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CURVING SPACETIME: ON PERFORMANCE, PLEASURE, AND THE IMAGINARY
BLACK GIRLHOOD SEXUAL POLITICS

A Dissertation in
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by
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a theoretical study of Black girlhood identity in space and time. While space and time are broad imaginings, this study focuses on Black girlhood identity amidst powerfully constructed layers of space and time, established by whiteness, patriarchy, and respectability. The work investigates how Black girlhood—Black girls performing identity—bend the powerfully constructed layers of space and time constructed to contain them.

Performance is most commonly understood as execution of action\(^1\). Within this study, Black girlhood and spaces created via Black girlhood identity are envisioned as a black hole where such performance is read through art-making, discussion, the imaginary—the sites of intellectual, physical, and creative production—and play become explosive sites of convergence.

Density is one of the things which makes the black hole unique. This study views Black girlhood amidst the backdrop of White supremacy, patriarchy, and respectability as the densest of matter(s). Physicist John Archibald Wheeler’s (1998) summary of Einstein’s theory of general relativity coins this extreme point of density wherein “[m]atter tells spacetime how to curve, and curved space tells matter how to move” (Ford & Wheeler, 2000, p. 235). I reason Black girls’ innate bending is a major element in the black hole make-up as they are not only guided by space and time—the spaces they are moved and bounded to—but simultaneously guide this interest by way of their movements, interactions, aesthetics, performances, and creative production(s). Thus, the

\(^1\) Part 1of Merriam-Webster’s definition of *performance*. Full definition to be utilized further and throughout the dissertation.
study is a reinvestigation of space(s) I created with Black girls, one being, The Vibrator Project. I created The Vibrator Project as an arts-based participatory research site to facilitate a study of pleasure among Black girls ages 14-21.

The convergence of space and time I explore takes place as Black girlhood\(^2\). My specific interest is in investigating the explosive quality of such a space(s). As any black hole at its farthest limit of density has explosive potential; so, do the interactions of Black girlhood in *what feels good*, *what tastes good*, and *what sounds good*. I understand such reasoning(s) as pleasure; and in this study, seek out how the sexual, physical, and emotional pleasure(s) generated in Black girlhood spaces further steer the convergence of space and time in and beyond Black girlhood spaces, ultimately revealing the fantastic\(^3\) potential (i.e. ability(s) by which fanciful interpretations of life experiences are crafted) of Black girlhood on social movement(s), aesthetics, and established systems of order.


\(^3\) Engaging Richard Iton’s (2008) use of “the fantastic” that points to a practice of moving between what is “grounded” and the “dadaesque ambiguity”, a “resistance of fixedness” coupled with consideration of a certain realm of fiction storytelling attributed to writers such as Toni Morrison (Iton, 2010, p. 11). This connection is to be explored further within the dissertation, as it concerns the imaginary in Black girlhood narratives.
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When you give me this degree, give my Mother her Ph.D.
I theorize in my Mother’s tongue.

No matter the many ways around, you sent me
I still find Her archives. Still, She is with me everywhere I find myself.
in every word written.

White men and their friends get paid to ponder the puzzles left by the named and archived —
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pedagogy
cumulative.

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I am truly grateful.
Chapter 1

Overview and Organization of the Study

Overview and History of the Study

A definition of pleasure belongs here, at the beginning.

I stood next to Her, tall and slender, red-boned,

Auntie, on the sidelines of the Gold Coast skate rink, probably Friday night

_Pop that coochie, hey!/ pop-pop-pop the coochie/

_pop that coochie babaye!

She sang it loud. She pointed her long red-boned and slender arm to the ceiling and swirled it.

I stood beneath her, eyes widely mesmerized to reach the point of her finger, shook.

Undoubtedly, I had heard the popular tune on the radio and out of the mouths of my hoodrat playmates. It was 2 Live Crew. It was 1991. And I was 10.

_pop-pop-pop the coochie!

She licked her plump red lips around those words. She swirled it. And I was exhilarated at her saying, knowing, where, how, and to whom she might “pop that coochie”. I was exhilarated by her playfulness, by her girl-ness, by her rebellion

To lick her lips, to throw her pointed red finger, to swirl it to know what and how.
I’ve held this childhood memory, oftentimes, tucked away. Life and a career in a Black woman’s body conditioned me, distracted me from the ways my many Mothers, Aunties, and Grandmothers taught me pleasure, wrote the pleasure pedagogy right before my eyes. She (as in a collective and femme lineage) defined pleasure for me, from the intimacy of bath time rituals with my mother as a toddler, to lace cuffed socks, to the rights of passage from white stockings to nude pantyhose, from slips and camisoles, and matching bras and panty sets, to lessons on hormones and hygiene beneath my mothers’ acute noses and squinted eyes, *that shower was mighty fast, did you make the sign-of-the-cross?*

I watched my mothers, aunts, and grandmothers dress and undress, roller set their hair, pulling stockings up their thick thighs, cook, sing, dance, swirl it. I bore witness to their pleasure pedagogies, and have thus determined the necessity of feeling good, looking good, tasting good. There is much more to pleasure, of course. But here is where it begins for me and this work. This dissertation chronicles a prototype for expressive power, a pleasure pedagogy.

Herein, *pleasure* is defined in the vein of Audre Lorde’s use of the *erotic*[^4], and Michel Foucault’s understanding of pleasure[^5]. Pleasure is a moment, defined by its intensity, quality, duration, as well as how it effects the mind, the body, and the soul. Pleasure accesses a site for power.

The pleasure pedagogy determined herein is expressed in a compilation of narratives belonging to the Black girls with whom I have worked. The narratives also belong to me. They are memory, field notes, collections, interviews, and conversations archived from the Black girlhood programs, spaces, and places named within.

The narratives herein, derive from evidence of location, space, and geography; of linear and non-linear time formations, of demography, the inhabitations of Black girlhood across space and time.

For me, study regarding pleasure began as an inquiry into the marketed narrative that unplanned pregnancy among Black girls disproportionately affected Black girls’ futures as opposed to their White

[^4]: I elaborate on Audre Lorde’s use(s) of the erotic within the conceptual framework section of the dissertation.
[^5]: I elaborate on Michel Foucault’s use of the term *pleasure* within the conceptual framework section of the dissertation.
counterparts. Additionally, unplanned pregnancy among Black women and girls has been framed as an out-of-control symptom of perceived hypersexuality as compared to White women or girls, thus needing to be corrected or controlled. In my professional work and program development with Black girls over the past 15 years, I detected a pattern in how girls structured narratives around motherhood. For these girls, motherhood signified the most viable path to respectable life/image. I understood this philosophy as inherently destructive and limiting to girls’ choices and futures. The common understanding of Black girl bodies in the abject—victims of trauma, discrimination, violence, and respectability narratives—serves as a primary factor contributing to this understanding. A path of questioning led me to develop a methodology that would help the girls with whom I worked, Black girls, express a heightened level of agency during sexual encounters and within their lives to combat the precarious nature of unplanned pregnancy and promote an entitlement to pleasure, thus more prolific life-choices, including but not limited to healthy and informed decisions about motherhood. Based on these developing questions, I created a methodology of arts-based programming, creative writing, and open dialogue with Black girl subjects about pleasure, which I called The Vibrator Project. (Demographic information regarding the praxis of The Vibrator Project is located here, [http://sites.psu.edu/mpsaed/wp-content/uploads/sites/53500/2016/05/Wallace-MPS_AED_action_research.pdf](http://sites.psu.edu/mpsaed/wp-content/uploads/sites/53500/2016/05/Wallace-MPS_AED_action_research.pdf).

Facilitating arts-based, action research with Black girls regarding the concept of pleasure in The Vibrator Project has led me to understand that when Black girls can center their own pleasure instead of the restrictions (i.e., discussions that focus primarily on methods of prevention) set forth by entities outside of themselves (i.e., church, school, parents, government), they are more open to sharing their experiences, their questions, their hopes, and fears. I found that when Black girls experience and elevate pleasurable feelings or the potential for pleasure in their lives, they then wanted to attain more of those

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6 Referring to theory laid forth by Evelyn Hammonds’s (1994) “Back (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality” and Hazel Carby’s (1992) “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context” that contextualizes Black women’s bodies and sexualities as outside of the cult of True Womanhood or as only in opposition to White women’s sexuality—pure, innocent, in need of protecting/preserving.

7 Arts-based action research here refers to the research and scholarship base for Karen Keifer-Boyd’s inquiry of using art as a way to research and motivate social justice in both formal and non-formal education work.
experiences, not less, therefore making the decision to enter into motherhood a less than practical path to freedom.

The process by which Black girls make and locate success\(^8\) in the world is a rare and radical siting within fields of research such as Art Education and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with little to no scholarship claiming expertise on Black Girlhood. The concept of pleasure imagined in Black Girlhood, requires recognition within Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Art Education. In this dissertation, I argue how such focus and research, that centers Black girls’ expressions of pleasure is a viable pathway to understanding how time and space are understood, navigated, and moved—the curve of spacetime. Black Girlhood study can and will enhance how we view, understand, and navigate World futures.

This work considers how Black girls in the Vibrator Project have accessed pleasure via their unique social perspectives and marginalized viewpoints, while also troubling a dominant narrative that deems Black girls as hypersexual and deviant social subjects. Black female pleasure and sex scholarship is emerging more and more by way of works such as Mireille Miller-Young’s (2014) “A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women and Pornography”, Jennifer Nash’s (2014) “The Black Body in Ecstasy”, and Ariane Cruz’s (2016) “The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography.”

This recent emergence of Black femme sex scholarship designates a necessity for study that focuses particularly on Black femme pleasure, equating it with sexual freedom. Sexual freedom then, is a heightened consciousness about the Black female body, as history, archival matter, and text. This, I have come to understand through theorists such as Evelyn Hammonds (1999) and Hazel Carby (1992), who have given context for a “politics of silence” which has historically governed Black female sexuality. Thus, the conundrum of silence/ surveillance regarding Black bodies, particularly Black female bodies

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\(^8\) Defined simply as a favorable or desired outcome or the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence by Merriam Webster's dictionary, success is a concept that U.S. Americans have attributed to hard work and perseverance, even in hardship. To understand success as it relates to Black people, and more specifically Black girls, I draw from historian Alisha R. Knight (2012) exploration of writings of Pauline Hopkins, a 19th Century essayists and critic who maintained the constant critique of concepts of such as success and the American Dream and the exclusion of the Black people within them in her writing.
and sexual practice, has conditioned a social perception of deviancy which charts how Black respectability is historically prioritized over something like pleasure. It is, in turn, the expectations of Black respectability, that haunts Black women and girls’ understanding of themselves as well as their entitlement to securing and owning pleasure for themselves.

The social conditioning of Black femme sexual repression or constriction is exemplified in the viral video of Nia Miller⁹, age sixteen posted to social media sites “live” in which she was brutally beaten by her mother for allegedly embarrassing her mother (and “herself) after she posted/ shared risqué details of her sex life with her boyfriend on her personal Facebook page. The graphic and punitive display on behalf of Nia’s mother, considered to have gone viral, did so because it triggered a heightened level of support and rallying by social media users of varying racial demographics and walks of life. Supporters of the vicious act initiated by Nia’s mother, shared the video repeatedly with pride that a Black mother could love her child so much as to discipline and reprimand her daughter for the behavior deemed embarrassing, reckless, and dangerous. The rallying around Nia Miller’s abuse at the hands of her mother is further contextualized by Evelyn Hammonds and Hazel Carby’s conception of the social conditioning the regards policing Black girls’ bodies. Nia Miller’s viral beating exemplifies a widely-acceptable response of suppressing Black girl bodies, especially as they relate to concepts of morality.

The Black girl body has long-been marked—being Black, woman, and girl—in need of surveillance. Hazel Carby’s (1992) “Policing the Black Woman’s Body in an Urban Context” supports this claim in arguing that Black female sexuality is first used and understood as a marker for determining what is wrong with the world, then for ridicule, and lastly to be fixed, straightened out. Carby provides that:

[T]he need to police and discipline the behavior of Black women in cities, however, was not only a premise of White agencies and institutions but also a perception of the black middle class. The

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moral panic about the urban presence of apparently uncontrolled black women as symptomatic of and referenced to the more general crisis of social displacement and dislocation were caused by migration. White and black intellectuals used and elaborated this discourse so that when they referred to the association between black women and vice, or immoral behavior, their references carried connotations of other crises of the black urban environment. Thus, the migrating black woman could be variously situated as a threat to the progress of the race; as a threat to the establishment of a respectable urban black middle class; as a threat to congenial black and White middle-class relations; and as a threat to the formation of black masculinity in an urban environment. (Carby, 1992, p. 752)

As a result of such conditioning, Nia Miller’s sixteen-year-old view of pleasure with her boyfriend cannot be centralized. It must be suppressed in order to represent and elevate the Black race, as well as to neutralize White fear of uncontrolled/uncontrollable Black bodies. Likewise, in the formations of Carby and others like Wilma King’s (2011) “Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America,” Black girlhood is thus the furthest state from whiteness in that it is both a diminished state of Blackness and a diminished state of womanhood. Black girlhood is hardly, if ever viewed, as a site for celebrating pleasure, for excitement, or for joy because arguably, Black and girlhood are opposing forces not meant to exist in the same realm of understanding. Black girls are required to stretch the farthest in representing Black respectability and are denied the carefree and innocent luxuries that girlhood typically affords their White counterparts.

My work and research with Black girls is based on the arts-based action-research project The Vibrator Project I established in 2012 as a space for Black girls, young adults, and parents to engage in open dialogue about pleasure to counteract this negative framing of Black girls. It was designed to facilitate participants’ quest to define a personal sexual narrative in hopes of alleviating the anxiety and discomfort many Black woman and girls face in relation to sex, sexuality, and pleasure. This arts-based engagement, occurring through discussion, creative writing, and artmaking is what I consider my practice
with Black girls. This practice propels my research about Black girlhood in which I consider myself an active participant. In this practice, I facilitate learning that centers Black girlhood by taking Black girls seriously, valuing their contributions to culture, and exhibiting Black girlhood study as an important path of scholarship that has too long gone untapped.

The dissertation also uses this practice to aide in uncovering what deceptively appear to be the deficiencies in Black girlhood, allowing for Black girls to be barred from accessing pleasure. It highlights these perceived deficiencies as root causes of the inequities Black girls face socially, economically, and educationally. In that, the work can then restructure an understanding of Black girls’ hypervisibility as troublemakers and sexual deviants that make them prime targets of racism, economic and class disparities, and sexual violence. The work also explores how Black girls, paradoxically confront repercussions of invisibility in that their experiences, the abuses they encounter, and the negativity associated with their representations are often overlooked, misunderstood, or misrepresented.

My ideas are informed by theory and praxis, and I approach understanding Black girlhood space(s) with a distinctive nuance that will serve as a contribution to my fields of study. Education scholar Stephanie Troutman (2015) notes “[w]hile contemporary scripts in research, educational discourses, and popular media often focus their gaze on black females as objects of study; they typically exclude black female subjects from participating in the meaning-making processes that define them” (Troutman, 2015, p. 3). To participate in artmaking with girls, to make my own art simultaneously, to participate in girls’ very lives, and to write influenced by the ideas and contributions made by Black girls and women, is the distinctive part of this work. I will utilize experiences centered around art-making with Black girls in the Vibrator Project to carry out this theoretical mapping of how Black girls understand pleasure and then use it to construct and navigate their realities. This will also serve as a basis of understanding for how such constructions are forces that, in turn, motivate and propel the way that space and time are read by all.

This dissertation is a theoretical perspective on The Vibrator Project, displaying relevancy to both concentrations of Art Education and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies because it is intended to
motivate discourse regarding Black girlhood which values pleasure and agency—the very tools necessary to support self-actualization, social and economic evolution, and that will sustain Black girls as driving forces in their communities and in the World. The discourse I engage with prioritizes artmaking and arts-based curricula, as well as the creation of concepts that matter by encompassing the intersections of visual and studio art practice, the study of contemporary artists and works of art, visual culture, educational practice, as well as the evolving disciplines of child and youth culture, feminist and critical pedagogies, critical race philosophy(s), curriculum and cultural studies, art museum and curatorial education, arts-based research, and practice-led research. This work centralizes interdisciplinary teaching and research by utilizing the perceptions, contributions, and experiences of Black girls, to produce an exciting body of knowledge and theory that transforms traditional areas of study, even those within the fields of Art Education and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

**Research Problem and Questions**

I started a second graduate career in 2011 after being laid off from a short tenure of work in programming with the Girl Scouts of the U.S. A, all while working in the education sector at the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami. By that time, my fear around the question: can I talk about pleasure with Black girls? had evolved to the form of academic inquiry asking, how do I talk about pleasure with Black girls? By the end of my first semester as a Master’s of Professional Studies student in Art Education, I had crafted my first research proposal entitled, *Vixens, Vibrators and Adolescence: Picturing Liberation of Sex Therapy for Youth* ("The Vibrator Project"). It was a proposal intent on centering my in-practice work with girls in Miami, FL as a community, museum, and arts educator. The proposal asked the question, [T]o what degree might experiences of non-heteronormative sexual expressions affect unplanned pregnancy or other significant life choices (i.e., the choice to enter college, or the desire to be financially stable) for a Black girl or young woman?
As my in-practice work with Black girls in the Vibrator Project evolved, so did my research question to ask, *how do Black girls understand their life experiences through a personal sexual narrative? What does the recognition and ownership of a personal sexual narrative do for Black girls?*

Then I wanted to know, *where do Black women experience pleasure? And from whom do they learn?* I wanted to understand how Black girlhood is shaped in American identity; and dared to ask how American identity is shaped by Black girlhood. To do so, I had to ask *what is pleasure? (how has it been affected by a Black girlhood?) Is it intellect? Is it play? Where does Black girlhood pleasure happen?* Well, first, *what and where are the spaces Black girlhood happens? (Are they separate from Black spaces? Are they from within Black spaces?) Where are these expressions of Black girlhood and of pleasure? (What’s in the space? —potential for thinking about the Black body differently) Is there the possibility of differentiation between the Black body and the Black girl-- the Black girl body maintaining potentiality?*

*Are these expressions, this space located in spirituality? god? Are these expressions occurring in Black girlhood homes? Are they, in Black girlhood education? And back to: what does this education look like?*

The questions have not only increased in quantity but grown in magnitude. From what began as a seemingly small venture into facilitating Black girls’ recognition and remembering experiences of pleasure within their lives, I have grown as a researcher and scholar. My position and perspective have shifted from that of facilitator to observer, to a researcher, to a student of Black girlhood. As my position has changed, I have come to want to know more from the Black girl herself—how she sees and understands the world.

Thus, I have come to ask:

*What is a Black girlhood story? In whose reflection does she see herself, how does she witness? How do Black girls perform the world they’ve been given? How does a Black girl turn a world she’s been given into one that is her own?*
Dissertation Summary

This work is being generated by a desire to theoretically ground the ideas, projects, and interactions produced via the Vibrator Project. Building upon the radical Black feminist theories and politics of Audre Lorde (1978), bell hooks (2000), and Patricia Hill Collins (1999), this work considers the erotic, thus pleasure, a site of power (Lorde), and the concept of love/self-love (hooks), an abundant resource that which possessed in Black girlhood, is an untapped wonder. My approach to theorizing Black girlhood as well as telling Black girlhood stories as theory, derives from Toni Morrison’s (1970) fiction-narrative styling on the lives and imaginaries of Black women, which I promote as a lucrative path to seeing Black female identity not only centered and valued, but as a driving force in a world the recognizes and supports the centering of Black existence as an iteration of love, power, and pleasure as opposed to victimhood. (This notion can be understood as the Afro future.10

To utilize scholar, Toni Morrison’s (1970) (1987) fiction work such as “The Bluest Eye” and “Beloved” as a theoretical springboard is to pay homage to Black women intellectuals writing about Black girlhood, but also to beckon the support of those contributing to what Black Studies scholars like Richard Iton and Lamonda Horton Stallings deem the Black fantastic and funk (which I will elaborate on in Chapters 3 and 4). Ultimately, this theoretical framework expands the boundaries of realism in mainstream and public pedagogies, particularly those that frame a collective imaginary around Black girlhood identity. I share in the belief that Morrison’s writing adheres to Frank Norris’s definition of the great American novel, where Norris argues that “the Great American novel is not extinct like the dodo, but mythical like the hippogriff” (Scott, 17). (Brown, 2008, p. 1) According to A. O. Scott, “the hippogriff, a monstrous hybrid of griffin and horse, is often taken as the very symbol of fantastical impossibility, a unicorn’s unicorn” (Scott, 17). The hippogriff represents the fact that Black science

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10 Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic, philosophy of science, and philosophy of history that combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, Afrocentrism, and magic realism with non-Western cosmologies in order to critique not only the present-day dilemmas of Black people, but also to revise, interrogate, and re-examine the historical events of the past.
fiction and the great American novel share the same trajectory in that they both center upon fantastical impossibility: Morrison’s (1987) “Beloved” is about a ghost, an example of how texts categorized as Black realistic literature routinely incorporate the fantastic, includes mystical events and the supernatural. Afro-future Black women writers/scholars such as Morrison, through works such as “Beloved” and “Paradise” (1993) transcend ghettoizing generic classification. They are among the best of American writers in creating work that combines mainstream literature with science fiction and fantasy, all of which I find important to realizing the fantastic potential of Black girlhood that extends beyond an abject view.

Utilizing Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) approach to deciphering black hole theory, this work builds an articulation around the magnetic quality of Black girlhood steering a universal conception that Black girls require fixing. My work, paralleled to the black hole phenomenon, reveals a mesmerizing and equally repulsive reaction to the performance of Black girlhood. Angela Davis’s (2003) prison abolition scholarship gives cause to why so many Black girlhood stories unfold under a lens of abjection, what is marginal at best. The deviancy and extreme opposition of Black girlhood to whiteness give context for Black girls’ perceived marginality, and for why the margins are ever constructed in the first place. Within, I will evaluate a concrete example of such margins via the U.S. prison industrial complex—an obvious and mainstream imagining of the black hole concept. Black girls exist in these spaces too. And Black girls’ perceived deviancy is exhibited in why systems like Juvenile Justice (a sector of the U.S. prison industrial complex) are the current and most prominent methods constraining Black female identity. This most especially includes sexual identity.

Davis’s work asks many questions, the most pertinent being, “Are Prison Obsolete?” Her work on prison abolition (as opposed to prison reform), among others such as Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1999) is important to a study of Black girlhood because it highlights that Black, Latino, Native American, and Asian youths are often portrayed as the purveyors of violence, traffickers of drugs, and as envious of commodities that they have no right to possess due to their lived existences deemed as deviant of White respectability. Young Black and Latina women are exclusively represented as sexually promiscuous and
as indiscriminately propagating babies and poverty. Criminality and deviance are racialized. Surveillance is thus focused on communities of color, immigrants, the unemployed, the undereducated, the homeless, and in general on those who have a diminishing claim to social resources. Their claim to social resources continues to diminish in large part because law enforcement and penal measures, like Juvenile Justice institutions such as the ones I will discuss in Chapter 4, increasingly devour them. Therefore, as the emphasis of government policy shifts from social welfare to crime control, racism sinks more deeply into the economic and ideological structures of U.S. society, including but not limited to how Black women and girls identify as sexual subjects.

The concept of Black girlhood in my work builds upon the scholarship of Ruth Nicole Brown (2008) (2013), whose pioneering work in Black girlhood studies advances Black girlhood thought in demonstrating how explosive qualities as well as social constructs blocking achievements to Black girls’ well-being and their thriving communities all intersect in the margins that are Black girlhood. To recognize the energies of such a space is an essential means to harnessing social power yet seen.

Like the need to understand the U.S. prison industrial complex, the work of Ruth Nicole Brown brings to light how too often, dominant images and popular discourse of Black youth in America revolve around damaging stereotypes that depict them as thugs, drug-dealers, and criminals; and for Black girls specifically, the tropes of being loud, angry, violent, and promiscuous prevail. Her work has highlighted how Black girls are often rendered invisible altogether, which makes the need for diverse representations of Black girlhood and positive reinforcement of Black girls’ creativity and worth all the more important for their healthy development. The organization/activist work she founded in 2006 to work with Black girls in Urbana Champaign, IL called Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT) is where she centers her scholarship in Black girlhood studies. In a culture often neglectful of or hostile to Black girls, SOLHOT provides respite and sanctuary, and a space to collectively interrogate and reimagine varied expressions of Black girlhood through art and performance that is centered on individuals’ lived experiences. In the tradition of Ruth Nicole Brown’s scholarship and praxis, this work clarifies the lived
and fantastical experiences created in Black girlhood as not only worthy of study but as an untapped possibility in understanding the world we live in as well as the human interactions within it.

Through fantasy in creative writing, I work to uncover my own trauma as it is reflected in many Black girlhood stories— from stolen girlhoods to the countless forms of raging that have been too often forged against Black girl bodies. The impetus for this is historical narratives of the Black female body such as The [Redacted] and art forms of Black girls (and women) relegated to outer spaces such as Pretty Taking All Fades (PTAF), Raven-Symone, and Nicki Minaj. These investigations venture within spaces deemed important to Black girlhood, including formal and non formal education sites like schools, museums, and their mamas’ kitchens, the Black church, and the U.S. Prison industrial complex.

I am first a visual artist with a concentration in black and white craft photography and multi-media painting. My artwork is shaped by a desire to narrate the stories, including traumas of Black girlhood visually. The dissertation weaves theories of pleasure, memory, spirituality, and Black girlhood narratives with art practices to elucidate the force(s) of Black girlhood pleasures. In addition to archiving praxis (The Vibrator Project), the methodology curates best practices I have encountered in facilitating nonformal learning spaces with Black girls and maps my mode of transmitting Black girlhood experience(s) through theoretical and performative, narrative writing.

I employ the integrated methods of theory, analysis, art practice, creative writing, and art teaching practice in order to exhibit a multi-layered mapping of pleasure onto Black girlhood experiences and spaces.

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11 Non-formal label encompasses a wide variety of educational systems endowed with features that either leads them towards or away from the established formal systems. This view is not limited to a merely academic interest because it is an extremely objective and practical one in the search for alternative solutions to educational problems. Given its scope, non-formal education is comprised of an ample diversity of educational situations, many of which have played a significant role in the renewal of educational systems. We shall now analyze three educative processes, namely: “correspondence learning”, “distance learning,” and “open systems”, which, because of the their features fall within the scope of non-formal education.
Key Theoretical Concepts

Black Girlhood

I have been a Black girl. My friends and intimate loved ones have all been Black girls, Black girls have since come into my life as cousins, friends, nieces, babysitting charges, students, and project participants. I love and hate the Black girl I was. I remember her, and in remembering her, I honor that she is still a part of me. In fact, every Black girl I have encountered has had some effect on me. And, in my remembrance of that, of her, I honor Black girlhood presently.

Although I worked for at least a decade in the service of Black girls in nonformal learning sites like the Girl Scouts, it wasn’t until I attended my first academic conference in 2010, that I realized Black girlhood could be scholarship. I will never forget walking past the pop-up bookstore in the lobby of the conference and setting my eyes on a purple hardcover book called “Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy” written by Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown. I remember my sheer joy to be witnessing such a prize. I also remember thinking okay, well she’s already written a book about Black girlhood, then what is left for me to contribute? Since that time, not only have I developed a confident understanding of my contribution, I can also name the author of that book a very dear friend and colleague.

Ruth Nicole Brown’s scholarly investigations into Black girlhood have become foundational to my work and research as Black girlhood scholar. She defines Black girlhood as a valuable field of study and describes it as “the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female.” (Brown, 2008, p. 1) She argues, “Black girlhood is not dependent on age, physical maturity, on any essential category of identity (Brown, 2008, p. 1).” She has been influential in the discourses of Girlhood Studies and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and has commanded these fields hold space for Black girlhood.
Additional and noteworthy scholarship has emerged to shape what we now feel comfortable claiming as Black girlhood Studies. Aimee Meredith Cox (2015) categorizes her experiences with Black girlhood as that of *shapeshifting*, understanding the navigating Black girls in the U.S. have to do to maintain recognizable citizenship. And literary scholar Nazera Sadiq Wright (2016) constructs the trope of Black girlhood as it regarded Nineteenth-Century literature. To just these three scholars alone, Black girlhood is a thing, Black girlhood is an identity, Black girlhood is a mode of operating, Black girlhood is a language.

