The future of Black girlhood: Creative expressions of Black girls' imagination

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THE FUTURE OF BLACK GIRLHOOD: CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS OF BLACK GIRLS’ IMAGINATION

by

Jamesha Leeshun Hayes

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Major: Instruction and Curriculum Leadership

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Dedication

First, I want to extend immense gratitude to God for carrying me through this process. It has been one of the toughest experiences in my adult life. I know that without God’s grace and favor I would not have made it through this process, and I am eternally grateful.

Second, I have to give gratitude and honor to my family. This process has brought the best and worst out of me. Mommy and Meme, each of you have lovingly wiped my tears, fed my soul, and provided me the space to grow through this life-altering journey. You have sat in the darkness with me, and today you will bask in the sunlight of success with me. Barbara Hayes, mommy, I dedicated this dissertation to you!!! You are the original Black girl!!! You were the Black girl who never gave up on yourself or any other Black girl that came across your path. You sacrificed your girlhood, navigating the hard streets of north Memphis. Like a fruit tree that grew from concrete, you used all the blessings God gave you to fight through life’s adversity. You made a way for yourself, me, and Meme. The sacrifices you have made have allowed you to bear the fruit that has helped our family and so many other families to survive. Thank you. Thank you for all the known and unknown things you did to provide my sister and me with the opportunity to have a girlhood.

Jameka “Meme” Hayes, my little one. I have always called you little one because I always viewed you as a little doll I had to protect. However, during this process it was you protecting me. Funny enough, you protect me a lot. You protected me from losing my inner girl. You remind me to have fun, be free, make mistakes, move on from the mistakes, and try again another day. Thank you for protecting one of the most important parts of me: my inner Black girl. Mommy and Meme, I dedicate this dissertation to us, the B.A.P. S! Let this be a reminder to always honor our family motto, “RUN YOUR RACE!”
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This dissertation would not have been possible if I had not had an army of loved ones, friends, and community members supporting me as I landed this plane. Dr. Cross, thank you for guiding me throughout this process. You never gave up on me, no matter how many times I took us on various planes rides with my ideas. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and for the grace you bestowed on me as I explored my imagination during this process. Additionally, I must acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Tanesha Greenidge, Dr. Crystal D. Cook, and Dr. Olayinka Mohorn-Mintah because each of you provided supportive feedback that transformed my imaginations for this study into a reality. I would not have been able to complete this study without the advice, feedback, and support that each of you provided to me during this process.

To the beautiful and brilliant Black girls that shared their girlhood stories with me, I will cherish each of you forever. Naomi, Madison, and Hope, each time I think about the world that you all imagined for Black girls, I am brought to tears of joy. Thank you for sharing your stories and thank you for sharing your vision. I am forever grateful that each of you decided to participate in this study, and I have no doubt that lives you imagined for yourselves will be a reality in the future.

Lastly, I have to give acknowledgment to all my besties, my friends, family members, loved ones, my IRC, and my godfather, William Matthew Jackson III. Each of you carried me in some way through the wilderness. Each of you prayed for me, inspired me, and ensured that I made it to the finish line.

TO EVERYONE INVOLVED ON THIS JOURNEY: THANK YOU!!!
Abstract

Historically, opportunities have been limited for Black girls to share their girlhood experiences with mainstream society due to the lack of scholarship produced on Black girlhood. Additionally, there are limited narratives written by Black girls on their girlhood experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to gather Black girls’ perspectives on Black girlhood through curated images of Black girlhood in the future. This study used two theoretical orientations: Black feminism and Black radical imagination. Both theories provided the study with the framework necessary to hear the girls’ unfiltered truths and provided the girls with methods to create future images of Black girlhood. This study found Black girls envision Black girlhood in the future being peaceful and providing Black girls the opportunity to experience beauty, happiness, and power. The study’s findings cite the origin of Black girlhood’s current inadequacies linked to White beauty standards, adultification of Black girls, and the notion of powerlessness tied to Black girls during their girlhood. The study’s participants pushed against those three forms of oppressions by curating images that eradicated those forms of oppression by showing Black girls basking in the diversity of Black beauty as they experience a girlhood that values their existence and happiness. Based on the findings there are implications for people that interact with Black girls. The findings of this study showed that Black girls have insight about the experiences that they are encountering in their daily lives, which means people that work with Black girls must create opportunities for them to share their perspectives. For policy makers the findings show the need for safer school environments and better policies that protect Black girls. Lastly, the findings show that as a society, we all must do a better job of valuing the lives of Black girls by honoring their intelligence, uplifting their beauty, and nurturing their imagination.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Be Careful! There is glass over the floor,” was a phrase shared all over numerous social media platforms once Kamala Harris became the first female, Black, and South Asian Vice President of the United States of America (Rappeport, 2020). Kamala Harris' ceiling-breaking victory for women of color came at an adverse time in America due to the unrelenting publicizing of the senseless murders of Black people like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Moreover, on one hand the second decade of the 21st century appeared to be telling Black girls that they could accomplish anything that they put their minds to, via the election of Vice President Kamala Harris. On the other hand, one could argue that Black girls were subconsciously being reminded that their lives did not matter due to the murder of Breonna Taylor in her home by police officers. Conversely, as the decade progressed, an article was written about a phenomenon in Memphis, Tennessee, that highlighted the brilliance of Black girls in the Memphis City School System (West, 2022). In short, Black girls were being exposed to a myriad of experiences during their girlhood, and I wondered how we were capturing their thinking about their experiences as they navigated girlhood.

In 2022, the Commercial Appeal, a prominent newspaper outlet in Memphis, Tennessee, printed an article titled “Black girls Graduate at Higher Rate than any other Demographic in Memphis schools.” The article stated the following: “Black girls have graduated from high school at a higher rate in Memphis-Shelby County Schools than any other demographic group on record, a reversal of traditional academic disparities where Black students lag behind their white peers,” (West, para 2, 2022). School officials, school leaders, and even community members that were asked to explain the phenomenon could not definitively explain the reason the Black girls were excelling past their peers. However, once the girls were asked their opinion on the reason
that they excelled they stated that they believed it was the girls’ “personal determination to excel in spite of the double burden of racism and sexism that Black girls often face,” (West, para 3, 2022). In asking the young girls their perspective the community was given insight on a phenomenon, which was a positive step in the direction of capturing Black girls’ thinking as they matriculate through girlhood. However, instead of those opinions being viewed as an authority, the writer continued to source adult perspectives about the phenomenon.

Samantha West (2022) asked numerous scholars about the phenomenon, and those scholars stated, “It’s hard to say for certain what’s behind Black girls’ high graduation rates in Memphis, experts say, their academic outcomes are chronically understudied in comparison to other demographics” (para 4). Note, the authority and power on the subject were placed on the academic experts due to their classification as experts in the preceding quote. Those academic scholars are adults who did not experience the phenomenon, so why were they seen as the “expert” on the phenomenon? Moreover, why were the Black girls not classified as experts on their own lived experience? Why are we not asking more Black girls about their experiences as they matriculate through girlhood during the second decade of the 21st century? Why we’re not viewing them as academic experts as they express their Black girl standpoints on issues impacting them in society?

My wondering is important to me because the research that I have found shows that for centuries, the social and political structures of America have orchestrated the erasure of Black girlhood by frequently silencing many Black girls when they try to self-define themselves or their experiences of girlhood. George Lipsitz (2006) agreed that there have been historical social and political structures that have de-invested into Black girls due to its investment into the social construct of Whiteness. Lipsitz (2006) stated, “Although reproduced in a new form in every era,
the possessive investment of Whiteness has always been influenced by its origins in the racialized history of the United States,” and, as previously stated, it was the social and political structures of American slavery that allowed White settlers personalized a possessive investment in Whiteness by making Blackness synonymous with slavery and Whiteness synonymous with freedom” (p.3). The silencing of Black girlhood occurs in American society to protect elite White males and dominate cultural interest by rewarding the dominate narratives prescribed about Whiteness and Patriarchy (Lipsitz, 2006). This is evident when looking at the limited opportunities Black girls have had to share their girlhood experiences in the girlhood cannon and within American society. Sadly, for centuries Black girls have endured discursive trauma, historical suppression, and subjugation of their knowledge, ideas, and authentic identity because that is the price that Whiteness deems that marginalized groups like theirs should pay in American society (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992; Lipsitz, 2006; Richardson, 2013).

Hip-hop feminist girlhood scholar Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) highlighted the value of including race and gender into conversations about childhood by providing scholarship in the girlhood cannon and by defining Black girlhood. R.N. Brown defined Black girlhood as “the representations, memories, and lived experience of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female,” (p. x). Moreover, R.N. Brown (2013) argued that Black girlhood should not be a fixed identity, but an experience that aims to share the complexity of the fluid nature of Black femininity and identity. R. N. Brown’s (2013) work is another example of counternarratives in girlhood studies in academia. While R.N. Brown’s work was monumental in presenting a counter narrative in girlhood studies in the 2000s, the majority of literature in childhood and girlhood studies continued to center White middle-class girls as the dominant figure for girlhood. Critical race theorist Cheryl Harris (1993) discussed in the article “Whiteness
as Property” that Whiteness functions as a treasured property in the United States because it grants access to privileges in such a way that it is valorized. C. Harris (1993) went on to discuss that one of the coveted privileges of Whiteness is the idealization that comes with Whiteness that believes that those that do not honor Whiteness should be seen as inferior in American society. For instance, American girlhood studies were created to challenge the idolization of maleness in the United States by creating scholarship about girls, so that girls would not continue to be othered in research or society. However, when considering C. Harris' argument about the valorization of Whiteness, Black girls become doubly excluded because they are members of both “non-standard” groups: male and White. Sadly, without scholarship like the one I produced for this study, deviations from what is considered ideal or in alignment with Whiteness will more than likely leave Black Girls with two options: (a) continue to be understudied and excluded or (b) continue to be misrepresented and depicted as the deviant, abnormal girl in comparison to Whiteness standards of dominance (Annamma et al., 2016).

Another space that historically limits the opportunity for Black girls to share their girlhood experiences is mainstream American society, due to the lack of scholarship and/or narratives written by Black girls during their girlhood experiences. Historian Tammy Cherelle Owens (2015) explained some of the challenges that exist when scholars attempt to find documents written about Black girlhood experiences in America:

But, without fail, at the beginning stages of my research on Black girlhood during the era of slavery, my questions and requests for materials were frequently met with blank stares or suggestions that Black girlhood was lost or that there were simply not enough documents authored by or on behalf of Black girls. (p. 386)

Not only is it hard to find historical documentation and scholarship on Black girlhood experience, but it is also even harder to find primary sources on Black girlhood in any period of American society (Field et al, 2016).
One of the reasons it is hard to find primary source documentation of Black girlhood experiences in American society is because of the oppression that marginalized groups like Black girls experience as a result of America’s investment in Whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006). Kenneth Hardy (2013) defined racial oppression as “a traumatic form of interpersonal violence which can lacerate the spirit, scar the soul, and puncture the psyche” (p. 25). It is a combination of racial oppression and other forms of physical and nonphysical trauma, such as classism, sexism, microaggressions, that Black girls often must circumvent when navigating through the world when they make meaning of their experiences (Hardy, 2013). Because some of these forms of oppression, trauma, and experiences can be difficult to prove, difficult to verbally recount, or occur cumulative in nature, they are arguably just as detrimental as more overt forms of pain could be preventing Black girls from being able to share their girlhood stories with outsiders (Hardy, 2013). Thelma Bryant-Davis and Carlota Ocampo (2005) noted “[these] incidents are never far from one’s consciousness and require expenditures of cognitive energy, hypervigilance, and coping” (p. 575). Furthermore, Bryant Davis and Ocampo (2005) reasoned that “the concept of race itself is a product of a racist world view,” and that “race is one of the most powerful determinants of a person’s life course, opportunity, and health status” (p. 577). Hence allowing Black girls as they matriculate through girlhood to have a safe space to express their traumas, their victories, and/or their truth is the ethical thing to do because it will allow them the opportunity to deal with any traumas they are facing as a result of Whiteness and allow more primary source historical documents of Black girlhood to be produced (Davis & Ocampo, 2005).

**Theoretical Orientation**

There were two theoretical perspectives anchoring this study: Black feminism and Black radical imagination. The essence of this study was about gender, specifically Black girlhood.
Hence, I needed a gendered theory to guide my research design and study. The best gendered theory to support a Black girlhood study is Black feminism. Black feminism has existed since the 1990s and honors the unique perspective that Black women hold in America. Additionally, I needed a theoretical perspective that could help Black girls create alternative future images of Black girlhood. The best theoretical perspective to use when creating new images of Black girlhood is Black radical imagination because it can honor Black girlhood and Black girls’ imagination by giving them the tools to create the future images of Black girlhood.

**Black feminism.** The lack of inclusiveness in the second wave of feminism led to the creation of the third wave of feminism and led to the creation of numerous forms of feminisms (Mack-Canty, 2004). Becoming a more popular theory of discussion in the late 1960s due to its ability to combat White dominant culture hegemonic ideals aligned to middle class feminism, Black feminism provides a space for Black women and girls’ experiences to be brought to the epicenter of scholarly and political discussions (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981).

Black feminism was created to be able to cradle all the issues of Black women and Black girls because it strives to address the complex needs of Black women by addressing the racial and gender injustices that women face (Crenshaw 1991). Additionally, race, class, and gender are not the only issues that can be addressed by Black feminism. Collins (2000) argued that Black feminism honors Kimberle Crenshaw’s (1991) perspective on intersectionality by addressing issues like ethnicity, nationality, culture, sexuality, and class. Often in American society, Black women, and Black girls’ identity places them in subordinate status within various systems of oppression. Black feminism recognizes the status of Black girls and women and creates scholarship to share this information. Additionally, Black feminism uses its standpoint to challenge the ascribe subordination status of Black girls and women in order to how that it is not
an inherent status but a status that was bestowed upon them as a result of societal views of Black girls in relation to societies deficit ideologies (Collins, 2002). Additionally, it is from Black feminism’s dualistic, dichotomous oppositional thinking about the construction of systems of domination in America that we are able to think about the humanity in each person. While it might not be an intuitive correlation to link oppositional thinking, systems of oppression, and humanity together, the way I have viewed them is the by seeing the through line of people in each of them. Often the victims/survivors of that oppression experience the emotions that make us all human. Emotions like pain, anger, hope, motivation, victory, and determination are all emotions that every human can feel and use to get over adversity. Anna Julia Cooper discussed the power of a humanist vision of society within Black feminist standpoint theory:

We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country, or condition. . . . The colored woman feels that woman's cause is one and universal; and that. . . not till race, color, sex, and condition are seen as accidents, and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won—not the white woman's nor the black woman's, nor the red woman's, but the cause of every man and of every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong. (Brown, E.B, 2006, p.175)

In recognizing the humanity in people and their issues, Black feminism honors the power of solidarity. By seeing people as people, the systems of inequity can begin to challenge the system and deficit ideologies that were created to separate people. Arguably, the safe place for Black girls to be able to define themselves, share their lived experiences, and comprehend their nonmonolithic experiences of Black femininity is Black feminism. In short, Black feminism is a theory, a perspective, and a paradigm that honors the intersectionality of Black women and Black girls in America. Black feminist thought provides space for Black women to form connection as they analyze and make sense of the various forms of oppression that the system places upon
them due to their identities (Collins, 1990). Lastly, Black feminism provides space for Black women to manifest and show the world the beauty and brilliance that is Black women’s culture (Collins, 2000). Hence, if Black feminism could provide all of that access to Black women, I propose that it could, and potentially already is providing, access to Black girls as they make meaning of their experiences of Black girlhood.

Black feminist thought addresses and uses Black women’s and Black girls’ collective knowledge, historical perspective, and lived experience in the world to address issues in the various arenas (hooks, 1992). Black feminist thought also centralizes the intersecting components of race, gender, and class, which value the unique lived experiences of Black women and Black girls. Additionally Black feminist thought allows Black women and Black girls to be the subject and researchers in a unique way that is not present in other intellectual spaces due to Black women feeling like they are the “outsider” in some academic spaces (Collins, 2000). There are three themes in Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000).

The first theme is anchored on the lived experience of Black women and Black girls in that the criterion for Black feminist thought is the scholarship collects and/ or shares knowledge of Black women’s and Black girls’ lived experiences (Collins, 2000). This is where the power of being able to define self and determine the value of self is so important for Black women and girls (Collins, 2002). Collins (2002) noted in the following quote the value of Black women and Black girls being able to circumvent historical thoughts, contemporary thoughts, and statements placed on Black women: “Self-definition involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood. In contrast, self-valuation stresses the content of Black women's self-definitions—namely, replacing externally derived images with authentic Black female images” (pp. s16-s17).
Moreover, it is critical for scholars and society to recognize the power of being able to self-define oneself, for you as an individual are the only person that can self-name who you are by stating the phrase, “I am.” When people can name for themselves who they are, what they believe, what they want, they move from a dehumanized, animalistic role in society to a human one.

The second theme of Black feminist standpoint is the interlocking nature of oppression. In the intersection of multiple forms of domination is the space where Black feminism thrives because it is there that Black feminist thought can accomplish their goal of determining the connection between the various forms of oppression that the system places upon them due to their identities (Collins, 1990). It is in this space of determining the interlocking of oppression that Black feminist scholars employ dualistic thinking around dichotomies in oppressive systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This is where Black girls will look at their girlhood experiences as Black girls. Interlocking oppression bring people into Black feminism that might not ordinarily see that they have a seat at the table as well; this unity allows people to recognize their difference, acknowledge the systems of oppressions that created them, and determine to use those differences to strengthen their resolve as individuals part of the human race (Collins, 2002). The final theme of Black feminist standpoint is about branding and showing the world the brilliance that is Black women’s culture. Collin’s (2002) noted, “there is no monolithic Black women's culture—rather, there are socially-constructed Black women's cultures that collectively form Black women's culture thus Black feminism takes pride in providing space for women to explore those social constructed cultures so Black women are able to make sense of their experience as Black women” (pp. s22). The journey of exploration of Black women and Black girls’ culture allows Black feminists to form a sister-like bond with Black women and Black girls
that is filled with camaraderie in the highs of life and support in the overcoming of the challenges of life.

Black radical imagination. The second theoretical perspective and theory that anchored this study was Black radical imagination. The essence of this study was about Black girlhood, but tangentially linked to Black girlhood, was the creation of images of a future that did not exist. Hence, I needed a theory centered on imagination to guide my research design and study. Black radical imagination theory was the perfect theory to guide this study because it could honor Black girlhood and Black girls’ imagination as they used those tools to create the future images of Black girlhood. Imagination and imaginaries are a complex concept that is formed from a multitude of conceptualizations that are neither completely a reflection of reality nor completely a figment of a person’s imagination (O’Reilly, 2014). The topic of imaginaries is a concept that is formed through people’s socially constructed, taken-for-granted meanings and beliefs about events, places, and people (Stokowski, Kuentzel, Derrien, & Jakobcic, 2021). Imaginaries provide scholars and participants in scholars’ studies the opportunity to:

grapple with the creative, individual and ever-changing nature of the imagination, with the socially shaped ways in which a place or lifestyle can be imagined, and with the social outcomes of people acting on their imagination in terms of both their own lives and the shaping of places (and new imaginaries). (O’Reilly, 2014, p. 211)

Essentially, symbolically, and rhetorically created, through claims about self, others, and places imaginaries help people make sense of individual and shared experiences (Stokowski et al., 2021).

Social imaginary is an amalgamation of legend, narratives, and myth that can only be concocted through shared anonymous or collective stories in societies (Maile & Griffiths, 2012). As Stella Maile and David Griffiths (2012) argued, social imaginary cannot be separated from
individuals’ emotional bonds and attachments due to the way things are imagined and fantasized. Hence, if the power of imagination was in the ability to create versatile understandings and interpretations of life it would be essential for my study with Black girls using their imaginaries to create future imagery of Black girlhood. In the book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Kelley (2002) discusses the freedom that radical imagination can offer scholars and everyday people by providing them with an opportunity to examine, imagine, and reimagine a vision of the present state of society and the future state of society. Kelley’s (2002) book uses historical events and movements in America to show the different ways that people struggled against oppression, “like Black Leftists, nationalists, feminists, surrealists have imagined collectively about the possibility of revolutionary futures and how social movements have activated that imagination” (Cahill, 2021, p.31). Furthermore, those different people belaboring in those struggles illustrate the power and the “wisdom of the Black radical tradition and Black people's diasporic history of Marxist resistance,” which allows, “Black political agitators [to] map a new world through the transformative process of dreaming towards Black futurity” (Cahill, 2021, p.31). To be clear, Black radical imagination is not a form of escapism nor a dreamlike state excluded from the realities of day-to-day struggle (Kelley, 2002). However, Black radical imagination is forged from critical analysis of the current realities of society and social problems (Kelley, 2002). Moreover, scholars using Black radical imagination must grapple with the:

challenge of solidarity and have a deep understanding of the mechanism of oppression that generates the conditions and requirements for new modes of analysis, new ways of being together. Therefore, it is not enough to imagine a world without oppression (especially since we don’t always recognize the ways in which we ourselves practice and perpetuate oppression). We must also understand the mechanism or process that not only reproduces subjugation and exploitation but makes them common sense and renders them natural or invisible. (Kelley, 2022, p. xiii)
Black radical imagination was such an ingenious tool for different people because it has existed in various forms, which was perfect for a study that had Black girls use different mediums to express their Black girlhood.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem as I saw it was two pronged. The first prong of the problem was centered on the need to hear Black girls’ voices as they were experiencing girlhood. The second prong of the problem was creating space for Black girls to use their imagination to envision a future image of Black girlhood. Black girls’ standpoint is not just useful for today, but it is useful for the future as well. In hearing their hopes and dreams of the future, we could support them in turning their dreams into a reality for themselves and other Black girls in the future. Both problems were linked together in that they both acknowledge that there was a dire need to hear from more Black girls and their experiences as they matriculated through girlhood.

**Stop overlooking Black girls’ girlhood.** Regarding the first prong of the problem, the Black female experience from childhood through adulthood had often been overlooked by mainstream society, in scholarship in academia, and even within the Black community until the last few decades of the 21st century (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). Take for instance the field of education, which is the epicenter of mainstream society, academic scholarship, and the Black community. Most of the focus in education was on the underperformance of Black youth or issues relevant to young Black males (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). However, recent studies have shown that in comparison to their White counterparts, Black girls are 5 times more likely to be expelled/suspended and are 2 times more likely to receive office referrals or detainment (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008). Furthermore, Black girls are arrested and/or
referred to law enforcement officers more than their White counterparts (Annamma et al., 2016). In the criminal justice system, Black girls are more likely to receive harsher sentences than White girls who have similar offences (Annamma et al., 2016). Also, research shows that, due to society's gender-specific ideologies associated with Black girls, they are being reprimanded more by figures in authority (Morris, 2007).

In 2012, the Law Review of UCLA Law School and the Critical Race Studies Program decided to disrupt the pattern of excluding Black girls from research by hosting a symposium, “Overpoliced and Underprotected: Women, Race and Criminalization,” which brought together advocates, lawyers, formerly incarcerated women, and researchers to address the alarming numbers of Black girls in the prison system as well as criminal supervision of women and girls of color (Crenshaw, Ocean, & Nanda, 2015). Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected as the culminating report of the symposium (Crenshaw, Ocean, & Nanda, 2015).

The report exposed the unjust treatment of Black girls in the education system through the corrupt disciplinary process that creates the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon that uses punitive school policies to funnel youth from school to prison (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Additionally, the report highlighted the need for studies to elevate Black girls’ experiences and knowledge. The report notes,

[e]merging from the 2012 symposium, it was clear that serious interventions were necessary to alleviate the knowledge desert that exists around the lives and experiences of Black women and girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p.6)

This dissertation honored the findings of the 2012 symposium by alleviating the desert of knowledge about the lives and experiences of Black girls in Memphis by having them share their stories and experiences of girlhood during the second decade of the 21st century.
**Black radical imagination: A space for Black girlhood to flourish.** The last prong of the problem was identifying a space where Black girls can authentically be themselves while also using their Black girl standpoint to critique, analyze, and create visions of Black girlhood. The concept of imaginary and the specific theory of Black Radical Imagination provide that space for Black girls. Imagination and imaginaries is a complex concept that is formed from a multitude of conceptualizations that are neither completely a reflection of reality or completely a figment of a person’s imagination (O’Reilly, 2014). The topic of imaginaries is a concept that is formed through people’s socially constructed, taken-for-granted meanings and beliefs about events, places, and people (Stokowski et al., 2021).

Imaginaries provide scholars and participants in imagination studies the opportunity to wrestle “with the socially shaped ways in which a place or lifestyle can be imagined” (O’Reilly, 2014, p. 211). Essentially, symbolically, and rhetorically created, through claims about self, others, and places imaginaries help people make sense of individual and shared experiences (Stokowski et al., 2021). Since the end of the 19th century, “the notion of ‘imaginary’ has gained prominence in various disciplines such as history (Duby, 1978; Le Goff, 1988/2005), psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1973), anthropology (Durand, 1992), philosophy (Castoriadis, 1975; Taylor, 2004), and sociology (Maffesoli, 1993).” (Arruda, 2015, p.128) with some historians citing that the idea of imagination being found in artifacts from the Middle Ages. Scholars in various fields with vastly different foci have used the concept of imaginaries to aid people to make sense of their experiences and to solve for inadequacies in their current reality. For instance, scholars in the social science field Patricia A. Stokowski, Walter F. Kuentzel, Monika M. Derrien and Yumiko L. Jakobic (2021) conducted a study that provided an opportunity for residents in a rural community to construct imaginaries in response to the increased tourism into
their community. Another example of the concept of imaginary being present in diverse academic topics is Karen O’Reilly’s (2014) study on the role social imaginary has on the lifestyle of migration. However, it was not until scholar Robin D. G. Kelley’s (2002) work *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* that race and imagination were united to address an issue.

In the book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* Kelley (2002) discussed the freedom that radical imagination can offer scholars and everyday people by providing them with an opportunity to examine, imagine, and reimagine a vision of the present state of society and the future state of society. Kelley’s book (2002) used historical events and movements in America to show the different ways that people struggling against oppression: “like Black Leftists, nationalists, feminists, surrealists have imagined collectively about the possibility of revolutionary futures and how social movements have activated that imagination” (Cahill, 2021, p. 31). Furthermore, those different people belaboring in those struggles illustrate the power and the “wisdom of the Black radical tradition and Black people's diasporic history of Marxist resistance,” which allows, “Black political agitators [to] map a new world through the transformative process of dreaming towards Black futurity” (Cahill, 2021, p. 31). To be clear, Black radical imagination is not a form of escapism nor a dreamlike state excluded from the realities of day-to-day struggle (Kelley, 2002). However, Black radical imagination is forged from critical analysis of the current realities of society and social problems (Kelley, 2002).

Black radical imagination is such an ingenious tool for different people because it has existed in various forms. Moreover, “due to its multidimensional nature, the Black Radical Imagination has found the capacity to exist within and beyond the limitations of the written word” (Cahill, 2021, p.31). Some of the different forms of Black radical imagination have been
represented in music, written, oral, Black oral traditions, visual arts, and organizing. As a praxis Black radical imagination allows scholars and their participants to work collaboratively to create a vision of freedom by using the strength of the racialized community to galvanize and use the community as a resource (Cahill, 2021). Black radical imagination allows people to live out loud an act of resistance from the limitation of their current realities, identities, and societal expectation of Blackness by allowing Black people to use their perspective to create a new perspective, world, or experiences for their reality (Kelley, 2002).

Black radical imagination proves the power that race and imagination can have to create images of freedom and access. Studies like Amalia Dache’s (2019) Ferguson’s *Black Radical Imagination and the Scyborgs of Community-Student Resistance* is a beautiful example of the power that the theory and praxis that Black radical imagination can provide to scholars and communities because it created space for the student activist to re-imagining a new society from the vantage point of Black resistance that makes visible the injustices of police brutality and actively fights to dismantle capitalism (Dache, 2019) In addition to (re)imagining a new society, it provided students agency to act on creating that society through various forms of protest (Dache, 2019). Marcelle Muhammad and Gholnescar E. Haddix (2016) reinforced the need to eliminate the silencing of Black girlhood experiences in the following assertation: “Black girls can know; simply stated, they have a voice. Black girls are generators and producers of knowledge… Black girls exhibit philosophies and practices that are distinguished from those of other groups” (p. 304). Black girls are brilliant, they are creating knowledge, and healing themselves, and healing others with their brilliance but the world and academia does not know this because we are not creating space for them to share their truths. Hence, it was the duty of scholars like myself to create space for Black girls’ plural, multidimensional, nuanced
epistemologies to be shared as they matriculate through their girlhood experiences. Black girls have a self-defined standpoint due to their intersectional identity that will aid in empowering them and others to end the cycle of trauma that is occurring in American society and school systems that either misrepresents, overlooks, or silence them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gather Black girls’ perspective on Black girlhood through curated images of Black girlhood in the future. Secondly, I wanted to create a space for present day Black girls’ narratives to be told by present-day Black girls. Lastly, I wanted Black girls in Memphis narratives about girlhood to be elevated so that they could be included in the Black girlhood cannon. During the first decade of the 21st century, scholars of the Black girlhood cannon shared Black girls’ stories using ethnographies and other methodologies to challenge historical narratives of Black girls. Studies like Venus Evans-Winters’ (2005) ethnographic study of Black girls’ resiliency in urban classrooms and Edward W. Morris’ (2007) study on Black girls’ experience in classrooms have highlighted the trajectory and challenges of Black girls. Dierdre Glenn Paul (2003) used an ethnographic approach in her book Talking’ Back: Raising and Educating Resilient Black Girls to discuss Black girls’ experiences in schools. Kyra Gaunt (2006), the author of The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop, Ruth Nicole Brown (2009), the author of Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy, and the other aforementioned studies do their part to give insight to the experience of Black girls. In the first decade of the 21st century Nicole Brown (2013) created a space called Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), which offers different methods to create spaces to explore, enact, and envision Black girlhood through the eyes of Black girls. SOLHOT gave researchers and participants tools to transform the oppressive,
sexist, racist, and biased spaces that Black girls were experiencing into one that had the potential of being liberating for Black girls. Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) was adamant that SOLHOT was not an afterschool program and not a mentoring program but was a space where Black girls and women could co-construct the space to serve the needs of the participants. While R. N. Brown and the other scholars’ studies are rich with descriptions of Black girl’s experiences, they did not include Memphis Black girlhood experience, nor did they share the experiences of present-day Black girlhood experiences during the second decade of the 21st century.

