical consciousness, supplement whitewashed curricula in K-12 schooling, and fosters positive racial and gender identity construction.

Misconceptions about Black Girls

Black girls and women throughout history have been perceived as being innately emotionally strong and unbreakable, which denied them the space to express a range of

emotions, (e.g. anger, rage, and excitement), without being perceived negatively (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011). For example, the grueling and inhumane work expectations of enslaved Africans during the 17th and 18th centuries that regarded all Africans as working bodies, led to perceptions of Black women as equally strong (mentally and physically) as Black men (Nunn, 2018).

Other stereotypes that have persisted for decades, including the angry and stubborn Sapphire, the hypersexualized Jezebel, and the nurturing Mammy, dehumanize Black girls and portray them as one-dimensional (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Epstein et al., 2017; Harris-Perry, 2011; West, 1995). Not only are Black women and girls depicted stereotypically, but they have been portrayed as opposite to whiteness and femininity: dark, vocal, hyper-sexualized, and aggressive (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

Misconceptions about Black Girls in Research. Crenshaw (2015) warned, “The existing research, data, and public policy debates often fail to address the degree to which girls face risks that are both similar to and different from those faced by boys” (p. 11). Black girls in research, for instance, are usually portrayed as having better educational outcomes than Black boys, being more adult-like than their white peers, and needing less nurturing and care.

Over the last 20 years, most of the education literature on Black girls paints what Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes & Watson (2016) call a “mythologized discourse,” which presents data in a way that suggests Black girls are “okay” because the numbers show they are succeeding when compared with Black boys (p. 194). For example, national data show that out of all bachelor’s degrees awarded to Black students, 64% were earned by women, and only 36% were earned by men (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Additionally, research on racial disproportionality in school discipline centers on Black boys (Bell, 2015). The “narrative of crisis” about Black boys focuses on how schools have failed to meet their academic and socioemotional needs, which contributes to the cycle of policing and punishment in schools known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Noguera, 2009). Scholarship that highlights Black boys' experiences or solely discusses the lack of Black girls in these conversations without examining their experiences creates an either-or binary that dehumanizes the lived experiences of Black girls (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). Although the educational experiences of Black boys are certainly important and their unique challenges and strengths should be addressed, Black girls often get overshadowed in education discourse.

Resilience, Resistance, and Strength

In spite of negative stereotypes, over-policing and over-surveillance, and lack of affirming curriculum in schools, Black girls exhibit resilience and strength. As defined by Ashford et al. (1997) and O'Connor (1997), resilience is the ability to recover from or adjust to problems, adversity, and stressors in life. Other terms commonly used in education discourse similar to resilience, include positive coping, persistence, and adaptation (Winfield, 1991). The ways that resilience is manifested can vary across social groups, classes, cultures, and genders (Arrington & Wilson, 2000). As a multidimensional construct, resilience depends on the bidirectional interaction between individuals and their environments within diverse contexts (Winfield, 1991).

Much of the current discussion surrounding Black girls' resilience is incomplete. The resilience literature about Black girls often discusses how Black girls are succeeding, without mentioning the oppression they face. Even in the mainstream media, Black girls are discussed as having #BlackGirlMagic, a hashtag created by Cashawn Thompson in 2013 to celebrate the

“beauty, power, and resilience of Black women” (Wilson, 2016, para. 1). This resilience or *magic*, when not paired with an acknowledgement of their struggles, perpetuates the strong, Black woman stereotype (Chavers, 2016). For example, the term #BlackGirlMagic is used to highlight the ways that Black girls succeed; however, Venus Evans-Winters noted in a 2019 tweet that it should be reframed to #BlackGirlPower to better describe how they are not just magical, but also humans with struggles.

Unfortunately, understandings of resilience often reflect “white, middle class cultural norms and lifestyles” (Erkut, Fields, Sing, & Marx, 1996, p. 55). By simply stating that Black girls are resilient without taking into account the racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression they experience, society denies their humanity by emphasizing their individualism without recognizing structural and systemic oppression. When resilience only reflects white, middle class values, it takes the microscope of analysis off of power and privilege, and encourages multiple stereotypes of Black girls (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Frazier-Kouassi, 2002; Neal-Jackson, 2018). An example that counters the narrative that Black girls are simply resilient and need less care is Nia Michelle Nunn’s (2018) Super Girl model. She stated:

The ‘Super’ element describes multiple identities, as well as trials and tribulations relevant to the need to defend, protect, and save oneself and others, like that of a Superhero. Followed by a hyphen, the capital ‘G’ emphasizes self-defined feminine power in Black girlhood. Super-Girl presents a new phenomenon about balancing both strength and sadness due to regular social battles. (p. 241).

In other words, Black girls should be able to show how they overcome challenges, but also be open and honest about the pain they experience. Just because they succeed, it does not

mean that oppression, racism, and sexism do not impact them. More research should carefully reflect what Nunn (2018) calls the “strength and sadness” of Black girlhood.

I argue that resistance is a more accurate and culturally-accurate term to describe how Black girls overcome challenges. By associating resistance with resilience, I acknowledge that there are outside factors, such as white supremacy, anti-Blackness, and sexism, that play a role in how Black girls experience schooling. When Black girls resist oppressive structures, they harness their power, and show their frustration about the pain caused by a system that denies their humanity.

As an outward expression of both Black girls’ strength and sadness, they resist structures and systems that they feel are discriminatory. “Resistance,” Raby (2006) said:

can include subtle and often covert acts as well as larger more pronounced oppositional actions against structural forces. Among girls, acts of resistance tend to be confined to the day-to-day interactions with peers and those in positions of authority. (p. xvi)

Black girl resistance literature shows how Black girls push back norms of white femininity and emphasizes how they define their own identities, often through creative and subversive ways (Ward, 1996). Creative resistance to stereotypes and oppression are central to girls’ development and is an important way to heal from trauma (Brown, 1999). As an example of creative resistance, in *The Pedagogy of Pathologization: Dis/abled in the School-Prison Nexus*, Annamma (2018) told the story of Myosha, a Black girl who wore a “No Columbus Day” shirt to school. Although she knew she could get punished, this act of protest and artistic expression showed her discontent with celebrating a colonizer and her strength in standing up for something she cared about.

Annamma (2018) called for a “pedagogy of resistance” (p. 145), which teaches and encourages Black (and Brown) girls to use their means of expression to speak back to negative stereotypes. Participating girls in the study described the arts-based curriculum, which included dance, art, and poetry, as a space where they could show their strength and sadness (Annamma, 2018). This study guided my understanding and conceptualization of extending art to arts-based practice, while highlighting Black girls’ expressions of resistance.

The need for arts-based pedagogy, rooted in resistance, is also supported by cognitive neuroscience. Shirley Bryce-Heath, in the foreword to Maisha Winn’s (2011) *Girl Time* described that the brain notices, observes, and understands emotions more deeply when empathy, visualization, embodiment, and imagination are employed. These emotions all come out of being creative. Bryce-Heath (as referenced in Winn, 2011) urged educators to consider how learning environments can be enhanced by tapping into artistic practices. While literature supports studying arts-based resistance, there are only a few studies outside of critical literacies literature (Brown, 2013; Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity, 2017) that provide examples of how Black girls enact resistance and construct their identities, as well as an examination of curriculum that supports their resistance.

Arts Education

Much of the research about arts education in K-12 settings explores the relationship between participation in the arts and academic outcomes. Research shows that students who participate in art classes and extracurricular programming have higher test scores (Catterall, 2012), stronger social-emotional skills (Wan, Ludwig, & Boyle, 2018), are more engaged at school (Bowen & Kisida, 2019), and are less likely to drop out of school (Israel, 2009). Different art forms and mediums benefit students in varied ways. For example, drama aids in helping

students process emotions and positively navigate social relationships, dance helps with creative thinking and self-confidence, while music assists in math and reading achievement (The Arts Education Partnership, 2002).

Although empirical research stresses the benefits of art education and national surveys show overwhelming support for art education as an integral part of a well-rounded and holistic education, the number of students who have access to art classes has decreased dramatically in recent years (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011; Americans for the Arts, 2008). Additionally, in predominantly low-income schools, access to arts education is even more limited than schools that are in more affluent areas. A study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2009) found that schools that cut time and resources for arts education serve predominantly Black and Brown and low-income communities and are often labeled as “in need of academic improvement” (as referenced in Cratsley, 2017). When schools are marked as being “in need of academic improvement,” funds are often shifted from artistic activities and courses to test-based accountability reforms (Yee, 2014).

The opportunity gap in access to arts education is particularly troubling because art has shown to enhance children’s learning, youth development, and positive identity formation in the context of racial, linguistic, and economic marginalization (Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor 2013; Gadsden 2008). I argue that limited access to art education is a strategic effort to perpetuate hierarchies and deny Black and Brown students opportunities to creatively express their emotions and resistance, thus making schools sites of conformity, rather than exploration and critical thinking.

Not only is access to art education stratified by race, but there is scant research that discusses culturally-affirming arts-based education (Kraehe et al., 2016). Charland’s (2010)

study showed that many Black students in four Midwestern high schools did not aspire to become professional artists because they identified artists they learned about at school as white men, not as Black people. The author also found that Black students discussed remembering artwork they did at home more than artwork they created at school. These students felt the proudest of the art that represented their communities and their personal life experiences that they created in out-of-school spaces. The art they did at school received praise and good grades for following directions rather than thinking abstractly. In out-of-school spaces, students are able to bring their culture and life experiences into their art and self-esteem in constructing a positive identity.

Art educators have traditionally rewarded technically talented students that follow directions; however, art education should be regarded as “social and aesthetic studies, intended for all, and as socio-cultural necessities” (Desai & Chalmers, 2007, p. 9). For students who do not see their cultural arts practices being taught or highlighted in either content courses or in arts classes, it is difficult to believe that they can pursue a career in the arts.

Art education is a form of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005), or an opportunity for Black (and Brown) students to express themselves amid rigid schooling and testing environments. In particular, Black students develop and exhibit communication skills in varied and artistic ways. While schools often privilege certain forms of communication over others (i.e. written and oral), Black students are “heirs to a great tradition of art, music, dance, science, invention, oratory, and so on” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.152). Cultures that center storytelling and artistic practices (e.g. African oral storytelling tradition) enhance students’ expertise in “memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme.”

(Yosso, 2005, p. 79). In sum, Black students use art as a form of communication in myriad ways that are not always valued in K-12 schools.

Culturally-Relevant-Responsive-Sustaining⁴ Arts Education

Culturally-sustaining pedagogy seeks to foster and sustain the cultural knowledge of communities who have been and continue to be erased through schooling⁵ (Paris & Alim, 2014). There are few studies that explore culturally-sustaining arts education; however, some focus on college-age students' perspectives (Lai, 2012), or are document reviews of textbooks (Grant & Kee, 2013). Additionally, much of the work on culturally-sustaining arts education is theoretical, conceptual, or offers a literature review of culturally-responsive pedagogy, with art as a component of the review and not the focal point (Bennett, 2007; Desai, 2005; Hanley & Noblit, 2009). The body of conceptual and theoretical articles are important for their critical perspective of art education and their warning against essentialist views of culture that portray colonized versions of art through symbolic art and craft activities. None of the studies reviewed involved empirical research of high school-aged students, and when they did, they focused on hip hop pedagogy.

Hip Hop Pedagogy. Aldridge (2005) defined hip hop as:

socially and politically conscious, or “socio-political,” when they focus on the social, economic, and political situation of oppressed people ... This genre of Hip Hop or rap examines historical problems with black communities, such as racism, police brutality, crooked politicians, greed, poverty, and substandard education. ... Socially and politically conscious Hip Hop and rap often espouses [agency, critical consciousness, and transformative resistance] as ways to ameliorate problems in black communities (p. 249)

⁴ I use the term “Culturally-Responsive-Sustaining” here to adhere to the various iterations of how scholars have theorized pedagogical practices and curricular choices that affirm the cultures and identities of Black and Brown students. I also use this term to not lose or overlook the foundation set forth by Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, and others whose work lies at the heart of creating classroom spaces rooted in equity and justice.

⁵ See Chapter 3 for more on culturally-sustaining pedagogy.

This definition of hip hop hones in on the critical consciousness aspect of culture. As a way to incorporate culture and to bring the everyday realities of students' experiences into the classroom, scholars and educators theorized hip hop pedagogy. Hip hop pedagogy is a "way of authentically and practically incorporating the elements of hip hop into teaching, and inviting students to have a connection with the content while meeting them on their cultural turf, by teaching to, and *through*, their realities and experiences" (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015, p. 67). Studies have shown that hip hop pedagogy scaffolds content knowledge (Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002), increases student engagement (Stovall, 2006), and raises critical consciousness. Love (2012) encouraged teachers to use hip hop feminism as a framework, specifically for girls of color, to develop feminist identities, critique gender roles and norms, and apply that knowledge to fighting sexism and misogyny in their communities and in hip hop culture. The elements of hip hop culture are rap music, turntablism, break dancing, graffiti, fashion, and language. When these elements, coupled with Love's (2012) hip hop feminism framework, are present in the classroom, Black students, specifically Black girls, renegotiate, develop, and navigate their socio-political identities.

However, when using hip hop pedagogy in the classroom, much of the research concentrates on Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE), which focuses on how to incorporate hip hop into school-based curricula, rather than how hip hop culture should inform pedagogy (Hill & Perchauer, 2013; Seidel, 2011). Unfortunately, when researchers, educators, and administrators only place emphasis on HHBE, the critical consciousness aspect sometimes gets lost. For example, teachers might simply play hip hop music in class or use call-and-response as an engagement tool. However, hip hop pedagogy is about actively critiquing and fighting against oppressive structures that have historically and currently impact Black communities.

Hip hop should not be the only culturally-affirming arts education effort that educators integrate into pedagogy to reach Black students. Hip hop pedagogy is a helpful and important framework for understanding how Black cultural practices of art can be brought into the classroom as a teaching tool to build critical consciousness. It is a useful foundation to begin to describe the many different ways Black girls might practice and express themselves through art and how those arts practices can be a tool for deepening engagement in the classroom. As Turner & Griffin (2020) note, teachers should not carelessly throw rap, hip hop, and R&B into lessons, but rather “work alongside Black girls to purposefully” incorporate art that humanize the curricula (p. 130). Recognizing and centering that Black girls are not a monolith, arts-based practices must be extended to be inclusive of all of the ways Black girls use art. This study built on the influential and important groundwork of hip hop pedagogy.

Black Girls’ Arts-Based Practices

The literature points to five different arts-based practices that Black girls commonly employ in their daily lives and in community settings: theatre (Brown, 2013; Cox, 2015; Lee & Finney, 2005; Winn, 2011), movement and music (Gaunt, 2006), critical literacies (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Turner & Griffin, 2020), digital literacies (Baker-Bell et al., 2017; Jacobs, 2016; McArthur, 2016) and hair and dress (Edwards, 2005; Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity, 2017). I specifically chose to review these forms of arts-based practices for two reasons: 1) my experiences working with Black girls over the past 10 years and 2) inspiration from Muhammad & Haddix’s (2016) literature review on Black girls’ literacies that grounded me in the body of work on Black girls’ use of artistic and literacy practices.

Through theatre and role play, Black girls are able to write about their lives and experiences from their own perspectives and try new roles as they reflect on and negotiate their

identities. By using movement and music, Black girls connect to historical practices, such as hand games, stepping, and battling cheers, as a way to build community and gain confidence through song and dance. Black girls use writing, journaling, and social media to process their experiences and disrupt dominant narratives through both private (journaling), and public writing (spoken word poetry, blogging). Lastly, through hair and dress, Black girls are able to outwardly express themselves by being able to choose and change their appearance and how they physically represent themselves to the world. These diverse art-practices serve a multitude of purposes, including assisting in the identity construction process and resisting both deficit narratives and oppression.

Theatre and Role Play

Theatre and role play have been used as means of re-writing and re-scripting stories for society (Winn, 2011) and constructing identity (Lee & Finney, 2005; Brown, 2013). In Winn's (2011) *Girl Time: Literacy, Justice, and the School-to-Prison-Pipeline*, she detailed findings from a program created by a woman-focused theatre company called Our Place. The program invites incarcerated girls to write plays about their lives, learn theatre strategies and techniques, and perform their plays. One of the girls in the program, Sanaa, said that playwriting was not only a way to "change the script" of her lived experiences, but also to show others that she was more than her sentence. Sanaa rewrote her story from her own perspective, not the dominant belief that depicted her as deficient. Playwriting could serve as a space of recovery and as a re-introduction into society. It creates a space for girls to re-imagine their futures by writing and performing, providing a counter-narrative against deficit perspectives, and confronting multiple oppressions.

Lee and Finney (2005) also studied theatre and role play as a means for using personal experiences to combat negative stereotypes through storytelling, dramatic interpretation, symbolic representations, and non-verbal and embodied techniques (e.g., popular theatre). In their study, girls (mostly girls of color) explored different voices and roles through performance, developed peer support, and articulated their own cultural knowledge to foster critical consciousness about themselves and the world (Lee & Finney, 2005). Based on the process of creating and performing skits, the researchers concluded that once the girls saw themselves through a dominant lens, they were able to speak back to their outsider status as insiders of their own experiences (Lee & Finney, 2005). In other words, the participants were able to resist negative stereotypes through sharing their own counter-narratives.

As another example, in Aimee Meredith Cox's (2015) book, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship*, Cox talked about how Black girls and women experiencing homelessness in Detroit used storying and re-storying to reenact situations as a collective. For example, Cox (2015) detailed an overnight hiking trip with participants where white campers tried to assert their dominance over the Black women during an interactive activity. Responding to this situation, the Black girls and women acted out an exaggerated scene to disrupt hierarchies created by the white campers. By enacting a performance that demonstrated the negative stereotypes white campers had about Black women, Black women fought against the negative stereotypes. The white campers were able to see how their racist acts impacted Black girls and women. Cox described this exchange, "They [Black women] were both constructing and referring to a road map, a set of choreographed steps used to upset the prevailing narratives of the lives" (p. 136). The Black women and girls continued to tell the story about their camping trip, bursting into laughter, showing what Cox calls re-storying. Re-storying

is a way Black girls use humor and exaggeration in collective storytelling to cope with racism and discrimination.

Another example of how Black girls use theatre to reflect on their own identity to combat discrimination and racism is in a radical youth intervention studied by Ruth Nicole Brown. Brown (2013) used performance ethnography, a research methodology that “explores the expressive elements of culture, focuses on embodiment as a crucial component of analysis and as a tool for representing scholarly engagement, and is often represented as (but not limited to) a staged interpretation of research” (p. 318). Through this methodology, the author studied the importance of providing a space for creative performance and expression of Black girlhood that centers Black girls themselves as producers of knowledge. By using this methodology and not other research methods, Brown (2013) was able to understand the complexities of Black girls’ experiences. The girls who participated in the program used poetry as a medium to reclaim their stories, including stories about violence, fighting at school and in their communities, and power.

Empowering curriculum to emancipate Black girls from negative stereotypes should offer activities, tools, and perspectives that “welcome storytelling, creativity, decision-making processing, and critical thinking about personal, school, and general social realities” (Nunn, 2018, p. 244). In research with Black girls, we must use tools of storytelling and creativity to give them a space to express their realities. Ruth Nicole Brown’s (2013) work was the inspiration behind the intentional decision to use performance ethnography in this study.

Movement and Music

Black girls also use movement and music to express childhood joy and build a positive identity. Kyra Gaunt’s book *The Games Black Girls Play* (2006) explored Black and biracial adolescent girls’ experiences in a Michigan summer writing workshop. Gaunt (2006) argued how

the games that Black girls learn when they are young (e.g., hands games and double dutch) are at the heart of historical and current Black music-making. Hand games and double dutch are particularly important in understanding the arts-based practices of Black girls from a historical context.

During the 18th century, dancing and singing were banned by enslavers. Stemming from traditional African cultural practices, dance was used to communicate and convey messages, express joy, and as entertainment during special events. Enslaved Africans brought the Juba dance to what is now the United States. When they were separated and forcefully torn from their communities in Western Africa, enslaved Africans were stripped of communicating in their indigenous languages. They used the Juba dance to communicate with one another and to remember where they are from. The dance consists of shuffling feet, patting hands, and slapping thighs. White colonizers banned drumming, another African central cultural practice of communication, so they used the Juba dance to express freedom and liberation under captivity. Much of what we see today in modern stepping practices derives from the rich and deep history of the Juba dance. Black girls using hand games, movement, and their bodies as musical instruments is tied to a rich cultural and racial history.

In contemporary contexts, Black girls also use twerking as an expression of play and creativity. As Gaunt (2015) explained, the term “twerk” comes from the contraction “to work” becomes “twerk” (twork) and the dance move is an “erotic isolation of the hips” (p. 245). This dance style has musical roots in West African dances and is connected to how Black girls play and self-express. It is a way to navigate their changing adolescent bodies while also exploring their sexuality, often seen as taboo and inappropriate in a heteropatriarchal society. As Wakumi Douglas, co-founder of S.O.U.L Sisters Leadership Collective said, dance is a place for sexual

freedom. She shared, “As I was coming of age in my sexuality, dancehall and hip hop and whining...they were a way of expressing my sexuality” (Morris, 2019, p. 141).

Being able to dance and be free in her body, Douglas shared, was combating colonization that has long denied Black women their sexuality, divine power, and feelings of comfort in their bodies without feeling a sense of shame, victimization, or sexual violence (Morris, 2019). When Black girls, and girls more generally, are shamed for their sexuality, they are denied the opportunity to feel a sense of ownership over their bodies, which can lead to destructive relationships with their bodies.

There are “politics of pleasure and sexual erotics,” as Lindsey (2013) argued, that are rooted in racism, classism, patriarchy, sexism, ableism, misogyny, and homophobia (p. 24). The everyday music and movement of Black girls resists racial and gender power relations (Gaunt, 2006). It’s more than just a form of art, but also a means of helping Black girls develop a positive sense of ethnic identity and kinship. It is a practice of bodily, emotional, and spiritual liberation. It aids in the process of the collective (re)membering of their histories and their culture as they make meaning of their own identity in relation to their ancestors and each others’ identities.

Both research and artwork have shown the power of tapping into ancestral and historical practices to support positive identity construction. Choreographer and dancer Camille A. Brown used Gaunt’s (2006) work as a framework to build a program entitled Black Girl Spectrum (BGS). In this program, she used participatory action research to work with adolescent Black girls and bring awareness to ‘Black girl brilliance.’ This research informed Brown’s production, *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play*, which used dance, double dutch, music, and hand game traditions from West and Sub-Saharan African cultures to highlight asset-based narratives about

Black girlhood and womanhood. The production served to give performers a space to come into their “identity from childhood innocence to girlhood awareness to maturity—all the while shaped by their environments, the bonds of sisterhood, and society at large” (Brown, 2015, para. 2).

Brown’s participatory action research fused with performance theory informed the construction of the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program. While Ruth Nicole Brown’s (2013) work and Camille A. Brown’s (2015) work provide both the infrastructure and vision for this study, I sought to bring this participatory, arts-based research to the field of education.

Critical Literacies

Black girls use writing, journaling, and social media engagement as arts-based practices to understand their own identities, and to tell their stories and counteract the negative stereotypes that confine them. Black Girls’ Literacies are “multiple, tied to identities, historical, collaborative, intellectual, and political/critical” (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016, p. 325). As Black girls construct their identities, they posit their dreams alongside their examinations of the structures and systems of oppression. For example, Turner & Griffin (2020) conducted a case study of twin sisters engaged in multimodal artwork to share their career aspirations. The sisters created boards of their future careers and life goals and critiqued the underrepresentation of Black career women images on Google. In this study, Black girls used multiliteracies, including professional literacies (i.e. presenting aspirations for career), aspirational auditory literacies (i.e. music), and life literacies (i.e. help Black girls navigate the world).

Much of the research on Black girls’ critical literacies is conducted in after-school or out-of-school spaces (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). While the K-12 curriculum is often constrained by standards and high-stakes testing, out-of-school spaces provide flexibility to explore creative endeavors without the bureaucracy and politics of K-12 policies and standards. For instance,

Muhammad (2012) conducted a case study of a Black adolescent girl in a summer writing institute. A participant, Iris, wrote about her life experiences to create a sense of self through reflective writing, which was different from her restrictive in-school experiences. This freedom to explore gave Iris the space to try different lenses and understand her intersecting identities as a Black girl.

Black girls also use critical literacies to counter media messages that portray them negatively. In another study, Muhammad & McArthur (2015) found that participating Black girls felt that the media judged them by their hair, temperament, and loudness. In order to talk back to these negative stereotypes, the participants wrote about their own experiences to reveal their truest selves. One participant, Dahlia, noted, “...Who can tell our stories best but us?” (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015a, p. 137). Dahlia’s reminder is essential -- Black girls must be given spaces to not only share their stories, but let those stories be heard.

Black girls use literacy to dismantle stereotypes by sharing their own truths. As another example, Jacobs (2016) explored how Black girls in grades 9-12 enacted “oppositional gaze” (i.e. speaking back to negative narratives; hooks, 1992) using forms of media, such as one participant who made a poster that said “Black girls rock!” Black girls not only take in different art forms, like media, but speak back to media representations.

In classroom spaces, Young, Foster, & Hines (2018) interrogated Eurocentric English education to challenge the idea that “even Cinderella is white,” by creating a model for counter-fairy tales. With counternarratives, Black girls were encouraged to take traditional fairy tales, like Cinderella, and reclaim the stories to reflect their experiences and communities. Practices like this inside and outside of classrooms give Black girls the opportunity to center themselves in

literature. Black girls' critical literacies research offers examples of how to leverage both out-of-school and classroom spaces as grounds to engage in a creative curriculum.

In Black girls' critical literacies research, many scholars use arts-based activities in their programs (Winn, 2010; Muhammad & Womack, 2016; Turner & Griffin, 2020), provide practical implications for classroom spaces both inside and outside of schools, and move to "(re)humanizing research" by lifting up Black girls' voices and experiences (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016, p. 330). I use Black girls' critical literacies research as a foundation and inspiration for conducting this dissertation study in creative and humanizing ways.

Digital Literacies. A subset of critical literacies is that of digital literacies, which is of importance for this dissertation study of a virtual program. Critical media literacies (e.g. using social media to tell affirming and positive stories about Black girls' experiences) are used to interrogate texts and analyze how stereotypes are perpetuated through media and literature. Harris (2008) urged scholars to take all girls' online practices and engagement seriously because they present "new directions in activism, the construction of new participatory communities, and the development of new kinds of public selves" (p. 482). The new "public selves" are an outward expression of political and personal identities. Black girls use hashtags to use social media to mobilize and sustain activist communities (McArthur, 2016; Baker-Bell et al., 2017), use screen names to rename themselves as they would like to be identified, rather than how others identify them (Kynard, 2010), and use online Facebook book clubs to construct their identity (Greene, 2015).

The literature shows how employing technology provides students with opportunities to create meaningful projects that impact their communities (Bers, 2006) and to express their autonomy over their activities through access to people and ideas, which builds self-efficacy

(Brown, 2014). Unfortunately, although research highlights the importance of educators preparing young people to use critical literacies (Morrell, 2008), school spaces “often do not contextualize digital technologies incorporated into the literacy curricula” (Greene, 2015, p. 285). Black girls use digital literacy to understand their identities (Hall, 2011; Kynard, 2010), speak out against injustice (Kelly, 2018), and engage in activism (McArthur, 2016). Social media sites like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube allow Black women (and girls) to share their experiences and perspectives online (Bradley, 2015). As technology continues to shift and change, education spaces and pedagogical strategies must be prepared to integrate digital literacies into curriculum.

Hair and Dress

Black women and girls have worn their hair in particular styles and used dress as forms of expression and resistance for centuries. Wearing natural hair reclaims the autonomous decision to style hair in a way that best expresses a Black girls’ individuality and directly counters the Eurocentric definitions of beauty. As an example of this resistance, Venus Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity’s (2017) youth participatory action research examined Black girls’ experiences in schools with zero tolerance discipline policies. One of the participating girls set off the metal detector at her school because of the bobby pins that were keeping her hairstyle in place. She resisted when the police officer told her to take her hair out because her body was being policed (Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity, 2017). Her hairstyle was a form of art that required time, patience, and creativity and to take it down would be disrespectful of the art. Black girls use their hair to reclaim their identities and history and to resist racist and discriminatory practices and policies.

Hair has also served as a communal practice and ritual passed down through generations (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Rooks, 1996). In an after-school reading and writing collaborative, Edwards (2005) explored the idea of “doing hair” with adolescent Black girls. “Doing hair,” in the study and in Black communities, is regarded as more than just styling hair, but as a cultural marker and social engagement opportunity. “Doing hair” is an arts-based practice, where Black girls look to each other to help beautify one another through an intimate and loving process. It is a cultural ritual used throughout history, which ties Black girls not only to each other but to their ancestors (hooks, 2001).

Additionally, doing hair is an act of community health and well-being (Mbilishaka, 2018). As an example of doing hair as a form of community care, Morris (2019) told the story of a girl, Esperanza, who experienced trauma after experiencing violence in her neighborhood. Esperanza was invited to speak at a conference. While waiting for her turn to speak, she felt the overwhelming emotions of coming to terms with the violence she experienced and started crying. One friend came up to her and started to braid her hair, which soothed her tears, and as Morris described, her spirit. Through this non-traditional art form of doing hair, girls built a sense of community and deep relationships. Despite hair is a key aspect of how Black girls construct identity and build relationships, Black girls’ meaning making and experiences with their hair have not been widely studied in education research (Mbilishaka & Apugo, 2020).

Benefits of Art-Based Out-of-School Programs

Much of the previous foundational research on out-of-school and extracurricular programs focused on how participation contributes to better academic performance (Cooper et al., 1999), lower rates of school drop-out (Davalos et al., 1999), and lower levels of delinquency

(Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). Instead, this study sought to center identity construction and resistance as important benefits of participating in out-of-schools programs to focus on asset-based portrayals of students in research.

Influence Social-Emotional Development

Out-of-classroom learning spaces can serve as sites for deep relationship-building between Black girls and adult figures and amongst Black girls. Lane (2017) discussed a lunch program that used Black feminist pedagogy, entitled Black Girls United, where high school-aged Black girls met weekly to discuss historical and contemporary issues that affect their lives and to celebrate Black girlhood. Data showed that Black girls stayed in the program because of the “spirit of collectivity” (p. 21). They all wore bright red shirts with the word “queen” on it, as a reminder of their ancestry, their shared community, and the power of their relationships (Lane, 2017).

Arts programming can provide Black girls with unique opportunities to address and heal from trauma (Palidofsky & Stolbach, 2012). Related to the healing aspect of arts-based practices, Morris (2019) found that when talking to Black girls about trauma and responses to trauma, many girls noted that mindfulness and meditation practices were two techniques that schools used in place of disciplinary action. One girl noted that this was not enough as she felt she needed to express herself by moving her body, screaming, or crying before silently reflecting.

Schools often weaponize mindfulness practices as methods of complicity, stillness, and control. Morris (2019) shared, “While quiet, nonverbal modes are certainly appropriate for some scenarios, blues women teach us that humming, singing, and other musical vibrations are also somatic expressions that can soothe the spirit.” (p. 78). To express emotions in healthy and calming ways, Black girls have used arts-based practices to process and to name their feelings.