Through my understanding of these scholars’ work, through my experiences having been a Black girl and, through my work with Black girls, my definition of Black girlhood has not narrowed. It has expanded to recognize Black girlhood in 3 main ways. 1) Black girlhood is female youth, under the age of eighteen, who identify as Black. 2) Black girlhood is the embodied experience of identifying as a girl (age range spanning 3-17 years) and Black in the past, present, or future (linear or nonlinear continuum). And 3) Black girlhood is the oppressed state of being associated with femaleness, youthfulness, Blackness, and/ or Otherness, that is experienced in the past, present, or future. (linear or nonlinear continuum).

*Spacetime*

Spacetime denotes how *Blackness* is understood, in this case, Black girlhood. Drawing on Michele Wright’s (2015) usage of *spacetime* in the *Physics of Blackness*, I seek to understand Blackness, in this case, Black girlhood as a *when* rather than a *what* considering Black girlhood identity not bound by historical and linear progressive narratives”, but rather an identity that encompasses time, space, and experience. (Wright, 2015) Thus Black girlhood—identity, space, and performance— can be understood as phenomena. Furthermore, Wright’s naming of Blackness as spacetime complicates, for me, the “epiphenomena” that is Black girlhood, validating my interest in breaking down the stereotype of Black girlhood—identity, space, and performance— to show the complexities and contradictions of it. (Wright,
In the dissertation, the Black hole metaphor is representational of Black girlhood spaces, phenomena. A point of density, the black hole consists of infinitely concentrated matter and movement. It is at the same time, spacetime. This matter rather, tells spacetime how to curve, and spacetime tells matter how to move. In other words, in a black hole the gravitational field is so intense that it bends space and time around itself so that inside the event horizon there are literally no paths in space and time that lead to the outside of the black hole: No matter what direction traveled, the path would lead back to the center of the black hole, where the singularity is found. The black hole curves spacetime back on itself.

To curve is both to move and to attract. In this theory, I find Blackness, and in a narrower focus, Black girlhood space, which encompasses Black girlhood identity, the spaces Black girls generate, and the performance of Black girlhood. Albert Einstein coins the black hole as the “dark star,” establishing it as a gravitational attraction so strong that nothing, not even light can escape from its grasp (Einstein, 1905). Assemblages—happenings or events, composed of the interactions of utterances are forms of engagement that suck all discussion into their orbit, preventing it from moving on. In the dissertation, this framework is utilized to demonstrate how the performance(s) with, of, and within Black girlhood spaces are those assemblages constituting this very condensed matter, attraction, and interaction; oftentimes to the point of explosion. In this work, I argue the good and bad physics of such explosions, ultimately magnifying the presence of pleasure.

I am most interested in investigating Black girlhood space(s) and locating pleasure. I construct the concept of space in this work, keeping in mind philosopher Michel de Certeau’s (2011) distinction between space and place. De Certeau makes the claim that a place is the order (of whatever kind) in which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. A place is thus an “instantaneous configuration of positions,” which makes it identifiable as stable (Certeau, 2011, p.117). A space, on the other hand exists when one takes into consideration “vectors of directions, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements” (Certeau, 2011, p. 117). In short, space is a
practiced place. I argue in this work that Black girls often transform places, making them spaces. This act is not only a phenomenon; but that this act of transformation is a location of pleasure unique to Black girlhood.

In considering my practice with Black girls and the spaces created; we generate space by tracing out (as a curve), by a moving points (as a surface), and by a moving curve of Black girl (woman) existence in relation to White space—White supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, respectability. Charles Garoian in his book *The Prosthetic Pedagogy of Art: Embodied Research and Practice* argues “the research and practice of art [do] not merely reproduce space but creates them,” meaning that artists don’t represent space(s) they make them (Garoian, 2014, p. 6). He goes on to say “the spatial practice of art developed dialectically through an organic and incremental process of social necessity and advocacy”, and that its value and purpose arose from the needs—experiential, spatial, and otherwise—of societies from which it emerged (Garoian, 2014, p. 7). In answering the question *how is Black girlhood space generated (and by whom)*, it is we that generate—the girls, myself, teachers, law enforcement, prison guards, and the place (program site) itself—as artists. All things condensing together, or all things conjuring chaos, generate *space* and time. In the space, performing connectivity with space generates an infinite cycle of call and response. This cycle of connectivity is what I recognize as *art*. Art is the performance of the players within the space, including the walls of the place. Art is the collective learning facilitated through the teaching and discussion of contemporary Women Artists. Art is the dialogue that occurs in response to the happenings of the space. Art is the present, and art is also memory. All of these things working in conjunction with one another and in opposition to one another generate *spacetime*.
A wise teacher once said; ‘You cannot train the brain to be free. Freedom can only be attained through experience.’

--Deepak Chopra (2016),

I began work about Black girlhood and pleasure because I saw a gap in education directed towards Black girls. At the same time, I understood that lack of knowledge, ignorance about sexuality, disease and pregnancy prevention, and reproductive rights were not the issue(s) in which Black girls needed further enlightenment. Highly affected by Paulo Freire’s (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and its critical analysis of an education system that capitalizes off the ignorance of its students, I recognize that Black girls are not facing an ignorance issue at all. Black girls did not need [more] fixing, but rather the way Black girls are looked upon and understood is what needed fixing, for one. Secondly, what Black girls might need is the ability to live out their girlhoods, to experience more joy, and to feel good.

I don’t want to be afraid to acknowledge that sites of joy and feeling good for Black girls are located in sensual pleasures which include sex acts. Michel Foucault provides in his *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* that “in erotica art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as practice and accumulated as experience” (Foucault, 1978, p. 57). This concept speaks to my initial work’s hypothesis that if Black girls could and did access pleasure, they would, put simply, want more. Foucault maintains pleasure as a consideration “in relation to itself… experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul” (Foucault, 1978, p. 57). Therefore, girls’ experience(s) of pleasure leading to wanting more, would cognize as (if not better) added choice to their lives.

Comparably, Lamonda Horton Stallings (2015) in *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetic and Black Sexual Cultures* captures funk correspondingly with my consideration of pleasure as the concept of pleasure complicates choice in the lives of Black girls. As a philosophy, Stallings determines funk to be
about “being or (un)becoming human,” making funk a useful field of study “to scholars who want to study joy, pleasure, race, and sexuality” (Horton-Stallings, 2015, p. 2). Thus an analysis of pleasure, like funk is shaped by “non visual sensory perception (smell/odor), embodied movement (dance and sex), and force (mood and will)” (Horton-Stallings, 2015, p. 4). These considerations of pleasure are translations of how freedom and choice motivate, in this case, by Black girls’ will. This work explores a recognition of what Black girls being free means to philosophies of being and life through the imaginations of Black girls crafting and experiencing pleasure for themselves.

In the fields of Art Education and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Black girls are seemingly outside of (and disruptive to) mainstream feminist politics and discourse, in the outer spaces. My engagement with Black girl subjects as a scholar and artists shapes the questions I think significant and challenge me to rethink what can be known about girldom and Blackness. The methodology for these investigations will draw on field notes from my self-designed, arts-based, action research project named The Vibrator Project, art and creative writing, music, and memory for the purpose of theorizing about issues of social justice, praxis, artistic production, and a poetics of pleasure that rejects the blaring refrain that deems Black girlhood(s) in and of the outer space. The dissertation is a testament to the notion that Black girlhood is not merely the outer space, but rather the space—the location of active production.

As I learned from Hortense Spillers (2003), the practice of locating and identifying pleasure I have facilitated with Black girls is a new American Grammar valuing Black girl subjectivity and centering the unique perspectives afforded by Black girlhood. This practice gives attention to particular Black girlhood spaces which boastfully exhibit what Black girlhood scholar Ruth Nicole Brown (2014) heralds as “reckless theatrics,” what Jillian Hernandez (2014) identifies as “raunch aesthetics” and what I, myself (2011) discuss as “pleasurable” in a challenge to the bureaucracies of gender, race, class, sexuality, and respectability that structure the intuitions constraining Black girl bodies, sexualities, pleasures, fantasies, and freedoms. Above all, this practice serves to lovingly and critically recognize processes and to make stories of girls whose value is not premised on institutional legibility or
mainstream consumption accessible for those who wish to learn.

In this work, my own girlhood is called into question in which I study a peeling back of layers of self, that I argue many Black girls encounter growing into adulthood. In this act, I uncover a trauma seemingly universal to Black girlhood of involuntary performance—playing an intricate role in her life, a role she didn’t realize she had subsumed, a subsuming of Blackness, particularly Black girlhood, as wrong—never the prettiest yet, ever the hyper-noticed.

1.2 Context: Understanding Black Girlhood as an Occurrence and Location of Black Hole Theory

Here, within this study, Black girlhood is understood as a black hole where performance, art, interaction, and cultural production initiated by Black girls’ work—their intellectual and physical labor—and their play become an explosive site of density convergence. Density makes the black hole unique; and in this case, Black girls’ location amidst the backdrop of White supremacy, patriarchy, and respectability, deemed Black girlhood, is arguably the densest of matter. Physicist John Archibald Wheeler’s (1998) summary of Einstein's theory of general relativity coins this extreme point of density wherein “[m]atter tells spacetime how to curve, and curved space tells matter how to move” (Ford & Wheeler, 2000, p. 235). I reason that Black girls’ innate bending of space, of time, of potential realities, is a major element in the makeup of the black hole.

Black Girls are not only guided by space and time—the spaces they are moved and bounded to—but simultaneously guide this interest by way of their movements, interactions, aesthetics, and performances. Where prior contribution to scholarship, “Pleasure (re)Collected with Black Girls in the Vibrator Project,” was an analysis of the praxis performed with project participants in the Vibrator Project, this dissertation is a reinvestigation of said space(s). This articulation is a theoretical curation of what occurred in the Vibrator Project’s art facilitations/lesson plans, discussions, and field notes that exhibit how Black girls navigate and steer space and time. I argue spaces such as the nonformal education
sites of the Vibrator Project as valuable and as important sites of cultural and theoretical production and influence.

As an additional layer to this reinvestigation of the Vibrator Project, I include in the inquiry, and analysis of popular culture expressions of Black girlhood, femininity, and fantasy that I believe are sites where theory is constantly crafted. This includes engagements with popular culture around the celebrity of Black female public figures like Nicki Minaj, and Pretty Taking All Fades (PTAF). Together this work highlights where and how the performance of Black girlhood as a phenomenon radically curves space and time.

The convergence of space and time I explore takes place as Black girlhood\textsuperscript{12}. And my specific interest is in investigating the explosive quality of such a space. As any black hole at its farthest limit of density will eventually explode—literally meaning to burst or shatter; so do the interactions of Black girlhood in what feels good, what tastes good, and what sounds good to a Black girl. I recognize these qualities as pleasure; and in this dissertation, seek out how the sexual, physical, and emotional pleasure(s) generated in Black girlhood spaces further steer the convergence of space and time in and beyond Black girlhood spaces, ultimately revealing the fantastic\textsuperscript{13} potential (i.e., ability(s) by which fanciful interpretations of life experiences are crafted by and of Black girlhood on politics, social movement(s), aesthetics—popular and consumer beauty cultures, and systems of race, class, and privilege.

Affected by long-lasting narratives of the Black female body, this work invokes the legacy and the fantastic potential of historical narratives like that of the [Redacted]\textsuperscript{14}, the remembered narrative of a

\textsuperscript{12} Referring to a foundational framing of Black girlhood laid forth by Black girlhood scholar Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) in “Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood.

\textsuperscript{13} Engaging Richard Iton’s (2008) use of “the fantastic” that points to a practice of moving between what is “grounded” and the “dadaesque ambiguity”; a “resistance of fixedness” coupled with consideration of a certain realm of fiction storytelling attributed to writers such as Toni Morrison (Iton, 2010, p. 11). This connection is to be explored further within the dissertation, as it concerns the imaginary in Black girlhood narratives.

\textsuperscript{14} Here, I am championing the historical narratives and storytelling of South African authors, poets, and artists who tell [Redacted]’s story in hopes of locating a pure and decolonized perspective of her existence. In particular I reference Meg Samuelson’s (2007) “Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?” to build a history and understanding of the life and afterdeath of [Redacted] and the narrative(s) that surround her existence. I will explore the influence of [Redacted]’s narrative on Black American girlhood sexuality in Chapter Two of the dissertation.
Khoikhoi\(^{15}\) woman who was exhibited as a freak show attraction in 19th-century Europe, known most popularly as the [Redacted]. Concurrently, the work hails representations of Black female deviancy embodied by contemporary artistry of icons like Nicki Minaj\(^{16}\), the popular culture, rap artist most known for her crude and raunchy music lyrics and gender and sexual expressions through the self-presentation(s) of her body. Both the figures of the [Redacted] and Nicki Minaj have become well-known, highly recognizable representations of caution in conjunction with Black femininity in discourses of Blackness. By entangling both types of representations, the study positions Black girlhood pleasure and the imaginary as a portal for Black girls to access freedom. Moreover, these portals are the sources of cultural production historically overlooked in quests for social, political and educational progress.

Locations of Black girlhood circulate mass and social media by way of language, aesthetics, music, and performed interpretations of the American dream\(^{17}\) circulate time and are relied upon as everyday theory without ever being acknowledged as such. This is exemplified in the work and celebrity of Black girl performers, actresses, and political pundits such as PTAF (Pretty Taking All Fades)\(^{18}\), Raven-Symoné\(^{19}\), and Stacy Dash\(^{20}\), whose performed celebrity subjectivities remain under extreme and constant scrutiny by Black and non-Black audiences alike due to their positioning either too far within or outside notions of Black respectability\(^{21,22}\). This work also will explore how these Black girl

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\(^{15}\) Khoikhoi, a group of Khoisan people native to southwestern Africa.

\(^{16}\) Pointing to previous scholarship on Nicki Minaj and how her aesthetic presentations and supreme sexual expression(s) can relate to girlhood contributing to an erotics of “feminist solidarity” laid forth by Jillian Hernandez and Anya Wallace (2014) in “Nicki Minaj and Pretty Taking All Fades: Performing the Erotics of Feminist Solidarity.

\(^{17}\) Suggesting interpretations of U.S. American capitalist ideals set forth by Adam Smith (1776) in “Wealth of Nations.” “Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality. For one very rich man there must be at least five hundred poor, and the affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many. The affluence of the rich excites the indignation of the poor, who are often both driven by want, and prompted by envy, to invade his possessions.”(A. Smith, 2014, p. 76)

\(^{18}\) Pretty Taking All Fades (PTAF) is “an emerging [rap] performance group of Black teen girls from L.A. …” who created the viral YouTube music video and rap “Boss Ass Bitch.” PTAF’s artistry is also laid out in “Nicki Minaj and Pretty Taking All Fades: Prefoming the Erotics of Feminist Solidarity” by Anya Wallace and Jillian Hernandez (2014).

\(^{19}\) Raven-Symoné is an American actress, singer, turned-talk show co-host of popular morning news/politics show, “The View.” She first came to fame as a child actress on the mainstream sitcom, “The Cosby Show”. I will discuss Raven-Symoné as a popular culture political pundit in chapter 4.

\(^{20}\) Stacey Dash is an America actress best known for her role in the teen blockbuster hit, “Clueless”. She currently serves as a news commentator for Fox News. She is most popularly known in popular culture and on social media for her controversially conservative views exhibited through her position with Fox and through social media outlets such as Twitter.

\(^{21}\) Influenced by articles written (and highly circulated via social media audiences) in the feminist-scholar-blogger sphere regarding mainstream celebrity voices Raven-Symoné and Stacey Dash (usually regarding politics) in a critique of the two subjects’ conservative-leaning platforms. To name a few characterizations of the subjects, I refer to articles: Sikivu Hutchinson’s
subjects resist the idea of theorizing girls as objects of girlhood; and at the same time, disrupt the very idea of a single and fixed subjectivity that tends to swallow Black girlhood identities, thus barring access and entitlement to pleasure.

1.3 Key Organizing Concepts

Influence: Arts-based Action Research

Definition of vibrate

transitive verb

1: to swing or move to and fro
2: to emit with or as if with a vibratory motion
3: to mark or measure by oscillation a pendulum vibrating seconds
4: to set in vibration

intransitive verb

1a: to move to and fro or from side to side: oscillate: fluctuate, vacillate vibrate between two choices
2: to have an effect as or as if of vibration music, when soft voices die, vibrates in the memory — P. B. Shelley
3: to be in a state of vibration: quiver
4: to respond sympathetically: thrill vibrate to the opportunity

In our trending lexicon, we know the vibrator to be a tool used to enact or enhance erotic


22 These subjects and topics, especially regarding mainstream celebrity and social media are heralded and supported by Richard Iton’s (2008) persuasion that Black folks’ linking of popular culture and formal politics is actually a necessity. He explains this theory in “In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in The Post-Civil Rights Era.”

23 Merriam-Webster definition of vibrate
pleasure. More generally, the vibrator massages; and is often associated with relaxation, and perhaps romance. More specifically, it is a tool used mainly by a woman and/or her sexual partner to stimulate the clitoris—the female sexual organ known to induce sexual arousal.

The language of pleasure circulates public pedagogy more commonly now than in the past. This may be due to an evolving culture where sex, sexuality, and the sexualization of bodies are more openly witnessed and accepted via television media, marketing, and popular music.

The research described in this dissertation is based on this work with girls—an arts-based action-research project The Vibrator Project I established in 2012 as space for Black girls, young adults, and parents to engage in open dialogue about pleasure that and facilitate participants’ quest to define a personal sexual narrative in hopes of alleviating the anxiety and discomfort many Black women and girls face in relation to sex, sexuality, and pleasure. Arts-based action research refers to a methodology discourse within the field of Art Education. I refer to this concept by way of the scholarship of Karen Keifer-Boyd’s (2011) “Arts-based Research as Social Justice Activism: Insight, Inquiry, Imagination, Embodiment, Relationally” that was an influential part of my studies at the time of writing my first research proposal about this topic. This practice has propelled my research about Black girlhood in which I consider myself an active participant. In this practice, I facilitated learning that centers Black girlhood by taking Black girls seriously, valuing their contributions to culture, and exhibiting Black girlhood study as an important path of scholarship that has too long gone untapped.

Facilitating arts-based, action research with Black girls regarding the concept of pleasure in The Vibrator Project has lead me to the understanding that when Black girls, center their own pleasure as opposed to restrictions (i.e., discussions that focus primarily on methods of prevention regarding sexual activity), they are more open to sharing their experiences, their questions, their hopes, and fears about sex and life in general. I found that when Black girls experience and elevate pleasurable feelings or the

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24 Arts-based action research refers to a methodology discourse within the field of Art Education. I refer to this concept by way of the scholarship of Karen Keifer-Boyd’s (2011) “Arts-based Research as Social Justice Activism: Insight, Inquiry, Imagination, Embodiment, Relationally.”
potential for pleasure in their lives they want to attain more of those experiences, not less, therefore making the decision to enter into motherhood less than a practical path to freedom.

Thus, The Vibrator Project transitioned from “action research,” to a lens for how I view Black girlhood experiences, especially those that have the potential to be pleasurable. It now incorporates the philosophy(s) for how I believe Black girls and Black girlhood should be viewed, accessed, and interacted with by those who consider25 them beautiful, wretched, or simply human.

I find amongst girls with whom I have worked, that there is pleasure in artmaking, creating with their hands, and seeing women of color—who look like them—experience pleasure making their own art. Artists Kara Walker, Wangechi Mutu, Mickalene Thomas, and Shoshanna Weinberger are but a few examples of Black women artists we study together. In workshops about these artists girls have the opportunity to explore not just beautiful artwork, but artwork that is also honest and grotesque. I will utilize this artwork throughout the dissertation to further theorize modes of pleasure.

Girls are drawn to an artist’s work because of her identity, background, and life experiences thus coming into contact with work that more fittingly represents Black womanhood and girlhood than what has been gained from their traditional learning environments (school). As an added bonus, these artists’ work is highly valued in the World. This notion is also one that is radical to Black girls in comparison to traditional education arenas which dictate how success looks and who is entitled to that success.

Considerations of Black girlhood pleasure, like the lens of the Vibrator Project, I argue, are rare and radical considerations within Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Art Education. The concept of pleasure imagined through the lens of Black Girlhood, begs for a space within Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Art Education, and an ultimate informal education, for a more informed and focused relationship to Black Girlhood studies.

25 I invoke Ntozake Shange’s (1974) “For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf.” The classic choreopoem about the love and trauma of Black girlhood.
Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) “Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza” champions the “rebel” writer. She claims this rebel class for herself, giving the reader entry into her childhood, a picture of her stubbornness and defiance from quite a young age, *that familiar stubbornness, defiance, oftentimes used to characterize Black girls, how we promote resistance to their subjectivities. Do you remember her, that Black girl you cast off as withdrawn, attitudinal, disrespectful?* Gloria, not wanting to iron her brother’s shirts or do household chores allowed her a mask of laziness but was actually a flat out refusal on her part to give up the “sovereignty of [her] rulership”(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38). Her time and her space belonged to her and only her, to write, read, paint, be. She refers to this “Shadow Beast” in that, “[i]t is the part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts.”(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 38)

Reading about Gloria Anzaldúa’s process of generating space for herself has had a profound effect on me, providing me words to articulate and explore a process of writing and investigating Black girlhood spaces that I had previously assumed to be similar laziness or attention deficit. Since Anzaldúa’s death in 2004, her writing and process have been further investigated and legitimized for the academy. The book/project meant to be her dissertation, “Light in the Dark/ Luz en Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality” has come to fruition having been edited and published through Duke University press by Ana Louise Keating (2015) a little more than a decade after Anzaldúa’s death.

Anzaldúa’s process for choosing words, rearranging them, and formulating articulations focused heavily on her desire to “move in readers’ bodies and transform them, from inside out (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. xii).” According to her friends and writing comrades, she repeatedly revised to achieve cadence, musicality, nuanced meaning, and metaphoric complexity. When I encountered this truth about Gloria Anzaldúa, I immediately recognized what is seemingly my exact process for formulating thoughts, concepts, and rhythms. I am also reminded of the strenuousness of such a task—the weight of writing for
movement, feeling, rhythm—but now I have no other choice. This is my chosen mode for bringing concepts from outside the academy (i.e., outer space), like Black girlhood at the margins, to the academic page. This way of writing also serves as my commitment to defying the structural limitations of the academy (or my own), perceived as a refinement tool, for not only my own processing and ability to consume and produce knowledge, but also for the concepts, people, and places I am exploring, not centered in the academy’s foundation.

Like Anzaldúa’s, my writing methods can be understood simply as poetry, as art-making. This is how I write. Poetic prose is a lyrical aesthetic for how I formulate words and expressions onto the page; and perhaps this is a reference to my cultural understanding of the World, how I read and move through it—embodying Blackness, identity, art, music, food, and oppression. Although admittedly, I am hugely affected by the poetry, creative, and fiction works of authors like Gabeba Baderoon, Fred Moten, and Toni Morrison to name a selected few; my identity as a Black girl and scholar beckons me to craft a necessary space, where my creative inclinations are reconciled as scholarship, legible both within the academy and amongst Black girl subjects. Therefore, a good portion of my writing functions as poetry (mostly because that is how it has been read leading up to this point). I rely on poetry now, an established organizing tool, but one that makes the sentence structure, word pairing, and cadence of the World I write about legible for both the academic page and the consciousness of Black girlhood.

In this dissertation, I theorize observations, notes, and girls’ creative production as well as to archive the practice of work I have facilitated with Black girl subjects that uses art practice to center

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26 Exercising the characteristics of the “qualitative researcher” a method of the genre of interpretive ethnography. This method relies on the author's ability to reproduce experiences that embody cultural meanings and cultural understandings that operate “to carry news from one world to another”(Denzin, 1996, pp. 32–33). “News” concept is based on three types of discourse: ordinary talk and speech, inscriptions of that speech in the form of transcriptions, and written interpretations based on talk... (Denzin, 1996, p. 33)

27 Poetry works by author Gabeba Baderoon include “The Dream in the Next Body” (2005) and “A Hundred Silences” (2006)

28 Poetry and research works “In the Break” and “Hughson’s Tavern” by Fred Moten (2003) (2008)


30 In the dissertation, I wish to establish a concept of Black girl that embodies the experience of Black girlhood past, present, and future. A when as opposed to a what, shaped by Michelle Wright’s (2015) concepition of Blackness as nonlinear space and time in “The Physics of Blackness.”

31 Referring to the physical structure of the art form, poetry. An example is the view of classical Chinese poetry in the case of the Shijing (Classic of Poetry), exhibiting the development of not only ritual of poetic canons but also aesthetic importance.
discussions about what feels, tastes, and looks good, what I refer to as *pleasure* in The Vibrator Project.
The Vibrator Project has consisted of arts facilitation with girls and garners a host of qualitative data from visual artwork, creative writing, performance, interviews, and voice recordings performed by Black girl participants, in addition to research of Contemporary Women artists, my own journaling, sketching, and enacting uses of theoretical, performative\(^{32}\), and narrative writing (as exercises in field noting the practice). Necessarily, this writing curates the best practices I have encountered in facilitating a nonformal learning space in The Vibrator Project and maps my mode of transmitting Black girlhood experience(s). Writing as my tool is meant to exhibit the theories that support all of the above-mentioned forms of data as well as the qualities and rhythms of living and working in Black girlhood, a seemingly *nonformal* task.

*Layered Data Analysis*

Layered Data Analysis is the method I have used to collect, sort, and articulate data gathered through the Vibrator Project programs and activities. When writing *Pleasure (re)Collected with Young Black Women and Girls in the Vibrator Project*,\(^{33}\) I employed Layered Data Analysis, a technique defined by Karen Keifer Boyd (2011) in “Arts-based Research as Social Justice Activism: Insight, Inquiry, Imagination, Embodiment, Relationality” where she argues that facilitating arts-based research such as the Vibrator Project as not only social justice and action research, but as a “layered process” (Karen Keifer-Boyd, 2011, p. 5). Keifer-Boyd offers the process of layered data analyzing as a qualitative tool for ethnographic observation, field note taking, data analysis, and articulation. This is accomplished via three main steps: the transcription of field notes, layered coding of said notes, and the translation of findings through poetic prose articulation.

\(^{32}\) Performative (i.e., performance text) is a form of text in the ethnography genre. It is also referred to as ethnoperformance. I refer to the terminology and definitions laid forth by the field/genre of interpretive ethnography, defined by the aforementioned text.

\(^{33}\) My Master’s thesis, written in 2013, was dedicated to laying forth the praxis of the Vibrator Project.

Here, I utilize the articulations from my Layered Data Analysis of the aforementioned project, in addition to a method of portraiture to establish *Black girl voice* in a single composite profile I name herein as AnneMarie.

**Portraiture**

In the need to organize the many voices and experiences of project participants, I utilize portraiture as a writing method. The major aspects of portraiture as categorized by scholars Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot’s and Jessica Hoffmann Davis’s (1997) research includes emergent themes, relationships, contexts, voice, and the aesthetic whole. These major characteristics highlight and complicate the many roles my writing must embody. To tell stories of girls is to *narrate*. To write rhythmically is poetic voice, poetic form, calibrated prose, it is *my poetry about them, their poetry about the spaces we have generated* and about the artists from which they learn. Collage responses to contemporary women artists whom girls learn from by painting, sculpture, photography, and creative writing is to *assemblage* their takeaways, understandings of identity and pleasure. To visually narrate these experiences with Black girls is to *exquisite-corpse*[^34], to document as the artist I call myself.

Portraiture makes spaces for a writing style, and exhibition quality able to house the data and documentation garnered from Black girlhood spaces that I present in this dissertation. Scholars Adrienne Dixson, Thandeka Chapman, and Dijanna Hill (2005) argue for research as an aesthetic process by way of portraiture indicating it as a "narrative that bridge[s] the realms of science and art, merging the systematic and careful description of good ethnography with the evocative resonance of fine literature". As does my artwork, my writing is shaped by a desire to visually narrate the stories, which include the traumas, of Black girlhood. The dissertation weaves the theories of pleasure, memory, spirituality, and Black girlhood narratives with art practices to elucidate the force(s) that make Black girlhood feel good, look exciting, as well as what makes others want, need, to gaze upon Black girlhood and to consume it.

[^34]: Exquisite Corpse, also known as *Exquisite Cadaver* (from the original French term *cadavre exquis*), is a method by which a collection of words or images is collectively assembled. Each collaborator adds to a composition in sequence, either by following a rule or by being allowed to see only the end of what the previous person contributed.
As a Black woman scholar, seemingly from (or in) the margins. I too write from the margins. I have found a promise in these margins that runs parallel to the very pleasure I have witnessed in Black girlhood, the pleasure I plan to exhibit.