In order for me to accomplish my goal of adding the necessary counter narrative scholarship to the girlhood studies I had to explore scholarship on Black radical imagination. As previously mentioned, in the book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* Kelley (2002) discussed the freedom that radical imagination can offer scholars and everyday people by providing them with an opportunity to examine, imagine, and reimagine a vision of the present state of society and the future state of society. Moreover, Black radical imagination is forged from critical analysis of the current realities of societal social problems. Black radical imagination provides Black girls the opportunity to express an act of resistance from the limitations of their current realities, identities, and societal expectations of Blackness and girlhood because it allows them to use their perspectives to create new perspectives, worlds, and experiences for their reality (Kelley, 2002). Black radical imagination proves the power that race and imagination can have to create images of freedom and access. Studies like Amber Caprice Sizemore Davis’ (2022) phenomenal study *Nurturing Black Girl Imagination: Using Portraiture to Disrupt the Omnivisibility of Black Girlhood and to Illuminate Black Girls’ Childhoodness, Creativity, and Criticality in Science Learning Spaces* used Black girl imagination and portraiture to highlight Black girls’ childhood experiences and creativity when they engage in
science classes. Black girls got to analyze their experiences as they engaged in science and then created futuristic images of themselves and other Black girls engaging in science. I wanted to conduct a study similar to Amber Caprice Sizemore Davis and Ruth Nicole Brown’s ceiling-breaking work on critically exploring Black girlhood alongside Black girls but focus my research on the regional locale of Memphis within the time period of today’s and tomorrow’s Black girlhood experiences.

Significance of the Study: Memphis Black girl Brilliance

In 2015 a Black female student in Columbia, South Carolina, was choked, flipped, and dragged from her desk by a resource officer at her school because she refused to leave the classroom when her teacher requested her to leave (Associated Press, 2016). Sadly, this horrifying incident was not the first incident where a Black girl had been treated in a dehumanizing manner at her school nor was it the first time that a Black girl was given an extreme punishment for a minor infraction like having her cell phone out in class. The difference with this incident was that it was filmed by her classmate, another Black female, which allowed for it to be shared on national platforms on social media. The horrific experience that the Black girl endured had been shared at least 4,487 times according to the number of people that had viewed the article about the incident (Newsy, 2015). On a YouTube channel, Newsy, (Newsy, 2015) that South Carolina Black girl's story was shared with thousands of people, and that was just one YouTube channel. In that moment, an undeniable image of Black girlhood was displayed for the world to see. In that moment a Black girl was reminded that her life, her education, and her freedom were not valuable to society because, instead of vindication for the assault on her person, she was given charges of disturbing the school (Newsy, 2015).
This means that with social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Facebook more Black girls can have the opportunity to elevate the truth to millions of people. All it will take will be for more courageous people and women like the student who recorded the video to hit record when injustices are happening and then hit upload on one of the various social media platforms. In seconds, counter narratives will exist that challenge the derogatory images of Black girlhood of the past. If more girls share their stories, we will have new positive, multi-dimensional images of Black girlhood. This is the value of Black female brilliance. Black girl brilliance was exhibited by the Black girl in South Carolina, when she used her connection to social media and her savviness to recognize the importance of visually capturing the experience of Black girls in that classroom in order to amplify to the world the injustices that she and other Black students in that class witnessed (Associated Press, 2016). The social environments or locale that people are living in have an impact on their view of race (Mims & Williams, 2020). If the preceding argument is valid, I would imagine that the social environments would have an impact on the way someone views their gender (Mims & Williams, 2020). Other scholars discuss the power of location on participants’ experiences. Kevin T. Smiley, Wanda Rushing, and Michele Scott (2016) suggested that place
denotes how mutually reinforcing features such as ‘geographic location’, ‘material form’, and ‘investment with meaning and value’ serve as ‘. not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game.’ (Gieryn, 2000: 464–466). The agentic power can be more closely designated as place character, defined by Paulsen (2004) as how diverse realms of urban life, from economy to culture to politics and more, ‘combine and endure . encouraging or discouraging different patterns of action’ (Paulsen, 2004: 245). (pp. 194-195)
The essence of Kevin T. Smiley, Wanda Rushing, and Michele Scott’s (2016) argument was the importance of crafting studies that provide opportunities for participants to voice the impact the social environments have and could be having on them. Therefore, conducting a study about
Black girls’ experiences with girlhood while living in Memphis, Tennessee, is a valid study because it allowed Black girls who live in Memphis to share their perspective on the impact a locale has on the intersectional identity of being Black girls. Moreover, Black girls’ brilliance comes when they can share their unfiltered truths with the world via using platforms and methods that best suit them to share their experiences. Memphis has so many beautiful, talented, brilliant Black girls with thoughts about their girlhood experiences, thoughts about the current events in our world, and thoughts about the future. Therefore, I created an opportunity for the girls of Memphis, Tennessee, to share their brilliance by conducting this study.

**Research Question**

The following question was the essential question for this research study: In what ways can the perspective of Black girls shape the future imagery of Black girlhood?

**Organization of the Study**

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter of the dissertation shares the introduction and the purpose of the study. It includes information on the central problem that ignited the creation of the study, an explanation of the significance of studying the problem, the research question, the organization of the study and a definition terms. The second chapter of the proposal is the literature review.

The literature review is organized in three sections:

1. The first section, *The Silencing of Black girlhood in America is Deafening*, defined terms like girlhood, Black girlhood, and shows how academia has silenced Black girlhood. The second section, *Historical Silencing of Black girlhood experiences in America*, showed
how Slavery, the Reconstruction Era, and the 20th century created images, mindsets, and rhetoric that dehumanized and silenced Black girls and their Black girlhood.

2. The third section, *Silencing of Black girls’ experiences in American School Systems*, discussed the impact the aforementioned social, political, and historical arenas have had on Black girls’ experiences in schools today.

3. The final section discussed the theories that have guided my study: Black feminism and Black radical imagination.

The third chapter is the methodology section, which explains the methods I used to conduct my study. The methodology section discussed narrative methodology, theoretical perspectives that I used to guide my methods and digital storytelling methods. Additionally, I discussed the research design, data collection process, and ethics related to the execution of my study in this section. In Chapter 4 share the findings of the study, the images the girl curated during the study, and a conclusion that explains the girls’ overall vision of Black girlhood in the future. The last chapter, Chapter 5, included a summary of the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

**Definition of Terms**

*Adultification.* This term “is defined as the dehumanization of Black children because it removes the critical component of innocence from the developmental period of Black childhood” (Epstein et. al., 2017).

*Black girlhood.* This “is defined as the representations, memories, and lived experience of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female” (R. N. Brown, 2013, p. x).
Curators of Black Girlhood: Museums and art galleries often employee curators to acquire, care for, and develop a collection. Those curators typical arrange displays of collection loaned works, and they help to interpret the collection with a specific mindset that informs, educates, and/or inspires the public. Like the traditional art curators, the Black girls in my study collected images and representations of Black girlhood. They aided me in determining the best way to share that information with the community so it could inform, educate, and inspire the public. Therefore, they will be referred to as curators in this paper.

Intersectionality. This term “is defined as a catch-all word that stands in for the broad body of scholarship that has sought to examine and redress the oppressive forces that have constrained the lives of black women in particular and women of color more generally. As an idea or an analytically distinct concept, intersectionality is a moniker, identified with Crenshaw (1989), meant to describe the ‘intersecting’ or codeterminative forces of racism, sexism, and classism in the lives of Black women” (Alexander-Floyd, 2012, p. 4).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Section I: The Silencing of Black girlhood in America is Deafening

Black girls’ imagination is the glass of water that dehydrated and exhausted America needs. Black girls are creative beings who have the intellectual prowess to redefine Black girlhood, craft images that evoke change in America, and ignite the enhancement of Black feminism. However, the systems and structures in America have limited the ability for Black girls to share their standpoint. George Lipsitz (2006) argued that there have been historical, social, and political structures that have not invested resources or energy into Black girls due to their investment into the social construct of Whiteness. Lipsitz (2006) stated, “Although reproduced in a new form in every era, the possessive investment of Whiteness has always been influenced by its origins in the racialized history of the United States,” and, as previously stated, it was the social and political structures of American slavery that allowed “White settlers personalized possessive investments in Whiteness by making Blackness synonymous with slavery and Whiteness synonymous with freedom” (p.3). The silencing of Black girlhood occurs in American society to protect elite White males and dominate cultural interest by rewarding the dominant narratives prescribed about Whiteness and patriarchy (Lipsitz, 2006). This is evident when looking at the limited opportunities Black girls have had to share their girlhood experiences in the girlhood canon and within American society. Sadly, for centuries Black girls have endured discursive trauma, historical suppression, and subjugation of their knowledge, ideas, and authentic identity because that is the price that Whiteness deems that marginalized groups like theirs should pay in American society (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992; Lipsitz, 2006; Richardson, 2013).
Some of the factors that inhibit the ability for Black girls to thrive daily in this country are rooted in historical, social, and institutional oppression (Morris, 2016; Crenshaw et. al., 2015). Each time Black girls attempt to combat the deficit ideologies that exist in those oppressive areas, it is costing them valuable psychological, physical, and emotional space in their bodies and psyches (Morris, 2016; Crenshaw et. al., 2015). One of the reasons it is hard to find primary source documentation of Black girlhood experiences in American society is because of the oppression that marginalized groups like Black girls experience as a result of America’s investment in Whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006).

Kenneth V. Hardy (2013) defined racial oppression as “a traumatic form of interpersonal violence which can lacerate the spirit, scar the soul, and puncture the psyche” (p. 25). It is a combination of racial oppression and other forms of physical and nonphysical trauma -classism, sexism, microaggressions- that Black girls often must circumvent when navigating through the world when they make meaning of their experiences. Because some of these forms of oppression, trauma, and experiences can be difficult to prove, difficult to verbally recount, or occur cumulatively in nature, they are arguably just as detrimental as more overt forms of pain. Furthermore, they could be preventing Black girls from being able to share their girlhood stories with outsiders (Hardy, 2013). Thelma Bryant-Davis and Carlota Ocampo (2005) noted “[these] incidents are never far from one’s consciousness and require expenditures of cognitive energy, hypervigilance, and coping” (p. 575). Furthermore, “race is one of the most powerful determinants of a person’s life course, opportunity, and health status” (Bryant-Davis and Ocampo, 2005, p. 577). Hence allowing Black girls as they matriculate through girlhood to have a safe space to express their traumas, their victories, and/ or their truth is the ethical thing to do because it will allow them to opportunity to combat any traumas they are facing as a result of
Whiteness, allow more primary source historical documents of Black girlhood to be produced, and allow Black girls the opportunity to share their perspective on what future Black feminist girlhood studies should incorporate.

Each section of the literature review exposes the scholarly and societal methods that America has used to protect the concept of Whiteness and limit the opportunities that Black girls have had to share their truths. The first section of the literature review discussed the silencing of Black girlhood in America. The purpose of the first major concept section was to highlight the historical experience of Black girls in America so that the reader comprehended the historical racial and sexist context that informs modern-day Black girls’ experience in America. Additionally, the first section was written to help the reader comprehend the origin of Black girls not being the authors of their experiences in American society. The second section discussed the silence of Black girl experiences in educational settings in America. The second section’s purpose was to aid the reader in understanding the impact that racism, sexism, and socialization has on Black girls’ experience of constructing their identity while growing up in an oppressive American school system. Additionally, it highlighted the brilliance of Black girls when they are able to share their stories from their perspectives. The third section of the literature review highlighted the impact that Black Feminism could have on Black girlhood in the second decade of the 21st century by providing a theoretical approach for more Black girls to create their own counter-narratives in society. The final section showed how the concept of imagination has the ability to create versatile understandings and interpretations of life, while also showing the value of having Black girls evoke their imagination to reimagine Black girlhood of today and tomorrow.
The difference between girlhood and Black girlhood

While researching the topic girlhood I found it difficult to find a succinct definition of girlhood. When I placed the term girlhood in the search bar of Merriam-Webster Dictionary the search engine did not produce a definition for it (Definition of girlhood, n.d.). Interestingly, the dictionary transformed the term from girlhood into girl. Then the dictionary defined the term girl similar to the way girl was defined above as a female child or person who identified their gender as female (Definition of girlhood, n.d.). When exploring academic scholarship, I noticed a similar issues of not getting a concrete definition. In the book Surviving Girlhood: Building Positive Relationships, Attitudes, and Self-Esteem to Prevent Teenage Girl Bullying, Rachel Beddoe and Nikki Watson (2013) implied that girlhood is time when “childhood gives way to adolescence” (p.14). Girlhood scholar Mary Kearney (2009) explained that the inception of girlhood studies was about providing opportunities for scholars to look at girlhood as a separate subject and topic from womanhood. This implies that one could argue that girlhood can be defined as a separate time period for womanhood. Jessica Calvanico (2022) claimed “that girlhood, broadly, is a carceral subject category, entombing the bodies of girls who deviate from its conventions and expectations,” which is naming that girlhood has limitation (p.403). Limitation that hinders and causes harm to girls who do not honor the pre-determined actions associated with girlhood (Calvanico, 2022) Now what are those predetermined actions? The following scholarship will give insight on the variability of those actions.

In the scholarly article titled “The Pain and the Creeping Feeling: Skewed Girlhood in Two Graphic Novels,” Maria Margareta Osterholm (2022) argued that for some people girlhood is about creating a time for girls to tap into their femininity and become familiar with norms and expectations associated with a specific group’s perspective on age-related feminine
characteristics. However, she followed that argument with the following statement: “The concept of girlhood and thus the meaning of ‘proper’ girlhood varies according to time and place, an issue much debated in the field of Girlhood Studies,” which I think is a perfect way to explain the difficulty of defining girlhood (Osterholm, 2022, p.48). Moreover, as Jennifer Helgren and Colleen A. Vasconcellos (2010) named in their book *Girlhood: A Global History*, “The realization that girlhood is a constructed, changing, and contested category of both experience and expectations,” gives clarity as to the reason that there is not a clean, clear definition of girlhood (p. xi). However, while there may not be a definition that scholars can agree on it appears that the consensus is that girlhood is a social constructed experience for girls, which, one could argue does not give a universal definition, element, and/ or concept for scholars to use when trying to define the term girlhood. However, that does not define Black girlhood. Regarding a definition of Black girlhood this paper used Ruth Nicole Brown’s (2013) definition of Black girlhood. Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) defined Black girlhood as “the representations, memories, and lived experience of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female,” (p. x). Moreover, Brown (2013) argued that Black girlhood should not be a fixed identity, but an experience that aims to share the complexity of the fluid nature of Black femininity and identity. Additionally, the following sections of this literature review will further elucidate the definition of Black girlhood by showing the experiences that Black girls are currently enduring in America in the 21st century.

**Racial Identity.** Given that I studied the gendered and racial experience of Black girls in Memphis, Tennessee, I had to discuss the construction of race in America, the construction of gender in America, and the connection those two identities have in response to each other in American society. For when scholars understand the impact race and gender have on the current
reality of Black girls, we are able to truly understand the magnificence of their ability to use their imagination to craft an alternative image of life for themselves and other Black girls. Since the beginning of time, race, and identity, researchers have struggled to define the construction of race (Sellers, Chavous, & Cooke, 1998). This is evident when trying to categorize the approaches that researchers have used to measure racial identity. Researchers measuring racial identity typically group the plethora of approaches into two categories: mainstream and underground (Gaines & Reid, 1995; Sellers et al., 1998). The mainstream approach to measuring racial identity typically disregards Black culture and focuses on the group stigma associated with racial identity (Gaines & Reid, 1995). On the contrary, the underground approach to measuring racial identity uses people’s experiences with racism, oppression, and culture to determine the impact that it has on racial identity (Gaines & Reid, 1995; Sellers et al., 1998).

The mainstream approach credits its roots to Gordon Allport’s (1954) work about the effects that living in a racist environment has on the detrimental effects on the psychosocial development of Black Americans (Gaines & Reid, 1995). Moreover, Allport (1954) assumed that Black Americans devalue parts of themselves that reflect stigmas and stereotypes about Black people, or they devalue parts of themselves that experience prejudice because of the institutional structure that dehumanizes them for being Black. This led to the mainstream approach desiring to research the cognitive process associated with the racial identity development of individual people. James Marcia (1980) and Jean Phinney (1990) had some models that exemplify the individual approach to racial identity development. Marcia’s (1980) model reviewed the development of individuals’ identity statuses through search and commitment. Phinney’s (1990) ethnic identity development model explores the universal cognitive process of individual ethnic identity development. The strengths of both models are that they both highlight the importance
of individuals' race and ethnic identity, yet both the models fail to explain the qualitative meaning that individuals have with their racial and ethnic identity (Sellers et al., 1998).

The underground approaches created a positive identity development for Black Americans by choosing to not see racial experiences as harmful to racial identity development (Gaines & Reid, 1995; Sellers et al., 1998). W.E.B. Du Bois’ (1903) concept of “double consciousness” elevated that racial experience could yield to positive identity development for Black people. This is especially so when thinking about the fact that Black people have to deal with making sense of the negative stereotypes that come with being consider Black or Negro in America, while also navigating nationalism as Americans. I would argue that positive identity development could arise out of a reconciliation of navigating the space of being oppressed as a Black person and being the oppressor as an American. In order to construct a healthy racial identity other underground researchers have noted the importance of the identification of racism in America (Cross, 1971). Racism, for example, has an impact on the racial experience for Black people, and that racial experience informs the racial identity of Black people (Cross, 1971). For example, I would argue that once a Black person encounters a racist situation, they would more than likely do some rationalization method to make sense of their identity, the racist’s identity, and the shifts they needed to make in order to coexist in the world. As time has progressed, modern racial identity theorists have begun to focus on attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies associated with racial identity development, rather than forcing on stagnant models (Sellers et al.,; Parham & Helms, 1985). This is evident with the Racial Identity Attitude Scale that measures the affective states associated with racial identity development or the Multidimensional Inventory of Racial Identity that focuses on the feelings people have about race from a private and public perspective (Sellers et al., 1998). Both models use behaviors associated with race,
ideologies associated with the racial group about race, and the environment of the individual as factors that shape racial identity.

As I bring this section to a close, I want to make it clear that the underground approach uses the historical and cultural factors as key components of the Black experiences, whereas, the mainstream approach investigates the cognitive process, affective process, and the prejudicial behaviors of all racial groups (Gaines & Reid, 1995; Sellers et al., 1998). As time has progressed the way researchers think about the development of racial identity has progressed to be more about the attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies associated with racial identity development (Sellers et al., 1998; Parham & Helms, 1985). During the 21st century, scholars have begun to include Black girls in their studies on racial identity. Scholars like Lauren C. Mims and Joanna L. Williams (2020) conducted a study on ethnic-racial identity development of Black girls that explored Black girls’ beliefs and attitudes about their race, racial categorization, and their experience of learning about race during their adolescent years. The power of the study was that Mims and Williams (2020) decided to use Black girls’ own words rather than using the parental racial socialization, adult perspectives, to understand the youth. In making the strategic choice to use Black girls’ voices and using locales familiar to adolescents like schools and friend groups they were able to get a unique insight on the way Black girls make meaning of their ethnic-racial identity. Mims and Williams (2020) found that it was important to distinguish between students’ knowledge of the definition of race and their application of that knowledge to their own lives. The large number of Black girls who described negative social incidents associated with being their race indicate that social experiences play an important role in the self-understanding of Black girls in early adolescence. (p.768)

The findings in Mims and Williams’ (2020) study were vital for my study because they highlighted the power that the social environments and experiences could have on Black girls.
Additionally, the study gave insight on the need for scholars working with Black girls to ensure that they have opportunities to share their own perspectives. Given that my study involved Black girls I had to ensure that I created a study that considered their racial identity as well as their gender identity. Moreover, as I co-constructed my study with Black girls, I used research theories that had a social constructionist lens of racial identity development (Sellers et al., 1998; Parham & Helms, 1985).

**Gender Identity.** Racial identity alone does not encompass the totality of being a Black girl. Black girls’ gender identity is a crucial element to comprehending a Black girl's identity, thoughts on girlhood, and their thoughts on Black feminism (Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Gender identity development is a complex field that has evolved throughout time. Initially, gender identity development was grounded in a biological distinction between male and female sex organs yet, today, research in the gender identity development field has found it necessary to distinguish between the term “sex” and “gender” (Levine & Munsch, 2016). In regard to a person’s sex it is determined by the chromosomes and sex organs they possess at birth (Levine & Munsch, 2016). In Linda Mealey’s (2000) book *Sex Differences: Developmental and Evolutionary Strategies* sexologist John Money explains sexual differentiation with chromosomal sex. Sex determination from a chromosomal perspective differentiates sex for mammals by sex chromosomes inherited from the mother and father: with the mother and father giving the child one sex chromosome each (Mealey, 2000). Females have two XX chromosomes, while males have an X chromosome and a Y chromosome (Mealey, 2000). In chromosomal sex, the male determines the sex of the child because females can only give their children an X chromosome when they produce the egg during the fertilization process. However, when the sperm from the male fertilizes the maternal egg, it adds to the egg either an X or Y chromosome.
Helen Lambert (1978) agreed that chromosomal sex should be used to determine the primary sex difference between males and females. However, Lambert (1978) added to Money’s claims by stating that the paradigm of sexual differentiation involves genes, hormones, and the chromosomal difference in humans. Hilde Lindemann (2006) and Amram Scheinfeld (1947) agreed chromosomal sex is a major method that biologists consider a person to be a female if they have two X chromosomes.

Gender, on the other hand, is constructed by societal and cultural ideologies of the term (Levine & Munsch, 2016). Academic journals use the term gender to reference a person’s psychological status (Mealey, 2000). Following this notion that gender is a more psychological perspective, Lindemann (2006) argued that the biological role of male and female does not matter until gender is introduced because gender is the vessel through which the power dynamics of those roles are introduced. Consequently, it is from that power dynamic that psychological perceptions of female or woman status have a value.

Biological determinism is a belief about the innate nature of human behavior, and the influence that biological attributes have on the superiority or inferiority of gender roles in society (Perry & Albee, 1998). Biological determinism has been known to suggest that women are inherently inferior to men because of their anatomical, psychological, spiritual, and intellectual composition. The psychological perspective of females in biological determinism has been known to offer advice that dehumanizes females and renders females inferior to men (Perry & Albee, 1998). Recently, the androcentric biases of earlier psychologists are being spotlight for their inaccuracy and for use of biological composition to definitively categorize people and their roles in society (Denmark, Rabinowitz, & Sechzer, 2016). Essentially, psychologists would say that a female is a person that has biological makeup that is influenced by societal norms about
gender and power. Theories like Bandura’s social learning theory, Bem’s sex role theory, and Kohlberg’s gender identity theory demonstrate the role that the environment has on gendered identity (Levine & Munsch, 2016). Through observational learning Black girls gather information from the environment and use that to create gender schemas or an organized set of gendered beliefs that guide their behaviors that impact their girlhood experiences and their perspectives on society (Levine & Munsch, 2016).

**Intersectionality.**

Due to Black girls having a multidimensional or intersectional identity it would not benefit them to have a study that evaluates only one aspect of their identity. I want to define the term *intersectionality* using Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd’s definition. Alexander-Floyd (2012) claimed that intersectionality serves as a catch-all word that stands in for the broad body of scholarship that has sought to examine and redress the oppressive forces that have constrained the lives of black women in particular and women of color more generally. As an idea or an analytically distinct concept, intersectionality is a moniker, identified with Crenshaw (1989), meant to describe the ‘intersecting’ or codeterminative forces of racism, sexism, and classism in the lives of [B]lack women. (p. 4)

The belief that social identities like class, gender, and race intersect in a manner that requires each identity to only be defined via the intersection of other identities is the fundamental theory of intersectionality (Harrison, 2017). Moreover, an intersectionality stance centered on the notion that each social identity can mutually constitute, naturalize, and reinforce each other is affirmed by Stephanie A. Shield’s (2008) following quote:

> By *mutually constitute* I mean that one category of identity, such as gender, takes its meaning as a category in relation to another category. By *reinforce* I mean that the formation and maintenance of identity categories is a dynamic process in which the individual herself or himself is actively engaged. We are not passive “recipients” of an identity position, but “practice” each aspect of identity as informed by other identities we
claim. By *naturalize* I mean that identities in one category come to be seen as self-evident or “basic” through the lens of another category. (p. 302)

Black feminist scholarship is the link into intersectionality thanks to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s work in critical race studies (Harrison, 2017). As a Black feminist in the legal field, Crenshaw used intersectionality theory to identify the marginalization of women of color in politics (Harrison, 2017). For centuries women of color have been silenced in feminist discourse because traditional feminist research is dominated by the perspective and experiences of White women rather than exploring the experiences and perspectives of Black women (Collins, 1990; hooks, 2000). In regard to gender, Crenshaw noted that most antiracist research centers on Black males’ ‘experiences and narratives, which leaves women of color to be devalued, denoted (Crenshaw, 1991). Furthermore, I would argue that the intersectionality of race and gender are vitally important to Black girls' understanding of their girlhood because it is from race and gender that Black girls have had to navigate the racist and sexist structures of America. The intersectionality of Black girls’ identity influences their self-esteem, self-worth, and overall identity development throughout their life. Black girls must comprehend their identity by making sense of the covert and overt messages sent to them from socialization structures like school, society, and culture. Moreover, they must navigate the institutionalized racist and sexist stereotypes embedded into their psyche during the socialization process of living in America (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). Hence, a racial or gender identity theory on its own would not suffice in being able to understand the complexities of Black girls’ identity, self-esteem development, or girlhood experience in America (Thomas et al., 2011).

Additionally, Black girls need to have curriculum, research studies, and interactions that fully encompass the intersectionality of their identity, rather than looking at their gender or their
race separately (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Thomas et al., 2011). Scholars have found that a single identity factor identity study denotes the complexity involved in the identity development process of multidimensional human beings. The identity development process relies on the intersectionality of the various identities that Black girls have because each identity is vitally important to their understanding of life (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Thomas et al., 2011).

An example of the importance of multidimensional studies is found in the model of multi-dimensions of identity study in which scholars were able to highlight the saliency of multiple identities and subjects’ core sense of self. Subjects needed to have all their identities honored in order to effectively comprehend their identity of self (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Furthermore, the more important a specific aspect of one’s identity is to them, the more integrated that salient part of their identity becomes to their understanding of self (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Therefore, for Black girls it is vitally important to have studies that honor all their multidimensional identities.

In 2007, Abes et al found that perceptions of identity are closely related and influenced by the meaning-making capacity of an individual being studied. They also found that the contextual or environmental factors affecting the individual being studied would affect their meaning-making capacity (Abes et al., 2007). This means that the way Black girls perceive their identity is directly related to the meaning that they can attach to the societal ideologies surrounding their identity. Hence, I needed to have a theoretical framework that was responsive to the psychological, biological, and societal needs of a Black girl in order to effectively honor the desire to create space for them to share their truth about their girlhood experiences today and create images of Black girlhood in the future.
Silence of Black girls through Adultification

In order to create spaces for Black girls to create future imagery of Black girlhood we first must understand why society has limited opportunities for Black girls to share their perspectives on girlhood, Black feminism, and American society. As early as the 15th century, the concept of childhood was identified as a period that should be looked at as distinct from adulthood (Skelton & Valentine, 1998). During the 15th century, children were recognized as individuals with distinct needs that are separate from adult’s needs and desires. Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine (1998) noted the following:

This conceptualization of the young was subsequently fostered through the development of formal education and the belief that children required long periods of schooling before they could take on adult roles and responsibilities (Prout and James, 1990). Although initially it was only the upper classes who had the time and money to provide their offspring with a ‘childhood’, legislation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and more critically the introduction of mass schooling, popularized the mythical condition of ‘childhood’ and slowly a universal notion of what it meant to be a child developed (Hendrick, 1990): namely, that a child is a temporally set apart from the adult world and that childhood is a time of innocence and freedom from the responsibilities of adulthood (although this is not necessarily the reality experience by many children). (p.3)

Childhood is denoted by the birth of growing ideas, development, and identity for the child so that there is a marked space between the innocence of infancy and the harsh realities that plague adulthood. Moreover, the scholars aforementioned in the quote express that the creation of adolescence and childhood as a social structure rested on the ability to accommodate the interest of dominant ideology and its economic structure of the upper class. However, on the contrary, theorist Stanley Hall argued that the politics of fear motivated the research on adolescence, and that this fear is found in the middle-class desire to protect their status as middle class by expressing control over the working class (Harrison, 2017). It is critical to note that none of the scholars above discuss a critical racialized or gendered lens in their analysis of the creation of
childhood. Additionally, neither scholar fully acknowledged the impact that the adult gaze had on the construction of childhood. Black girlhood was not a before or after thought in the construction of childhood due to the 15th century’s dominant class desire to create childhood as a concept to manipulate the lower classes to ensure that their economic interests were not compromised and that their social status was maintained. Therefore, society could not remember Black girlhood if it was not intentionally considered in the construction of childhood.