Practices, such as mindfulness, are sometimes used in schools as a mechanism for controlling students and their emotions; however, schools must move to allowing students to find solace and express themselves in practices of their choice (e.g. dancing, humming, crying).

Oftentimes out-of-school spaces provide Black girls a space that meets their needs for comfort and community when they are not met in school spaces. Out-of-school programs can be spaces for refuge from societal expectations when constructed and implemented in an intentional way (e.g. not making Black girls conform to respectability politics) (Cooper, 2017). These programs can serve as spaces for Black girls to recognize, understand, and harness their power, talents, and stories.

Supplement the Curriculum

Schools teach through a Eurocentric lens that privileges the “master narrative,” or the ideologies, beliefs, and history from the perspective of the white, middle class (Lawson & Payne, 2006). The privileging of teaching colonization erases the experiences of Black people (and also Indigenous communities). For instance, a study found that only 8-9% of class time is devoted to Black history (NMAAHC, 2015). A study of one textbook found that there were only 53 images of Black women, in comparison to 232 images of white women (Woyshmer & Shocker, 2015). Additionally, Mims & Williams (2020) found that when Black girls described learning about race in school, they only learned about enslavement. Thus, as Stevenson (1995) posited, the misrepresentation of Black culture and the overrepresentation of white people in curriculum may lead Black youth to feel “missed.”

The limited representation of Black experiences in schools lead to Black young people feeling like their ancestral contributions are diminished or absent, which is a “type of emotional destruction legitimized as teaching.” (Jones, 2020, p. 2) This curricular violence (Jones, 2020)

contributes to how schools are both symbolically and physically violent spaces for Black students.

Deficit teaching about Black people can impact Black girls' experiences in school, a site of socialization that influences their understandings about their race and gender (Banks, 2007). To fill the curricular gap that does not amplify Black people's stories, out-of-school programming must connect Black girls "to their unique histories and their Blackness" (Nyachae, 2016, p. 799). While programs may connect Black girls to one another, it is critically important to also examine historical context and connect them to the rich legacy of their ancestry. A study that used Black feminist pedagogy in after-school programming showed that participating Black girls had a heightened critical consciousness of Black women's history, a more positive sense of self-esteem that resisted negative stereotypes, and a more positive view of school than those who did not participate (Lane, 2017). Knowing their history helps Black girls to see beyond the one-dimensional narratives about Black history in school. Out-of-school spaces supplement the K-12 curriculum with meaningful and resonant topics to Black girls and their experiences.

Positive Racial and Gender Identity Formation

Out-of-school spaces have proven to be effective in helping Black girls build positive racial and gender identities (Brittian Loyd & Williams, 2017). According to Wheeler et al. (2005), "Girls are best served in gender-sensitive programs – programs that pay explicit attention to gender, as well as to race, culture, and other aspects of girls' lives such as socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, and immigrant status" (p. 7). I argue that gender-sensitive programs must also be culturally-sustaining in order to best serve Black girls. Programs must provide a space to process through interlocking systems of oppression (intersections of race, gender, and

other identities) without placing hegemonic norms and patriarchal viewpoints that constrain their girlhood or racial identity.

Programs that address the intersections of both Black girls' Blackness and their girlhood help them to successfully navigate and construct their identities. It is important to note that programs that promote "empowerment" (Brown, 2013) or advocate for an exclusive model for how Black girls should act (Nyachae & Ohito, 2019) can be harmful spaces that reproduce respectability politics and further constrain Black girls' identities. Thus, programs must build critical consciousness and center liberatory pedagogy. By liberatory pedagogy, I refer to education that is centered in social change and transformation through critical consciousness-raising (Freire, 1970).

Negative experiences with racial discrimination (e.g. Eurocentric curriculum) can hinder the identity formation process of Black girls, while positive experiences around affirming racial identity can provide a sense of protection from racial discrimination. As an example, The Young Empowered Sisters (YES!) program, focused on strengthening four cultural assets in its participants: ethnic identity, communalistic values, critical awareness of racism, and engagement in liberatory youth activism (Thomas, Davidson, & McAdoo, 2008). The program's curriculum included the core values of African culture, one of them being *Kuumba* or creativity. Findings demonstrated that students participating in the program had a stronger sense of ethnic identity than those who did not. In building a strong sense of ethnic identity through artistic practices and learning about creativity in African culture, the girls in the YES! program used their arts-based practices as a tool for activism (Thomas, Davidson, & McAdoo, 2008). In this sense, Black girls used arts-based practices to not only develop resistance, but see the historical legacy of their

resistance. The confidence and sense of strong identity they develop in arts-based programs then serve as a form of protection -- it is armor they wear against racism and discrimination.

The arts also make it possible for children to imagine a world rooted in social justice and challenge stereotypical notions about their intersecting identities (Love, 2019). This act of envisioning through artistic endeavors opens up new possibilities for Black girls to imagine who they want to be during a pivotal point of adolescent development. Unlike other extracurricular activities, art does not reinforce interpersonal competition. It legitimizes the strength of emotion as adolescent Black girls try to make meaning of their world and their racial identity. Overall, these programs create spaces that are holistically -- emotionally, mentally, physically, intellectually -- safe for Black girls to express themselves and explore their identities. From my own personal experience facilitating art programs for ten years, these spaces encourage Black girls to process their experiences through creative expression.

Summary of the Chapter and Research Gaps

In this chapter, I explored the literature on three major areas: 1) misconceptions and stereotypes about Black girls 2) art education and the arts-based practices of Black girls, including theatre and role play, movement and music, critical and digital literacies, and hair, and 3) the benefits of out-of-school arts programs. I reviewed literature in education, extracurricular and out-of-school programming, Black girlhood, history, sociology, psychology, and performance studies to put these fields in conversation with one another.

There are many misconceptions about Black girls, including that they are faring better than Black boys, have experiences comparable to white girls, and are strong and need less nurturing. Despite these misconceptions, Black girls continue to exhibit strength that must be recognized in tandem with how they are impacted by oppression. Resistance, rather than

resilience, is a more appropriate term to describe how Black girls counter stereotypes while also putting the onus on structures and systems to change.

The literature on culturally-sustaining art education is scant and often only inclusive of hip hop pedagogy. While hip hop pedagogy is foundational to this study, it cannot be the only way education researchers and practitioners discuss culturally-sustaining art practices and pedagogy because it may exclude the multiple and varied ways that Black girls express themselves. Black girls use arts-based practices such as theatre and role play, movement and music, hair, and critical and digital literacies to resist oppressive narratives and stereotypes and construct their identities.

Previous literature on extracurricular and out-of-school programming has studied the impacts of these on student engagement or achievement; however, this approach often painted Black students in a negative light. Out-of-school arts-based programming literature for Black girls shows that these programs can aid in social-emotional development, supplement Eurocentric curriculum in K-12 schools, and contribute to positive racial and gender identity formation.

The literature reviewed in this chapter creates the foundation for this dissertation study. It also reveals areas where additional research is needed. While the current literature highlights programming for Black girls, it does not discuss the implications for virtual programming, especially in light of a global pandemic. This research study offers a more in-depth examination of multiple forms of art, as well as offers insights on what type of art Black girls choose in performance ethnography. Black girl critical and digital literacies literature often uses case study methodology or other qualitative inquiry, while this study uses creative and participatory

methodology. Simultaneously, education research at large includes little to no studies that integrate performance ethnography as methodology.

Lastly, this study adds to the culturally sustaining art pedagogy literature by providing pedagogical practices relevant for Black girls. While many empirical studies focus on pre-service teachers and the literature broadly is theoretical or conceptual, this study centers students' perspectives.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework and Pedagogical Framework

Conceptual Framework

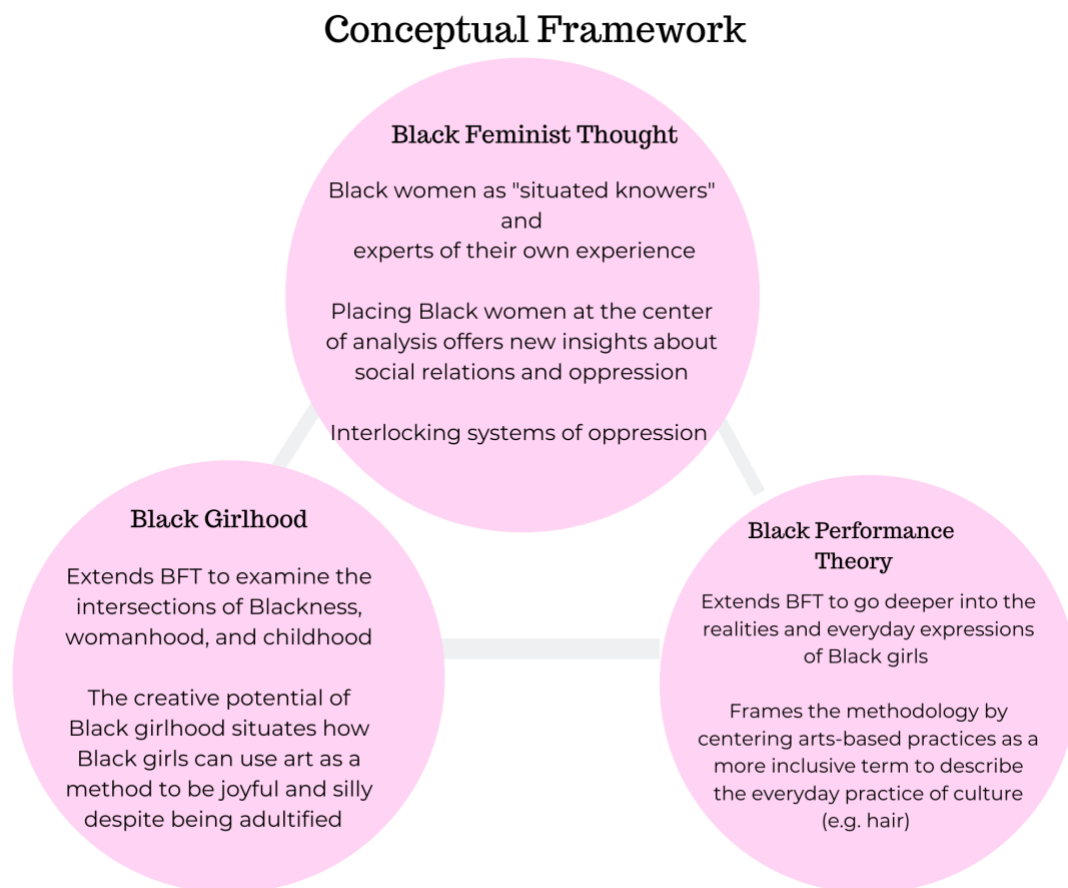
In this chapter, I introduce the conceptual framework that theoretically underpins the study, as well as the pedagogical framework that influenced the curriculum development and facilitation of the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program. This study is theoretically grounded in Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990), Black girlhood (Brown, 2009; 2013), and Black Performance Theory (DeFrantz & Gonzalez, 2014). I also used culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2014), Black Feminist Pedagogy (Omolade, 1987), and Abolitionist Teaching (Love, 2019) to root my pedagogy in liberatory practices aimed at uplifting and celebrating Black history and culture.

The overarching theoretical framework that grounds the study is Black Feminist Thought (BFT), as this theory places Black women's lived experiences at the center of analysis to offer new insights about their social relations and how to dismantle multiple oppressions. An underlying premise of this study is that Black women are experts of their own experiences and offer unique insights about power and privilege because of their "both/and" position of understanding society from the lenses of race, gender, and sometimes class oppression.

Black girlhood extends BFT by examining the intersections of Blackness, womanhood, and childhood. Recognizing that research has shown that Black girls are viewed as more adult-like than white girls, Black girlhood provides a theoretical frame for the creative potential of Black girls (Brown, 2013; Epstein, et al., 2017). In this creative potential, Black girls can use art as a playful method to be joyful and silly (some of the affordances of childhood), despite stereotypes that often depict them as adult-like. This framework also considers both their individual strengths and the context of the world they live in.

Black Performance Theory also extends BFT by going deeper into the lived realities and everyday expressions of Black girls. This framework also shapes the methodology used in this study as diverse arts-based practices better represent how Black girls produce and express art in daily performances of culture, such as hair and language. Together, these three frameworks center Black girls' experiences, voices, and artistic expressions to better understand the bidirectional influences of social context and Black girls' individual realities. Figure 1 illuminates the main postulates of each theoretical perspective, which I examine deeper in the following sections.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Black Feminist Thought

Collins (1990), in her theorization of Black Feminist Thought, emphasized that the lived experiences of Black womanhood are essential to the creation of new knowledge. This new knowledge plays an important role in highlighting oppressed and marginalized groups' power in speaking back to and actively fighting against oppression. BFT centers Black women in defining reality based on their own experiences and not from the distortions that dominant groups (e.g., white men) perpetuate to uphold the power hierarchy in society. This is important because as the late Zora Neale Hurston said, "If you are silent about your pain, they'll [members of the dominant group] kill you and say you enjoyed it." In other words, when Black women's stories are erased, hierarchies of domination continue because of stereotypes that distort the experiences of Black women.

The main tenets of Black Feminist Thought that frame this study include examining interlocking systems of oppression in Black womanhood and establishing Black women as agents of knowledge. Black women are "situated knowers" and experts of their own experiences with interlocking systems of oppression. Collins (1990) inserts that Black women are asset-defined and self-reliant women tackling racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

Historically, Black women have used art as blues singers, poets, and storytellers to express the truth of their inner lives, discuss the struggles of the Black community, but also to give voice to Black women's creativity (Berry & Gross, 2020). Black women have long used the blues as a transformative tool of resistance and survival for centuries. Morris (2019) says, "They [blues women] know what they know, and they know that they know it" (p. 127). Not only are they experts of their own experiences, but have a unique worldview that is communicated through soulful, creative outlets.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality* to describe the multiple oppressions that individuals experience at the intersection of the many and sometimes conflicting identities individuals have. Black feminist scholars, such as Anna Julia Cooper, Patricia Hill Collins, and Barbara Smith also centered their work around the intersections of Blackness and womanhood. Anna Julia Cooper considered how Black women are “doubly enslaved” because of their multiple, oppressed identities (Moody-Turner, 2009). Frances Beal coined the term “double jeopardy” in 1969 to describe these oppressions as being different from Black men or white women.

Collins (2000) argued that Black women have a self-defined standpoint that is situated within a “both/and” conceptual orientation. The idea of “both/and” represents the experience of Black women who are members of the Black race and members of a gender group. This orientation, Collins (2000) stated, of standing with and yet apart from both groups is the foundation of Black women’s consciousness and their interactions with the world. Their “both/and” worldview from the lens of race, class, and gender creates new possibilities and solutions for dismantling oppressive structures and offers new insights about the potential of society when white, cisheteropatriarchy is not centered as the norm. Black feminism⁶ is centered in the present study to recognize the intersections of oppression that Black women experience at the intersections of their multiple, oppressed identities (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991).

⁶ Acknowledging the criticism of many scholars about Black women’s troubled relationship to feminist movements, I use Black Feminist Theory in partnership with Black womanism to highlight the importance of Black women in the feminist movement; a movement in which they were overshadowed by narratives about white women’s contributions. Mainstream feminism has been dominated by the interests of white women who have supported racist policies such as the sterilization of Black women: an attempt to police and suppress the Black woman’s body. Further, in her definition of womanism, Alice Walker (1983) stated a Womanist, “Loves music. Loves dance.” The idea of movement being a part of the definition of womanism, juxtaposed with attempts to control of Black women’s bodies denotes a symbolic representation of the freedom and appreciation of movement and music as being an integral piece of how Black girls express themselves inside and outside of classrooms.

Specifically, it is important to note that I use BFT to also take up a critical analysis of power and how white supremacist power hoarding has long impacted Black girls' experiences. One of the key components of Black Feminist Thought is that both changed individual consciousness of oppression and changed political and economic institutions are necessary for social transformation.

In this study, Black girls are not compared to white girls, who are often the comparison group and the standard for femininity. In Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach's (2008) model of intersectional invisibility, they argue that those with intersecting subordinate-group identities are viewed as deviations from the standard, rather than their own standard. This leads to historical invisibility, cultural invisibility, and political invisibility. As to not render Black girls and their experiences as deviants from the standard, this study refutes the notion that white girls are the norm and studies Black girls as their own focus group. I argue that Black girls should not be regarded as deviant from any standards and are worthy of their own scholarship. Although Black Feminist Thought grounds this study by emphasizing the importance of Black women's voices and experiences in schools, Black Girlhood theory provides a critical lens to understand the impacts of educational spaces on Black girls' development.

Black Girlhood

Girlhood studies as a field focuses on girlhood and girls' social and cultural experiences to move away from an adult focus. Girlhood studies, a subfield of women's and gender's studies, has historically been a field rooted in Eurocentric values about what it means to be a girl in a white male patriarchal society (Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity, 2017; Kearney, 2009). Girlhood studies has been criticized for its lack of analysis around and discussion of girls of color (Harris et al., 2005; Kearney, 2009). In contrast, Black girlhood highlights how Black girls

add critical perspectives about human experiences, produce and validate knowledge that disrupts dominant deficit-based narratives, and use experiences as a source of strength (Wright, 2016; Brown, 2013). It extends Black Feminist Theory to include childhood as a focal point of analysis. While research shows that Black girls are viewed as more adult-like than white girls, it is essential to study how they still experience and express childhood joy and creativity despite the systems that oppress them (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017).

Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) in her book *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip Hop Feminist Pedagogy* discussed how Black girlhood could be used as a powerful tool for Black girls to create safe spaces for themselves and each other, despite society deeming them as a variation of the norm (i.e. white girlhood). Brown (2009) also offered an important note of critical reflection about programming that "Programming for programming sake defines young people as the problem" (p. 28). Instead, Black Girlhood and BFT taken together examines *power* inside and outside of programming, so programming is not used as an act of saviorism, but rather centers Black girls' desires.

As Aria Halliday (2017) stated, Black girlhood is a "scholarly home for Black girls' perspectives, sensibilities, and experiences in the U.S. and abroad" (p. 66). While much of Black girlhood theorization is still relatively on the rise, much of the theory is rooted in the work of Black women writers, scholars, and artists, such as Ntozake Shange, bell hooks, and Toni Morrison. Further, scholars such as LaKisha Simmons (2015) and Marcia Chatelain (2015) told Black girls' stories through historical examinations of place and space, while other scholars, like Nazera Sadiq Wright (2016), have explored Black girlhood in literature to examine societal conversations about femininity.

Black girls are confronted with developing their identities and representing themselves while also seeing and internalizing negative images and rhetoric about Black girlhood (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Black girls' identities are not fixed but rather are complex, multidimensional, and multilayered (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). In this, Black girlhood became an important framework to shape my methodology. I knew I could not fully understand the complexity of Black girlhood without their direct input. Further, Brown (2013) argued that when Black girls examine their lived experiences, they come up with radically unique ideas about those experiences, as compared to educational researchers who try to define Black girlhood experiences without their input. Black Girlhood informed the development of the program curriculum, which iterated, shifted, and adapted to respond to participants' needs and desires. It also informed methodology to ensure that the research methods were participatory and encouraged Black girls to voice their opinions about their experiences.

Black Performance Theory

While the study combined the aforementioned frameworks to examine Black girls' experiences, Black Performance Theory adds the nuance of studying arts-based methods, tools, and approaches to how Black girls might counter deficit narratives and enact their identities. This expands Black Feminist Theory and Black girlhood by going deeper into the lived realities of Black girls through examining arts-based practices. As DeFrantz & Gonzalez (2014) note, "Black expressive performance springs from the need to communicate beyond the limited events of the world alone" (p. 3). In other words, there are multiple ways in which Black girls may communicate and express their identities and acts of resistance -- some of these ways communicate beyond what can be verbally expressed or written.

Black Performance Theory also adds the importance of community and culture in studying and understanding the nuance of Black girl identity and of their arts-based practices. It places performance as a central element of social and cultural life. This theory also extends conversations of art beyond the traditional four types (i.e., dance, visual arts, theatre, and music) and beyond the schooling context (Parsad, Spiegelman, & Coopersmith, 2012). Art, rather, is the expressive behavior of everyday practices. For example, how Black girls choose to wear their hair in certain styles to honor their ancestors, to communicate messages about their personality, or to conform to Eurocentric norms, is artistic. This everyday practice is, in essence, an artform that is often not regarded as such and also an embodiment of culture.

Further, Black Performance Theory upholds that although race is a social construct, Black performance is created in response to imagined identities within the context of white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, homophobic society (DeFrantz & Gonzalez, 2014). It is also an act of preservation of culture and history. DeFrantz & Gonzalez (2014) stated that this performance of Blackness is action and in this action, it “enlarge(s) capacity, confirm(s) presence” (p. 5). Despite the emotional, physical, and psychological violence that is often enacted onto the Black body, the body physically makes itself larger as an act of resistance through art. Camille A. Brown in her TEDx talk on BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play (2016) stated that, “The most challenging and rewarding role I have ever had to play in my life is being myself. Showing my humanity now is my greatest intention.” As Black girls construct their identities, they also assert and laminate those identities through performance -- these performances allow them to deepen their identity, while also exploring or “trying on” multiple identities. Performance allows them to assert their identities and take up space, when they are

often told through media messages and through the “spirit murdering” (Love, 2019) of school that they should not.

I combine these three theoretical frameworks to highlight three epistemological standpoints: 1) Black girls’ experiences should be centered in research to provide new possibilities for dismantling hierarchical structures of power and privilege; 2) Black girls (and women) are “situated knowers” and experts of their unique lived experiences at the intersection of race, gender, and other oppressed identities; and 3) the performance of everyday acts of culture are important in understanding how Black girls challenge dominant narratives in education that often silence and minimize their lived experiences.

Pedagogical Framework

Besides the theoretical perspectives discussed in the conceptual framework, I also relied on pedagogical frameworks for the co-construction and implementation of the Black Girls S.O.A.R. virtual summer program. I used the major pillars of culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), Black feminist pedagogy (Omolade, 1987), and Abolitionist Teaching (Love, 2019) to guide my teaching philosophy and pedagogy, as well as the curricular content of the program. In this section, I share what pedagogical frameworks I used and how they grounded the program structure and my facilitation.

Culturally-Sustaining Pedagogy

There has been an evolution in the development of pedagogical approaches that elevate marginalized students’ voices and experiences. Twenty-five years ago, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the term culturally relevant pedagogy to provide a framework for moving beyond deficit conceptualizations of students of Color and their cultures. Theories about culturally relevant pedagogy show that a curriculum that reflects students’ lived experiences and culturally-

relevant topics and content are important for Students' of Color engagement. Culturally relevant pedagogy also promotes the importance of teachers that are competent and compassionate and classrooms where students feel valued and are provided with the tools and skills necessary to reach their full potential (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Noguera, 2016).

Similar to culturally-relevant pedagogy, culturally-responsive teaching is defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students.” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). In other words, this pedagogy responds to students' talents and unique contributions. Gay's concept of culturally-responsive teaching is centered on teaching practices.

Paris (2012) offered an extension to culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy that illuminated the importance of not only having the content and pedagogy be relevant or responsive to students' experiences, but rather *sustain* their cultures in the classroom and beyond. In Gloria Ladson-Billing's words, culturally-sustaining pedagogy “speaks to the changing and evolving needs of dynamic systems” (2014, p. 76). Sustaining, in this case, means to preserve the lifeways of communities whose cultures and experiences have typically been erased or diminished through the process of schooling. For example, sustaining Black girls' literacies (e.g. art, social media) would mean not simply adding it as an after-thought to curriculum, but centering it in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Culturally-sustaining pedagogy seeks to honor cultural pluralism, in that it elevates both within-group and intergroup cultural practices. Black girls' epistemologies and their arts-based practices are also considered

central to curriculum, pedagogy, and for their greater contribution to the cultural heartbeat of society.

When some schools in the United States are banning teaching people's history and enforcing policies that uplift 'patriotic education' (i.e. not grappling with the history of looting, violence, and colonization that the United States was built on), it is even more imperative that students' cultures are elevated. If not, we risk the continuation of educating generations based on white, middle-class, heteropatriarchal norms and values. These values then shape our society and what is regarded as "correct," while all other expressions of culture are criminalized. As the United States has tried to embrace a monolithic society (i.e. a melting pot where individuals should embrace one identity -- "American"), culturally-sustaining pedagogy reminds us of the beauty and power of diverse cultures.

Educators must note "how young people importantly both rehearse traditional version(s) of ethnic and linguistic difference(s) and offer new visions of ethnic and linguistic difference(s)" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). In other words, young people maintain traditional cultural practices, while also remixing, and extending those practices into the future. Culturally-sustaining pedagogy centers the fluidity of culture. Culture is dynamic and shifts in varied ways. Specifically, students may borrow, adapt, and extend cultural practices by blending together what they learn at home, in their communities, with peers, and online. Students might draw from many cultural practices and traditions. Culturally-sustaining pedagogy honors the past, while also creates spaces for students to explore, shape, and adapt new iterations of culture. Culturally-sustaining pedagogy guided many of the pedagogical choices for the summer workshop, including collecting oral history testimonies from their loved ones to engage with co-researchers' cultural stories and utilizing an artform that best expressed their meaning-making processes.

Black Feminist Pedagogy

Black feminist pedagogy privileges “a mindset of intellectual inclusion and expansion” (Omolade, 1987, p. 32) and is a “creation of an intellectual partnership” (p. 35). In other words, it moves beyond the “banking” model or the idea that students are vessels to be filled with knowledge by a teacher that holds the knowledge (Freire, 1970) and approaches learning with humility and openness.

Black feminist pedagogy guided my facilitation in the Black Girls S.O.A.R program in that it honors students as intellectual equals. Regardless of my experience and expertise in education, there is much more that I can learn from Black girls’ and their experiences. To facilitate critical thinking during the program, I shared open-ended questions, admitted when I did not know an answer to a question, and let the co-researchers lead by starting all conversations about a topic with, “What do you know about or think about this?” to privilege co-researchers’ knowledge. By approaching facilitation from a Black Feminist pedagogical perspective, I was reflexive of my privilege. I did not always get facilitation “right.” There were times where I shared a story out of excitement or jumped into the conversation before someone else had the opportunity to share. Part of this pedagogy leads with a commitment that goes beyond the classroom (Henry, 2005). To me, this meant reflecting and unpacking my pedagogy after every session and striving to engage in on-going, critical self-reflection.

Abolitionist Teaching

Bettina Love’s (2019) conceptualization of abolitionist teaching poses a call-to-action to dismantle current schooling structures and build new structures. The premise is that schools operate exactly how they were formed to operate -- to educate the masses to become workers who conform and reinforce hierarchies in a capitalistic society. Institutions, such as schools, do

not need to be reformed, but instead replaced. Love (2019) also emphasized that abolitionist teaching is not just a teaching practice, it is a way of life. It is about putting Black joy and love at the center of practice.

Through Black Girls S.O.A.R., I sought to create an alternative to traditional schooling spaces, where Black girls' creativity was centered and truth-telling was a cornerstone of the curriculum. In the spirit of abolitionist values -- creativity, determination, rebellious spirit, subversiveness, love, and freedom -- I invited the co-researchers to dream alongside me about how schools and society could look and feel if they were built based on love and community (Love, 2019).

The aforementioned pedagogical frameworks were used in the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program by centering students' knowledge and expertise and honoring them as partners in the learning process. The pedagogical frameworks are more than just teaching strategies, but commitments to building a just world by honoring student's historical cultural practices, while simultaneously dreaming and creating new practices together.

Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter, I detailed the conceptual framework that guided the study and the pedagogical framework that shaped the construction and implementation of the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program. The conceptual framework wove together Black Feminist Thought, Black girlhood, and Black Performance Theory to center Black girls' experiences in the research, particularly how they use art in their daily practices as mechanisms for identity construction and resistance. The conceptual framework also shaped the methodology. Through the methodology, I chose to include co-researchers in the data collection and data analysis processes and used art as a way for them to share what the data meant to them. I made this decision so that Black girls'

voices would be centered in the study and to highlight the varied ways they use their voice (i.e. art).

The pedagogical framework influenced the development of the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program and my approach to facilitating the conversations and art-making. I used culturally-sustaining pedagogy, Black Feminist pedagogy, and abolitionist teaching to guide my pedagogy. Each of the frameworks centered the inclusion of Black student's cultures and lived experiences in curricular content and pedagogical methods. I chose these frameworks not only for how they explicitly uplift Black students and refute Eurocentric curricula, but also because they position teaching as a political act. Every pedagogical or programmatic choice I made was rooted in wanting the co-researchers to experience liberatory pedagogy.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter describes the research design and methodology utilized to conduct this study. As a reminder, the purpose of study is to answer the following research questions: *How, if at all, do Black girls use arts-based practices (such as movement and music), as forms of identity construction and resistance? What specific attributes of Black girls' involvement in art programs foster identity construction and acts of resistance?* In the first section of the chapter, I describe the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program and curriculum, including the core pillars of the program. Then, I share the research design, my positionality, as well as grapple with my reflexivity and my role in the study. In the third section I discuss the study context, the research setting and co-researchers, and procedures for data collection and analysis. I end the chapter with a discussion on validity and ethical considerations.

The Program: Black Girls S.O.A.R.

Black Girls S.O.A.R. (Scholarship, Organizing, Arts, and Research) was designed to bring middle and high school-aged (14-17 years old) Black girls together to participate in arts-based activities to learn about Black Feminist Thought, Black history, leadership, activism, social change, and community organizing through a healing-centered lens. The program met for five, two-hour sessions over the summer in 2020, which culminated in a performance for an audience they invited. The workshop curriculum was centered in the co-construction of a Black girlhood performance that showcased co-researchers' challenges, triumphs, and stories to the community. We used art including dance, visual art, social media, poetry, theatre, and more, to process, reflect, and express our thoughts, ideas, and emotions.

The first session explored Black history and the history of resistance through learning about Black women activists and artists (i.e. activist-artists), including Maya Angelou, Judith

Jamison, Faith Ringgold, Audre Lorde, Destiny Watford, and more. In the second session, co-researchers talked about the meaning of self and community care and traced the roots of self-care back to the Black Panther Party. With an emphasis on self, we crafted arts-based work that captured the counter-storytelling tenet of Critical Race Theory. During the third session we talked about dreaming our futures into existence using song lyrics and science fiction work as points of analyses. We discussed Afrofuturism⁷ and what it means to write ourselves into the stories of the present and the future, with inspiration by Octavia Butler, Janelle Monáe, and N.K. Jemisin. During this session we also learned about qualitative coding and collectively coded the transcripts from our first three sessions. During our fourth session, we created our own Ten Point Program based on the Black Panther Party's program and decided what individual and collective actions we could take to fight for our demands.

In developing the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program, there were a number of considerations that shaped both the curricular content and structure of the program, including: 1) my personal experiences as an educator developing and running similar programs with Black girls, 2) the co-researchers' interests identified in our pre-interviews, 3) literature about Black girl programming, culturally-sustaining pedagogy, Black Feminist pedagogy, abolitionist teaching, and 4) continued racial injustice in the United States and COVID-19.