In my employment of the portraiture, I organize an exhibition of individual girls’ stories and experiences with my own, from within The Vibrator Project as a single narrative interspersed throughout. These components of poetry, artwork, sketches, or quotations taken from field notes or interviews conducted with girl subjects will introduce each section of theoretical writing, constructing a juxtaposition, a vibration of sorts that marks an acknowledgment “contradiction” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 10)—embodying Black girlhood and Black womanhood, girl subject, and woman facilitator, teacher-student, participant, artist, ethnographer, documentarian. Black girl participants’ experiences as well as and my own as facilitator, artist, and ethnographer in The Vibrator Project will be collectively presented by way of poetic prose, artwork, and quotations under the guise of a fictive girl narrator named Anne Marie. Anne Marie is a ghost-character I have relied upon throughout this work to creatively streamline (in writing, sketching, and field-noting) girls’ experiences from the Vibrator Project and to protect their subjectivities in the process. As portraiture is about crafted storytelling, I use it to exhibit the multiplicity of Black girlhood stories, experiences, and outcomes as a singular organized narrative. This element of organization and exhibition displays not only my understanding of portraiture, but also that of my subject(s) effect on the outside world, and the outside world’s effect on her.

With this, I offer my reader a map for navigating this dissertation by way of the established methods of portraiture and layered data analysis, which formulates my process for crafting, writing, and depicting the experiential happenings, conjuring the space of Black girlhood. Portraiture, for the purpose of this dissertation, permits me to draw that image perhaps when my audience is awaiting words, or to write poetry, while my audience covets the promised painting, as I deem it necessary as author and artist.

35 I conducted Internal Review Board (IRB) approved interviews during the course of The Vibrator Project action research project I facilitated with Black girl subjects in 2013. I will employ excerpts from said interviews for the purpose(s) theorizing pleasure within Black girlhood spaces within this dissertation. The continued use of this data is permitted by the Penn State IRB.
I like to state early on in any autobiographical writing that I am first a visual artist, explicitly detailing my preferred media for conveying ideas like black and white craft photography and multi-media painting. But the truth is writing is also an art form of mine. Mirroring Gloria Anzaldúa’s style of jumping around and conjuring assemblages of seemingly unrelated media and format, I strive for a similar aesthetic in presenting these forthcoming ideas. This tactic speaks to how my brain functions to convey messages, providing then an autoethnographic representation of the concepts related to the cultural experiences (i.e., a Black girlhood) I wish to portray.

Chapter 2 explores the enduring legacy of the [Redacted] narrative and its effect on the potential of Black girlhood pleasure, challenging established scholarship and cultural criticism that situates the [Redacted] narrative as a cautionary tale in order to regulate contemporary discussions of Black female sexuality. Rather than rehash the details of her infamous story, this chapter reconsiders the viability of the [Redacted] narrative as we know it in order to reassess Black female sexuality in relation to power. For instance, if scholars have largely used the [Redacted] narrative to explore Black women’s encounters with White men, what does this offer for studies of Black girlhood? Pleasure? Also, what writing strategies and aesthetic practices can scholars use to trouble the transhistorical reach of the [Redacted] narrative?

What does the cautionary tale of the [Redacted] do for the Black woman, Black girl who looks more like her than not? How do Black women, Black girls locate pleasure in the face of such troubling imaginaries?

Zine Magubane (2001) reasons that the [Redacted] narrative has become the very thing it initially troubled: a master narrative. It operates as the iconic example of Black women’s sexual subjection at the hands of White men, in this case, scientists. The scholarly obsession over the [Redacted] narrative

36 Deluezean use of “assemblage” as analysis of social framework
37 Autoethnography is an element of the portraiture I am constructing, used to accomplish a “visual truth” described by Denzin’s (1997) “Interpretative Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century” as a method to connect mobile, moving, shifting minds (and their representations) to a shifting, external world” (Denzin, 1996, p. 32), regarding the subject of Black girlhood as well as my own thought-process having the experience of both author and Black girl. Autoethnography is equally the mode by which this writing as a “performance text” emerges, that which “makes experiences concrete, anchoring [them] in the here and now” (Denzin, 1996, p. 91).
explains skewed power dynamics between White men and Black women, but it manipulates our understanding of the Black Venus as a cultural trope in a contemporary moment. I argue this cultural trope has turned on itself becoming a tool of manipulation used to maintain the constriction of Black women’s and girls’ ability to delight and have pleasure in what might be their own Venus-like bodies. Using arts-based action research from The Vibrator Project, this chapter investigates what a reversal of caution means for Black girls in their quest to construct a personal sexual narrative.

Chapter 3 builds on the theory of Black girlhood pleasure through an assessment of the archetypes that emerged in my research and work with Black girls. If Black girls witness, what then is produced in one’s witnessing? How and why does such witnessing evolve in Black girlhood? This chapter will conceptualize the most recurrent symbols of pleasure revealed in The Vibrator Project through explorations of sex, food, money, The Sacred, and rage as pleasure in Black girlhood identity and space.

Understanding Black girls experience pleasure in a myriad of ways extending from physical enjoyment to modes of expression best accessible to them, plagued by historical narratives of the Black female body like that of [Redacted]’s (The [Redacted]), Black women and girl’s modes of expressing and receiving pleasure have been interrupted or simply rerouted. I find them in my investigations with Black girls in The Vibrator Project, in girls’ bodily aesthetics, their relationship to food, in their music, their quests to make that money, and how they express anger. This chapter theorizes these expressive modes through artwork, testimony, memory, expressions of Black girl raunch in the musical lyrics of Nicki Minaj and Pretty Taking All Fades (PTAF) exhibiting Black girls and Black girl desires and pleasure(s) as marking the curve of spacetime.

Chapter 4 is an exploration of spacetime, what we deem the margins. Angela Davis’s prison abolition scholarship gives cause to why so many Black girlhood stories unfold, not only in the margins but are the reasons the margins are constructed, like prison walls. Black girls’ perceived deviancy is exhibited in why systems like Juvenile Justice are the current and most prominent methods in
constraining Black female identity, and therefore pleasure. Davis’s research reveals:

[U]ntil the abolition of slavery, the vast majority of black women were subject to regimes of punishment that differed significantly from those experienced by White women. As slaves, they were directly and often brutally disciplined for conduct considered perfectly normal in a context of freedom. (Davis, 2003)

The Black Female Body Bureaucracy, an iteration of the black hole, employs the social concept of freedom by deconstructing Black women’s containment within it, demonstrating how skewed perceptions of blackness and womanhood ensure that black womanhood, inside or outside of this social construct, never quite reaches free.

My work as an artist and educator with Black girls in prison investigates an experience of Black female bodies contained-- inmates, guards, administrators, social service workers, and program facilitators like myself. This chapter poses the questions: Who drives the machine perpetuating the containment, punishment, and subsequent demonization of black female bodies? And, if the answer can be Black women?

Positioning the prison spacetime, among other Black girlhood sites, as performative and educative, provides an investigation of the margins, spacetime and the players within it. The girl, the guard, the place, even myself are teachers and learners amidst this educational/performance-site. The arts programming, I have facilitated with Black girls at youth service provision sites—camps, afterschool, and rite of passage programs—and within Juvenile Justice are closely related by how Black girl bodies are understood and managed. The writing will constitute a critical analysis that goes beyond reflecting on the relational dynamics experienced by Black women and girls within these contained spaces to examine a recognizable Black Female Body Bureaucracy and its inhabitants, both permanent and temporary, as a territorialized plane of consistency lying between powerfully constructed layers—whiteness, patriarchy, and respectability, the black hole.
Chapter 5 asks what a Black girlhood story is. And how do Black girls perform the world they’ve been given? How does a Black girl turn a world she’s been given into one that is her own? In my practice of work and research with Black girls, I have learned that sexual trauma is far too common amongst them. Over the course of a decade, I have shared in the stories of sexual trauma of young Black women and girls. One thing that I have come to uncover is that these young women and girls carry and live with these experiences in many different ways. This chapter explores Black girls’ memory and fantasy work in The Vibrator Project as coping sources related to their experiences of what has been deemed sexual trauma in their lives. Through the referencing of their narratives, tellings in like children’s book stories, I explore the performance and imaginary of their tellings they encompass in crafting the agency of their bodies and subjectivities as ultimately superior and heroic. This chapter bypasses the angle of survival to highlight the genius in Black girls’ ability to recreate their worlds to one where they are able to live and thrive, thus positing the art of Black girlhood pleasure and fantasy as promising learning pathways for Art Education.
Chapter 2: Reimagining Black Girlhood Pleasure History

Rememory

I remember an argument with a dear friend and philosopher, Ebony Rhodes. Amidst a heated debate, she pronounced to me, “the problem with stories is they control you and trap you into a given outcome!” (Personal conversation with Ebony Y. Rhodes, 2013). The assertion has remained with me. I can’t fully remember what we were arguing about, but the essence was my frustrated excitement about something we were not doing, or some way we were not being, how we did not measure up to my expectations. This hopeful and ideal perspective of mine was met by a seemingly harsh response from my friend. I was trying to make whatever we were experiencing a story.

I started to think about it this way: a story or narrative is like a cover or cap that seals in elements and protects them from further influence. This can be true in the case of a positive or negative unfolding. A “cap” is defined as a limiting structure that covers or protects38. In other words, occurrences, experiences, ways of being, fashioned into stories or narratives, as I will later elaborate on, have a sort of limited potential. Since this realization, I have been careful and critical in my considerations about the many stories or narratives I encounter.

What complicates this realization is that I consider myself a storyteller and creative writer. I see life in narratives and am eager to participate in the retelling of life experiences as narrative. I think my upbringing as both a U.S. American Black girl and as the offspring of Bahamian immigrants has conditioned me for seeing and retelling life experiences through a particular narrative perspective that is important to share with the world. In writing a proposal for a new photography series I wanted to create, I contextualized my desires to do so in remembering the tradition of image-making and storytelling in

38 A combination of the eight definitions for the word “cap” as defined by Merriam-Webster.
which I was raised (how these ways of remembering and retelling have stayed with me). I reasoned that I had come from a family of photographers and image hoarders. As a part of this upbringing, I had realized how the right to possessing one’s image, both physically and metaphorically, remains a complex notion for Black folks—one that embraces love, expression, and resistance.

I evolved to understand that my family, in particular, took pictures and told stories to both see themselves, and to keep themselves. Sojourner Truth exemplified this in her self-staged carte-visites that were staged specifically to provide clues, breadcrumbs, for those existences following her own, that her offspring could find ways back, ways out, so as not to vanish amidst erroneous characterizations, or lack thereof, often made on behalf of Black folks. Like Sojourner Truth’s famous carte-visite—a shadow sold to support her substance, my family members have employed storytelling and image-making to communicate a kind of deliberate remembering. Truth reminds me that our personal accounts, our truths are of few authentic things we own out-right.

As narrators of cadence and consistency, my family members subjected me to the same stories, in the exact-same sentence structure and phraseology, over, and over again in my upbringing. Your Aunt Jane was a great cook. She was the cook for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor when they resided in The Bahamas. When John Kennedy was a senator, he had a summer home in Lyford Cay. She was his cook. And Grandmamma, you knew she was comin’ by dem big, pretty legs, dat strut, walkin’ down 17th avenue, a bushel of greens in each arm. This kind of deliberate remembering and staging of life experience is what author, Toni Morrison (1996) establishes as “rememory”—a form of willed creation. “It is not an effort to find out the way it really was…The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared that particular way (Morrison, 1996, p. 213).” So how then does such a Storyteller metabolize the idea that narratives can limit potential reality?

39 I have used the example of Sojourner Truth’s carte-visite, “Selling the Shadow…” as confirmation of the way in which she wanted to be known and perhaps remembered. Where much was written about this historical figure, even during her lifetime, much of it was the characterizations and perceptions made by White women intrigued by her persona. Sojourner Truth as a nonliterate, ex-slave, used the crafting of imagery as her tool to present her personhood, character, and class to the outside world. This commentary is sourced from historian Nell Irvine Painter’s (1998) historical research on Truth. (Bell-Scott & Johnson-Bailey, 1998)
Morrison relies on appearance and perspective in defining rememory as a literary device and explains the occurrence as “a deliberate remembering.” For example, in Toni Morrison's novel “Beloved,” the main character Sethe's "re-memoring" involves remembering memories, just as I described in my proposal to make a photography series of my family’s memories and retellings. In the novel, Morrison's concept of "rememory" is utilized when memory is revisited, whether physically or mentally. Yet the word is not a verb but a noun. It is an actual thing, person or a place that takes on the existence of a noun. When Sethe explains rememory to Denver, she states,

> [i]f a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place-the picture of it-stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think about it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there (Morrison, 1997, p. 36).

Rememory(s), then, are places, or better, pictures of certain places triggering off representations, vivid descriptions or accounts. Here and throughout, rememory enables Sethe to reconstruct her past realities. The vividness that Sethe brings to every moment through recurring images characterizes her understanding of herself. Through rememory, Morrison is able to carry Sethe on a journey from being a woman who identifies herself only through motherhood to a woman who begins to identify herself as a human being.

I first became familiar with the concept of rememory in my research to support the role of memory work with Black girls in the Vibrator Project. My goal when I embarked upon that project was to facilitate each girl’s building a personal sexual narrative for herself. In this case, in order to chronicle this narrative—a construction and examination of the Vibrator Project participants’ personal histories and experiences related to sex, sexuality, and pleasure—art projects were established to facilitate the girls’ building a model for pleasure based upon their individual desires, experiences and truth(s) that could serve as a viable path to this self-discovery. This does not differ from Sethe’s journey as written by Morrison.
The personal sexual narrative activity proved that memories about first encounters with sexual pleasure, emotional satisfaction, and positive touch easily contributed to self-esteem and the way a girl might contextualize *pleasure*. Relatedly, Black feminist scholar, bell hooks (1994) also relies on memory work as a foundation for healthy self-esteem. She speaks about the importance of the images our memories have, saying, “using these images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities [and] images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye” (hooks, 1994, p. 53). To me, these words are matched in the expectations implicated by Sojourner Truth’s self-image making, in my family’s retelling of stories, in Sethe’s willful remembering of her life’s past scenes.

Far from being some sort of useless longing, hooks regards this memory work as being in the service of working towards an understanding of the present and the future.

By asking girls to examine the memories each one owns out-right, these art projects helped them to retrace their physical and emotional desires up to a given moment and to construct what we titled the *pleasure timeline (or map)* and the *family structure map*. Each of these projects were drawing and painting exercises in which girls were asked to “fashion a map, however you might conceive of the idea of a map,” and “tell me a story of how you think you arrived at the things that feel, sound, and taste pleasurable to you,” or to “draw a blueprint of what your family unit looks like” (Field Notes, 2012). In other words, I was asking each girl to *make a story* out her life and her experiences, a rememory. These projects would become components, or at least stepping-stones to each girl recognizing this *personal sexual narrative*—the overarching goal of the Vibrator Project program facilitation.

Rememory supported my understanding of *the story or narrative* begging to have purpose. And, in realizing that, I started to understand the importance of the storyteller as well as the *why* and *how* a given story is being constructed. The use of rememory thus, sets up how I mobilize the [Redacted] narrative, which I will discuss later in the chapter. Here, historical facts are not the focus, but rather the way the narrative is remembered, and concentrates more on the *rememberer* and the specific need for the
story’s retelling. Not to say that the narrative is fiction or fantasy, but rather that perspective, in this case, is the most valuable. Morrison’s rememory is a kind of creation, and so it describes a way that creative writers and artists alike are using (or willing) the narrative of the [Redacted] specifically, for their own artistic purposes.

Narratology & Narrative Violence

Considering willed remembrance or rememory, as something that I have learned to do and appreciate by way of my family and Black feminist creatives, I have found support in the field of narratology, which is a literary criticism that grapples with the structure and function of narrative within various cultural respects. In this chapter, I am considering the purpose of stories and narratives as well as the constraints of storytelling, exemplified in how the [Redacted] narrative, the story of a young South African woman, captured, and exhibited as a freak show attraction in the 1800s has affected Black girl bodies in the present-day. In investigating this effect and how it has evolved across time and geographical landscapes, I also argue the significance of what the narrative means to and does to Black-American girl bodies today.

Backing up to the idea of stories or narratives having a darker side, or having caps on potential, I find support in Nouri Gana’s and Heike Härting’s (2008) article “Introduction: Narrative Violence: Africa and the Middle East” where the idea of capping is complicated even further to encompass the violent potential of narrative or storytelling. This guides my question, how then are violent or traumatic stories supposed to be remembered? Retold? Gana and Harting explain narrative violence as problematic because of the “narrativizing imperative that constitutes it: the ethical and testimonial obligation to make the violent event speak, and speak coherently in order to be witnessable, understandable, and credible. (Gana & Härting, 2008, p. 2)” The quote supports the claim that the [Redacted] narrative as told traditionally
and historically factual, proves how the tragedy of the Venus’s story is relied upon more than any other parts.

Embarking upon this chapter, my quest began as a simple reimagining of the narrative because I felt like Black girls had not had the ability to focus on or to remember the Black and female body of the [Redacted] in a healthy way due to the traumatic aspects of the way this story has been retold—what happened to her body, what happened on her body. With knowledge of how narratives told about Black girlhood often rely on the tragic Black or tragic girlhood (particularly in relation to the body) aspects more so than any other part(s), I find Gana’s and Harting’s argument regarding the violent acts of a story being necessary for making a narrative credible quite astute. I also recognize how this articulation is mirrored in the expectations that White patriarchy puts onto the Black body, and this is the reason why certain aspects of Black life such as Black suffering is often what is most legible in our mainstream understanding of the Black body.

As a result, this chapter explores what happens when we choose to acknowledge the violence of the [Redacted] narrative, but then to further focus on other kinds of engagement happening in spite of, and in addition to an aspect of narrative violence. From Gana and Harting, my consideration of the narrative or story has broadened to encompass the questions, what is the purpose of tragic remembering? And, does such remembering have to be violent? These questions put rememory and narrative violence in conversation with one another because while willed remembering can be a healthy avenue to self-actualization for Black girls, we must acknowledge that they are trying to make such progress at the expense of the expectations of White supremacy and respectability. In this case of this chapter, I focus on the infamous narrative of the [Redacted] to further my investigation of how narratives can be violent, and specifically to Black girl bodies. What happens when Black girls have the chance to engage with a narrative like that of the [Redacted] in spite of, in addition to, the violence of the narrative?
The Lessons of Black Girlhood

As I just unpacked narrative violence, this sets up an analysis of the Vibrator Project—As History Lesson by way of two voices 1) the voice of AnnMarie and 2) my voice as the Scholar-Ethnographer. These ways of telling, support my central argument that: by both centering the voice of the Black girl storyteller and by disrupting an obligatory focus on the violence of the [Redacted] narrative, we can begin to visualize and construct meanings for Black girlhood pleasure. But first, I wish to exemplify how I understand access to Black girlhood pleasure as being often caught between the dichotomy of good or bad practices.

I am considering how the specific lessons of Black girlhood are often delivered in the form of narrative, in parables that caution the dangers of behaving badly. Such lessons of scrutiny and respectability, I believe, outnumber those simply focused on joy, celebration, or examples of alternative life paths from respectable and Eurocentric ideals like heterosexual love and White history. I do this in a brief discussion of memes that circulate on social media which I believe are just new forms of such “lessons” directed at Black girls and those [doomed] with the task of parenting Black children, most especially Black girls. I understand memes to be quick-witted and easy-to-get narratives made to fit a fast paced and technology-centered society, intent on getting to the point, and keeping perceived chaos (or the potential thereof) to a minimum.

Doing scholarship, talking about, and writing about sex and sexual pleasure with regard to Black girls most certainly situates my work in discourses of moral panic. Therefore, the controversial nature of my work makes me highly aware and intent on being able to articulate its purpose. This also means that when I encounter the narratives, lessons, and parables that evoke a feeling of policing that Hazel Carby (1992) writes about regarding Black women and girls’ sexuality, I am equally hyper-aware. The place that I encounter such narratives the most is on the Internet, social media, through these memes that I consider to be the moralistic policing of Black girls’ sexuality via their bodies. Through the combined consumption of social media as a news source and connector to popular culture, these lessons are
marketed and consumed as easy-to-live-by. However, they also become the everyday narratives, stories, and parables that put a cap on the potential of Black girlhood in the public imagination. (Carney, Hernandez, Wallace, 2016)

Black modes of sexual expression already occupy an untenable position on the rigid continuum of “normal” sexuality that undergirds the arguments of these texts, reflecting sociologist Janice Irvine’s contention that “the White middle class has routinely justified oppression by casting people of color as sexually deviant”. This is evidenced in the way the sexual moral panics driving these studies have centered on middle-class White girls as the subjects of primary concern, as Black girls are thought to be deviant and therefore incapable of “correction” (Knupfer). As subjects who are marginalized and made vulnerable by their positions relative to race, gender, and status as youth, Black girls are “thought to be morally wanting by both dominant society and other indigenous group members” (Cohen, 29). Such discourses compel the contemporary circulation of moralistic memes on social media by some Black communities, as they attempt to deem Black girls valuable by articulating notions of their sexual purity through respectability politics. This purity, however, is nevertheless positioned in such images as tenuous and susceptible to trouble through Black girls’ exposure to popular Hip Hop music, thus unwittingly reinforcing the very racialized stereotype they seek to contest.

Black women Hip Hop and R&B artists in popular culture are often framed as depraved Jezebels40 who bring about the moral downfall of Black girls, in particular, due to their sexual body presentations, lyrics, and video productions. Memes such as these circulate on the social media feeds of communities of color online, often among people who claim to be invested in progressive race and gender politics. The meme in Fig. 1 portrays a young Black girl fighting off monsters that represent artists such as Beyoncé, Rihanna, and Nicki Minaj. These Black women celebrities are charged with attacking “Black daughters” through their presence in mainstream media. The meme in Fig. 2 utilizes a still image of Nicki

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40 Jezebel is one of the characterizations of Black females being portrayed as lascivious by nature. It is explored in foundational studies of stereotypical Black figures in media, television, and marketing from minstrelsy onward in U.S. history and social structures. I utilize Donald Bogle’s (1973) characterization of Black Stereotypes in “Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies” here.
Minaj appearing maniacal to convey the message that parents who do not invest time in properly “training” their daughters will leave them in the hands of these purportedly deviant figures.

Social media has been a site where the Minaj/Hill dichotomy has also been staged (Figure 3). They declare that Nicki Minaj, unlike conscious, hip-hop artist, Lauryn Hill, indeed promotes the miseducation of people of color. Social texts such as these encapsulate the either/or framework of
empowered/respectable versus deviant/denigrated Black girl- and womanhood. These paradigms refuse to situate artists like Minaj and Hill along a continuum of women’s Hip Hop practices that embraces a variety of expressive modes without creating hierarchical valuations between them. Along with many other women and girls of color, I love and relate to the music of both artists. Sesali Bowen has analyzed a similar meme that juxtaposes the recording artists Erykah Badu and Beyoncé, arguing that to “‘be a Badu in a world full of Beyonces’ is to be respectable and discretionary or passively engaged with your sexuality, while other women publicly or explicitly express theirs.” The popularity of such memes exposes a widespread investment in shaming Black women pop culture performers who embrace sexual self-presentation. Memes are effective tools of communication because of their efficient and precise juxtaposition of text and image makes them easy to circulate and digest in minimal time. According to Bowen, memes provide “archival evidence of how Black women are constructed, represented, and approached within the current digital landscape”. 
Figure 2: “Don’t Feel Like Training Your Daughters” meme
Figure 3: “The Miseducation of Basically Everything” meme
The memes illustrated here convey an address to Black parents, and likely mothers specifically, to take up arms against popular music in order to protect their daughters’ sexual respectability. Knowledge is referenced as a weapon with which to fight against this “sexualization,” but what kind of knowledge would provide the solution to this moral panic is less clear. It appears, according to the logic of these memes, that girls must either be protected from exposure to this media or, alternatively, be encouraged to take an oppositional stance against it.
For example, the meme in Fig. 4 depicts a young Black girl lying in bed in her room, drawing a self-portrait. On the wall behind her hangs a large poster bearing the likeness of celebrated Black Mexican-Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong’o grinning while holding the Oscar she was awarded in 2014. The foreground displays, among dolls and other childhood relics, posters and other Nicki Minaj fan paraphernalia that have been torn down and thrown in a trash bin. The image conveys the impression that the child once admired Nicki Minaj, but learned that she is no longer praise-worthy when compared to the respectable, elegantly dressed, and culturally exalted Academy Award-winning Nyong’o. The meme not only polarizes the artistic crafts of Minaj and Nyong’o, but pits one Black woman against the other, reinforcing the notion that for Black girls there is a right and wrong version of Black womanhood to aspire to. This point is most clearly expressed in how the meme portrays the girl creating her own “positive” self-image that is inspired by Nyong’o’s example. The meme denies a complex understanding of the women being portrayed and disregards the evolving Black girlhoods in question. It strictly assigns each artist to the role of a literal poster child—one respectable, and the other disgraceful—thus imposing on Black girls the impossible expectation of making the right choice for their own well-being. 41

41 I published this information on memes (2016) since finalizing this dissertation.
Returning to Nouri and Ghana’s elaboration of narrative violence I’ve begun to read these memes and lessons as a form of such violence. This has influenced my reconsideration of many narratives,

Redaction, Reimagination, and Liberation

Figure 5: “Lupita” meme.
especially those that seem to be directed at, or in nod to what the right kind of Black womanhood or Black girlhood should look like. This is how I arrive at the narrative of the [Redacted], the story told and retold of the Khoisan woman, [Redacted], displayed as a freak show attraction in the 1800’s due to her perceived exotic corporeal form. *I am reluctant to say her name, as I grapple with this willed remembrance, this mentioning.* I know this story well, and now so do the girls with whom I work.

Within this document, I redact the name of [Redacted], the historical figure remembered in the [Redacted] Narrative as way to exhibit my own grappling with how to remember and honor her as a historical figure and not simply a tool or lesson that I am critiquing. Simultaneously, I wish to conjure the rememory I believe to be a necessity, not just because of her historical existence, but also because of how her remembrance affects the Black girl body. I am relying on Christina Sharpe’s usage of redaction42 in her writing to emphasize this challenge. The theorist Hortense Spillers’s phrase “hieroglyphics of the flesh” is also employed to make justification for this mode of creative redaction. Saidiya Hartman further defines Spiller’s term as “the gap or incommensurability between the proper name and the form of existence that it signifies”.

I didn’t learn the [Redacted] narrative as a school-aged girl, in a History or Social Studies, or Social Science classroom. I didn’t learn this story as a common narrative or fable such as the Three Little Pigs or Little Red Riding Hood⁵. This story did not reach me until the age of twenty-two or so, in my last semester of undergraduate school, in a class dedicated to teaching the foundations of Black female sexuality(s). Although I had attended an all-girls, Liberal Arts College in the U.S. South, it was nonetheless a predominantly White institution, just like every other formal education institution I had attended from the age of five. And well, as a Studio Art and Spanish double major, Female Sexuality(s) and or Women’s History or Black History were courses never a prioritized in my proposed curriculum. So, in my Senior year, when there were no other necessary classes in my queue, I bought and acoustic guitar and registered for a beginner’s guitar class, and opted to partake in what my friends and I were

42 I borrow this mode of redaction from Christina Sharpe’s (2016) “In the Wake: On Blackness and Being.”
calling a once -in- a-lifetime opportunity, a course on Black women and sexuality, a first-time opportunity for many of us. This is where I first learned the tragic (as told to me) narrative of The [Redacted].

I encountered the narrative and perhaps its importance again for the second time when I attend my first National Women’s Studies conference (turns out, Women’s Studies had been ingrained me, even outside of Studio Art and Spanish) where my best friend and I chose to sit in on one of the few sessions we could connect with at the time, a documentary on [Redacted]’s return home to South Africa directed by Zola Maseko. Here, was where I was once again, asked to consider the importance of this story. I was beginning to feel the weight of it. I grew into an understanding that this story was more than history; for me and for my body, it was a significant place on the map of the many atrocities to follow (and predate) it, committed onto Black Women’s bodies.

The narrative of the [Redacted] easily becomes, the place to start, the most important thing to know, to fear. And since it is so easy to “teach” (read: fix) Black girls, it becomes the most portable of lessons. The narrative of the [Redacted] is everywhere, even as it is not told. It is a way of looking, recognizing for Black American women that whether told as historical fact, narrative, or art, is a tool used to keep Black female sexual from nearing depravity, sexualization, or stereotypical characterization, just as the memes of social media mentioned prior. And in the often-uncritical redeployment of the [Redacted] narrative (from historical and localized context) I have begun to consider such to be a restriction a form of violence constantly committed onto Black girlhood.