Scholars Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia Blake, and Thalia Gonzalez (2017) discussed the impact that the social construction of childhood has had in America on Black children. For centuries, the impact of that callous omission of race and gender in the social construction of childhood has affected the ability for Black children to experience the innocent period of grace that childhood offers to White children. Priscilla Ocean (Epstein et al, 2017) noted, “As the notion of innocent, developmental child emerged, white children began to enjoy greater [legal] protections [,] while Black children’s position remained relatively unchanged,” (p.3). Due to Black children’s unchanged status a legacy of racial discrimination and harsher punitive response to Black children’s youth-like behavior developed in America (Epstein et al., 2017). Moreover, during slavery

Black boys and girls were imagined as chattel and were often put to work as young as two and three years old. Subjected to much of the same dehumanization suffered by Black adults, Black children were rarely perceived as being worthy of playtime and were severely punished for exhibiting normal child-like behaviors. (Epstein et al., 2017, p.4)

In short, the phenomenon that was occurring was the start of adultification of Black children. For this dissertation I defined adultification as the dehumanization of Black children because it removes the critical component of innocence from the developmental period of Black childhood (Epstein et. al., 2017). Additionally, adultification promotes the incorrect narrative that the
transgressions of Black youth are intentional, malicious, and warrant harsh punishments instead of the typical grace shown during the developmental stage of childhood (Epstein et al., 2017). When looking at the results of the 2017 Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality study it is evident that the legacy of adultification of Black children is still present and more potent today than in its inception. The study found that contemporary adults view Black girls as less innocent than their peers because those adults in the study perceived that Black girls required less nurturing, less protection, support, and comforting due to the misconception that Black girls know more about sex and adult topics (Epstein et al., 2017).

Furthermore, scholars like G. Stanley Hall, discussed in his book, Adolescence, a developmental perspective about adolescence that scholars later found problematic because of the assertion that there is a normalized experience for young adolescence (Harrison, 2017). Research has shown that marginalized youth, like Black girls, experienced a nonmonolithic adolescent experience due to their lives being impacted by social and cultural constructs like class, gender, and race (Harrison, 2017). Black girlhood scholar Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) crystalized the preceding point in her argument on the structural constraints that Black girls experience during adolescence and girlhood:

> Structural inequalities coupled with the material realities of Black girlhood make it necessary for many Black girls to grow up before their time, so much so that bearing responsibility for more than themselves at particularly young ages shapes Black girls’ activity around the needs, desires and well-being of others, instead of themselves. Implications abound and include the possibility of never experiencing a Black girlhood that was ‘care-free’ or innocent. (p.111)

For many marginalized youths it would be impossible to explain or comprehend their developmental upbringing if a researcher only used a traditional developmental framework or theory. Specifically, for Black girls, who bear the burden of institutionalized racism and
oppression, the American political landscape often does not allow them to experience a childhood that is carefree. In fact, the Black girls that come from an impoverished and/or working class have childhoods that are miniscule because American society and political climate requires them to grow up quickly if they are going to survive it. The preceding research in this section highlights the misconceptions that society has about Black girls, and aids in my argument that we need more counternarratives that are written by Black girls about their Black girlhood experiences. If we have more narratives and scholarship produced by Black girls about their Black girlhood experiences in America, we begin to see life through their eyes, feel life through their feelings, and gain the perspective needed to unlearn the horrible adultification paradigm that we use to view Black girls in America today.

**Silencing of Black girlhood in Girlhood Scholarship**

The 15th-century scholars that originated the distinction of childhood and adolescence were purposefully oblivious to the complexity that gender and race add to the construction and comprehension of childhood and adolescence. Girlhood studies is an academic field that started in the 1990s to address the need for youth research to include a gender perspective. Bruno Bettelheim (1965) stated the following:

What strikes the psychologist forcefully when he [sic] surveys the available literature on adolescence and youth is that, if the amount of discussion were indicative, then all or nearly all problems of youth would appear to be those of the adolescent male. True, the more serious authors nod in the direction of female adolescence and recognize that it creates problems, too. But having done so, they turn so exclusively to the problems of the male adolescent that the net impression remains: female adolescence, if it exists at all, does not create problems equally worthy of the sociologist's or the psychologist's interest. (p.76)
Bruno Bettelheim was elucidating for scholars the need to explore the issues of female youth, yet his call went unanswered for decades. It was not until 1990 that Bruno’s call was answered, and research on girls began to be studied outside of feminist studies (Kearney, 2009). Scholars like Carol Gilligan (1982), Angela McRobbie (1980), Nancy Chodorow (1978), Jean Baker Miller (1976), and Meda Chesney–Lid (1740) conducted studies and spoke out against the patriarchy and sexism that historically shaped youth research (Kearney, 2009).

After 1990, numerous cross-national and global studies on girlhood found that girls were facing challenges in the world because of their age and gender discrimination (Seager, 1997; Kurz & Prather, 1995; Sohoni, 1995). Some scholars found that the challenges were life threatening, while other scholars found that the challenges affected girls’ self-worth and self-esteem. Sherrie Inness (1998) gave a strong explanation of the global situation of girlhood:

> Around the globe, girls often face bleak realities about their lives, careers and families. They are second-class citizens, doubly marginalized by their age and gender, and their lives are rarely taken seriously or are disregarded entirely; this is particularly the case for girls who are also marginalized by race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background. (p.1)

Inness (1998) illuminated the central issue for girlhood studies: boys receive privileges that leave girls experiencing various forms of discrimination in most cultures around the world. Limited access to education, violence, harassment, sexual abuse, and rape are some of the experiences that girls endure simply because of their gender (Seager, 1997).

Conversely, as girlhood studies became popular in the United States in the 1990s it became evident that girlhood studies’ developmental focus paid more attention to middle-class White girl experiences (Kearney, 2009). Scholars began to realize that girlhood studies could not provide insight into the experiences of girls from different classes, backgrounds, and racial
groups (Kearney, 2009). Hence, girlhood studies began to evolve so that it could include more topics that are diverse, and it spread to four fields of academia: sociology, psychology, communications, and education.

In sociological research girlhood studies have moved from solely focusing on girls’ experience in the juvenile delinquency system to girls’ involvement in nondomestic youth cultures (Kearney, 2009). Examples of nondomestic youth culture are:

- Hip-hop, riot grrrl, skateboarding;
- Ethnic female coming-of-age rituals (batmitz vah, la quinceanera);
- Girls’ labor practices (babysitting, household labor);
- Girls’ school-related social activities (prom, sports, recess play, cheerleading);
- Girls' non-familial and non-curricular cultural practices (dance, media consumption, music fandom, beauty pageants);
- And girls' socialization according to norms of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and ability. (Kearney, 2009, p.17)

While sociology has become more inclusive and diverse in its focus on girlhood studies, other fields have begun to do the same. Psychological researchers’ studies from the 1970s studied women’s development but has altered much of their research to focus on girls’ self-esteem, body image, eating disorders, silence, social passivity, depression, sexual abuse, suicide, substance abuse, anger, self-mutilation, aggression, family relations, sexuality, and friendships (Kearney, 2009).

In education the girlhood studies continue to fight to ensure that girls have the same learning experiences as their male counterparts (Kearney, 2009). However, educational focused girlhood studies have begun to study topics like gender bias of teachers, educational materials, girls’ experience with STEM subjects, girls’ experiences in co-ed educational environments, girls’ experience in single-sex educational environment, sexual harassment in school, educational experiences of disabled girls, educational experiences of poor girls, and educational experience of bisexual girls (Kearney, 2009). In communication studies, girlhood studies focus on the teen
magazines, digital communication practices tailored to girls, emailing, blogging, instant messaging, and there have been studies on girls’ use of cellular phones (Kearney, 2009). Black girlhood scholars like Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) have highlighted the value of including race R. N. and gender into the scholarship about childhood by providing scholarship in the girlhood cannon. Brown defined Black girlhood as “the representations, memories, and lived experience of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female” (p. x). Moreover, R. N. Brown (2013) argued that Black girlhood should not be a fixed identity, but an experience that aims to share the complexity of the fluid nature of Black femininity and identity. R.N. Brown’s (2013) work is one of the many branches under the girlhood studies tree in academia. In short, the girlhood studies department has grown from being a White, middle class, singularly focused field of research to a diverse, multifaceted, interdisciplinary field that addresses a plethora of issues that affect girls from various lifestyles.

Silencing of Black girls and their girlhood experience is deafening in American history. Black girls were silenced with the inception of the concept of childhood because their experiences were not taken into consideration when the concept was developed. Moreover, as a tactic to ensure that upper and middle class could maintain their socioeconomic status, they created the concept of childhood filled with notions of innocence and grace, which were notions that were not afforded to Black girls. Due to the adultification of Black girls during slavery, grace and innocence was not bestowed upon them. Hence, Black girlhood did not exist in society during the inception of childhood. Furthermore, to this day, the adultification of Black girls continues to prevent society from fully seeing Black girls as deserving of unconditional love, grace, innocence, nurturing, protection, or even a childhood. Girlhood and Black Girlhood studies have started the process of dismantling the silencing and adultification of Black girls by
sharing the stories and experiences related to their girlhood, and I have done my part to ensure that Black girls’ voices and their experiences during childhood are magnified by using this study to share their perspective on future imagery of Black girlhood.

**Section II: Historical Silencing of Black girlhood experiences in America**

Since the inception of America, the cost for Black girls having an intersectional identity of being both Black and female has been their girlhood. However, in slavery the historical cost that Black girls had to pay was their physical beings because slavery wanted to dehumanize Black girls. The process of dehumanization started with the conceptualization of race, for it was the categorization of people based on their skin that allowed Whites to start the process of not seeing Blacks as humans. Race conceptualization is the thought process and the belief that a person uses to create their definition of race (Morning, 2011). While initially, I thought that race being socially constructed was an accepted fact, I found in my research that there are mainly two schools of thought on the concept of race. One school of thought on the concept of race is the social constructivist view, and the other school of thought is the essentialist’s concept of race (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2010; Morning, 2011). The concept of race for an essentialist is based on categorizing people using innate differences, biological essence, and genetics (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2010; Morning, 2011). Whereas, social constructivists, believe that race is socially constructed by the members of society (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2010; Morning, 2011).

Furthermore, as Peter McLaren (2015) stated in his book *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, “racialized identities have political, economic, and sociological consequences for groups of people” (p. 195) in America. Since the inception of America, racial inequality has been a major component of the DNA of America because slavery and racial segregation were the building blocks of this nation (Feagin, 2010).
Therefore, for this study, I aligned with social constructivist views of race, because studies have shown biologist and social scientist agreeing that race is a socially constructed concept that has historical implications of division amongst people because of their race (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Saldanha, 2011; Eden, 2011; Omi & Winant, 1994).

The Stripping of Black girls’ voices during Slavery and the Reconstruction Era

During slavery in America Black, women’s gender was legally unrecognized because Black women in America were seen as property (Collins, 1998). As a result of their property status, Black women and girls were sexually abused, raped, and forced to work various tasks on the plantation (Jones, 1985). Succinctly, Black girls and women were disregarded as human beings during slavery and were subjected to inhumane punishments because of their race and their gender (Battle, 2016). The mindset that society was placing on Black women and girls during slavery was that their individual identity did not matter, yet their ability to contribute to the economic growth of America mattered (Battle, 2016). Moreover,

White male privilege allowed White men and women alike to ignore the abuse of Black women as they focused on economic growth, for which they depended on the womanhood of Black women, most notably their forced physical and sexual labor. Grounded in intersectionality, the abuse of Black women highlights the ways in which oppression of women varied based on their race, class, and gender, which is used as an analytical tool to explain social inequality grounded in structural domains of power. (Battle, 2016, p. 113)

During slavery, Black girls and women were expected to complete traditional masculine tasks like working in the fields, and they were expected to fulfill traditional women tasks like raising children (Davis A. [Angela], 1981). Black women were subjected to institutional sexism, which sexually exploited Black women (Davis A. [Angela], 1981: hooks, 1992). Essentially, during
slavery Black women’s value in society was built upon their ability to produce a service or produce life that could produce a service for slave masters.

During the Reconstruction era, the social status of Black women was tainted by the ideology formed about them during slavery. Femininity ideologies like Barbara Welter’s (1966) *cult of true womanhood* created a dominant narrative around womanhood that was centered in Whiteness (Collins, 1990). By this I mean, the notion of womanhood was predicated on the traditional family values and ideals associated with White women (Collins, 1990; Welter, 1966). The virtues of the *cult of true womanhood* were domesticity, piety, purity, and submissiveness (Welter, 1966). Black women’s intersectional identity was not included in this value system of cult of true womanhood, and, what’s worse, the exclusion of Black women from this ideology provided society justification to place Black women in harsher treatment than their White counterparts (Battle, 2016). An example of the harsh, dehumanizing treatment of Black women is found in Mary Armstrong’s narrative about her experiences in slavery (Clayton, 1990).

Why, Miss Olivia, my mistress, used to put a glass plumb full of water on my head and then have me waltz round the room, and I’d dance so smoothlike, I don’t spill nary drop.

That was in St. Louis where I’se born. You see my mama belong to Old William Cleveland and Old Polly Cleveland, and they was the meanest two white folks what ever live, cause they was always beatin’ on their slaves. I know, cause Mama told me, and I hears about it other places, and besides, Old Polly, she was a Polly devil if there ever was one, and she whipped my little sister what was only nine months old, and just a baby to death. She come and took the diaper offen my little sister and whipped till the blood just ran-just ‘cause she cry like all babies do, and it kilt my sister. I never forgot that.

(Clayton, 1990, p. 5)

As evident in the excerpt above, Black women’s piety, domesticity, and purity were not taken into consideration because society had constructed the notion that Black women were not considered to be people as a result of their intersectional identity (Battle, 2016).
Another example of the structural oppression and inhumane treatment of Black women endured during the Reconstruction era is the legal case *State of Missouri v. Celia* in 1855. In the Celia’s case,

On June 23, 1855 Celia confronted her master and pleaded for him to stop his sexual abuse. She had sought out Newscom’s daughters for help, but they did nothing, perhaps having no authority to even try. One evening, Celia repeatedly warned Newsome to leave her alone after he visited her cabin and attempted to rape her. As he leaned toward her, she grabbed a stick and hit him over the head twice, the second blow causing him to fall to the floor. This resulted in his death. Celia then placed Newsom’s body in the fireplace and let him burn overnight until he became ashes... The next day, the entire Newsome family, led by family friend William Powell, who took charge of the search party, began to look for Newsome. They all suspected that George, Celia’s lover had something to do with his death because of his relationship with Celia and also because of his own intersectional identities: he was Black, male, and a slave. After repeated verbal threats and intimidation by the Newsom family, George implicated Celia. (Battle, 2016, p.114)

Once implicated Celia was captured, questioned, and the trial began on June 25, 1855 (McLaurin, 1991). However, it is important to note that the process of her initial questioning did not involve due process, a right given to freed citizens in America. Additionally, *the cult of true womanhood* that was socially constructed for White women was not afforded to Celia because she was not White, not a free person, and because she was viewed as property (Battle, 2016).

During the trial sexist notions that Celia could not have physically moved her slave owner were expressed, which implied that she received help to kill her master (Battle, 2016; McLaurin, 1991). The sexist notion that her female slender frame prevented her from picking up her master’s body on her own led to elimination of a self-defense claim her lawyer was trying to make (Battle, 2016; McLaurin, 1991).

More racism, sexism, and dehumanization were exhibited during the case when Celia’s lawyer tried to use the 1845 Missouri Statue that made it criminal to unlawfully take a woman against her will and rape her (Battle, 2016; McLaurin, 1991). Battle (2016) noted, “the specific language used by the defense was that Celia had the right to protect her honor. Under the
ideology of the cult of true womanhood, however, Black women who were generally all enslaved held no honor” (p. 116). Celia’s rape was seen as consensual sex by the prosecution because as a slave she was his property. Due to Celia being Newsom’s property she was not seen as human, and she did not have the right to kill her master. The law was showing the southern social system and the world that Black women were not equal to White women, Black women had no honor to protect, and as property Black women should continue to be exploited, dehumanized, and harshly punished (Battle, 2016). Moreover, Black women’s intersectionality placed them in a social system that is socially constructed to abuse, exploit, and oppress them through sexist, racist, and dehumanizing systems like slavery.

This section gave a historical overview of the dehumanization that occurred in America for Black women and Black girls during the reconstruction and slavery era. Sadly, the Black women were treated inhumanely during slavery because society at the time did not recognize Black people as human but as cattle or property (Battle, 2016). During the Reconstruction era Black women were still treated inhumanely, even after they began to transcend from slaves to citizens in America. The cult of true womanhood ensured that Black women were seen as inhumane, barbaric by centering Whiteness, White femininity, White fragility, and notions of womanhood as the premier operation model for all womanhood. One can assume that if Black women were dehumanized during this era, then Black girls were as well. However, what is missing from the above section is the conversation about Black girls' experience due to the pervasive nature of adultification.

Adultification of Black girls was pervasive during slavery and the Reconstruction era because the purpose of both eras was to dehumanize Black people. Thus, when the older Black people were dehumanized, Black children were dehumanized as well to ensure that their
innocence, humanity, and value were not prominent (Battle, 2016; Epstein et al., 2017). As Tammy Cherelle Owens noted:

Visible accounts of Black girlhood and Black girls’ lives are present from as early as Harriet Jacobs’ 1861 publication of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to the… texts such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Life among the Lowly*, which illuminate representations of Black girls in White cultural imagination (Field et al., 2016, p.386) but those resources are limited.

Even when considering the time period’s racialization of Black girls, the probability of unintelligibility of their accounts of girlhood, and Owen’s push for scholars to use creative researching methods to find Black girls voices during slavery, I still believe that we should use this time period as inspiration to collect more sources authored by Black girls as they are matriculating through girlhood (Field et al., 2016, p. 386). I wanted to ensure that we did not dehumanize and continue to silence Black girls by not capturing their experience from them as they matriculated through girlhood.

The *Stripping of Black girls’ voices in the 20th century through controlling images*

While America's slavery system oppressed all women, it is important to note a blueprint of stereotypes and controlling images that socialized Black girls and women as insignificant in society formed from the collective oppression that Black women endured during slavery. After reconstruction and slavery, the socially constructed racist and sexist identities of Black women continued. The dominant group created images of Black womanhood that justified the subordination, dehumanization, and degrading practices enacted towards Black women in society (Collins, 1990; Harris & Hill, 1998). Black womanhood was categorized into four controlling images: the mammy, the lazy welfare mother/queen, the emasculating matriarch, and the hypersexualized Jezebel.
The jezebel is one of the most overtly sexual images of Black women. A jezebel is a controlling image that arose from the notion that enslaved women were unable to control their sexual drive, seductiveness, and manipulative prowess (Townsend, Thomas, Nielands, & Jackson, 2010). A jezebel is often depicted as a lighter skin, long haired ‘mulatto’ woman, and was used to justify the sexual abuse and rape of Black women (Collins, 1998). In regard to Black girls’ self-worth, the jezebel is an important controlling image to study because it represents the politics surrounding Black girls’ bodies. As Black girls grow up in America, they are constantly responding to the racist stereotype that they are hypersexualized beings similar to the jezebel. Moreover, the pervasive racist stereotype that Black girls will become teen moms is a stereotype that comes from the jezebel image or Black women. Additionally, the notion that Black girls do not honor the ideology of the cult of true womanhood is birthed from the jezebel's hypersexualized stereotype (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992; Way, 1998).

The mammy juxtaposes the jezebel in that her image is asexual, obese, and dark skinned with broad features (Townsend et al., 2010). The mammy typically is depicted working in the master’s house, working as a nanny, working as a housekeeper, or a cook (Townsend et al., 2010). The mammy image also challenged the jezebel image in that it endorsed notions of motherhood and devoted service to the master and the master’s children. For Black girls the mammy might not have an overt connection to their self-worth, but I posit that Way’s (1998) assertion that Black girls are, unconsciously and consciously, fighting against the mammy image as they define success for themselves is correct. By this I mean, historically, Black girls have been traditionally socialized towards two paths: traditional roles (care and nurturing wife and mother) and nontraditional roles of worker or employee (Ross-Leadbeater & Way, 1996). In short, the mammy is a controlling image that produces racist stereotypes about Black girls’ value
as a woman, mother, and member in society. The controlling images leave Black girls with a decision. They have to decide whether they will be the mammy, jezebel or some other negative stereotype created about Black women (Collins; 1990; Way, 1998).

The third controlling image that shapes the identity of Black girls is the emasculating matriarch. A 1940s and 1950s character called Sapphire from a show called *Amos’n’Andy* is the archetype of the third image (Mitchell & Herring, 1998; West, 1995). In the show, Sapphire took pleasure in emasculating men. She was depicted as a loud, crude, and argumentative (Mitchell & Herring, 1998; West, 1995). I would argue that Sapphire is the mother of the Angry Black woman stereotype. Sadly, Black girls are often portrayed as argumentative, crude, callous, loud, and full of verbal assaults (Townsend et al., 2010). Controlling images like Sapphire create negative stereotypes of Black girls of being loud, argumentative, and people seeking to challenge authority. Stereotypes like Sapphire have become internalized by society and Black girls, which often influences the way society values Black girls. What is worse, stereotypes like Sapphire’s become internalized by Black girls and influence the way they value themselves (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992; Stephens & Philips, 2005; Way, 1998).

The fourth historically controlling image of Black women is the lazy welfare mother or queen. During the 1960s Black women activists fought to receive the benefits of the American welfare system (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Collins, 1998). Unfortunately, after gaining those rights, Black women were portrayed as exploiting the welfare system. Media in the 20th century portrayed Black women as welfare queens, welfare cheats, and as a human debit that drained the United States’ resources because she had children without a husband or the child’s father was not around to help her provide for the children (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Collins, 1998). Amott & Matthaei (1996) noted that the welfare system is advertised in America as a system designed to
“give people money to have children, avoid marriage, and stay out of the workforce” (p. 290).

Unfortunately, this portrayal of the welfare system leaves Black women susceptible to blame for their own hardships and have the discrimination and exploitation they experience in the workforce ignored.

Essentially the four controlling images discussed in this section of the literature review fuel the assumptions people make about Black girls. Moreover, Collins (1990) argued that oftentimes Black girls are stereotyped to have bad attitudes that are laced with anger, hostility, loud talk, and rudeness. Black girls are stereotyped to be unladylike, domineering, emasculating, and hypersexualized like jezebel and Sapphire. At the same time, Black girls are stereotyped by society as being dangerous, threatening, and relentless in pursuing the things they need to survive similar to the welfare queen that will do anything to drain the government’s benefits (Anamma et. al., 2016). These over-sexualized, dehumanizing images of Black women and girls are propagated in the media, and it creates a societal perception of Black girls and women that could shape the way that Black girls view themselves. Additionally, these controlling images and negative stereotypes of Black women and girls have the potential to influence the way that people interact and treat Black girls as evident with the data on Black girls increasing being pushed out of school and over disciplined (Collins; 1990; Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006; Stephens & Phillips, 2005).
Section III: Silencing of Black girls’ Experiences in American School Systems

Due to the dehumanizing perceptions of Black girls and women during slavery and the Reconstruction era, the scar of slavery has not disappeared for modern Black girls. Those images haunt Black girls today in every sector of their being, which is evident when recentering on Kenneth Hardy point on trauma for Black girls (Hardy, 2013). As previously mentioned, Hardy (2013) discussed in his scholarship the traumatic form that racial oppression has on the soul and psyche of people of color. Due to the combination of racial oppression and other forms of non-physical trauma like the examples of the negative controlling images that represent Black women and girls, Black girls are having to constantly fight negative stereotypes even in their own classrooms. The next section of the literature review explains the impact those racist, sexist, and demeaning images have on Black girls’ experiences in the classroom.

The Black female experience from childhood through adulthood is often overlooked by mainstream society and the Black community (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). Mostly the focus of “the Black problem” in education is on the underperformance of Black youth or issues relevant to young Black males (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). As Crystal Muhammad and Adrienne Dixson (2008) poignantly stated,

Except for in comparison to White females and Black males, educational researchers have little research to explain who young Black girls are as students. The best accounts contemporarily are rich, thick descriptive pieces, which in spite of their rigor are of limited generalizability due to their sample size. (p.163)

Moreover, the research on Black girls, Black girls’ experiences in their childhood, Black girls’ identity development, and Black girls’ identity as students in the educational settings is limited. Regarding stereotyping of Black girls in school, the research I have found has been focused on the disciplinary actions taken against Black girls. I have also found that the research focuses on
the reasons behind those disciplinary infractions against Black girls (Annamma et al., 2016; Blake et al, 2011; Morris, 2007; Wallace et al., 2008). In comparison to their White counterparts, Black girls are 5 times more likely to be expelled/suspended and are 2 times more likely to receive office referrals or detainment (Wallace et al., 2008). Furthermore, Black girls are arrested and/or referred to law enforcement officers more often than their White counterparts (Annamma et al., 2016). In the criminal justice system, Black girls are more likely to receive harsher sentences than White girls who have similar offenses (Annamma et al., 2016). In addition, research is showing society's gender specific ideologies associated with Black girls are present by their authority figures because Black girls are being reprimanded more by figures in authority in their schools (Morris, 2007). For example, Blake et al. (2011) and Morris (2007) found that a majority of the violations that Black girls were cited for do not honor traditional standards of femininity. Black girls' violations reflected stereotypical images of Black girls being angry, hostile, and hypersexualized (Blake, 2011; Morris, 2007). Morris (2007) found that teachers were giving Black girls infractions and demerits because they did not exhibit ladylike behavior. Morris (2007) found that teachers would often instruct Black adolescents to act like a lady by exhibiting proper feminine mannerisms, feminine dress, and feminine speech. Compatibly, Blake et al. (2011) found that teachers in their research have expressed issues with Black female students not dressing ladylike. In the same study, Blake et al. (2011) noted that Black girls were disproportionately sent to the office for acts perceived as defiance, profanity, and physical aggression. Blake et al. (2011) argued that the reason the Black girls were disproportionately being sent to the office was because the perceived acts of defiance, profanity, and physical aggression were not representative of traditional standards of femininity. Assumptions about Black girls are directly reflective of the controlling images of Black girls being compared to the
images originate historical images that label Black women and girls as jezebels, mammies, sapphires, superwomen, and welfare queens (Collins, 1990).

All of these images of Black girls directly relate to the aforementioned controlling images and stereotypes of Black women being viewed as unladylike, domineering, and emasculating. In addition, all of these images directly correspond to the researched findings on how educators and school environments view Black girls. Succinctly it appears that those controlling images and negative stereotypes from slavery have many educators and school systems viewing Black girls as unladylike, hypersexualized, emasculating, authority defying, trouble making, threatening, worthless beings that must be punished harshly (Annamma et al., 2016).

I have shown in the preceding sections the impact that the adultification of Black girls has had during slavery, the Reconstruction era, 20th century, and in education on Black girls. Black girls for centuries have been prohibited to testify on behalf of themselves because their girlhood experience has been deemed too insignificant for society to care about. Furthermore, each time Black girls have tried to combat the deficit ideologies that exist in the oppressive area of American society, they do it at a cost of mental, emotional, and physical harm, which is evident when looking at the video of the young girl being physically assaulted by a resource officer in her school in Columbus, Ohio (Associated Press, 2016; Morris, 2016; Crenshaw et al., 2015).

In 2015 a Black female student in Columbia, South Carolina, was choked, flipped, and dragged from her desk by a resource officer at her school because she refused to leave the classroom when asked by her teacher (Associated Press, 2016). Sadly, this horrifying incident is not the first incident where a Black girl was treated in a dehumanizing manner at her school nor was it the first time that a Black girl was given an extreme punishment for a minor infraction like
having her cell phone out in class. The difference with this incident was that her classmate, another Black female, recorded the incident, which allowed it to be shared on national platforms on social media. This is one of the values of Generation Z Black female genius because of her connection to social media, having a cell phone with her, and savviness to recognize the importance of visually capturing the horrific assault of her classmate she was able to amplify the injustices that she and other Black students in that class witnessed (Associated Press, 2016). In that moment, an undeniable image of Black girlhood was displayed for world to see, and in that moment a Black girl was reminded that her life, her education, and her freedom were not valuable to society because, instead of vindication for the assault on her person, she was given charges of distributing the school (Newsy, 2015). As I stated in the previous section, these oversexualized, dehumanizing images of Black women and girls that are propagated in the media have created a societal perception of Black girls that has influenced the way that resource officers interact with that female student and, what is worse, is that data are showing that he is not the only one who over-disciplines, over-policing, assaults, devalues, and strives to not educate Black girls in our American school system today (Collins; 1990; Sinclair et al., 2006; Stephens & Phillips, 2005).