Curriculum Development. As an educator, I have been co-creating and facilitating culturally-sustaining arts programs with Black girls for ten years; the curriculum and structure is grounded in years of experience and from the input and feedback of Black girl students throughout that tenure. While previous programs I developed focused on pillars of exploring self,

⁷ Afrofuturism is described as an aesthetic that explores the intersections between cultures of the African diaspora and technology. It was coined by author Mark Dery in the 1990's.

community, and action, Black Girls S.O.A.R. also incorporated an examination of history. In the pre-interviews, the co-researchers noted that they wanted to learn about Black history; this became a key theme of our conversations and art-making. Much of the historical components of the program and some of lessons (e.g., Resistance 101 mixer introducing Black women artists and activists detailed in Chapter 5), were adapted from, and inspired by, the Zinn Education Project materials and the work of D.C. Area Educators for Social Justice, where I served as an education fellow from 2019-2021.

The curriculum was created iteratively. The choices I made heavily relied on the ideas, thoughts, and interests of the girls in the program. While I had topics in mind for each session before the pre-interviews (e.g. Black history, Black women artists, Afrofuturism), the specific details were not solidified until I conducted the pre-interviews. I also added topics for discussion from their interests that were not originally in my outline. For example, in the second session, we discussed how the Black Panther Party revolutionized the term “self-care.” Co-researchers shared that they wanted to know more about the Black Panther Party, so in the fourth session, we analyzed the Black Panther Party Ten Point Program and created our own ten point platform. The activities and prompts of each session were informed by the conversations we had in previous sessions (see below for a detailed description of the program curriculum and structure).

The literature review and conceptual framework in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation provided another layer of information to apply evidence-based strategies, pedagogies, and practices. Pedagogies, such as Black feminist pedagogy, culturally-sustaining pedagogy, and abolitionist teaching (detailed in-depth in Chapter 3), informed my facilitation and teaching practices to hold space for as non-hierarchical a learning space as possible.

The program was responsive to the co-researchers' desire for community. Not only were we, Black Girls S.O.A.R. co-researchers, creating a space to process and heal from collective grief and trauma, we were also preparing to begin another academic year of emergency remote learning. Because of the compounding factors of current events, it was imperative that the space was centered in healing, less structured than a formal classroom, and flexible and adaptable to the changing and uncertain nature of the world. For example, co-researchers and I created and operationalized Community Agreements together, rather than have "rules." The collective and iterative process enabled us to turn our cameras on and off, eat snacks, be in our most comfortable spaces, wear clothes that best represented us, and disengage when we needed to.

Program Dynamics. The virtual nature of the program impacted program dynamics. Because we were all coming together as a collective without meeting one another in person, we had to learn each other's interaction styles. Some of the co-researchers were quieter than others. I observed that the co-researchers who were just starting high school were less vocal than the co-researchers who were entering their junior and senior years of high school. I tried to balance their perspectives by using the chat box to ask for their thoughts. If they did not want to share out loud, they could message me privately in the chat box and I could read their notes out loud to the group. I also recognize that participation was not just verbal; each co-researcher created powerful and moving artwork that told important stories and offered insightful contributions to our community.

We also used the sisterhood circle as a space to make sure everyone had a turn to be heard. My intention was to make sure each of the co-researchers felt seen and heard. Admittedly, especially in a virtual space, it is more challenging to do that. My pedagogy and orientation to facilitation is to not call people out or put them on the spot to answer, so there were many

moments where I had to lean into silence to give space for processing after I asked a question. I grappled with this because I wanted to give all of the co-researchers an opportunity to share, but I also did not want them to feel like they had to verbally share as to not privilege that form of communication. Because of this, I am reflective of how the dynamics may have privileged some voices over others.

Despite the challenges that arose from trying to balance the co-researchers' perspectives, we were supportive of one another. There were no contentious moments and many of the conversations offered resounding consensus and agreement. There were times where co-researchers "piggybacked" off one another, or in other words, added in agreement to what others shared previously. Many times the conversations felt like a delicate dance that was equally improvisational and choreographed. The group moved together seamlessly, with the occasional addition of a viewpoint or opinion that allowed us to deepen our thinking as a group. As a reflection, I recognize that the harmonious nature of the program may be in part to the virtual format and to the shorter time period of the five-week program.

While some of the conversations were heavy, none of the conversations felt difficult. I recognize that this statement comes from my own place of privilege and frequently being in many spaces where conversations are challenging. While this is my perspective, it may not be reflective of how co-researchers understood the conversations. We discussed topics like not feeling loved or accepted, being judged by our "loudness" and our hair and dress, and frustrations about how history is taught in school and how it affects us. Co-researchers shared remarks that had been made about them and to them, and even though they presented the feedback they received alongside their own counter-narratives, reliving those moments and hearing those words out loud can be difficult. When conversation topics were heavy, we took a

break, did some breathing exercises, or created some artwork. I also followed up with co-researchers through direct messages in the chat box or via email after the sessions to check in on them.

It was also important to me to remain in contact with their loved ones. I sent out weekly emails to both the co-researchers and their loved ones, letting them know what the theme of the session would be. I also made sure that loved ones and co-researchers had my phone number, in case anything came up. Since their parents and caregivers are an important part of their lives, I wanted to make sure to include them in the process, as they were entrusting me with holding space for their daughters.

Program Curriculum and Structure. Each session consisted of three parts: 1) Community-Building (Ubuntu), 2) Discussion/activities, and 3) Sisterhood circle. The sessions aimed to create a space where co-researchers could share their stories, but also where they knew they had the choice to decline to share if they did not want to.

Table 1. Session Activities and Agenda

Sessi on	Topic(s)	Ubuntu	Discussion/ Activities	Sisterhood Circle
1	Black History	Prompt: Share an object that has meaning to you/makes you feel powerful.	<p>Discussion: What have we learned about Black history at school, at home, or in your activities? What are the stories we've learned?</p> <p>Discussion: What does resistance mean to you? What ways do you think Black people resisted throughout history? What were they resisting?</p> <p>Activity: Poetry of defiance</p> <p>Activity: Resistance 101 (Black women activist meet</p>	Prompt: Share a time where you used your strength and your power to resist something that was wrong.

			and greet)	
2	Identity/Care/ Counter-narratives	Prompt: Draw a significant event that happened over the past six months (it could be in the world, something personal to you, you can draw anything that comes up!)	<p>Discussion: What is self care? What are some ways we take care of ourselves?</p> <p>Activity: Affirmation artwork</p> <p>Activity: Identity bubbles - what identities are most important to you?</p> <p>Activity: Dual self-portraits</p> <p>Activity: Counter-narrative song lyrics</p> <p>Discussion: Why is it important to share our stories?</p>	Prompt: Imagine you're writing a letter to future generations that will go in every student's textbook. What would be the title of the letter? Why? What life lesson would you share with them?
3	Afrofuturism/ Research Training (known as: data coding party)	Prompt: If you had a superpower, what would it be and why?	<p>Discussion: What is Afrofuturism?</p> <p>Activity: Afrofuturistic dream worlds</p> <p>Discussion: View Afrofuturistic art and Janelle Monae and Erykah Badu's QUEEN Music video</p> <p>Training: Research and coding training</p>	Prompt: What is one "gift" (attributes about yourself) you bring to our circle?
4	Activism/ Organizing	Activity: What My Hands Hold	<p>Discussion; Why should we make art? How has art been used as activism?</p> <p>Activity: Black Panther Party Ten Point program</p>	We used the circle time to plan our Community Arts Showcase.
5	Community Arts Showcase	During this session, co-researchers and I put on a performance with the artwork we created to an audience they wanted to invite.	-	-

We started each session with a community-building exercise, called Ubuntu, which translates to "I am because we are" in Zulu. Community building exercises included a question

or art prompt, such as “Share an object that has meaning to you or makes you feel powerful,” “Draw a significant event that happened over the last six months,” and “If you had a superpower, what would it be and why?” An example of an interactive activity is an exercise called *What My Hands Hold*, where they traced their hand and inside drew the societal problems they wish to solve. Around the hand they drew the unique strengths and talents they could use to influence and change society. They also drew the people and places that are in their network that they could rely on to support their social justice work. After Ubuntu, we discussed or reviewed the Black Girl S.O.A.R. community agreements. Our community agreements were: “We take care of ourselves, we take care of each other” and “Throw sunshine, not shade.” “Throw sunshine, not shade” means that if we disagreed with something that someone said or did, rather than call them out or shame them, we called them into conversation by asking clarifying questions to understand where they might be coming from.

Second, I introduced an interactive activity or art reflection based on the topics that Black girl co-researchers wanted to learn. Some of the topics were: self and communal care, activism, and Black artists and activists in history (See Table 1 for an outline of all sessions, topics, and activities). An example of an interactive activity included sketching dual self-portraits, which represented how they see themselves and how they believe others see them, to speak back to negative narratives and stereotypes they have heard.

The final session was a performance, which was called “#HistoryRewritten.” The performance program integrated both opportunities for them to highlight their individual talents and stories, while also telling a shared story of Black girl resistance through community poetry, affirmations, and a call-to-action. We shared poetry, their song lyric counter-narratives, their dual self-portraits, their art affirmations, and their Ten Point program. One co-researcher sang

Stevie Wonder’s “Don’t Worry about a Thing” and another co-researcher played Josh Groban’s “You Raise Me Up” on her instrument. Through the Community Arts Showcase, we also incorporated an exchange of stories, by inviting an audience *talkback*. A *talkback* is where after a performance, those involved with the production (i.e. in this case, the co-researchers) have an informal discussion with the audience. It is an opportunity for the audience to ask questions and provide feedback. The audience asked the co-researchers to share how they came up with the works of art and the meaning and themes behind how they expressed the data and what they learned. During the *talkback* the co-researchers also asked the audience to share their perspectives and their stories.

Figure 2. Community Arts Showcase Program



Core Pillars of the Curriculum

Ubuntu. Ubuntu is Zulu for “I am because we are.” It comes from “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” which means, “a person is a person through other people.” It is an African concept

for humanity and how we are all interconnected. This principle not only was the name of our check-ins to open each session, but was embedded within the framework and curriculum of the program. For example, our community agreement, “We take care of ourselves, we take care of each other” was an embodiment of *Ubuntu*.

As part of *Ubuntu*, we called in the words of our ancestors, elders, and other Black women activists and artists by reading direct quotes and referring back to their words during our conversations. For instance, in one of the activities we used India.Arie’s and Solange’s song lyrics as a foundation to craft our own counter-narratives. Meta DuEwa Jones (2011) noted that contemporary poets read and recite works by their ancestors to preserve their relationship to historical memory. By using Black women’s words as the infrastructure for our own art, we strengthened our ties to our ancestral identities.

Storytelling/Counternarratives. Storytelling, or rather counter-storytelling, has been used as a method of centering the stories of those whose accounts have not been privileged and as a mechanism for challenging white supremacy (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The practice of counter-storytelling, “strengthen(s) traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). African women have long used storytelling to preserve cultural knowledge and give voice to their thoughts, opinions, and ideas (Royster, 2000). Drawing on the traditions of West African oral storytelling, the curriculum encouraged storytelling and counter-storytelling in many ways --including centering co-researchers’ individual stories and group discussions, and re-examining dominant narratives we have learned from history textbooks and the news.

During the sessions, not only did we examine multiple modes of storytelling, but we were in dialogue with those stories. We looked at Black history not through the lens of white

colonizers and textbooks, but rather through first-hand narratives and artwork of Black activists, organizers, and artists. We investigated history by asking questions such as: “Who is telling the story? Who is not telling the story? Why? What might be missing? Where can we look to get a different perspective of the story?” We used primary documents like the Black Panther Party Ten Point program, music videos like Janelle Monáe and Erykah Badu’s Q.U.E.E.N., a video of Angela Davis speaking about radical self-care, and artwork by artists like Sonya Clarke and Mickalene Thomas as multi-media explorations of narratives.

One of the ways we fused together stories of the past with our own stories was through collecting oral histories from loved ones. During some sessions, we asked ourselves in the process of learning more about others’ stories, “If we were re-writing the history textbooks, what would we want others to know?” We positioned our stories and our community’s stories as central to the historical narrative.

Storytelling can be verbalized or expressed through art, but stories can also be something we hold close (i.e. we do not share our stories until we feel ready to). In the program, there was no right or wrong way to share a story, including not sharing a story. While I provided an open-ended prompt, question, or activity to spark conversation or art-making, the conversations were organic, often generating additional stories, questions, and thoughts. One of the ways that the curriculum also centered individual storytelling was through the closing sisterhood circles.

Sisterhood Circles/Homespaces. Creating a comfortable and trusting community among and with the co-researchers was imperative, especially since we could only meet online. I strived to create a virtual community and one of the key community-building strategies was employing sisterhood circles. In many fields, such as social work and education, practitioners have “modified [sister circles] for use with Black adolescent girls” (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011, p.

268). Using Indigenous and African traditions of circle-keeping, sisterhood circles enabled us to each have space to share what we called “with the heart and from the heart” and to wholeheartedly listen to one another’s stories, realities, and experiences. Sisterhood circles closed out each session and allowed us to leave the space on a note of hearing everyone’s voices, including those who decide to pass.

In the midst of COVID-19 and continued racial injustice, the program was a space to come together and to support one another. I used the theorization and definition of homespaces (hooks, 1990; Ward, 1996) to ground and guide my understanding of co-creating and sustaining a healing-centered space. Through sisterhood circles we built our homespace and “be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts” through the practice of listening and being heard (hooks, 1990, p. 42). In being affirmed by one another, we could process our understandings of self as whoever and however we showed up that day.

Self and Communal Care. Throughout the program we explored the different types of self-care and also the importance of caring for ourselves with the support of a community that cares about us. The concept of self and communal care was personified through our Community Agreement, “We take care of ourselves and one another.” We examined self-care not in the capitalist framing that tells us we need to buy something in order to be well, but rather think about care from a structural, communal, and individual level. In a society that profits off of girls’, particularly Black girls’, insecurity and oppression, we reclaimed the concept of care to honor what our bodies, minds, and souls needed. Sometimes this care looked like speaking up when we needed a break, using our art to share a message that was important to us, and ending each session with the phrase, “Peace and love!” as a reminder that we were navigating the challenges of life together.

Research Design

This study used performance ethnography and integrated aspects of youth participatory action research as methodology. Together, this approach centered the co-researchers' experiences, perspectives, and voices, particularly as it was expressed through art. Performance ethnography brings together ethnographic methods rooted in cultural anthropology and theory from performance studies (Denzin, 2009; Soyini Madison, 2006). Performance as a method of inquiry allows the researcher to study the “sensory elements of the event: how it looks, sounds, smells shifts over time” (Hamera, 2011, p. 320). In this case, I considered the embodied experiences of Black girls using art to perform their multiple, layered, and nuanced identities and acts of resistance against structural and systemic oppression. In essence, constructing and performing identity and acts of resistance helps us to better understand and make visible these aspects of self, as well becomes a modality for remembering and re-representing self through the lens of counter-narrative.

Soyini Madison (2006) noted that performance ethnography is “the doing of ‘performance’ of critical theory” (p. 15). It allows us to 1) critique society and challenge structures of power and domination through embodied reenactments and recollections of oppression and 2) highlight possibilities of liberation by refuting said oppression and deficit narratives. Through performance that re-enacts the oppression of marginalized groups, it provides a space to critique values, attitudes, and practices (Denzin, 2003). Performance ethnography allows researchers to better understand how culture is performed through daily practices (e.g. hair). In this study, I was particularly interested in performances of Black girlhood, which Black Performance Theory as a theoretical framework enabled me to explore.

Black Performance Theory afforded a critical lens for performance ethnography centered in the beauty and brilliance of Blackness.

Further, studying performance examines how “emotions and behavior intersect to produce meaning” (Hamera, 2011, p. 320). This is particularly important for Black girls, who have historically been denied the opportunity to express a wide range of emotions without retaliation or ridicule. Performance ethnography explores the social practice of how individuals perform daily social acts.

Performance ethnography utilizes arts-based methods to explore the multiple and varied expressions of Black girlhood. As Neal Jackson (2018) posited, a multiple methods approach is needed to understand and access Black girls’ voices. The “overreliance on oral and written communication” fails to fully capture the ways that individuals comprehend themselves, the world, and the relationship between the two (Kortegast, et. al, 2019, p. 503). This is represented through the collection of and analysis of the artwork the co-researchers created throughout the program and presented at the Community Arts Showcase.

The study also integrated participatory methods of community-based research, where participants as co-researchers are key agents and active participants. Brown & Rodriguez (2009) remind us that “authentic understandings of social problems require the knowledge of those directly affected by them” (p.1). To study how Black girls’ use arts-based practices to resist oppression, Black girls are central to examining what they are resisting and how. For example, during the pre-interviews, one of the questions on the interview protocol was, “If you were leading a program for Black girls, what would you and your girls do?”⁸ Their answers to the questions informed the curriculum for the program.

⁸ Thank you to Dr. Jennifer Turner for encouraging and helping me shape the Black girl-centered interview protocol.

As Irizarry (2009) noted, “Youth participatory action research (YPAR) challenges the traditional roles of youth as passive recipients of education and consumers of knowledge by repositioning them as active learners and knowledge producers” (p. 197). I chose to integrate youth participatory action methods in light of the conceptual framework, which places Black girls, as critical producers of knowledge, at the center of data collection and analysis. By recognizing and valuing the varied ways in which Black girls express themselves that cannot be fully captured in other research methods, creative and participatory methodologies have promise for studying the nuances and complexities of Black girlhood. I integrated YPAR by including co-researchers in the data collection and analysis processes.

Research Context

Co-researchers lived in either Washington, D.C. or Columbia, South Carolina. These sites have histories of racism, notably in their schools, that co-researchers navigate on a daily basis. I draw on Butler’s (2018) *Black Girl Cartography*, which highlights the critical nature of analyzing the connections between Black girls’ social identities and the geopolitical spaces of the schools they attend. Butler’s (2018) call encouraged me to be intentional and explicit in understanding and situating the geopolitical spaces and places that are part of the co-researchers’ experiences.

Washington, D.C. was nicknamed “Chocolate City” to denote it was a predominantly Black city and one of the epicenters of Black culture. However, due to gentrification, its nickname is being reconsidered. The city’s gentrification was the focal point of uprisings in April 2019, when Donald Campbell of Metro PCS was threatened by a tenant of a nearby luxury condo who said they⁹ would sue Campbell for playing go-go music on the street corner, something he has been doing since 1995. This started the #DontMuteDC movement, which is

⁹ I use a gender-neutral pronoun here because I am not sure how the tenant identified.

dedicated to “battling Black displacement and cultural erasure” in Washington, D.C (Kennedy Center, 2020).

Not only has racism tried to suppress D.C.’s cultural soul in the streets, but in school buildings as well. A 2018 study found that 68 percent of D.C. public high schools that published their dress codes banned headwraps or hair scarves, an important symbol of cultural resistance in Black history (Brodsky & Evans et al., 2018). D.C.’s public schools dress codes were rooted in stereotypes about gender and race, which promote the idea that girls’ bodies in general, and Black girls’ bodies specially, are subject to policing and sexual harassment (Brodsky & Evans et al., 2018). The policing of Black bodies and Black expression has been heavily documented and resisted in Washington, D.C.

In Columbia, South Carolina, a teacher called the School Resource Officer (i.e. police officer) when a 16-year-old Black girl at Spring Valley High School did not comply with her teacher’s instructions. Ben Fields, the white officer who was called to the classroom, forcibly removed the student from her desk and slammed her violently into the ground. As in Washington, D.C., there is a deeply rooted history of the emotional, psychological, and physical policing of Black people, particularly Black girls in Columbia, SC.

This context is important to understand the geopolitical spaces and sociocultural locations that the co-researchers discuss, reflect on, and interrogate in their artwork and meaning-making practices throughout the program.

Positionality

The study was conducted from the perspective of the author, who ran the virtual Black Girls S.O.A.R program. Because of the nature of my position within the program, I take a critical perspective of ethnographic research. I am also reflective about my positionality and interrogate my own “power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that

surround our subjects” (Madison, 2011, p. 7). While I aim to highlight and amplify the co-researchers voices and experiences, I am also aware and deliberate in examining my role in conducting ethnographic research. I am a cisgender, heterosexual, non-disabled, millennial, multi-racial Black woman from the eastern coast of the United States.

I recognize my personal experiences shape the questions I ask, the ways I conduct research, and the theories I employ to analyze data. In this, my hope is not to give Black girls a voice, but to amplify their stories, which have historically been distorted and erased in both research and classroom settings. I am deliberate in this framing and seek to move away from the term “empowerment” to refute the neoliberal, capitalist way this term has been misused as a tool for white saviorism (Brown, 2013). This term also places emphasis on the individual, rather than the system to change.

I have taught dance and movement to Black and Brown girls in both the D.C. Metro Area and rural and suburban New Jersey. I have had the privilege of witnessing their brilliance, talent, and excitement about learning on a daily basis, but often did not see their joy represented in research, as discussed in-depth in Chapter 1. I also reflect critically that in my role as an educator/facilitator/researcher/ally, my work does not begin and end in the classroom. As Treva Lindsey (2016) stated, “Our thinking and our activism are inextricable. The future of Black feminism demands that we resist any and all attempts to disentangle knowledge production from organizing and mobilizing” (p. 2). It would be irresponsible of me to only relegate my work solely to curriculum and pedagogy. My work is also in refusing to uphold the very systems that oppress the young people I work with, while also aiming to dismantle how those systems show up in myself.

Reflexivity. Throughout data collection and the program, I kept both a detailed journal and recorded voice memos to document my reflections about my role in the program and the choices I made and reasonings behind those choices during facilitation of the program. “Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). My internal dialogue was shaped by how I think about the multi-layered and multi-faceted relationship between me, my work, and the co-researchers (Fine & Sirin, 2007). Specifically, reflexivity allowed me a point of reflection about my insider-outsider status in the program and the study, recognizing that co-researchers might be more likely to share their experiences with me because I am young, Black, and identify as a girl/woman, or as Berger (2005) notes, someone the co-researcher feels is sympathetic to their experiences.

In the program, I served as a facilitator, researcher, and ally. I sought to use the privilege I have to navigate multiple roles and what Fine (1994) calls “work the hyphen” by understanding how my presence impacted the co-researchers and in turn, how they influenced me. Fine (1994) noted that in the hyphen, our identities shift in relationship with participants (i.e. co-researchers) and therefore, we must explore the “blurred boundaries” of our relationships and how and why we become involved (p. 75). My role of facilitator-researcher-ally was fluid and shifted throughout the program as the co-researchers and I got to know one another and develop deeper relationships.

At the onset of the program, I had not worked with any of the co-researchers; however, a few of them I knew through relationships with their families prior to the start of the program. This made me both an “insider” and an “outsider” in many ways. Vanessa Siddle Walker asked,

“First, do I know enough about the group of people I am studying to have the credibility to interpret their views? Do I even know how to ask the right questions?” (Walker, 2005, p. 34)

These questions led me to further unpack my insider-outsider status. I have been leading and co-creating art programs with Black girls for about ten years at the time of the study and over time, their influence shaped the questions I asked. I also received feedback from other Black women scholars who work with Black girls about ensuring that the qualitative interview protocol was Black girl-centered.

As an insider, I had access to knowledge about their families, their communities, their successes, and their challenges, even if they did not share those with me throughout the program. This information does not explicitly appear in this study; however, I am critical of myself as a researcher and cannot say that these did not implicitly impact my interpretations, thus making it even more important to include the co-researchers’ direct words and their feedback.

I was also an insider in that, by Ruth Nicole Brown’s (2013) definition of Black girlhood, the co-researchers and I all self-identify as Black girls, which created a level of comfortability and openness to share, as the co-researchers noted, without feeling judged. Even though our shared identity of being Black girls gave us a point of connection, Black girlhood is not a monolith; therefore, as a researcher, I am always partly an outsider because no two individual’s experiences and identities are exactly the same.

At the time of the study, I was at least ten years older than the co-researchers, so age was a point of difference and a place where I navigated and grappled with most of my potential bias. Because of the experiences I have had as an adult and the reflections I carry with me about my own childhood, I wrote frequently in my journal about separating my personal experiences and the experiences the co-researchers shared with me. Another point of difference was that I did not

attend high school in the Washington, D.C. area or Columbia, SC area, nor did I have to go to high school through a global pandemic and emergency remote learning. Time, sociopolitical context, and geographic context certainly impacted the differences in our experiences, thus leading me to be an outsider. I was reminded throughout the program of this outsider status whenever the co-researchers might note a pop culture reference that I was unfamiliar with or an event that happened in their school district.

Throughout the process, I engaged with and reflected on three questions at the beginning and end of both data collection and data analysis, as described by Patel (2016), ‘Why me?’ ‘Why this?’ ‘Why now?’ (p. 57) I also asked myself questions such as, “How do I feel? What am I afraid to document? How is it connected to me? What about this is me and what about this is data?” I asked these questions to place myself, “within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative” (Creswell, 2007, p. 26). By examining what I may be afraid to document and reflecting on some of my most raw and vulnerable emotions, it helped me to better understand and interrogate my role in the study.

Role of the Facilitator/Researcher/Ally. As a facilitator, I organized and marketed the program to potential participants, managed correspondence with co-researchers and their caregivers, and handled tech and logistics such as sending out Zoom links for the sessions. I use the term facilitator rather than educator because I approached my role as more of creating a space for co-researchers to share their expertise and build on their knowledge base to answer the questions we posed. I came to each session with possible topics, activities, and prompts, and adapted and shifted the curriculum as conversations deepened and co-researchers shared their interests and thoughts. Before launching into a topic or art-making session, I asked an open-ended question, such as “What have you learned about Black history at home, at school, or in

your activities?” or “What does resistance mean to you?” In the questions I asked, I was not looking for a “correct” answer, but instead opening up a conversation or encouraging deeper dialogue.

While the curriculum was based on co-researchers’ pre-interview data, I also recognize that my experiences as an educator and working for an education non-profit gave me access to lessons and inspiration from other educators to take what the co-researchers’ interests were and turn those into specific activities. Because of this, I am reflective that my own biases about how and what to teach contributed to what we learned and how we learned it. My positionality influenced the questions I asked, how I phrased them, and what I decided to dig deeper on.

As a researcher I guided the research process by collecting pre-and-post interview data, taking field notes after session meetings, and teaching qualitative data collection techniques (i.e. interviewing) and analysis (i.e. coding and developing themes). While teaching about coding and analysis, I tried not to influence their coding by remaining silent while they had the document open. I prompted them to find “words, phrases, themes, and ideas” that either came out more than once or represented something important to them during this process. I recognize that my education and my role as a researcher affords me a level of privilege.

As an ally I held Cooper’s (2018) words close, “Black girls at every age need other Black girls to hold their truths” (p.18). During the research process and the program, I was learning alongside the co-researchers. I also regard the ally role as what Brown (2013) called homegirling. Homegirling is both an identity (i.e. ally to Black girls) and a verb (i.e. action to support Black girls both in the program and beyond). I do not take it lightly that they shared their experiences, their analyses, and their reflections with me and with each other. As an ally I feel a duty and responsibility to not only create space and listen to their truths, but actually do the work

necessary to ensure that their words and thoughts are accurately captured, as well as do my part to make sure that their recommendations do not just go into this dissertation, but also that I advocate for the solutions they have posed (e.g. Black history and ethnic studies and police-free schools).

Co-researchers and Recruitment

The co-researcher team included eight Black adolescents who identify as girls.¹⁰ The co-research team consisted of high school students ages 14-17. Co-researchers were recruited from a dance studio where I regularly teach and also through snowball sampling. I created a two-page Black Girls S.O.A.R. recruitment sheet with information (e.g., goals of the program, dates, times), and an outline of the sessions, which the dance studio shared via e-blast (See Appendix A). Three middle and high school teachers in Washington, D.C. also shared the recruitment sheet with their Black girl students. Participants reached out to me with questions and to confirm their participation. One co-researcher reached out via phone and seven caregivers reached out via phone or email. All eight caregivers filled out consent forms and all eight co-researchers filled out assent forms.

All co-researchers who reached out to participate enrolled in the program. One co-researcher began the program but was not able to complete it due to unforeseen circumstances; her information is not reflected in the data collection or analysis. Eight co-researchers participated in the 5-week program and only two co-researchers missed one session each because of prior commitments. As a gesture of gratitude, co-researchers were compensated \$50 each for

¹⁰Participation in the program and study was open to gender non-conforming students; however, all of the participants identified as girls.

their time and expertise. Each co-researcher also received a copy of N.K. Jemisin's *How Long 'Til Black Future Month?* and an artist's box with coloring utensils and a journal.

Next, I introduce each co-researcher using pseudonyms. I share their talents and interests, as they graciously shared with me during pre-interviews or program sessions.¹¹

Camille

Camille identified as a “young, inspired Black girl.” She also described herself as an educator and a role model for others. As she noted in our pre-interview, “I feel like in my heart, God really put me here to educate people and care for people.” At school, she plays lacrosse and tennis and meditates and reads the Bible as part of her healing practices. When she graduates from high school, she wants to study theatre and business. She also wants to move out of the United States with her family to go to Africa -- she named Uganda as a possible place she would like to live.

Briana

Briana identified as kind. After high school, she wants to own a business. She is skilled at hands-on crafting and enjoys making keychains with recycled beads.

Jessie

Jessie identified as a “creative, enthusiastic person.” She attends an arts high school and is extremely talented at creating animations on her iPad. She enjoys painting landscapes, crafting, and reading novels and comic books. When she graduates she wants to be an animator and work for an animation facility like Pixar, as well as own a business on the side for art projects.

Mackenzie

¹¹ Some of the girls were quieter throughout the program and skipped some of the questions during the pre-and-post interviews, so their descriptions are less robust than others. Overall, the co-researchers who were younger (e.g. 14-15), were quieter than the older co-researchers (e.g. 16-17).

Mackenzie identified as a “Black female, student, and innovator.” Outside of her courses at school, she takes college level courses. She participates in Black Girls Code¹² and does web design. She enjoys movies and photography. Over the summer of 2020, she took pictures of Black Lives Matter protests in Washington, D.C. and posted them on VSCO.¹³ When she graduates from high school, she wants to work in cybersecurity policy at the Department of Defense.

Lisa

Lisa identified as a “musician and gamer.” At school, she plays tennis and basketball and is in the band and orchestra. Her focus in the band is on classical music. She enjoys movies, painting, and drawing. When she graduates, she wants to be an instrumentalist that works on movie soundtracks and scores.

Olivia

Olivia identified as a “Black girl, dancer, writer, and teenager.” She enjoys writing and has had her poetry published about #SayHerName. She dances ballet, tap, modern, and jazz. When she graduates, she wants to be a neurosurgeon.

Nia

Nia identified as a “Black woman.” She is involved in Girl Scouts, likes to dance, and plays basketball. When she graduates from high school, she wants to be a lawyer.

Alia

Alia identified as a “Black girl, an athlete, and musician.” She plays tennis, sings and plays guitar, and writes music. When she graduates, she wants to be a fashion designer, professional tennis player, and sell art as a small business.

¹² Black Girls Code is a non-profit organization that offers coding workshops and technology trainings for Black girls.

¹³ VSCO is a photography mobile app that enables users to take pictures in the app and edit them using different filters.