In the tradition of Toni Morrison’s rememory, I find the concept of reimagination. And in that, I find it important to connect such a possibility to freedom, liberation. AnneMarie’s voice as exhibited later in the chapter spotlights a particular Black girlhood quest for passage—freedom, away from, or even through the constant violence(s) committed onto or in the name of Black girlhood. I have exemplified this violence(s) specifically by way of narrative and media lessons erected to restrict Black girlhood, especially in the areas of sexuality and sexual expression. AnneMarie’s quest on behalf of Black girls is
actually a call to the reader to envision Black girlhood as a possible and new portal for not only (re)seeing or reimagining narrative violence, but also for seeing and understanding the world.

To understand the necessity for freedom or liberation in imagining Black girlhood, I go to English and Black Studies Scholar Alexander Weheliye (2014), who purposes his work “Habeas Viscus” to affirm that such freedom constitutes Black girls becoming themselves. His work argues, “the more we become ourselves the more ability we have to take control of who we can be, freed from the constraining pre-defined identity options we are granted” as Black bodies in the U.S. developing into social beings (Weheliye, 2014). According to Weheliye, philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s (1995) concept of “bare life,” for which “Habeas Viscus” takes up, deeply obscures the way race and racism shape the modern idea of the human in the world, and thus freedom. As a result, this concept imagines that the way the state exerts power over the body (a power that divides people either into disposable creatures or citizens) exists prior to a process by which human beings are racialized—that is, ordered, and ranked on the basis of their flesh. Weheliye’s point is that traditional perspectives of knowledge bases such Philosophy have never been expected to take race seriously. (Weheliye, 2014, p. 6).

As a result, Weheliye’s work calls for theories of law and governance that center race, particularly Black feminist forms of knowledge production like that of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter. Weheliye laments the fact that because Women-of-color often articulate their critiques in relation to their identities, the knowledge they produce is marginalized in comparison to White males whose identities go unmarked, whom readers often grant the benefit of the doubt that they are “objective” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 7). If we privilege a Black feminist epistemology, more specifically a Black girlhood epistemology, our attention will be guided to alternative modes of cognition.

And so, in the vain of freedom, Weheliye’s concept of habeas viscus—“you shall have the flesh”—exhibits temporality of space and time. This temporality is made clear in what science-fiction writer and Afro future scholar, Kodwo Eshun (2003), calls the “futurepast” in his 2003 essay, “Further Considerations of Afrofuturism. From the perspective of Blackness, the apocalyptic collapse of human
life on Earth that, for Whites, seems like a distant future dystopia, this apocalyptic occurrence already exists (i.e., in the Middle Passage) and is passed down to Black people through visceral remembering(s) of and through Black flesh (skin and body). Like rememory, like a future past, I argue that living out a Black girlhood is, in fact, a practice of a similar “non-alignment”. Non-alignment is a way of living out of synch with [White] Man’s space or time. And reimagining by way of Black girlhood might be a very productive way of creating alternatives to [White] capitalist realisms, or respectability. It is at and in this time “when the hieroglyphics of the flesh are…transit visas to universes betwixt and between the jurisdictions of Man” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 127). Like a rememory of past experiences, and as Eshun argues, “non-alignment is a practice in the making, something to be achieved in the present. It is a potential that oscillates between these two states [Man and the flesh, to use Weheliye’s terms] without reaching equilibrium” (Eshun, 2003, p. 293). It not only supports Black girls’ access to freedom in the present but also shows what liberation to reimage space and time (rememory) (i.e., the [Redacted] narrative) gives to Black girl flesh. Weheliye maintains “[i]t is not a vacant, uniform, or universal feature that sets in motion liberty but rather the future as it is seen, felt, and heard from the enfleshed parenthetical presence of the oppressed, since this group’s NOW is always already bracketed (held captive and set aside indefinitely) in, if not antithetical to, the world of Man” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 138).” Thus, according to Weheliye, the only way to perceive and practice the potentiality of habeas viscus, the flesh, is to experience it as a temporal misalignment with Man’s space and/ or time, through liberation.

In order to reimage, we must understand how the media relating to Black girlhood flesh is taken up, which I take to be Spiller’s hieroglyphics of the flesh or as Weheliye describes as “emanat[e] rays of potential enfleshment” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 127). The whole point is that freedom is foreign in the White and respectable world I contest in this work. So, for Black girls to access it in their perceived relation to “man,” the way is not by digging more deeply into “Earth,” but rather by transporting themselves out of and beyond such a world—the Afro Future. Weheliye argues this “syncopation” as freedom, “as a leap or jump into what is out of synch with Man’s vibe” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 129). In other words, it’s not a
practice of re-aligning Man [whiteness] with the vibrancy of things, but of inhabiting entirely different dimensions, and spatio-temporal relations. As Weheliye repeatedly emphasizes, this un-human future is the now of the flesh—i.e., Black girlhood flesh approaching freedom.

Chapter Map

As this chapter continues, I will first operationalize a reimagining of the [Redacted] narrative that is often utilized as a cautionary device, in both its teaching and shaping of Black girlhood sexual identity. As present in much historical and scientific research, as well as creative works occurring in the past three hundred years, this historic event, this person, this life has come to have a constant and profound effect on how Black female bodies are read and how Black female sexuality is narrativized, even within a present-day social, sexual, and aesthetic context.

Through contextualizing lessons of Black girlhood, I consider the varying constraints of storytelling and narrative, while also making a claim as to why I do not adhere to a factual, historical record of a narrative like that of the [Redacted]. In this chapter, I am activating the “willed remembrances” or rememories of creative writers, storytellers, and artists who are purposing the [Redacted] narrative. For me, and Black girls, these creatives are putting the experience of having grown and existed in a Black girl body in conversation with their own perspectives of the relayed lessons of how Black girl bodies have been treated and viewed in a U.S. and World historical context. My investigation will focus on Black girlhood space(s) I have engaged with through arts practice in the Vibrator Project. And, in order to honor the transcontinental and the trans-generational reach of the narrative and its lessons, I do not prioritize a factual, historical record of the [Redacted] narrative. Engaging a select range of visual artists and creative writers shaping creative projects around the [Redacted] narrative such as Shoshanna Weinberger’s (visual artist) *Freak show* and *Stangefruit* series, Suzan Lori Parks’s

In the remainder of this chapter, I continue to emphasize space in reference to a particular lens of seeing and relating to Black girlhood articulated by the arts-based programming spaces I created and named The Vibrator Project. While The Vibrator Project is an articulation of praxis, I also utilize it as a theoretical lens for recognizing, exploring, and validating physical and emotional pleasures experienced by project participants. First, what is the narrative? This chapter recounts the master narrative of the [Redacted] through Black girl voice, AnneMarie, and her perspective in prose-form vignettes. Secondly, I explore how Black girls I have worked with encounter the narrative through implicit [null] and explicit [formal] curricula. This is accomplished by narrative investigations of ways Black girls with whom I have worked have encountered the master narrative in their rearing from parents, teachers, and mentors; but also, how Black girls have encountered the narrative through arts programming in the Vibrator Project, like with the Shoshanna Weinberger arts facilitation. The chapter considers the possibilities of reimagining the constraints placed on Black female sexuality by historical events and investigates how such reimagining operates as a mode of learning for Black girls—one example of the curve of spacetime. I explore these things through Black girls’ self-portraiture in the Shoshanna Weinberger arts facilitation as well as their creative writing, drawing, and painting responses to the [Redacted] narrative. I present this through the voice of AnneMarie. Annemarie’s voice is a use of narratology that combines, one-on-one girl interviews from the Vibrator Project, group discussions from the Vibrator Project arts facilitation, my own ethnographic field notes, journaling, and visual art responses to the activities made possible by the Vibrator Project.
Figure 6, six figure, is mine, AnneMarie’s. Trying, a little bit, to be grown, as the adults often say. But really, trying to be me and free, all at the same time. They say grown to mean too tight, too fast, too curved, too much that makes me look like I feel good, like I am having fun, like I like the way I look, feel, am. “Too” might resemble joy, a bubbling over and spillage of joy, that is, not becoming of virtuous43 Black girlhood44.

As another practice of space, we have a day poolside45, so we could be free, just for a little bit. So we, I with them, six others of the Ms. Anya’s girls group, from Fred Wessels46, and Yamacraw Village, and Frazier, and Kayton Homes accepted that brief moment to be free and grown, and to swim, and to laugh, and to eat the things that would taste sweet, sour, and spicy on our tongues. We shimmied our budding and busting hips, breasts, and thighs into swimsuits that varied, one-piece, two-pieces, and too-tight bikinis. No need to wear t-shirts, shorts, or sweatpants, to cover these voluptuaries47 or spilling parts. There is no one there to see, to point, to ask questions, make demands or reprimands, to swarm48 towards our flesh49. There was a little bit of free50.

Free as short for freedom. Freedom like Frantz Fanon’s free, Hortense Spillers flesh, and Alex Wheheliye’s understanding of the two.

Scholar’s Note

I. “Figure 6 (or six)” denotes a literal Figure 6, depicting the image taken at a pool party, and described by AnneMarie. This is one of two images I often recall when discussing the junctions of Black girlhood, sexuality, and freedom. This one is an image of seven Black girls with whom I was working with as Vibrator Project participants in Savannah, Georgia. The girls were in attendance at a pool party, enjoying a day of swimming, eating, laughter, dressed various swimsuit fashions from bikinis to full pieces ensembles. They wanted to see themselves, save themselves, remember; so they orchestrated this self-portrait. Most likely through the use of a timer of a now old-fashioned digital camera, from what appears to be a position on the ground of the pool deck in front of them, they stage this recording. The image in figure 1 is the record of this moment. When recalling my own memory about the day because I was not exactly aware the image or the moment had even existed until I was tagged on Facebook days or even weeks later. When I clicked the link indicating I had been tagged, I was brought face to face with this image, which I did not, at first, recognize. For one, I was not in the image, two there was a bunch of half-naked girls staring at me, three I had been tagged, so everyone I knew and was friends with on social media following my time-line had access to viewing this image of half-naked Black girls in association with me. Taking in the image, I asked myself the question what is so wrong with this image?

43 A virtuous woman
44 Black girlhood here is representing a when, as opposed to a what, elaborated upon in Chapter 1
45 We are at the pool because of a joint Girl Scout group slumber party and pool party. The lens of the Vibrator Project makes this relevant because of how I am making the image legible outside of the lens of policing and surveillance.
46 In this work, I place the lens of The Vibrator Project--seeking out the emotional, corporeal, and aesthetic pleasures found in Black girlhood experiences on to programming spaces I created to facilitate arts-based education with Black girls regarding such pleasure. These names represent three of the housing projects hosted such programming in Savannah, Georgia.
47 Borrowing from Jillian Hernandez’s use of the term in “Raunch Aesthetics as Visceral Address: (MORE) Notes from a Voluptuary,” contextualizes the term in relation to intrigue sought in the aesthetic imagery of the Black female body.
48 Swarming references the Deleauze and Guatarri’s black hole here
49 Habeas Viscus, and you shall have the flesh
50 See freedom in the introductory section.
Free like I don’t wear a t-shirt because there is no one or nothing there to swarm, to make me feel like I am wrong, embarrassed for my body’s willful developing or maturing and begging the resemblance of [Redacted]’s wrong, for rogue and independent hormones, for such boastful curving and spilling happening as cleavage, as awkward sways in my hips, in knock-knees, in pigeon-toes, in brittle, polish-chipped toenails or in my bad-walkin-self as my Mama calls it. Swarm to me, and render me wrong, like the white man buying Girl Scout cookies that day at the convention center booth, who upon handing Ms. Anya the money for his order said slyly atop his breath, “I thought the girls were supposed to be selling the cookies, not the moms” all while nodding in the direction of my budding, busting, thick-filled-Girl Scout uniform, the one I was proud to ensemble with just a note of yellow accent in my hair ties, earrings, belt, and shoe laces, accented with a little bit of free. He wants to dissect her but he loves her.

Free like, not knowing exactly how-to swim. Free like being able to ask the how, or to flap, and spit-cough up water in my tries. Free like Ms. Anya is also a lifeguard so she watches me, got me, will have me, can help me learn if I, just, ask. He wants to dissect her, but he loves her.

There amidst free’s visitation, I wear my one-piece, two-pieces, too-tight bikini. Pull it over top my baby-fat flesh, budding hips, boastful curves, and unsure cleavage. It is hugging, and tight-white. It is my favorite, low-cut, flower-power statement to the world, or at the least the other pool-goers that day, that I am me, am free, am a bit grown, and a bit free.

It is my hair that stands atop my head. Because in free, I can let it be. Swim, play, and not care who sees. No one there to see me, shame me,

The adult AnneMarie refers to is synecdoche connoting the adult mentor, facilitator, program service provider both the project participants and I encounter within a day at homes, schools, after-school programs, youth service provisions such as summer camps, youth groups, and prisons [correctional facilities]. These youth service providers, including parents, acted as hosts to The Vibrator Project programming. These individuals are assessed within my journaling and field notes about The Vibrator Project, which contributes to the shaping of a lens that centers pleasure. The individual relationship between girls and these adults, in addition to my interaction with the same adults, has impacted how I determine Black girlhood’s curve on spacetime—how their mere presence approaching the free horizon moves decision-making, conflict, and critique.

Here, self-portraiture or the selfie are shared as access(es) into Black girlhood pleasure because they are tangible records of exactly how she wants to be represented. As described in the voice of AnneMarie, this stylized image personifies what she is trying to communicate as beautiful, the personality she wishes to exude, and the things that are important to her. AnneMarie’s voice is Black girlhood articulation of wardrobe as costume, props, set/scene design, and camera angle to achieve the

51The refrain of protection. Referring to protection in how we handle Black girls, referring to Venus in Suzan Lori Parks, refraining in reference to D & G refrain.

52 Synecdoche is a rhetorical trope and a type of figurative speech similar to metonymy, a figure of speech in which a term that denotes one thing is used to refer to a related thing. Indeed, synecdoche is sometimes considered a subclass of metonymy.
for daring to have hair that aint long, aint straight, aint presentable, may- be- aint-even-mine. It is mine because I wear it, share it, don’t care to fit it or fix it for the no one who is watching.

Free like Fanon, like Spillers’, like Weheliye’s understanding of the two. That says it is my experiencing freedom that might be the reason that they swarm to me to see, to touch, to try to feel, not me, not this body. But I cannot leave the body. Cannot not be me. You see the flesh is necessary for all these things to be seen, these parts to come to together. It is Hortense Spillers reflection, Weheliye’s reference that this flesh I carry cannot be left behind.

So as a matter of figure 6, I decide we must photograph our moment of free. To save it, to see it later, maybe preserve a glimpse of what that free felt like. And without a doubt our flesh cannot be left behind. We set up the digital camera, the one with a timer. How do we get everyone in the picture—cute and free? Can’t ask an adult because she will try to say we are too grown, too tight, too happy. She will see our spilling. Take free away from me. So, set it on the ground in front of us. Angle up. Maybe lean it back on Kella’s shoe? Yeah…like that. And the shutter will ignite in 5-4-3-2-1.

--Picture Theory

and her friends have sough out the necessary equipment to produce and present these images to the masses (i.e., digital cameras, video cameras, and computers). The group here successfully creates the image of themselves they want to exhibit, and establish the images in the venue they deem appropriate (or create a new one).

AnneMarie’s group exploration of their bodies through the selfie exhibit Brent Wilson’s (2005) investigation of a third pedagogical site in his work “Lessons from the Superheroes of J.C. Holz: The Visual Culture of Childhood and the Third pedagogical Site,” describes and educational environment that is both teacher and student constructed. Thus, I (Miss Anya) as a scholar have been motivated to investigate educational spaces or nonformal learning environments as the Girl Scout pool party, as a potential site for Black girls to have safe and healthy explorations regarding their sexuality. Wilson’s article serves as an insightful view of a learning model that encouraged me to contemplate and accept the value of an educational experience structured with initiative(s) and motivation(s) with the ideas of the student centralized. Before this enlightenment, I had a hard time trying to imagine such a space. Despite the intrigue of the concept, I found it difficult not to simply direct educational experiences involving students. Through the lens of The Vibrator Project, I’ve begun to overlay the concept of student-teacher constructed learning.
In thinking about the self-portraiture or posed photography that AnneMarie and her groupmates engaged in, I understood that this was a similar approach to a third pedagogical site and model for Art Education. To the trained or skilled photographic eye, these photographs may lack quality, however, what Annemarie and her groupmates exhibit is a recognition and versatility in understanding the popular culture familiar to them. Thus, the discussions in The Vibrator Project have cultivated responses to their own creative explorations, providing a forum to critique how and why they want to represent themselves in the way that they do. This expanded thinking is a major component in The Vibrator Project action research project, not just for the girls, but for the other adult facilitators and me also. By way of artistic practice, young women and girl participants make claim to opportunities for not only, unrestricted creative expression, but unrestricted learning.

AnneMarie’s stressing a particular need for freedom is a probing for the reader to consider or reconsider their own imagining of Black girlhood—how hard, how fast, does one cringe in witnessing a Black girl approach free? In other words, we all have a response to Black girlhood that is unrestricted, whether we are cognizant of it or not.

While I consider here, a Fanonian notion of freedom, I refer back to the theoretical lead-in in the introductory section of this chapter, to Alexander Weheliye’s and Hortense Spiller’s stressing a requirement for freedom in order for one to possess their own flesh fully. Free
here, is the overarching archetype of Black girlhood in an unprotected movement towards an undetermined horizon, a rushing, a scampering, a tip-toe without permission towards the potentiality of fulfilling their own pleasure(s). Frantz Fanon (1963), who both Weheliye and Spillers refers to in their considerations of flesh, in his book “Wretched of the Earth,” articulates decolonization as a willing to alter the order of the world, which implies a movement towards dis-order. He articulates decolonization as a historical process, unresponsive to magic, nor “natural shock, nor [of] friendly understanding” (Fanon, 1963, p.4). This disorganization, an unfriendly removal of one’s self from its surrounding [white, patriarchal, respectable] order, I understand as freedom. As a result, there is pull to enforce (reinforce) order upon such a movement; however, mere movement away is intelligible according to Fanon. Its murkiness arises as a result of not measuring up to conventional discernments proving such movement the phenomena of two forces in innate opposition to one another. (Fanon, 1963). AnneMarie’s Picture Theory narrative exhibits Black girlhood in relation to all who connect with it as those two opposing forces, the black hole in relation to the white wall.

In AnneMarie’s mention of the Girl Scout cookie sale and the uniform is a metaphor for the black hole/ white wall interaction. The uniform here, is a visual representation, in this case, of the Girl Scout organization’s history, identity, and legacy. It also visually represents
the restricted Black girlhood, and its relationship to whiteness and adulthood (elements in opposition to it) that I call into question. The Vibrator Project as a lens makes this tension legible. Similarly to Fanon’s understanding of decolonization, when we encounter history, written or physical, historical landmarks and artifacts, the inclination is to preserve and to leave untouched. What the altering of the uniform (by Black girlhood) conveys is a rendering of the destruction that is inevitable in order for Black girls’ harshness and beauty, to exist on their own terms. AnneMarie’s quest for freedom exhibits this destruction as crucial, however. This harshness and destruction is exhibited by Black girl bodies in pleasure, literally stretching and ripping uniforms, and in utilizing unrestricted learning modes.

Implied also in the idea of permission, permission to escape, permission to approach free is thus a willed escape from necessary protection because it is active decolonization that counters everything coming into contact with it—whiteness, adulthood, respectability, womanness, and maleness. Something has resonated in every aspect of my observations in Black girlhood space, from the school to the prison, to the home, or even to the youth group intended for fun. It is the common thread that I witness as the points in spacetime where Black girlhood collides with, non-Blackness—whiteness, non-girlhood—adulthood, non-citizen, non-respectable. Those collisions ignite the disorganization and disorientation that Fanon understands as the process
of decolonization. Thus, Black girlhood is innately in motion to oppose and to move away from normality, correctness, and safety. In turn, what opposes it (Black girlhood) is innately in motion to correct it.

Fanon’s freedom invoked by AnneMarie is hereby a strategy for decolonization applied in the art-based learning being employed in the Vibrator Project, in this case the selfie at the pool. The photograph in discussion exhibits Black girls curating freedom, where they feel sexy, grown-up, and experience pleasure. They pose provocatively with pointed toes, stretched and extended bosoms, flexed hips, and hands/arms placed delicately on their waists, all while wardrobed in one-piece and two-piece bathing suits. They direct sensual gazes or smiles into direct eye contact with the camera lens, displaying no traces of shame, embarrassment, or fear that they might be read as wrong. The aspects of this image that make me or anyone who views it read it as wrong become the implied lessons of Black girlhood--restriction or fear--as opposed to learner-centered, learner-focused, or learner/teacher constructed imaginings. This photograph is an articulation of Black girlhood movement, mobilizing Fanon’s freedom. It is a willed departure from the colonizing eye of white supremacy and Black respectability--which I argue foster the concepts of control and correction that restrict Black girlhood pleasure.

As articulated by Fanon, these aspects of restriction, these lessons are colonial practices. And breaking away from such restrictive
expectations requires destruction. Fanon reminds us that:

[d]ecolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history’s floodlights upon them.

It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and a new humanity.

Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself. (Fanon, 1963, p. 36)

So perhaps what makes one cringe is the mere “noticing” of Black girls like AnneMarie enacting decolonization--a tearing down of the enduring legacy of colonial structures that have been established to confine them.
Figure 6: Self-portrait of Black girl project participants dressed in swim-wear and self-posed.
**Lesson 1: Master Narrative, Master Lesson**

The [Redacted] narrative haunts me, even though I have never met [Redacted], herself. I know her by name, but perhaps not on a first-name basis. The narrative is not hers, not [Redacted’s, or [Redacted]’s, perhaps neither. The narrative is one of The [Redacted]. It is quite possibly, quite assuredly not [Redacted], not [Redacted], perhaps, assuredly neither.

The [Redacted] [Redacted], The [Redacted] [Redacted] also known as [Redacted], also known as The [Redacted] The story of The [Redacted] The [Redacted] Narrative narrative

She lived when? She lived in the 1700’s. She lived where? A young South African women of the KhoiKhoi tribe. There are conflicting stories you see, some tell she was captured and taken, others that she was lured by the promise of riches and fame. But, does it matter? She was taken to Europe, exhibited as freak show attraction due to her large buttocks and elongated labia, genitalia. Pointed at, prodded with intrigue. Used for science, to justify the white man’s science which needed, then, to substantiate our inferiority, the below-human state of existence of Blackness, the rape-ability of the Black woman, beast, Venus. Her life and body, decidedly mark the beginning of a long and continued history of the objectification and dismissal of the Black female body. [Redacted]’s life story still exists today and lives in all Black women and girls. She died an early death, having been exhibited, and exposed scantily-clad

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53 A recount of the narrative used to open the lesson on Shoshanna Weinberger in the Vibrator Project

II. The master lesson refers to the colonialist legacy of the [Redacted] narrative as it shapes curricula in, explicit and implicit, null and concrete. The master narrative teaches the master’s lesson. Master is meant to play on the concept of the master/slave relationship dynamic implicit in colonialist structures that educate Black girls like AnneMarie. Additionally, it denotes main, mainstream, normative, and traditional as relating to formal modes of education in the United States. This section is a reflection on how Black girls in The Vibrator Project navigate the expectations and legacy of the [Redacted] narrative through their encounter with it in a programming facilitation based on the biography and work of artist, Shoshanna Weinberger.

Scholar Zine Magubane (2001) determines this [Redacted] narrative as becoming the very thing it intends to trouble: a master narrative. Her work argues how the mainstream narrative most have come to know functions as this iconic example of Black women’s sexual subjection at the hands of powerful White men, in this case, scientists. I understand Magubane’s use of master to mean main; the main narrative determining how Black women’s bodies body are subsequently read and encountered, to date. Black women’s bodies are marked and measured by this main narrative, marked by outside of their bodies, marked before their bodies. I witness this construction in Black girls encounters with the narrative. These are mostly first–time encounters, in which Black girls whom I have worked within the Vibrator Project, learn of the life and experiences of
and in below-standard ways for the climate, the climate so drastically different from that of her home, because she was so far from home, land, language, food, family. She died at the approximate age of twenty-one, alone, and away from home. But that’s not it! Even after death, [Redacted] did not rest. Her body was dissected, her buttocks and genitals removed from her, preserved for display, only after a full-body cast was made of her body. This combination of artifact put on display in the Mussé del Homme in Paris until, get this..., the 1970’s.

Yes. Even after her remains were removed from public few, her remains would remain under the ownership and control of the French government in 2002. You see, the South African people, her people, her family wanted her back—she had never had a proper burial—they wanted her back on South African soil. Upon approaching the French government initially about the return of [Redacted]’s remains, they were told “no”. Eventually, the French government conceded. The picture6154 of this interaction between the South African council and French ambassador at the time says so much. Just look at his face. A disgrace, indeed.

Lesson 2: Fitting
Because what was done to her body55 is feared, so then is the body.

The girl—her sister, her cousin, at least kindred—is taught by this infamous tale56. Yes, on the far end of a pointed finger, dust-caked nail holding a broken piece of chalk, the fading streak of a colored dry-erase

54 Referring to an image of which is amongst the slide show images in the lesson on Shoshanna Weinberger and the Hottentot Venus
55 Referring here to the [Redacted] Narrative
56 Story denotes Narrative. In the dissertation, my use of narrative is shaped by study of narrative theory. Notably, this work is influenced by James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz's (2012) explanation of narrative theory in the essay "Narrative as Rhetoric" in that "a fiction-al narrative is a single text combining multiple tracks of rhetorical communication." and that we do find interest beyond the meaning of narrative but most importantly, in the experience of it (HERMAN, PHELAN, RABINOWITZ, RICHARDSON, & WARHOL, 2012, p. 4).

[Redacted] as a historical figure.

AnneMarie’s voice in the narrative is again used to represent the Black girl voice present in my field and journal notes taken during sessions of The Vibrator Project, coupled with the interview recordings of project participant interviews and their artwork produced during these sessions. The master lesson narrative [left] does not represent a single voice just as one Black girl/woman body cannot singly represent all Black girl/ women bodies, however, it does. This narrative, in its style remarks on this occurrence—on the body that is not AnneMarie’s, not [Redacted]’s ([Redacted]), required to represent the whole, in a mainstream imagination. Here, AnneMarie grapples with what it means to encounter someone else’s imagination of what “she” means; who her body is for, not for; and how she must carry it as a result, but also in the absence of what the same body means to herself, a Black woman-becoming, Black girl.

While the scholarly overemphasis on the [Redacted] narrative explains power dynamics between White men and Black woman-becoming, like AnneMarie; it also eclipses and distorts the mainstream imagination and the Black girlhood understanding of the Black Venus as a cultural trope. This cultural trope, this life becomes metaphorical, has turned on itself to manipulate Black girlhood- becoming, Black girlhood attaining uninhibited access to locating pleasure in such becoming. Functioning as a punitive device, the [Redacted] maintains the constrictions we wish to mold Black
marker, and, or, forwarding click of a PowerPoint slide; but also behind the everyday-squinted eyes and gritting teeth of Mamas, Grandmas, Aunties, grade-
school teachers, and youth-service missionaries of etiquette and respectability. This girl—[Redacted]'s sister, [Redacted]'s cousin, [Redacted]'s kindred—is taught to fear [Redacted]'s body, as we are all taught to fear what was done to her, and therefore her own physical construction.

In asking this girl—AnneMarie—what she sees, actualizes, from where she stands:

[Redacted]'s body is big, tall, but I think she was actually, only 4'11,"," tough, big enough to massively destruct, big enough to fear, big enough to be full of fear. If ever shrouded, amidst those cartoon depictions\textsuperscript{57} we witness\textsuperscript{58} in art space\textsuperscript{59} (where I am taught it is okay to look at naked ladies and sometimes naked men), [Redacted] wears her full-of-fear. In her, I see my fear, the same fear I am taught to wear. At least, that is how she is drawn in the cartoons. This is the diagram from which I am taught.

They tell us she was captured. They teach me of her enslavement. Is she held against her will or not? Is she tamed or savage? Who’s savage?\textsuperscript{60} They tell us this wasn’t about sex, but rather power—colonialism, imperialism, scientific racism. But it was too about sex. Can we ever say “pleasure,” even if ill-gotten? Did she have a choice? She did have a choice. You don’t have a choice.

He wanted to dissect her, but he loves her. Is it love if she couldn’t feel it?