While it feels like Black girls will never have an opportunity to overcome these historic injustices placed upon them, I believe that not only will Black girls be able to overcome these challenges, but also they will ensure that they do not happen to anyone else. My confidence comes from a thought I had about the video of the young Black female student being dragged across the floor by her resource officer in South Carolina. Her horrific experience with girlhood has been shared at least 4,487 times according to the number of people that have viewed the article about the incident (Newsy, 2015). On the YouTube channel, Newsy (2015), that South
Carolina Black girl's story was shared with thousands of people, and that was just one YouTube channel. This means that with social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook more Black girls can have the opportunity to elevate to millions their truth. All it will take will be for more courageous people and women like the student who recorded the video to hit record and then hit upload when they witness injustice towards Black girls. In seconds, counternarratives will exist that challenges the derogatory images of Black girlhood of the past and in seconds, if more girls share their stories, we will have new positive, multidimensional images of Black girlhood for the future.

Section IV: Theoretical Frameworks: A space to Reimagine American society

For this chapter, I synthesized the frameworks and literature that centralized the Black girl experience and expressed the nuance that is Black girlhood during the second decade of the 21st century. The first section was a section about Black feminist thought. In the Black feminist thought section, I give a historical breakdown of Black feminist thought and discussed the potential limitation Black feminist thought could have for Black girls. In the last section section, I made the case for a theoretical frame that fuses together Black girlhood studies, Black Feminism, and the concept of imagination to demonstrate the utility that all three have in a study about contemporary Black girls’ depictions of future images of Black girlhood.

Note every theory being used in this study is simultaneously modeling the power of imagination and offering scholars a new possibility of an alternative future. If Black feminist, had not had a moment of critical reflection and reflexivity about the experiences of Black women in the feminist movement they would not have been able to create a theory that attempts to provide safety, freedom, and power to all Black women. Black Radical imagination is the theory that forges forth possibility as a result of critical analysis of current injustices. Therefore, it is
from struggle, from reflection of self in the struggle, analysis of the struggle, and from taking a moment to center on the present reality, people have the opportunity to spark their imagination to create different possibilities.

**Black Feminism: A tool Black women used to Reimagine**

Black feminism honors the tenets and honors the unique perspective that Black women hold in America. Therefore, this section illuminated some of the unique benefits that Black Feminism has to offer to Black women and Black girls in society and academia. First, I set the historical landscape of the Black feminism by discussing the lack of inclusiveness of feminism. I ended this section addressing the potential limitations of Black feminism for this study.

The lack of inclusiveness in the second wave of feminism led to the creation of the third wave of feminism and led to the creation of numerous forms of feminisms (Mack-Canty, 2004). Becoming a more popular theory of discussion in the late 1960s due to its ability to combat White dominant culture hegemonic ideals aligned to middle class feminism, Black feminism provides a space for Black women’s experience to be brought to the epicenter of scholarly and political discussions (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981).

Feminism as a movement, theory, and perspective in its first wave was focused on White middle-class feminist issues, which often left issues of women of color, working-class, poor women, and women in grassroots organization misrepresented, disregarded, or silenced (Henry, 2005; Lorde, 1984; James, 1999; Vogel, 2000). Hence, activists and scholars like bell hooks, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Patricia Hill Collins created Black feminism with the hope of creating a philosophical space that honored Black women’s standpoint, experience, and issues central to them (Lorde, 1984; Collins, 2000). Some scholars claim that the first wave of Black feminism
started in the 19th century with Sojourner Truth’s speech, “Ain’t I Woman” (Marbley, 2005). As a critical race theorist, Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) was apt to highlight the multiple oppressions and injustices Black women face due to their being women and members of a minority. Hence, Black feminism was created to be able to cradle all of the issues of Black women because unlike an antiracist movement or a feminist movement, Black feminism addresses the complex needs of Black women by addressing the racial and gender injustices that women face (Crenshaw, 1991). However, race and gender are not the only issues that are addressed by Black feminism. Collins (2000) argued that Black feminism honors Crenshaw’s (1991) perspective on intersectionality by addressing issues like ethnicity, nationality, culture, sexuality, and class. However, other scholars challenge Collins' assertion of the complete inclusiveness of Black feminism. In short, Black feminism is a theory, a perspective, and a paradigm that honors the intersectionality of Black women in America that allows scholars to critique culture, economics, history, politics, law, and any other societal forms of oppression from an anti-patriarchal perspective.

Black feminist thought addresses and uses Black women’s collective knowledge, historical perspective, and lived experience in the world by addressing issues in various arenas (hooks, 1992). Black feminist thought also centralizes the intersecting components of race, gender, and class, which values the unique lived experiences of Black women. Additionally, Black feminist thought allows Black women to be the subject and researchers in a unique way that is not present in other intellectual spaces due to Black women feeling like they are the “outsider” in some academic spaces (Collins, 2000).

There are three themes in Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). The first theme is anchored on the lived experience of Black women in that the criterion for Black feminist thought is the scholarship must collect and/or share knowledge of Black women’s lived experiences
(Collins, 2000). This is where the power of being able to define self and determine the value of self is so important for Black women and girls (Collins, 2002). Collins (2002) noted in the following quote the value of Black women being able to circumvent historical thoughts, contemporary thoughts, and statements placed on Black women by having the ability of “Self-definition [which] involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood. In contrast, self-valuation stresses the content of Black women's self-definitions—namely, replacing externally-derived images with authentic Black female images” (p s16-s17). Moreover, it is critical for scholars and society to recognize the power of being able to self-define oneself, for you as an individual are the only person that can self-name who you are by stating the phrase, “I am.” When people can name for themselves who they are, what they believe, and what they want, they move from a dehumanized, animalistic role in society to a human one.

In the following excerpt, Collins (2002) highlighted the significance of self-naming as a powerful, humanizing tool against society and historical stereotypes of Black women:

The insistence on Black female self-definition reframes the entire dialogue from one of determining the technical accuracy of an image, to one stressing the power dynamics underlying the very process of definition itself. Black feminists have questioned not only what has been said about Black women, but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define. When Black women define themselves, they clearly reject the taken-for-granted assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to describe and analyze reality are entitled to do so. Regardless of the actual content of Black women's self-definitions, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women's power as human subjects. (p.s17 )

Additionally, self-evaluation magnifies the power of Black feminist standpoint theory’s first theme because it provides an analytical objection to the content of the images being expressed about Black women and girls (Collins, 2002). This is critical when considering the power of Black women being able to do a self-evaluation to determine if they have internalized any of
those oppressive thoughts connected to those images, and then choosing to reject those images that they have internalized. The self-evaluation and rejection of those thoughts, feelings, and experiences allow the psychological and spiritual strength of Black girls to be renewed and was essential to my study. The girls in the study were reimagining Black feminism and girlhood by becoming present to their current reality and name for themselves, who they were, and why they thought they were the way they were. Black feminism provided them with the power of self-actualization because it held me and the girls accountable to being open to the diverse forms of thought that the girls came to when activating their self-actualization. Moreover, if it suited some of the girls to use popular culture, hip hop, or social media platforms to spark their reflection and/or willingness to share, I had to honor it. I wanted to do whatever I could to make them feel comfortable sharing their truths, and Black feminism was created to provide opportunities for people to feel comfortable sharing their truths.

The second theme of Black feminist standpoint is the interlocking nature of oppression. In the intersection of multiple forms of domination is the space where Black feminism thrives because it is there that Black feminist thought can accomplish their goal of determining the connection between the various forms of oppression that the system places upon them due to their identities (Collins, 1990). It is in this space of determining the interlocking of oppression that Black feminist scholars employ dualistic thinking around dichotomies in oppressive systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Collins (2002) noted:
One fundamental characteristic of this construct is the categorization of people, things, and ideas in terms of their difference from one another. For example, the terms in dichotomies such as black/white, male/female, reason/emotion, fact/opinion, and subject/object gain their meaning only in relation to their difference from their oppositional counterparts. Another fundamental characteristic of this construct is that difference is not complementary in that the halves of the dichotomy do not enhance each other. Rather, the dichotomous halves are different and inherently opposed to one another. (p. S20)

Sadly, the duality of many Black women’s identity places them in subordinate status with various systems of oppression. Black feminism recognizes this, creates scholarship to share this information, and uses its standpoint to challenge the ascribe subordination status to show that Black women are not supposed to automatically be placed in a subordinate status in society. Unfortunately, as a result of societal views of Black women in relation to society’s deficit ideologies Black women and girls are often viewed as subordinate to their counterparts (Collins, 2002). However, Black feminism’s dualistic, dichotomous oppositional thinking about the construction of systems of domination in America provided people the opportunity to challenge these deficit ideologies and think about the humanity in each person.

While that might not be an intuitive correlation, oppositional thinking, systems of oppression, and humanity, but from those different forms of oppression, often the victims/survivors of that oppression experience the emotions that make us all human. Emotions like pain, anger, hope, motivation, victory and determination are emotions that every human can feel and can used to help them overcome adversity in their life. Anna Julia Cooper noted the power of a humanist vision of society within Black feminist standpoint theory:

We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country, or condition. . . . The colored woman feels that woman's cause is one and universal; and that. . . not till race, color, sex, and condition are seen as accidents, and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won—no
the white woman's nor the black woman's, nor the red woman's, but the cause of every man and of every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong. (Brown, E.B, 2006, p.175)

In recognizing the humanity in people and their issues, Black feminism honors the power of solidarity. By seeing people as multifaceted beings, we can challenge the oppressive systems in society that purposefully uses deficit ideologies created to separate us. Interlocking oppression brings people into Black feminism that might not ordinarily see that they have a seat at the table. The unity formed from interlocking oppression allows people to recognize their differences, acknowledge the systems of oppressions that created them, and identify strategies they transform those differences into strengths (Collins, 2002).

The final theme of Black feminist standpoint is about branding and showing the world the brilliance that is Black women’s culture. Collins (2002) noted, “there is no monolithic Black women's culture—rather, there are socially-constructed Black women's cultures that collectively form Black women's culture,” (p. s22) thus Black feminism takes pride in providing space for women to explore those social constructed cultures in order for Black women to be able to make sense of their experience as Black women. The journey of exploration of Black women’s culture allows Black feminist to form a sister-like bond with Black women that is filled with camaraderie in the highs of life and support in the overcoming of the challenges of life. The interpersonal relationships of Black women are not the only ones that are developed on this journey of exploration. Collins (2002) claimed that the role of motherhood is a unifying seat that many Black women experience that allows them to explore their identity. Black women explore their roles as a mother to biological children, adoptive children, and children within their communities to gain perspective on themselves and the experiences of their children. These experiences of exploration of various identities allow Black women to formulate a consciousness
about the workings of oppression that allow them to recognize the opportunity to enact activism within various forms of oppression (Collins, 2002).

Each of the three elements found in the Black feminist standpoint were powerful and revolutionary but some could argue it is incomplete for my study due to the adultification typically found in Black feminist thought. Moreover, the adultification in Black feminism becomes evident when you recognize the perspective of Black girls are missing from the information shared above. In creating space for Black women, oftentimes the experiences for Black girls are omitted or crafted from the perspective of adults. For instance, the exploration of Black women’s culture through the lens of motherhood is noted here:

In reassessing Afro-American motherhood, Black feminist researchers have emphasized the connections between (1) choices available to Black mothers resulting from their placement in historically specific political economies, (2) Black mothers' perceptions of their children's choices as compared to what mothers thought those choices should be, and (3) actual strategies employed by Black mothers both in raising their children and in dealing with institutions that affected their children's lives. (Collins, 2002, S10)

While the focus of the quote above is on the adult mother’s experiences, it did not go the extra step to strengthen the argument by including the child’s perspective on their experience with their mother. In the following quote, Treva Lindsey (2012) explained that the critical analysis needed for Black girls is not always the same for adults:

Children and adolescents are not adults, and an analysis of the female adolescent’s actions must be situated within an analytic framework of Black girl and adolescent empowerment. Centering on Black girls and adolescents shifts the analysis to a discussion of consent, coercion, self-esteem, empowerment, and the role of popular culture in the lives of Black girls and adolescents.(p.26)

Lindsey (2012) expressed the potential missing link that Black feminism could have had for my study if I had not ensured my research design included the voices of Black girls.
Black feminism was created for Black women, and it could be argued that it does not have the ability to fully be responsive to Black girls in Memphis who are experiencing Black girlhood from a different perspective or time period than other Black women and girls. However, Black feminism is an appropriate theory to use as a theoretical framework because it has the ability to guide the research design of a gender study for Black girls. As a theoretical perspective it anchored the content of my study and honored the essence of my study, which was about Black girlhood. Hence, I needed a gendered theory to guide my study and the best gendered theory to support a Black girlhood study was Black feminism. Furthermore, when Black feminism is forged with the theory of imagination, anything is possible!

**Imagination: A tool Black girls can use to Reimagine**

The second theoretical perspective and theory that anchored this study was Black radical imagination. The essence of this study was about gender, specifically Black girlhood, but tangentially linked to Black girlhood was the creation of images of a future that did not exist. Hence, I needed a theory centered on imagination to guide my research design methods. Imagination and imaginaries are complex concepts that are formed from a multitude of conceptualizations that are neither completely a reflection of reality nor completely a figment of a person’s imagination (O’Reilly, 2014). The topic of imaginaries is a concept that is formed through people’s socially constructed, taken-for-granted meanings and beliefs about events, places, and people (Stokowski et al., 2021). Imaginaries provide scholars and participant the opportunity to comprehend their individual and shared experiences while also creating alternative outcomes for the future (Stokowski et al., 2021). Social imaginary is an amalgamation of legend, narratives, and myth that can only be concocted through shared
anonymous or collective stories in societies (Maile & Griffiths, 2012). As Stella Maile and David Griffiths (2012) argued

social imaginary cannot be separated from individuals’ emotional bonds and attachments and the ways in which these are imagined and fantasised (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973). The important point here is that the imaginary as a primary creative power functions at both a social and individual level (Castoriadis 1997: 72-4) resulting in the continuous production of novel representations. (p.32)

Hence, if the power of imagination is in the ability to create versatile understandings and interpretations of life, it was essential for my study with Black girls using their imaginaries to create future imagery of Black girlhood.

Since the end of the 19th century, “the notion of ‘imaginary’ has gained prominence in various disciplines such as history (Duby, 1978; Le Goff, 1988/2005), psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1973), anthropology (Durand, 1992), philosophy (Castoriadis, 1975; Taylor, 2004), and sociology (Maffesoli, 1993),” (Arruda, 2015, p.128) with some historians citing that the idea of imagination was found in artifacts from the Middle Ages. Scholars in various fields with vastly different foci have used the concept of imaginaries to aid people to make sense of their experiences and to solve for inadequacies in their current reality. For instance, scholars in the social science field Stokowski et al. (2021) conducted a study that provided an opportunity for residents in a rural community to construct imaginaries in response to the increased tourism into their community. Another example of the concept of imaginary being present in diverse academic topics is Karen O’Reilly’s (2014) study on the role social imaginary has on the lifestyle of migration. However, it was not until scholar Robin D. G. Kelley’s (2022) work Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination that race and imagination were united to address an issue.
In the book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* Kelley (2022) discussed the freedom that radical imagination can offer scholars and everyday people by providing them with an opportunity to examine, imagine, and reimagine a vision of the present state of society and the future state of society. Kelley’s book (2022) used a historical event and/or movement in America to show the different ways that people struggling against oppression: “like Black Leftists, nationalists, feminists, surrealists have imagined collectively about the possibility of revolutionary futures and how social movements have activated that imagination” (Cahill, 2021, p.31). Furthermore, those different people belaboring in those struggles illustrate the power and the “wisdom of the Black radical tradition and Black people's diasporic history of Marxist resistance,” which allows “Black political agitators [to] map a new world through the transformative process of dreaming towards Black futurity” (Cahill, 2021, p.31). To be clear, Black radical imagination is not a form of escapism nor a dreamlike state excluded from the realities of day-to-day struggle (Kelley, 2002). However, Black radical imagination is forged from critical analysis of the current realities of society and social problems (Kelley, 2002). Moreover, scholars using Black radical imagination must grapple with the challenge of solidarity and a deep understanding of the mechanism of oppression generate the conditions and requirements for new modes of analysis, new ways of being together. Therefore, it is not enough to imagine a world without oppression (especially since we don’t always recognize the ways in which we ourselves practice and perpetuate oppression). We must also understand the mechanism or process that not only reproduces subjugation and exploitation but makes them common sense and renders them natural or invisible. (Kelley, 2022, p. xiii)

Black radical imagination is such an ingenious tool for different people because it has existed in various forms. Moreover, “due to its multidimensional nature, the Black Radical Imagination has found the capacity to exist within and beyond the limitations of the written word,” (Cahill, 2021, p.31). Some of the different forms of Black radical imagination have been
represented in music, written, oral, Black oral traditions, visual arts, and organizing. As a praxis
the Black radical imagination allows scholars and their participants to work collaboratively to
create a vision of freedom by using the strength of the racialized community to galvanize and use
the community as a resource (Cahill, 2021). Black radical imagination allows people to live out
loud an act of resistance from the limitation of their current realities, identities, and societal
expectation of Blackness by allowing Black people to use their perspective to create a new
perspective, world, or experiences for their reality (Kelley, 2022).

Black radical imagination proves the power that race and imagination can have to create
images of freedom and access. Studies like Amalia Dache’s (2019) Ferguson’s *Black Radical
Imagination and the Scyborgs of Community-Student Resistance* is a beautiful example of the
power the theory and praxis that Black radical imagination can provide to scholars and
communities. Studies like Karen O’Reilly’s (2014) showed the power of social imagery and
imagination on issues related to lifestyle. However, I noticed in the field of imaginaries studies a
unique perspective missing. I noticed a lack of scholarship being produced on Black feminism,
Black girls, and Black girlhood in the field of imaginary studies. I did find a study that included
Black radical imagination and Black girls. Amber Caprice Sizemore Davis (2022) conducted a
phenomenal study using Black girl imagination and portraiture to highlight Black girls’
childhood experiences and creativity when they engage in science classes but, the study did not
focus solely on Black feminism or Black girlhood. My study was unique because it included
Black feminism, Black girlhood, and imaginary studies. The field of imagination is blossoming
with numerous studies and my study added to those studies by showing the power that Black
girls have when they get to use their imagination to create images of Black girlhood.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

In 2023 Black girls were “encountering unusual events or issues” like witnessing the first Black first lady of United States, Michelle Obama, lead in the White House, to witnessing the first biracial female Vice-President elected to office, to witnessing a Black girl be cast as Ariel for Disney’s live action film. On a local level Black girls in Memphis were witnessing articles praising them for outpacing their peers academically in Memphis Shelby County Schools, and a whole host of unique experiences that honored the beauty and brilliance of Black girls (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 227). While all of this was happening, I was left wondering, how did we capture the meaning being made by Black girls as they witnessed those events during their girlhood? Moreover, what were the Black girls’ perspectives on visually seeing all these events during their girlhood, and what did that make them think when they thought about the future of Black girlhood? Those wonderings led me to produce a qualitative research study that sought to gather Black girls’ perspectives on Black girlhood as they curated images of Black girlhood of the future. Given that this research study sought to elucidate on their experiences, and create images about their lived experiences, a narrative inquiry methodology provided the agility needed to support the intended outcomes for my study.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

There were two theoretical perspectives anchoring this study: Black feminism and Black radical imagination. The essence of this study was about gender, specifically Black girlhood. Hence, I needed a gendered theory to guide my study. The best gendered theory to support a Black girlhood study was Black feminism. The essence of humanity is the link between narrative
inquiry methodology and Black Feminism. Narratives and narrations have been part of the fabric of human life since its inception:

*Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversations... narrative is present in every age, every place, every society; it begins with the very history of mankind... it is simply there, like life itself. (Barthes, 1977, p. 251)*

As Roland Barthes (1977) noted in the quote above, narratives come in variations across genres and are diverse in their production, which is perfect for a multilayered study. John Dewey (1938), one of the founding scholars of narrative theory, emphasized that life is education because it provides human beings the skill and capacity to reconstruct experiences that they have endured so that they can analyze those experiences and use that analysis to make meaning of them. Jerome Bruner (2002) expounded on Dewey’s (1938) sentiment by stating, “to narrate derives from both ‘telling’ (narrare) and ‘knowing in some particular way’ (gnarus); the two tangled beyond sorting” (p. 27). Black girls have a Black girl standpoint, Black feminist thought, which equips them to have the ability to know something in a unique way. Additionally, when given the opportunity, they have the ability to analyze their Black girl standpoint and share that perspective with others in an impactful way that can lead to change and the enhancement of society.

Black feminist thought aligns perfectly with the methodological approach of narrative inquiry because it is centered on the power of sharing people’s unique lived experiences with the world (Bruner, 2002; Dewey, 1938). Each theme of Black feminist thought dovetails with narrative methodology because each of the Black feminist themes discuss storytelling. Narrative inquiry methodology is about giving people tools to share their stories. When Black girls use
Black feminist thought to show their diversity, they are sharing the story of the nonmonolithic experiences of being a Black girl (Collins, 2000). When Black girls use Black feminist thought to share with people the shared oppression that they experience as Black girls they are telling a story of community (Collins, 2000). Lastly, when Black girls create images that they self-define as a representative of Black girls and/or Black girlhood, they are using Black feminist thought to introduce to the world a new narrative about Black girlhood (Collins, 2000). In short, narrative methodology and Black feminist thought are perfectly aligned because narrative methodology is the vehicle that aids Black feminist thought to travel to its destination.

Narrative inquiry provided an opportunity for my curators, also known as my participants in the study, to examine how they made meaning of their shared experiences of Black girlhood in Memphis by providing them with the opportunity to engage in reflection and dialogue about their girlhood experiences. In addition to being able to provide space for Black girls to make meaning of their girlhood experiences in Memphis, narrative inquiry allowed them to produce versatile forms of their perspectives of future Black girlhood. The second theoretical perspective and theory anchoring this study was Black radical imagination. Another essential element of this study is the method of creating images of a future that does not exist. Hence, I needed a theory centered on imagination to guide my research design and study. Black radical imagination theory was the perfect theory to guide this study because it honored Black girlhood and Black girls’ imagination as they used those tools to create the future images of Black girlhood.

Moreover, narrative inquiry aligns with the theory of Black radical imagination because it allows researchers and participants to examine the events of their current realities, and make meaning of those current realities, in order to use that revelations to re-imagine future realities of girlhood (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).
Narrative knowledge helps people “make sense of the ambiguity of human lives,” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 228) because people make meaning of their life and experiences through narrative or thoughts. Narratives provide space for participants to reflect on the contribution made by actions, social factors, and experiences of an event, so that they can create a product that shares that experience with the world. This process is similar to the process that Black radical imagination uses to get people to form critical analysis of the current realities of society and social problems in that both encourage people to use their perspectives of their current realities, to create new perspectives, worlds, or experiences for the present, future, and past (Kelley, 2002). In short, I needed to have my curators, also known as participants, create a narrative of their current reality of girlhood, so that they could make meaning of that current reality. Once they had clarity of their current reality, they used their imagination to create new forms of Black girlhood that hopefully become the reality of Black girls in the future.

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly (2000) argued that temporality/continuity, sociality/interaction, and place/situation are the three common places that narrative inquiry will take place. It is in the intersection of those commonplaces that the nuance of the experiences of the participants are studied because in that nuance the researcher can understand the loudness in participants’ silence and vividly see the participants’ imagined future (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). For it is those three common places that the researcher and the participants are able to build a bond that allows them to hear, see, and comprehend each other as not just a transactional arrangement but as co-authors, co-researchers conducting a study.
Narrative Inquiry Three-Dimensional Framework

Sociality is the first dimension of the three-dimensional framework, and it refers to the social and personal interactions participants experience during the sharing of their experiences. Sociality asks that researchers are reflective about the relationship between themselves and the participants because sociality highlights the impact that social, cultural, and environmental conditions can have on the participants’ stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Hence, if each participant’s cultural, environmental, and social conditions can have an impact on the understanding that participants have of their stories, researchers must be cognizant of the impact of the cultural, environmental, and social conditions of the location on the interview or on the disposition that the researcher has when posing questions. In short, any of the aforementioned factors can have an effect on the participants. Additionally, the researcher had to be aware of how those same conditions could impact their interpretation of the data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Temporality, also known as continuity, is the second dimension of the three-dimensional framework. It shows how people are constantly writing and rewriting their stories as they grapple with thoughts about their past, present, and future experiences. As a narrative researcher I had to remain flexible because, “participants stories and meanings change in the telling. This aspect of narrative approaches requires that researchers remain flexible, acknowledge that the research questions and purposes may change as the inquiry progress” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 213). This is an important dimension of the framework because it held me accountable to one of the core tenets of narrative approaches: flexibility (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

The last dimension of the framework is about the power of the location of the phenomenon, the time period of the phenomenon, and the selection of the place to conduct the
study. Participants’ identities are formed within, depending on, and in response to the time, place, and/or situation that the experience they choose to discuss occurs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This means that it is vital that I did not diminish or dismiss the value of the time period of the participant’s story, the location of their story, and the conditions that created the story because all those elements play a vital role in informing the participants understanding of the experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Additionally, it was important to consider the location where the study was conducted because that could influence the participants’ recollection of the story or even their ability to share their story. I used the three-dimensional framework as a reflectivity tool to ensure that it informed me of my biases, my positionality, and the impact that I could have on the participants.

Research Question

The essential question for this research study was: In what ways can the perspective of Black girls shape the future imagery of Black girlhood?

Digital Storytelling Methods: Research Design

Qualitative research aims to understand the meanings that people make around sociocultural phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Conducting this type of research requires researchers to collect and analyze (nonnumerical) data, so that they understand the concepts that they are studying, the opinions that the participants are sharing, the people involved in the study or phenomenon, and the experiences that the participants undergo during the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Most qualitative research is conducted so that the researcher gains a greater understanding to the problem being studied or they are able to produce new ideas about the problem/phenomenon.
This is possible because qualitative research situates the observer in the world by using a set of interpretive and material practices that make the world of the observed more visible to the researcher and participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In this study, I sought to understand the experiences of adolescent Black girls in Memphis, Tennessee, so that they could produce new ideas on Black girlhood. Given that I wanted to ensure that Black girls were in the driver seat of their narratives, the best research approach for me to use was the digital storytelling method because it became a tool that allowed the girls to express themselves in various formats.

Additionally digital storytelling was the best narrative approach method for my study because it allowed the girls the ability to create future images of Black girlhood in a method that was responsive to their age. Digital storytelling “is an approach to narrating stories that draws on the power of digitized images to support the content of the story,” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.158) and it was created to aid everyday people to share their stories with the world. Digital storytelling provides people the opportunity to put sound, voice, and images to their lived experiences. For this study digital storytelling allowed the girls to incorporate sound, voice, and images in their creation of Black girlhood in the future (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Digital storytelling was perfect for my study because, “it has great appeal to young people who are very comfortable with software and willing to ‘hack around’ to figure out how to create a compelling story” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.158). Aligning with the narrative approach, digital storytelling honors the premise that individually and collectively people are impacted when others share their stories about their experiences navigating their identities and executing the actions associated with living in their identity (White & Epston, 1990).

Additionally, digital storytelling methods serve as counter narratives in the stories told, as noted in the following except from Adele de Jager, Andrea Fogarty, Anna Tewson, Caroline
Lenette, and Katherine M. Boydell (2017) in the article *Digital Storytelling in Research: A Systematic Review*, which stated,

> Given these philosophical underpinnings, it is no surprise that in community-based projects, digital stories are often explicitly posited as counterstories or alternative interpretations of the world, others, and oneself that “counter” dominant narratives. The importance of counter-stories is most obvious when considering aspects of identity usually associated with social inequity and/or stigma, particularly in regard to gender, disability, ethnicity (Castleden, Daley, Sloan Morgan, & Sylvestre, 2013), health status (e.g., HIV/AIDS; mental health difficulties), lower socio-economic and/or refugee status (Luchs & Miller, 2016), and sexual orientation (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012). (p. 2550)

Furthermore, the process of creating a digital story is user friendly for ordinary people because it has two steps. First, the participants construct their narrative by writing a script or outline of their experience in order to guide their digital layout. Second, they find images, sounds, video clips to bring that script to life (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Data collection was something really important to consider, especially with the narrative approach of digital storytelling method. Maggie Savin-Biden and Claire Howell Major (2013) stated the following about data collection with narrative inquiry approaches: “data collection is a design issue in narrative approaches. Always focusing on gathering stories, data may be collected in a variety of ways, including stories, journals, fieldnotes, letters, conversations, interviews, family stories, photos (and other artefacts) and life experiences” (pp.236-237). My intention was not to have any data collection issues by ensuring that I was clear on the data I wanted to collect and ensuring my participants were clear on the data I was trying to collect.