Procedures. Data collection occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic. To ensure the health and safety of all co-researchers, all data was collected virtually using Zoom. Zoom was the virtual platform that co-researchers felt most comfortable with and most equipped to navigate, as well as offered the functionalities for screen-sharing, breakout rooms, and non-verbal engagement through the chat box. While the collection of data virtually will be discussed more in detail in the next section, it is worth noting that creating and implementing a virtual program offered the opportunity for co-researchers, who may not have had the chance to interact otherwise, to be able to participate.

Data Sources and Collection

After obtaining IRB approval for this study and going through the consent/assent process with the co-researchers and their caregivers, I used several instruments for data collection (including pre-and-post individual interviews, observations, and artifacts) and field notes to register my impressions and areas that require further exploration. The qualitative data collection that guides performance ethnography includes participant observation, field notes, in-depth interviews, and collection of art artifacts to create a collaborative artistic production that is accessible to audiences outside of the academy.

Pre-and-post individual interviews

I conducted individual pre-and-post program interviews with co-researchers over Zoom. For the pre-interview, I met with each of them individually before the beginning of the program (one to two weeks beforehand) and then again after the Community Arts Showcase (two to three weeks after). Each semi-structured interview was approximately 30-45 minutes.

During adolescence, young people ask important questions about their identities, such as “Who am I?” and “How do I fit in?” and begin to solidify those conceptualizations about self (Erikson, 1968). During this time, their relationships with others and with the process of schooling, and cultural and societal expectations that are often shared and reinforced through the media, all become crucial to exploring identity (Williams, Mims, & Johnson, 2019). To better understand how participants understood themselves, their identities, and conceptualizations of resistance, I used a Black girl-centered qualitative interview protocol (see Appendix B). Questions in both the pre-and-post interviews included topics about their identities and experiences, their relationship to art, their perspectives on Black girlhood, and in the post-interview, questions about their experiences program. Some of the questions I asked in the pre-and-post interview were the same, so I could see how their answers may have shifted or stayed the same after participating in the program. Some of the questions included, “How do you identify yourself? How would you describe resistance and activism?”

I began each interview by assuring the co-researchers, “We can stop, skip a question, and/or come back to any questions at any time. I just want to hear what is on your heart and your mind when you think of these questions. There are no wrong answers.” These choices were influenced and guided by Denzin’s (2003) reminder, “doing interviews is a privilege granted to us, not a right that we have” (p. 24).

During the pre-program interviews, I used the space to build trust and relationships because it was my first interaction with many of the co-researchers. Specifically, examples of pre-interview questions included, “How would you identify yourself? What do those identities mean to you? What is your favorite form of art? How does art make you feel? What does being a Black girl mean to you? What does it mean to be a Black girl activist?”

After the program and performance, I followed up with post-interviews to be able to examine how, if at all, the participants felt like their participation in the program changed the way they thought about their identity and acts of resistance. Some of the post-interview questions included, “What did you learn in the program that surprised you? How would you describe your experience in the program? What was your experience in the Community Arts Showcase like? How would you describe resistance and activism?” I also relied on field notes to record the answers of the participants and their non-verbal cues in answering the questions.

Additionally, I trained co-researchers in qualitative methodology, including interviewing techniques and inductive coding, specifically. Participants collected oral histories from their loved ones throughout the program to practice qualitative interviewing skills. I asked them, “As historians, researchers, and curators, what would you want to know about your loved ones if you were writing down their stories in a history book?” Some of the questions they decided on included, “Who was your mentor? Who inspired you to be where you are now? What causes are you passionate about? What have you done to contribute to the Black community?” They reported back what they learned from their loved ones each week to engage in a collective process of storytelling. See Appendix C for our collective interview protocol.

Documents and Artifacts (Artwork)

I incorporated the collection of artifacts as data sources, specifically artwork, because “artifacts collect and tell stories” (Liu & Sunstein, 2016, p. 60). Particularly, the artwork the co-researchers created told stories about their identities and current and historical acts of resistance. I collected artwork that was created throughout the program and all chat box notes from program sessions on Zoom. During the first four sessions, I was able to take photos of six of the eight co-researchers’ pieces of art that they created. Some co-researchers created art with their cameras

off during the Community Arts Showcase. Co-researchers shared photos of their artwork or access to the artwork they created (e.g. recorded song, animation) via e-mail. I wanted them to keep the original copies of their artwork to communicate to them that they are “keepers of their own work” (Liu, 2019, p. 349; Morrell, 2008).

Observations and Field Notes

I documented my field notes after all of the sessions of the program. During the two-hour sessions, I typed words and phrases in my session outline that I wanted to return back to in the recordings. I wrote down questions as they came up, new information that surprised or intrigued me, and co-researchers’ responses or art that I wanted to reflect on after the session. Immediately after each session (within one hour), I recorded myself processing through the session via voice recorder with my initial reactions, thoughts, and reflections. I wrote field notes and observations by answering three core questions: “What surprised me? What intrigued me? What disturbed me?”¹⁴ These questions provided a structure for consistency and to document changes, patterns, and shifts over time. To better capture body language, tone, and interactions, I used open observations to understand the performance of social acts in a group setting. I specifically paid attention to participants’ conversations, non-verbal cues (if their cameras were on), responses and affirmations that came through the chat box, and any notes they made when sharing their artwork with the group.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved collaborative coding with co-researchers during the program and individual coding (i.e. coding I did on my own). I used inductive and deductive approaches to privilege the co-researchers’ direct quotes, while also examining the data in light of the research

¹⁴ Thank you to Dr. Rossina Liu for suggesting these questions to me.

questions and the conceptual framework. Data analysis was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, I prepared the data, specifically the pre-interview transcripts and transcripts from the first three sessions. In the second stage, the co-researchers and I collectively coded the data from the first three sessions. In the third stage, I coded the remainder of the data using both inductive and deductive approaches.

Stage One

I transcribed the pre-interviews before the program began, so that I could prepare the activities and topics from the co-researchers interests and feedback. Then, mid-way through the program, I transcribed the first three sessions and de-identified transcriptions to share with the co-researchers to conduct the second stage.

Stage Two

In the second stage, we collectively coded the de-identified transcript data during the third workshop session using in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2009) with my guidance and assistance. I included a coding training portion in the third session of the workshop. For the training, we began by having a conversation about their experiences collecting and analyzing data. They mentioned that they had not coded before. I shared that in qualitative research there are two types of coding: inductive (where you create the themes directly from the data) and deductive (where you decide beforehand what you're looking for and then see how it shows up in the data). I showed the two types on a slide via screen share.

Next as part of the training, I told them about *in vivo* codes that are taken directly from words in the data. I told them that the focus of our coding would be *in vivo* because their words are powerful. The transcripts were located in a collaborative Google document and each co-researcher highlighted, each in a different color of their choice. My prompt for them was to

highlight the words and phrases that came up often that they felt had importance in light of the full context of the transcript conversation. When we started coding, Olivia gasped, “I said that?! Wow!” The process of coding allowed them to see their words as research worthy of study. In the document, they highlighted mostly words (e.g. resistance) or quotes they liked (e.g. “history is reflected by those who write it.”)

We coded initially for approximately 30 minutes, then discussed the main takeaways/themes and their final collective codes for another 30 minutes (one hour total). The initial codes they highlighted included: *history*, *resistance*, *narratives*, *school*, and *care*. Some of these codes, such as *narratives*, were collapsed for a more specific code from other codes including *stories* and *communication*. From the codes, co-researchers discussed the emerging themes and defined these codes from reading the transcript data. The co-researchers were surprised because they thought they would find the word discrimination repeat often, but rather it was resistance (in hair, school, and culture) that they saw come up most often.

In the conversations we had, they discussed amongst themselves how they wanted to represent resistance in each section of the showcase. Some of them represented resistance through spoken word poetry, singing songs by Black artists that were joyful, and drawings that depicted moments of resistance in history or in their personal lives. They then represented how they interpreted the themes through art, which they shared during the virtual community performance. Representing the data through art is supported by performance ethnography (Denzin, 2009; Soyini Madison, 2005). They used resistance and re-writing history as themes for the Community Arts Showcase (they titled the showcase “#HistoryRewritten”).

Stage Three

For the third stage, I transcribed the last two sessions. The Community Arts Showcase and post-interviews were transcribed by a third-party service while I focused on organizing the pre-interview and session data. After receiving the transcripts back from the service, I reviewed their accuracy by listening to all audio to ensure that the co-researchers' voices and perspectives were captured authentically. In the few cases where I found inconsistencies, I corrected the transcripts to accurately reflect what the co-researcher shared as stated in the audio. Many of the inconsistencies were names and proper nouns that were spelled incorrectly. Each co-researcher selected a pseudonym, which appeared on all transcripts. Additionally, during this stage I organized my field notes and all of the virtual artifacts.

I familiarized myself with the data and memoed my initial thoughts and reflections and observed meanings and patterns. I then took the codes that co-researchers identified and used those codes to deductively code the pre-and-post interviews, observation data, and field notes through a process of open coding (Saldaña, 2009). Dedoose software was used to organize and analyze the diverse sources of data. I also used descriptive coding to code my field notes (Saldaña, 2009).

Next, I deductively coded as I continued to understand the data in light of the research questions and the definitions of resistance and identity construction outlined in the definition of terms in Chapter 1. The deductive codes I added included: *Black girl*, *identity*, *art*, and *program*. These codes allowed me to note what co-researchers said about being a Black girl and about how they identified themselves in the pre-and-post interviews, during the second session (that focused on identity), and during the Community Arts Showcase. *Art* as a code enabled me to understand how we used art, how we talked about art, and what types of art we chose to represent our

thoughts and opinions. Lastly, *program* as a code helped me to recognize when co-researchers talked about their experiences in the program in light of RQ2.

With further *in vivo* coding of all data, I added more codes including: *stereotypes*, *role model*, *voice*, *community*, and *confidence*. These codes came directly from co-researcher direct quotes and their descriptions. The codes were words that we used often in our sessions and in the pre-and-post interviews that were not represented in the transcripts we reviewed collectively. To merge both my and the co-researchers' perspectives in the coding process, I referred back to the raw data from the coding training and co-researchers' analysis of the data as I foundation for any additional codes I added. I also privileged *in vivo* coding because that is the type of coding we used in our collaborative coding.

I turned codes into categories using thematic analysis across all forms of data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998). Categories included: *identity* (Black girl activist, beauty, community, hair, history, pain, stereotypes, role model), *art* (voice, accomplishment, activist art, Afrofuturism, emotions, healing), *program* (being around other Black girls, confidence, and history), and *resistance* (confidence and counter-narrative) (codes noted in parentheses). At this stage in coding, I had a complete list of codes, how they were organized, and definitions of the codes. See Appendix D for codes and definitions. I did a general round of coding and then used those themes and codes to analyze the data around each research question. In the next section, I organize and detail analysis around each research question.

Question #1

How, if at all, do Black girls use arts-based practices (such as movement and music), as forms of resistance and identity construction?

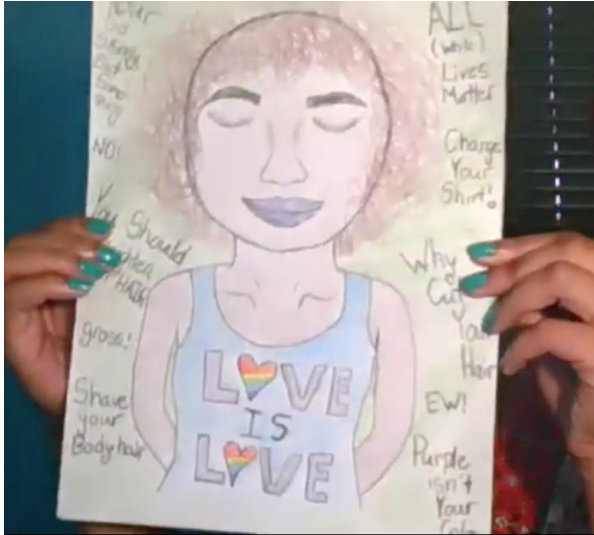
As the first step of analysis for this question, I used field observations, pre-and-post interview data, session conversation data, and artifacts to understand how Black girls use arts-

based practices. I looked for evidence of identity and resistance by inductively coding from the session conversation data to let Black girls speak for themselves and their experiences, using *in vivo* codes from their direct words and quotes. I also deductively coded using diverse theoretical models (including Ruth Nicole Brown's (2009) definition of Black girlhood in the conceptual framework) and for evidence of the definitions of resistance and identity construction outlined in the definition of terms in Chapter 1.

To code the observations and field notes, I typed up all of my notes and uploaded them to Dedoose. After the sessions, I also recorded myself verbalizing and processing through my reflections. I transcribed the recordings and uploaded those to Dedoose as well. I coded this data alongside the pre-and-post interview and session conversation data and used my observations and field notes to provide examples of the themes, as well as further illustrate specific moments in the program. For example, I used the observations and field notes to write about how the co-researchers spoke and what body language they used to express their thoughts. I used the conceptual framework, specifically Black Performance Theory, to guide my understanding of everyday expressions (e.g. body expressions) as art.

To code the artwork created throughout the program, I used Turner & Griffin's (2020) adaptation of Serifini's (2014) framework to create coding sheets for the visual artwork co-researchers did throughout the program and as part of the Community Arts Showcase. First, I used the coding sheet to write down who/what was represented (perceptual dimension); the relationships between the visual elements (structural dimension); ways the images represented aspects of identity construction or resistance (ideological dimension); and how the co-researcher discussed and interpreted their artwork.

Figure 3. Example of critical visual analysis coding sheet -- Camille's self-portrait

<p>Image</p>	
<p>Perceptual Dimension</p>	<p>The image shows a light-skinned person who is wearing a blue tank top that says "Love is love." The person is wearing purple lipstick. Around the person are different sayings like "Shave your body hair" and "All (white) lives matter." The person appears to have their eyes closed.</p>
<p>Structural Dimension</p>	<p>The person is in the middle of the drawing and the focal point of the drawing. The sayings around the person frame all aspects of the person's exterior.</p>
<p>Ideological Dimension</p>	<p>The sayings around the person are all negative things that Camille has heard in her life. She mentioned being frustrated because she got in trouble at school for something she wore. The shirt the person is wearing is in solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community, which is Camille using dress as a form of resisting discriminatory comments she's heard by continuing to wear the shirt anyway. This is how Camille chose to show her identity through a self-portrait that directly speaks back to stereotypes and negative comments because she is closing her eyes and not listening to those things.</p>

Participant Interpretation	These are supposed to be the negative comments that I have gotten before. I'll explain why. They say, "Why cut your hair? Purple isn't your color. Shave your body here. You should straighten your hair. You're so skinny. Eat something. Change your shirt." I'm just tuning out everything and that's why my eyes are closed and not even looking at what other people were thinking about me.
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I recognized that “the meaning ascribed to images are socially constructed” (Kelly & Kortegast, 2017, p. 7). Since my goal was to ensure that I accurately reflected the co-researchers’ meaning behind the artwork, I encouraged them to describe what the image meant to them or what the art-making process was like for them during the sessions, although they often shared those thoughts without further prompting. I elevated their words and descriptions in the analysis. I did not differ in opinion from any of the co-researchers’ words or descriptions in the analysis. Since the descriptions of the artwork were reflected in the conversation session data that was uploaded in Dedoose, I was able to code those descriptions alongside the rest of the data. I used the artwork to provide illustrative examples of the themes from the transcribed data.

As the second step during analysis for the first question, I looked for patterns in the codes across the majority of participants. Specifically, I analyzed how they use arts-based practices for either identity construction or resistance and what messages their art shared. I looked for how they defined their own identity and Black girl collective identity, how they defined art, and how they defined resistance. The pre-and-post interviews directly asked for a definition of art, and during the program and post-interviews, I asked them about their thoughts on resistance and how that showed up in their daily lived practices. The questions I drew from to inform this research question included: “What are your dreams for the future? How do you identify? What do each of

these identities mean to you? What's your favorite form of art? How do you use that art? How does art make you feel? What does being a Black girl mean to you? How would you describe resistance and activism?"

I was interested in learning more about how they identified themselves and how those interpretations and explorations of selfhood changed, developed, or solidified throughout the course of the program. Throughout the study, I asked them the question, "How do you identify?" at three different points (pre-interview, week 3 of the sessions, and post-interview) to garner a deeper understanding of how they were exploring identity in various contexts. As McArthur & Lane (2017) emphasized, "It is critical that educators are intentional in creating space and place for Black girls to define and redefine themselves" (p. 74). Exploring this question multiple times helped us define and redefine ourselves throughout the course of the program.

Question #2

What specific attributes of Black girls' involvement in art programs foster identity construction and acts of resistance?

To answer this question, I examined the questions in the post-interview that ask about their experiences in the program, what they learned, and how the program made them feel. I also used the transcript data from the Community Arts Showcase because many of the audience members asked the co-researchers questions about their experiences in the program and their major takeaways during the *talkback*. I inductively coded in vivo to learn more about how programs, like this one, help to foster positive identity construction and acts of resistance. After coding, I looked for themes across participants to see if there are specific themes that come up amongst the majority of the participants. The specific post-interview questions I pulled from included: How would you describe your experience in the program? How did the program make you feel? Do you see any changes in yourself since participating in the program? If so, what are

your reflections? What was your experience in the community showcase like? Would you suggest to other girls that they should do the program? If so, why?

Validity. I used two main strategies to increase the trustworthiness of my findings: member checking and triangulation. Member checking enabled me to receive feedback from the co-researchers about the transcript data and findings section to ensure that they felt I was representing their words and themes with fidelity. Triangulation allowed me to corroborate the data by using multiple modes for data collection. Overall, my goals were to create a deeper, richer, and more full examination of the co-researchers' experiences in the program and to ensure their voices and expertise were placed at the center of the study.

Member Checking. Member checking (Carspecken, 1996; Maxwell, 1996) with participants was utilized during two stages during the study: 1) during week three and four of the program, where participants coded and analyzed transcript data from the program discussions and 2) when the first draft of the findings section was written. I did this for co-researchers to give their feedback, to update, or clarify transcripts and the first draft of the findings. This enabled me to ensure that my interpretations accurately and authentically represented their voices, perspectives, and experiences.

Triangulation. I used methods triangulation by employing multiple methods for collecting data including field notes and observations, pre-and-post interviews, artifacts, and transcripts from the session (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). I also used data source triangulation by asking the same set of semi-structured questions of each co-researcher in the pre-and-post interviews. I compared data amongst the multiple methods and amongst the co-researchers. Triangulation allows researchers to “map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (Cohen and Manion, 2000).

By utilizing multiple modes of data collection and comparing the data, I sought to capture different dimensions of the co-researchers' experiences in the program.

Ethical Considerations

Co-researcher Consent and Confidentiality

Informed, voluntary consent was obtained from all co-researchers through a consent form written in standard American English—this includes an assent form for co-researchers under the age of 18 (Appendix E and F). All co-researchers received a copy of the consent/assent form for their own records, and a copy for the parents of co-researchers under the age of 18. The consent process took place prior to any pre-interviews. Co-researchers were informed about the nature and purpose of the study, how the data would be used, and what would be expected of them if consent was given. Co-researchers were encouraged to ask me questions throughout the duration of the study and they were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Co-researchers chose a pseudonym during the initial interview, which was used on all documents related to this study. All printed and collected material and information are kept in a locked filing cabinet; this includes printed transcriptions, handwritten notes, and any written prompt responses from participants. Electronic files are secured on a private computer using password protected computer files. Data was transcribed via an external service. Collected data, such as transcriptions and audio-taped recordings will be kept for ten years and then deleted. Written data will be shredded after ten years.

Chapter Five: Findings

In this chapter I present my study findings organized into two sections (each section corresponds to a research question). Overall, the findings demonstrate how Black girls use arts-based practices to rewrite historical narratives that are based on stereotypes, while also asserting their identities through counter-narrative art as a mechanism of resistance. Through art, Black girls facilitate social-emotional wellness and healing by using art as affirmation and to express emotions that are difficult to put into words. Lastly, they use art as a means of creating and presenting demands for new futures rooted in equity, justice, and love.

The findings also suggest that programs for Black girls should give them opportunities to showcase their work in a loving and affirming space so that they can be seen, heard, and uplifted as they explore their multiple identities and acts of resistance. The co-researchers also noted that being around other Black girls in a space where they did not have to worry about being judged was a crucial component of the program. Programs should also provide curricular content that encourages Black girls to learn about self and communal care and reexamine history through the lens of Black women and Black feminist resistance.

How Black girls used arts-based practices as mechanisms for resistance and identity construction

Findings indicated that Black girls used arts-based practices as identity performance and resistance in four ways. These ways included rewriting narratives of Black trauma and pain, sharing their counter-narratives, healing and expressing emotions, and dreaming a better world into existence (Research Question 1).

#HistoryRewritten: From Stories of Black Pain to Stories of Black Power

Throughout the program, the co-researchers used art to rewrite history and recreate historical narratives they learned in school. During the first session of the program, we discussed

how the co-researchers did not see Black history embraced in the curriculum and when it was embraced, it was only narrowly presented. As the co-researchers cited, the only topics they covered in regards to Black history at school were enslavement, “Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts,” and “Martin Luther King, Jr.” In essence, they learned very little about Black history, only focused on a few figures, Black trauma, and Black inferiority by mostly seeing their ancestors depicted as enslaved in textbooks. By only highlighting stories of Black subservience, the standard curriculum communicated to them and their classmates that Black peoples’ history began at enslavement and ended with the Civil Rights Movement. As Lisa noted,

I also think that they [teachers and textbooks] should explain that Black history isn't full of suffering and that they should explain a lot more of the successes that are in our history and that make us who we are because there is and not everything is suffering for us. There are a lot of artists and things that we don't learn about.

Lisa points out how the narrative of suffering, especially when that narrative fails to share stories about Black success and joy, affects how society views Black people. Fighting back against the singular narrative of suffering in history was a theme throughout the sessions. They discussed that they never learned the history of Black resistance to enslavement in school. They hoped that the history taught in schools should instead focus on Black power and strength, not just Black pain. The narratives of pain, the co-researchers shared, enforces the dehumanizing and false notion that Black people did not and do not have agency. The co-researchers noted that these narratives, rather than stories that uplift Black resistance and power, were shared to perpetuate the status quo.

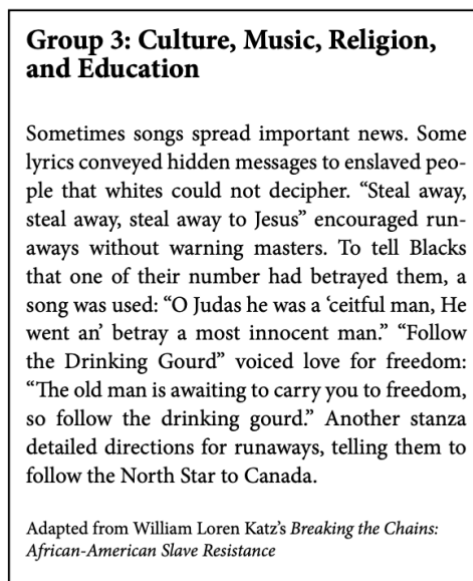
As one co-researcher, Alia, said, “History is reflected by those who write it, ” namely from the perspective of white men. Co-researchers added the clapping emoji as a reaction on Zoom and wrote exclamation points and words of affirmation in the chat when Alia shared this perspective. The co-researchers were excited about the idea that while history was often written about them, they could rewrite history to elevate their experiences. More specifically, they could use their art to tell the stories that had been left out of the curriculum. History could be reflected by them.

All co-researchers agreed that Black history was not well-represented in schools; however, some co-researchers saw a little more representation in their classrooms than others. For example, Nia mentioned that she learned about Black Wall Street in school, but only from a few lines in a textbook. The textbook did not discuss how or why Black Wall Street was devastated and destroyed at the hands of white supremacists. To further unpack Black Wall Street and the Tulsa Race Massacre in the program, we discussed how there have been historical patterns of racist backlash to Black advancement. Black advancement was something the co-researchers wanted to lift up as an important part of history. As Mackenzie shared, “I didn’t know about that [Black Wall Street] before. It felt like it was suppressed from history because it was something good that Black people did.”

Mackenzie amplified how Black success stories were not only brushed aside in history, but were physically destroyed by white people’s racist acts. Other co-researchers questioned why they did not learn about Black Wall Street, or even about Black communities that are thriving despite operating in an oppressive society. The question about what else they had not learned in schools fueled their desire to not only rewrite history, but to amplify the uncovered stories that specifically highlighted Black ingenuity.

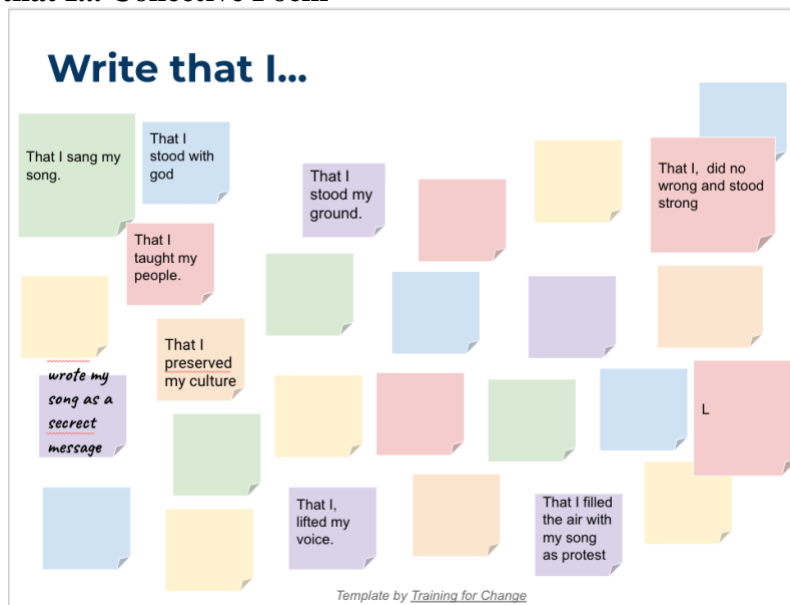
After we discussed what we did not learn in school in regards to Black history as a whole, I mentioned that there has been a long history of Black resistance to inequity and unjust policies and practices. To illustrate the history of resistance, we used a mixer lesson created by the Zinn Education Project called “Poetry of Defiance.” Each co-researcher was given a different paragraph on a virtual slip of paper about a way that enslaved people resisted using culture, music, religion, or education (Figure 4). After they read it, they went into breakout rooms to discuss with others the ways they resisted.

Figure 4. Poetry of Defiance lesson material example



When they returned to the main room, we wrote a collective poem about how we would want people to write about our resistance in history textbooks (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Write that I... Collective Poem



As Figure 5 demonstrates, the co-researchers' lines in the poem emphasized standing strong, using songs as a form of protest, and educating others through their art. The co-researchers rewrote the dominant narratives by elevating Black resistance to show that Black people have a long history of fighting back against injustice through mechanisms like culture, music, movement, and style. This activity began to bridge our views of history with the present by situating "Write that *I*." By using first person in this case, we were beginning the process of writing ourselves into history.

After the activity, I asked the co-researchers what they would add to the school textbooks if they were re-writing them. Briana shared that she would add how Black people used artforms, including style and culture to resist colonialism and assimilation,

If I had to add something to a history book, I would add more about our African culture before slavery because we don't really learn about that. We learn about slavery but there's plenty of things we did beforehand like our unique styles that was taken away in the

midst of slavery, but there's plenty of other things that I've learned of our culture that we don't learn about in school.

Briana's point showed how starting Black history with enslavement leaves out the history of Black style and culture. Co-researchers mentioned several times the art, style, and culture that originated with Black people as a topic does not often get discussed in the curriculum, but is rather policed in the classroom, school buildings, and co-opted in society. As an example Camille's powerful words flowed through the virtual room,

Also, I'm going to say something, I'm a low-key ranting in this, but I feel like the short comment would be everybody wants to be Black till it's time to be Black. They [white people] want to take our hairstyles, like cornrows into boxer braids and stuff like that, and box braids, but once a police officer pulls you over, they want to pull their white card or their privileged card, I should say, and hide behind their privilege. That's why I feel like us as Black people get so upset when people culturally appropriate us because that's our culture, and you're just stealing that, renaming it and taking it away from us like you did us. Cornrows were used to put rice base...put rice in cornrows so people would have stuff to eat while they were getting shipped across the east and stuff. This is what we have, and this is what we stand for.

Camille's point illustrated that rewriting history was not only about telling stories about Black history, but also making clear how this history is manifested in the present. Rewriting history meant educating others about Black culture and style so that it would not be culturally appropriated or used out of context. For the co-researchers, being able to express themselves was rooted in arts-based practices, like hairstyles, to remind others of their rich history and how to use art to pay homage to their ancestors. Collectively, the co-researchers felt that the idea that

Black history was solely part of the past and does not impact the present was reinforced in schools and on social media. In Lisa's words,

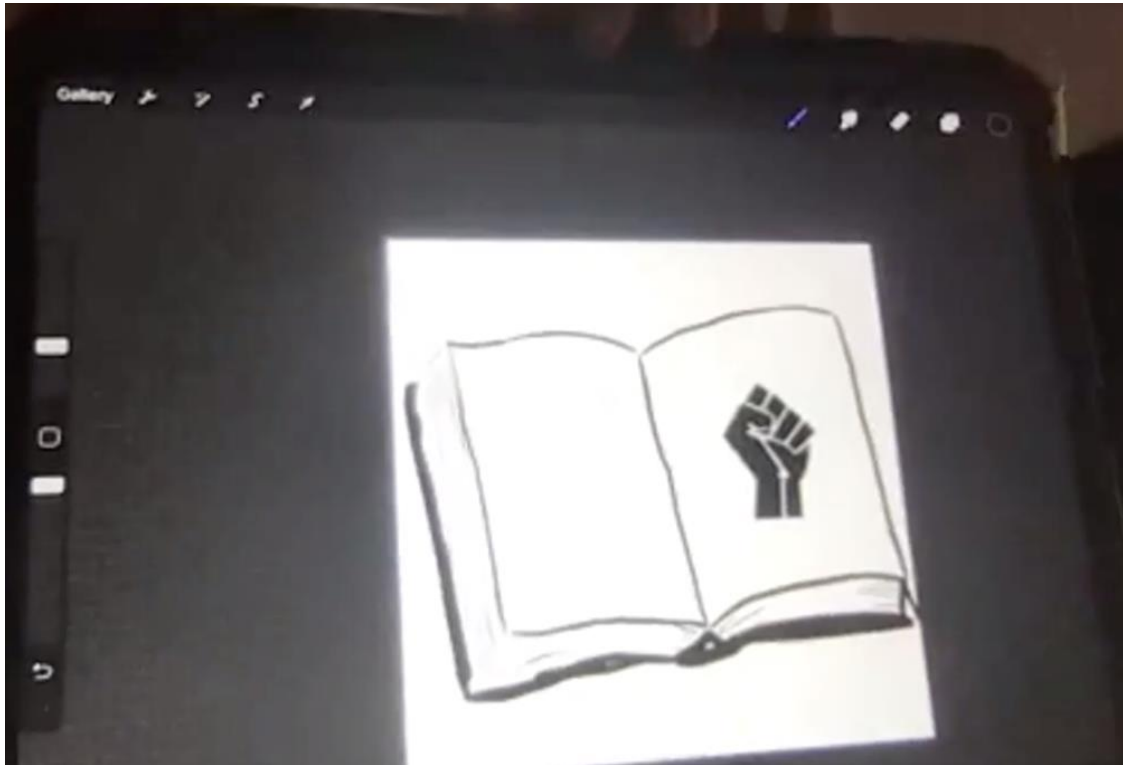
I also want to say I was thinking about something that I saw a post [on social media] and someone was like, "You guys can't keep blaming what happened to your ancestors on us." The comment under it was, "It wasn't our ancestors. You mean our grandparents and our great-grandparents?" In the way it's written in textbooks it seems like this happened so long ago, but it wasn't. It was not that long ago.