\textsuperscript{57} Referring to slide show in Shoshanna lesson that is shown to girls in the Vibrator Project lesson facilitation.
\textsuperscript{58} Talking about a Kelly Oliver's witness here. To be discussed further in Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{59} Space is the Vibrator Project, the freedom in space to “look” is the lens
\textsuperscript{60} These questions come from Suzan Lori Parks's Venus play the dueling characterization, the indentured servitude, the choice, the doctor loves her or he loves her not

This chapter utilizes artworks, and creative writing works by Black women artists, scholars, and play writers whose work is influenced by the [Redacted] narrative to explore how Black girls first receive the story, how they are taught by the story, and then what they do with those lessons. Figure 7 is a slide used in The Vibrator Project programming facilitation for teaching the biography and work of artist, Shoshanna Weinberger. The programming (lesson) consists of a lecture with accompanying slide show that is meant to spark discussion and intrigue. A lecture slide/show usually involves a photograph of the artist, images the might represent the artist’s background and influences, and examples of her artwork. In the case of Shoshanna Weinberger who attributes the likeness of the monstrous, discombobulated figures in her work to [Redacted] or the [Redacted], the slide show used for teaching about her work consists of a section on the life and experiences of [Redacted]. It is usually the case that project participants have never heard of [Redacted], [Redacted], or the [Redacted] in formal or non formal learning sites prior to a Vibrator Project program facilitation. Figure 7 is a slide taken from the section used to introduce girls to this story.
Figure 7: Diptych, cartoon depiction of Khoikhoi woman, pictured nude in juxtaposition to a photo image of rap artist, Lil Kim. Lil Kim is also nude bearing markings (tattoo-like) of the Louise Vuitton logo. The connotation of the Khoikhoi woman’s pose purports the image as documentation (i.e., mugshot). The face of the cartoon depiction has been redacted. The connotation of Lil Kim’s pose purports the image as an exhibition of sexuality (i.e. titillation). This diptych image appears within the first 100 images of simple Google search under “The [Redacted]”. This image is used in the slide show/lecture of the “Shoshanna Weinberger” lesson, referred to here.
Lust and intrigue masked as love. Lust and intrigued masked as anger. 

This learning is twisted.

Taught to me in this way, this traumatic moment in history we must want to forget, but remember always. Remember, mostly because her story marks my body. So should my body also be remembered and forgotten, all at the same time?

We are taught to fear, not know her, a Roderick Ferguson’s synthesises of Black as pathologically deviant kind of fear, more specifically Evelyn Hammond’s Black woman as the beached whale of sexuality kind of horror. And if that’s not bad enough, we never hear her voice, read her words, see her chosen pose. We eat the sketches and are taught that we are, but should never be that which we are. We are of her, but while that which they saw, transcribed, and recorded, is what they will also see in us because we are of her, we should not want to be. So where does that leave me?

AnneMarie?

Running?

Paralyzed?

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61 To further contextualize the fear being used here, I refer to Ferguson’s sociology of black as deviant.

62 Thinking about Ferguson got me to thinking about Evelyn Hammond’s article that my Penn State Women’s Studies (WMNST) 100 students read. “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality"

63 Eating Black bodies, this concept, comes from Kyla Wazana Tompkins's "Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th century" that considers a psychological and visual history of the consumption of Black bodies in American mainstream media and marketing.

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Figure 7 is a diptych demonstrating a cartoon depiction of a Khoikhoi woman (used to represent the likeness of [Redacted], the [Redacted]). This image is juxtaposed with a photograph image of a rap artist, Lil Kim. Lil Kim is also nude bearing markings (tattoo-like) of the Louise Vuitton logo. Similar diptych depictions can be found with rap artist Nicki Minaj in a similar pose to Lil Kim’s. The connotation of the Khoikhoi woman’s pose (i.e., mugshot forces the misconception that the image is documentary, and not a skewed rendering. And the connotation of Lil Kim’s (or Nicki Minaj’s image is an exhibition of sexuality, meant to titillate. The photograph of Lil Kim placed next to the caricature of the [Redacted] is a call and response—*if this, then that.* Overall, the imagery created by the diptych connotes a lesson.

Such lessons, often crafted as memes in present-day social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter) attempt to deem Black girls valuable by articulating notions of their sexual purity through respectability politics as noted in the theoretical lead-in and supported by the work of Christina Carney, Jillian Hernandez, and myself on both sexual knowledge(s) and restrictive lessons mobilized by hip-hop culture. This value, this purity, however, is nevertheless positioned in such images as tenuous and susceptible to trouble through Black girls’ exposure to popular Hip Hop music like Lil Kim and Nicki Minaj, thus unwittingly reinforcing not only the racialized stereotypes, but the corporeal pleasures memes.
(juxtapositions) like this seeks to contest. Simply put, the lesson here is don’t end up like her.

What AnneMarie’s narrative attempts to highlight here is that such lessons leave behind the Black girlhood flesh (Alexander Weheliye, 2014)—Black girl bodies, developing and budding, becoming Black woman, Black girl bodies in the ancestral lineage of figures such as [Redacted]. What truly happens when Black girls see an image, a lesson like this one? How does she internalize the irony?

The lesson of the meme and the lesson of the narrative, both support Zine Magubane’s articulation of a master narrative as a violation and as a barrier to Black women-becoming, and to Black girls experiencing a particular joy in what could be their own images mirrored in [Redacted]’s representation.

I fashion AnneMarie’s narrative in the vein of, and in juxtaposition to Black women (re)writing of the [Redacted] narrative in creative forms, mainly Suzan Lori Parks’s play Venus. Parks, in addition to creatives such as Sadiya Hartaman in the interview-article “Venus in Two Acts”, Robin Coste Lewis in the “Voyage of the Sable Venus” poetry collection, and visual artist and author Barbara Chase-Riboud in the fictional novel “[Redacted]”, find way to answer the question who is Venus? even in the absence (limitations) of her voice and personhood in the historical record.

These scholars, artists, and creative writers marry the use of academic theory, excess, raunch, visual art, and even comedy in an
effort to distance us from the infamous facts of the historical tale.

Suzan Lori Parks’s play “Venus,” for one, is determined to convey a possible emotional world for [Redacted], one of naïveté, enchantment, and disillusion. As artists, they all boldly take risks to add to, take from, and create where we do not, might not know her. This is exemplified in how Parks leaves her audience wondering whether the manipulative doctor doesn’t have some smidgen of actual love for [Redacted], along with the fetishistic murmurings and callous plans, as alluded by Annemarie’s equally confused and accurate retelling of the narrative. These scholars, artists and creative writers attempt to deliver some magic in their workings, which draw parallels between the freak show attraction first responsible for marketing the image of the [Redacted] and the historical record of the narrative, mostly transcribed by White men.

These scholars, artists, and creative works to make the [Redacted] narrative more than a symbol, more than a master lesson; in addition to claiming some entitlement to share in the haunting manifestations of such a lesson.

The referenced artists, scholars, and creatives acknowledge themselves as Black women sharing [Redacted]’s circumstances (i.e., her body, the lessons facilitated by her body); and they generate new authenticities by way of those shared circumstances. In the form of theoretical investigation, Sadiya Hartman champions how these creatives tell the story(s) by way of their common flesh, as not only giving new
voice to the [Redacted] narrative, but also reimagining the narration of this master lesson. They take liberties to redact the centralization of “violence, excess, mendacity, [the very reasons Hartman argues] have seized hold of Black female lives, and transformed them into commodities and corpses” (Hartman, 2008). In this, Sadiya Hartman, among the others, reclaims this master narrative having been mainly told by a “failed witness” (Hartman, 2008) the colonizer. Most of all, these references are about voice, the kind of voice that the individual artist is sharing with [Redacted], the main character in this narrative. In departing from historical fact, each is reimagining a departure from the violent events. They prioritize the voice over the violent renderings.
Lesson 3: Reimagining

Can I tell you what a reversal of caution contains for Black women—becoming, Black girls like me, ones in quest to construct what is personal, sexual, narrative...pleasure?

While it is not uncommon to reject her, [Redacted], I stay in my seat go with it. It is kind of like school. Perhaps I do not have a choice to break free. But this, I am intrigued to I stay, perhaps I choose to stay. What a tragic truth to consume! Do I eat it? Or pretend it is not there?

Anne Marie’s group, the orange group usually stank-faced are intrigued and appalled by Shoshanna’s mangled, discombobulated bodies strange fruit, freak monster They make artwork able to look through multiplied nipples see their own bodies understand the joke and put paint brush to paper

The light blues, express less and less comfort with the subject matter

Royal blues, start out abstract play with color slowly allows herself to be comforted gave herself permission to release

III. The name of artist Shoshanna Weinberger is one never forgotten among Black girls with whom I have worked. A remarkable outcome of the one-on-one interviews conducted with The Vibrator Project participants is that each participant introduced to Weinberger’s artwork can, without a doubt articulate the influence of the workshop on her sexual expression/identity. Even when AnneMarie cannot remember Shoshanna Weinberger’s name correctly, she can remember (exactly) what piece of artwork (and why) this artist inspired her to create. She can most definitely remember how that interaction made her feel.

To begin with, the workshop based on the biography and artwork of Shoshanna Weinberger was created with these main purposes: 1) to familiarize girls with another woman of color contemporary artist

2) to introduce girls to the history of the Black female body through the [Redacted] narrative (one they would not receive in school)

3) to spark critical dialogues about body image, representation, and culture. In addition to a lecture/slide show about the artist, participants take part in a hands-on art-making and a creative writing project called “body language”. Each girl is given the directives to create her own artwork based on how the artwork or the workshop made her feel. (See Figures 3 and 4. Figure 3 exemplifies the artwork of Shoshanna Weinberger influenced by the [Redacted] narrative. Figure 4 exemplifies the artwork created by project participant, Quen relayed through AnneMarie’s narrative. And Figure 5 serves as documentation.
a floating breast here
there
Teal, the last group
is not at all comfortable with such a subject few
would begin to draw her parts
but rather rainbows and suns
the writing, weightless phrases
“sexy body”

Non-black girls, no matter her Honey Shine-assigned color met more
difficulty in their making,
in her considering
[Redacted]
Instead she makes
faces with Caucasian
skin and batting
eyelashes.

The one who is flustered by my approaching, she paints the Virgin Mary.

Part II...
Conversations are on point accents
change
attitudes loosen
Black-girl-stankness emerges once again
but this time, the kind I like
that I crave baring witness to perhaps
“If Lil Kim wants to act and dress the way she does, then she should be
able to
Same goes for strippers! I’m just sayin’.”

of the 3-dementional-sculpture (“part II”) of the Shoshanna Weinberger
workshop.) The directives given the girls for the creative writing project called
“body language” is to write as if one of your body parts is speaking. Choose a
body part that may have caused you or is causing you pain, or choose a body
part that you feel insecure about.

Shoshanna Weinberger, the artist, explores the legacy of colonialism on sexual representations of women of color by marrying beauty and grotesquity in ink and watercolor paintings. Learning about her work is the first time Black girls I worked with in the Vibrator Project are introduced to the [Redacted] narrative. In addition to conversations facilitated about the exploitation of [Redacted], and how the treatment of her body has contributed to the hyper-sexualization of the Black female body throughout history, girls make watercolor paintings inspired by Weinberger’s style. An additional session (added on to the Shoshanna Weinberger lesson) shifts the hands-on art activity into an opportunity to consider the subject matter 3-dimensional, through sculpture. Participants are given a plethora of multicolored bras, panties, batting, and costume jewelry beads, and asked to create three-dimensional Shoshanna Weinberger-inspired works.

Through facilitator evaluations, field notes and journal entries, I learned that the project participants were especially engrossed with learning about [Redacted] through Shoshanna Weinberger’s artwork. The [Redacted] narrative absorbs Black girls in the open forum for
They remembered EVERYTHING behaving, maybe because...
she remembers “Body language”\textsuperscript{64} presentation makes me chuckle with pride
soundtracked to their poetry read in pre-teen giggles and squeals they teach me phraseology
— “exploding ovaries” We bond over bodies and parts differently sized, and (differently-)abled
all while trampling atop some huge insecurities we stuff them in our lacey-satin bras and panties pose
and giggle some more
Superheroes again.

When Ms. Anya interviews me about the Vibrator Project, about [Redacted], I don’t cringe; I do not even blush, not now. Oh, what was that artist’s name? You know the lady that drew “a bunch of nipples and hands, and hair”\textsuperscript{65}? Of course, I do remember the painting I made about her though. She was my favorite artist because she “showed the female body in a way I had never seen before.” It is also “something different from what I normally see”. I make my art different now too. I am comfortable drawing parts of the body, like hands instead of just trees and landscapes the way I did before. When Ms. Anya and I look at my paintings (from now several Shoshanna Weinberger workshops), we giggle when we notice my signature hand having made its way in each painting, a hand discussing this tragic part of history never introduced to them within their formal educational settings. Because of the many mixed emotions sparked, ranging from intrigue to utter disgust, the workshop warranted more time and care. For this reason, we included the 3-dimensional sculpture aspect to the Weinberger workshop for project participants.

The gestures drawn in Figure 8 and referred to at the end of AnneMarie’s narrative is a Vibrator Project participant’s response to session one of the Shoshanna Weinberger facilitation. I refer to this participant’s work often in discussion this facilitation because for one, she has participated in the workshop several times, and it has been interesting to see artistic signature evolve over time. The hand that tends to show up consistently in her renderings are crucial to discuss as they provide insight into a particular view or connection to pleasure and desire. In this case, discontinuous female body parts are drawn softly with thin-lined artist markers in brown-skin toned colors. Here there is a connection to Blackness, femaleness, and becoming-womanness. The coveted hand floats in the forefront invoking a prioritization of security and protection, as well as an acknowledgment of vulnerability. She still however, has desire, desire to be a sexual being, sultry, and sometimes serious, sometimes innocent and flirtatious.

Adding a second part to the Shoshanna Weinberger workshop was initially meant to help girls ease away from the harsh realities that recounting this narrative presented. In a way, I as a facilitator, was

\textsuperscript{64} “Body Language” is a creative writing activity prompt from the Shoshanna Weinberger Lesson Plan utilized in The Vibrator Project.
\textsuperscript{65} Quotations here are taken from The Vibrator Project interview with participant Quen April 30, 2013
touching a nipple, suspended in thin air, a hand shielding a vagina in a sultry way.

reimagining the possibilities this narrative could have on my girls. I didn’t want to leave them hurt, or afraid, or most importantly stuck. I realized that it was the violence of the narrative that had a residual power to captivate girls’ attention more so than the art-making.

Without knowing how the second, hands-on workshop would be received by the participants (or hovering adults), I imagined what the ability to touch materials might mean to this lesson. In addition, I considered how highlighted violence might perpetuate fear of their own bodies or a body that looks like my mama, my sister, my aunt. I imagined a making that might alleviate fear, even if temporarily. My colleagues and I scrambled to piece-meal a second project that would still allow the girls to explore the subject matter but in a new way, sculpting. What the girls did with the project, in terms of the materials and their bodies was an exciting surprise.

Augusto Boal’s (1985) Theater of the Oppressed came to mind as an example of arts-imagination arts-based research, and a source for research strategies that include problem-posing, debating, and problem-solving through embodied performance. Without prior plans, this interaction and the art-making session had evoked what Boal, a Brazilian cultural activist, discovered as a method for empowering people to generate social action. Providing girls the added opportunity for touch, and embodied sculpting with the fun materials of silky bras, panties, and batting gave them the power first to relax, to own their flesh, then to use their
innate understanding of the world, and in this case [tragic] history, to construct an informed and alternative perspective to being stuck--trapped as oppressed subjects. Through involving their bodies, their flesh in the art-making, and therefore learning, girls were able to imagine change, to practice it, and to reflect collectively.

AnneMarie’s narrative remarks on how and why this workshop, thus the [Redacted] narrative became a monumental tool of engagement. The Shoshanna Weinberger lesson has been one of the few opportunities for Black girls to learn about someone who resembles who they are—skin color, hair, and body-build in any learning environment. The [Redacted] narrative presents a portal for Black girls to learn in a way more recognizable to their own history(s), experiences, and relationships. Therefore the delivery of such a narrative is crucial. AnneMarie’s narrative is the compiled results of a layered data analysis I performed from field notes taken during facilitation of the Shoshanna Weinberger lesson.

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66 Layered data analysis is a method used to analyze arts-based action research established by Karen Keifer-Boyd in ‘J’rts-based Research as Social Justice Activism: Insight, Inquiry, Imagination, Embodiment, Relationality.”
Figure 8: Cockeyed Susan, ink on paper, work from Shoshanna Weinberger’s *Strange Fruit* series.
Figure 9: Artwork by project participant Quen, created in the Shoshanna Weinberger workshop, 2014. Quen’s Shoshanna-inspired works are mentioned throughout AnneMarie’s narrative.
Figure 10: Photograph taken as documentation during “part II” of Shoshanna Weinberger workshop’s 3-dimensional sculpture activity, 2014
Chapter Wrap-up

To begin understanding the pleasurable experiences of Black girlhood which I compare to the activity of a black hole, it is important to understand the value of Black girl bodies—flesh, as exhibited through the work of Alexander Weheliye and Hortense Spillers. This is useful in recognizing how Black girls navigate the world in their bodies that carry historical trauma in addition to the potential for pleasure. The value of flesh is also important in understanding how Black girls (and their bodies) are viewed, imagined by others, and how this flesh both attracts and opposes the outside world.

I begin contextualizing these concepts by way of Toni Morrison’s literary device, rememory—the places, and/or pictures of certain places triggering off representations, vivid descriptions or accounts—of the past. Rememory enables Black girls embracing their pasts, even their traumas, in order to recognize a personal sexual narrative, as well as to find purpose in their own lives and experiences. Black girls understanding their power as the tellers of their own stories opens access to their freedom (as I discuss through the lens of decolonization in the work of Frantz Fanon), and therefore their centered pleasure.

The use of rememory sets up how I mobilize the [Redacted] narrative, where, historical facts are not the focus, but rather the way the narrative is being remembered and concentrates more on the rememberer and the specific need for the story’s retelling. In this case, the need for the story’s retelling is to counteract it as a lesson, which I argue,
is but one barrier to Black girls realizing their own freedom, their own pleasure. Black 
girls are constricted by this lesson even before they are fully aware of the narrative. I 
argue however, that Black girls have the right to be the rememberer, of even this 
narrative; and as it has restricted them, they are entitled to repurposing it for their own 
evolution. They need to be able to unabashedly love their bodies in order to build a 
personal sexual narrative, to be free, to locate pleasure. Reimagining the effects of the 
[Redacted] narrative is where we begin as a collective.

The ability to decipher the lessons inherited by Black girlhood is a significant part 
of breaking away from the colonialist structures that bar access to Black girlhood 
pleasure(s)—White supremacy, patriarchy, and Black respectability. These are structures 
or layers pressurizing the confines of the black hole. The explosive quality of Black 
girlhood is that Black girls have found ways to create even within these confines. The 
truth is, too often, we want to focus on the tragic Black or tragic girlhood (particularly in 
relation to the body) aspects of Black girlhood more so than any other part(s). While the 
[Redacted] narrative is one of few accesses to Black female sexual history and rememory, 
when it is told in a historically factual way, it becomes one of the layers constricting 
Black girls. This chapter asks the questions: How then do Black girls use it, if not to 
perpetuate shame and fear? How can the narrative be reclaimed to give them power? 

Work and research in the Vibrator Project have proven that this power is gained 
from making and remaking, rememory, art-making. Exhibited in this chapter were girls’ 
uses of self-portraiture and their process of learning the [Redacted] narrative by way 
artists like Shoshanna Weinberger, who explores “lesson” from the powerful standpoint 
of a creative thinker. In this, girls learn to decipher the violence from what gives them
their own power. These activities give them tools for decision-making, confidence, and social action—things necessary for owning one’s sexuality.

Comprehensive knowledge of self, which includes how to move forward with carrying the historical weight of trauma [in flesh] is step one in recognizing Black girls’ power to curve space and time in their free movement. Comprehensive knowledge of self, which includes tragic history(s) as Black people is also important in understanding the barriers to Black girls accessing pleasure. There is sadness, hurt, and rage that comes along with this recognition. These are not only responses to hurtful experiences, but ways of rerouting such blocks. I will go on to unpack the power(s) and necessity(s) of feelings like rage in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3

Sourpuss Tellings: Black Girls, the Pleasure Prototype, and Rage

rage⁶⁷:

1: violent and uncontrolled anger b: a fit of violent wrath c archaic: insanity
2: violent action (as of wind or sea)
3: an intense feeling: passion
4: a fad pursued with intense enthusiasm

Freewill as Activation

I find in my investigations of Black girlhood spaces that pathways to expressing freedom and receiving pleasure have been hugely interrupted and/or rerouted. From Black girls, in Black girlhood spaces, I’ve learned to acknowledge that the experience of pleasure occurs in a myriad of ways, extending from physical enjoyment to the modes of expressing most readily accessible to them. I have learned that rage is a part of what feels good that I believe pleasure to be. I exhibit Black girlhood rage as an exercise of free will that is a fulfillment of desire in Black girlhood.

This chapter theorizes the expressive mode of rage in prototypical characteristics of Black girlhood alongside popular culture, as it focuses on the expression of rage that occurs in the artwork, testimony, and rememory of the Black girls I worked with in Miami, FL (The Vibrator Project and Women on the Rise!) and Savannah, GA (Girl Scouts of the USA). In that, I pair these examples with the infamous, popular culture performances of rage in the musical lyrics of Nicki Minaj and Pretty Taking All Fades (PTAF), that exhibit the concepts of “wreckless theatrics” and “raunch aesthetics” as established by scholars Ruth Nicole Brown and Jillian

⁶⁷ Definition of rage as defined Oxford English dictionary (Dictionary, 1989) used to support a theory of rage as a feeling of intensity and uncontrolled expression.
Hernandez. Here, I begin to hold space for rage as a form of pleasure, opening access(s) to Black girlhood freedom.

In science, the term prototype\textsuperscript{68} is defined as a preliminary version of a device or vehicle from which other forms are developed. As it has evolved in common English discourse, it is understood as being an original model on which something is patterned or an individual that exhibits the standard or typical example. I utilize this term to connect the creation, or production, the activity happening within Black girlhood to the magnetic pull of the [activity] happening at the black hole’s center. I believe that rage in Black girlhood is a prototypical model of free expression that is an influential force curving spacetime. In Chapter 3: Sourpuss Tellings: Black Girls, the Pleasure Prototype, and Rage, I argue this exploration of rage in Black girlhood as a prototypical transference of the constriction, I have elaborated on in the previous chapter. If the black hole phenomenon happens at the densest core of spacetime, I understand this as being constructed and moved by way of Black girlhood.

Black girlhood subsumes emptiness; composting it, along with negativity, oppression, and constriction into new energy forms\textsuperscript{69}. In the language of black hole theory, this makes Black girlhood a holding of concentrated energy having the ability to consume everything in its path as well as to emanate new/different substance(s). By using the black hole theory as established by Gilles Deleuze (1987) and Felix Guattari (1987) in the work “A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia”, I have deduced that social or psychic black holes can either trap subjectivity with finality, or, can potentially conjure energy emitting semiotic substances that enable liberating lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari’s black hole theory is made plain in a conceptualization of face with/without eyes. The face represents a white wall, with its eyes representing the black hole. In this representation, the eyes are not relied upon just

\textsuperscript{68} Oxford-English definition of prototype.
\textsuperscript{69} Referencing the ever-popular theory of physicist Albert Einstein that states: “Energy cannot be created or destroyed; it can only be changed from one form to another.” (Einstein, 1905)
because they are cavities within the face (as a nose or mouth would also be cavities), rather the
soul, the activity of the face. Both the face and the eyes rely upon one another, at the vibratory
meeting of one against the other. This is how I understand Black girlhood as being experienced,
viewed, and interacted with (under an outsider’s gaze). This is how I understand Black girls in
their approaching freedom. Since this work is a lens for seeing Black girlhood as the action of
black holes, I use this chapter to delve further into the metaphor to ask *what is happening within
these converging points? How does such activity unfold?*

I argue: It is sometimes *rage*.

When I experience and witness expressions of rage in Black girlhood spaces, something
gives me pause. I can’t quite say, it makes me happy, but there is a sort of reverence and space I
hold for such a moment that is evidencing unrestricted truth and humanness. From a technical
definition of rage\(^{70}\), I adhere to the characterizations that designate the expression (as
distinguished from hatred) as both *uncontrolled* and *intense*. In other words, to rage (in addition
to being evidence of truth and humanness) is to accept (or reject) a state of being controlled. I
believe this to be an exercise of free will, the freedom I understand as pleasure that results in a
moment of *truth*.

I look to Michel Foucault’s (1978) understanding of societies where pleasure is a form of
*truth* as he lays out his theories in the three-part volume, “The History of Sexuality.” He argues
that we have been removed from such an understanding due to the separation discourse of
biology from that of medicine, claiming the latter as a demonstration of the “immense will to
knowledge which has sustained the establishment of scientific discourse in the West, whereas the
other would derive from a stubborn will to nonknowledge” (Foucault, 1978, p. 55). Here, I
engage Foucault because of his connecting of pleasure to the obtainment of knowledge. I argue
that the freewill to pleasure for Black girls is, in fact, a quest to find truth. This is a process of

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\(^{70}\) Indicated in definition reference above.
knowledge-making. I do not wish only to define sexual pleasure, rather I am defining pleasure similar to the activity of the black hole, as a route to seeking truth and freedom, including but not limited to sex. His work contextualizes how I see pleasure functioning in Black girlhood and helps me to arrive at a definition that best encompasses uncontrolled desire and freedom—the aspects of Black girlhood I understand as in need of articulation. I want to articulate what happens in a moment of pleasure for Black girls, whether sexual or not. To expand the perception of feeling good, I have realized that what I seek to describe is a moment where she is doing what she wants, how she wants, when she wants. Thus, I understand this kind of freedom (from constriction) as truth.

In this chapter, I conceptualize and articulate possibilities for resistance and the practice of freedom in a context in which Black girls are enabled and constrained by the same sets of sociopolitical structures and institutions. I’ve named some of these mechanisms as White supremacy, patriarchy, and Black respectability. Like Michel Foucault, I see Black girlhood flesh as the locus of such enablement and constraint and, hence, innately resistant in seeking freedom. The point for Foucault is that given the function of pleasure in Black girlhood, it is an articulation that normalizes the practices that help Black girls reach free states. Like Foucault’s theory, it is therefore twofold in where he seeks to elucidate the normalizing potential of self-practices such as rage so that the enabling, emancipatory aspects of self-work can be maximized, and their conformist aspects minimized. The work of Foucault suggests, on the one hand, that people make sense of the world by “empirically imagin[ing] the unity or coordination of governmental and civil institutions”; they “fill in the gaps,” as it were, of an uncertain reality by way of the imagination (Foucault, 1978, p. 14). On the other hand, people believe they can “improve their own situation, individual or collective,” and, in so doing, they challenge the ordered reality they have created (Foucault, 1978, p. 14). This implies a sort of reconciliation to prevailing conditions that are aimed at obtaining at least a bit of security; Black girls fill gaps in order to create a less
troubling picture of reality. Here, political imagination involves resisting power structures meant to secure [whiteness; patriarchy; Black respectability] in favor of what Foucault refers to as “thinking differently” and “innovation,” the latter of which he describes precisely as “seek[ing] out in our reflection those things that have never been thought or imagined (Foucault, 1978).”

Foucault finds erotica, where “truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and the forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility; but first and foremost in relation to itself (Foucault, 1978, p. 57).” He claims that the confession (tied to torture of old) has led to “a metamorphosis in literature: we have passed from a pleasure to be recounted and heard, to a literature ordered according to the infinite task of extracting from the depths of oneself, in between the words, a truth which the very form of the confession holds out like a shimmering image”(Foucault, 1978, p. 59). Here, Foucault is evaluating not only the weight and value of truth but additionally, the strength and fervor by which such truth is exuded. Those heightened expressions of truth are highly recognizable in moments of passion, but also in a fury, rage. I suggest that the will in Black girls’ expressions of anger, disgust, or opposition to constriction(s) constitute a similar level of fervor.

Sarah Ahmed (2014) investigates the work that emotion does and what it produces in the current formation of the capitalist nation-state in her book “The Cultural Politics of Emotion”. Her inquiry traces how a cultural politics of emotion create "others" by working through signs and on bodies to materialize the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds such as the exhibition of rage as navigated by Black girl flesh. (Ahmed, 2014, p. 191). Instead of defining emotions, such as rage, she asks what do emotions do? She explores how emotions become attributes of collectives, like Black girlhood, and get constructed as “being” through “feeling” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 14). She relays that emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds, like Black girlhood flesh, like Black girlhood spaces explored in this
dissertation.