**Research Setting: Memphis, Tennessee**

Racism, for example, has an impact on the racial experience for Black people, and racial experience informs the racial identity of Black people (Cross, 1971). Mims and Williams (2020) found that the social environments or locale that people are living in have an impact on their
view of race. Mims and Williams (2020) argued that social environments have an impact on the way people view their race, I would imagine that the social environments would have an impact on the way someone views their gender. Other scholars support my preceding assertions that the location that people live in has an impact on the experiences, perceptions, and actions of the people who live in that place. Smiley et al. (2016) suggested that place
denotes how mutually reinforcing features such as ‘geographic location’, ‘material form’, and ‘investment with meaning and value’ serve as ‘not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game’ (Gieryn, 2000: 464–466). The agentic power can be more closely designated as place character, defined by Paulsen (2004) as how diverse realms of urban life, from economy to culture to politics and more, ‘combine and endure’. encouraging or discouraging different patterns of action’ (Paulsen, 2004: 245). (pp. 194-195)
The essence of Mims and William’s (2020) and Smiley, Rushing, and Scott’s (2016) arguments from their respective studies was the importance of crafting studies that provide opportunities for participants to voice the impact the social environments have and could be having on them. Therefore, conducting a study about Black girls’ experiences with girlhood while living in Memphis, Tennessee, was a valid study because it allowed Black girls who lived in Memphis to share their perspective on the impact a locale had on their intersectional identity of being Black girls.

Furthermore, scholars Jerome E. Morris and Carla R. Monroe (2009) in their article “Why Study the U.S. South? The Nexus of Race and Place in Investigating Black Student Achievement” argued that the south and African American people should be studied more in academic research. Jerome E. Morris and Carla R. Monroe (2009) stated this:

Although Black people left the South en masse during the Great Black Migration, more than 50% have remained there, and many of these individuals have relocated from rural to urban areas (Lewis, 1991; Trotter, 1991). Yet social scientists’ heavy emphasis on migration out of the South misses how southern experiences continue to frame Black life
in new locales and obscures the significance and stories of African Americans who have remained in the South. The South’s unique importance for any effort to understand African American life, identity, and schooling is evident in its dual role of being the poorest region of the country and being perceived as offering unique economic and social opportunities, particularly for African Americans. It is the only region of the United States where the majority of public school children are low income (SEF, 2007). Black children’s disproportionate level of representation among low-income populations causes them to be most affected by the consequences of poverty. (pp. 23-24)

The goal of this study was to honor the first part of Jerome E. Morris and Carla R. Monroe’s (2009) argument by conducting a study on the southern city of Memphis, Tennessee. Additionally, this study sought to honor the second part of Jerome E. Morris and Carla R. Monroe’s (2009) argument by making this study a resource that highlighted the girlhood experiences of Black girls in Memphis and provide opportunities for Black girls to share their vision of Black girlhood in the future.

Wanda Rushing (2009) supports and encourages people to produce more narrative studies about Memphis. In her book, *Memoirs and the Paradox of Place: Globalization in the American South*, Rushing (2009), used narrative case-study analysis to show the uniqueness of Memphis as a, “resilient southern city,” that is “anchored in global flows of technology, culture, people, and goods, [which] reveals the complexity of local and global processes inter-twined in the production of locality and in urban transformations” (p. 187). Rushing (2017) suggested that Memphis’ geographical and global location is a unique one because of the cultural, technological, and human experience in the city. Moreover, Rushing (2017) contended in her article “School Segregation and its Discontents: Chaos and Community in Post–Civil Rights Memphis” that Memphis is a “significant “agentic” player in the world because of its place-specific cultural and material resources,” and because of the “paradoxes of poverty and wealth, racial conflict and collaboration, cultural accumulation and innovation,” in the city which all
came together to create “transformative possibilities,” and “offer a wealth of opportunities for further research on Memphis,” (p. 79). Rushing’s (2017) claims are further proven when considering a phenomenon that occurred in Memphis, Tennessee, in 2022 that shocked the nation about Black girls’ graduation rates in Memphis. In 2022, the Commercial Appeal, a prominent newspaper outlet in Memphis, Tennessee, printed an article “Black girls Graduate at Higher Rate than any other Demographic in Memphis school” (West, 2022, pp.1). The article discussed the causes and impacts of the phenomenon of Black girls in Memphis having a higher graduation rate than, “any other demographic group on record, [being] a reversal of traditional academic disparities where Black students lag behind their white peers” (West, 2022, para 2). Journalists and scholars were trying to get answers to explain the phenomenon but none of them could definitively explain the reason the Black girls were excelling past their peers. Samantha West (2022) the lead journalist, asked numerous scholars from around the country to give their academic insight about the phenomenon, and those scholars stated, “It’s hard to say for certain what’s behind Black girls’ high graduation rates in Memphis, experts say, their academic outcomes are chronically understudied in comparison to other demographics,” (para 4). Note, Black girls and their academic progress are rarely studied without it being included in a comparison study. This is problematic because it does not allow Black girls to share their brilliance with the world. However, Samantha West attempted to create space for Black girls to have a platform to share their brilliance with the work. She decided to ask the Black girls included in the phenomenon to share their explanations for their occurrence they stated there, “personal determination to excel in spite of the double burden of racism and sexism that Black girls often face” (West, para 3, 2022) motivated them to excel. In asking the young girls their perspective the community was given insight on a phenomenon, which is a positive step in the
direction of capturing Black girls’ thinking as they matriculate girlhood and Black feminism. Furthermore, it eliminated the need to compare the girls to other demographics and centered their voices and their thoughts about the occurrence. Memphis has so many beautiful, talented, brilliant Black girls with thoughts about their girlhood experiences, thoughts about the current events in our world, and thoughts about the future. It is up to us to see them, hear them, and honor them by creating space for them to share their Marvelously, Magically Melanated Memphis Black girl standpoints!

Participants’ Identification and Selection via Purposeful Sampling

Given that I conducted a qualitative study about a specific experience happening to Black girls, purposeful sampling had to be executed when selecting participants for this study. Moreover, it was more beneficial for a study on Black girls in Memphis to use a purposeful sampling method because purposeful sampling carefully selects “members of a community who are likely to provide the best information” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 314). Stephen J. Gentles, Cathy Charles, Jenny Ploeg, and K. Ann McKibbons (2015) noted the following about purposeful sampling:

Patton (2015) provides the following description of purposeful sampling: “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry...Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding” (p. 264). Patton (2015) further specifies that, according to his use of the term, purposeful sampling applies specifically to qualitative research, “I introduced purposeful sampling as a specifically qualitative approach to case selection.” (p. 1778)

The narrative inquiry methodology aligns perfectly with the purposeful sampling method because both are about providing opportunities to get in-depth, rich, information from participants. The purpose of a narrative inquiry methodology was to provide a space for people
from marginalized groups to use their voice to share their untold stories and perspective on their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Moreover, “narrative approaches tend to focus on the stories of a single participants or a few participants, considering them as individuals, rather than investigating the stories of a larger group” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 231) so that the researcher and the participant can build a bond that provides them both with an enriched understanding of the participant’s experience. Narrative inquiry and purposeful sampling are used to enhance the participants’ and readers’ understanding of experiences and uses that understanding to explain those lived experiences to the world (Polkinghorne, 2005; Haavio-Mannila & Roos, 1999). As I designed this study and selected participants, it was imperative that I selected participants that were knowledgeable about the phenomenon of Black girlhood in Memphis so that they could share their stories of Black girlhood in Memphis. I also needed them to give voice to the marginalized experiences of Black girls (Polkinghorne, 2005; Haavio-Mannila & Roos, 1999; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, my plan was to be strategic with my selection of participants to get no more than three Black girls from one of the following organizations that worked with Black girls in the city of Memphis: Girls Incorporated of Memphis or South Side Wildcats nonprofit program. It was my intention to select girls that would aid in creating a counter narrative to the results found in the 2017 *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood* study, which found that the adultification of Black girls ages 5-19 occurred because adults saw them as needing less nurturing support, comfort, and protection than their counterparts (Epstein et al., 2017).

Therefore, the following criteria guided my selection of my participants:

1. The participant must have identified as Black, African American, or a descendant of the African Diaspora because the study was about Black girls’ experiences.
2. The participant must have identified as female because the study was about Black girlhood experiences in Memphis.

3. The participant must have fallen in the age range of 11-17, which honored the girlhood age range that would be best suited to engage in the digital storytelling methods.

4. The participants and their guardians must have been willing to complete a consent form agreeing to participate in a study about Black girlhood because I wanted to ensure that all participants felt safe and that their parents gave consent for them to be willing participants in this study.

5. The participants must have been interested in creating images of Black girlhood and interested in sharing their Black girlhood experiences in various forms (i.e., music, written, videos, pictures, etc.) because the digital storytelling methods required those methods to be used in the study.

Note I purposefully chose to exclude a criterion for the girls to have prior knowledge of the term Black feminism or Black radical imagination because those were theories guiding this study. In short, it was not necessary for the girls to use or recognize the terms Black feminism or Black radical imagination to be considered eligible to be part of this study.

Site Selection and Recruitment

Given that the location of Memphis was central to this study, the site selection for this study occurred in Memphis. Additionally, given that there were nonprofit programs in the city of Memphis serving Black girls and Black girl identity development, I leaned into convenience sampling of the selection of the nonprofit program. The two nonprofit programs that I had access and previous connection with were Girls Incorporated of Memphis and South Side Wildcats.
cheer program. Girls Incorporated of Memphis was a nonprofit agency that served girls ages 5-18 with research-based programming that supported the development of the girl. Girls that participated in Girls Incorporated of Memphis program learned to do these things:

- value their whole selves, discover and develop their inherent strengths, and receive the support they need to navigate the challenges they face. Girls Inc. girls live healthy and active lifestyles and are less likely to engage in risky behavior; they are eager to learn, successful in school, and more likely to graduate from post-secondary education; and they display diligence, perseverance and resilience. (Girls Inc. of Memphis, 2022, para 1)

Girls Incorporated was an amazing organization that I sought to source girls for my study because it had the demographic of the girls that I wanted to be in the study and had girls engaging in daily experiences of expressing their thought, feelings, and creativity, which was vital for my study about girlhood.

South Side Wildcats cheer program was another great organization to attempt to find willing participants for this study because it was a program that had the demographics that I desired to have in my study: Black girls who were ages 11-17. South Side Wildcats was described this way:

- South Side Wildcats is a Christ-centered organization devoted to families and the academic and athletic success of student-athletes. We strive to educate self-governing learners, train self-driven athletes, and develop self-motivated professionals. We believe in creating and building an authentic support system around student-athletes in the Greater Memphis area. (Southside Wildcats, 2022, p. 1)

The cheerleading squad had girls ages 11-13 on the squad who identified as Black, and they had girls who were used to expressing their opinions and using their creativity in robust conversations with peers and adults. Therefore, I was confident this site was a great site to seek willing participants to engage in my study.
Regarding accessibility to participants, I was confident I would be able to gain access to participants of the Girls Incorporated of Memphis program because I am an alum of the program. Specifically, I am a second-generation Girls Incorporated of Memphis girl due to my mother attending Girls Incorporated of Memphis when she was a girl. Additionally, during my course work for my doctoral program, I partnered with Girls Incorporated of Memphis on a project about Black girlhood. Therefore, I was able to work with them again to conduct this study. I was confident that I would gain access to the South Side Wildcats cheerleading program because they prided themselves on welcoming members of the community to support and engage in the program. I was part of the community; thus, I was able to engage with the program.

The following took place regarding recruitment of the girls to participate in the study. Institutional review board (IRB) approval I emailed the executive directors of both of the programs to set up a meeting to discuss my study. During that meeting I asked their permission to place flyers in the common areas of the facilities so that girls could see the flyer and choose to reach out to me if they willingly wanted to participate in the study (See Appendix B). I asked both executive directors if I could place flyers in their parent/guardian communication boards so that the parents/guardians of the girls could see the flyer as well. Lastly, I asked if I could get on an upcoming agenda with the girls that met the criteria of the study to verbally promote the study and personally hand out flyers.

After the recruitment stage, I connected with the parents, guardians, and/or girls that contacted me seeking participation in the study. I then discussed the study with the parent/guardian and girls who meet the criteria of the study so that they were clear that they were volunteering to participate. Additionally, during that conversation, I showed them the research plan, so that they were aware of the time commitment for the study. Next, I asked those that
wanted to continue being participants in the study to sign an assent form (See Appendix E) and ensure that their parent/guardian signed a consent form (See Appendix D).

**Data Collection & Procedures**

Below was my research plan, which explains the execution of the study and the procedures to collect the data. For this study I collected data from three sources: (a) Black girlhood workshop, (b) a one-on-one follow-up interview with the girls post the workshop, and (c) analysis of my Research Reflection Journal.

**Black Girlhood Workshop.** A Saturday workshop was the first part of the study because it allowed the girls and me to build a strong relationship, which was imperative in a narrative inquiry study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Post that workshop, I hosted one-on-one follow-up interviews with each girl to discuss the images they created and discuss their individual Black girlhood experiences. I wanted to ensure the girls felt safe and knew their privacy was protected. I suggested that all the meetings, including the workshop, took place at a neutral location that was not Girl Incorporated of Memphis facilities or at the South Side Wildcats facilities. Regarding girls being transported to the workshop I suggested girls were transported by a parent, and if that parent was not available, I offered to pay for an Uber to pick them up and drop them off. Figure 1 presents an overview of the Black girlhood workshop day.
<table>
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00 am - 10:30 am</td>
<td>Breakfast and Bonding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 am - 11:30 am</td>
<td>Collecting our tools: Aligning our Purpose and Power as Black girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 am - 11:30 am</td>
<td>Black Girl Curators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 am - 12:30 pm</td>
<td>What is Black girlhood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 pm - 1:30 pm</td>
<td>Lunch and Laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 pm - 3:00 pm</td>
<td>Creating our future images of Black girlhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 pm - 3:30 pm</td>
<td>Wellness Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30 pm - 4:30 pm</td>
<td>Curating our images of Black girlhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 pm - 5:00 pm</td>
<td>Closing and Celebration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase I: Building a Bond as Black Girls.** Prior to the collection of data, I ensured that the participants were clear on the goal of the study and the logistics of the study. The first phase consisted of building our foundational understanding of the researcher’s study and building our relationship as Black girl curators of girlhood. As noted above these were the “Breakfast and Bonding” and “Collecting our tools: Aligning our Purpose and Power as Black girls” sections of the agenda. We spent an hour together completing icebreakers, solidifying our foundation as a
group by having the participants meet each other, creating their pseudonyms, discussing why they joined the study, identifying their personal goals, sharing their intended outcomes of the study, and responding to the clarifying questions they asked. During that hour I shared with the girls the agenda for the day and the research outline that explained to the girls the one-on-one interview process.

For the last 30 minutes of the Phase I section of the workshop I explained the term Black girl curator. Black girl curators are similar to the curators that work with art galleries, in that, the Black girls participating in my study acquired, cared for, and developed a collection of Black girlhood images of the future. I explained to the girls that as curators, they would spend majority of their time in the workshop curating and creating images of Black girlhood. I explained that they would be collecting images from various sources like Google and social media. I told them they also could create their own images using any method desired: poems, songs, videos, short stories, phrases, paintings, pictures, etc., I explained that they would work together, using the digital storytelling methods, to curate their collection of individual images of future Black girlhood and then they would analyze their individual images to identify common themes and trends. I then explained that would use that data to curate a shared collection of images of future Black girlhood. Then, once they felt they had the images that best represented Black girlhood, they would determine the best way to share that information with the community so that it informed, educated, and inspired the public. After we got the foundational portions of the agenda together, the girls began working on crafting and curating images of Black girlhood in Memphis.
**Phase II: What is Black Girlhood?.** The next hour of the workshop we continued to build rapport with each other and build more trust with each other. During that time, the girls worked together to gain an understanding of the term Black girlhood by having a combination of reflective time and independent time to write their individual definitions of Black girlhood and group time to create a shared definition. Below are some of the prompts I used to guide our independent reflection time:

For example, some of the questions prompts were:

1. How do you see yourself as a Black girl?
2. How do you think others see you as a Black girl?
3. How does being a Black girl impact or affect your life?
4. What are some things you do every day as Black girl?

Before I gave the girls independent work time to reflect on the preceding prompts, I asked their opinions on the prompts. Specifically, I ask them to tell me if they wanted to add anything to the prompts or change anything about the prompts because I wanted them to feel ownership in the research process.

During the independent reflection time, participants included images, music, poems, videos, or written narratives to respond to the prompts. The goal was to get an organic outline of Black girlhood. Once the girls completed their independent reflection time, we came together as a group to discuss their responses to the prompts. Once the girls finished defining girlhood individually, they then took time to collaborate to create a shared definition of Black girlhood. The goal of group discussion was to begin to craft a shared reality of the present state of Black girlhood in Memphis and craft a shared definition of Black girlhood. As the girls were talking, I
listened and looking at trends/common themes in the images, words spoken to aid in my understanding of the shared definition for Memphis Black girlhood. I also added those reflections in my Reflective Journal.

**Phase III: Curating their world and future imagery of Black girlhood.** After they solidified their individual and collective definition of Black girlhood, they began to discuss future images of Black girlhood. The girls were provided lunch so that they could recharge themselves. During that time, we engaged in activities that they liked to do to have fun. That included watching TikTok videos, practicing new dance routines, singing, and dancing. The goal was to allow space for them to be girls and for us to have fun. After lunch we used the guidance in digital storytelling to aid each girl to create her vision of the future images of Black girlhood (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). First, each girl reflected on the current reality of Black girlhood and decided what they loved about it and what they would change about it. Next I used a five-senses activity I created to help them imagine girlhood in the future. I asked the girls to write a response to the following questions: What would girlhood in the future feel like? What would girlhood in the future smell like? What would girlhood in the future taste like? After each question the girls wrote a response and shared their answers with the group. They then began to discuss their answers and used the activity to put together a description of Black girlhood in the future. After they got that description written each girl wrote their vision for the future of Black girlhood down, as if they were writing a storyboard for a film (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The storyboard acted as a script for the girls because they used it to aid them in creating and curating the digital versions of the images of future Black girlhood (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Once they were confident about their written draft they searched for images, songs, and poems that reflected the written narrative they created on their story boards (Marshall &
Rossman, 2016). Their storyboards and final digital images were portions of the data collected for this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Note the girls’ used images that were created if they struggled to create their own or found a better image online than the one that they created. However, I encouraged the girls to create their own songs, images, or poems to ensure their voice was heard. In the end the girls ended up using a combination of images online and images they created. Once they curated those digital images, they created a 3-to-5-minute presentation, the recommended time for Digital Storytelling, using PowerPoint, Prezi, or Google Slides to craft their presentation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I then had each girl share their presentation with the group. After sharing their individual images of future Black girlhood, we looked for trends of shared themes, images, and/or phrases in their images of future Black girlhood. After we identified shared themes the girls spent time curating and creating their collective vision of the future Black girlhood. We ended the day with gratitude and appreciation of each other and the space.

**Black girlhood Semi-Structured Interviews.** Post the Black girlhood workshop, I hosted one-on-one follow-up interviews with each girl to discuss the images they created and discuss their individual Black girlhood experiences. After the workshop I conducted the final phase of the study by conducting an hour semi-structured interview with each girl to discuss the digital Black girlhood product and their unique Black girlhood experiences at a location of the girl’s choice. The girls chose the format of the meeting, more so, they determined if it was best to have the meeting virtually or in person. We had one-on-one meetings to verify the information shared in the previous workshop was still true, since storytelling and experiences can alter with time (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I used a portable tape recorder during the interview and a transcription service to transcribe each interview. Semi-structured interviews are “a good
approach when the research has only one opportunity to interview someone,” which is the reason that I chose to incorporate them in this study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p.359). Note the question for semi-structured interviews, “tend to be open-ended enough to allow interviewees to express their perspectives on a topic or issue and it also allows for comparable data that can be compared across respondents” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 359). H. Russell Bernard (1988) recommended that scholars should use an interview guide when conducting the interview. I created an open-ended interview guide that guided my semi-structured interview (See Appendix C). As the semi-structured interview, I asked clarifying questions if needed to ensure that I captured the authentic and intended narrative that the girls were conveying. Post those semi-structured interviews I ensured that I met with each participant to make sure that they approved of the transcription made of the interview.

Additionally, to ensure I honored the three-dimensional framework of narrative inquiry I prepared for each interview by using a journal to express my thoughts, my intended outcomes, and reground in the purpose of the study. Post the interviews and the transcription verification, I reviewed my research question, my intended outcomes of the study, addressed my biases and concerns, and reflected on the demographics of the girls and their shared goals for joining the study. Lastly, for safety measures I kept all three data sets (participants data collected, my tape recorder, and my reflection journal) in a locked filed cabinet at my house.

**Research Journal.** Michelle Ortlipp (2008) encouraged scholars to keep a reflective journal throughout their study. I had a reflective journal to ensure that I kept track of my thoughts, observations, and feelings throughout the entire conduction of the study. Ortlipp (2008) noted the following:
Increasingly qualitative research, particularly that which is situated within feminist, critical, and poststructuralist paradigms is, ...presented in ways that make it clear how the researcher’s own experiences, values, and positions of privilege in various hierarchies have influenced their research interests, the way they choose to do their research, and the ways they choose to represent their research findings. (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001, p. 325) Rather than attempting to control researcher values through methods or by bracketing assumptions, the aim is to consciously acknowledge those values. Keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers use their journal to examine “personal assumptions and goals” and clarify “individual belief systems and subjectivities” (p. 695).

Given that I identified as Black woman, it was critical that I engaged in reflection and reflexivity as I conducted this Black girlhood study. I used the researcher’s reflection journal to keep me present about my experiences, values, and positions. Moreover, it allowed me to have the emotional and mental space to make any necessary changes needed to the study’s design.

Data Analysis

Narrative inquiry methodology encourages scholars to use multiple methods and tools so that they can accurately understand the lived experiences of their participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). For this study I analyzed three sources of data: the girls’ images of Black girlhood, the semi-structure interviews, and my research journal to reflect on my praxis and orientation to the study. Given that this was a creative process I did not know exactly what data would be produced, but here were some of the data that I thought would be produced from the girls: Poems, PowerPoints, and Google Slide presentations.

Regarding the type of data analysis, I used thematic analysis to analyze the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2013). The goal of using three data sources was to identify a theme by using thematic analysis to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is “a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in the data” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 439). Moreover, “thematic analysis at a fundamental level is the process of recovering the theme or themes that embodied and dramatized in the evolving meaning and imagery of the work” (Savin-
As a data analysis method, thematic analysis dually does these things: works to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of ‘reality’. However, it is important that the theoretical position of a thematic analysis is made clear, as this is all too often left unspoken (and is then typically a realist account). Any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of data, what they represent in terms of ‘the world,’ ‘reality’, and so forth. A good thematic analysis will make this transparent. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 8)

Thematic analysis paired perfectly with my theoretical framework of Black feminism and the theory of Black radical imagination because both honored the humanistic experience that people endure by providing them the opportunity to share their truths, name their experiences, and express their thoughts on that unique experience (Barthes, 1977). Additionally, thematic analysis aligned with the digital storytelling method of my study because it unveiled the realities, also known as thematic truths, that the girls were sharing in their images. Additionally, thematic analysis helped me to identify themes in their semi-structured interviews. I used the process of coding to help identify the reoccurring themes in the data so that I could gain an understand of the phenomenon I was studying (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When coding the data, the process of generating names and labels or themes and categories found in the data, I used the versatile forms of the written and visual data sets provided to me from the girls to conduct a powerful thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2013). In the excerpt below, Alhojainan (2012) noted the value of having versatile data sets when using thematic analysis for coding:

Thematic Analysis provides the opportunity to code and categorize data into themes...In the case of Thematic Analysis, processed data can be displayed and classified according to its similarities and differences (Miles and Huberman 1994). In order to achieve the above, the process should include coding, categorisation and noting patterns, i.e. different level of themes could be provided (Braun and Clarke 2006), also to provide a relationship between the variables and factors in order to create a reasonable and logical chain of evidence (Creswell 2009; Braun and Clarke 2006; Miles and Huberman 1994). By gathering data using different instruments, (e.g. observation, questionnaires with interviews on one study)
with participants in different environments, Thematic Analysis will produce and present the data more effectively and reflect the reality of the data collection (Miles and Huberman 1994; Creswell, 2009; Hayes 1997). (p. 41)

As Alhojainan (2012) noted above the power of thematic analysis is collecting different forms of data using different instruments, which is why I had three sets of data: (a) Black girls digitally created images of the future of Black girlhood, (b) a member-checked transcription of the semi-structured interview, and (c) my research journal. It is through thematic analysis and coding of those three pieces of data that I gained insight on the similarities and differences between the girls’ depiction of girlhood and their girlhood experiences. Note I used a transcription service to transcribe each interview because the narrative inquiry approach suggests verbatim transcription (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). I conducted a member check with participants to ensure that I accurately transcribed the narrative they were trying to convey, and I member checked the findings of this study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). To effectively conduct thematic analysis, I followed Miles and Huberman’s (1994) thematic analysis model, as seen in Figure 2. The thematic analysis model consisted of three, “link stages or ‘streams’, i.e. data reduction, data display and data conclusion-drawing/verifying as illustrated by the following figure” (Alhojainan, 2012, p.47).

![Figure 2](image)

**Figure 2**

*Component of Data Analysis: Interactive model* (Miles &Huberman, 1994, p.12)
Stage 1 of Thematic Analysis: Data reduction. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) thematic analysis model data reduction is the first stage in thematic analysis. Data reduction is the process of “selecting, simplifying and transforming the data” (Alhojainan, 2012, p.43). During data reduction I coded the data by “assigning table units to the data that could be collected from the participants,” (Alhojainan, 2012, p.43) and I looked for patterns of repetitive statements and repetitive statements lengths. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) data reduction is a multistep process:

(1) collect the data,

(2) tabulate it using Microsoft Word prior to preparing and organizing the content of data,

(3) read the data at least twice so that I can begin to see significant patterns and/ or themes in the data. I should engage with the data numerous times until I become familiar with it and the patterns (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

(4) highlight the texts/ images reoccurring themes and/ or patterns,

(5) and then separate the highlight texts/ images into smaller segments/ themes or categories (Alhojainan, 2012).

Stage 2 of Thematic Analysis: Data Display. According to the Miles and Huberman (1994) model data display is the second stage in thematic analysis. During the data display stage, the goal is to make sense of the data collected. Moreover, that data display organizes the data collect and ensures that the concepts and thoughts gained from the themes collected in Stage 1 are coherent. (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Alhojainan, 2012). During this process data can be displayed in a variety of ways using a variety of techniques to facilitate analysis of the data. Moreover, “Utilizing different data display techniques and gradually framing it, enables the
researcher to focus and organize his/her thoughts by linking and comparing the information to reach conclusions” (Alhojainan, 2012, p.45). This is one of the reasons digital storytelling methods paired well with thematic analysis because I used the images as way to explain themes and analysis of the data collected.

**Stage 3 of Thematic Analysis: Data Drawing and Conclusion.** The last stage of Thematic Analysis is Data Drawing and Conclusion. During the process of data drawing and making conclusions about the data I displayed the data in a variety of ways as noted below. Researchers can group and/or display the data in the following ways:

1- The notation of any patterns or themes and the relevance of any statement especially if similar or contrasting
2- Grouping or establishing categories of ‘information that can go together’
3- Identifying interrelations among factors and variables
4- Building conceptual coherence and consistency, which the research should use to explore the validity of the findings so that they fit the theoretical framework of the study (Alhojainan, 2012, p.45).

It is important to note that one element is not overtly present in the above steps. When conducting thematic analysis researchers tap into a unique element included in the process: intuition (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The researcher must become immersed in the data to identify the interconnection between the concepts, codes, and themes that led to a triggering of the researcher intuition or “aha” moment that aids them in making meaning of the data being analyzed (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).
Trustworthiness and Ethics

Black feminist research, Black radical imagination theory, and Narrative inquiry methodology all encouraged a co-construction model of meaning making of experiences of the participants, which ultimately required me to build rapport and a trusting relationship with the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Collins, 2002; Kelley, 2002). During the entire study, I had to make sure I was building a trustworthy relationship with each participant so that they felt comfortable working with me. In order to co-construct meaning and understanding in my study I included semi-structured interviews. Additionally, to ensure that the participants’ responses were accurate I used a recording device and a transcription service to transcribe their interviews verbatim. Additionally, I built that trust by implementing member checking throughout the process. Member checking is a strategy that “involves checking with participants for feedback or verification of interpretation,” which gives the participants voice, and makes them feel confident that the findings accurately reflect them and their narratives (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 477). I member checked via phone calls and text messages with the girls because that was their preferred way to communicate.

Regarding ethics I ensured that all matters related to confidentially were followed. All of the girls in this study chose to use pseudonyms. I made sure that I held everyone accountable, including myself, to referring to each person with their pseudonyms. All materials they shared with me that could identify them, the Black girlhood journal, the digital product of their images of Black girlhood, and their responses in the semi-structured interviews, were secured and locked away in my home office. I used a password-protected laptop to store all electronic files and those files were stored in a password protected virtual filing systems. Lastly, I went through the IRB process, and they approved me to conduct this study (See Appendix A). Once my study
was approved by the IRB I made sure that I abided by the confidential and ethical parameters they set for working with humans.

**Limitations**

I only identified a few limitations as I prepared to conduct the study. One limitation dealt with the methodology. During the co-constructing process in the group sessions there was a potential for my subjectivity or the participants co-subjectivity to skew the data. By this I mean, if I was dominating the conversation or a few girls were dominating the conversation I knew that I might not get an inclusive understanding of the topic. I had to ensure that there was a process for reflection and process for discussion throughout the study to ensure everyone had time to independently think and respond to prompts during the study. This helped me to avoid having a limited understanding of a topic because I heard from every girl at every stage of the study. Another possible limitation was the participants’ inability to articulate a definition for Black girlhood or a vision of Black girlhood in the future. While I believed that the girls would be able to articulate themselves, there was always a risk that they chose not to share their thoughts or did not know how to articulate their thoughts. To address this limitation, I made sure to ask follow-up questions, gave wait time for responses, and I encouraged through girls with positive praise as they shared their perspectives.
Chapter 4: Stoking the Lames of Harriot Jacobs’ Torch!