Lisa's comment highlighted how racism and anti-Blackness are often taught as things of the past, and as if the fight for equity and racial justice is over. The idea that we live in a post-racial society absolves individuals of dismantling systems that serve them (i.e. individuals who hold privileged identities) because the belief is that they no longer have to fight against racism. It also gives the false notion that structures and systems that continue to push forth inequity do not need to be disrupted. In sum, post-racial beliefs perpetuate racism and oppression by denying their existence.

The co-researchers created art that positioned nuanced and complex perspectives of history that was not only focused on pain, but rather centered on Black power and resistance. These perspectives also showed how the present is impacted by the past. During the Community Arts Showcase, all of the co-researchers chose to represent some aspect of historical resistance in the artwork they presented. The concept of Black power showed up in every piece of art that Mackenzie shared in her presentations at the Community Arts Showcase. The first picture she drew showed "the differences between what they [textbooks] show as Black people versus the power that Black people have." Although she shared with the audience that the drawing was still

in progress, she juxtaposed two pictures, side by side, where one side was going to show “Black people being led off boats” and the other side showed the Black power fist (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Mackenzie’s Textbook Drawing



She pointed out that the image of “Black people being led off boats” is one that she has seen at school and she wanted the audience to know that “they [school] don’t necessarily talk about the power that we’ve shown.” She was re-writing history by speaking directly to the images she had seen and then re-created those images. Another drawing she shared illustrated a Black woman with an Afro with a tear streaming down her face (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Mackenzie's Community Arts Showcase Self-Portrait



When explaining this drawing, Mackenzie shared,

I wanted to highlight the Afro like when we talked about the Black Panthers and how female Black Panthers wore their hair naturally. That's what I was trying to highlight there. Then, I also drew tears on the narrative that we're told because I feel like that's usually how we see Black people in our textbooks and things like that. They're always sad and crying, but in reality, we are powerful, even though we've gone through some rough things.

One half of the face had lightened hair to contrast with what Mackenzie drew as an Afro that symbolized the Black Panthers' resistance. To Mackenzie, the Afro symbolized strength and resistance. The other side of the face has a muzzle over the mouth. In Mackenzie's explanation, she noted that this is the side that is typically depicted in textbooks, which communicates how Black people are not only shown as in pain, but lacking voice because they are visibly missing or misrepresented.

Other co-researchers also used their art at the virtual Community Arts Showcase to directly address and counter dominant narratives in history that left out more nuanced and full depictions of Black history. For example, Jessie used her iPad to create an animated video that highlighted the work of Robert Smalls, Claudette Colvin, Florynce Kennedy, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos (Figure 8).

Figure 8. [Link to Jessie's animated video](#)

The faces of each figure were blurred. When she presented her animation to the audience she followed up by explaining about the artistic choice to conceal the faces, “What matters is that they helped change things and they could be any one of us.” What Jessie illuminated is that when Black history is taught through the limited scope of just a few figures, it makes it seem as though it is impossible for everyday, ordinary people to create change. History that only highlights the contributions of a few Black people makes it seem as though we have to wait for heroes to come and save us from oppression, which diminishes the power of collective struggle and resistance. Jessie intentionally used the term, “any one of us,” to reposition history away from heroic figures to the strength of community. The word “us” also moves from individual identity “I” to “we.”

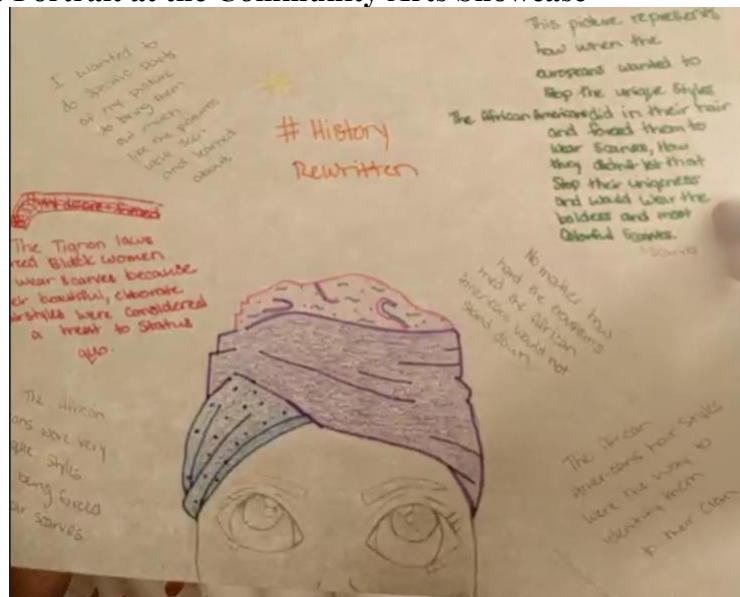
As another example from the Community Arts Showcase, Briana presented an illustration that represented the Tignon Laws in Louisiana in the 1700s that mandated that Black women had to wrap their hair to show that they were part of the “enslaved class” even if they were free (Figure 9). Briana described the drawing,

This picture represents how when the Europeans wanted to stop the unique styles the African-Americans did in their hair and forced them to wear scarves. How they [Black women] didn't let them [white colonizers] stop their uniqueness and we wear the boldest and most colorful scarves. The Tignon Laws forced Black women to wear scarves

because their beautiful elaborate hairstyles were considered a threat to the status quo.

You see, I did the hair wrap and cover in the face in black and white because of a portrait that we've learned about previously about how they may color in the parts that they wanted to stand out and they wanted you to pay more attention to.

Figure 9. Briana's Portrait at the Community Arts Showcase



The portrait Briana referred to was created by Adeyemi Adegbesan, which we discussed during our session on Afrofuturist art. This same theme of having a pop of color to highlight certain aspects of the art was also present in the music video Q.U.E.E.N. by Janelle Monáe and Erykah Badu that we viewed together in the session on Afrofuturistic art. Briana merged history and the future by adding elements of Afrofuturistic art with a historical illustration. Not only did her art root the future in the past, but Briana used the term “we” to describe who wore bright and bold headwraps. She moved from the past “they” to present day “we” to bridge the past, present, and future, while also writing herself into history.

As a group, they decided on the name “#HistoryRewritten” for the Community Arts Showcase. They said they wanted the title to represent resistance because it was something

“we’ve talked about a lot” after reviewing and coding the data. In other words, they saw how the theme of resistance came up in our conversations and artwork and they wanted to share that message with their loved ones at the Community Arts Showcase. They wanted the art to highlight how they spoke back to negative narratives in history.

As evidenced throughout the sessions, the co-researchers used art to recreate their textbooks by showing what they had learned in school and offer a more nuanced and complex version of history that emphasized the power of the collective. In their artwork, rather than depict certain historical figures, the art they created either made reference to Black people as a community or in Jessie’s case, took aspects of individual identity and made it collective.

To the co-researchers, collective identity was a part of how they understood themselves and how they made meaning of their own resistance. Particularly, their art often illustrated hair as resistance that tied their individual identities to the past. Mackenzie made reference to the Black Panthers and Afros in her self-portrait, while Briana discussed the resistance to the Tignon laws in her art through bright and colorful headwraps. While they used art to rewrite history, they also wrote themselves into history to construct their identities in light of learning more about Black history that was reflective of their experiences.

Sharing their Counter-narratives

Throughout the program, the co-researchers used art to express their own counter-narratives. Their counter-narratives spoke back to stereotypes about Black girls they heard at school and in the media, such as that Black girls are strong or loud. Art was a way they felt comfortable using to share their stories that refuted one-dimensional portrayals of who they were. While sometimes the co-researchers felt it was difficult to express their experiences, they

felt that sharing counter-narratives was not only necessary to resist on their own behalf, but to speak up for their communities.

At school, written and oral communication, as well as logical-mathematical modalities are most valued, while other expressions of intelligence, like art, are not always used as frequently (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). The co-researchers recognized how written and verbal were the communication norm in schools, but emphasized that art also enabled them to communicate their ideas. Art, for the co-researchers, was a form of communication that allowed them to express words and experiences that words could not do justice. In Olivia's words,

We use art because talking is not the only form of communication. Art is also a form of communication, and it's another way for you to get out everything that you want to say without necessarily having to say it.

Olivia points out that often oral communication is privileged, but there are other ways to get messages across that she did not always feel were accepted or appreciated. Similarly, Nia's voice resounded,

If we never share a story, I mean, we'll never be heard. That's why, you know, you can express yourself in so many different ways if it's your artistic skills or, you know, music or writing something, you know, I just feel like using your voice doesn't always have to be oral or vocal.

Nia also pointed out that the concept of voice does not have to only be expressed in a few ways. In essence, using art to express themselves was a form of counter-narrative itself because art was not always regarded as the appropriate way for them to articulate their understandings at school. The co-researchers pushed the argument that school should extend its regard of what constituted

voice -- they wanted art to be included in how they are encouraged to demonstrate their knowledge.

The word *voice* came up frequently in our conversations and in the art that the co-researchers created. Here, voice is defined as “naming one’s own reality” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13); however, the co-researchers extended this definition to also include asserting who they are through art, which became an integral part of their voice. Rather than art being an extension of their voice, it was a medium through which their voices resounded. When it was challenging for their physical voices to speak on their experiences, they were able to make their stories known through their art. Art allowed them to reflect, name, and communicate their experiences, some experiences that they could not explicitly put into words. It was a way that their voices could not only be heard but felt.

To understand counter-narratives, we first started by thinking deeply and critically about our identities. This was important because in order to counter negative and stereotypical narratives about ourselves, we have to first understand our identities and how we see ourselves. During the second session, we explored identities through a series of arts-based activities and discussion. The first activity was an exercise where co-researchers drew their identities in bubbles on a page. Some of the identities they discussed included: “daughter,” “friend,” “sister,” “role model,” “supporter,” “motivated,” and “achiever.” Based on these multiple identities, they created dual self-portraits, where on one side of their face they drew their outer self (what they think people see) and their inner self on the other side (how they feel on the inside).¹⁵

¹⁵ This enabled us to think about the concept of identity by exploring two of the questions in Chapter One: “Who am I?” and “Who do you think I am?”

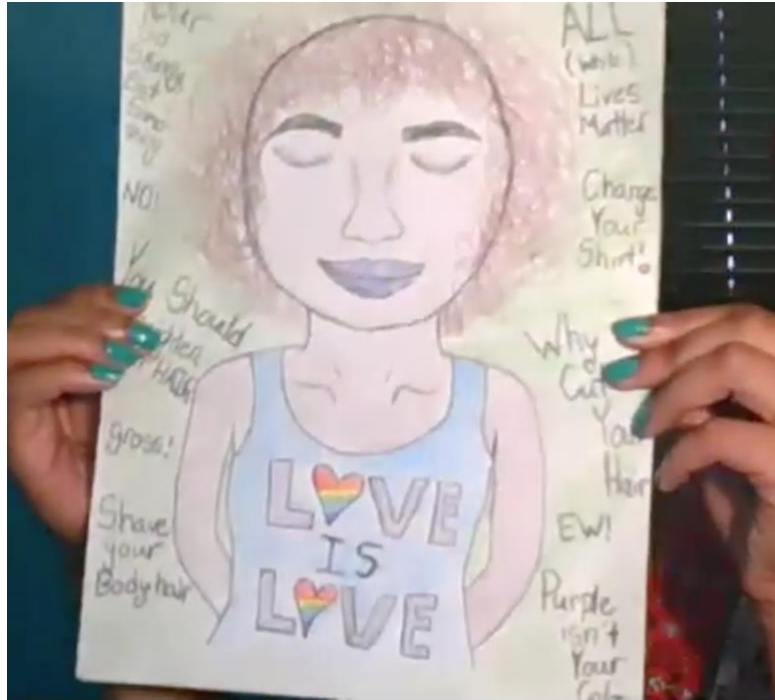
In Lisa's dual self-portrait, she said that at school, she's known as "the girl with the hair," referring to her natural hair. Instead, she wanted people to know that she is so much more than just what is on the outside. She discussed how she got in trouble at school because she wore her hair in a bright color. Even though there were others that dyed their hair in similar colors, she was one of the only students who got in trouble. She declared, "You can't really see me by looking at me." With this statement, Lisa wanted others to know that there was more to her than what was on the surface and asked to be "seen" for her personality, her talents, and her brilliance, not just the ways she did not conform to the school's dress code standards. Black girl identity is a refusal of falsified, one-dimensional narratives.

Camille's self-portrait is a good example to illustrate how the co-researchers used art to resist stereotypical narratives by proclaiming their identity on paper. Camille drew a self-portrait for the Community Arts Showcase that showed critiques she received from classmates, teachers, and administrators. While she was presenting at the Community Art Showcase, Camille showed the feedback swirled around the edges of her upper body,

These are supposed to be the negative comments that I have gotten before. I'll explain why. They say, "Why cut your hair? Purple isn't your color. Shave your body here. You should straighten your hair. You're so skinny. Eat something. Change your shirt."

In response to these negative messages, Camille drew herself wearing a shirt that said, "Love is love" and her facial expression was content with her eyes closed (Figure 10). While explaining her portrait she added, "I'm just tuning out everything and that's why my eyes are closed and not even looking at what other people were thinking about me."

Figure 10. Camille's self-portrait



Camille's image represented her counter-narrative. She drew herself through her own lens, with her eyes closed, and blocking out others' negative words. Camille chose to include the stereotypes and harsh feedback she received to be able to directly speak to it. However, she physically drew the negative feedback around her and none of the feedback ever touched her. She also wanted others (namely, teachers and classmates at school) to know exactly what was said to her so that they could be shocked and appalled by their words. While others thrust these directive statements at her, she was unbothered by their negative feedback because she was secure in her identity. In a society that profits off girls', particularly Black girls' insecurities, the act of being confident in her identity is a form of resistance.

Similarly, Nia shared a powerful counter-narrative during the Community Arts Showcase. She drew a heart with her name and wrote words that described her positive attributes. She drew "bad things that people say" about her outside of the heart, which were "crossed out and faded." The words that were closest to the heart with her name, such as "best

friend” and “determined,” were “believable because they’re the good ones.” By having the good qualities, the qualities that she saw in herself, close to her, she represented what it would look like to hold these aspects of her identity close, while physically separating herself from the negative feedback.

These practices of autobiographical art showed how Black girls assert identity as a practice of remembering who they are and the rich legacy of resistance from which they come from. In Audre Lorde’s (1982) words, the co-researchers were “defining themselves for themselves.” In defining ourselves, we were not only clear about who we are, but who we are not. The co-researchers showed who they were through art and represented who they were not by physically placing the negative words farther away from the elements that represented them.

In reflecting on their dual self-portraits, many of the co-researchers shared that they feel their inner and outer selves were similar, although others did not necessarily perceive some of the strengths that they see in themselves. When we discussed our dual self-portraits, some of the co-researchers said that on the inside they are “anxious,” “gentle,” and “loving,” while on the outside they “talk loud.” “Talking loud” is a stereotype that is often used as a way to describe Black girls (Morris, 2007). When a few of the co-researchers discussed how they talked loud they made jokes about it and giggled into their screens. Their humor and lightheartedness offered a counter-narrative because they were reclaiming a term that has been used to stereotype them. I wrote specifically about the concept of “being loud” in my field notes,

One conversation that intrigued me in today’s discussion was the idea of being considered “loud” by peers at school. Three of the co-researchers put that description as part of their outer self on the self-portrait, which struck me. When each of them elaborated on the concept of loudness, they laughed and shrugged it off. “I just can’t hear

well,” Mackenzie said in follow-up. Even though others who classified them as loud were perpetuating a stereotypical jibe about Black women, the girls seemed to reclaim that trait for themselves by directly naming it and then calling it out. What is interesting to me is that they seemed, from my vantage point, to be making sure their voices were heard by amplifying the sound of their voice [by audibly making it louder], while also brushing off and refuting what has been regarded as a negative trait.

“Being loud” was something that the co-researchers embraced about themselves; they did not regard it as being a negative trait. By reclaiming loudness, they shared the counter-narrative that there was more to who they were than what society portrayed them to be.

Using their voices was not only about sharing their own stories but using their stories to inspire and encourage others to speak up and be heard. The need to “get their stories out there” echoed throughout the multiple conversations in the program, especially because the stories the co-researchers shared about their lives have the ability to counter inaccurate perceptions. As Jessie shared,

I would say specifically when I make art, I use it to define a story and get words out and go against what other people maybe think, or their perception of other people, how they perceive people and how they think they are. I go against that.

Jessie highlighted the importance of art as a mechanism for “going against” or resisting negative perceptions and stereotypes. This also goes back to Lisa’s statement about being seen for more than just what is on the surface. The co-researchers used counter-narratives to let society know that their stories are not monolithic.

Another way the co-researchers used art was to give voice to the experiences and struggles of Black girls, in general. In her Community Arts Showcase performance, Olivia shook

the virtual room with a dynamic spoken word poem that rewrote the negative narrative of Blackness,

Black is ignorance and it is laziness.
Black is a ghetto mess and a whole lot of trouble.
Blackness is a threat and it is something you should fear.
To be Black is to be the worst version of a human being.
I'm sorry, I fear I was mistaken before.
To be Black is everything.
Blackness is power and knowledge.
It is beauty and strength.
To be Black is a blessing because Blackness is greatness.
I rewrote their story and you can too.

Be proud of your Blackness and all of its glory because Blackness is a part of you.
Olivia's poem is split in half by the statement, "I'm sorry, I fear I was mistaken before." This line separated the dominant narrative from the counter-narrative. The poem illuminates how Olivia wrote the negative narrative and directly spoke back to it.

As part of sharing their counter-narratives, the co-researchers highlighted how while Black girls are strong, they also wanted the world to recognize how dehumanizing it can be to only regard them as strong, without recognizing the challenges they face. Camille noted,

I feel like Black women, especially dark skins, have it way harder than people would expect and see because we don't really want to let people bring us down because we're stronger than that and if we act on it, we're always the angry Black woman that's always mad, but they don't understand the struggle that we have to go through on the daily.

Camille's statement emphasized how Black women and girls are often stereotyped as strong, but when we express that we cannot always be strong, we are met with backlash and stereotypes.

Throughout the pre-interviews with the co-researchers, there was a theme of Black girl strength as they unpacked their thoughts about what a collective Black girl identity was. When I asked the question, “How do we, as Black girls, identify ourselves?” Alia shared,

We definitely describe ourselves as strong. Black women are very strong. From day to day we get discriminated against, we get objectified, and people don't view us as humans. If we stand up for each other or for ourselves, we are crazy people, or we're feisty, or whatever you'd like to say. There's just so many people that choose not to take us seriously, but we bring so much to this world and people don't really have gratitude for that, people don't really consider that at all.

Alia's powerful quote illuminated how, in many instances, she felt that Black girls were dehumanized. It is important to note that strong was the one word Alia chose to use when talking about Black girls, particularly how Black girl strength shields us from not being taken seriously. I couple these two quotes to point out that the co-researchers recognized themselves as strong, but at the same time they want to be seen as humans with strengths and weaknesses. Towards the end of the program when we revisited the question of a collective Black girl identity, Olivia added a nuanced perspective of Black girl strength,

I think most of us [Black girls] identify ourselves as strong, before anything else, which I don't even really like anymore because, of course, we are strong but it's like...pushed on us, in my opinion. I think that's what we've taken with identifying. I think that it is very damaging, in a sense, that it doesn't allow us to be sensitive and to show that we are hurting or to show that we need healing.

Olivia emphasized that she no longer liked to identify as strong because she felt like that was an identity that society placed onto her. Because of structural and systemic racism and

heteropatriarchy, Olivia felt that society gave her no choice but to be strong. She wanted society to know that there is more to who she is than what society paints her to be. In essence, she wanted the world to see her “strength and sadness” (Nunn, 2018).

Similar to re-writing historical narratives, the Black girl co-researchers also wanted their own stories to be remembered as nuanced and not simply one-dimensional. They wanted society to see their power and strength, but they also wanted there to be conditions for them to speak on and express their pain, joy, and curiosity. They wanted to be seen as full humans, capable of being hurt and capable of expressing and developing multiple and nuanced identities that were not confined by stereotypes.

While our art explored how our own experiences and Black girl storytelling practices at large challenge and change deficit-based discourses about our personhood, we also created art that expressed the importance of standing up for our communities. As an example of another activity, we used India.Arie’s song “I Am Not My Hair” and Solange’s song “Don’t Touch My Hair” as frameworks for writing our own counter-narrative song lyrics. I specifically chose these songs because the co-researchers shared that hair was something important to them in previous sessions and during the pre-interviews. They also drew representations of hair multiple times during the program without prompting. For example, Alia drew a picture of the back of her head to show her hair during a Black Lives Matter protest because hair is something she takes a lot of pride in. Jessie created an animation where someone was trying to touch her hair and she refused. The co-researchers used art to present aspects of their life where they resisted, and part of that resistance was through their hair.

To illustrate counter-narrative song lyrics, Alia wrote hers during this activity to speak back to the racism and discrimination she experienced. She also chose to perform the poem she wrote as part of this activity at the Community Arts Showcase,

My soul is the kingdom.

My body is the crown.

My skin is the armor, and I'll never let my pride down.

In deep waters, now I have risen from the shallow.

Now their words don't trigger anymore.

The pain still feels like yesterday

but the bruises don't burn anymore.

I am the fighter. I'm a knight with swords made of gold.

My voice is powered.

Alia ended the poem by acknowledging the power of her voice, despite having to overcome overt discrimination. She asserted that she is a fighter, and used her words as a weapon of choice, while her racial pride protects her from the stings of oppression. It is important to note that she chose to use the word *powered* rather than say her *voice has power*. Her voice is powered by her strength, but also the armor that protects her. The armor, or protection, is bolstered by her community because she goes on to say, "I'll never let my pride down." This has two meanings. First, she will not let her own sense of pride be diminished by others and secondly, she will not let her community, or her pride, down.

Other co-researchers also noted the importance of speaking up and using their voice as a tool for fighting on behalf of themselves and their communities, even when they felt shy about allowing themselves to be heard and seen. Like in Alia's song lyrics, to the co-researchers, using

their voices was about more than just them. Olivia discussed how she typically doesn't like to speak up,

I know for me, it's really hard to share anything and I don't. But I think what I just have to realize is that my thoughts and my experiences need to be shared, and that just overpowers any anxieties that I have, because I need to get my story out there. Other people need to get their story out there, and as long as you remember that, I think that you will be quite all right. That's my two cents.

Alia's song lyrics and Olivia's point highlight how Black girls use their voices as a means of survival and protection, both of themselves and of others. As Alia's poetic lyricism shared, their voices are a weapon to fight back against negative narratives and rather speak their lived truths to directly oppose narratives in their classrooms, textbooks, media, and the news that portray them in a deficit light.

Healing In and Building Community Out

The co-researchers, in both the pre-interviews and the sessions, discussed how they used art as a mechanism for connecting with and processing their emotions, healing internally from combating racism and discrimination, and building community externally to be reminded that they are not alone. Their time making art was a space where, even in the stress of their daily lives and the harmful impacts of the intersections of racism, sexism, and other systems of oppression, they could be reminded of who they are and what they strive to achieve. Camille said,

I feel like my favorite part [about art] is that I feel like myself.

The idea of coming back to oneself, their most "authentic" self as it was most frequently captured in the raw data, was a way that the co-researchers used art not just in the program, but in their daily lives. While society often tried to make us forget who our most "authentic selves"

were by enacting the emotional violence of oppression, we used art as a crucial aspect of our healing and well-being practices.

The concept of healing and well-being was a notable theme in the data. Art helped us to uncover and surface challenging aspects of our experiences and to tap into parts of ourselves that previously we had not been able to name. In Alia's words,

I think that music has really helped me heal from the racism that I experience still to this day. I feel like Black girls heal when they just do what they love and do what they know they want to do.

Here Alia mentioned that Black girls do what they love to do as a way of combating injustice and oppression. The creation and practice of art was an expression of self-love and an emancipatory practice that helped them to facilitate healing and well-being. In a sense, art was a mechanism and an enactment of pouring back into themselves when the world attempted to diminish their sense of self. Recognizing that there are many ways to heal and healing is a continual process, art offered emotional, somatic, and even spiritual dimensions to taking care of ourselves, amidst stress.

As another example of how the concept of healing and well-being came up in our conversations, during our first session, we ended with a sisterhood circle after engaging in conversations about Black women's resistance in history and an accompanying art reflection process. Our Ubuntu in that session was to "Share an object that has meaning to you and makes you feel powerful," and that object became the talking piece for the virtual circle. Some of the objects included notebooks, phones, an instrument, and a favorite book. All of the objects they shared tied back to their relationship to art -- they used notebooks and phones to write song lyrics

and poems, instruments to make music, and books to serve as inspiration for animations and painted portraits. These items brought us comfort and facilitated feelings of self-care.

Our prompt in the first sisterhood circle was, “Share a time where you used your power to resist something that was wrong.” We each placed our talking pieces into the camera as we “passed them” to one another and gave each co-researcher the space to share their thoughts on the prompt. As each person shared individually, they described experiences with racism at school: the inequitable treatment of Black students by teachers, not feeling supported at school, and being punished at school because of their hair. I wrote about the sisterhood circle in my field notes,

I was surprised, but also not surprised, that all of the shares (except for one) in the sisterhood circle were about the girls fighting against racism in school. Even though the prompt was broad, racism is so insidious and so prevalent in their lives, specifically at school, that it came to the forefront of their sharing. One thing I’m grappling with is that I could hear the power in their voices as they shared stories of standing up -- to people that excluded them from activities in school, to teachers that treated them differently than their peers, to hosting school-wide conversations about race. But I could also hear the sadness. The frustration. How they shouldn’t have to experience the emotional violence of racism.

They each named fighting against racism in their responses, yet they also discussed how they used art as a place for them to restore and find peace. Art-making afforded them a pathway to the necessary rejuvenation needed to continue to resist and to stand in their power, especially to process their experiences at school. They used art as a place of liberation and freedom. Art offered an escape from the daily stressors of their lives.

Understanding and processing emotions was also an integral part of our conversations on healing and well-being. According to Jessie, art “whether it is art musically, or art dancing wise, it relieves stress.” In our pre-interviews, Jessie talked about how she created animations about emotions she experienced while listening to music. Lisa described how she wanted to create soundtracks for movies because it makes people feel certain emotions in crucial moments. Nia talked about using hip hop dance to convey her feelings when she did not feel she had the words. Olivia shared,

It [dance] really calms me. I know when I'm in the wings waiting to go on [stage], I'm always super nervous, but as soon as I go out there, it's just...I'm in the moment. I think that's the best part.

Art allowed them to be present with their emotions and present in the moment, despite anything that might be going on around them. Briana noted that for her, art was “very therapeutic and made me feel really good to write and draw my emotions and my feelings.” Art was a mechanism by which we were able to connect deeper to ourselves and our emotions. Lisa noted how music helped her process her feelings and make sense of them,

I feel like I have such a strong connection, um when I listen to music I can get into my headspace and just think about things and take time to myself. I'm like, I listen to a lot of classical music and yeah, just classical music because, um, without lyrics, it gives me time to think about my feelings. As a whole, I feel like the music that I listen to makes me feel a certain way like, I can imagine it [feelings] based on like...the key of the song.

You know, the chords. So, um, I definitely like to listen to that to calm me down.

Music, for Lisa, helped her to practice mindfulness by being present in the moment with her feelings and being able to notice and observe her emotions as they came up. Artistic and creative

practices were how they exhibited mindfulness by getting in touch with how they were feeling in the moment, rather than suppressing those feelings. Similarly, Camille shared the sentiment that music can be a tool for understanding emotions as universal feelings that connect us to one another,

Music can save peoples' lives, sometimes because real people write music. You can be going through something and someone else that has written that song can be going through the same thing. You don't feel really alone in that experience.

Camille highlighted how music and art are important for communal care¹⁶ because it is a universal language. To the co-researchers, art presented an opportunity to communicate and be in community because it reminded them that “they are not alone.” Through art, the co-researchers shared their experiences with one another and even though many of them had never met in person, their art allowed them to develop a bond because they could see similar emotions and experiences reflected in their sharing.

Dreaming a Better World into Existence

During the third session, the co-research team and I discussed Afrofuturism and what our dreams were for a better world. After defining the term Afrofuturism, we watched a clip of *Black Panther* that detailed the Wakanda¹⁷ origin story. We drew our own Afrofuturistic worlds with these prompts guiding us: If you could design a new world, what would it be like? Where would it be? What resources would it have? Who would be in leadership? The answers to these questions inspired the co-researchers' dreams of a world rooted in equity, justice, love, and joy.

¹⁶ See chapter 4 for our conceptualization of communal care.

¹⁷ Wakanda is a fictional country set in Africa that is home to Marvel Comics character, Black Panther. It is a hidden mountain kingdom.

Many of the Afrofuturistic worlds the co-researchers imagined addressed some of the current problems in the world. As an example, Olivia discussed her world,

My Afrofuturistic world would be an all-inclusive society. There is no hatred towards one another. There is love; we welcome all people. That was the main value, that everybody is just kind to one another. We had to talk about the things that we would have there. I wanted community facilities, there was a place where people who weren't from here could come here for sanctuary or for permanent citizenship.

Olivia imagined her world as welcoming and kind, but that also provided structural supports (e.g. healthcare, food) for communities. Her world would not only welcome those who are deemed part of the community, but also others seeking to become members. In Olivia's case, she was offering subtle commentary about how the United States pushes forth policy and narratives riddled with stereotypes about other countries to maintain white supremacy. She opposed keeping others out.

As they described their worlds, many of the co-researchers mentioned that the world they imagined would be inclusive, where everyone felt like they belonged. Camille shared that in her world, "Everybody takes care of each other. We don't have a president or higher power. We're all equal in this [world]." The co-researchers dreamed of a world centered in equality that wasn't governed by one person, but rather all people. In her drawing, the community is surrounded by nature represented by "string lights," which hang from the trees and gave an ethereal feel to the scene (Figure 11). Camille noted, "my world is not here." By "here" Camille was referring to the United States. By saying that her world was not in the United States, it reinforced how she viewed the United States as not being a place that is equal.

Figure 11. Camille's Afrofuturistic World



In a previous session, Camille also shared that she wished that she and her loved ones could move to a different country where there were “more people that looked like” them. In her drawing, she used darker colors to illustrate the beautiful skin tones of the community members. This underscored, in many ways, how the co-researchers felt that they were being failed by United States society in its lack of providing the structural support needed for them to feel affirmed and valued in this country.

Even in their frustration, the co-researchers offered powerful visions for what the world could look like. For example, Jessie shared an idea of how she envisioned bridging technology and nature (Figure 12),

One of the main things that I would want was the house in my drawing to be powered by the waterfall in the background so that it would be connected to nature but still be technology-based [powered by the waterfall].