The girls I have worked with have naturally shown that emotions can be positive, pleasant, and give good feelings, hence our many discussions and activities that center pleasure—*what feels good, what looks good, what tastes good*. However, they have also often displayed that emotions may also be negative, unpleasant, or cause discomfort in themselves or in others; and that these emotions are useful and cathartic modes of expressing that have proven necessary for them. In our art workshops and group discussions, we have established that any emotion can be placed on a scale between extreme pleasure and extreme discomfort, with a zero point between where neither positive nor negative feelings are experienced (such as the way surprise is often experienced). While we may wonder about the value of negative emotions, our work together has led us to understand that these negative expressions are designed by evolution to keep us alive; and as Ahmed describes, they shape our bodies and worlds. For example, fear has been reflected on in our groups as helping us to avoid danger while anger helps us to defend ourselves. Positive emotions also have evolutionary benefits, such as love that bonds people and families together and pride that drives learning more about the world around you.

Psychologists, Bernd Figner (2009) Rachael J. Mackinlay (2009), Friedrich Wilkening (2009), and Elke U. Weber (2009), have published research in the “*Journal of Experimental Psychology*” on the need for arousal, determining that as a social norm, we are taught to move towards pleasure and away from pain (even though the mere existence of Black girlhood innately takes up pain). In delving further to understand Ahmed’s theoretical concepts, I find through these scientists, that emotional intensity is about how strongly we feel emotions. This is a “uni-polar dimension”, as it can range from close to zero, for example when we feel flat or just a bit irritated, to very intense, such as feelings of grief or extreme anger (Figner, Mackinlay, Wilkening, & Weber, 2009). For example, many emotions have words for high and low intensity, such as the more intense *rage* and the less intense *irritation*. Intensity can be highly energizing,
and it can also be paralyzing. In extreme, the strength of emotion can overcome us, blotting out our external senses as we focus on the inner experience. *I ask, is this a state of freedom?* In considering how Ahmed’s theory about how emotion shapes and is shaped by our worlds, a feeling such as arousal can be easily understood as activation, the energy and motivation that emotions give us towards taking action. You can experience an intense emotion, such as joy, but not be motivated to act. Likewise, arousing emotions such as curiosity may not be particularly intense. This temperature metaphor reflects how we often feel. As argued by Figner (2009), Mackinlay (2009), Wilkening (2009), and Weber (2009), “an aroused person may be red-faced, reflecting the activation of their body” (Figner et al., 2009). I understand rage as such an arousal, an opposite but equal form of activation. Can activation be translated as freedom?

**Rage as Survival**

Where Black girls’ behavior is commonly described as pessimistic, sassy, attitudinal, or even scary (i.e., the angry Black woman trope), I see rage as high-intensity emotion that directly combats this stereotypical constriction of both White and Black respectability. I have observed how rage activates flesh, helping to build momentum in Black girlhood activity. It has a liberating effect because there is *impatience* in rage. It is the same rage unique to experiencing America via the lens of Blackness. While, it can be argued that the emotion of rage is sufficiently responsible for spurring movements, such as the Civil Rights or Black Lives Matter movements, emotions such as love and sorrow have also contributed to these movements. Michael Denzel Smith (2014) makes this clear in his essay, “The Function of Black Rage” by asserting “[w]e don’t associate someone like Martin Luther King, Jr. with rage mainly because his image has been whitewashed to that of a peaceful dreamer, but one cannot read or hear him without feeling that palpable sense of frustration, fury, and anger that activates his movement” (M. D. Smith, 2014).
Sarah Ahmed also describes the intense, uncontrolled reaction of disgust as “something that creates an object” that can be described as a border or fetish, insofar as it admits itself to prior contamination (Ahmed, 2014). *Can this disgust be compared to rage, and this contamination to an evocation of disgust emanated by Black girlhood?* I contend the distance between disgust and pleasure is not all that far apart in the case of Blackness, specifically Black girlhood. I argue there are times in which it is productive, and times when it is destructive. I ask, what is produced when Black girls intentionally engage with these borders? Is this release (release like orgasm)? In releasing, especially release of control, it is one that troubles border of respectability and whiteness. To speak out of anger as Black woman is then to confirm your position as the cause of tension. A Black woman’s anger gets in the way of social bonds; it injures or hurts the groups which it both opposes and is measured against. As Audre Lorde (1984) describes in her popularly cited essay “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger”: “When women of color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with White women, we are often told that we are “creating a mood of helplessness”, “preventing White women from getting past guilt”, or “standing in the way of trusting communication and action.” The exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence. And the Black woman must let go of her anger or rage to be normal.

So, I ask, can rage be healthy, especially in Black girlhood which grapples with the barriers or borders of White supremacy and respectability? Foucault, Ahmed, and Lorde make me believe, yes. Lorde in describing Black women’s long history with anger, describes it as a passion of displeasure that may be excessive or misplaced but not necessarily harmful. While on the other hand, hatred is an emotional habit or attitude of mind in which aversion is coupled with ill will. She argues that anger, used, does not destroy. Hatred does. Lorde says “Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being” (Lorde, 1987).

As citizens who deal with the oppressing systems of sexism, racism, and respectability,
there are, of course consequences for both expressing and suppressing rage for Black girls. In northeastern Brazil, women refer to suppressing their anger as “swallowing frogs,” which contributes to “emotion-based ailments,” according to L. A. Rebhun, an anthropologist who studied the connection between anger and illness in the region (Gay, 2016). The physical manifestations of anger, Rebhun (2016) writes, “may also be seen as symptoms of the pain of bridging gaps between cultural expectation and personal experience in emotion, a process neither easy nor simple (Gay, 2016).” Too often, anger is viewed as divisive to feminism or scary for dominant regimes to deal with. As Audre Lorde notes, White women often fear the anger of women of color more than their own racist attitudes; they are more afraid of being criticized and feeling guilty than perpetuating violence and pain towards women of color. Lorde argues that this is because mainstream culture “doesn’t want us— either people of color or White folks– to respond to racism, but instead to stifle our feelings and honesty” (Lorde, 1987). Anger, like the erotic (addressed in my contextualization of pleasure) is reframed as a source of power, energy, and knowledge. Anger, and what I denote as rage, for her, is an understandable response to racism and being silenced. It must be listened to. Lorde argues that anger or rage, unlike guilt, involves action through a critique of power systems. (Guilt is stagnant and thus useless for Black women.) If, as Lorde argues, the rage of women of color against racism should instead be viewed as a means of survival and a striving towards justice; not merely a way to make White people feel bad; I want to know how this translation can be understood as useful in the space(s) of Black girlhood.

**Pleasure in Rage**

Using Foucault’s assertion that “in erotica art, truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as practice and accumulated as experience” (Foucault, 1978, p. 57), I want to make
the connection between rage and pleasure—if pleasure is a form of truth, then the activation that rage causes is a form of truth-telling. There is pleasure in this expression. Lamonda Hortan Stalling’s (2015), in Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetic and Black Sexual Cultures frames funk correspondingly with this consideration of pleasure. As a philosophy, Stallings determines funk to be about “being or (un)becoming human”, making funk a useful field of study “to scholars who want to study joy, pleasure, race, and sexuality” (Horton-Stallings, 2015, p. 2). She analyzes pleasure as being like funk which shapes “non visual sensory perception (smell/odor), embodied movement (dance and sex), and force (mood and will)” (Horton-Stallings, 2015, p. 4). From Stallings, I understand a human subject as worthy of freedom, worthy of truth, constituting a (re)visitation to the philosophies of Alexander Weheliye’s and Hortense Spillers’s theorizations of Black flesh. The considerations of pleasure in various forms, which I argue include rage are thus translations of freedom and choice motivated, in this case, by Black girl will.

This chapter then exhibits how rage functions as activated will in Black girlhood pleasure. And it is used as a transformative mode for navigating the world in their flesh and being recognized as human. Like Stalling’s funk, an investigation of rage is an investigation of pleasure among Black girls. Stallings’ work makes an argument for how funk allows Blackness to become a public concern, in its activation of Black movement. And, it is presenting a new kind of truth about Blackness, sexuality, and even about philosophy. Because Stallling, uses Foucault, she pulls out Foucault’s connection of pleasure and truth, to support, her own mobilization of joy, pleasure, race, and sexuality, in her establishing of funk as an essential understanding necessary to philosophies of Black sexual politics.

Literally, funk is also smell, funk is music, funk is flavor—what looks good, what feels good, what tastes good. The work of Jillian Hernandez (2014) (2015) (“Carnal Teachings: Raunch Aesthetics as Queer Feminist Pedagogies in Yo! Majesty’s Hip Hop Practice” and “Raunch Aesthetics as Visceral Address: (MORE) Notes from a Voluptuary”) deploys “raunch”
as similar to funk and rage. Hernandez believes, that “[r]aunch is rarely defined or fleshed out in critical analysis (Hernandez, 2014, p. 92).” Her suggestion moves that raunch aesthetics are reworked to reorder a hierarchy of power back through “racialized and gendered bodies” like Black girlhood flesh “to incite pleasure for its subjects”(Hernandez, 2014). Raunch aesthetics also employs the use of funk which describes the truth-telling aspects of unbridled will (like rage) as “not valu[ing] legibility or legitimacy” (Hernandez, 2017). I understand Black girl rage through this lens. In similarity with the Hernandez’ s conceptualization of raunch aesthetics, the analysis I offer in this chapter does not always paint a “politically progressive” picture of rage (Hernandez, 2014). Therefore, I address the ways in which some of the most powerful artists of rage, like Nicki Minaj and girl group Pretty Taking All Fades (PTAF) sometimes reinscribe the stereotypes of Blackness that are arguably in need of eradication. If I, however, am to comment on the complexity of a Black girlhood that holds space for pleasure, even as it is potentially seen in a negative light, I must discuss what I see as the forms of powerful and willed resistance being performed by and through Black girlhood. This is rage.

In the continuation of this chapter, I will exhibit and discuss Black girls’ expressions of rage occurring in their creative writing, group discussions, and artwork. These observations are exhibited through AnneMarie’s narrative. Additionally, I will explore mirrored expressions of Black girlhood rage that occur in popular culture by way of lyrics by rap artist Nicki Minaj and girl band Pretty Taking All Fades (PTAF). Through these avenues, I wish to ultimately explore how rage can be pleasurable as performed in Black girlhood spaces, by Black girl flesh.
Pleasure looks like matching yellow barrettes to the bee’s stripes of my earrings, to my studded belt, to my lace shoelaces, to the ribbon weaving in-and-out my sock. *I pimp school uniforms. I pimp Sunday school outfits. And turn the idea of Brownie sash in-on itself.* Too much matching, you say? When that is but the trend, you built on my back. You and I both know I am the pleasure principle, pleasure prototype. Sethe slayed her Black baby girl, to keep her, only, from pale-pink masters that dare think they could bottle up the pleasure she spewed, and sell it. I am the Black baby girl, come to life, again and again, to conjure chaos, forcing your stare into the brightest of lights, the principle of pleasure, what *Janet said* became between you and me, the prototype of the “human differential.” ⁷¹ When I open my mouth wide to holler, *yo muthafuckin’ mama!*, when I suck the bok choy from my teeth, round my marshmallow-pillow lips with one lick of the tongue to clear away the MacSauce and grease residue, when I stretch the button to the hole that secures the khaki school pants, doubling as a Girl Scout uniform, over my hips-piled-upon-hips, when I sing, when *juju on that beat*, when I praise report on a higher frequency than your pastor, when I pimp *Sourpuss*, pimp *Sweet*, pimp *Tart*, I sweat pleasure. Write it down, the principle of pleasure, that I am the prototype.

--the Pleasure Principle

⁷¹ Poetic use of lyrics from Janet Jackson's (1986) "The Pleasure Principle".
Figure 11: Photographic image: “WestSide” from The Patterson Girls. Photography by author (2008)
Lesson 4: “West Side”\textsuperscript{72}

Where does my self-image come from?
self-esteem, identity, autonomy—all those things grown folks say?
Where do I find womanhood? good womanhood? god-like?

Whose subject am I?
whose will I be?
Who will take such care so as to notice me in all my complexities?

Then could I ever be, this good you look to see?
where am I, if not the girl I see on t.v.
movies?
packaging?
Who can be,
good
loved and cherished
mad
loved and cherished,
and everything in between?

Why do I provoke you? and mess up our connection interaction?
How do I cause the look of concern on your brow?

Picture me.
See me, anyway
let your brow uncurl

\textsuperscript{72} Referring to the image "West Side" in Figure 11 from the Patterson Girls series by author (2008).

Scholar’s Note

I. AnneMarie’s depiction of “West Side” in Figure 11, to me, is visual representation of the dynamic between good and bad pleasure, that Black girlhood often must straddle. The photograph (and scene AnneMarie describes) is backdropped by the [Redacted] Community of the Housing Authority of [Redacted]\textsuperscript{73}. There is also evidence of Black girlhood play in the background as a brown-skinned, pigtailed girl draws with chalk on asphalt ground. In the foreground, three young Black girls, no older than a 5th grader, provide hand expressions towards the lens of the camera that range from indecisive hand games to more pointed sign language. The girl in the foreground to the far left of the image forms a “W” with her right hand to indicate her allegiance to a “west-side” neighborhood of her town. Her facial expression is stern as her eyes interact directly with the camera’s lens. The photograph is presented as a black and White image to evoke a timeless nature in the scene. The four girls together display multi- dimensions of Black girlhood emotion.

AnneMarie’s voice here speaks to the prototypical characteristics I observe as supporting iterations of rage. This is performed in her announcement of the relationship to pimp, tart, sweet, and located in how she aestheticizes the Girl Scout uniform. To further operationalize these dynamics, I use two compelling children’s narratives that centralize the

\textsuperscript{73} Specific location has been redacted to protect the identity of individuals pictured.
What do you see behind your lens?
when *I describe myself without using adjectives*.

*I am a flower.*
I am King-kong.

*Who is Lil’ Scrappy?*
*He my husband...*

You say, Zora\(^74\) say,
“I love myself when I’m laughing,
and then again when I’m looking mean and impressive.”\(^75\) so then
Ms. Anya, look at me and she
if I glare deep into your camera lens
now tell me what do you see?

Patterson girls, we are
not, Yamacraw Village,
not Kayton- Frazier Homes
also not
Hitch Village
not Fred Wessels homes
We Patterson.

Can you still see my smooth girl-like complexion my tight pig-tails my mama
did for me for school that I kept my white uniform shirt clean during lunch like
mama said
even with my hard face on?

Black girlhood sourpuss figure, which could be another name for the stern-faced
girl in the image that could be an example of rage. Here, I begin to contextualize
Black girlhood rage as one mode of pleasure.

In the story “Sourpuss and Sweetie Pie” written by Norton Jester
(2008) and illustrated by Chris Raschka (2008), the Black girl subject of the
narrative is presented as a complex and multifaceted, and allowed to be human
enough to rage just as AnneMarie paints herself as multi-dimensional in her
poetic narrative. The dual personalities of the main character in “Sourpuss and
Sweetie Pie” are Black girls for sure, brown skin, kinks, and curls for hair. The
artwork throughout depicts color, vibrancy, and complexity to young Black and
female existence. In the first narrative, alter egos--Sourpuss and Sweetie Pie are
mapped within embodied Black girlhood just as AnneMarie performs her multi-
dimensions as good, mad, and loved and cherished. The main character lives
with or simply visits her grandparents. She has a close and intimate relationship
with them as they put her to bed and get her ready for school in the mornings.
They know her, and they love her. While they often vocalize a preference for
Sweetie Pie over Sourpuss, Grandma and Grandpa bathe both egos, feed them
both, hug and kiss them both, often. Here, the author validates a human
experience embodied by Black girls, for Black girls, just as in AnneMarie’s
request.

The layout of the second narrative, “Grump, Groan, and Growl” is that
of an extended poem, with words spanning the length of the book

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\(^74\) Zora Neale Hurston
\(^75\) Debra Willis (1995) writes about Zora Neale Hurston and quotes these words she
speaks while viewing photographs of herself taken by earl van vechten. (Willis, 1995)
behaving (like they say) badly but really being free.

Lemme show you hold out your hand like you’re giving five turn it around cross you middle and you ring finger, that will make a W. Yeah, like that (can you see me?) click

Put that in the story. And should you use my real name? Yes, first middle and last.

--the making of The Patterson Girls series.

76 Poem written from field notes I took during the photographing of The Patterson Girls series. This is a photography series I took of girls in the Vibrator Project at play, describing themselves without adjectives.
that there is no room for their anger, sadness, or pessimism in an adult world, a White world, or a respectable world. There is a push to move through their own fear, or the discomfort they may cause others, to be comfortable in their own right. This, however temporary, is an example of a free state of being human. To explore my own encounters with Black girls in this free state, I combed my field notes and documentation to recall moments in the Vibrator Project where girls most often felt free enough to express their rage. I found that this occurred when exploring the work of artist, Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, who makes street art in response to street harassment directed at women and girls. The next section investigates Black girls in the Vibrator Project as they relate and respond to Fazlalizadeh’s work.
When we learn about this artist
I can’t say her whole name cuz it long and weird.
Tatyana something
Anyway
She makes drawings, big hug e drawings that you can see walking down
the street.
We even have some in Miami now.
They say things like “Stop Telling Women to Smile”
or “Hey Baby, is Not My Name.”
We get to talk about what “street harassment is”.
Ms. Anya doesn’t know it but
I know what this feels like.
It’s not just what I can see happen to my mom or older sister.
It happens to me too, even though I am just a girl.
Can you believe it?
Even when I know I look like a girl!
Even when I’m wearing my school uniform!
They cat call me
ask me, “hey Boo, what yo name is?”
And I have to ignore
or suck my teeth
or run home fast.
And yes, sometimes they’ll call me a “bitch”
or say “well you fat anyway”, “ugly anyway”
if I don’t respond
or come to where they are calling.
Bu that’s what they do.

II. Tatyana Fazlalizadeh enacts large-scale painting and drawing work to
express how women get angry about the street harassment they experience. Her
series of works “Stop Telling Women to Smile” are inspired by the numerous
political movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement. This series of
works seek to express the passion and rage that “fuel a protester’s spirit to fight
back against injustice”.
Fazlalizadeh has been recognized for her large scale street posters that are
literally plastered throughout heavy-trafficked streets and neighborhoods of New
York and New Jersey. She began this endeavor by plastering an illustrated self-
portrait above the words, “Stop Telling Women to Smile” on a vacant storefront,
across the street from the New York City federal courthouse. Her work has since
grown to include supporters in the form of assistants who have assisted in
plastering more than two dozen posters of her drawings of young women’s faces
paired with quotes like “My Outfit Is Not an Invitation,” or “Women Do Not
Owe You Their Time or Conversation.”
In the Vibrator Project, Falalizadeh’s work is introduced by asking girls if they
know what street harassment is. Tell me what it is? How does it make you feel?
Often girls, as exemplified in AnneMarie’s narrative, respond sharing their
encounters with street harassment or catcalling. And in cases where girls might
have been too young to have experienced it, they almost always knew what it
was and could give examples based

77 Field note in the form of poetry from the Tatyana Fazlalizadeh art facilitation in the
Vibrator Project.

78 As described via artist's website about her work titled "Get Angry"
We all know about that.
To ignore and to keep walking
or running.

But when we learn about Tatyana
I see it’s not just me
It’s not even just us in the art room.
You mean this happens to a lot of women and girls?
Everywhere?
Like New York?

When I get my black paper and white chalk
or maybe white paper and black charcoal
Ima make a sign that shows how they make me feel.

And I won’t get in trouble if I cuss
because it’s ok to get mad sometimes
just like Tatyana did.

on something they have heard or overheard by way of a woman family member.
In AnneMarie’s voice, I recount a particular session when girls were able to
make the connection between their age and the type/degree of street harassment
they had received, saying: “I mean Ms. Anya, I’m only 15!” or “[h]e didn’t
even care that I was in my school uniform!” These comments sparked
discussions that rallied the support and/or rage of their group mates, and
eventually fueled the rage that went into their artistic responses. These responses
are archived in Figures 12, 13, and 14.

So, in their encounters with street harassment prior to our sessions and
discussions, girls might not have felt empowered or activated, or even knew
what street harassment was, or that they were supported in getting mad about it;
in this session and in their art responses, they did experience the freedom to get
mad about it. In their poster drawings (with color pencil, marker, White conte,
or charcoal on white or black drawing board), their rage activated their desire to
speak truthfully and without filter. This happened by way of their artworks. In
having the chance to evoke Falalizadeh’s anger and replicate her style of art-
making, girls in The Vibrator Project felt validated in expressing their shared
rage.

Her work remains emotionally charged, and conversation about this
work with girls in The Vibrator Project has become a space where rage is not
only acceptable, but necessary. In speaking in regard to a long history of police
brutality against Black bodies, the artist comments “[M]

79 Taken from field notes on the Vibrator Project session, June, 2013.
y first emotion when another Black person is killed at the hands of police is anger. We’re angry.” (Lee, 2014). Fazlalizadeh argues that her work is necessary because Black people must navigate a society built on White supremacy, from micro-aggressions to larger systems of racism. She expresses her anger and rage about the things that might seem small or unnoticeable like getting followed in stores or Black children’s higher suspension rates in the U.S. school system than their White counterparts. She continues to rage through her artwork at the acknowledgment that “our lives are unfairly treated at traffic stops, in the education system, in housing practices, in the workplace, in the legal system, at home, at church, in a park, on the lawn, in custody, on a train, on a doorstep, in a stairwell. (Lee, 2014)”

While Fazlalizadeh’s expression and entitlement to anger about the truths that affect her life (and folks who look like her) corresponds to Audre Lorde’s recognition of anger as power, it is her use of art-making as a supported mode self-expression that feels closer to Michel Foucault’s discussion of pleasure and truth.
Figure 12: “Fuck Off”. Vibrator Project participant’s response to Tatyanna Fazlalizadeh workshop
Figure 13: “Let Me Be”. Vibrator Project participant’s response to Tatyanna Fazlalizadeh workshop
Figure 14: “No Thank You”. Vibrator Project participant’s response to Tatyanna Fazlalizadeh workshop
Lesson 6: Pleasure in Rage

I know all the words, and sing the lyrics clear
when only my girls around to hear:

Stupid ho\textsuperscript{80} shoulda befriended me then she coulda prolly came back
Stupid hoes is my enemy, stupid hoes is so wack
Stupid ho shoulda befriended me then she could’ve probably came back
You a stupid ho, you a stupid ho, you a stupid ho
And I ain’t hit that note but fuck a stupid ho, fuck you stupid hoe
I said fuck a stupid ho and fuck a stupid hoe
I said fuck a stupid ho and fuck a stupid hoe
I said fuck a stupid ho and fuck a stupid hoe
I am the female Weezy

I get it cracking like a bad back
Bitch talkin she the queen when she looking like a lab rat
I’m Angelina, you Jennifer come on bitch you see where Brad at?
Ice my wrist-es then I piss on bitches
You could suck my diznick, if you take these jizzes
You don’t like them disses, give my ass some kisses
Yeah they know what this is, give bitches the business
Cause I pull up and I’m stuntin but I ain’t a stuntman
Yes I’m rockin Jordans but I ain’t a jumpman
Bitches play the back cuz they know I’m the frontman
Put me on a dollar cause I’m who they trust in
Ayo SB, what the fuck’s good?
We ship platinum, them bitches is shippin wood
Them nappy headed hoes, but my kitchen good
I wish I wish I wish I wish a bitch would
You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, yeah you a you a stupid hoe

III. When I think about locations of Black girlhood in the public sphere
where the image of rage is evoked, I think about popular music culture. I think
of girl group Pretty Taking All Fades or PTAF\textsuperscript{81}—an emerging performance
group of young Black women from Crenshaw, Los Angeles—a popular music
phenomenon, entered popular music culture as teenagers through the viral
circulation of their do-it-yourself (d.i.y) music video “Boss Ass Bitch,” which
was posted on YouTube in May 2012 and had amassed over 13,000,000 hits by
September 2016. The lyrics of P.T.A.F.’s “Boss Ass Bitch” are explicit and
demonstrate that the young performers are aware of their sexual selves through
language that vigorously describes the corporeal pleasure they seek, while it also
expresses their deep rage at being torn down for their looks. Their group name,
PTAF, is a literal commentary on are their commitment to being pretty and not
wishing to turn down a fight if ever challenged. Relatedly, I think of rap/pop
sensation, Nicki Minaj, who is not a girl by age-definition, but who is subsumed
in Black girlhood as she is often perceived as in need of fixing, parenting, or
managing due to her music’s explicit lyrics about sexual pleasure, anger, and
rage against the sexist and racist systems she encounters. The image Nicki Minaj
promotes as a part of her public persona attracts a great deal of naysayers who
are disturbed by the kind of representation, she exhibits

\textsuperscript{80} Lyrics from Nicki Minaj's (2011) rap hit "Stupid Hoe"

\textsuperscript{81} Commentary on PTAF first published in two co-authored articles, "Nicki Minaj and
Pret-ty Taking All Fades: Perfonning the Erotics of Feminist Solidarity", written by
Jillian Hernan-dez, Ph.D and author.
You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, yeah you a you a stupid hoe
Look Bubbles, go back to ya habitat
MJ gone and I ain’t havin that
How you gonna be the stunt double to the nigga monkey??
Top of that I’m in the Phantom lookin hella chonky
Ice my wrist-es then I piss on bitches
You could suck my diznick, if you take these jizzes
You don’t like them disses, give my ass some kisses
Yeah they know what this is, give bitches the business
‘Cause I pull up in the Porsche but it ain’t de Rossi
Pretty bitches only could get in my posse
Yes my name is Roman, last name is Zolanski
But no relation to Roman Polanski
Hey, yo Baby Bop, fuck you and your EP
Who’s gassing this ho? BP?
Hmm.. thinks 1, 2, 3, do the Nicki Minaj blink
‘Cause these hoes so busted, hoes is so crusty
These bitches is my sons and I don’t want custody
Hoes so busted, hoes is so crusty these bitches is my sons and I don’t want custody
You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, yeah you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, you a you a stupid hoe
You a stupid hoe, yeah you a you a stupid hoe
If you cute, then your crew can roll
If you sexy, eat my cucka roll
Put ya cape on, you a super hoe
Twenty twelve, I’m at the super bowl
Stupid hoes is my enemy, stupid hoes is so wack!

for Blackness and what kind of role model she might be to young and impressionable girls. For example, her recent appropriation of Malcolm X in her hit single Lookin’ Ass, as a figure she identifies with in her critique of disciplinary surveillance, was described as tasteless, exploitative, and endangering to youth of color.

Emcees Alizé, Kandii, and K’Duceyy, the group members of PTAF, met in high school and fomented a friendship born from turning their everyday experiences (like dealing with other girls talking behind their backs) into the art of Hip Hop. They improvised lyrics and created beats by banging on school desks. In fact, the infectious hook to “Boss Ass Bitch” was initially “I don’t like that bitch.” In “Boss Ass Bitch” however, the girls express both their erotic and, when necessary, violent selves, thus merging two of the most dominant, negative tropes of Black girlhood. I refer back to the scholarship of Ruth Nicole Brown, whose praxis is based among Black girls in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois through Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT). Brown writes about hearing many fight stories from the girls she has worked with. In theorizing the troubling commonality of violence in their lives she writes that, “If power were transformed on a structural level, fighting would not take up as much space as it does in the personal lives of Black girls. If power were the target of change, rather than individual Black

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82 Commentary on Nicki Minaj’s appropriation of Malcolm X in "Lookin' Ass" first published in co-authored article, "Nicki Minaj and Pretty Taking All Fades: Performing the Erotics of Feminist Solidarity", written by Jillian Hernandez, Ph.D and author.
girls, they would not have to service their body as the site of change on which everyone else inscribes their own version of justice and survival” (Brown, 2013, p. 146). Black girlhood is often a depleting struggle, but, in owning the aspects of themselves that fight and fuck, while highlighting their close connection to each other, as evidenced by their body language throughout the “Boss Ass Bitch” YouTube video, P.T.A.F. stages unsanitized truths about Black girlhood with joy and melody. Ruth Nicole Brown would describe their approach as wreckless theatrics.