Using their voices as a powerful weapon to fight injustice, the girls in this study have kept Harriet Jacobs’ fire burning by sharing their stories of Black girlhood. Similar to Harriot Jacobs, the girls used their stories of girlhood to aid readers to become present to the realities of Black girlhood in Memphis, and they used their stories to inspire readers to envision a new possibility for Black girlhood in the future. For far too long Black girls have been ostracized, overlooked, and outcast from the main topic of conversation in society. This is the time. This is the day. This is when Black girls use their brilliant minds and powerful voices to evoke change.

The essential question for this study was: In what ways can the perspective of Black girls shape the future imagery of Black girlhood? To answer this question, I used two theoretical orientations: Black feminism and Black radical imagination. Both theories provided the study with the framework necessary to hear the girls’ unfiltered truths and provided them with the tools necessary to create future images of Black girlhood. Black feminist theory honored the intersectionality of Black women and girls by providing space for them to form connection as they analyzed and made sense of the various forms of oppression that the system placed upon them due to their identities (Collins, 1990). Robin D. Kelly’s (2002) Black radical imagination allowed the girls to enact an act of resistance from the limitation of their current realities, identities, and/or societal expectation by helping them to use their imagination to create a counternarrative about Black girls’ realities in the future (Kelley, 2002). United, Black feminism and Black radical imagination theories provided the girls with a sacred space and the tools to show the world the beauty and brilliance that they possessed (Collins, 2000; Kelley, 2002).

Given that I used two human-centered frameworks, Black feminism and Black radical imagination theory, I used a narrative methodology, digital storytelling method, during a Black
girlhood workshop with the girls. During the Black girlhood workshop the girls’ magic occurred as the girls became present to their individual and shared realities of Black girlhood. In that sacred space the girls were able to authentically be themselves and dream without limitations. Using the theories and methodology as a guide, the girls were able to share their girlhood experiences as Black girls, analyze those experiences, and create their images of Black girlhood in the future. This chapter shares the images the Black girls created and shares the findings of all the data collected. The findings in this study represent the data collected from the Black girlhood workshop, individual semi-structured interviews, and my researcher journal. All the data collected were reflexively analyzed and synthesized before being shared in this chapter (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). To ensure I honored the participants’ voice I issued a member check with each participant for all representations of the findings that will be shared in this chapter (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). After thematically analyzing all the data collected in the study, three thematic findings emerged about the girls’ vision of Black girlhood in the future. For the Black girls in this study Black girlhood in the future will be peaceful and provide Black girls the opportunity to experience beauty, happiness, and power. Black girlhood in the future will be a space where all Black girls can say the following phrases with confidence:

1. “I wasn’t born a failure boo; I was born a Queen!”
2. “I’m dancing in the rain with a big smile.”
3. “I am a champion, everything attached to me wins, period.”

As I continued to analyze the findings I noticed the themes found in the findings aligned with concepts like White beauty standards, adultification, and the power of imagination. Therefore, at the conclusion of this chapter, I provided an overview that explains how those concepts intersect to create the girl’s cohesive image of Black girlhood in the future. Note, I have paired the girls’
statements with these concepts to make it easier for the reader to understand the overall findings for this study. Below are the titles of the sections of the findings for this study:

1. “I wasn’t born a failure boo; I was born a Queen!”: Eradicating White standards of beauty and uplifting forms of diverse Black beauty

2. “I’m dancing in the rain with a big smile.”: Challenging the darkness of adultification with the happiness of Black girlhood

3. “I am a champion, everything attached to me wins, period.”: My imagination as a Black girl is connected to the freedom of all

Before I delve further into the findings, I wanted to make sure I elevated the girls’ voices in this chapter by providing the reader a profile on the girls that participated in this study. For when you come to know them, you will better understand their vision of Black girlhood.

**Black Girl Curator Profiles**

For my study I had three participants that I have renamed as Black Girl Curators (BGC). Museums and art galleries often employ curators to acquire, care for, and develop a collection. Those curators typically arrange displays of collections of loaned works to the museum. Additionally, the curators typically help to interpret the collection with a specific mindset that will inform, educate, and inspire the public. Like the traditional art curators, the Black girls in this study identified images, collated those images, and added various creative mediums to them to create a collection that represents Black girlhood in the future. Note, one of the images was an original painting made by one of the BGCs. Two of the images were found online but were enhanced with an original song or poem that the BGCS created. The goal for the girls’ collective art piece was to inform, educate, and inspire the public through visually showing them all the
elements that comprise a Black girl’s peace in the future. For the duration of the chapter, you will see the participants referenced as girl, girls, or BGC. The three BGCs’ pseudonyms are: Madison, Hope, and Naomi. Figure 3 gives a brief explanation of the girls’ grade levels and race.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3

*Black Girl Curator Profiles*

For this study it was pivotal to honor the collective data findings for the group and the individual data findings of each girl. Therefore, I decided to provide the following in each girl's profile: a quote from the girl about something they love, a brief narrative on the girl’s background, their individual definition of Black girlhood, and the image that represents a manifestation of their individual imagination of beauty in Black girlhood in the future. Note, it was important that I shared their individual definition of Black girlhood in their profiles because the girls used those individual definitions to create a shared definition for the group to work from for the duration of the study. Additionally, the girls’ individual images of beauty were included in their profiles because it was the most reoccurring topic throughout the study. Additionally, understanding the girls’ curated image of beauty gives the reader the richest insight on the girls’ personalities.
Madison: Self-love is the best love

“Watermelon is just got a big, it got a big old space in my heart.”

- Madison

If there was one thing you must know about Madison, you had to know that she LOVED watermelon. Madison loved the fruit because of the way it tasted but, more importantly, she loved the fruit for the memories of love it provided her. For Madison, the core of everything in her life came down to love. Madison was a middle school girl who was very active in her school and community. She was part of various clubs, beauty pageants, cheer squads, athletic groups, and other extracurricular activities. She chose the name Madison as a pseudonym because it was a name she always admired. She LOVED her family, and it was obvious that her family LOVED her. Madison’s shared memories of family gatherings full of love and watermelon. It was there, in between the bites of the delicious fruit, that she got nourished mentally, emotionally, and spiritually by her family. Madison’s family was super supportive, and her mom was her biggest advocate. Madison and her mother were all about finding activities that poured loved into Madison and/ or allowed Madison to pour love into it. Therefore, when they saw the flyer about the Black girlhood study, Madison and her family excitedly join the study, and they even encouraged other girls to participate. Specifically, Madison and her family were the ones to encourage her friend Hope to participate in the study.

When Madison entered the Saturday Black girlhood workshop, she gave off the energy of a cool, effervescent preteen. She had her hair braided and pulled back in a ponytail with flared jeans on, black block heels, and a red festive shirt. Throughout the workshop she either had her
clear lip gloss in her hand or her iPhone. Being the middle schooler in the group she often found herself being a bridge connecting the ideas of the highschooler in the group with the ideas of the elementary student in the group. She played this role effortlessly, always pushing the group to see the connection between them. During the workshop she ensured that she kept her friend Hope on task by bringing her focus back to the question and helping her to spell certain words. It was evident that Madison was a cheerleader, because she always encouraged the group as they worked through activities and praised them for their creative ideas. Madison’s ability to unite the girls was a testament to her ability to exude unconditional love to herself and others. Figure 4 represents Madison’s definition of Black girlhood.

Figure 4

*Madison’s Definition of Black girlhood*

Madison’s definition of Black girlhood was centered on Black girls having fun and experiencing life. During the workshop she talked a lot about her experience going around Memphis, going out to eat, and going out with her friends. Madison’s reality was one that was centered on doing fun extracurricular activities like playing on a youth basketball team and
participating in city-wide beauty pageants. She explained that she was always actively engaging in activities that were enriching and fun in Memphis. She expressed that she viewed those activities as a benefit to her and she hoped other Black girls were able to engage in activities that were fun. Figure 5 represents Madison’s vision of beauty in the future for Black girlhood.

Figure 5
*Beauty comes from self-love* (Elina, 2023)

For Madison, Black girls in the future would experience the feeling of beauty by practicing and embodying self-love as represented in Figure 5 (Elina, 2023). To Madison, “self-love is the best love,” and while it is powerful to transform the external world, she felt that it was equally important to transform the internal world of Black girls. Therefore, she selected the image above from Google to represent Black girls confidently displaying self-love and realizing that they “love every part of themselves.” Madison selected a song to represent the sound and the vision of Black girlhood in the future. Madison decided to select an R & B girl empowerment song by Ebony Jenae called “Little Brown Girl” (LyricFind, 2019). The song’s message is about Black girls experiencing the beauty of finding acceptance in their imperfections. Madison was adamant that this song accurately reflects the sound of the future because it embodies the concept of self-love that every Black girl will have in the future. She stated:
It's called ‘Little Brown Girl.’ It is telling you that you are beautiful no matter what. If you don't have your edges done, if you don't have your hair done, if you got big nostrils, if your size is different, if your color is different, no matter what.

When I asked her how that relates to the future of Black girls, she expressed that the song reminds Black girls to remember that “no matter what they look like they [still can] have a good time. Have a girlhood that is worth living!!” Given that Madison and the girls spoke so much about the current reality for Black girls being defined by their beauty, hair texture, and external forms of validation, it makes sense that Madison desired to have a future that honors Black girls for who they are and to have a future that honors them exactly as they are.

**Hope: High fives equal love**

“High Fives are fun and are showing love!”

- **Hope**

Hope was a bubbly, bright-eyed elementary student. Even though she was the youngest in the trio no one would have known due to her energy and captivating ideas. Hope was outgoing, fun spirited, and loved spending time with her family and friends. She played basketball and was a cheerleader. Hope selected the pseudonym Hope because it represented her personality. She and Madison had a close bond based on friendship, love, and the joys of exploring Memphis. She loved food and was always comparing things to the flavors of food. She came from a large family filled with many aunts and cousins that all come together to support one another to succeed.

During the Saturday Black Girlhood Workshop, Hope was the one that kept everyone laughing. She would say the funniest phrases, make the funniest expressions, and she kept the energy up in the room. For instance, she had this ritual that she would do in response to people
sharing an idea. Every time someone would share an idea, regardless of what the idea was, she would give the person a high five. She would hit their hand and say, “great answer!” or another comical response. When I asked her in the semi-structured interview why she did that, she said the quote above, “High fives are fun and are showing love!” Hope further explained that high fives symbolized that she and the other person are in a relationship together; they are connected to each other. Hope valued relationships, she wanted those relationships to be positive, and she wanted to make sure that her relationships were built on something fun. Therefore, when she gave you a high five, she was letting you know that she values you, values your thoughts, and was excited to be connected to you. While Hope loved the happiness that relationships brought her; she also wanted it to be clear that you can have happiness by yourself. Sometimes she would ask the girls for help with drawing and spelling. However, sometimes, when she struggled with spelling words instead of asking the group for help, she would pull her phone out and said, “Hey Siri! How do you spell ….?” She would then laugh hysterically at the response and get back to working. Additionally, when she and Madison struggled with drawing certain images by hand on their paper, they savvily would grab their phones, find images online, place their phone under the paper, and trace it on the paper!!! Hope’s jovial, can-do spirit had a tremendous impact on all of us engaging in the study.

When it came time for Hope to share her definition of Black girlhood, you can bet that she did it with style. She cleared her throat and made sure the entire room felt every single word she spoke by looking everyone in the eyes and enunciating every syllable of the words. Figure 6 represents Hope’s definition of Black girlhood.
Hope’s definition for Black girlhood was centered on Black girls having fun. During the workshop she discussed all the activities she participated in like cheerleading, basketball, and going on family outings. She agreed with Madison that the activities she engaged with were fun and provided her with happiness. A distinction in Hope’s definition from Madison’s definition is Hope’s definition added the element of beauty. When the girls discussed Hope’s definition, beauty became a major topic. Hope loved talking about fashion! Her little brown eyes lit up discussing beauty, fashion, and all the latest styles. She oozed confidence and self-assurance in her natural beauty and admiration of other Black girls’ natural beauty. She expressed that the definition of Black girlhood had to include beauty to honor the beauty she felt all Black girls possess. Figure 7 is represents Hope’s vision of beauty for Black girls in the future.

Figure 7

Beauty comes down to hair and skin (Quality Design Crafts, 2023)
When Hope began to create her vision of beauty for Black girlhood in the future she really focused on the external features. Hope was very keen on selecting an image from Google of a darker skin Black girl with an Afro. When I asked her why she chose the image seen in Figure 5 she stated, “because she is beautiful,” (Quality Design Crafts, 2023). I then asked her to elaborate on the reason that she considered the image beautiful, and she named “Her hair, and her skin color. They’re beautiful. I like how her Afro is just fluffing out and stuff. And she has a different color, she has a Black [skin] ... It's a little darker.” Colorism, specifically the idea of being too dark, was a reoccurring topic that came up in the data collected for this study. Hope desired to address colorism by including images that promote girls who are not always seen as the face of beauty. Even though she realized that she had the power to create something new, she still desired to combat that notion of colorism by selecting a darker skinned girl to be featured in her images of the future. Additionally, another reoccurring topic in the data was hair and different textures of hair being seen as beautiful in society. Hope’s vision for the future included everyone accepting Black girls’ natural hair and natural bodies because she felt that natural looks are beautiful. Hope chose the image represented by Figure 7 to challenge White beauty standards that claim that natural hair or Afros are not beautiful by selecting an image of a girl with and Afro to represent the beauty of Black girlhood in the future (Quality Design Crafts, 2023).
Naomi: Loving me, means giving me peace

“They're going to speak their mind, but they're going to say it in a way that's kind to you, but they're not going to sugarcoat things.”

-Naomi

Naomi was a confident, intelligent introverted highschooler. She loved arts, stimulating conversations, music, church, and spending quality time with loved ones. Naomi’s interests included drawing, anything artistic, softball, video games, reading, and writing. She liked to wear combat boots, oversized t-shirts, jeans, and other comfortable clothes. At her high school she was on the advanced track due to her intelligence and tenacity for being the best person she could be academically. She was unafraid to speak her mind and willing to stand up for what she believed in. She said she selected the pseudonym Naomi because it was a name of a character that she admired from something that she read. Her mother and father were key figures in her life that inspired her to unapologetically live into all things that would make her become the best Naomi that she could be. Additionally, Naomi discussed the influence her mother and grandmother had on her outlook of Black womanhood and Black girlhood. She expressed that her mother and her grandma were everything that she wanted to be as a Black girl because,

They are very beautiful, intelligent, and honest. They’re kind-hearted, and they're friendly. They're going to speak their mind, but they're going to say it in a way that's kind to you, but they're not going to sugarcoat things. They embrace their hair. They embrace who they are, and they're very faithful in their own beliefs. And I just want to be just like them.
I shared this quote from Naomi to honor her words, and to give a better sense of who Naomi was as a person. Everything that she saw in her mother and her grandmother, the girls and I saw in her throughout the study. Naomi was kind with her words, but unapologetic about her truth. She was friendly, honest, and faithful to her beliefs. One truth that Naomi held dearly was the need for Black girls to have a girlhood that provided them some form of peace. She stated, “There are enough things in the world to stress us out. We need to find joy and peace inside of ourselves.” In every stage of the study, she continued to come back to idea of peace being an essential element in Black girlhood, and she modeled this level of tranquility in the workshop.

While Naomi had a tranquil spirit, she also had a strong sense of consciousness and self-awareness that anchored the group throughout the Saturday Black girlhood workshop. She empathically listened to the ideas of the group, vulnerably shared her truth, and provided insight to concepts that the girls were not aware of. Naomi was the oldest in the trio and really lead the charge in bringing in a different level of consciousness to the group. Naomi’s leadership shinned throughout the workshop, she would offer advice about the artistic design of their collective vision of girlhood, and she would encourage the girls to include their voice and artistic touch to the designs. By the end of the workshop, Naomi became a pseudo big sister to the other girls.

When it came time for the girls to craft their individual definitions of Black girlhood, Naomi took her time crafting the definition. She looked at the paper and then looked out of the window as if she were envisioning something. Once she finished crafting the definition she let the other girls share their definitions first. When it came time for her to share, Naomi’s posed demeanor was very warm and exuded confidence when she spoke. Figure 8 represents Naomi’s definition.
Like Hope, Naomi’s definition included beauty, but her definition described beauty in a more abstract sense. She referenced physical beauty of Black girls but wanted the definition of Black girlhood to include more than a physical description of Black girls. She wanted the definition to describe the beauty of Black girlhood, so she included other elements she believed were innate to Black girls. After each girl shared their individual definition, they discussed the similarities and difference in their definition. During the discussion all came to realize that Naomi’s definition encompassed all their definitions. Figure 9 represents Naomi’s vision of beauty in the future.
The conversations about beauty and colorism during the study inspired Naomi to create a future that eliminated colorism, low self-esteem, and Black girls feeling like they had to measure up to society’s beauty standards. In the future Naomi desired for Black girlhood to be such an affirming space that ensured that all Black girls would be understood:

If you're a Black girl, you're beautiful. If you're a girl, you're beautiful. I think, with being a Black girl, you're just going to need to understand that you're not going to be the certain shade of skin. You're going to have a certain type of melanation. You're not going to have the perfect curly hair where you can just have these beautiful spiral curls. You're going to have kinky hair. You're going to have straighter curly hair. There's going to be different textures and different colors that go into being a Black girl, so you need to understand that any shade or any type of Black girlhood is beautiful.

She decided that the best depiction of the preceding excerpt was an image of a Black Queen. She wanted to find a picture that had a Black girl with a crown to show that she was in control of her
life, her existence, and her standards of beauty. She wanted a Black girl with an Afro to honor her natural beauty and she wanted to have a picture that explicitly gave Black girls the title of Queen. Figure 9 represented Naomi’s desire to have Black girlhood in the future be a space that sees everything about Black girls as beautiful and reveres every .

**Black Girlhood Defined by Madison, Hope, and Naomi**

To gain an understanding of the realities of Black girlhood for the three girls in this study I had to ensure that we were working from a unified understanding of the term Black girlhood. During the workshop the girls participated in an activity that asked them to use nouns to describe Black girlhood. Table 3 represents their answers and perception of Black girlhood in Memphis. Black girlhood for the girls in my study was represented in various ways from historical sheros to catch phrase like “girl bye.” Black girlhood is in the music, in the school, on social media, and in the day-to-day living for each Black girl. As evident in Figure 10 the girls listed phrases that represented their Black girlhood experience that modeled the language that they encountered in Black girlhood.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Things</th>
<th>Idea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harriet Tubman</td>
<td>Hair salon</td>
<td>Black girl magic art</td>
<td>Phrases: “girl please”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India Aire</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Black girl magic merchandise</td>
<td>“what in the devil”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My grandma</td>
<td>Memphis</td>
<td>Afros!!</td>
<td>“gone felicia”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(There are some more popular girls on social media, but we don’t want to say their name because we don’t want them to represent Black girls.)</td>
<td>Beale Street</td>
<td>Money</td>
<td>“I know you ain’t talking to me”</td>
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<tr>
<td>India Aire</td>
<td>Nail shop</td>
<td>Jewelry</td>
<td>“girl bye”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harriet Tubman</td>
<td>Sleep over!</td>
<td>Spotlights (Because Black girls should be in the spotlight... we feel like we are getting that more, but with the wrong ppl)</td>
<td>“I wish you would” “100%”</td>
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<td>India Aire</td>
<td>Cousin house</td>
<td>Food</td>
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<td>My grandma</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Phone</td>
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<td>(There are some more popular girls on social media, but we don’t want to say their name because we don’t want them to represent Black girls.)</td>
<td>The hood</td>
<td>Tablet</td>
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<td>My grandma</td>
<td>The gas station</td>
<td>Air pods</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(because we like food)</td>
<td>Grocery stores</td>
<td>Apple watch</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My grandma</td>
<td>Seafood places</td>
<td>Clothes (Shein, Temu, Nike, Polo, Walmart, Citi Trends, Rainbow)</td>
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<tr>
<td>My grandma</td>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>Forever 21</td>
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<tr>
<td>(because we like food)</td>
<td>School- (*Ya’ll we don’t have to go... we can go online)</td>
<td>Go outside -jump on trampoline, TikTok, run around, chase each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My grandma</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Get our hair done</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(because we like food)</td>
<td>Skating rinks</td>
<td>Get nails done</td>
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<td>My grandma</td>
<td>Urban Air</td>
<td>Play basketball</td>
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<tr>
<td>(because we like food)</td>
<td>Jumping world</td>
<td>Cheer</td>
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<td>My grandma</td>
<td>Movies</td>
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<td>Figure 10</td>
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**Black Girls’ Perceptions of Black Girlhood in 2023**

As evident from Figure 10, the possibilities that emerge from Black girls’ representations of their perceptions of Black girlhood, society, popular culture, and their lived educational experiences in Memphis, Tennessee, are a combined mixture of people, places, and ideas. Table 3 explicitly names Black girls’ perceptions of Black girlhood, society, popular culture, and their...
lived educational experiences in Memphis, Tennessee. Once the girls completed the noun activity they created a shared definition of Black girlhood, which is found in Figure 11.

**Black Girlhood Defined:**

Black girlhood is something that black girls go through during their life while also having style, beauty, intelligence, and a good attitude while honoring their melanin and physical characteristics of being a black girl.

**Figure 11**


The girls decided they wanted an image to accompany their unified definition of Black girlhood, thus they curated the image in Figure 11 (An, 2018). They found the image in Figure 8 on Google. They selected it because the Black girl in the image honored the characteristics that they admired in Black girlhood. For Naomi the Afro was the perfect hair style to represent Black girls’ natural beauty. For Madison and Hope, they loved the skin tone of the girl in the image. Additionally, the girls loved that she was holding a sign up saying, “take Black girlhood seriously” because it honored the words in their definition, and it expressed the importance of valuing Black girls’ experiences and needs. When I asked them why they chose to include the
#BlackGirlMagic, the girls stated it was a reference to a song they heard, and the hashtag mimicked the way they spread awareness on important topics on social media.

**Findings**

In the future the Black girls in this study envisioned a Black girlhood that was centered on peace— one where they, and the world they lived in, acknowledged their beauty, their happiness, and their power. Below are three phrases that express the girls’ sentiments on beauty, happiness, and power.

1. “I wasn’t born a failure boo; I was born a Queen!”
2. “I’m dancing in the rain with a big smile.”
3. “I am a champion, everything attached to me wins, period.”

Honoring their role as BGCs, the Black girls in this study curated an art piece to represent their collective vision of Black girlhood in the future. Their collective art piece consists of three co-constructed pieces that reflect the three phrases above, which reflect the three themes of Black girlhood: Beauty, Happiness, and Power. The title of their collective art piece is “A Black Girl’s Peace” and is seen in Figure 12. The first image represented their theme of happiness by having a Black girl dancing in the rain. It also includes a song they created to emphasize their theme of happiness in Black girlhood, on top of an image they found on Google that represents a Black girl dancing in the rain (Christine, 2017). The second image has a Black girl with an Afro with the words *Black girl magic* spelled out in her curls (Fontana Studio, 2023). They found the image on Google and decided to add a poem created by Naomi on her face to represent their theme of beauty. The last image was an original art piece of Naomi’s, and it was drawn to show Black girls’ ability to thrive in an uninhibited girlhood that allows them to freely exert their power.
These findings became evident once I analyzed, synthesized, and member checked all the data from the Black girlhood workshop, the individual semi-structured interviews, and my research journal (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Given that this study was anchored on increasing the volume of Black girls’ voices in scholarship, I thought that the best way to share these three thematic findings was to use the phrases and the art pieces that the girls had shared throughout the study. The first portion of this section discusses the thematic finding of beauty using the girls’ phrase, “I wasn’t born a failure boo; I was born a Queen!” (Fontana Studio, 2023). The second portion of this section discusses the finding of happiness using the girls’ phrase, “I’m dancing in the rain with a big smile” (Christine, 2017). The third section discusses...
the finding of power using the girls’ phrase, “I am a champion, everything attached to me wins, period.” Finally in the conclusion, I explain the cohesive vision of Black girlhood in the future by discussing the intersection of the following concepts: White beauty standards, adultification, and the power of imagination.

“I wasn’t born a failure boo; I was born a Queen!”:
Eradicating White Standards of Beauty and Uplifting forms of Diverse Black Beauty

“I wasn’t born a failure; I was born a queen!” is used to describe the thematic finding of beauty because it accurately reflects the girls’ sentiments on beauty standards. After analyzing the data, I found two reoccurring thoughts: (a) The Black girls in this study felt that they were born in a society that requires them to combat colorist beauty standards daily. (b) The Black girls in this study envisioned a future where colorism is eradicated, and with that eradication, they will have the power to define beauty for themselves. Moreover, they will be able to be seen as beautiful Black queens from birth. Figure 13 is the collective imagination of the Black girls in this study, and it represents their vision of beauty in Black girlhood in the future (Fontana Studio, 2023). This section presents the evidence to support the two preceding thoughts and ends with an explanation of Figure 13.
“I wasn’t born a failure” is a statement the girls made to combat colorism. This section explains how Black radical imagination inspired the girls’ statement. Following the recipe of Black radical imagination, the girls were asked to examine the present state of their world so that they could use their imagination to create a new world in the future, thereby, initiating their first step of activism (Kelley, 2002). When I asked the girls to explain some of their daily experiences as Black girls, I found that they often described navigating issues of colorism and beauty.
standards. When Hope was asked to share an example of the daily experiences she encountered as a Black girl, she stated,

    My auntie always taught me that when I wake up, I need to go look at my mirror and talk about how I've been doing good, and how I'm beautiful, and stuff like that. Because it just encouraged me to keep doing what I'm doing even though people's hating.

Her statement about people hating led me to seek clarification on the term “hating” and the impact she believed “hating” has on Black girls. Hope explained that she saw hating as “somebody making fun of you because you're Black, you know your hair that Afro, kinky texture, and stuff like that.” Hope stated that she believed that Black girls experience hating regularly because of the color of their skin, the texture of their hair, and/or their facial features. Hope’s description of hating was essentially describing colorism. Trinity Alexander and Michele M. Carter (2022) defined colorism as the process of discrimination that privileges light skin and Eurocentric features over dark skin and Afrocentric features (Harris, 2008; Hunter, 2005). Researchers suggest that African Americans (AAs) of all skin tones are subject to inequity, unfair criticism, and second-class citizenship merely because they are African American. The discrimination’s intensity, frequency, and outcomes, however, differ dramatically by skin tone (Hunter, 2007). While colorism is a subcategory of racism when considering out-group discrimination, it exists independently of racism in the context of intragroup biases. (p. 249)

As I analyzed the data, I found that Alexander and Carter’s (2022) definition of colorism was found in the data collected from Naomi. Specifically, all the data about Naomi’s experiences and perceptions of being a Black girl were linked to the definition of colorism. I noticed a trend in the data: when Naomi discussed colorism, she connected it to a White beauty standard that oppressed Black girls. For instance, when discussing her girlhood experiences Naomi named that she thought Black girls should be “embracing that [they] have darker skin than others, because some people will try to bring it up as if it's an insult.” In the preceding quote, Naomi is
referring to colorism in that darker skin girls receive insults, bully, and hating because they have dark skin. When I asked her to elaborate on her statements, she stated,

Because it's interesting, because if you're Black, if you're a Black girl, there are going to be times where you're going to feel like, "Huh, I'm really dark," or, "I'm really light," or just... Because with being a Black girl, I think there's also this standard of what is too dark and what is too light to be considered a Black girl. But then there's also what is too straight or what is too curly of a hair to be a Black girl, or what is too just... What is not beautiful when it comes to beauty standards for Black girls.

Naomi’s statements are expressing colorism. Additionally, the data show that Naomi believed Black girls were spending time evaluating if they met the White beauty standards set by colorism. Naomi expressed that Black girls were spending too much time worrying about if they measured up to those White beauty standards. She felt Black girls could be using their time on other issues or topics, rather than spending the amount of time they spend combating White beauty standards. Naomi expressed her frustration with Black girls being stressed out about beauty standards and worrying about if they measured up to those standards. When I asked the girls to give me more context on where they thought the images of beauty came from, they talked about TV, their friends, and social media. Naomi stated,

And I think that also comes in part to social media, 'cause you're going to see a lot of people who are what the standard calls beautiful. But when you look different from those people, you're going to feel a little bad sometimes. You're going to say, "I don't look like her, and everybody says that she's beautiful, so I must not be beautiful.”

The sobering reality that so much energy of their girlhood was being spent on combating this colorist beauty standards helped the girls recognize that their current girlhood experiences were not peaceful. The girls recognized that they did not experience peace because they constantly had to find methods like daily affirmation, positive self-talk, and/or finding alternative representations of beauty to combat these colorist beauty standards. These realities inspired them
to engage in the process of imagining a world where Black girls did not “feel like failures” because they did not measure up to colorist beauty standards.