Figure 12. Jessie's Afrofuturistic World



Jessie's weaving of nature and technology exemplifies the possibilities of the future, when situated in the visionary inventiveness of Black girls. As Jessie illustrated, the house resembled a hut on stilts that raised it above the water. The waterfall behind the house offered an energy source to power the home, which reflected Jessie's commitment to efficient, clean energy. This representation provided another example of how the co-researchers bridged elements of the past (older building structures) and present with futuristic elements (technology from the waterfall) to benefit the greater good.

The week after our session on Afrofuturism, we focused our conversations on activism, specifically art as activism. We discussed activism in light of the worlds we created to think about how we could use our actions to facilitate the changes we desired that were depicted in our

worlds. To fight for the worlds we all dreamed together, we recognized that in order to see the changes we wanted, activism was necessary to bring about those changes. The co-researchers talked about what activism means to them,

Nia: I'm thinking you have to be bold and be able to speak up all the time and care for others, but also care for yourself as well.

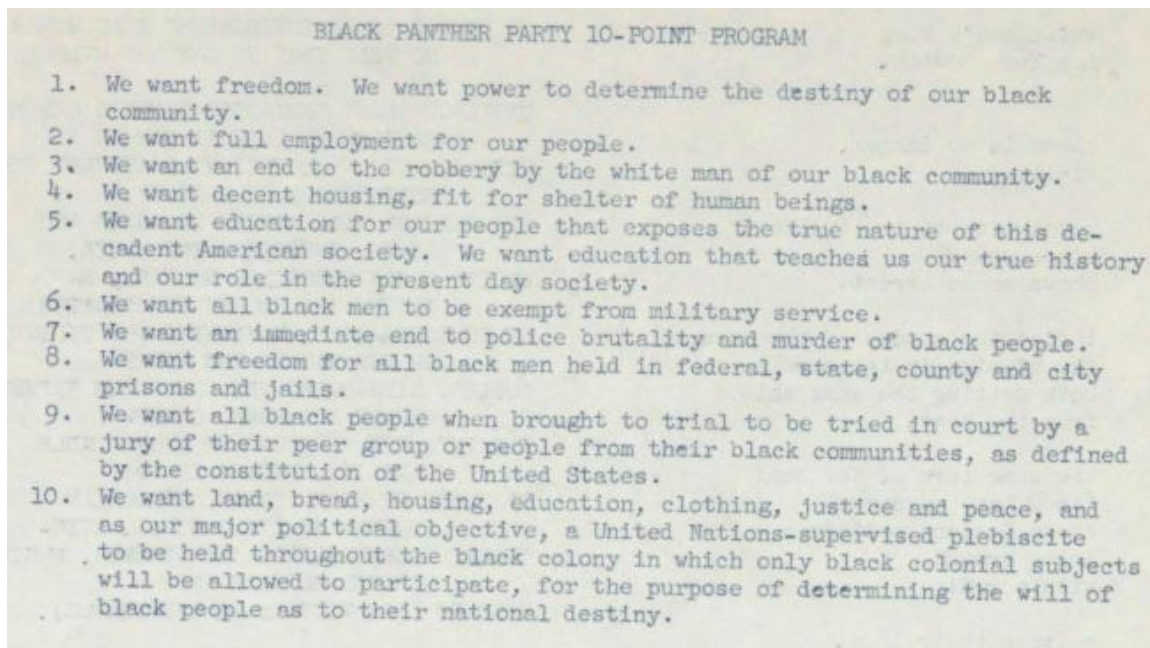
Jessie: Personally, I feel like activism can come in a lot of different ways, not just we, when we think of an activist, we do think of someone who's out there doing things. I feel that's a really good example, but when you talk about how do you personally see yourself as an activist, I feel like you can be a small-scale activist and just be an activist within your friend group or within your community. Just boiling down to it, it's just speaking out for what you believe in. I feel like that's just what it is.

Camille: There are going to be so many people in this world who are going to try to silence you and tell you that your voice doesn't matter, but it does. Activism is also resistance, and it's taking a lead and showing an example to people who are younger than you, older than you, just really being, I guess, like a teacher and spreading the word about what you know is right or what you believe in. That's what activism is to me.

Nia, Jessie, and Camille all mentioned the concept of “speaking up,” as well as how activism can happen at many levels (e.g. with yourself, your friends/community, the world). Together, we talked about how, as activists, we stand up for what we believe, but how we also have the power to use our art, our strengths, our gifts, and our talents to influence, create, and fight for the world we dream of. To dig deeper into activism and organizing, we used the Zinn Education Project’s

lesson, ‘What We Want, What We Believe’: Teaching with the Black Panthers’ Ten Point Program. We reviewed the Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program to relate what the Black Panthers were demanding in the 60’s to what we are still demanding today (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Black Panther Party Ten Point Program



After reading the Ten Point program, we discussed the similarities and differences between the Black Panthers’ demands and current issues today. Specifically, we noted how the end to police brutality is something we are still fighting for. We also offered other thoughts and insights about the language the Black Panthers used to detail their ten points. For example, Mackenzie raised a critical point,

I can't remember if anyone [one of the other co-researchers] said this. Of the first six ones, something that was a common theme [in the Ten Point Program], was *decent* housing and *decent* education. I don't know. I just think it's interesting that what they were pushing for was just decent and not equal because I feel like decent has the connotation of the bare minimum. I guess that is your right, is to have the basic whatever,

or basic anything. I think that they should have been pushing for something other than just decent.

Mackenzie's point encouraged the team to think about what we would demand in our Ten Point program. Specifically, the co-researchers wanted to make sure they accurately and vividly reflected their dreams for what the world could be by being intentional with their language. Mackenzie pushed us to think about how to demand equity and go beyond just decent, but equitable. Using the Ten Point Program, the co-researchers brainstormed and created their own version of the program,

Black Girls S.O.A.R. Ten Point Party Program

We want...

- A fixed justice system
- Equality in race, gender, and religion
- We want to have free rights to believe what we choose, to follow who we want to follow and speak our minds
- Officers involved in shootings of Black people held accountable and charged
- We want to ban conversion therapy, the KKK, and other organizations/group that harm oppressed groups
- We want an immediate end to workplace and school discrimination for the hair choices of Black people
- We want to end private prisons/for profit prisons
- We want an end to the over-policing in Black neighborhoods
- We want to replace police in Black schools with counselors

- We want to incorporate the teaching of Black history as a required course in the school system

Much of what we outlined in our Ten Point program highlighted how oppressive systems continue to police and punish Black people, including police in schools and neighborhoods, hate groups like the KKK, and also the carceral state of prisons. We were also concerned more largely with ensuring equity, equality, and justice for all people, including LGBTQ+ communities and other marginalized groups. Along with the demands for society, we also detailed our demands for schools, including teaching Black history, hiring more counselors, and ending hair discrimination. Through our demands, the co-researchers offered a roadmap for not only creating a world where Black girls feel safe and affirmed, but where all people, specifically marginalized communities, could experience freedom and liberation. The co-researchers were clear in laying out a framework for a world rooted in equity, equality, justice, and love.

Specific attributes of Black girls' involvement in art programs that foster identity construction and acts of resistance

There were four specific attributes of Black girls' involvement in the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program that fostered positive identity development and acts of resistance. The four attributes detailed in this chapter include reexamining history by centering Black women's resistance, learning about self and communal care, being around other Black girls, and showcasing their work to loved ones (Research Question 2).

Reexamining History by Centering Black Resistance

Learning the history of Black peoples', specifically Black women's resistance, helped to shape how some of the co-researchers viewed themselves, and built their confidence for speaking up about issues that are important to them. By learning about Black women's resistance, they

saw their experiences reflected in the lives of other Black women and learned about the many ways that resistance has been enacted. The co-researchers saw their own activism, organizing, and artwork as part of a long and rich legacy of resistance.

During our first session, when asked what Black women figures they learned in school, the co-researchers paused. After a few seconds, Jessie said, “Rosa Parks,” and then Camille mentioned, “Harriet Tubman,” followed by Nia, “I learned about Phyllis Wheatley.” The few figures that they were able to name also fueled them to share that they did not learn enough about Black women figures in school, especially outside of Black History Month. We used the Zinn Education Project’s Resistance 101 mixer lesson to learn about Black women activists and artists, including Toni Morrison, Septima Clark, Maya Angelou, Judith Jamison, Faith Ringgold, Ella Baker, Destiny Watford, Claudette Colvin, and Audre Lorde. Each co-researcher received a virtual slip of paper with a short bio of these powerful Black women and a quote that they said or wrote (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Example Bio Sheet - Faith Ringgold

Faith Ringgold (1930 -)

I grew up in Harlem, New York, where my mother, a seamstress, encouraged my creative interests from a young age. After earning my bachelor’s degree, I taught art in New York City public schools before earning a master’s degree. In the late 1960s I created oil paintings and posters with political messages in support of the Civil Rights Movement. I protested the exclusion of Black and women artists in museums and co-founded Where We At, a group for African-American women artists. I am most well known for story quilts, which share open-ended narratives. My first story quilt was called *Who’s Afraid of Aunt Jemima?*, which turned the character into a successful businesswoman. I’ve also written and illustrated a number of children’s books.



“You can’t sit around and wait for somebody to say who you are. You need to write it and paint it and do it.”

The co-researchers then played the role of one Black woman and went into breakout rooms to meet one another in character. As they met one another, they practiced interviewing skills in preparation for the co-researchers collecting oral history testimonies from their loved ones. When we came back from the breakout rooms, I asked them what surprised them about their person and what were their initial reflections on anything new they learned. Nia shared,

Yes, [I had] Claudette Colvin, 15-year old Black girl who sat down on the bus nine months before Rosa Parks. Yes, she has a very interesting story. She's actually..she's still alive.

Nia emphasized that Colvin was 15-years old, while other co-researchers put in the chat box that they were 15-years old. Textbooks often leave out young people or leave out their ages to make them seem as if they are older than they actually are. For the co-researchers, this was a powerful revelation --to see a Black girl in history play a significant role in a mass movement.

Additionally, textbooks leave out youth activists and organizers who are leading present movements. For example, Alia had Destiny Watford, a youth environmental activist and organizer who grew up in the Baltimore, Maryland area. Alia reflected on Destiny's work,

She inspires other people to use their voices because I feel like so many people who have things that they want to get out and want to spread with other people. But they just don't look how to express it. They're nervous. So to have somebody else who can encourage you to stand up and make a change, I think it's very motivating.

Alia referenced how she felt inspired by Destiny Watford's story and it made her feel encouraged to speak up because she could see someone around her age who organized other young people.

As another example of the reflections co-researchers shared, Briana typed in the chat box that she learned about Septima Clark during the activity,

I learned that Septima Clark made a daycare after four kids died in a house fire while their mom was at work. You know, pretty powerful stuff.

Briana discussed how this was powerful because Septima Clark saw a need in the community and created a solution. All of the figures we learned about used their art and their activism to mobilize and support others in fighting for a cause that was important to them.

When I asked the co-researchers if they had heard of any of the figures before, those who had their cameras on shrugged. Alia added,

Most of them were new to me. I think that says a lot. I feel like there's so much more that Black people have done.

Even though the co-researchers noted that most of the figures we learned about together were people they had not heard about before, they continued to reference the Black women figure's work and words throughout the program. In the Community Arts Showcase, when a loved one asked the co-researchers during the audience *talkback*, "What's one thing that you learned about yourself [during Black Girls S.O.A.R.]?" Lisa answered,

The only way I can really answer this question is with a quote that I learned from Faith Ringgold. She said, "You can't sit around and wait for someone to say who you are. You need to write it and paint it and do it."

Lisa invoked another Black woman's message and brought her words into the space to describe how she was making meaning of her own identity. This practice of (re)membering a Black woman's words in relation to her own experience tied her meaning-making of her identity to another Black woman's. By centering Black women's resistance, and artistic resistance, the co-

researchers could relate their experiences to that of those they learned. They saw their experiences reflected back to them.

In the post-interviews, the co-researchers detailed a number of reflections about what they learned in the program that was most impactful. Briana highlighted how pivotal it was to learn about and discuss how Black peoples', specifically Black women's, stories have been left out of their curriculum at school,

I think what I learned was that Black people, Black women specifically, have been fighting for so long, and because we are left out of that narrative so often, we are not put in the spotlight so there were a lot of accomplishments of Black women that I had not known of, specifically with the Mardi Gras and their- not the- but their hairstyles. I didn't know that there was that act of resistance. That was something new that I definitely learned.

Briana referenced our conversation about the Tignon laws as how she defined resistance, which is something she had not thought of before -- hair as not only expression, but resistance. By amplifying Black resistance stories throughout history, the co-researchers developed their own definitions of resistance and identified themselves, as Olivia affirmed in her post-interview, as "resistors." They talked about how everyday acts in how they use their art, like wearing their hair a color that was criminalized by their school, as an act of resisting racist and discriminatory policies and practices. As Olivia shared,

I would describe resistance as art, as communication, as anything really that shows people that I am not going to stand for this, and this being anything, oppression, racism, any of it.

Not only did the co-researchers talk about what they learned that both broadened and crystallized their understanding of resistance in the post-interviews, but also how they shared their learning with their loved ones. For example, after learning about the Black Panther Party, Alia told her mom about our conversation,

I was surprised because I remember you were telling us about the Black Panthers. I knew about them, but I guess a little bit more in-depth about who they are. I was talking to my mom about them, and she was telling me about, for example, how they started providing meals for children and how now it impacts the world. Everywhere schools are providing meals for children who don't have that privilege.

What struck Alia was that the Black Panthers are often discussed in the curriculum from a deficit perspective if and when they are mentioned, yet they created the Free Breakfast for Children Program, sponsored schools and started a number of Freedom Schools, organized clothing distributions, and opened free health clinics. The many ways that Black organizers and activists have created significant changes to take care of their communities continued to surface in our discussions and in their art. As a team, the co-researchers and I reiterated these stories of resistance.

Some co-researchers named feeling more confident in their daily lives after being rooted in stories of Black power and equipped with new knowledge about Black history. At the end of the program, when asked if she felt a change in herself since the beginning of the program, Camille replied,

Yes, I do. Actually, I feel like, especially my peers -- my peers have seen a lot of difference in me. I feel they've seen more confidence and -- I don't know, I feel like I've just been more open with myself and who I am.

In my field notes, I wrote about Camille's confidence during the Community Arts Showcase,

Camille logged in early and asked me if it would be okay if we did a group prayer before starting the showcase. She told me a lot has been going on in the world and two days before [the Showcase] Chadwick Boseman passed away, so she wanted to make sure we prayed over the space and over everyone attending. I asked her if she would like to lead it and she hesitated for a moment, like she was thinking hard about it. Her face scrunched up. But after a slight pause, I could see her confidence shine through. Her shoulders relaxed as she said, "yes." Later on during the *talk back* with the audience, I paused to create space for any reflections. The pause was uncomfortably long (for me), but then Camille ended up sharing three more really powerful thoughts that she wanted everyone to leave with. I'm so grateful to have been able to see her step into a leadership role.

Camille highlighted how programs that employ Black feminist pedagogy and curriculum can help Black girls develop confidence. This confidence comes from a knowledge of self that is deepened by understanding how Black communities have always resisted, even if textbooks do not tell this full story. Olivia shared similar sentiments about feeling more confident and vocal as well,

I definitely saw changes, internally. My self-esteem has been boosted, my confidence has been boosted. I have tried to work on becoming more outspoken, work on protecting me and advocating for me, and just being the best version of me as a Black girl.

Olivia pointed out that she not only was becoming more comfortable speaking up and sharing her opinion about social justice issues, but in standing up for herself and her needs.

Even co-researchers that did not feel they changed as a result of the program mentioned the importance of learning about topics related to Black resistance and how that encouraged confidence. For example, Alia noted,

I definitely learned many new things and I'm really happy that I learned so many new things, because I think that if I wasn't a part of this, I probably wouldn't have known all of the information that I do now. I don't think it changed me, but I think that it enhanced my brain and my knowledge and, of course, just my confidence in sharing my opinions and discussing things with people.

Knowing the true history of resistance encouraged the co-researchers to feel confident in speaking up about injustice, but also sharing their learnings with others. Because, in comparison to the lack of representation they saw in their curriculum at school, they could see themselves and their experiences reflected in our activities and discussions, they saw the many ways they were already resisting dominant narratives.

The Importance of Self and Communal Care

During our second session, we talked about the origins of the term self-care. Together, we unpacked how the term self-care was introduced widely and revolutionized by the Black Panther Party, who knew that because the government and healthcare system would not take care of them, they had to take care of themselves and one another. In our discussion about self-care, communal care, and structural care, we created colorful affirmation sheets. Our prompt was to, “Choose one word that you want to be in this energy this week (and beyond).” After we drew out their affirmations, we muted ourselves, stood up, and shouted our affirmations three times, with our arms outstretched to welcome the energy into our bodies. During the Community Arts Showcase, they filled the virtual Zoom room with their powerful declarations,

Briana: I am productive and positive.

Jessie: I am optimistic.

Nia: I am powerful and brave.

Olivia: I am stress-free.

Lisa: I am creative.

Camille: I am inspired.

Alia: I am motivated.

Mackenzie: I am innovative.

These affirmations, while a small practice, encouraged the co-researchers to advocate for themselves and for what they want. The sentences were both their desires and boundaries set in motion. They said the process of saying the affirmations out loud felt “weird” and “silly” but “good.” Particularly, they mentioned that even though it felt uncomfortable at first, it made them feel powerful to actually voice those messages about themselves.

When I asked them what it looks like and feels like to be cared for, Olivia said she felt “shocked” when someone tells her that they care about her. When I followed up to ask why she felt shocked, she replied by saying that she is “an overthinker” and “sometimes I don’t think anybody likes me.” When she said that, every co-researcher nodded their heads into the screen, signaling that it was a shared feeling amongst them. To be able to vocalize those thoughts about ourselves takes bravery and courage, especially as we often talked about Black girl strength and resistance. Nia also gave voice to feeling surprised,

When I feel cared for I feel happy and relieved in a type of way. Because I feel like, ‘oh, someone actually does care about me,’ you know? And sometimes that that person has to be you, you know? So, yeah.

This vital message that sometimes the person that has to care for us has to be ourselves repeated throughout the program. Camille recalled this specific session on care during the Community Arts Showcase when a loved ones asked the co-researchers what they learned about themselves during the program,

Can I say something? Something I learned, it is about myself, but not just about myself, is that activists also have to be a self-activist. Even though you're helping others, you need to help yourself first, too, like self-care. There's so many different types of self-care out there, like emotional, not just emotional, mental, and physical, it's like other ones. There's way more and I learned that. I'm now going to use that daily to help me. That's something I learned.

Camille named the importance of self-care as being a crucial aspect of being an activist. In order to take care of others, they recognized that they had to take care of themselves first. Olivia also mentioned self-care in follow-up to Camille's comment at the Community Arts Showcase,

I go for what Camille said. Something I learned is that it's okay to say no. Saying no does not mean you're mean, it doesn't mean that you're a bad person. It just simply means that you are taking care of yourself, and you are doing what's in your best interest. That's what I learned.

Both Camille and Olivia seemed to be announcing these statements to themselves, but also to the group, as a reminder that we all needed to do a better job of caring for ourselves. Olivia not only shared that this was a key takeaway she learned in the Community Arts Showcase, but in the post-interview conversation,

The one thing that stuck out to me most was prioritizing myself and this idea of self-care, and that I am allowed to say no, and that no is a full sentence.

In a society that has made Black girls believe that saying no makes you “mean,” in Olivia’s words, it is even more critical for them to set and assert boundaries to protect themselves, to protect their talents and craft, and protect their energy.

Being Supported by Other Black Girls

Many of the girls shared how they appreciated being in a space with other Black girls because it afforded them a sense of safety. Particularly, being in a program with other Black girls made them feel as though they could share their thoughts and opinions freely. This was especially the case for those who went to a predominantly white school or lived in a predominantly white area. In Alia’s words,

I think my experience was very good because I had dedicated every Sunday to learn something new and listen to the perspectives of other people who are familiar to me and may have gone through the same thing, so I think it's interesting to get another perspective or another view from other Black girls because I don't really have access to that. Yes.

Most of the co-researchers were introduced to each other for the first time during the first session. As Alia noted, even though they only knew one another for five weeks without ever meeting in person because of the virtual aspect of the programming, something about the other girls felt “familiar” to her. The shared experiences of being both Black and a girl encouraged a level of discussing different perspectives in a way that felt safe and comforting. They felt like the experiences they had and the feelings they were grappling with were valid because they were surrounded by others who understood. Mackenzie also noted the importance of being around other Black girls,

We got to talk with girls of color around our age about social topics that impact us, and I liked it.

Similarly, Olivia reflected,

It was nice to be surrounded by other Black girls because I know when you're not, it can be very hard to speak up and it can make conversations more uncomfortable, you're afraid you're going to offend people by sharing your experiences, but when you have this space for Black girls and with Black girls, you are able to be yourself, be authentic, and that is what the program provided me with. I loved it. It made me feel safe. It made me feel I was valid, like I have a voice, and that I have the right to use it.

Olivia's comment about safety was important, in that Black girl-centered programs have the potential to remind Black girls that they belong and they can be loved for exactly how they show up in the world.

The space allowed them to share their struggles with one another and also created bonds that transcended outside of the actual physical space of the program. In the post-interview with Jessie, she giggled as she told me that in preparation for the Community Arts Showcase, she chatted with one co-researchers as they shared their art with one another the week before the show. Jessie said that they asked each other questions about their art, specifically asking if the art they created represented "resistance." This camaraderie between the co-researchers was evident throughout the program. I wrote in my field notes after the first session,

They were open and honest with what they shared -- speaking from the heart and listening from the heart. If two people unmuted at the same time, they paused and created space for the other person to go. There was a lot of extensions of points that other people shared and affirmations in the chat box like "I agree!" or "Me too!" Even though it was the first team meeting, I could see their support for one another.

Being in a program dedicated for Black girls created a space where the co-researchers were able to recognize pieces of their shifting and solidifying identities in others. It became a brave space for them to articulate their thoughts and feelings without the fear of being judged or shamed, where they could create artwork that enabled them to explore their identities and their history. It was a space where they could be reminded that their voice is valuable. Throughout the conversations, there were a lot of verbal exclamations of, “I agree with...” and “To echo.” Each addition was a love note to one another wrapped in the form of building on each other’s thoughts.

Community Arts Showcase

All of the sessions led to the co-creation of a virtual Community Arts Showcase that highlighted the art we worked on throughout the program and also artwork they created on their own that illustrated the themes they found in the data. During the third session, we collectively coded the data in de-identified transcripts, which were located in a shared Google Document. To code, I invited the researchers to *in vivo* code directly from the words (Figure 15). Each researcher chose a different color highlighter and emphasized words, phrases, and ideas that stuck out to them as being important. After we coded the data together, they shared these as themes from what they read,

Discrimination

Personal experiences with hair, school, and culture

Famous Black people

Challenges within the Black community (e.g. “talking/acting white”)

Black history/School doesn’t highlight those successes of Black people in history as much as they should/History is reflected by those who write it

Resistance in Art/Resistance means not allowing others to not let you express your culture

Figure 15. Example of Group Coding

R: Well, most of **Black history** that I have learned has been from my parents, and that is because my **school** doesn't do enough because it is a **predominantly white** private school. So I don't get to learn as much about my history. We learn more about **American history**, and I mean American history by the Europeans and Christopher Columbus who get there. But they never say anything about you know, any of the Black people, the issues that they face. Any black history. We haven't talked about any important Black people. I feel like it's always Christopher Columbus this Christopher Columbus that.

C: That's a really great point. Other thoughts? You can feel free to come off mute, you don't have to, like, raise your hand or anything like that. You can feel free to just jump in the conversation whenever you'd like. And also, if you don't want to share verbally with the group, you can also write your thoughts in the chat box, too. Whatever is most comfortable for you. So what have you learned about Black history at **school**, at home or in your activities?

R: **Schools** they don't teach enough Black history. I learned about **Black Wall Street**. Uh, and I was like we're learning this in **school**? Yeah, This is crazy.

C: Yeah. And what did you learn about Black Wall Street? That's a really great, um, a really great topic.

From some of the aforementioned themes, they decided that they wanted the overall theme of the Community Arts Showcase to be “resistance.” They also made the prompt for the art they would present that represented the data, “What story do we want to tell the audience about what we’ve learned and the data we’ve collected? What do we want to tell the audience about who we are, what our history is, and how we use art?” To illustrate their conceptualizations of the theme of resistance, Lisa played Josh Groban’s *You Raise Me Up* on her instrument, Camille drew a picture of herself blocking out negative messages about her (Figure 10), and Jessie created an animated edit on her ipad that highlighted Black figures in history (Figure 8). Olivia wrote a counter-narrative poem, Mackenzie drew a textbook that showed narratives of pain on one side and narratives of power on the other side (Figure 7), and Briana drew a portrait of a Black woman wearing a hair wrap as resistance (Figure 9). Nia

crafted a heart with her name in it and all of her traits with negative words crossed out around it, and Alia sang Stevie Wonder's *Don't Worry About a Thing*. In all of their presentations, they noted how their art aimed to speak back to negative narratives, and instead show their power. Some of the art, such as Alia's song and Lisa's performance, shared their joy. The co-researchers also wanted to balance showcasing their counter-narratives with their joy because in a society that polices and adultifies Black girls, joy is a counter-narrative.

Performing at the Community Arts Showcase allowed the co-researchers to see the platform they have to share their stories. By being surrounded by those who love, support, and affirm them, they were able to see their brilliance celebrated and love reflected back to them. Camille discussed what the Community Arts Showcase was like for her during her post-interview,

I've been more open with people because, usually, before the program, I was very to myself. It wasn't bad. I wasn't hurting, but now that I've pushed myself out of that comfort zone, I feel I can express myself more.

By being in a new space, learning about topics that are typically not taught in school, and centering her voice and artistic talent as being considered data, Camille felt like she was more equipped to express herself and be bold in that expression. Olivia noted how even when her nerves started to surface, she could feel the support of her community behind her,

The support that we got from parents and family members was amazing. I know that I was a little nervous about showing what I had worked on and what we had worked on, but seeing their reactions and how proud they were really made me feel good and supported as a Black girl.

The showcase not only opened up space for the co-researchers to present, but also for the audience members to learn. Briana shared that it was a transformative experience for everyone involved, including her loved ones,

It was fun. I felt like the showcase was good because even after the showcase, the people that I invited texted me and was like, "Wow, this is very empowering." They learned a lot from the showcase too. I feel like it was an educational experience for all of us.

I wrote about my reflections from the Community Arts Showcase in my field notes,

Even in a virtual space, I could feel the rush of love surge through the Zoom room. As the co-researchers presented, I could see their loved ones, specifically their moms, aunties, and grandmas, clapping silently on mute, cheering, and giving affirmative gestures. The chat box was going off! What was so beautiful was the murmurings of loved ones saying, "I love you all," "Keep shining," and "I'm so proud of all of you." The collectiveness of Black girlhood spanned generations and love that knew no barriers. Many of the loved ones also gave their reflections. Reflections like the importance of continuing to listen and learn from the girls because every day, they teach them something they've never learned about. Reflections like how we must commit to taking care of ourselves. Even reflections about having more spaces like this one, intergenerational, to bring the girls and their loved ones together to learn. They said, "We need a Black Girls S.O.A.R. program for all of us!"

I got teary as we hung up the call. So much growth. Girls that had been on the shyer side came with their talking points and a confidence and presence that I hadn't seen. I, too, learned so much. I regarded myself as just a facilitator in the space, but they drove so much conversation and allowed me to examine and unpack my own understandings as

well. Every Sunday for the past month, I've been able to hear these nuggets of wisdom in our conversations. I have the privilege of being able to carry that knowledge and to carry all of the lessons that they've taught me over the past couple of weeks. Some of them being, for example, we had a conversation about self-care, about communal care, some of them have shared their artwork, and just the way that they so unapologetically take care of themselves in saying no and creating time and space to meditate and to come back into their bodies, has so deeply inspired me to do a better job. They are all the examples of what we all need to be doing and the shifts and the changes that we make in this world.

Having a place where Black girls could share their expertise, their knowledge, and their art with trusted loved ones, enabled them to feel more comfortable voicing their opinions in other spaces. Black girls need “both physical spaces and psychological places” in order to best make meaning of their everyday lives (McArthur, 2019). The showcase created a protective physical and psychological space where they could be built up, test out different ways of expressing their thoughts, assert their stories as being central to knowledge creation and production, and be affirmed in the process.

Chapter 6: Implications and Conclusion

Mate Masie¹⁸: Summary of Findings

This dissertation study explored two major questions. First, how do Black girls use arts-based practices as mechanisms for identity construction and resistance? Findings showed that Black girls used art, such as music and song, poetry, and visual art to (1) rewrite narratives of Black pain into narratives of Black power in the standard curriculum (2) to share their counter-narratives (3) to heal in and build community out and (4) to dream a better world into existence. Art was a tool for speaking back to negative and deficit narratives, but also for healing and dreaming of a world rooted in justice and joy.

Secondly, this study examined the question: What specific attributes of Black girls' involvement in art programs foster identity construction and acts of resistance? Findings revealed that in the Black Girls S.O.A.R. virtual summer art program, Black girls expressed that (1) showcasing their work to loved ones (2) being supported by other Black girls (3) learning about self and communal care and (4) reexamining history by centering Black women's resistance were integral aspects of the program that contributed to how they made meaning of their own individual and collective identities, as well as encouraged them to deepen both their understandings of and actions of resistance.

Through the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program, my goal was to co-create a space for Black girls to come together, learn about history, explore and speak about their identities, and encourage them in their resistance to systems and structures of oppression. I also share a potential model for educators and community-based program facilitators to adapt that places Black girls, their interests, and their talents at the center of liberatory curriculum and pedagogy.

¹⁸ The name of the Ghanaian adinkra symbol that means "what I hear, I keep." I use this to symbolize all I have learned from the co-researchers. I carry their words and wisdom with me.

In this section, I tie the findings to existing literature, provide implications and recommendations for practice and future research, and discuss the challenges and limitations.

Interpretation of the Findings

I approach the analysis of the findings by weaving together connections amongst all of the findings to illuminate major themes and considerations in the data. I specifically focus on emphasizing the linkage between language and art -- how both communicate the “inner lives” (Berry & Gross, 2020; Simmons, 2015) of Black girls to help us understand their experiences beyond the surface of the raw data.

Sankofa. For co-researchers in the Black Girls S.O.A.R. virtual summer art program, our time together illustrated the African principle of Sankofa (“it is not taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind”). Sankofa teaches us that we must remember our roots, or our past, in order to move forward and reimagine a future rooted in Black epistemologies. The symbol of Sankofa is represented by a mythical bird with its body faced forward and its head turned backwards to retrieve an egg from its back. This embodies the idea that we must honor the teachings of the past and those who have paved the way in order to carry us forward. The co-researchers were on a quest for knowledge -- knowledge of self, knowledge of community, and knowledge of ancestry.