Brown (2014) has found that Black girls define “wreckless” as a performative mode that is “dramatic, semi-confrontational, and passionately argued even in the case of inevitable defeat” (Brown, 2013, p. 35). Wreckless, a common misspelling of the word reckless fits this concept as one that is supportive of Black girl flesh in rage-the wrong, behaving wrongly. There are no contexts in which the usage of “wreckless” is considered grammatical. Whenever it is used as a substitute for reckless, it is considered a spelling error—in both American and British English. Brown, however, claims it on behalf of performance(s) occurring within Black girlhood spaces. Drawing from the insights of the girls she works with in SOLHOT which is dedicated to Black Girlhood survival (Saving Our Lives, Hearing Our Truths), Brown offers a concept of wreckless theatrics as a method of inquiry that would foreground “the motions and emotions of Black girls attempting to live their lives”; “val[ing] the cultural resources and performances of
Black girlhood”; allow for the “creation, presentation and representations of culturally embodied knowledge of import to particular communities of practice”; and, lastly, “share stories of Black girlhood as told by Black girls and those who love them as a means of collective action dedicated to the survival of Black girls everywhere” (Brown, 2013, p. 37). Brown views wreckless theatrics as disrupting academic norms by acknowledging Black girls as producers of knowledge and privileging collaborative and organic practices of knowledge production. I understand this by way of AnneMarie’s explanation: [w]hen I open my mouth wide to holler, yo muthafuckin’ mama!, when I suck the bok choy from my teeth, round my marshmallow-pillow lips with one lick of the tongue to clear away the MacSauce and grease residue. She understands her own processes as important, important enough to proclaim, important enough to be recorded (by me). I am compelled by Brown to view the passionate, dramatic, and confrontational stances assumed in Black girlhood art-making and poetics, just as I (and others) have in the art of PTAF and Nicki Minaj, as a performance of wreckless theatrics that displays the girls’ embodied sexual knowledge. The moments when those participating in some form of Black girlhood can witness and participate in these expressions of unmitigated rage and wreckless theatrics, similar to these locations in popular culture like the music of PTAF and Nicki Minaj, are in fact moments of pleasure, not far from truth.
Conclusion

This article exhibits how rage as a form of pleasure gets mobilized through the case study of girls in the Vibrator Project, rendering artistic reactions/ responses to confrontational aspects of Black girlhood. These reactions/responses are sometimes rage. My witnessing expressions of rage in Black girlhood spaces is something I wanted to write about because there is a poetic voice and space I wanted to hold the evidence of unrestricted truth and humanness that rage provides. In making these arguments, I adhere to the characterizations that designate the expression of rage (as distinguished from hatred) as both uncontrolled and intense.

The theoretical concepts of raunch aesthetics, wreckless theatrics, and funk are employed to provide multi-layered prescriptions for truth-telling that do not prioritize legibility or legitimacy and do need to be understood or appreciated. I understand Black girlhood rage through this lens. The characteristics I offer in this chapter do not always offer a picture of rage that is free from stereotype. It also seems like an absurd contradiction to juxtapose pleasure and rage. I address this by exhibiting the ways in which some of the most powerful artists of rage, like Nicki Minaj and girl group Pretty Taking All Fades (PTAF) reaffirm what is often seen as stereotypical representations. I do this to treat the Black girlhood deployment of rage with the complexity.

The tactic of rememory is also revisited here as an activation of visceral and willed interactions that Black girls have experienced with racism, sexism, and respectability. It is also, however, their resistance to it and their expectations for survival. Just as rage is an activation to survive in the flesh, so is pleasure as it makes Blackness (their flesh) tangible and makes humanness more accessible to them. Rage, like pleasure, is, therefore, a “visceral site for the expression and elaboration of Black sexual politics” as argued by Jillian Hernandez’s raunch aesthetic theory (Hernandez, 2014). Stallings,
Hernandez, and Brown, I understand a human subject as worthy of freedom, worthy of truth, and thus entitled to uncontrolled expression, be it pleasure and/or rage.

The considerations of pleasure in various forms, which I argue includes rage are translations of freedom and choice and motivated by Black girl will. This chapter, as does the dissertation, explores the recognition of what Black girls being free means to philosophies of being human through the imaginations of Black girls crafting and experiencing pleasure for themselves. So, I understand such crafting as Black girls being an original model on which a particular form of pleasure is patterned. To me, they exhibit a standard or typical example. I utilize their prototypical expressions of rage (as pleasurable) (and as observed in the workshop facilitation in the Vibrator Project) to connect their creations, and productions to the activity happening by way of the magnetic pull at the black hole’s center. I also argue this exploration of rage in Black girlhood as a prototypical transference of the constrictions they have experienced. If the black hole phenomenon happens at the densest core of spacetime, I understand this as being constructed and moved by Black girlhood.

Black girlhood does this by subsuming emptiness; composting it, along with negativity, oppression, and constriction into new energy forms. In the language of black hole theory, this makes Black girlhood a holding of concentrated energy having the ability to consume everything in its path as well as to emanate new/different substance(s). By using the black hole theory as established by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, I have deduced that Black girlhood can either trap subjectivity with finality (to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari) or conjure the energy that emits semiotic substances that enable their freedom. This semiotic substance is theorized here, as rage. I will explore this concept more as the work continues, in an investigation of the ramifications of Black girl freedom in how this flesh confronts and/or subsumes space in Chapter 4, “Spacetime and The Margins: Black Girlhood in and of the Black Hole.”
Chapter 4

Spacetime and The Margins: Black Girlhood in and of the Black Hole

black hole\textsuperscript{83}

1: A place of confinement as punishment.

2: A region of space within which the gravitational field is so strong that no matter or radiation can escape, except perhaps by quantum-mechanical tunneling.

Introduction to the Black Hole

Simply put, a black hole is a region of space where gravity pulls so intensely (gravitational pull) that no kind of matter or radiation (light) can escape from it. Informally, the black hole is often spoken of as a place where people or things disappear without a trace, a point of no return. And lastly, and more frequently, the term used in the English lexicon to refer to a vast emptiness, voided space.

Spacetime is that space, and the concept of time, regarded as one to form an additional dimension of thought.\textsuperscript{84} As an exploration of spacetime and the margins, this chapter will investigate the social and cultural voided spaces often deemed the margins. I introduced my understanding of the physics of a black hole in the introduction as everything but empty, rather including emptiness… This statement resonates with me because it corresponds with Michelle Wright’s (2015) declaration that “Blackness is simply too many things to be anything but

\textsuperscript{83} Definition of black hole as defined by Oxford-English dictionary (Dictionary, 1989).

\textsuperscript{84} Definition derived from the mathematical model of time and three-dimensional space regarded as fused in a four-dimensional continuum first made popular by Albert Einstein. The term is written as one word instead of hyphenated to differentiate between that and the scientific concept of space-time continual as defined by Oxford English dictionary (Dictionary, 1989)
“everything” as she begins to explore the discomfort and challenge Black Studies scholars have had trying to find an all-encompassing way to define Blackness. (Wright, 2015, p. 3) Wright goes on to consider Blackness through an understanding of spacetime, and understanding of Blackness as nonlinear movement, simplified as a when rather than a what. She argues:

> [o]ur Constructs of Blackness are largely historical and more specifically based on a notion of spacetime that is commonly fitted into a linear progress narrative, while our phenomenological manifestations of Blackness happen in what I term *Epiphenomenal time*, or the “now” through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted. (Wright, 2015, p. 4)

Wright’s consideration of Blackness supports how I theorize Black girlhood in this dissertation. I recognize Black girlhood in 3 main ways. 1) Black girlhood is female youth, under the age of eighteen, who identify as Black. 2) Black girlhood is the embodied experience of having been a girl under the age of 18 who identifies as Black at any point in the past, present, or future. And 3) Black girlhood is the marginal state of being associated with femaleness, youthfulness, Blackness, and/or otherness, or deviancy that is experienced at any point in the past, present, or future. Ultimately, Black girlhood, like Blackness, is an articulation and expression of nonlinear time.

With these understandings, I come to my explorations of the marginal spaces where I meet Black girls for work in The Vibrator Project. The Vibrator Project is too an articulation of epiphenomenal time where Black girls, the rememory they create, and the art-making that occurs are responses to issues, injustices, and pleasures of the *now*. While program facilitation for The Vibrator Project mostly happened in physical places like schools and community centers, a designation of this programming took place to meet Black girls, incarcerated, within the U.S. Juvenile Justice system, simply written as *prison*.
As a common understanding, prison is a marginal space, especially as it relates to our U.S. prison industrial complex (PIC)\textsuperscript{85}, which describes the rapid rise in U.S. inmates to the political influence of for-profit prison operation. These not only include youth involved in the juvenile justice system, like the girls in my programs, but also include a way of rearing and managing school-aged youth as if they are predestined for the life of a criminal, and therefore prisoner. This disproportionally affects Black youth, mainly boys, but it does, in fact, affect Black girls. Due to both the dark conditioning associated with prison life, as well as the dark political notions that surround the rising inmate epidemic in the U.S., it is easy to understand the prison as an iteration of the black hole concept.

Many have made the connection between the prison and the black hole metaphor before me. Angela Davis (2003) tells us the prison has become “a black hole into which the detritus of contemporary capitalism is deposited”… and that “mass imprisonment generates profits as it devours social wealth, and thus it tends to reproduce the very conditions that lead people to prison” (Davis, 2003). In turn, Davis’s prison abolition scholarship gives cause to why so many Black girlhood stories unfold, not only in the margins but are the reasons the margins are constructed, like prison walls. Black girls’ perceived deviancy is exhibited in systems like Juvenile Justice as they are the current and most prominent methods for constraining Black female identity, and thus pleasure.

Davis’s scholarship begs for a reassessment of the concept of prison reform in a call to fully dismantle of the U.S. prison industrial complex. She advocates for an eradication of such constraining and institutionalized barricades in the lived existences of Black people, more specifically Black women. As I cited in the introduction, Davis reminds us that Black female bodies have always been held to more strenuous modes of disciplining in a U.S. historical context

\textsuperscript{85} Terminology and concept coined by philosopher, scholar, and social activist, Angela Davis. "The Prison Industrial Complex" was the title of a recorded 1997 speech she gave on the topic.
of crime and punishment; and that the Black female body in mere opposition to its White counterpart maintains a long history in the U.S. social psyche as marginal regarding conduct, civility, and morality.

To further the issue of morality standards on Black women in prison, Ruth Gilmore (1999), another prominent voice on prison scholarship also agrees that as both print and electronic media have started again to headline annual federal reports about long-term drops in crime (still falling since 1980) and as elected and appointed officials have started to take credit for the trends, the explanation for bulging prisons centers on the remarkable array of longer and stiffer sentences now doled out for a wide range of behavior that used to be punished differently, if at all. This explanation, tied to but different from the ‘moral panic’ explanation, proposes that while social deviance might not have exploded after all, active intolerance pays handsome political dividends. The explanation that new kinds of sentences (which is to say the concerted action of law makers) rather than crises in the streets, produced the growth in prison, is a post facto explanation that begs the question. Where did the punitive passion come from in the first place? While all the dominant accounts carry some explanatory power, there is a huge hole at their centre. Who is being punished, for what, and to what end? If crime rates peaked before the proliferation of new laws and new cages, what work does prison do? (Gilmore, 1999)

Here, not only does Gilmore relate the specific moral punishment of Black women (and girls) to the “huge hole” reminiscent of a black hole, she also initiates a questioning of the prison’s purpose, what work does prison do? From this perspective, I arrive at the concept of the Black female body bureaucracy, an iteration of the black hole, that employs the social concept of freedom by deconstructing Black women’s containment within prison walls. Based on the sector of my work in The Vibrator Project that occurs in the prison place, I wish to demonstrate how
these skewed perceptions of Blackness and womanhood entangle Black women and girls, inside and outside of the social construct of prison, in a body bureaucracy that both expels freedom and creates new forms of freedom at the same time. It could be easily argued that Black womanhood under these circumstances can never reach free, but in this chapter I explore how Black female bodies contained define pleasure, thus constructing new kinds of freedom in what could be argued as the black hole’s explosive center.

Most memorably, Evelyn Hammonds (1994) names her iconic article on “the politics of silence” that Black women’s sexuality has assumed in the U.S., “Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Women’s Sexuality” as a direct play on the black hole concept. The title alone requires an understanding of the Black female body written off, voided and puts it in conversation with the great phenomenon of physics, the gravitational pull of the black hole. She makes clear the black hole white wall dichotomy with an explanation of how the images of sexuality, images of "white" (read normal) and "black" (read not white and abnormal) sexuality, are juxtaposed in our social psyche.

Even this reading of Black women’s sexuality is grounded, however, by Michele Wallace’s (1997) "Variations on Negation," which invokes the idea of the black hole as a trope that can be used to describe the invisibility of Black creativity in general, and Black female creativity specifically. Rather than assuming that Black female sexualities are structured along an axis of normal and perverse paralleling that of White women, we might find that for Black women, a different geometry operates. As Wallace rightfully notes, the observer outside of the

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86 Some speculative science suggests that black holes may explode. It is believed that quarks and electrons resist being compressed together for various reasons, so under everyday conditions we see everyday densities. The thing is that gravity is always additive - more mass means more gravity and more pressure, and we can keep piling on more matter and the gravity and pressure will keep rising. At some point the pressure gets so great that electrons react with proton to form neutrons, and we get matter made up just from neutrons. There is a theorem in General Relativity that essentially states that if ever all of the matter is contained within the associated Schwarzschild radius, that matter must collapse to infinite * density. (jonah, 2015)
hole sees it as a void, an empty place in space. However, it is not empty; it is a dense and full place in space.

My work as an artist and community educator with Black girls in prison though The Vibrator Project investigates an experience of Black female bodies contained-- inmates, guards, administrators, social service workers, and program facilitators like myself--as the extreme point of density to which black holes explode. This chapter poses the questions: How does the space of the black hole (prison) and the body of the Black hole (Black women and girls) work together? Thus, can pleasure exist within such a phenomenon?

In Chapter 4, I work to move beyond reflecting on the relational dynamics experienced by Black women and girls within these places of contaminant to examining a recognizable Black female body bureaucracy and its inhabitants, as both permanent and temporary fixations that exemplify Deleuze and Guattari’s articulation of a territorialized plane of consistency lying between powerfully constructed layer. I argue these layers as whiteness, patriarchy, and respectability. This is the black hole. Positing the prison (place) as a site of Black girlhood space that is both performative and educative, as the chapter continues, I investigate the densest of margins, spacetime and the players within it—the girl, the guard, the place, and myself—as teachers and learners among two correctional facilities and hosting sites of The Vibrator Project--The Miami-Dade Regional Juvenile Detention Center and the AMIKids/ WINGS (Women In Need of Greater Strength) for Life of South Florida, Inc. (a detention center for pregnant and postpartum adolescents). As the chapter continues, I argue how the arts-based programming I have facilitated through The Vibrator Project with Black girls at youth service provision sites—camps, after-school, and rite of passage programs— and within Juvenile Justice are closely related by how Black girl bodies are read, managed, and imagined. The writing from here begins another poetic inquiry in the voice of AnneMarie that should serve as an analysis of the U.S. prison
industrial complex as well as an interaction of the black hole, commenting on the extreme density created by the Black female bodies operating within such containment.
“I know God won’t give me anything I can’t handle. I just wish he didn’t
trust me so much.”
– Mother Theresa

Someday, We’ll All Be Free
Maybe it was that Lady [Ms. Anya] and her new orange and black, leopard print
earrings. It was the weight of them, not just their brightness, bigness, shine, but
the weight of them. These earrings, given to her
as a gift shortly before entering the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)
(MDRJDC) that night, were not only glaringly bright, a spotlight
pointing out her complete and utter displacement, but also heavy, pulling every
fiber of the despair and confusion the night’s experience had drudged up in her,
weighing her down as she walked out into the free night air.

They left the place in a hurry, fleeing with all of the supplies and materials they
were able to retrieve, stuffed into the purple velvet rolling cart and little canvas
bags. They were three that night, at the very least they were thankful for that.
They were three facilitators having come to provide the usual Monday arts
programming to the Girls-mod at DJJ. They left with our own images stained in
their memories, the image of each of us standing behind our respective caged
glass. But they left without our artwork, without the watercolor painting I had
worked on for almost two hours. They left thinking, hoping, that another of the
three had grabbed it. Or maybe they left the art, subconsciously wanting to
leave the paint-stained papers, to leave something behind, something with me,
so I wouldn’t be robbed of the entire night, the entire experience. They left this
place. They left us, felt like, deserted us.

Scholar’s Note

I. We need to write about this. This is the phrase that I found myself
recounting incessantly in my work with young Black women and girls
involved in the juvenile detention system. We need to write about it.
Not merely about the experience of incarcerated Black girls but that of
black women and girls moving about this system- inmates, guards,
administrators, and social service workers. I have questions. I would like to
open a dialogue rather, bringing all entities to the metaphoric table in order to
deconstruct the realities of a bureaucracy of body politics within a system
already deemed dysfunctional. Who is behind the wheel of the machine that
perpetuates the punishment and subsequent demonization of Black female
bodies? And what if the answer is Black women?

The above words were the first words I wrote in search of a way to
express my feelings and concerns about the work I was engaged within the
U.S. prison industrial complex. After many months of arts programming
with Black girls, incarcerated in the juvenile justice system in Miami, FL, I
had become quite heavy with these feelings. And at first, I couldn’t quite
place what those feelings were or why I had them. What I didn’t know
before the writing is that my colleagues and I in the Vibrator Project were
feeling a shared heaviness. It wasn’t until one evening after delivering
programming in this space that I returned to the Museum of Contemporary
Art, North Miami to regroup from a session and drop off the art supplies we
had used. There, I had the

87 Quotation exhibited on under the wall mural at the Miami-Dade detention Center.
fortune of running into three of my colleagues in the Vibrator Project (who all provide programming in the prison). We began to discuss the experiences we had had there and learned that, while it is common knowledge that prison is no fun place to work, this heaviness, this darkness, this fear was actually something we all shared. It was made clear to me that this thick dark feeling that came along with this work was inevitable. The place itself carried it. And it didn’t matter that we, ourselves, were not prisoners, that the guards were not prisoners. All of our bodies were being implicated in this system every time we stepped foot on the grounds. And to only think we were helping, saving, or liberating bad girls, was a privilege we did not have.
Figure 15: *Leopard Print Earrings*, Pen Sketch (2014), by author.
This place is the Miami-Dade County Regional Juvenile Detention Center (MDRJDC), or as we all call it, DJJ. DJJ is a site of Florida’s Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). It sits at 3300 Northwest 27th Avenue, Miami Florida. DJJ is a 126 bed, hardware secure facility that serves youth detained by various circuit court(s). Youth are detained pending adjudication, disposition or placement in commitment facility.

The facility provides supervision of youth in a safe, secure and humane environment. Services for youth include: education, mental health, substance abuse, and health care. Medical and mental health care are contracted services. Educational services are funded by the Department of Education through local school districts.

A typical day in secure detention would involve hygiene, meals, school, structured physical and educational activities, and court appearance as scheduled. The average length of stay in secure detention is approximately 15 days.3

WINGS (Women in Need of Greater Strength) is a program facility that is an extension of the Department of Juvenile Justice. It is designed to accommodate adolescent girls that are either pregnant or new mothers. Like DJJ, we girls are incarcerated, deemed delinquent by the court systems. If accepted to participate in the WINGS program, we can remain with our new babies after delivering and for the duration of our sentences. We deliver our babies on-site. The program is designed to provide care for me as a new mother, to assist us in providing care for our babies, and to help us develop parental and other educational skills.

DJJ-place is big. It is dark. It is dank. Many facilitators, like herself,

II. As a photographer, accustomed to seeing with a photographer’s eyes, I take in the place despite the constrictions placed upon me. In the place, I do not take photographs. Cameras are not permitted. In the place, I do not make voice- recordings. Tape recorders, cellular phones, video cameras are neither permitted. The records in my possession come from that of my field notes, sketches, journal entries, and comparable recordings from those of my colleagues. These are records we make for ourselves upon each departure from the programming site at the MDRJDC site.

A visual discourse is a rendering of the time and space spent in the prison. It describes the collage-approach I take in exhibiting my employed resources of memory, field notes, sketches, journal entries, the creative responses of my colleagues, as well as writings and artwork developed by participants to imaginatively examine a Black [female] body bureaucracy within the United Stated prison industrial complex (PIC). The visual discourse is a canvas for my resources and creativities combined, thus serving as more than the photograph, the sketch, the field note or journal entry alone. The visual discourse offers a varied and complex access to truth, a methodology capable of both problematizing and reconsidering the subjectivity and truth-telling that the PIC cultivates.

What occurs in the narrative of place, girl, and guard is visual discourse detailing observations and encounters made by the incarcerated
are reluctant to visit this place to deliver programming, mentorship, or counsel. She was no exception. Despite one’s skill set or experience that might “equip” them as art educator, as girlhood expert; they would be afraid of what awaited them at this site, even if She never said it out loud.

And She was scared, mostly because She had never visited a prison before. She did not know what was inside. Was it a prison? After all, the inmates are girls, she would think. She wondered if it could have been different, like a kid-friendly prison, if that could exist.

It did not exist, at least not here. The affect of this place is powerfully relayed even in the parking lot, which is dark, big, and isolating. As a visiting enrichment program provider for the Girls-mod, facilitators like herself and her colleagues entering DJJ are limited in what they are allowed to bring into the facility. As a result, the stripping process begins in the parking lot of the place. Leave your purse. Put it in the trunk of your car. Leave the cell phone. Put the cell phone in the trunk too. Bring your keys. Bring your driver’s license. Bring only workshop supplies.

The WINGS-place is marketed as “a residential commitment program for females in an educational environment”. Opened on July 1, 2006 WINGS became a residential commitment treatment program for 20 pregnant and postpartum girls and young women, and their babies. The program markets and promotes the support of young women to pursue their educational and vocational goals; to develop good parenting skills; and to build and develop essential personal, social and family relationship skills in order to be contributing citizens through responsible decision-making. Mental health and medical services, including prenatal and post-natal care, are components of the program. The objectives of the program include: 1) providing a structured and supervised transition from residential placement to the community; and 2) closely monitoring the girl program participants, the guard, and myself with and within the PIC—the place. The visual discourse is meant not only to tell but also to beg of its student engagement beyond that of an audience member or listener, to encourage (and not limit) a full and embodied involvement with the subject matter.

I carry the memory of leaving the place with the reverberating question what happens when every single element of a given situation matters? In AnneMarie’s narrative, I explore a place, a container for Black bodies, even those not detained, or possibly differently detained such as prison wardens, guards, and program facilitators like myself (our bodily detentions, though temporary, must adhere to many of the same disciplinary qualifications as do permanent detainees). In addition, I explore the specified bodies in relation to the place, or yet the place’s relation to each body. I merge the language and reflections of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s black hole with the Foucauldian concept of discipline to depict a perceived effect of these institutions—the prison and the Black female bodies operating and propelling it—upon one another. I am pondering how bodies contained in this space become what they are, the constants, the assemblage of controlled movements and operations; and how do such bodies educate one another under the coercion of an arguably invisible power? Is it then the power or rather the space educating those within its jurisdiction?
youth to ensure public safety. The goal is to return these girls and young women to their respective communities with the skills necessary to lead productive lives and successfully parent children. The average length of stay is 9-12 months. The WINGS-place literature never mentions that We are incarcerated.6

To enter the DJJ-place, She is met by a towering chain-link gate. A buzz-in is required for entry. The concrete facility sits back approximately fifty feet from the initial gate. Once she has buzzed and entered the first gate, she is surveilled on the radar of the on-duty guard at the check in desk. A sequence of several buzz-in’s are therefore ignited. An incessant buzzing...buzzing-in...buzz-buzzed-in...buzz, buzz, buzzing, buzzing-in, buzzed-in, then followed by buzzing...buzzing-out...buzz-bussed-out... buzz, buzz, buzzing, buzzing-out, buzzed-out, out..., not a musical, but rather a discordant series of sounds.

Upon reaching the facility’s entrance door She is buzzed-in again, She approaches a reception window where it is necessary to bend and to peer through the smudged, bullet-proof glass. “Hello. Here from MOCA. Going to the Girls Mod.” She adheres to the requirements of signing-in, showing and leaving identification, and car keys. She is given permission to pass through the metal detector that leads to the next buzz-required door. Through the third buzz-point, She has to stop and wait. Her supply bag is strip-searched—No scissors, permanent markers, sharp devices like etching materials, no cameras allowed in the facility. A metal detecting wand is waved up the length of Her front side, down the length of Her backside, while She is subject to questioning about the supply bag. It is at this point where She is asked to go change her clothes. (She remembers the day she was told “those shorts are too short.”4) When, and only when,
She passes inspection, she is permitted to enter through the next buzz-required door. And then, for a brief moment, She reaches outdoors again, to breathe in the remainder of free night air before entering the mod.

The outdoors is a courtyard of sorts. It is vast. It is made up of grassy quadrants surrounded by tall concrete pillars that hold up concrete ceilings and walls, that make breezeways. There are what appears to be other mods, a sea of concrete buildings, seemingly vast enough to hold every child in the world. It is empty. And, it is silent. One of the towering concrete walls bears a mural, some abstract blobs of greys outlined in navy blues, black and white. (We later inform Her that the mural is supposed to depict the Greek Titan, Atlas. We realize it while combing our recollections and matching the figure to Renee Cox’s Atlas (World Up) which we studied in one of our sessions). A quote from Mother Theresa rests below the blobs. The words do not evoke any remembrance. They were unmoving. I know God won’t give me anything I can’t handle. I just wish he didn’t trust me so much. – Mother Theresa

She rolls the supply cart to the door of the Girls-mod. This door must be unlocked for Her to enter by the guard who directly supervises us Girl inmates. She waits for Officer_ to come outdoors to get Her. There are two doors that must be unlocked and locked behind Her before She can enter the mod. Sometimes on-duty guards are pleasant with their “hello’s” and “good evenings”, others of them do not speak at all.

To get to the WINGS-place She drives more than an hour to Homestead, FL, a more rural city of the South Florida area, deep-south of Miami you see on post cards and music videos. They always visit WINGS in pairs because of the drive. The facility rests on about an acre of land, and it seems pleasant as to drive up to. It is a compound, an open landscape of
Figure 16: “Girls Mod” sketch#1 by author.
Figure 17: “Girls Mod” sketch#2 by author.
five or six small bungalows. It is grassy. And from the outside, it appears kid-friendly due to the playground and building facades painted with teddy bears and a-b-c- blocks.

To enter the WINGS-place, She is first required to enter a gate that surrounds the facility. To enter the gate She buzz-zzes a small speaker box. The voice on the other end asks Her name and reason for being there. She stands outside her car and speaks into the face-less black box, “Anya Wallace, here from MOCA.” The gate begins to open as She rushes back into the car to drive it into the facility’s parking lot. Similar to the DJJ-place, She parks, leaves her phone and purse in the car, and departs with nothing else but the supply cart for the program.

Inside the Girls’ Mod at the DJJ-place that thing She is afraid to see is there, a diminutive panopticon structure. It is not as physically daunting as ones She’s seen in the books, or read description of (Michele Foucault). But, it is conceptually daunting because She knows its purpose is the same.

The “tower booth” of the panopticon, in the case of the Girls-mod at DJJ, is one-floor-level. The guard booth sits in the center of the mod, and the cells—small theaters as Foucault suggests—for each of us inmates, surround the booth in a half-moon crescent. The booth sits empty as the guard on duty oversees our small group from a chair and small table off to the side of the activity table in the main room. The space that exists between the tower booth and our inmate cells, which spans about twenty-five feet, is the main room. This is where our activities and most of our downtime for takes place. There is activity table is a painted- yellow sitting in the main room between the cells and the tower booth. We sometimes move it about according to where program facilitators
would like it to be for their planned activity. Also in the main room are two blue rubber sofas, a television cart with a television and DVD player that program facilitators are permitted (but that we also can use to watch movies if the guards on-duty is nice), and no more than one non-designated chair situated about the room. There is a community bathroom in the mod with two stainless steel toilets, two stainless steel sinks that spurt water like a drinking fountain, and three shower stalls without curtains. A single sheet is hung by the on-duty guard however, when she supervises shower time. From Her visitor-view, She can see inside each of our inmate-cells. Each cell contains a bed (a thin mattress atop a raised concrete slab, about 4ft off the ground) and a low-sitting stainless steel toilet that protrudes from the wall.

The walls of the Mod bear unfinished childlike murals seemingly in an attempt to render the place “kid-friendly”; but She’s right in thinking, they are creepy. A thick, black outline of Sponge-bob Square Pants looms scarily on one of the cement walls. She wonders why the mural is unfinished. She wonders what program, what do-gooder youth service provider came and went, or lost its funding in the middle of completing the cartoon mural.

This place is definitely a prison. It doesn’t try hard not to be. It is a vast place; but She only ever visits the Girls-mod. She finds herself wondering what else happens here, in this place. Where do the girls eat? But She is has no clearance to enter other areas, so she will not know us in that way, beyond inmate, beyond the panopticon.

There are no other sounds, just vastness. Whether She is there to facilitate programming by Herself or with a co-instructor, when the heavy doors throughout the place slam closed and lock behind Her, whether She is
inside or outdoors, the overwhelming feeling are isolation, punishment, captivity. Even amongst other bodies, Her body feels alone. The place commands so much attention and fear of all bodies within it. Inside the place, makes Her body is no different from ours, and Officer... no different from the next body. Our bodies are complicit in this complex holding us captive, and the overseer’s chair empty. The bodies are ours and the bureaucracy maintained with the locking of each door behind us.