Each girl curated individual images of a future free of colorism, which was shared in their profiles. Once the girls had their individual visions of beauty solidified, they began to co-construct an image to represent beauty in the future. The girls noticed that their individual art pieces all had a Black girl with an Afro, and decided they want to continue this trend with their collective vision. They decided to find an image with a Black girl with an Afro for two reasons. First, they desired an image of an Afro in their collective vision because they wanted to acknowledge the natural beauty of Black girls, and they felt that the Afro was the best representative of natural Black girl beauty. Second, they wanted an image of an Afro to be included in their collective vision because they wanted the image to serve as a visual protest of White standards of beauty. Moreover, the BGCs wanted to ensure that Black girls understood the power of being able to transform their hair into various styles because they saw that power as unique. For instance, when Naomi was asked about the beauty of being a Black girl she stated,

Because there are certain things about being a Black girl, and you can't replicate those in other ethnicities or other demographics. Like with a white girl, they're not going to be able to have the same curls that we have. They're not going to be able to do and take care of their hair the same way that we do. But that same thing can be said in vice versa. We're not going to have pin-straight hair. And even if we do straighten our hair, it's not going to be forever. It's just, there's certain things that we have to take care of because we are Black, like with our hair, it's going to take forever to take down our braids, but we can still make certain hairstyles, like twists and curls and Afros, that they cannot replicate if you're not a Black girl.

During the Black girlhood workshop the girls connected the power of hair transformation and style transformation to the power of Black Girl Magic. For the BGCs, Black Girl Magic is a reference to a concept of the beauty, power, and uniqueness of Black girls often tied to the way
they navigate society’s various form of oppression. The magic is that Black girls still thrive and find ways to excel despite various forms of oppression. As Naomi suggested in the quote above, the girls viewed the magic of Black girls’ unique ability to exert their brilliance, agility, and beauty all while combating standards of beauty and oppression. Therefore, when they found the Google image in Figure 13 of a Black girl with an Afro that included the phrase “Black Girl Magic” spelled with her curls, they decided it was a good image to represent their concept of beauty (Fontana Studio, 2023). Additionally, it was decided that as queens, the Black girls would need a crown and, to the Black girls in this study, the best crown for a Black girl would be one that represented Black Girl Magic. While the Afro serves as the crown on the Black girl’s head, the words “Black Girl Magic” represent the crown’s jewel.

However, once they evaluated the image, they felt that the image was missing something since the original format did not have any facial features on the girl’s face. The girls decided that they wanted to make the implicit, explicit by including a free verse poem written by Naomi to show the brilliance, agility, and beauty of Black Girl Magic in the future. As Lauren C. Mims and Joanna L. Williams (2020) stated, “Black girls who described negative social incidents associated with being part of their race indicate that social experiences play an important role in the self-understanding in their early adolescence” (p.768). The girls in this study have had to make sense of their racial and gendered identity as they navigate colorism in America and, while they all resoundingly have named throughout the study that they unequivocally love every part of themselves, they recognized that is not the case for all Black girls. They recognized the current reality has girls combating some form of negative thoughts related to their beauty daily. Therefore, the BGCs wanted to add the poem written by Naomi to the center of the image to address the internal struggle that Black girls face when declaring they are beautiful to themselves.
and the external world. While they all envision a world where the beauty of ALL Black girls reigns supreme, they also do not want Black girls to forget that they should view themselves as Beautiful Black Queens. Moreover, combining the background image in Figure 13 with the words of the poem written by Naomi, Black girls now have an image of Black girlhood that lets them, and the world, know that they are living in a new world where they are seen and known as queens who have control over their life, their experiences, their identities, and their beauty (Fontana Studio, 2023).

“I’m dancing in the rain with a big smile!”:

Challenging the darkness of adultification with the happiness of Black girlhood

After analyzing all the data collected, I found the second theme in this study to be happiness. The Black girls in the study believed that for Black girls to experience peace in the future, they had to experience forms of happiness. The phrase, “I’m dancing in the rain with a big smile,” encompasses the girls’ sentiments on happiness because it acknowledges a unique finding in the data. While the girls did envision a future of peace, they did not envision Black girls going through girlhood without encountering moments of sadness or strife. Figure 14 reflects the girls’ philosophy that life will have times that are rough, but their vision in the future was that Black girls would have two ways to navigate those rough times.
The first way Black girls would navigate the rough times would be having a companion with them to endure the rough times. They envisioned the companion providing them with emotional support and encouragement, which would help them get back to a state of happiness.

Second, they imagined that Black girls would rely on the power of their own mind to transform the rough time into a positive one.

Figure 14
Dancing in the Rain! (Christine, 2017).
Dance alongside them. In the future Black girls can dance in the rain with a big smile because they have a companion with them to help them to endure the storms of life. For the girls the companion did not have to be a specific person, nor did they have to be a specific age. The companion provided the girls with an emotional sacred space to process their emotions and would help them find a way to experience happiness regardless of the circumstance. Naomi described the value companions could have in a Black girl’s life when she described her experience in the hair salon. Naomi stated,

Well, you know how I said going to the hair salon? There was one specific time... Well, this happens a lot, but when I go to the hair salon, I'm with this hairstylist that I'm very comfortable with. She's gone to our church a couple times, my mom's church and my dad. I went there with my mom, and she dropped me off so she can go get me some food, 'cause I haven't ate. And my hairstylist slapped me in the chair. She went to go set up the bowl and stuff, and then I went to get my hair washed. And while we were washing my hair, we were having this long conversation about all this stuff. And then when we get back, my mom's in the room, and we all start talking about just daily stresses and different types of music. And we were listening to gospel music, and then it turned into R&B music. And it took hours. And I know I complain a lot about how long it takes, but I'm glad that it takes so long for me to get my hair done, because after I'm done, I'm like, "This is what it means to be a Black girl." I get to sit there for hours while my mom and me are just talking the whole time, and my hairstylist is just talking about all the clients she's getting, and then she talks about her kids, and then she talks about her husband, and then she talks about the show she's watching. And it just makes me think, "This is what it means to be a Black girl." You get to sit here for hours, tired, wanting to go home, but also having these great conversations with your mother and whoever's taking you there, wherever you are. And I know that some people don't have... Some Black girls don't even have the relationship with my hairstylist that I do, but just us three Black girls, us three Black... Well, two Black women, one Black girl, sitting there just having a meaningful conversation about just everything and anything all at once was just what it meant to be a Black girl.

Naomi’s experience in the hair salon was such a rich example of the power of companions in Black girls’ lives. Naomi acknowledged that initially she felt annoyance with the time it took to get her hair done at the salon, but when she reflected on the experience, she found that it was that quality time spent with her mother and hairstylist that ended up providing her with happiness. It
was the experience of being in a safe space with other Black girls and women, where she could literally let her hair down to discuss the peaks and valleys of life, that she was able to experience peace. The conversation with other Black women, who understand, affirmed, and validated her existence was the beauty of the moment for Naomi. Black feminism was created to be able to cradle all the issues of Black women and Black girls because it strives to address the complex needs of Black women/girls by addressing the racial and gender injustices that women face (Crenshaw, 1991). In Naomi’s example above, Black feminist thought occurred in the hair salon because there, in between the roller sets and twists outs, Naomi was experiencing conversations on race, class, gender, identity, and the struggles of living in America with two Black women. In that salon she and the two Black women in that salon were modeling the first theme of Black feminist thought by being able to reflect on their lived experiences as Black girls and women. They were able to use the space to focus on their value, their thoughts, their understanding of self (Collins, 2000). They were modeling the second theme of Black feminist thought by experiencing an interlocking nature of oppression due to their discussion about the connection between the various forms of oppression that the system placed upon them due to their identities of daughter, mother, wife, Black girl, and Black women. (Collins, 1990). Lastly, they were modeling the final theme of Black feminist thought because they were able to engage in a conversation that modeled, “there is no monolithic Black women's culture—rather, there are socially-constructed Black women's cultures that collectively form Black women's culture” (Collins, 2002, p.s22). In that hair salon Naomi and her companions created a space for them to explore and make sense of their social constructed understanding of their identities as three different Black women at different stages/ages of their lives (Collins, 2002, p. s22). The feeling of happiness that came from engaging in that Black feminist thought with her mother and the
hair stylist outweighed Naomi’s feelings of frustration, anger, and disappointment that she said she initially felt when she entered into the space. When she was with those companions she was not left alone to navigate the stresses of life that she faced as a Black girl. She had two companions with her to help her, and that brought her back to feelings of peace and happiness. Therefore, as the girls expressed, dancing in the rain is not about eliminating the stresses of life, but having someone that they can be in relationship with to help them navigate the storms of life.

Madison expressed similar sentiments as Naomi about the power of companionship. She revealed that she found that she could dance in the rain, when she has her cousins and her best friends. Madison stated,

You need somebody there that you love that can help you get through the rough times… I don’t want any Black girl to feel alone. When I am with my family and friends, I know I will be able to get through anything.

When I asked Madison to explain how those relationships help her find happiness in the dark times, she expressed that they provide her with “someone to do things with, someone to have fun with, someone to laugh with. Someone to communicate with.” A reoccurring finding in the data was the thought that Black girls would not be alone in the future. Specifically, the data continued to come back to the power of Black girls never being alone because they always have someone there to support them, which is something that girls want to be true for ALL Black girls in the future. By having a companion, they feel like they can dance in the rain because there dancing buddy is right there dancing alongside them.
**Dancing to the beat of the song inside of us.** While it was important for all Black girls to have a person that they identified as a companion that would dance with them in the rain, the data showed that the girls found that they could find happiness without a physical companion present. Hope named that a philosophy she lives by is, “You should always have fun, even if you're in a bad predicament.” When I asked her to explain who taught her that she said, “Nobody, it’s just my belief” Hope’s assertion about choosing happiness, regardless of the circumstance, was a powerful assertion. It highlighted the power that each Black girl possesses to create happiness for herself. Naomi’s aligned with Hope’s astute assertion that Black girls are powerful and can create happiness for themselves. When Naomi was deciding on a song to represent the future of Black girlhood, she chose the song “There’s Hope” by India Arie. When I asked Naomi to explain how the song represented Black girls having happiness in the future, she began to explain the lyrics as follows:

> It doesn't cost a thing to smile, and be happy and have a good time, which is why I chose it, because Black girls are going through enough things in the world that are stressing us out, we shouldn't complain about those things. Instead, we should find joy in ourselves, and we should find faith and hope and peace, and we should understand that whatever the situation is, there is a way to make it better within ourselves. And even if it doesn't seem like that right now, there is a way to make it better.

Essentially the song encourages Black girls to look within themselves to find happiness and peace. Regardless of the circumstance, if they are with a friend or by themselves, they always have the ability to find happiness, which is the main argument the girls are making with the phrase “dancing in the rain with a big smile.” Additionally, another reoccurring statement in the data was about the influence things like music, books, and nature had on the girls’ happiness. They were able to find happiness with friends and family, but equally found happiness when they
had time by themselves. Note, it was interesting that none of the girls named social media as part of providing them happiness.

As the girls determined the best way to present the image of the phrase, “Dancing in the rain with a big smile,” they decided that they would find an image that had a girl by herself rather than one with another girl physically in the image, which is represented by the image of Figure 14 (Christine, 2017). They wanted the image to exude the thought that Black girls are powerful beings that can experience fun, happiness, and peace regardless of the circumstance in the future. The girls found the image of a Black girl dancing in the rain. They loved the colors in the image because it showed the rain falling on the girl but did not make the image look sad. Instead, with the vibrant colors representing rain drops, the girls felt it expressed their ideas about Black girls having fun, happiness, and peace regardless of the situation. They decided to enhance the image by adding a nontraditional companion to the image. As stated earlier, a reoccurring topic in all the data collected was the power of music in the girls’ lives. One of the most powerful sources of happiness for the girls in the study was music. They loved listening to music throughout the study, discussed music in their semi-structured interview, and created little songs at the workshop. Therefore, they decided that they would include a song they created called “Dance.” The also decided to add an image of a sun to the original image because they wanted to remind Black girls that they have the power turn any negative situation into a positive one, especially if they dance to the beat of the song inside them.
“I am a champion, everything attached to me wins, period.”:

My imagination is connected to the freedom of all

The third theme in this study was power. It was revealed after analyzing all the data collected in this study that power was an essential element that the girls required to thrive in the future. Specifically, the Black girls in this study saw themselves as victorious in Black girlhood if they had the ability to be seen as powerful, valuable members of society who could enact decisions for themselves.

Madison shared a story during the study that models the powerful impact that Black girls can have on society. Madison shared a heart-breaking memory about experiencing racism in the classroom. She stated,

I experienced a racist teacher who used to pick on me and stuff. She would call me out in the middle of class. She would just say things about the way I looked, my clothes, my hair, and stuff like that. It made me feel a little down. But not for long because I decided to do something about it.

Madison decided to resolve the issue by telling her mom about it so that she could help her address the teacher. Madison and her mother went to the school’s principal to address the racist remarks made by the teacher. When I asked Madison how she felt after speaking up for herself she said, “I felt good…Because I did something to stop it. I told somebody about it and the problem was solved.” When asked how she thought that relates to being a Black girl she said, “Sometimes racist people will mess with you and stuff like that. And because of your skin color and that's all it has to be is a skin color. But we don’t have to accept that. We can fight it!”

Madison’s story shows the power that Black girls can exert when they are not limited by others. Madison was able to use her powerful voice to make a change in her experience in the school.
Additionally, as a result of her powerful voice, she was able to make a change for others by holding the adults accountable to address the teacher’s racist behavior.

As Kenneth Hardy (2013) discussed in his scholarship the traumatic hold that racial oppression has on the soul and psyche of people of color, he named that that traumatic hold has found its way into classroom of Black children. Due to the combination of racial oppression and other forms of nonphysical trauma found in racist stereotypes and images; Black girls are having to constantly combat racism in their classrooms (Hardy, 2013). Madison’s experience in her classroom validated Hardy’s (Hardy, 2013) points and it exhibited the power of Black girls being able to use their voices. By not silencing Black girls and allowing them to speak up and out against forms of oppression, we are providing them the opportunity to eradicate change. Madison spoke out about her experience and informed her mother and the school administration. Madison’s actions led to her being able to evoke change in her school experience. Madison’s story inspired the girls to desire to be champions of justice like her. Hence the phrase, “I am a champion” began being used to represent the collective image in Figure 15. Madison showed the other girls the power that one person can have to create positive changes in other lives. This led to the girls thinking about other forms of power they all possessed.
Hope was the catalyst that identified a power that all the girls in the study possessed. Being the youngest in the group, Hope always had a sense of uninhibited possibility about life. She often encouraged the group to dream bigger and stretch themselves to see more possibilities. During the conversation about power Hope brought up an image she found that inspired her personal vision of Black girlhood. The image was of two Black girls high fiving, with the phrase “Never be limited by other peoples limited imagination” displayed across the image (Berrington, 2018). Hope said that she initially selected the image because it had the girls high fiving but, after she looked at it some more, she realized that it was the perfect image because of
the statement it made about imaginations. That statement stood out to Hope because she believed that “you need to use your imagination, it doesn't matter how old you get, it doesn't matter how young you're getting, it doesn't matter how you act, you always need to use your imagination. It can help you and others.” During the semi-structured interview Hope elaborated on the importance of imagination being connected to caring relationships. Hope stated:

So, if you're thinking of something, or if you're playing a game or something, you have to use your imagination so you can think about how you're playing it. Like, me and my Madison, we always play together, and we always use our imagination. It doesn't matter if anything's real, we act like its real, people and stuff. So, even though if they're not real... Like my imaginary dog, I care about him because he's my imaginary dog and he need someone to take care of him. And anything, even though it's not real, it still needs caring. So, even though Madison or I can’t see him, we act like we can and we take care of him. We feed him. Walk him and stuff. Madison knows it’s not real but she knows it matters to me, so she plays along. I know it’s not real but it matters to me so I take care of it.

Hope’s explanation of the power of imagination is layers of genius, in that she acknowledged the power that her mind has to create a shared belief with someone else about an issue that, at the time, is not real. However, Hope’s powerful brain is able to transform an issue that, initially to others does not seem real, into an issue that she and Madison both should care about. She then used her imagination to ideate about strategies to respond to the issue, and then turned those strategies into action for her and Madison to enact. As she and Madison enacted those strategies, they collectively created a new reality. In the example above Hope and Madison are living out Hope’s imagination of caring for a dog. They both are modeling love for one another, supporting each other beliefs, and providing each other with an experience that gives both of them joy. From nothing, the girls created something that honors their core values and shows the power of their mind.
In short, Hope’s explanation on the power of imagination magnified the significance of the phrase, “I am a champion; everything attached to me wins, period” because Hope explained that when Black girls use their power to imagine something it will typically involve someone and/or something else being cared for and nurtured. This is an astute assertion because Black radical imagination is a form of activism and resistance against the current inequities of the world. In order to combat these inequities, it will more than likely require and involve other people to unite, to show compassion, and show care for issues that directly impact them and/or issues that do not directly impact them. As Hope alluded to in her statement, when people use their imagination, it typically does not only involve them and/or the impact of that imagination becoming a reality has ripple effects on other people. When imagining a new world, the girls were not recreating a world solely for themselves; they were recreating a world for other people. For Hope, it was important that Black girls used their imagination to support other Black girls to accomplish tasks that at first might not be real but, with the act of care and the bond of the relationship, were able to become real. In the end they can use their imagination to transform what appears to be impossible into something that is possible. The preceding statement models the second part of the girls’ phrase, “Everything attached to me wins, period” because in the hands of the Black girls in this study they will ensure that all that is connected to them thrives and is cared for. This is further proven when considering the image above was created by Naomi. Once the girls had the phrase for their collective images of girlhood, Naomi used her imagination to create the powerful image in Figure 15. It represents the power of Black girls’ imagination, creativity, intelligence, and voice. Looking at the image you see a Black girl that is confident, owning her power, owning her voice, and owning her ability to create change as a result of her existence. From a blank canvas, Naomi brought the girls’ vision of Black girlhood to life on the
As a result of this act of imagination, the readers are currently learning about the power that Black girls possess and potentially are becoming inspired to help them turn their vision of girlhood into a reality in the future.

**Conclusion**

As I bring this chapter to a close I want to thread the needle on the cohesive vision of Black girlhood from the data collected from this study and the findings that were produced from the data. For the Black girls in this study, Black girlhood in the future is peaceful. The peace of Black girlhood in the future comes from the creation of a world that eradicates White beauty standards, adultification of Black girls, and the notion that powerlessness is tied to Black girls during their girlhood. By eradicating those three forms of oppressions Black girls are able to bask in the diversity of Black beauty, experience a girlhood full of happiness, and be seen as valuable members of society.

For the girls in this study White beauty standards are beauty standards that are tied to colorism, which “privileges light skin and Eurocentric features over dark skin and Afrocentric features,” (Alexander & Carter, 2002, p. 249). The eradication of those White beauty standards provides Black girls peace because it eliminates the energy they place on constantly comparing their beauty to those standards. Moreover, in the future, the girls in this study desired to uplift the diversity of Black beauty by having society recognize that all shades and hair textures of Black girls are beautiful. When the girls expressed the statement, “I wasn’t born a failure boo; I was born a Queen!” they felt that they were combating today’s White standard of beauty and promoting their vision of the future that uplifts all forms of Black beauty. They envisioned every
Black girl saying those words, reading that free-verse poem, and holding their curated image up as a reminder to themselves, and to society, that they were beautifully made from birth.

The second prong of their vision of peace comes from the notions that Black girlhood should be fun. The girls were adamant that Black girlhood had to provide Black girls the opportunity to be kids and do fun things that make them feel happiness. As the girls discussed their vision of girlhood they often mentioned terms like freedom, fun, laughter, and playing. They mentioned that they did not want to be consumed with problems bigger than themselves. When the girls expressed that they did not want to be consumed with problems bigger than them, they were alluding to the notion of adultification. Adultification is the dehumanization of Black children through the removal of the critical component of innocence from the developmental period of Black childhood (Epstein, et al., 2017). Adultification promotes the false narrative that the transgressions of Black youth are intentional and malicious, which then leads adults to justify harsh punishments towards Black children rather than the typical grace shown during the developmental stage of childhood (Epstein, et al., 2017). The 2017 Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality study expressed that the legacy of adultification of Black children is still present and more potent today than in its inception (Epstein, et al., 2017). The study found that contemporary adults view Black girls as less innocent than their peers because they perceived them as require less nurturing, less protection, support, and comforting due to the misconception that Black girls know more about sex and adult topics (Epstein, et al., 2017). When the girls stated, “I’m dancing in the rain with a big smile” they were challenging the darkness of adultification by presenting an image of Black girls engaging in fun, childlike behavior. They are showing society the innocence and purity that exist in Black girls. They are expressing that if adultification did not exists they could engage in activities that would make them feel happy
rather than navigating the stresses that adults place on them. Challenging the darkness of adulthood with the happiness of Black girlhood is evident when they expressed they desired a companion with whom to enjoy life. The girls were specific that the companion did not have to be someone their age, meaning it could be anyone that was willing to support them. Moreover, given the lack of an age requirement, a companion could be viewed as a call in to society as a whole to become a companion to Black girls. Specifically, when society become a companion to Black girls then society will have to stop the adultification of Black girls during their girlhood and start engaging in actions that provide Black girls the opportunity to dance in the rain.

The last component of the girl’s vision of a peaceful girlhood unites all of the concepts and findings in this study. For the girls in this study, they wanted to be viewed as powerful people that matter to everyone in society. They did not want to be seen as powerful, so that they could dominate others. They wanted the world to see them as powerful people who are valuable in society, powerful people that possess unique perspectives and knowledge that can provide freedom to all through the use of their powerful imagination. If Black girls are allowed to have a girlhood that is peaceful, free of stresses of beauty standards, and free of adultification, they can have more capacity to tap into their powerful minds and imaginations. Moreover, as Gholnesar E. Haddix and Marcelle Muhammad (2016) stated, “Black girls can know; simply stated, they have a voice. Black girls are generators and producers of knowledge… Black girls exhibit philosophies and practices that are distinguished from those of other groups,” which for the girls in this study is their ability to use their Black girl imagination (p. 304). When the girls made the statement, “I am a champion, everything attached to me wins, period,” they were expressing to society that their imagination as a Black girl is powerful and, when given the opportunity to freely exercise it, they will use that imagination to create worlds that unlock freedom for all
those connected to them. For inside of them is the connection to all in humanity. Therefore, if Black girls are free to exert their powerful imagination they can unleash a freedom that provides a freedom this world has yet to know.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Chapter 5 presents a critical discussion of the findings that emerged from the data collected. In the discussion section of this chapter relevant literature from Chapter 2 will be discussed. This chapter also includes a summary of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

The silencing and overlooking of Black girls’ perspectives about their experiences in girlhood from mainstream society and scholarship in academia were the problem driving this study (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). The purpose of this study was to “alleviate the knowledge desert that exists around the lives and experiences of Black women and girls” (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 6) by having the Black girls in the study share their stories and experiences of girlhood during the second decade of the 21st century. Additionally, this study was designed to address the aforementioned problem and purpose by examining Black girls’ perspectives on the future imagery of Black girlhood.

The essential question, “In what ways can the perspective of Black girls shape the future imagery of Black girlhood?” guided all aspects of this study. The essential question led to a narrative methodology method called digital storytelling, to be used to support the three Black girls participating in the study as they shared their girlhood experiences, analyzed those experiences, and created images of Black girlhood in the future. These experiences were captured through the following data methods: a research journal, a Black girlhood workshop, and a semi-structured interview. The data collected from these methods produced three overall themes. For the Black girls in this study Black girlhood in the future will be peaceful and will provide Black girls the opportunity to experience beauty, happiness, and power.
Major Contributions

This study contributed to three of the following fields in academia: Girlhood studies, Black feminism, and Black radical imagination. This study contributed to the field of girlhood studies by providing literature on Black girls’ voices about their girlhood experiences. This study contributed to Black feminism by providing insight on Black girls’ standpoint. This study contributed to Black radical imagination studies by showing the unique impact of Black radical imagination theory and the power a place has in inspiring the Black girls in this study to imagine Black girlhood in the future.

Elevating Black Girls’ Voices

Currently, it is hard to find historical documentation and scholarship on the Black girlhood experience, but it is also even harder to find primary sources on Black girlhood in any period of American society (Field et al., 2016). Historian Tammy Cherelle Owens (2015) stated,

But, without fail, at the beginning stages of my research on Black girlhood during the era of slavery, my questions and requests for materials were frequently met with blank stares or suggestions that Black girlhood was lost or that there were simply not enough documents authored by or on behalf of Black girls. (p. 386)

This study provides Black girlhood literature written about Black girls, historical documents that reflect 2023 Black girlhood experience, and primary sources on Black girlhood of today. Muhammad and Adrienne D. Dixson’s (2008) scholarship explains how the Black female experience from childhood through adulthood has often been overlooked by mainstream society, in scholarship, and in academia. For instance, in the field of education, most of the focus in education has been on the underperformance of Black youth or issues relevant to young Black males (Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). This study provided scholarship that focuses on Black girls’ experiences in mainstream society by discussing the activities they engage in throughout
their girlhood. Additionally, this study provided primary sources on Black girls’ experiences in
school that highlight some of the injustices in the school system.

In 2012, the Law Review of UCLA Law School and the Critical Race Studies Program
decided to disrupt the pattern of excluding Black girls from research by hosting a symposium,
“Overpoliced and Underprotected: Women, Race and Criminalization,” which brought together
advocates, lawyers, formerly incarcerated women, and researchers to address the alarming
numbers of Black girls in the prison system as well as criminal supervision of women and girls
of color (Crenshaw, Ocean, & Nanda, 2015). *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and
Under protected* was the culminating report of the symposium. The report exposed the unjust
treatment of Black girls in the education system through the corrupt disciplinary process that
creates the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon that used punitive school policies to funnel
youth from school to prison (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Additionally, the report highlighted the
need for studies to elevate Black girls’ experiences and knowledge. The report noted this:

> [e]merging from the 2012 symposium, it was clear that serious interventions were
necessary to alleviate the knowledge desert that exists around the lives and experiences of
Black women and girls. (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 6)

The findings of this study alleviated the desert of knowledge about the lives and experiences of
Black girls in Memphis by having them share their stories and experiences of girlhood during the
second decade of the 21st century. Lastly, over the years, the girlhood studies department has
grown from being a field focused solely on issues relevant to White, middle class to a more
diverse, multifaceted, and interdisciplinary field that addresses issues that affect girls from
various lifestyles. This study helped girlhood scholarship to continue to develop more diverse
and multifaceted literature by providing literature on the experience of Black girls in Memphis.
Black feminism and Black Girl Standpoint

As Gholnescar E. Haddix and Marcelle Muhammad (2016) stated, “Black girls can know; simply stated, they have a voice. Black girls are generators and producers of knowledge… Black girls exhibit philosophies and practices that are distinguished from those of other groups” (p. 304) which is a Black girl standpoint. With the assistance of Black feminism, this study was able to contribute scholarship that supports Gholnescar E. Haddix and Marcelle Muhammad’s argument that Black girls have a standpoint that creates knowledge that is unique to themselves. More specifically, the Black girls in this study were able to express their Black girl standpoint through the use of Black feminist thought.

Treva Lindsey (2012) expressed the critical analysis needed for Black girls is not always the same for adults: “Children and adolescents are not adults, and an analysis of the female adolescent’s actions must be situated within an analytic framework of Black girl and adolescent empowerment,” (p. 26) which was the reason I chose Black feminist thought as the framework to support the girls as they analyzed their individual and collective experiences as Black girls in Memphis. Black feminist thought honored the intersectionality of the Black girls in this study as they critiqued girlhood and the treatment of Black girls in society.

Traditionally, Black feminist thought uses Black women’s collective knowledge, historical perspective, and lived experience in the world to address issues (hooks, 1992). Black feminist thought values the unique lived experiences of Black women by centralizing their intersecting components of race, gender, and class. Additionally Black feminist thought allows Black women to be the subject and researchers in a unique way that is not present in other intellectual spaces due to Black women feeling like they are the “outsider” in some academic
spaces (Collins, 2000). For this study, the findings showed that Black feminist thought was relevant to Black girls in this study because it provided the Black girls a sacred space to use their collective knowledge, historical perspective, and lived experience to create imagery of Black girlhood. Moreover, this study provided the unique opportunity for the girls in this study to be the subject and researcher as they critiqued and analyzed the impact that their intersecting identities had on their current experiences of Black girlhood. As a result of their dualistic role, they were able to create a vision of Black girlhood that addressed those critiques.

The first theme of Black feminist thought is anchored on the lived experience of Black women in that the criterion for Black feminist thought is to collect and/or share knowledge of Black women’s lived experiences (Collins, 2000). The data collected in this study provided first-hand accounts of the lived experiences of the Black girls in this study, while also providing findings about the lived experiences they want Black girls to have in the future. Additionally, the girls created their own definition of Black girlhood and shared their historical perspective of Black girlhood in 2023. During the study the girls discussed their individual and shared experiences navigating the highs and lows of their life, which represents the second theme of Black feminist thought due to it allowing the girls to determine the connection between the various forms of oppression that the system places upon them due to their identities (Collins, 1990). Moreover, they were able to identify the collective impact that the oppression of Whiteness, colorism, beauty standards, racism, and other forms of oppression had on creating stressful lives for Black girls (Lipsitz, 2006). This revelation led to them living into the final theme of Black feminist thought by providing the girls with an experience that allowed them to formulate a consciousness about the workings of the oppressions occurring in their lives, which
then allowed them to recognize the opportunity to enact activism against the various forms of oppression via the counter narratives shared in the findings in this study (Collins, 2002).