In the pre-interviews co-researchers asked to learn about *their* history in the program. In this, the word *their* is critical because it denotes a shared and collective history -- one that is not always taught in schools. The word *their* captures how the co-researchers were aware that even though they learned history in school, it was not a history they identified with. Sankofa, in this case, is culturally-sustaining pedagogy. Knowing the history and enacting historical art practices sustains the lifeways of communities. The co-researchers asked for pedagogy that sustains their

cultures through artistic practices, but also pedagogy that creates space for inventiveness and creativity to expand new iterations of culture.

Culturally-sustaining pedagogy, in this program, looked like bridging the past with the future. In Briana's drawing that she presented at the Community Arts Showcase, she drew a woman with a headwrap to signify how Black women resisted the unjust Tignon laws by creatively decorating their wraps. In Briana's description of this drawing, she highlighted how she only colored in certain aspects of the headwrap because she was inspired by the Afrofuturistic art we looked at. The artist she was referring to drew Black and white images with a pop of color in certain areas to emphasize modern and futuristic clothing. Briana (re)created history by adding in an Afrofuturistic element, which bridged history with the future.

In essence, the co-researchers wanted to see "windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors," (Bishop, 1990) to their own experiences reflected in the curriculum. They wanted to move beyond the "master narrative" of teaching about history (Swartz & Goodwin, 1992; Payne, 2012; Swartz, 2013) that relegated Black women's organizing, resistance, and leadership to solely a footnote to Black men's contributions or the whitewashed narrative that only painted Black women as docile or weak. The results from this study support previous research that showed that a Black feminist curriculum builds critical consciousness (Lane, 2017; Thomas, Davidson, & McAdoo, 2008).

In her post-interview, Mackenzie offered a point about Black Wall Street being suppressed from history because it was something good that Black people did. Mackenzie's recognition reinforced a critical piece of one of the major themes of all of the sessions -- the importance of (re)centering Black resistance and achievement, despite the conscious effort to erase and distort the powerful history and legacy of Black people in the curriculum. Previous

research showed that just a small percentage of class time in K-12 schools (8-9%) is devoted to Black history, thus rendering the nuances and complexities of Black history almost invisible in the standard curriculum (NMAAHC, 2015).

The co-researchers shared that schools served as sites that strived to make them forget their true and full history. Re-engaging with not only their history, but with the historical practices of art, helped them to both remember and assert narratives about their strength and their power. While schools often serve as sites of *forgetting*, meaning Black history, Black epistemologies, and culturally-sustaining practices are often secondary or non-existent in many K-12 schools, art offered an opportunity for the co-researchers to (re)member their ancestors' resistance and creativity. The act of (re)membering was tapping into their innate artistry and what they intuitively knew from their ancestors that had been passed down to them, even when school did not always allow them to be creative.

For example, Lisa shared a story about administrators at school that told her that she had to change her hair because it was adorned in a bright color. She said she “resisted” this because she knew it was wrong. She asked the administrator why white girls in the school could wear their hair different colors, but hers was called a “violation of dress code.” Collective memory relates to Black Feminist Thought, particularly that Black women are knowers. As Morris (2019) conceptualized about blues women, who used participatory somatic expressions and art as healing practices, “they know what they know, and they know that they know it” (p. 127). Black girls instinctively and intuitively know their power, and society must regard the importance of Black girls' knowledge.

In the second session, we discussed how Black women in New Orleans in the 1700s resisted the unjust Tignon laws, which forced them to wrap their hair in public because they

often wore their hair in large, elaborate styles, which attracted too much attention from white men. During that conversation, four of the co-researchers noted how they, too, resisted racist hair dress code policies because hair was one of their forms of art. Even before they learned about the Tiignon laws, they had already confronted dress code policies. These results build on existing evidence of how Black girls refute discriminatory policies through artistic means (Evans-Winters & Girls for Gender Equity, 2017; Brodsky, et. al, 2018).

The concept of remembering ancestral roots and practices also surfaced in how the co-researchers discussed their relationship to their art. For them, art was where, as Camille said, she could “feel like herself.” The co-researchers mentioned that art allowed them to be their most “authentic” selves, that it helped them to relieve stress, and Lisa even noted that art, like music, “saves people’s lives.” In concert with Angel Kyodo Williams’s (2002) work, art-making brought them to a freedom spot in their brains. For example, in Camille’s Community Arts Showcase drawing, she drew herself with her eyes closed, blocking out the world because of the negative and discriminatory feedback she heard. When the harsh realities of the world and oppression aimed to strip them of their childlike wonder and joy, art enabled them to (re)member and reclaim their imagination.

The co-researchers also described how art made them feel as if they weren’t alone. Through art, a sacred form of communication, they could see others going through similar experiences as them. Art helped them heal from racism they experienced and it helped them to collectively process. This result supports Hill’s (2009) definition of “wounded healing” which is how “storytelling practices that enabled learners to recognize the commonality of their experiences” (p. 259). By creating art both individually and as a community, the co-researchers could see they weren’t alone in their experiences. Being around other Black girls, without fear of

retaliation or having to censor, was an act of collective healing. Together, they reminded one another who their most authentic selves were through affirmative statements and by “piggybacking” off of one another’s thoughts.

The need for affirmation and care was particularly important for the co-researchers. When I asked them what it felt like to be cared for, many of them said they felt in Olivia’s words “shocked” and in Nia’s words, “relieved.” They felt this way because in some cases, they worried that they were not accepted. Their words rang through me as a call-to-action that society needs to not only tell Black girls that they are loved and affirmed but show them with sustained action.

McArthur (2019) stated that Black girls need “both physical spaces and psychological places” to make meaning of their identities and experiences. This study provides an example that supports the importance of Black girl-centered programming. It offered a physical space for processing. This physical space was a program focused on Black girls, facilitated by a Black woman, that ended in a Community Arts Showcase where Black girls were affirmed by loved ones. The curriculum centered Black girls’ interests, the inclusion of art-making, and examination of history through the lens of Black resistance, which created a psychological space for Black girls to explore their identities and resistance.

Another way co-researchers exhibited the principle of Sankofa was through the concept of leaning into ‘the village.’ During the third session, co-researchers created art that showcased what their Afrofuturistic world looked like. Mackenzie said that her world blended technology and culture together, but also would be grounded in “Black roots.” Although this world had futuristic elements, she wanted to make sure it reflected her Black ancestral roots.

For the co-researchers, Black roots were represented through drawings that illustrated small gatherings of people, ‘the village,’ who had shades of dark skin, and helped one another. Camille said in her Afrofuturistic world “the land is everybody’s” and that there are resources for people who need assistance. This was a theme amongst the drawings -- they emphasized the importance of sharing power, helping out others, and how discrimination of any kind would not be tolerated. These results support how African cultures are regarded as collectivist cultures (Triandis, 1989); however, in the United States, individualistic culture is pushed, especially in school settings where success is often determined by individual standardized test scores. The co-researchers emphasized the importance of the village and supporting not only themselves, but as Jessie said, “their people.”

They not only created through their art and their imaginations what the world could look like, but advocated for actionable steps that could be made to turn those “freedom dreams” into reality (Kelley, 2002). The demands they crafted based on the Black Panther Party Ten Point Program highlighted the need for “equality in race, gender, and religion” as well as the need to “ban conversion therapy, the KKK” and other actions and groups that harm *all* oppressed people. The co-researchers shared their support throughout the program of all oppressed groups, not only in their demands, but also their artwork. Camille drew herself wearing a shirt that said, “Love is Love,” in support of the LGBTQ+ community. ‘The village’ is not only people within their direct communities, but the village is rooted in creating communities where all people are free and liberated from oppression.

They inquired and asked about history, while strategizing about demands for a more equitable world as a form of resistance. The imagined, Afrofuturistic worlds they offered and demands they shared directly refuted the status quo. In Denzin’s (2008) words, “inquiry is a

form of activism...that inspires and empowers persons to act on their utopian impulses” (p. x). In this case, Black girls’ utopian impulses were worlds where communities share power and resources. In correspondence with the pedagogical framework that guided the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program, particularly Abolitionist Teaching, “Art first lets us see what is possible. It is our blueprint for the world we deserve and the world we are working towards.” (Love, 2019, p. 100). The co-researchers created futures worthy of Black girl brilliance -- futures rooted in justice, joy, equity, and love.

Voice. Throughout the program, the co-researchers talked about the concept of *voice* and depicted it through their artwork. For the co-researchers, art was an enactment of voice, it was a mechanism to assert identity, and a means to vocalize resistance. During the second session, the co-researchers discussed how they were often regarded as “loud.” A few co-researchers even put “loud” on their dual self-portrait. While the stereotype of Black girls being seen as “loud” in school has been documented in the research (Morris, 2016; Morris, 2007; Koonce, 2012); this study showed how Black girls reclaim loudness as resistance (Fordham, 1993). When I inquired why they felt they were “loud,” they said it was a way that they amplified their voices.

Mackenzie and Olivia both described themselves as loud because they couldn’t hear well, so they raised their voices to hear them better. After she said this, two other co-researchers visibly signaled “me too” in their cameras by pointing at themselves. Rather than seeing it as a stereotype, the co-researchers brushed it off by reclaiming “being loud” through making a joke of it and using humor as their armor. This exemplifies what Cox (2015) called “re-storying,” where Black girls use humor to cope with racism. While previous research discussed stereotypes about Black girls, asset-based approaches support how Black girls use their voices to take up space and speak back to negative narratives with humor as an artistic practice.

The co-researchers also noted that storytelling was a key exhibition of voice. When we pondered on the question, “What would history look like if we rewrote the history textbooks?” the co-researchers named that Black artists, activists, and everyday people would be highlighted. The stories they wanted to tell were stories rooted in Black joy and creativity, rather than Black trauma or pain. For example, at the Community Arts Showcase, Briana presented a drawing of herself wearing a bright headwrap as a nod to ancestors’ creative resistance, while Mackenzie drew a Black woman with a natural Afro, which she said was inspired by the Black Panthers. They drew themselves into history, specifically they told historical stories that emphasized Black people’s creative resistance.

Richard Delgado (1989) reminded us that “oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” (p. 2436). Voice was their tool for sustaining their cultures and making sure asset-based stories about Black people survived, particularly within curriculum and textbooks that often erase Black contributions. This supports scholars’ work that showed how storytelling is “one of the most powerful” practices Black girls’ employ to “convey their special knowledge” (Richardson, 2003, p. 82)

Voice, to the co-researchers, wasn’t solely about verbally using their voices, but also how they described their artwork. Nia said that stories do not have to be shared vocally, but through artistic skills. For some of the co-researchers, who shared that sometimes it is difficult and intimidating to speak up, they use art to, in Jessie’s words, “get their stories out there.” In the art the co-researchers created throughout the program, they also shared that they used art to communicate important messages in a variety of ways for when their words could only scratch the surface of the deeper messages they aimed to share.

In Alia's poem that she presented at the Community Arts Showcase, the last line read, "My voice is powered." In the vein of Sankofa, Alia's voice is powered by ancestral roots, as she recites earlier in the poem, "I'll never let my pride down." The pride she mentions is both individual and about her community. She knows that her community is behind her and her voice is powered by the strength of those who came before her.

Voice also meant speaking up for themselves and for others. As Camille said during the Community Arts Showcase, she learned during the program that "being an activist sometimes means being a self-activist." Voice was how they made sure their needs were met and how they set boundaries to say "no." It is how they shared with others both their strengths and frustrations. While many of the co-researchers said that people judged them and viewed them as "mean," they learned in the program that saying "no" does not mean that you are mean, it means that you are doing what is best for you. Throughout the program, one of the themes was the importance of taking care of ourselves, so that we could continue to fight on behalf of the causes we cared about. They resisted the notion that as activists they had to sacrifice themselves, but rather realized that in order to give their communities the support they need, they had to speak up for themselves.

The concept of voice also showed up in the Community Arts Showcase. Where some of the co-researchers were on the shyer side during our conversations, they were more vocal when presenting their art to their loved ones. Four of the co-researchers noted this shift in their post-interviews. They said they felt more confident, more comfortable, and could express themselves more because they were outside of their comfort zone during the program and learned new things about themselves and history. Much of the research on Black girls discussed their experiences at school or how critical consciousness-raising curriculum impacted them. This study added to the

body of literature how Black girl-centered programming and curriculum increases confidence, particularly encouraging Black girls to feel more comfortable developing their voices and letting their voices be heard.

Identity and Resistance. I opened this dissertation with Olivia's poem that she presented at the Community Arts Showcase. The poem begins with stereotypes about Black people ('Black is ignorance and it is laziness'). The poem is physically split in half with the line, "I'm sorry, I fear I was mistaken before." The second half of the poem highlights the brilliance and beauty of Blackness with the ending, "I rewrote their story and you can too. Be proud of your Blackness and all of its glory because Blackness is a part of you." The co-researchers all shared art in the Community Arts Showcase that served as counter-narratives. Their counter-narratives were how they made meaning of their own identities -- a delicate dance of processing how society identifies them, while simultaneously speaking back to those depictions. Lisa's statement that is reflected in the title of this dissertation, "You can't see me by looking at me," was about going beyond the surface level, or the physical, but to really *see* her -- her pain, her joy, her talent, and her brilliance.

Their counter-narratives were also their forms of resistance. In many cases, their identity construction and resistance were intertwined. Black girls engage in identity work through resistance because while they are making meaning of their identities, they are also resisting society's deficit representations of them. Art was how they made sense of, solidified, and presented their identities. Art laminated the practice of identity construction. In other words, Black girls seeing their identity on paper or another medium through writing or art makes it so they can see it and speak back to it. In a society that strives to push them out of spaces, like schools, their art is a visible reminder of their presence. In line with Black Performance Theory,

their performance, or artwork, allowed them to take up space and be seen (DeFrantz & Gonzalez, 2017).

By putting their identity on paper, they asserted not only who they were, but who they were not. For example, Camille's self-portrait showed who she was and who others tried to tell her she was, but she resisted by not letting those negative comments get to her. In Briana's drawing of her heart, she reinforced who she was by placing the traits she liked about herself on the inside of the heart and everything negative others have said on the outside of the heart. A common theme from the artwork the co-researchers created during the program was holding the positive traits close to them and physically and visually representing the stereotypes on the outside. They used art to tell the stories of their experiences and speak back to negative narratives, which supports previous studies that have found that Black girls use critical media literacy to create counter-narratives and analyze the messages they receive (Jacobs, 2016; McArthur, 2015; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). The art they created in the program established their selfhood, laminating their identities by placing them on paper or iPad.

It is important to note that in some of the artwork, the co-researchers chose to include the negative comments they've heard, rather than leave them out completely. This speaks to Cox's (2015) ethnography that showed how Black women acted exaggerated stereotypes in front of white people to shock them into seeing how harmful stereotypes were. For the co-researchers, they wanted others to know the negative feedback they heard at school and from the media. They talked about being judged by their hair and dress, being regarded as loud, and being told they were mean.

They also tackled the stereotype that Black girls are "strong" or "more adult-like" (Epstein et. al, 2017). Olivia said, "I think that it is very damaging, in a sense, that it doesn't

allow us to be sensitive and to show that we are hurting or to show that we need healing.” In essence, the co-researchers chose to represent the negative comments to remind society of their humanity -- that they wanted to balance their resistance with care and be supported in their resistance. This is what Baker-Bell et al. (2017) called a “pedagogy of healing” where Black girls used critical literacy to identify areas where they sought to heal and then responding to “responding to the wound using a tool that works to transform the conditions that led to the wound” (p. 139) The tool the co-researchers used was art. As Alia said, “I feel like Black girls heal when they just do what they love and do what they know they want to do.” These findings support Nunn’s (2018) complication of Black girlhood narratives that solely privilege Black girl resilience without examination of systems of oppression. Art was a mechanism through which the co-researchers expressed their “strength and sadness” (Nunn, 2018), but also through which they crafted solutions to transform society.

Implications for Practice

This study has many implications for practice, particularly for classroom educators, schools, and community-based educators and facilitators. The findings suggest particular considerations for a Black girl-centered curriculum and pedagogy. It also provides necessary policy and cultural changes schools must make to ensure that they are holistically safe spaces for Black girls to fully express themselves and resist discriminatory policies and practices without ridicule or retaliation. Below I outline implications from the study and recommendations for educators and schools to take up, particularly highlighting what the co-researchers have shared with me.

For Classroom Educators and Schools

Curriculum. During the program, the co-researchers expressed their frustrations that they had only learned about Black pain and Black trauma through enslavement, but not the history of resistance. The co-researchers wanted to learn about Black artists, Black business owners, and other Black people in various fields. The co-researchers acknowledged the “curricular violence” (Jones, 2020) that occurs as a result of “white-only curriculum, culturally-biased texts, and pedagogical standards” (Young, Foster, & Hines, 2018, p. 103). Through their art, they depicted sadness, tears, and hurt, which is how they made meaning of the images they saw in school. This is consistent with previous research that has shown that Black history curriculum is often only about enslavement (Mims & Williams, 2020), or a few figures, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, whose stories are depoliticized (Wineburg & Monte-Sano, 2008).

They asked for history, instead, that highlighted resistance, Black art and culture, and Black achievement and success. In the co-researchers’ Ten Point Program (modeled after the Black Panther Party), they explicitly named their demand for curriculum, “We want to incorporate the teaching of Black history as a required course in the school system.” Currently, at least (and only) twelve states mandate Black history in their curriculum (NMAAHC, 2015). Additionally, what is taught and how it is taught varies greatly from state-to-state and district-to-district. There needs to be national adoption of curricula that centers Black joy and Black resistance. Particularly, curriculum planning should also involve young people in the process to identify what their interests are, to shape content to build critical consciousness, and ensure that young people’s cultures and experiences are represented in what is taught.

Jessie’s comments about the animated video she created and presented at the Community Arts Showcase emphasized a key aspect of the importance of teaching the history of resistance. All of the figures from Black history that she highlighted in the video had a black line over their

eyes. She said she did this strategically to communicate that activists in the struggle for justice and Black freedom could be any one of us. This critical revelation showed a major theme of many of our conversations in the program -- that while history often lifts up heroes and singular figures, these stories overshadow the power of the collective and the power of ordinary people to create widespread change. When the curriculum only offers a few figures in Black history, it provides a false notion that we have to wait for an extraordinary 'hero' to rise up and save us. The reality is, as Jessie points out, that we all have a role to play in the struggle for justice. Many historians have pointed out the harm in the hero myth and confront what Julian Bond called the "master narrative" (Payne, 1998; Theoharis, 2018).

In essence, the hero myth perpetuates the idea that individuals and communities are disempowered, while presenting students with analyzes that include the organizing of everyday people encourages them to see themselves as leaders, activists, and organizers. For example, Olivia said that at the end of the Black girls S.O.A.R. program she began to identify as a "resistor." This study showed how teaching about collective struggle and the strategic organizing behind mass movements for social change contributed to Black girls' positive identity construction and to their resistance of dominant narratives.

The co-researchers' critical questions and insights revealed the need to not only highlight and amplify the stories of Black women in the curriculum, but showcase versatility in their professions and provide a more nuanced examination of their stories and biographies that moved beyond singular portrayals. Further, it supports previous research that shows how a curriculum that interrogates the master narrative engages students in the construction of a fuller historical narrative; therefore, makes them active readers and creators of history (Frost, 2012).

As practical examples, while teaching about the Civil Rights Movement, include content about Black women and non-gender conforming activists like Coretta Scott King, Ella Baker, Pauli Murray, Ericka Huggins, Dorothy Height, Angela Davis, and more. In a unit on poetry, bring in the work of Black women poets and writers, such as Maya Angelou, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Nikki Giovanni, Amanda Gorman, and more. Discuss how art contributes to historical narratives and culture.

Make connections to the powerful grassroots organizing of Black women today, like the impact of Stacey Abrams, LaTosha Brown, Nsé Ufot, Helen Butler, Deborah Scott, and others organizing against voter suppression in Georgia. Bring in local activists and organizers to share their experiences. Connect their work to the long history of Black women organizers, like Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and more. During the Community Arts Showcase, Lisa commented that Black history is often portrayed as far back in the past to absolve the United States from making the necessary changes to ensure equity and dismantle the status quo. This statement contributes a consideration for curriculum by providing students' perspectives that current events must be taught in light of the historical context. When the textbook fails to provide fuller, more nuanced stories of history that are told from the perspectives of everyday people, it is imperative to teach outside the textbook.

Curriculum should also provide opportunities for young people to dream, to create, to play, to tell their stories, and to explore their identities. The co-researchers noted how transformative art was for them to be their most authentic selves, but also to share messages that they could not translate or communicate verbally. This study highlights the importance of creative expression for Black girls to affirm their multi-layered identities. Black girls need to see that their identities are, literally and figuratively, works of art.

Art is also, in and of itself, radical and revolutionary. In activist adrienne maree brown's words, "All social justice work is science fiction. We are imagining a world free of injustice, a world that doesn't yet exist" (as cited in Love, 2019, p. 100). Art affords a mechanism by which young people can tap into their imaginations. It is through this creativity that activist and organizing demands are birthed and realized. The work the co-researchers and I did around Afrofuturism allowed us to reflect on what a world could look like if it was rooted in equity and justice. It encouraged them to represent themselves in the future. Coupled with writing demands based on the Black Panther Party's Ten Point Party program, they began to draw and fight for worlds that are possible. Art should be used in the classroom to invent new futures and take action towards ensuring those futures. This study provides an example of how curriculum can weave together history, present, and the future to ensure a holistic examination of identity.

Pedagogy. Changing the curriculum itself is not sufficient without pedagogical shifts. It is not just about *what* is taught, but *how* it is taught. Even if the content highlights Black people, pedagogy can still be punitive. For example, if a teacher uses the banking model, where they are the arbiter of knowledge, young people will not have the opportunity to challenge, the question, and to reflect (Friere, 1970). In the Black Girls S.O.A.R. program, we started every session with open-ended questions and reflections such as, "What do you know about Black history?" or "What do you think this piece of artwork means?" In these questions, I did not have any solidified answers, but rather started with their knowledge and we collectively struggled through our understanding of the topics. The co-researchers shared how important it was to be surrounded by other Black girls to hear their different perspectives.

I encourage teachers to infuse choice into lessons. Ask students what they might be interested in learning or what they already know about a topic and support their reflections. For

example, have them interview loved ones and collect oral histories like the co-researchers did in the program. Students could collect and analyze their own data about issues that are important to them. The co-researchers noted that collecting oral histories from their loved ones uncovered new insights about friends and family that they did not know before. Some of those conversations, particularly with friends, resulted in deeper conversations and strengthened relationships.

In Morris's (2019) words, "Give[s] girls a chance to center their experiences, tell stories, dance, sing, write, meditate, and play their knowledge into a curriculum that recognizes and values these expressions as commensurate with the other "data" they will learn in school" (p. 127). As I noted in Chapter 3, when the co-research team collectively coded the data, one researcher exclaimed her delight in reading her own words as data. By starting with Black girls' ideas, they see how the information they collect daily and unique knowledge they hold is valid when society tries to convince them otherwise.

Through understanding their gifts and strengths, they gain a deeper knowledge of self and of the world around them. This study offers examples of culturally-affirming social-emotional learning in practice. Specifically it shows how social-emotional learning can move beyond the whitewashed framework of manage and control tactics, but ensure that critical consciousness-building is at the center of how students, namely Black girls, come to self awareness and social awareness (Simmons, 2019). The co-researchers provided reflections about new insights about themselves, about history, and their community as a result of the conversations, conducting their own research, and then performing their interpretations of the data.

In this study, the co-researchers named how showcasing their work to loved ones helped them feel more confident vocalizing their ideas and exploring their identities. Building on Black

Feminist pedagogy, affirm Black girls for their ideas rather than call out areas that are still developing (Omolade, 1987). The co-researchers talked in their post-interview reflections about how affirmed they felt by the audience at the Showcase because their loved ones all touched on the power behind their artwork, including artwork that was still in process.

Involve their loved ones and the community in the learning process. Refute the idea that schools should be fortresses. Create opportunities for students to present their work to a supportive community through whichever modality is most comfortable to them. This sustains culture by encouraging intergenerational dialogue. Not only did the co-researchers learn from the Showcase, but their loved ones also gained new knowledge from the Showcase. One parent reflected (as shared in my field notes) that her daughter would log out of the program and then tell her about what she learned. Through this mutual exchange of information, they both expanded their perspectives. Pedagogy can be transformative not only for Black girls, but for their families, communities, and teachers too.

School-wide policies, practices, and initiatives. Two of the co-researchers' demands they shared at the Community Arts Showcase spoke directly to school policy. These demands included, "We want to replace police in Black schools with counselors," and "We want an immediate end to workplace and school discrimination for the hair choices of Black people." Many scholars have documented how harsh discipline policies, discriminatory dress code policies, and the presence of police in schools disproportionately impact Black girls (Annamma, 2017; Brodsky et al., 2018; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016). Although outside of this demand, none of the co-researchers talked about police presence in schools during the program, it does warrant further attention. Nationally, Black students make up about 17 percent of enrollment in schools that referred students to law enforcement, but were 26 percent of students who were referred

(Blad & Harwin, 2017). Unfortunately, 1.7 million students are in schools with police but no counselors (Mann et. al, 2019). The co-researchers recognized this as a change they want to see in their schools.

Co-researchers also wanted schools to stop policing them through racist and sexist dress codes because of their hair. Much of the co-researchers' artwork concentrated on hair. Jessie drew a picture of someone asking if they could touch her natural hair. Camille drew her self-portrait with someone telling her to change her hair. Mackenzie drew the back of her head, with special attention to her hair, at a Black Lives Matter protest. Three of the co-researchers discussed negative experiences at school because of hair and dress code policies during our sisterhood circles. Recent research has begun to pay attention to Black girls' hair experiences in school, particularly how negative hair experiences lead to further marginalization and punishment (Mbiliishaka & Apugo, 2020). This study offers insights to how Black girls use hair and create artwork focused on hair to resist discriminatory policies that shame their natural hair.

Educators and administrators should take note of the stories the co-researchers shared to center student demands in school policy adoption and implementation. In order to create schools that are physically, emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually safe, educators and administrators must not only listen to Black girls, but act on their demands. In the spirit of abolitionist teaching, schools cannot be reformed because they are operating exactly as they intended to -- to control and manage students, namely Black and Brown students. Instead, schools and districts should center students' demands. As this dissertation shows, Black girls have insightful ideas about change and transformation, schools and districts must see those demands through.

For Community-based Educators/Program Facilitators

For community-based educators and out-of-school program facilitators, this study offers implications for how to involve Black girls in the co-construction of curriculum development and program implementation. First and foremost, this pedagogy involves adapting and being flexible. As educators, we cannot always come to the space with answers and solutions, but rather pose questions alongside young people. It means truly learning alongside students and there is no checklist or formula for that. Because Black girlhood is not a monolith, co-creating these programs means shaping the program to the girls' suggestions and taking context into consideration. While this work is highly individualized, I can offer practical suggestions that aided in the co-development of the program.

Individual Relationship-building. I started by asking about co-researchers' interests and hobbies in our pre-interviews. The pre-interview served as an opportunity to begin building a relationship with each co-researcher by understanding more about them on an individual level. The questions I outline in Chapter 3, specifically the question: *If you and your girls were creating your own program, what would you do?* allowed me to get a sense of not only their interests, but what structure might look like from their vantage points. They named that their programs would include reading, art-making, listening to music, learning about history, and having space to talk about issues they were facing as Black girls. A few of the co-researchers expressed an interest in gaming, coding, and science fiction. Others expressed that they wanted to talk about hair and self-care.

With their suggestions as a foundation, I wove together these topics, which showed up in the program in myriad ways. For example, some topics I used as examples for activities. I used two songs (incorporating music) as a framework for writing counter-narratives. Both of the songs communicated messages about hair. Some of the other topics, such as history, self-care, and

science fiction, became session topics. My goal was to build trust through the pre-interview conversations by not only listening to what they were saying, but also follow-through on their requests.

Additionally, when each co-researcher entered the meeting room at the beginning of each session, I made an effort to individually greet them by name and ask questions like, “How was your week?” “How’s your heart feeling today?” “What was the best part of your weekend?” I gained so much insight into who they are, but also what emotions or feelings they might be bringing with them into the virtual space (e.g. exhaustion, sadness, joy). With their answers, I would send individual messages in the chat or follow up via email about something they had shared. In a virtual space, it is particularly important to create moments to let people know that you “see” them because eye contact is not easily read and people can end up feeling not seen.

Amid COVID-19, part of individual relationship-building was being flexible and holding space, considering the multiple struggles and challenges that the co-researchers also brought into the space. There were moments where other priorities took precedence over the program and what was most important to me was that the co-researchers knew that I would be there for them and the program would be there for them when they needed it. This meant being flexible if co-researchers could not attend sessions because they were not feeling well or had another commitment. Sometimes holding space was about encouraging young people to do what is best for them and to invite them to make the decisions necessary to put themselves first.

Collective Relationship-building. During the program, community-building was crucial. One of the findings from this study showed that Black girls named being supported by other Black girls as a specific attribute of their involvement in the program that was important to them. We built community by incorporating a check-in, a check-out, community agreements, and a

sisterhood circle. Each session began with an Ubuntu, or icebreaker. The prompts encouraged the co-researchers to check in both with themselves and with one another. I specifically chose the prompts for the co-researchers to reflect on themselves and their experiences, so that the group could get to know each co-researcher better.

After Ubuntu we created and reviewed our Community Agreements. One of the agreements was that, “We take care of ourselves. We take care of each other.” This was exemplified during a short moment in one of the sessions. During the third session, one of the co-researchers came off mute and asked if they could grab a snack. This offered pause for all of us because we were all reminded of the importance of taking breaks. Albeit a small way, it was a way to take care of one another. Our Community Agreements presented us with a collaborative commitment to how we would show up for ourselves and one another. Part of this meant speaking up for our needs in front of the group to give everyone else permission to do the same.

Lane (2017) noted that community-building must be continuous. I would also add that it should be sustained. Not only should community-building be once a session, but rather embedded throughout all aspects of the session. Some of the community-building exercises were intentional. The sessions ended with a sisterhood circle. Programs for Black girls must provide a foundation of support through “sisterhood activities” (Nunn, 2018, p. 17). In line with the traditional practice of circle-keeping, the circles served as a place to check-in with one another, tell our stories, and physically create the sense of equality by being placed in a circle. Each co-researcher used a talking piece (an item that brought them comfort or made them feel powerful). In the virtual format, we adapted our circle by virtually passing our talking piece by placing it up in the camera. The next person in the virtual circle would take their own talking piece down from

the camera and pull it to their chest¹⁹. Each person had the opportunity to pass; however, none of the co-researchers decided to pass. For the co-researchers who were on the quieter side, engaging in the circle keeping practice invited them to speak without feeling pressure to speak.

For some of the co-researchers, the invitation to bring their voice into the space pushed them to speak up more. Art can be used as a way to allow collective and individual voices to resound. In preparation for the Community Arts Showcase, there was some art that was presented collectively, such as the Poetry of Defiance poem, the affirmations, and the Black Panther Party Ten Point Program. In the presentation of this artwork, each co-researcher shared their own line, but together, it created fuller, richer artwork. This allowed every voice to be heard, but to be heard through the support of the collective.

Some of the community-building was also organic. During the post-interviews, I learned that some of the co-researchers presented their artwork to one another outside of the sessions to get feedback before the Showcase. I could have assigned or suggested they work in pairs or in groups to give feedback, but the organic nature of their relationships was a testament to their support for one another.

Structure. Having a specific structure for each session provided the co-researchers and I a roadmap for our time together. We knew each session would start with Ubuntu, then move into a conversation and art-making about the topic for the day, and end with a sisterhood healing circle. This loose framework created space for shifts and adaptations in the content, while still providing a structure for the time, so that there was a focus. I did not create timestamps for how

¹⁹ I am so thankful to Nicole Hamilton and Michelle Grier at Girls for Gender Equity for teaching and modeling this virtual practice.

long I wanted to focus on each part of the agenda because I did not want to constrain our conversations and abruptly shift to the next topic if there was robust conversation.

When co-creating programs with Black girls, there must be room for flexibility in the structure and the plan. There were sessions where I had content planned and had to shift, adapt, or scrap the plan. For example, talking about the Tignon Laws or the Tulsa Massacre were not on the document I used to catalogue possible activities or topics. These came up organically from what the co-researchers shared, the questions they asked, and what they wanted to know more about. These were my contributions to the dialogue, rather than planned lessons I put together. While these were not part of the plan, these two topics were represented in the artwork the co-researchers shared at the Showcase and were mentioned in their post-interviews as highlights of the program.

In virtual spaces, it is also difficult to determine non-verbal communication, specifically to be able to tell when the co-researchers were ready to move on from an art piece or take a break. One strategy I used, also as a tool for relationship-building, was I asked co-researchers to share answers to prompts in the chat when they were ready to move forward. For example, “Share your favorite food in the chat,” “Share your favorite season in the chat,” “Share your favorite color in the chat.” This tool created informal connection points.

Implications for Research

This dissertation answered Evans-Winters’s (2015) and Edwards et. al (2016) calls for more humanizing research, particularly from Black women scholars, to highlight the educational experiences of Black girls in scholarly research. Particularly, this research illuminated how Black girls, despite misconceptions and stereotypical representations in the literature, shared their joy, their creativity, but also their pain and frustrations. Studying Black girls perspectives through art

strives to rehumanize them by moving away from one-dimensional portrayals that only highlight Black girls as strong and needing less nurturing. Thus, this research adds to the asset-based literature about Black girls without diminishing the challenges they experience.

This study contributed to the growing body of literature that centers Black girlhood by using arts-based and integrated participatory methodology. This research was both inspired by and aimed to extend the work of scholars, particularly Black girlhood scholars like Ruth Nicole Brown, Venus Evans-Winters, and Monique Morris, and Black girl literacy scholars like Gholnecar Muhammad, Sherrell McArthur, Marcelle Haddix, Jennifer D. Turner, Autumn Griffin, and Charlotte Jacobs on programming with Black girls.

Education Research. The literature that uses performance ethnography as methodology, particularly within K-12 education, is scant. While Ruth Nicole Brown's (2013) work offered a framework for using performance ethnography in research and programming with Black girls, this dissertation offered performance ethnography as methodology in education research, which has implications for classroom practice and curriculum. While much education literature on Black girls' experiences incorporates art, specifically through the lens of literacy, there are more studies needed that use arts-based and integrated participatory action approaches. By involving Black girls in the process of collecting and analyzing data, and turning that data into art, this study added Black girls' perspectives to education literature as active researchers.

This study also contributes to the growing body of literature on culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014). Given that Black girls often experience formal educational spaces as sites of oppression, out-of-school programs can serve as potential sites where culturally-sustaining pedagogy can both be established and advanced. School settings and curriculum are often bound by standards, while out-of-school programs have more flexibility to

make curricular and pedagogical shifts. By exploring culturally-sustaining pedagogy in an out-of-school setting, the findings yielded critical information about how Black girls view their school's curriculum and what curricular changes can be made to sustain their cultures, their art, and their epistemologies. While much of the current research is conceptual (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012) or focuses on teachers (Woodard et. al, 2017; Puzio et. al, 2017), this study placed Black girls' suggestions for culturally-sustaining pedagogy at the center.

Additionally, this study offered insights for how to expand thinking about and the teaching of culturally-sustaining arts-based practices beyond hip hop pedagogy. While hip hop pedagogy has provided a solid foundation to include culturally-relevant-responsive-sustaining pedagogical practices in the classroom, this study offered additional ways to engage young people through art and critical consciousness-building. Hip hop pedagogy, at its core, is about creativity and employing learner-centered pedagogy, which can be transcended to other aspects of art education. In this study, the Black girl co-researchers drew, sang, played instruments, wrote poetry, led prayer -- all as enactments of sustaining their cultures in the process of constructing their identities, resisting negative narratives, and building critical consciousness. Essentially, this study exemplified what Turner & Griffin (2020) described when they said that Black girls' literacies extend beyond the page.

Lastly, this study highlighted how Black girls use counter-narrative as praxis through art, which can serve as a framework for bridging arts-based methodology and counter-storytelling. While schooling spaces, and subsequently education research, privilege certain forms of communication (i.e. written, oral), this study extended the theoretical and methodological practices of counter-storytelling by centering arts-based methodology. Arts-based methodology is counter-narrative in and of itself, as it resists Eurocentric ways of communication.

Black Girl-centered Research. The study added to the body of literature that uses Black-girl centered and/or Black Feminist curriculum as a means of encouraging Black girl identity construction, feelings of agency, and facilitating healing or wellness. Nia Michelle Nunn's (2018) work on Black girl programming offered important considerations for liberatory Black girl-centered curriculum. Nunn's (2018) study of Black girls' strength and sadness focused on Black girls ages 8-13, so this study extended this work to include Black girls ages 14-17. Black girls ages 14-17 are at a pivotal stage in adolescent identity construction. This age group warrants attention in the literature because youth make meaning of the messages they receive (both direct and indirect) about race, gender, and other salient identities. At this stage, Black girls have already internalized messages about their identities and need spaces to process, reflect, and refute negative portrayals.

In addition to adding to the literature on Black adolescent girls' experiences, this study also expanded previous studies on Black girl-centered curriculum by incorporating the creation of Afrofuturistic worlds and hosting a Community Arts Showcase. Muhammad's (2012; 2015) work explored Black girl literacies (e.g. poetry, digital literacies) through a sociohistorical examination of literacy collaboratives. This dissertation extended Muhammad's work (2012; 2015) by utilizing additional artforms, such as animation, drawing, and visual art through participatory methodology.

Charlotte Jacob's (2016) work used a Black feminist critical media pedagogy curriculum for critical consciousness development for Black girls to speak back to deficit and stereotypical narratives. Other studies have also emphasized the importance of Black girls having space to (re)imagine possibilities for social justice-rooted futures and critique stereotypes about Black girls through art and literacy (Turner & Griffin, 2020; Dunn et. al, 2018; Muhammad &

Womack, 2015). The literature underscores the need to examine Black girls' arts-based practices through a historical lens (Muhammad, 2012; 2015), through critical consciousness-building (Jacobs, 2016), and through dreaming imagined futures (Turner & Griffin, 2020). This study bridged these three areas together (i.e. past, present, future) to create a holistic curriculum aimed at Black girls negotiating and building their multi-layered identities while simultaneously crafting Black epistemological futures.

In all, this study employed participatory and creative methodology in a virtual setting, thus offering a unique vantage point for Black girls' experiences in virtual programs and adapting critical pedagogical curricula to online formats. While there is scholarly literature that explores virtual learning and Black girls' digital literacies, there is not much literature that highlights a fully virtual program for and with Black girls. While previous research has posited the growing importance of incorporating digital tools in classrooms (Price-Dennis, 2016; Price-Dennis et. al, 2015; Vasudevan et. al, 2010), these studies were conducted in-person using digital tools. This dissertation adds to this body of literature by studying a program that was solely online. This study also offers implications for conducting research online with Black girls. For example, the study used collaborative Google documents for coding and note-taking. In an increasingly virtual world, especially in light of a global pandemic, we will need more research that explores fully online studies and programs.

More broadly, this study offered an examination that nuanced Black girls' experiences in United States society. Previous literature has shown how Black girls experience *adulthoodification* (Epstein et. al, 2017), pushout (Morris, 2016), and are criminalized in both school and larger society. In this study, the co-researchers discussed their frustrations with being regarded as strong, talked about their experiences at the intersections of racism and sexism, and provided

critical analyses about those experiences. The findings add to the body of literature that explores the concept of childhood. While children should be afforded the innocence of childhood, dominant, biological definitions of adulthood privilege this stage as a rite of passage and as a step in the biological development process. Biological definitions of growth and development leave out the structural and systemic impacts that adultify Black girls long before they reach the biological stage of adulthood. In a redirection from biology, this study placed emphasis on Black girls' pluralistic ways of knowing and their racial literacies to discuss growth and development, namely identity construction.

In sum, this study bridged the literature from art education research, Black girl literacies, community-based and extra-curricular programming, Black girlhood studies, sociology, history, and women's and gender studies. Because Black girlhood and Black girls' identities are multi-layered and complex, an interdisciplinary approach is required to fully capture the brilliant breadth and depth of their experiences in both theory and practice.

Challenges and Limitations

Although the study contributed to the growing body of literature that explores the varied experiences of Black girls, there are challenges and limitations. The challenges of the program and corresponding study are related to the sociopolitical context of current events that were taking place at the time of the study. While the program and study were originally envisioned as taking place in-person, COVID-19 barred this from happening. Most importantly, the health and safety of the co-researchers was of paramount importance, thus the program was shifted to a virtual format. What was challenging was that the co-researchers were already experiencing emergency remote learning, digital fatigue, and isolation from their peers.

Due to time and resource constraints, the program was five weeks long and only took place remotely. With the constraints of not being able to be with the co-researchers in person, I was not able to gather data about how what they learned in the program may or may not have transcended into other areas of their lives (e.g. at home or school). Because of this, my conceptualization of the broader context that inherently shaped their experiences inside and outside of the program was limited. However, it enabled me to commit further to truly centering the perspectives of the co-researchers because I relied on their words and artwork.

Additionally, as noted in the methods section of the dissertation, the study integrated components of YPAR methods. The shorter time limit of the program was a result of the collective exhaustion many were feeling because of the global pandemic and emergency remote learning. The research was different from traditional YPAR because I came to the study and program with research questions and incorporated data outside of what the co-researchers and I collected and coded together. One aspect of integrated YPAR that served as a challenge was moving the co-researchers away from the banking model of education (Freire, 1970) to a collaborative process. As Ruth Nicole Brown (2018) noted about the Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT) work, “Even as you are representing SOLHOT and giving it your all, you can still mistrust it because schooling can educate you out of what is Black, what is collective, what is community, and what is good” (p. 400). Both the co-researchers and myself have been socialized into an education system that privileges the silence of Black girls (Fordham, 1993) and adheres to the norms of teacher-student hierarchy. Even though as a collective we sought to collaborate, there were periods of silence and the co-researchers looking to me for answers. In those moments, I tried to lean into the silence and recognized it as part of the process.

I am also transparent and critical that in this study, it was important to remain reflexive throughout the process. I came into this study and this program as a Ph.D. student interested in learning about the arts-based practices of Black girls because of my own experiences in school and as a dance teacher. I used my field notes and journal questions, particularly “What about this is me and what about this is research?” to shape my understanding of the findings and analysis of the findings.

There were aspects of the program that I was not initially expecting, like the emphasis on learning about the history of resistance together or that a major thread through our conversations would be re-writing history. I also anticipated incorporating more movement-based art into the program because of my background and experience as a dance and yoga teacher. While a few of the co-researchers expressed their interest in movement, none ultimately chose movement to express themselves, which could have been the result of the remote nature of the program.

One of the challenges of engaging in programming in a virtual environment was not being able to build relationships in the same ways we would be able to in person. For example, each session there were one or two co-researchers who kept their cameras off or had wifi challenges. It was important to me that they were comfortable and being in a virtual environment, I was a guest in their space. Part of our Community Agreements were to take care of ourselves, and it was important to me to honor that. Co-researchers engaged via the chat function on Zoom, so even when I could not see them, I was glad to be able to communicate in that way.

The reflections I have about the challenges and limitations ultimately offer a path forward for continued research. Next, I will discuss directions for future research that are guided by these reflections.

Directions for Future Research

One aspect of the study that I was struck by was how the loved ones who attended the Community Arts Showcase called for an intergenerational space where they could participate in the Black Girls S.O.A.R. programming. Additionally, many of the co-researchers noted in their post-interviews how it boosted their confidence having their loved ones at the showcase and hearing their affirmative feedback during the *talkback*. Future research could explore how mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and other loved ones learn from and with Black girls through collective involvement in Black girl-centered programming.

While this study only explored Black girls' experiences who were ages 14-17, there is much to be learned from younger and older generations together, specifically how contextual factors play a role in understanding Black girlhood. There is currently research that engages both daughters and parents in critiquing stereotypical images of Black girls (McArthur, 2015), and more research can make this area more robust.

Particularly, studies could take up an intergenerational examination of Black girlhood and explore Black girlhood in elementary school through adulthood through questions such as: How do Black girls ages 5-80 conceptualize Black girlhood? How do Black women make-meaning of their Black girlhood experiences across their lifespan? Longitudinal studies and intergenerational studies, namely intergenerational case studies or participatory action research, warrant further consideration and study. These questions would continue to expand Black girlhood as a field. It is important to note that "Black women neither have identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion," meaning that more research from the perspective of Black girls across the lifespan is necessary to compensate for the long history of research that either left out Black girls' experiences or painted them negatively (Collins, 1990, p. 27).

Secondly, the co-researchers named how transformative it was to be able to present their ideas and artwork to their loved ones in the Community Arts Showcase. I am interested in adding a component to the program where the Black girl co-researchers present their findings as professional development for educators. Questions to frame future research could include: How does Black girl-led professional development shape teachers' pedagogy and curricular choices? How do Black girls make meaning of their experiences in school through presenting professional development workshops to teachers? What specific attributes of Black girls leading professional development workshops for teachers contribute to their identity construction?

While I point out the need for more research on culturally-sustaining arts-based pedagogy, research should also explore what this means and looks like from the perspective of Black girls. This would further bridge the gap between theory and practice. It would also allow insights from the mutual exchange of information between K-12 schools and out-of-school programs. As referenced throughout the study, the Black girl co-researchers have strong demands and powerful ideas about how to shift and transform their school policy and curricula.

Future research should carefully and thoughtfully explore Black girls' experiences in virtual programs. At the time of writing this dissertation, all of the co-researchers were attending school virtually and many of them noted that their school clubs and extracurricular activities were cancelled because of COVID-19. Research could explore: What specific attributes of Black girls' involvement in virtual programs contribute to sense of community in the program? How do Black girls articulate the ways they use virtual spaces to learn? What specific strategies or tools do Black girls name as increasing engagement in virtual learning spaces? While many programs like Black Girls S.O.A.R. shifted to a virtual format, there is more that can be learned about

effective virtual facilitation practices for community-building and learning, as well as strategies that make virtual spaces engaging for Black girls.

Lastly, now that this study has provided a foundation for Black Girls S.O.A.R., I would like to further iterate on opportunities to better balance power in the program. For example, what would it look like to include a session after the Community Arts Showcase where co-researchers redefined the workshops? What would follow-up look like to push us to better understand what a program fully centered in Black girls' perspectives would consist of? What would it look like to dream and vision together the future of Black Girls S.O.A.R.? For the future of Black Girls S.O.A.R., my dream is that Black girls would be resourced to co-create, co-facilitate, and co-evaluate programs to truly steer the direction of this work.

Closing Thoughts

In closing, I come to back to Lisa's words, "You can't see me by looking at me." Black girls use arts-based practices to remind society of their presence when society has tried to diminish, punish, and police their existence. Through their art they desired to let their expressions not only be heard, but *felt*. Their expressions communicated messages of resistance and dreams of community and justice, rooted in Black ancestral epistemology. They put their identities on paper, represented them through song, and animated themselves into history and the future. They asked to be *seen*, but not hyper-surveilled. Rather, they asked for schools, in particular, to love and affirm them in the ways their communities pour into them. They asked for schools to center their history and highlight Black joy, creativity, and inventiveness. They demanded that schools be spaces where they could show up as their full authentic selves, without fear of retaliation.

Black girls sing, dance, animate, play, analyze, research, and dream new futures. These futures center deep relationships, equity, collective value, empathy, and love. Black girls inspire me and remind me that every day we have a responsibility to create the world we all deserve.

Appendices

Appendix A. Recruitment Materials

Black Girls SOAR Virtual Summer Program



Illustration: [Vashti Harrison](#)

“I am a Black girl because I am courageous,
And the colored women before me changed nations.
I am a masterpiece of creation, the quintessence of liberation
And the beautiful reality of my ancestors’ imagination.
Harriet, Ruby, Coretta, Rosa, Oprah, Michelle
Say their names, these women changed the game
And fought for freedom, and not the fame.”

- April Chukwueke, [Rattle Young Poets Anthology](#)

Black Girls SOAR stands for Black Girls Scholarship, Organizing, Arts, & Resistance!

This summer program is designed to bring middle and high school-aged (13-18 years old) Black girls together to participate in arts-based activities to learn about Black Feminist Thought, Black history, leadership, activism, social change, and community organizing through a healing-centered lens. We’ll use art like dance, visual art, social media, poetry, theatre, and more, to process, reflect, and express our thoughts, ideas, and emotions. We’ll explore the work of Black women artists and activists like Ella Baker, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler, and more. The program will meet for five, two-hour sessions, where the girls would be both active participants in the program and in the research process. In the middle of the program (week 3), participants will learn how to code and analyze qualitative data and participants will decide how to best represent the data through a performance, as experts of their own experience. At the end of the program, participants will take what they learned during the program and from the data and present a performance to a community they select to invite. For example, data could be turned into motifs for a dance or spoken word poetry. At the performance, the participants will have a *talk back* with the audience to share how they came up with the works of art and the meaning and themes behind how they expressed the data, what they learned, and a call to action.

Dates: Sundays -- August 2nd, August 9th, August 16th, August 23rd, August 30th (Showcase)

Times: 11:00am-1:00pm ET

Location: Zoom

Week Five Showcase Link

***note:** All program meetings will use the same link. There will be a different link for the Week Five Showcase, so please share that link with your loved ones. Cierra will also follow up with calendar holds, which will have the Zoom links as well!

Weekly Curriculum:

Week One: Sunday, August 2nd

Together, we'll explore the powerful resistance of Black communities throughout history, specifically the usage of poetry, movement, and music to speak back to dominant narratives, stereotypes, and oppression. We will also learn about the Black women and girl activists, writers, organizers, artists, and changemakers throughout history who are often left out of textbooks, but have played pivotal roles in creating, shaping, and shifting the fabric of our nation.

Co-researchers will be encouraged to collect an oral history, where they will interview a loved one about their experiences navigating this moment. We will draft the questions together as we dive into what stories we would like to share and pass down. Co-researchers will come to Week Two with notes from the oral history they collected.

Week Two: Sunday, August 9th

We will discuss the origins of 'self-care' that were rooted in Black activists' communal wellness practices. They recognized and demanded that they had to take care of themselves when the government and healthcare system refused their requests. We'll examine the different types of care, including communal and structural care, as well as the dimensions of wellness.

With an emphasis on self, we will also talk about identity, and craft arts-based work to explore who we are and the unique talents, gifts, and talents we'd like to share with the world. We'll learn about Critical Race Theory's counter-storytelling tenet to journal and artistically create our own counter-narratives to tell our stories. We'll analyze Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework for our data collection and analysis and talk about what that means.

Week Three: Sunday, August 16th

This week, we will talk about dreaming our futures using song lyrics and science fiction work as a point of analysis. We'll discuss Afrofuturism and what it means to write ourselves into the stories of the present and the future, with inspiration by Octavia Butler, Janelle Monae, and N.K. Jemisin.

We will also read a youth participatory action study that details the experiences of high-school aged Black girls using art as part of their research process. We will have a data/coding party, where we will look at the data from our previous conversations and oral history notes to learn about how to code qualitative data. Co-researchers will decide what themes come up in the data and discuss how that data can be turned into their favorite forms of art.

Week Four: Sunday, August 23rd

During Week Four we will talk about organizing and activism. We will develop a call-to-action that will be shared during the community showcase.

The research team will also prepare for the community showcase and collectively discuss vision, flow, and production details.

Week Five: Sunday, August 30th

Invite your loved ones to join us for the Black Girls SOAR virtual community showcase! We will share themes from the data we've collected and how we've turned this data into art. Co-researchers will have an opportunity to present their findings and have a *talkback* with the audience about what their work of art meant to them.

Contact Information

Cierra Kaler-Jones

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Appendix B. Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Pre-Interview Protocol

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this research project is 1) to gain an understanding of how Black girls use arts-based practices as forms of resistance and identity development and 2) how out-of-school art spaces help foster positive racial and gender identity development and acts of resistance.

I have a few questions I'm going to ask you about your identity, your hobbies and interests, and your experiences at school. There are no right or wrong answers; I am only interested in your opinions and attitudes. Remember, that you can skip any questions at any time or tell me you don't know something. I'm here for you.

Preliminary Questions

1. What is the pseudonym you would like to use? This is a name you will be referred to in all research-related work. You can make up your own name.
2. Tell me about yourself. What do you want to do when you're done with school?
3. What are your dreams for the future?
4. How do you identify? For example, some of my identities include Black woman, dancer, teacher.
5. What do each of these identities mean to you?
6. What do you wish people knew about you?

I'm going to ask you some questions about your hobbies and passions.

Questions about out-of-school and art

7. Besides school, what programs or activities have you participated in? What do you like to do for fun?
8. What's your favorite part about these activities?
9. What interested you in this program?
10. What's your favorite form of art?
11. How do you use that art? It could be at home, with your friends, at school.
12. How does art make you feel?

Questions about Black Girlhood

13. What does being a Black girl mean to you?
14. What are some struggles you feel Black girls have?
15. How do Black girls resist those struggles?

16. How do Black girls heal? What are you healing from?
17. If you were leading a program for Black girls, what would you and your girls do?
18. What does it mean to be a Black girl activist?

Post-Interview Questions

Questions about the program

19. How would you describe your experience in the program?
20. How did the program make you feel?
21. Do you see any changes in who you see yourself because you participated in the program? Give me some examples.
22. What did you learn in the program that surprised you?
23. What was your experience in the community showcase like?
24. How would you describe your identity? Has it changed since the beginning of the program? How do we, as Black girls, describe ourselves?
25. How would you describe resistance and activism? Has it changed since the beginning of the program?
26. Would you suggest to other girls that they should do the program? If so, why?

Appendix C. Black Girls S.O.A.R. Collective Interview Protocol

Tell me about yourself.

What kinds of experiences have you had as a Black woman?

Who was your mentor? Who inspired you to be who you are now?

Is there anything you would change about your childhood?

What are your outlets for expression?

What causes are you passionate about?

If you were going to be in a textbook, what would you say to readers?

What is the main message you'd like to get across?

What's a choice that you had to make that affected your community/the Black community?

What have you done to contribute to the Black community?

Appendix D. Codes and Definitions

Identity

- **Black girl activist** - how co-researchers viewed themselves as activists, directly tied to fighting against the intersections between racism and sexism
- **Beauty** - this code was twofold: 1) how co-researchers described mainstream beauty standards (i.e. white femininity) and 2) on the contrary, how co-researchers described Blackness as beautiful (e.g. natural hair, dark skin)
- **Community** - how co-researchers described a place of belonging; a place where others all not only shared geographic space, but experiences, interests, and worldviews
- **Hair** - how co-researchers discussed the historical and socio political nature of their hair and Black hair, more generally
- **History** - past and current events that make up the story of human affairs, particularly past and current events in Black history that co-researchers related to
- **Pain** - how co-researchers described emotional and psychological distress
- **Stereotypes** - "...a fixed, over generalized belief about a particular group or class of people." (Cardwell, 1996)
- **Role model** - how co-researchers described a person that is considered an example and inspiration for their achievements, their kindness, or for how they support others

- **Art**

- **Voice** - “naming one’s own reality” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13) orally, through written methods, through art, and other forms of verbal and non-verbal communication
 - **Accomplishment** - how the co-researchers named an act or creation they were proud of
 - **Activist art** - art that specifically communicated ideas and messages about societal challenges
 - **Afrofuturism** - any futuristic element that is centered in Black culture, specifically whenever co-researchers made mention of the third session (which topic was Afrofuturism)
 - **Emotions** - an intuitive feeling experienced in the body and soul (e.g. joy, happiness, sadness); a state of feeling
 - **Healing** - a practice by which co-researchers experienced therapeutic sensations or practices by which co-researchers named they facilitated wellness or wholeness
-
- ***Program***
 - **Being around other Black girls** - how co-researchers described their relationships with other co-researchers, how they named their experiences in the program as it pertained to sharing the virtual program space with other Black girls
 - **Confidence** - a feeling of assurance or belief in one’s abilities, qualities, strengths, gifts, and talents; confidence, in this case, was solely related to self-confidence

- **History** - how co-researchers named learning about or expressing their understanding of Black history throughout the program
- **Resistance**
 - Ward (1996) defined resistance as “the development of a critical consciousness that is invoked to counter the myriad distortions, mistruths, and misinformation perpetrated about the lives of Black women and men, their families, and communities” (p. 246)
 - **Counter-narrative** - “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” and “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J., 2002, p. 32)



Initials: _____ Date: _____

Institutional Review Board

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Black Girls' Arts-based Practices as Mechanisms for Identity Development and Resistance
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Cierra Kaler-Jones at the University of Maryland, College Park. Your child was invited to participate in this research project because they identify as a Black adolescent girl (aged 12-18) and is interested in participating in a virtual summer arts program. The purpose of this research project is to gain an understanding of the experiences and perspectives about being a Black girl in today's society.
Procedures	The procedures include involvement in a virtual arts program and a 30 minute pre-and-post program interview. The program will take place for two hours once a week for five weeks depending on their availability. At the end of the program, the student will be able to produce and/or perform in a virtual community arts showcase. With your consent, interviews will be audio and video recorded for transcription; if your student prefer not to be recorded, the researcher will take notes instead.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There are no known risks from participating in the study. Students can skip or stop answering questions at any time.
Potential Benefits	<i>There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. However, it is possible that the results of the study will contribute to generalizable knowledge and producing new knowledge about the experiences of Black girls and how they use arts-based practices in virtual settings.</i>
Confidentiality	<p>If there is a report or article about this research project, your student's identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by using the following procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assigning a code number or giving you an option to select a pseudonym for transcripts.• Using generic descriptions (ie. "one student said") in any publications or reports that results from this research.• Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data on a password protected computer. This data will be destroyed after five years, or earlier, if deemed that there are no further use for the notes. <p>Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if</p>

	your student or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
Compensation	<i>Your child will receive \$50 for participation in the study. You will be responsible for any taxes assessed on the compensation. Only your name and address will be collected to receive compensation.</i>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p><i>Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. Your child may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, your child may stop participating at any time. If your child decides not to participate in this study or stops participating at any time, your child will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p><i>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 investigators:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Cierra Kaler-Jones Department of Teaching & Learning, Policy & Leadership College of Education University of Maryland Benjamin Building 3942 Campus Drive College Park, MD 20742 609.513.4705 ckj@umd.edu </p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Dr. Claudia Galindo Department of Teaching & Learning, Policy & Leadership College of Education University of Maryland 2311 Benjamin Building 3942 Campus Drive College Park, MD 20742 301-405-4546 galindo@umd.edu </p>
Participant Rights	<i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i>

Initials: _____ Date: _____

	<p>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</p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Consent	<p><i>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 have your child participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF MINOR PARTICIPANT [Please Print]	
Signature and Date	NAME OF PARENT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF PARENT	
	DATE	



Initials: _____ Date: _____

Institutional Review Board
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ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	Black Girls' Arts-Based Practices as Mechanisms for Identity Development and Resistance
Purpose of the Study ?	<p>This research is being conducted by Cierra Kaler-Jones at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you identify as a Black girl (ages 13-18) interested in a virtual summer arts program. The purpose of this research project is to hear about your experiences and perspectives about being a Black girl in today's society.</p> <p>This form will give you information about the project. I will talk to you about the project and answer any questions you may have. If you do not understand something, please ask me to explain it to you. I will ask you to sign this form to show that you understand the project and agree to take part in it.</p>

Initials: Date:

Procedures	<p>The procedures involved in this study are individual 30 minute pre-and-post program interviews and involvement in a 5 week program. The program will be one day a week for 5 weeks, and about 2 hours once a week. We will start each group with an icebreaker activity, followed by a reading, art activity, and a sisterhood healing circle. At the end of the program, participants will be able to produce and/or perform in a virtual community showcase, if they would like. The discussions will be video and audio recorded with your assent. If you don't want to be recorded, the researcher will take notes instead. Nothing you say during the focus group conversations will be shared with anyone outside of the research team.</p> <p>Please remember to ask me as many questions as you want to about the study. I want to answer all of your questions whether they are simple or complicated. You are also free to stop whenever you like, and no one will get angry with you if you decide you don't want to participate.</p> <p>Here are some sample questions you'll be asked during your interview:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Tell me about yourself. What do you want to do when you're done with school?2. What are your dreams for the future?3. What are the ways you identify? What do those identities mean to you?4. Tell me about your experiences in the program
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<p>There is a potential risk for you to feel discomfort or uncomfortable talking about past experiences. To mitigate this, you have the right to skip any questions you do not wish to answer; you have the right stop answering questions at any time.</p>
Potential Benefits	<p>There are no benefits from participating in this research. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of how Black girls use art outside of school and online.</p>

Confidentiality	<div data-bbox="1068 239 1243 260" data-label="Text"> <p><i>Initials:</i> <i>Date:</i></p> </div> <p>If there is a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by using the following procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigning a code number or giving you an option to select a pseudonym (a fake name) for transcripts. • Using generic descriptions (ie. "one student said") in any publications or reports that results from this research. • Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by storing data on a password protected computer. This data will be destroyed after five years, or earlier, if deemed that there are no further use for the notes. <p>If I write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. 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.</p>
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Initials: _____ Date: _____

Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p>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. Students will be encouraged to take part in both the program and the research study. If a student is not interested in participating in the research study, they will be given the opportunity to take any of the regular classes given in community program.</p> <p>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 investigators:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cierra Kaler-Jones Department of Teaching & Learning, Policy & Leadership College of Education University of Maryland</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Benjamin Building 3942 Campus Drive College Park, MD 20742 609.513.4705 ckj@umd.edu</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dr. Claudia Galindo Department of Teaching & Learning, Policy & Leadership College of Education University of Maryland</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2311 Benjamin Building 3942 Campus Drive College Park, MD 20742 301-405-4546 galindo@umd.edu</p>
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<div style="text-align: right;"> <i>Initials:</i> <i>Date:</i> </div>	
Compensation	<p>You will receive \$50 for participation in this study.</p>
Participant Rights	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> 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 </p> <p>For more information regarding participant rights, please visit: https://research.umd.edu/irb-research-participants </p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>

Statement of Assent	<p style="text-align: right;"><i>Initials:</i> <i>Date:</i></p> <p>Your signature indicates that you have read this assent 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 assent form.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>
Signature and Date	<p>NAME OF SUBJECT</p> <p>[Please Print]</p> <p>_____</p> <p>SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Please check the box if you assent to being audio recorded</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Please check the box if you assent to being video recorded</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>DATE</p>

	<div><div>Initials: Date:</div><hr/></div>

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