The Power of Imagination

The method of activism that the girls in this study used to address the various forms of oppression in their Black girlhood experience was Black radical imagination. The theory of Imagination and imaginaries is a complex concept that is formed from a multitude of conceptualizations that are neither completely a reflection of reality nor completely a figment of a person’s imagination (O’Reilly, 2014). It is a concept that is formed through socially constructed, taken-for-granted meanings and beliefs about events, places, and people (Stokowski et al., 2021). Scholar Robin D. G. Kelley’s (2002) Black Radical Imagination unites race and imagination to address issues by offering freedom to scholars and everyday people after they complete the process of examining, imagining, and reimagining a new vision of the present state of society and the future state of society. Moreover, Black Radical Imagination is forged from critical analysis of the current realities of society and social problems (Kelley, 2002). Amber Caprice Sizemore Davis’s (2022) phenomenal study Nurturing Black Girl Imagination: Using Portraiture to Disrupt the Omnipresence of Black Girlhood and to Illuminate Black Girls’ Childhoodness, Creativity, and Criticality in Science Learning Spaces used Black girl imagination and portraiture to highlight Black girls’ childhood experiences and creativity when they engaged in science classes. This study used the power of place and Black girls’ standpoint on their girlhood experiences to ignite the imagination of the Black girls in this study to create their vision of a peaceful Black girlhood in the future.
The girls in this study used Black radical imagination to examine the present state of society for Black girls and reimagined a new society for Black girls. They reimagined girlhood to be peaceful for Black girls instead of providing them with the stress of navigating racism and other forms of oppression. They reimagined society's perception of beauty by having all Black girls viewed as beautiful and worthy of having experiences that provide them beauty. They reimagined happiness in Black girlhood to be an experience that all Black girls have as a result of not being alone. Additionally, they reimagined happiness in Black girlhood by creating a vision of Black girlhood that provided experiences for Black girls to have a carefree girlhood, rather than the current one that uses adultification to eliminate girlhood for Black girls (Epstein, et al., 2017). Adultification removes the critical component of innocence from the developmental period of Black childhood by promoting the narrative that the transgressions of Black youth are intentional, malicious, and warrant harsh punishments instead of the typical grace shown during the developmental stage of childhood (Epstein, et al., 2017). Additionally, the results in the 2017 Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood study found that the adultification of Black girls, ages 5-19, results in adults seeing them as needing less nurturing support, comfort, and protection than their White peers (Epstein, et al., 2017). The Black girls in this study used Black radical imagination to challenge adultification by creating an image of girlhood where society values Black girls and their power and sees them as a powerful source of knowledge that will positively impact the world.

**Implications**

This study had the opportunity to enrich and contribute to current research and literature on Black girlhood by providing firsthand accounts of Black girls’ experiences in Black girlhood and insight on methods to support Black girls as they matriculated through girlhood. The
findings of this study have several implications that may be significant for people working with Black girls and scholars who are conducting research that includes Black girls. Moreover, this research study holds implications for theoretical and cultural research. Additionally, it holds implications for methods used in academia and has implications for all who are concerned with the positive engagement and/or development of Black girls.

Theoretical

The theoretical framework for this study was rooted in two theories: Black feminism and Black radical imagination. Both theories provided the study with the framework necessary to hear the girls' authentic truths and provided them with the tools necessary to create future images of Black girlhood.

- Hope, Naomi, and Madison each identified as Black girls and discussed their experiences from an intersectional identity, thus when working with Black girls it is imperative that theories like Black feminism are utilized to honor their intersectional identity. Specifically, Black feminist theory honored the intersectionality of girls by providing a space for them to form connections as they analyzed and made sense of the various forms of oppression that the system places upon them due to their identities (Collins, 1990). Therefore, scholars seeking a framework to provide space for Black girls’ voices to resonate should consider using Black feminist thought due to its ability to create a space where Black girls can be their unapologetic, nonmonolithic selves.

- The launching pad for the girls’ vision of future Black girlhood was their Black radical imagination. Robin D. Kelly’s (2002) Black Radical Imagination provided the girls tools to enact an act of resistance from the limitation of their current realities, identities, and/or societal expectation by helping them to use their imagination to create a counternarrative
about Black girls’ realities in the future. When asking the girls to create a new reality for Black girls a racialized imagination theory provided them the best tool to imagine a future for their intersectional identity. Therefore, scholars seeking insight on acts of resistance or thoughts of future change from an intersectional group, like Black girls, should include Black feminist thought and Black radical imagination in their theoretical approach.

**Digital Storytelling**

The results of this study imply the usefulness of the narrative methodology. Digital storytelling method provided age responsive formats for the girls to engage in to express their narratives. Digital storytelling provided the girls with the opportunity to put sound, voice, and images to their lived experiences and their creation of Black girlhood in the future (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

- Digital storytelling is an approach to narrative methodology that uses the power of digitized images to enhance the content of the story shared from the participant(s) (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The data collected and the results of this study included different formats of narrative that honored the girls’ stories and provided digitized images that the girls curated to reflect their stories about girlhood.

- When working with girls ages 11-17 a methodology that is responsive to their age group and provides easy access for them to engage with was critical. Digital storytelling method was created to aid everyday people to share their stories with the world (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The process of creating a digital story was user friendly for ordinary people because it only required participants to engage in two two steps. First, the participants construct their narrative by writing a script or outline of their experience in
order to guide their digital layout. Then they find images, sounds, and video clips to bring that script to life (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Black girls in this study needed a method that would be able to honor their multifaceted, intersectional identity, and the digital storytelling method proved to be a methodology that enabled them to engage in the study as their authentic selves. Researchers seeking similar knowledge that this study was seeking or who are working with younger participants should consider using the digital storytelling method.

**Cultural**

This study implies that Black girls have always had voices but have not had many opportunities in society or in academia to share those voices. Therefore, for the positive development of Black girls provide opportunities for them to share their voice.

- Treva Lindsey (2012) acknowledged, “Centering on Black girls and adolescents shifts the analysis to a discussion of consent, coercion, self-esteem, empowerment, and the role of popular culture in the lives of Black girls and adolescents,” (p. 26) but the key word in their statement is “centering.” In order for society or academia to have discussions that are relevant to Black girls they must “center” Black girls in their discussions. The result of this study implicates that Lindsey’s assertion is correct, the girls in this study discussed self-esteem, empowerment, and the role of popular culture. However, it is important to note that the girls in this study did not address consent or coercion. This could be due to a myriad of reasons: age, comfortability, or a lack exposure. Nevertheless, when anyone is working with Black girls they should be prepared for a range of topics to be discussed.
• Black girls have always had a voice but have not always been given the opportunity to express it. Therefore, when interacting with Black girls provide opportunities for them to share their voice and perspectives with all parties involved. The concept of adultification was prevalent in my mind, in that I did not want to perpetuate the notion that Black girls are less innocent than their peers because society perceives them as requiring less nurturing and less support (Epstein et al., 2017). Therefore, I created semi-structured question that were open-ended and really attempted to remove myself as much from the conversation as possible. As a result of those actions, I noticed that none of the girls discussed sex or sexuality during the study. Adultification has society thinking all Black girls are thinking about those topics, but for the girls in my study, sex or sexuality were not ever mentioned. However, racism and the unfair treatment to them based upon their race was a prevalent topic that they discussed at length. By not viewing the girls as anything other than innocent girls who deserved grace, I saw them for who they were in the moment in the study, and I used my reflection journal to check myself throughout the processes. Therefore, as a society we must enact the same practice of openly listening to Black girls when they speak and limit our interruption of them when they express themselves. We must co-construct experiences with them by showing agility when plans need to be adapted to honor the needs of the girls in our care. Lastly, we must create systems to check our biases, stereotypes, and deficit mindsets when working with Black girls.

• The final point for this section is about creating environments for Black girls to feel vulnerable to share their voices. For anyone working with Black girls it is imperative that you provide them access to an environment that affirms their identity. This study took
great measure to provide locations that were centrally located in the city and provided them with an environment I thought would allow them to share their perspective of girlhood. Consider the location, the setup of the space, the material used, the neighborhood, and all other aspects that could impact the girls feeling safe.

**Organizations, Teachers, and Individuals that work with Black girls**

Black girls deserve to be in an environment that encourages them to thrive, which is why more studies must be conducted to inform practitioners and scholars of better strategies and practices that will transform the world into a safe space for all Black girls.

**Recommendation for Organizations, Teachers, and Individuals working with Black girls**

The findings of this study showed that Black girls have opinions about the experiences that they are encountering in their daily life. As an organization that works with Black girls ensure you are frequently creating opportunities for Black girls to share their opinions on the proficiency of your program. Model that you are listening to them by modeling a member check. During this study I issued a member check of my findings and received direct feedback from the girls to change aspects of the findings to better represent them. Specifically, I was told, to change the word joy to happiness. The girls provided a detailed explanation of their perspective of the word, which enlightened me and strengthened the overall findings of this study. When the Black girls in your organization share their thoughts with you, acknowledge you hear them, and show them that you are honoring their words.

**Recommendation for policy**

The girls in this study did not mention one policy that supported them. They did not list a policy maker and or current day civic leader as vital people part of the Black girlhood
experience. Specifically, Hope desired to create her own museum in the future, so she could place more relevant historical examples of people supporting Black girls in the museum. Additionally, all the girls in the study expressed a desire to learn more about the community and city of Memphis. Policy makers and civic leaders are part of the Memphis community, and they must become more present in Black girlhood. Specifically, they should be including Black girls in the political process, show them how policies are made, explain how policies and laws impact them.

For policy makers the findings of this study show that there is a lot of work to do when it comes to creating school environments and other spaces in our society safe for Black girls. The girls in this study discussed experiencing racism in their schools and discussed the racist messages found in social media about Black girls. Moving forward, we must create stronger policies against racism, colorism, and other forms of oppression towards Black girls. We must hold people accountable who enact these violations and provide Black girls an opportunity to be part of the policy-making process.

**Recommendations for families**

One of the most influential groups in the girls’ lives were their family members. During the study the girls shared stories about the positive impact the maternal figures had in their lives. Their maternal figures provided the girls a safe space to be themselves, to learn, to grow, to make mistakes, and often provided them happiness. Additionally, the girls discussed other family members that provided support, encouragement, guidance in their lives.
• It is important for all families with Black girls to be a safe space for Black girls to learn, grow, and to experience happiness. Expose the girls to versatile experiences in the city and support them when they step outside their comfort zone to try new things.

• As family members make sure you are seeing the Black girls in your family for who they truly are, nurture their passions, and do not try to limit their growth. Provide them with resources and support them in becoming their best self.

• Families continue to model effective strategies of successfully navigate the world because the girls in this study gave rich examples of life lessons learned from watching how the people in their family responded to adversity and success.

• Lastly, never stop nurturing their imagination. Each girl could name an individual in their family that supported their dreams and their imaginations. By nurturing their imagination you are encouraging the girls to continue to dream, which could lead to the girls creating actionable steps to transform their dreams into realities.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study attempted to enhance the current literature on Black girls and address gaps in research about Black girlhood in Memphis. While the findings provided insight on three Black girls’ perspectives on girlhood, I know more research in the future can further enrich the field of Black girlhood to ensure that we honor the nonmonolithic experiences of Black girls matriculating through girlhood. Moreover, this study is a call for greater investment in producing studies and readings about Black girl counter stories. Therefore, I have the following recommendations for future research on Black girlhood:
1. I suggest that we hear from more Black girls about their experiences as they matriculate through girlhood. A national study gathering Black girls’ experiences on Black girlhood in different cities could provide scholarship with more primary sources of Black girlhood in America during the 21st century. Additionally, a national study would “alleviate the knowledge desert that exists around the lives and experiences” of Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 6). However, the study must not be in violation of honoring the needs of a locale once the study is conducted. All resources and support in response to the study must support the various locations in which the study occurred and will need to be responsive to the different locales that participated in the study. Each locale is unique, just as each Black girl is unique.

2. This study should be replicated but it should include larger sample sizes of Black girls. This study only included three Black girls’ perspectives on Black girlhood in Memphis, which provided a rich insight on the experience of Black girls and their perspectives of the future. However, additional insight on Black girls’ perspectives on Black girlhood could be collected if future research used a larger sample of Black girls. Yet the focus of the locale where the study is conducted must remain a vital component of the study.

3. This study focused on Black girls ages 11-17, which created a wide range of ages and grade levels between the girls in the study. Specifically, this study had one girl in elementary school, one girl in middle school, and one girl in high school. Studies that examine Black girlhood could enhance the literature on Black girlhood by designing their studies to focus on gathering stories of Black girlhood from homogeneous sample sets aligned to age and/or grade levels in a specific locale.
4. I recommend we create more Black girlhood workshops and symposiums to gather Black girls’ perspectives on addressing specific issues within the community. Similar to the 2012, the Law Review of UCLA Law School and the Critical Race Studies Program hosting the “Overpoliced and Under protected: Women, Race and Criminalization” symposium, more departments in colleges and community organization should work together to ensure that an annual symposium for Black girls occurs in their cites.

5. There should be an incubator created that nurtures Black girl’s imaginations so that they can vibrantly and uninhibitedly thrive in a sacred space design by Black girls for Black girls. Additionally, it should be a fun, safe place where Black girls can engage in educational development, explore their imaginations of the future, and find strategies to transform their imaginations into realities.

6. All educators and people engaging in programming with Black girls should ensure that the curriculum, the policies, and the execution of those policies provide Black girls the opportunity to have fun while also providing opportunities for Black girls to share their voices about their experiences within that programming. The feedback collected from the Black girls on their experience in the program should then be transformed into strategies to strengthen the program.

**Conclusion**

As Kevin T. Smiley, Wanda Rushing, and Michele Scott (2016) have argued the power of a place is that it has an impact on the individual’s living in the place, and it is important for scholars to capture that knowledge. Centering Black girls’ voices is an act of resistance, especially in today’s society. America is a place where the silencing of Black girls and their girlhood experience has been deafening since the origin of American history. Black girls were
silenced with the inception of the concept of childhood because their experiences were not taken into consideration due to adultification. Black girls’ voices have been muffled regarding the unjust practices occurring in their schools and their voices have been overshadowed by the stereotypical images presented in society. This study actively resisted the injustice towards Black girls by increasing the volume of Black girl voices so that society and academia could hear them more clearly. By having the Black girls in this study share their perspective on Black girlhood today and share their perspective of Black girlhood in the future; it is my hope that all will be encouraged to transform the current structures so Black girls can have a girlhood that allows them to thrive. Furthermore, it is my hope that it inspires all of us to ask the questions, “What other voices are missing?” or “Who else should we include in this conversation?” As a nation, we should begin to think critically about the human experience that we are all creating when drafting polices, laws, procedures, rules, products, posts for social media, and/or images. Before sharing those drafts with the world, ask those two questions, “What other voices are missing?” or “Who else should we include in this conversation?” This will help us to remember that every decision we make has an impact on someone else that could have lasting effects.
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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
215 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

October 10, 2023

PI Name: Jamesha Hayes
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Beverly Cross
Submission Type: Initial
Title: Black Girlhood Study
IRB ID: PRO-FY2024-17

Expedited Approval: October 10, 2023

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse event for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

For additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.6783.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.
Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

I WANT TO HEAR YOUR VOICES BLACK GIRLS!

- ARE YOU A BLACK FEMALE BETWEEN THE AGES OF 11-17?
- ARE YOU INTERESTED IN CREATING IMAGES OF BLACK GIRLHOOD?
- ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES OF GROWING UP IN MEMPHIS AS A BLACK GIRL?
- DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW, CREATE VIDEOS, TAKE PICTURES, WRITE POEMS, WRITE SONG LYRICS, OR LISTEN TO MUSIC?

If you answered yes to the questions above, consider participating in my research study about Black girlhood!

1. What you’ll do: Create future images of Black girlhood and share your lived experiences of growing up as a Black girl in Memphis in different formats like music, written, videos, pictures, etc.

PARTICIPATION FOR THE STUDY IS STRICTLY VOLUNTARY!
IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THIS STUDY AND MEET THE CRITERIA, PLEASE CONTACT ME DIRECTLY VIA EMAIL OR PHONE:

Jamesha Hayes
Jamesha.L.Hayes@gmail.com
901-463-0875
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. Do you have examples of Black girlhood that you encounter daily?
   a. If so, explain where you encounter them?
2. Tell me when you experienced something and thought, “this is the beauty of being a Black girl?
3. Are there any images that come to mind when you think of Black girlhood?
   a. Where did you see those images?
   b. What does that make you think of for yourself and other Black girls?
   c. Why do you think that image stuck with you?
4. Are there any images that come to mind when you think of Black girlhood in Memphis?
Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent for Research Participation

Title
Creating Future Images of Black Girlhood Research Study

Researcher
Jamesha Hayes, University of Memphis

Researchers Contact Information
(901) 463-0875, Jamesha.L.Hayes@gmail.com

Your daughter is being invited to take part in this research study on Black girlhood. The box below highlights key information for you to consider when deciding if you want to allow your daughter to participate. More detailed information is provided below the box. Please ask the researcher any questions about the study before you make your decision. If you allow your daughter to volunteer for this study, she will be one of about three girls to do so.

Key Information for You to Consider

Voluntary Consent: You are being asked for permission for your daughter to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to allow her to participate or not. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you or your daughter are otherwise entitled if you choose not to allow them to participate or discontinue participation.

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to identify the perspective Black girls have about Black girlhood in Memphis and hear their vision of Black girlhood in the future.

Duration: It is expected that your participation will last 10 hours over the next month.

Procedures and Activities: During the study your daughter will participate in the following:

- A Saturday Black girlhood workshop from 10:00 am-5:00 pm at a location that is centrally located in the city that is not a school. Some possible locations are Teach for America, Memphis office in Crosstown Concourse, Pyro’s Fire Fresh Pizza on Union’s conference room, or Panera Bread on Popular conference room. Girls will be transported to the workshop by a parent/family/guardian or by
Uber at my expense. During the workshop they will engage in icebreakers, create images of Black girlhood, and create a 3–5-minute digital presentation explaining the images of Black girlhood they created during the workshop. During the workshop breakfast and lunch will be provided.

• After the Black girlhood workshop, they will attend a two-hour interview with the researcher that allows them to discuss the presentation they created during the workshop, and they will discuss their unique Black girlhood experiences. During the interview they may skip questions that make them uncomfortable, and they can stop the interview at any time. The interview will be scheduled within three weeks of the workshop, and they will be based on your child’s schedule. Your child can choose to have this interview conducted in person or virtual.

• Lastly, they will meet with the researcher for an hour to make sure everything they shared during the workshop and interview is correctly explained in the study. All interview locations will either be in person or virtual and will be based on your child’s preference of in person or virtual.

**Risk:** To the best of my knowledge, the things your child will be doing have no more risk of harm than your child would experience in everyday life. If something makes your child feel uncomfortable while they are in the study, I will stop the study to see if your child wants to continue to participate in the study. If your child decides at any time that they do not want to finish the study, they may stop whenever they want. I will inform you that your child has decided to stop participating in the study. If something emotionally makes your child uncomfortable, I will contact you to inform you of the incident and provide you with the information about mental health services. If there is a crisis I will call the statewide toll-free crisis hotline at: 855-CRISIS-1 (855-274-7471) to get immediate support and I will contact you to let you know about the crisis.

**Benefits:** There is no guarantee that your child will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, your child’s willingness to take part in the study could help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

**Alternatives:** Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate.
Who is conducting this research?
Jamesha Hayes of the University of Memphis, Department of Instruction and Curriculum is in charge of the study. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Beverly Cross.

Why is this research being done?
The purpose is to identify the perspective Black girls have about Black girlhood in Memphis and hear their vision of Black girlhood in the future. Your child is being invited to take part in this research study because as a Black female, between the ages of 11-17, she has the potential to give a unique perspective on the experience of Black girlhood that could contribute to scholarship that will help people better understand Black girlhood. This research study will also have your child create images of Black girlhood, which could encourage society to create the systems and structures needed to support Black girls as they go through girlhood.

How long will your child be in this research?
All research procedures will be conducted at a location that is centrally located in the city that is not a school. Some possible locations are Teach for America, Memphis office in Crosstown Concourse, Pyro’s Fire Fresh Pizza on Union’s conference room, or Panera Bread on Poplar conference room. Girls will be transported to the workshop by a parent/family/guardian or by Uber at my expense.

- The first part of the study will be an in-person Saturday Black girl workshop that will take 7 hours.
- The second part of the study will be an in-person interview that will be 2 hours. Note, if your child prefers to conduct this interview virtually they can choose that option, which would eliminate the need for them to meet at one of the locations mentioned above.
- The last part of the study will be an hour in-person meeting for your daughter to ensure the researcher correctly explained the information they shared during the study. Again, if your child prefers to conduct this portion virtually they can choose that option, which would eliminate the need for them to meet at one of the locations mentioned above.

The total amount of time your child will be asked to volunteer for this study is **10 hours** over the **next month**.
What happens if you agree to your child participating in this Research?

If you agree to allow your daughter to participate in this study she will be asked to participate in the following:

- A Saturday Black girlhood workshop from 10:00 am-5:00 pm at a location that is centrally located in the city that is not a school. Some possible locations are Teach for America, Memphis office in Crosstown Concourse, Pyro’s Fire Fresh Pizza on Union’s conference room, or Panera Bread on Popular conference room. Girls will be transported to the workshop by a parent/family/guardian or by Uber at my expense. During the workshop they will engage in icebreakers, create images of Black girlhood, and create a 3–5-minute digital presentation explaining the images of Black girlhood they created during the workshop. During the workshop breakfast and lunch will be provided.

- After the Black girlhood workshop, she will attend a two-hour interview with the researcher that allows her to discuss the presentation she created during the workshop, and she will discuss her unique Black girlhood experiences. During the interview she may skip questions that make her uncomfortable, and she can stop the interview at any time. The interview will be scheduled within three weeks of the workshop, and they will be based on your child’s schedule. Your child can choose to have this interview conducted in person or virtual.

- Lastly, she will meet with the researcher for an hour to make sure everything she shared during the workshop and interview is correctly explained in the study. All interview locations will either be in person or virtual and will be based on your child preference of in person or virtual.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

I will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify your child to the extent allowed by law. When I write about the study to share it with other researchers, I will write about the individual perspectives I have gathered. Your child will be identified by a self-selected pseudonym, false name, when represented in the final research publication. Your child will not be personally identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, I will keep your child’s name and other identifying information private.

Any data collected from the workshops, interviews, and consent forms will be stored in
a locked cabinet in my home office while not being analyzed. All digital forms of data will be stored on a password protected computer. Additionally, to avoid any tampering or breach of trust, I am the only person who will analyze the data, which, when not in use, will be locked away on a password protected computer and a locked file cabinet in my home office. Only unidentifiable transcripts will be retained indefinitely. The consent forms and master list of participants’ names and pseudonyms will be destroyed immediately after the study.

**How will my child’s privacy and data confidentiality be protected?**

I promise to protect your child privacy and security of their personal information as best I can. Although, you need to know about some limits to this promise.

Measures I will take include:

- Not using your child’s name in data or other identifiable information to protect their identity.
  - At the start of the Black girlhood workshop, they will be asked to choose a pseudonym, false name, which will be used in any published material.
- None of your child’s perspectives will be shared with their schools.
- Conducting the Black girlhood workshop and other interviews from a location that offers them privacy to protect their identity.
- Excluding all identifying information.
- Storing the collected data on the researcher’s passcode-protected computer using password protected files. Only I will have access to the data.

I will keep private all research records that identify your child to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which I may have to show your child’s information to other people. For example, I am required to report if I suspect child abuse or neglect, or suicidal thoughts. TN Laws may require this suspicion be reported. In such case, I may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to disclose personal information.

**What are the risks of my child participating in this research?**

Your child might experience an emotional distress and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study.

**What are the benefits of my child participating in this research?**

There is no guarantee that your child will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, your child’s willingness to take part in the study could help the advancement
of knowledge on the experiences of Black girlhood in Memphis due to her sharing her stories of Black girlhood in Memphis. Additionally, a benefit to society is receiving insight on Black girls’ perspectives on the experiences and images they desire for the future of Black girlhood. Both benefits provide society with an opportunity to reflect on their involvement with Black girlhood and provide them with an opportunity to create the systems and structures needs to support Black girls as they matriculate through girlhood.

**What if my child wants to stop participating in this research?**

It is up to you to decide whether you will allow your daughter to volunteer for this study.

If your child decides to take part in the study your child still has the right to decide at any time that they no longer want to continue. It is also ok for them decide to end participation at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled if they decide to withdraw their participation. Your child will not be treated differently if your child decides to stop taking part in the study nor will it affect their relationship with the researcher or the University of Memphis.

Any data collected prior to the child’s exit will be used for the study. I may need to withdraw your child from the study. This may occur if your child is not able to follow the directions I give your child or if I find that your child's being in the study is more risk than benefit to your child.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

There are no costs associated with participation in this research study.

**Will I receive any compensation or reward for participating in this research?**

Your child will not be compensated for taking part in this research. However, breakfast and lunch will be provided during the Black girlhood workshop.

**Who can answer my question about this research?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation for your child to take part in the study, please ask any questions that come to mind. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Jamesha Hayes at Jamesha.L.Hayes@gmail.com or 901-463-0875. If you have any questions
about your child’s rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705 or email irb@memphis.edu. I will give you a signed copy of this permission form to take with you.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to consider the information in this document. I have asked any questions needed for me to decide about my child’s participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions through the study.

By signing below, I am allowing my child to volunteer to participate in this research. I understand that I am not waiving any legal rights. I have been given a copy of this consent document. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, my legal representative or I may be asked to consent again prior to my continued participation.

As described above, your child will be audio recorded while performing the activities described above. Audio recording will be used during the interview, and I will have it transcribe so that the information gather from the interview can be part of data collected for this study. Initial the space below if you consent to the use of audio recorded as described.

_____ I agree to the use of audio recording my child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Parent Signing Consent Form</th>
<th>Signature of Parent Signing Consent From</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Researcher Signature (To be completed at the time of Informed Consent)

I have explained the research to the parent of the child volunteering to participate in this research study and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understand the information described in this consent and freely consents to allow their child to participate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Research Team Member</th>
<th>Signature of Research Team Member</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Appendix E: Assent Form

ASSENT FORM

Creating Future Images of Black Girlhood Research Study

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Jamesha Hayes, a doctoral student, from the University of Memphis because as a Black female, between the ages of 11-17, you have the potential to give a unique viewpoint of the experience of Black girlhood. The purpose of this study is to hear your stories about your experiences of Black girlhood in Memphis and to learn about the images of Black girlhood you desire to see in the future.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to attend the following:

- A Saturday Black girlhood workshop from 10:00 am-5:00 pm at a location that is centrally located in the city that is not a school. Some possible locations are Teach for America, Memphis office in Crosstown Concourse, Pyro’s Fire Fresh Pizza on Union’s conference room, or Panera Bread on Popular conference room. You will be transported to the workshop by someone in your family or by an Uber at my expense.

- During the workshop you will engage in icebreakers, create images of Black girlhood, and create a 3–5-minute digital presentation explaining the images of Black girlhood you created during the workshop. During the workshop breakfast and lunch will be provided.

- After the Black girlhood workshop, you will attend a two-hour interview with the researcher that allows you to discuss the presentation you created during the workshop, and you will discuss your unique Black girlhood experiences. During the interview you may skip questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can stop the interview at any time.

- Your interview will be scheduled within three weeks of the workshop, and they will be based on your schedule. Note, you can choose to have your interview in person or virtually. If you select to meet in person then it will be at location in midtown that is not a school. Some possible locations are Teach for America, Memphis office in Crosstown Concourse, Pyro’s Fire Fresh Pizza on Union’s conference room, or Panera Bread on Popular conference room. Girls will be transported to the workshop by a parent/family/guardian or by an Uber at my expense.

- Lastly, you will meet with the researcher for an hour to make sure everything you shared is correctly explained in the study. All interview locations will either be in person or virtual and will be based on your choice of in person or virtual.

- Participation in this study is a total of 10 hours, which includes the 7-hour workshop, 2-hour interview, and 1 hour meeting to review the information shared during the study.

- There is no payment for this study.

Your family will know that you are in the study. At the start of the Black girlhood workshop, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym, false name, which will be used in any published material.
If something makes you feel uncomfortable while you are in the study, please tell Jamesha Hayes, so that she will stop the study to see if you want to continue to participate in the study. If you decide at any time you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want. I will contact your parent to inform them of the incident and provide them with the information to support you. If something emotionally makes you feel uncomfortable, I will contact your parent to inform them of the incident and provide them with information about mental health services. If there is a crisis I will call the statewide toll-free crisis hotline at 855-CRISIS-1 (855-274-7471) to get immediate support and I will contact your parent to let them know about the crisis.

You can ask Jamesha Hayes questions any time about anything in this study by email Jamesha.L.Hayes@gmail.com or phone 901-463-0875. You can also ask your parent any questions you might have about this study.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

________________________________________  ______________________________
Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study  Date Signed

________________________________________  ______________________________
Printed name of Person Agreeing to be in the Study  Date Signed

________________________________________  ______________________________
Signature of Person Agreeing to be audio record in the Study  Date Signed

________________________________________  ______________________________
Printed named of Person Agreeing to be audio record in the Study  Date Signed

________________________________________  ______________________________
Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed assent  Date Signed