Entering the first bungalow (A) at the WINGS-place, She signs-in and waits for an attendant to come greet Her and take Her car keys. This place is different. Bungalow A is clearly an office environment. It is carpeted with the main room containing a sofa and love seat, a flat panel television screen mounted on the wall. A hallway leads to individual personnel offices. The staff person that greets Her is usually pleasant, though sometimes clueless as to why She is there, or what time, or if the program should be happening that day. She is escorted by this staff person from bungalow A to our dormitory. The dormitory is bungalow B. The entry door for the dormitory needs to be unlocked for Her to enter, and then locked again behind Her. She can then move about the place freely as we girls do. The program facilitation takes place in our TV room. There are three sofas and a television with a DVD player in the room. In addition to the TV room, the dormitory has a formal living room set-up with brown leather sofas, a kitchen and dining area, and a curved hallway where our bedrooms are located. Our rooms consist of a bed, a small nightstand with drawers, and a crib. The dormitory also has a laundry facility and a small room with exercise equipment.

This place is brighter than DJJ, mostly because She visits WINGS on
Saturday mornings and not on Monday evenings as She does the Girls-mod. But it is still prison. She is locked inside or outside. She isolated, and policed with the same hyper-vigilance as we girls. She thinks if these places can make Her feel so alone, so watched, so wrong, while Her stay is but a temporary one, what then, do such places do for girlhood?
Girl Body

The girl is a Black girl, not every girl; but the majority of the girls are Black, then Latina, then the occasional White girl. The case is the same in both places, at the DJJ-place, at the WINGS-place. Our identities are inversely mirrored in any facilitation team that arrives, of majority Latina women facilitators, and Her, solely identifying as Black.

We wear the designated correctional facility uniform, orange at the DJJ-place, khaki at the WINGS-place. We are fed. And we are clothed. And we are sheltered. But, She has a looming suspicion we are not cared for, and most definitely, unloved.

My hair looks the way it should look only behind closed doors, with family, the ones who know me, love me, won’t punish me for what my body is not, or the one’s assisting it through one of the many Black girl transitions like giving me perm or tightening up my braids. But in here, it seem like it don’t matter. Or does it matter the most? I like to get my hair done when my mama gets to visit, or my baby’s daddy. Although these females is as close to family I might get for a while. So I lounge and let my pregnant belly hang from beneath my tightening uniform. I don’t care if the stretch-marks show. Everybody ‘round here dragging their feet to the same beat. We got nothing to hide or be shamed about. I walk about in my department-issued socks and slippers, I sing, I dance, or I make whatever obnoxious outbursts I feel like making, either on the subject matter of Their project or completely off base (if I think its stupid). Sometimes I’m vocal about the fact that I don’t like no damn MOCA or Her! Or I’ll ask Her if She’s pregnant too, because She has gained weight. Or let it loudly be known that somebody’s pussy smells “loud”, and ask is it Her? I couldn’t care less whose feelings I hurt. These pregnancy hormones got my sense of smell intensified, and my moods up.

III. Performance in the Black hole

I argue the place is an educative structure for those who reside there, work there, and even visit there. It is constructed, designed, and meant to be spirit breaking. This is evident even in my experiences with the place, each place. It is definitely not the place described by my, now, colleague Jillian Hernandez in her work On Visual Politics and Poetics: Incarcerated Girls and Women Artists (2011), in which she highlights work accomplished between girl inmates and the women on artists affiliated with the Women on the Rise! Program. These outreach efforts made possible by way of the Girls Advocacy Project (GAP), explained by Hernandez as “a Florida initiative that serves girls while they await adjudication,” are long gone (Hernandez, 2011, 249). Continued governmental cutbacks affect the place deeply, more extensively than its originally intended design. This is exemplified in its emptiness, destituteness, and a dwindling staff.

The restrictions on the supplies that can be brought in do more than limit access to danger for inmates; it restricts the content and delivery of program facilitation. As a member of the education staff of the Museum program, we acutely develop lessons and actives that can best support each group of girls we serve within their home institution. Studying artists as Louise Bourgeois, Shoshanna Weinberger, Wangechi Mutu, and Ellen Gallagher work well with watercolor paints, ink, model magic, magazines, construction paper, and pencils. Projects that are responses to
and down.

The emotional state in this place is volatile, at the DJJ-place, at the WINGS-place. She has to tread softly, because she knows like we know, we pounce when we sense Their fear. If I don’t want to participate, if I am angered by this talk of a [Redacted] and refuse to paint about my pain, if I am crying because these bitch-ass Guards won’t give me my turn to use the phone to call home, if I need to hold or feed my baby and paint my art project with one hand, She tries to accommodate. She knows the emotional volatility can have a domino effect amongst these Bodies contained, inmates. One emotion gone awry has the power to start a collective meltdown.

Guard Body
She is “guard” at the DJJ-place, “counselor” at the WINGS-place. She regulates the happenings within the place. We are to believe she has all the power—the power to “lock down”, to give allowances, to take away treats, privileges, like my one-call-a-night home, or to manage my human rights. She enforces the law, but we also know she doesn’t make the law. She only holds their keys for as long as a given shift will allow. She is a Black woman. She is always a Black woman. If a White woman is ever moving about the place, she is an administrator, and rarely interacts with me.

Guard and Counselor observe the program facilitation from beginning to end, offers her approval with a nod or “um hm” of the subjects we discuss, and has the power to shut the whole operation down in one swift wave of her hand. She don’t appreciate cussing or anything perceived as getting out of control. Her emotional state is volatile too. None of us ever know what might shut down a program—not me, not Her, not Them. So the work of Mickalene Thomas that make use of photography; projects that respond to the work of Ana Mendieta, an exploration of female bodies and nature, and projects that respond to the work of Ali Prosh, requiring etching song lyrics onto gold leaf board, are more difficult to administer. These projects are often times bypassed.

This space of incarceration is meant to take away not to add. Just as a school environment simultaneously affects and educates its inhabitants—students, teachers, parents—this space affects its inhabitants. It takes away formal education, activity, enrichment, and rights; and these things are replaced with a null or negative curriculum. Participants in this space are consistently educated by their reductive surroundings, by the negation of various aspects of their experiences and existences. What is taught is that human rights and privileges can be taken away because of how one’s actions are judged and perceived by higher entities and authorities, the non-contained. This curriculum is implicitly taught by the space, even to me (and perhaps by me in my willingness to participate with the space upon obtaining entry).

The place perpetuates a harshness-masqueraded-as-tough love in the Black female guard, ultimately meant to restrict her own free will and thought and to trap her as an administrator of this null or negative curriculum. Women-policing-women in the place, mirrored after men-policing-men (or men-policing-women) reinforces a history of fear maintained in Black women’s spaces at the mere thought that one might
They tread as softly as they can with Guard as well, balancing Their will to provide a certain level of programming and Their desire not to get put out early.

The cookies, cakes, or hot flamin’ Cheeto’s that They bring us for treats go to Guard first, Counselor first, immediately upon entering the mod or dormitory. When I ask if I can keep some model magic, so that I can finish my project later, like when we are all alone with no program to keep our mind of our state on containment, like when bursting with anxiety of being trapped and I miss home, when everyone from outside has gone and it is just us locked in, Guard says “yes” or “no”, determining what is contraband and what is not. If she says “yes”, and I do something she doesn’t like, she reprimands Them, which ever one she can corner first, the next time They come for a program. Ms. They can’t keep that play dough no-more. Some were making obscene figures out of it. And that’s considered contraband.9

She can handle me, chose to, or not to, use force to restrain me, can pin me straight to the ground like a cop if I’m out of line. She holds my baby when I ask her nicely and she’s in a good mood. She stands watch over shower time, tells me if I can or cannot use the bathroom during “group”, passes out the marks given my use of profanity, or is the deciding factor in whether or not I need my meds. In the dormitory, in the mod, we all fall in line to the performance that Guard, Counselor has the power over us all. But deep down, I think we are all aware, we are bu the performers on the stage; and not one of us makes the rules. Who then is the “condemned man” observed in Foucault’s (1975) archetypal place? To whom does this panopticon belong? Is it ours? And the Bodies then, contained within? Are they ours. To keep?

dare step outside of the limits to which we are all forced to conform. Such conformity, in many a case, is not regulated to prison behavior, but rather strictly prescribed womanhood, which every delinquent girl in the place has, in some form, opposed. Girls’ rejection of a strictly prescribed womanhood—lady-likeness—is angering, most especially to the woman whom she resembles the most. These are the murky cosmic layers we, the Black [female] bodies, within this trapping find ourselves. Deleuze and Guattari challenge that “the black hole/white wall system is, to begin with, not a face but the abstract machine that produces faces according to the changeable combinations of its cogwheels.”(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) Thus is the black hole is our battle, our battle out, and simultaneously our battle to maintain, to cherish what we’ve been given.

Often times, while girls feel the need to maintain a performance that is harder than boys to survive the system, the Black [female] guard possesses the need to be hard in suppressing and breaking the spirit triggering such emotion in Black and delinquent girls. The girl, here, is perceived as already far beyond the line of what is deemed respectable, so much so that she becomes an offense, a discomfiture, not only to herself but even more so, to Black [female] guard. Like the girl, the guard is ultimately Black women; but the Black [female] guard has the sensed luxury of autonomy—to leave the place after one’s shift, to get herself tight and right, pretty, lady-like (to which meets her own personal standards). To enter the place, even under the restrictions of
her uniform requirements, and job duties, she is not only pretty; she is respectable; she is right. The delinquency of the girl, the liberty invoked by myself as a temporary presence, is a rebuke—a commentary in stark opposition to the Black [female] guard’s own identity and decency.

In comparison to the WINGS site, the criteria for the inmate’s incarceration are no less offensive. The girls are not necessarily better behaved. The difference in their treatment and levels of security is the status of the girl as a new mother. The pregnancy of the girl inmate or her baby is a form of capital to those who oversee these groups. The girls are similar people in both institutions. Many of the girls in either facility grapple with mental illness and histories of abuse and trauma. Because the girl at WINGS is a mother or is going to be, she is handled as if she has done at least one thing right in the world. She is a proven stakeholder in becoming the woman she should be, therefore superseding any of her other issues.

The Black [Female] Body Bureaucracy exemplified in the case of this chapter, is not only perpetuated by a flawed [PIC] system but in itself, maintains the damaging systems of patriarchy and White supremacy for the women implicated within it. Inside the place, no one Black woman is so different from another beyond her status of confinement. The potential of the girl, the guard, and myself, all coming from the same neighborhood outside of those prison walls, the same social background, is real. These layers—classism, patriarchy, White
supremacy—we find ourselves navigating, both inside of and outside of the U.S. prison industrial complex, expertly condition this place we occupy together (even temporarily) as both a confined construction and “unstable matter”. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) The ever-establishing black hole then is less a physical manifestation of negatively entangled layers (strata), but rather, a code of judgment (strata7), propelling Black [female] bodies into the devouring of our own selves. In the originally intended structure (the place), the pulling-force to seize one another, more specifically to seize with the weapon of order becomes to be in direct opposition to Black [female] existence and ultimately the stark opponent of free. And so I am left to ask, what then is the possibility for the Black [female] body that simultaneously occupies, perpetuates, and resists such intentional order? Is it destruction or is yet freedom?
But Today, We’ll All Be Free
You got thirteen girls in the mod tonight... haven’t had that many in while. 2
There were 13 girls in the mod that night--13 of us, 3 of Them, and 2 guards.
There were 18 of us in the mod that night. 18 marked bodies in, locked in. It’s
always a problem when we have this many girls in the mod... small group, five
or six... fine; but when it’s this many girls in the mod, there’s always an issue.
These are the words Officer Witherspoon spoke as she unlocked the mod door for Them to leave that night.
They would replay her words, with the images stained in their memory(s), and
She would carry the weight of those orange and black leopard print earrings,
into the free night air, and perhaps forever.

The fight shut down the night’s session. They were asked to pack up and leave
immediately, being forced to leave behind the girls’ watercolor-stained works
and their faces pleading that we not end their sessions indefinitely, because of
this negative incident. They left the place that night feeling heavy, and defeated.
How could a project they were so excited to continue have ended this way?
They fought; but was it me, us? Had our service upset the space, the space that
was not made with this work in mind, with this kind of freedom in mind? They
left weighted by their wardrobes of maybe too cute, or too short dresses, of
bright orange, leopard print jewelry causing “too much” conversation and
excitement, brightness that spotlighted the stage we hoped to create, a stage
where her story could be heard and witnessed. They left with our supplies and
materials, and their consciences wondering, worrying, that they, and the service
they provided, was what had, in fact, upset the climate that night.

She came to discuss our scars that day, to facilitate an art workshop on scars.
Sounded weird at first, but we got into. I knew the exact one I was

IV. Writing about what happens in these sessions within the prison walls
has become a method, not just for me, but for my colleagues and
I to mark time in a space where we lose time. A black hole where so much of
what is poured out can never be recovered. What I present here are the broken
and unreliable recollections of our time in DJJ, and the contaminated and
sometimes beautiful things we are able to salvage.

I do not pretend the arts-based facilitation I conduct at the Miami-Dade
County Regional Juvenile Detention Center, and AMI Kids/Wings are a tool for
reform. The space occupied and the space the Vibrator Project generates injury
as much it arouses pleasure and institutional pressure.

The work is dirty, but I want to do more than air the dirty secrets of the
fleeting sisterhoods and creativities created in the girls’ mod. I know that my
programming, writing, will not necessarily free the girls, but I also know that
silence also means that their bodies and creativities go unremarked and
unremembered. The telling is loving. A difficult loving.

What I offer beyond my descriptions of our experiences teaching
feminist, anti-racist art history, and art practice with justice-involved girls are
glimpses of the genius and brilliance of the girls, in addition to the violence
inflicted on them--by the institution, themselves, each other, sometimes us, and
vice versa.

The eruption and interruption, the chaos that the Vibrator Project
going to paint, my snake scar. We all had one, even She; but I presume it is the
scar on her upper right calf, the one she stares at daily, and whose subtly raised
mark she rubs habitually. It was this scar, or perhaps its story, that had sparked
her own artistry and mind as an educator. The girls could do this she thought.
We could discuss, remember, compare, contrast, and contemplate physical and
emotional scars through artistic practice.

She decided on a two-session lesson plan. In the first session, she would inform
the group of the project’s background and we would together begin a dialogue
about our own scars. The group was instructed to use their pencil and the back of
their Just Because sheet to sketch or write about their scar albeit physical or
emotional. How did you get it? How old were you? Does your scar remind you
of a person, event, or unrelated object or character? After we had finished our
sketch, we would then be given a sheet of watercolor paper to begin to layout our
composition and to paint. In the second session (because we would inevitably
run out of time or be shut down early), she would bring back all of the
unfinished pieces along with embellishments like rhinestones. We would be
allowed to finish our watercolor renderings, and to add rhinestones and sequins
to the work! The bedazzlement was intended to allow us to reflect on our scar,
how I healed from it, how I overcame, or am overcoming, or perhaps not
overcoming.

She would be given space, the platform to tell a story that belonged to her. She
would have the stage to tell of the time she fell, or was pushed down the stairs
while playing; or talk about the way her mom called her names and
accompanied them with a slap; or to draw that favorite scar of hers that looked
like a caterpillar, or the one that stood as proof that she was, in fact, stabbed.
Someone would relish in the story-writing phase,

workshops bring to these secure facilities, often leads to unexpected and
complex opportunities for expressions of the girls’ agency, power, and protest.
The art presented, the presence of me and my colleagues’ bodies, the materials
from which the girls create, are channels for their energy, anger, love, and
despair. I am ultimately grateful to be in the crossfire and to bring the fire.

My body moves in this system, in addition to theirs. I don’t pretend
to dismantle it. I don’t ignore that fact that I disturb the system, with my body,
freedom-promoted pedagogy, art materials, conversations, and aesthetics.
and some would draft their narratives through sketching. Some would be ready to “just paint”.

It was in session two of the scar project that our excitement peaked, and when simultaneously, emotions and personalities clashed. It was in session two that an altercation erupted in the space and the work was brought to a screeching halt by flying cups of dirty painting water, rhinestones, hair, and department-issued jump suits.

They, we, really don’t know what caused the fight.

But then, she remembers the tension from in the evening when we were sketching and drafting and telling stories of our respective arrests. The room became unsettled as stories of mistreatment by the cops were uttered, in debating over what they can do to you versus what they can’t, the if-they-didn’t’-read-you-your-Miranda-rights-then-they-cant’s, up against the THEY-CAN-DO-WHATEVER-THEY-WANT-TO-YOUS, and Officer Witherspoon’s if-they-did-THAT-then-you-had-to-have-done-something-to-provoke-the-officer. But all-in-all, the freedom to talk and to tell had overwhelmed the place that night. Freedom in that moment meant that our rage about our lives and circumstances had been allowed to flare.

*Can freedom function within a prison’s walls?*
Figure 18: “Just Because,” anonymous, July 21, 2014.

Just Because I am in DJS
(am, do, look like, from perceived as, make)

 Doesn’t mean I am Imacriminal
(am, do, will be)

My name is Murielle

And I am a dreamer.
(feeling, characteristic, self definition, dream, goal)
Figure 19: “Scar Sketch,” anonymous, July 21, 2014.
Figure 20: “Scar Narrative,” anonymous, July 21, 2014.

I have a scar on my right eyebrow.
Figure 21: water-color-stained paper towel, anonymous. July 28, 2014
Chapter Wrap-up

Simply put, a black hole is a region of space where gravity pulls so intensely that no kind of matter or radiation (light) can escape from it. Informally, the black hole is often spoken of as a place where people or things disappear without a trace, a point of no return. And lastly, and more frequently, the term is used in the English lexicon to refer to a vast emptiness, voided space. This is what I understand prison to be. It is not a difficult leap to match this theory to the U.S. prison industrial complex. In fact, various scholars have accomplished it over the evolution of this system. In Chapter 4, I push the metaphor further to consider Black female bodies (flesh) contained within the said system as an equally dense concentration of matter—the black hole.

This chapter explores the marginal spaces where I meet Black girls for work in The Vibrator Project, specifically the Department of Juvenile Justice’s facilities, the detention center and AMI kids/WINGSSs in Miami, Florida. While program facilitation for The Vibrator Project mostly happened in physical places like schools and community centers, a special designation of this programming took place to meet Black girls, incarcerated, simply written as a prison. As a common understanding, prison is a marginal space, especially as it relates to our U.S. prison industrial complex (PIC), which describes the rapid rise in U.S. inmates to the political influence of for-profit prison cooperation’s. My work as an artist and community educator with Black girls in prison though the Vibrator Project investigated the experience of Black female bodies (flesh) contained—inmates, guards, administrators, social service workers, and program facilitators like myself—as pushed to the extreme point of density to which black holes explode. This chapter questions how and why the space of black holes (prison) and the bodies (Black women’s and girls’ flesh) of black holes work together, arriving at whether or not pleasure can exist within such a phenomenon.

This chapter worked to move beyond reflecting on the relational dynamics experienced by Black women and girls within prison walls of contaminant to examining a recognizable Black female body
bureaucracy and its inhabitants, as both permanent and temporary fixations which exemplify Deleuze and Guattari’s articulation of a territorialized plane of consistency lying between powerfully constructed layers. I have argued these layers as whiteness, patriarchy, and respectability, which I believe mirrors the black hole theoretical model. Positing the prison (place) as a site of Black girlhood space that is both performative and educative, I used the interactions and art-making that happened in the art workshops facilitated in the Vibrator Project to investigate what I believe to be the densest of margins. As an exploration of spacetime and the players within it, which I name as guard body, girl body, my body, I investigated how the prison system—prison walls, cells, bathrooms, and the bodies that move about it (at any level)—perpetuate the interworkings of black hole activity.

In this chapter, Black girlhood is taken up in the 3 main ways I elaborate on this dissertation’s introduction: 1) Black girlhood as female youth, under the age of eighteen, who identifies as Black, 2) Black girlhood as the embodied experience of having been a girl under the age of 18 who identifies as Black at any point in the past, present, or future, and 3) Black girlhood as the marginal state of being associated with femaleness, youthfulness, Blackness, and/or otherness, or deviancy that is experienced at any point in the past, present, or future. With this understanding, this chapter utilizes Angela Davis’s and Ruth Gilmore’s prison abolition scholarship to focus on the specific moral judgment that first constrict the freedom of Black women and girls and then punishes them for crossing the boundaries constructed for their containment. These scholars specifically initiate questioning of the prison’s purpose, what work does prison do? From this perspective, I name and deconstruct a Black female body bureaucracy—an iteration of the black hole, that I believe is a perpetual state of Black women and girls policing one another in order to maintain the social and psychic systems that have contained them in the first place. Based on the sector of my work in The Vibrator Project that occurs in the prison place, I demonstrate how these skewed perceptions of Blackness and womanhood entangle Black women and girls, inside and outside of the
social construct of prison, in a *body bureaucracy* that both expels freedom and creates new forms of freedom at the same time. This is the *activity* of the black hole.

I will continue to explore the ways in which Black girls create new forms of freedom in my mapping of the *fantastic potential* of Black girlhood pleasure in Chapter 5.
Chapter 5

The Fantastic Potential of Pleasure in Black Girlhood: Implications for Art Education

fantastic\textsuperscript{88}

1: informal Extraordinarily good or attractive.
2: Imaginative or fanciful; remote from reality.

Chapter 5 asks what, exactly, is a Black girlhood story? And how do Black girls perform the world they’ve been given? Black girlhood stories and narratives presented to me since childhood, like Pecola’s in Toni Morrison’s (1970) “The Bluest Eye”, Celie’s in Alice Walker’s (1982) “The Color Purple”, and the more recent Precious’s\textsuperscript{89} in Sapphire’s (1996) “Push” have mostly centered Black girlhood in the abject. By asking about the world Black girls have been given, I exhibit recognition of this abjection that seems to hover over Black girlhood narratives, while showing my desire to delve deeper. Without ignoring or denying that some Black girls have had the experience of trauma specifically shaped by the precarious position of being Black and female and child in the world, I still consider the potential for freedom and pleasure within such an entrapment. So, my question evolves, how does a Black girl turn a world she’s been given into one that is her own?

Other than, the Abject

Abject\textsuperscript{90} comes from "abjectus," the past participle of the Latin verb abicere, meaning "to cast off." Its original English language meaning was "cast off" or "rejected," but it has evolved in the lexicon to refer more broadly to things in a low state or condition. The word compares in meaning to the terms

\textsuperscript{88} Definition of abject as defined by Oxford English Dictionary
\textsuperscript{89} “Precious” has also been adapted into a motion picture directed by Lee Daniels (2010) and based on the novel “Push”. (Daniels, 2010)
\textsuperscript{90} Oxford English dictionary origin of the word abject.
"mean," "ignoble," and "sordid," sensing that of being below the normal standards of human decency and dignity. I understand the term most commonly as a descriptor for monstrous, deviant; and as a block to what I will later elaborate on as the imaginary.

Since many of the mainstream Black girlhood narratives I’ve mentioned have the theme of poor, monstrous, or deviant Black girlhood in common, I can certainly understand how the theme of abjection can become a lens for how Black girlhood is seen and metabolized in the public sphere. A term such as poverty porn\(^{91}\) immediately comes to mind, which suggests a reliance on the perceived abject conditions of a given subject to impose feeling or sympathy from an audience. This is exemplified in all three of the above-mentioned narratives. Alice Walker’s “The Color Purple” marks the tale of a young Black girl, Celie whose letters to god, turned letters to her long-lost sister Nettie, provide the telling of 20 years of her life that is spent in some form of imprisonment. She is first imprisoned by a sexually abusive relationship with her stepfather, and then by an emotionally and physically abusive marriage, she was forced into. Sapphire’s “Push” also presents multiple horrors of Black girlhood through the tale of a young girl, Precious, growing up in Harlem in the 1980s. On the surface, Precious is bound to suffering because she is dark-skinned and obese; but also like Celie, the story unfolds to reveal her as a victim of sexual abuse. She is raped and had twice become pregnant from her father. Her oldest child is born mentally challenged, and Precious herself is nonliterate. Additionally, she is verbally, physically, and sexually abused by her mother; and by the end of the narrative, she learns she has tested positive for AIDS. And lastly, in what is probably the most well-known of the three narratives, Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye” presents main character Pecola Breedlove, a 12-year old preteenager who suffers throughout, first because of her extremely dark skin, but ultimately (and again) at the hands of her father who sexually abuses her. Pecola’s character (as well as the other three characters mentioned) is consistently regarded through the audience’s eye as flat-out ugly; and by the end of the narrative has gone insane.

\(^{91}\) I’ve crafted this definition from my own understanding of the word poverty porn as used in the colloquialisms of Black political thought.
Abject theory has emerged in scholarship as study or commentary on the eruption of the Real into our lives, the Real being “the state of nature from which we have been forever severed by our entrance into language” as established by French philosopher, Jacques Lacan (Evans, 1996). And as a prominent scholar of abject theory, Julia Kristeva (1982) marks the abject as "primal repression" preceding the establishment of a subject's relationship to its objects of desire and of representation. Kristeva refers, instead, to the moment in our psychosexual development when we established a border or separation between human and animal, between culture and that which preceded it (Kristeva, 1982). The abject as neither object nor subject, but rather situated at a place before we entered into the symbolic order, being able to talk, recognize ourselves in relation to others, and to understand and follow rules. In turn, I understand the concept of abject theory as a representation of the threat that meaning is breaking down and it constitutes our reaction to such a breakdown. Thus, abjection has to do with what disturbs identity, systems, order. It is what does not respect borders, positions, or rules.

The it, however, the moment for which Kisteva and Lacan remark on, seems to be a way of understanding Black girlhood, as mentioned in stories like Celie’s, and Precious’s, and Pecola’s, from outside of how she might want (or need) to be seen and understood as a girl. Neither Celie, Precious, nor Pecola tells her story to be abject, but rather Alice Walker, Sapphire, and Toni Morrison tell the story of each; and then their audiences ascribe additional meanings to those unfoldings. In being somewhat obsessed with the movie “The Color Purple” growing up as a Black girl, it wasn’t until I was a young adult that I actually took the time to read Walker’s original 1982 novel. By now, I have read the novel at least a dozen times and assign it often to my introductory university students who are studying representations of Women and Gender in Literature, Popular culture, and Art. I’ve come to believe that the book and the movie (which I still admire) are two different “animals”. I recall reading many interviews and articles written with and about Alice Walker in the 1980s after the film shot to acclaim where she admitted that after first screening the film she didn’t like it, offering “it wasn’t my book
(quote.)” Of course, she can now say she eventually fell in love with the film just as many others have. However, this reaction has stuck with me, perhaps because I can deeply understand both reactions.

In calling out the reliance on abjection in these novels, I am trying to discuss, the way these narratives have been taken up in public discourse, how then Black girlhood is taken up and aestheticized in the public sphere. More so than the actual writing of the works, (except for maybe Sapphire’s “Push”, which generationally, is born of the precedent set by narratives like “The Bluest Eye” and “The Color Purple, and is what I believe to be more intently poverty porn), these narratives are complex articulations of Black life and the lived experiences of some Black girlhood(s). They have become the most popular narratives imaging Black girlhood: 1) because they depict a struggle and beauty with which Black women have been able to identify, and 2) they depict a kind of abjection that is easily marketable and consumed in U.S. American culture—a performance of the Black body in suffering. This supports my argument that these narratives, in particular, have a cyclical power that drives a specific consumption of Black girlhood in the world that cannot center (or value) pleasure.

The concept of abjection, articulated mainly by Kristeva (1982), and its connections with George Bataille’s (1929) notion of the informed, “radical art,” and Lacan’s concept of the Real, is manifested in these narratives through the pleasure obtained from the spectacle of Black suffering and monstrous terrorization. I argue that these narratives likewise allude to the heterogeneous image experienced in what Kristeva understands as “the semiotic chora” which engages with the fallen body, the repetition of the traumatic Real or the anxiety to annihilate the Black female, child, becoming maternal body. My theoretical inquiry is concerned with using these narratives as a springboard for questioning whether the abject perspectives, functions implicitly or explicitly, in the construction or deconstruction of the

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representation of Black girlhood subjectivities through the emphasis on the desublimated\textsuperscript{94} body. In Chapter 2, I invoke Sojourner Truth, who staged her famous self-portrait and carte visite to not only provide a livelihood for herself but to be known and remembered as a part of a specific and certain social status and education, not an ex-slave, not illiterate, not without sexuality\textsuperscript{95}. Although the factual history of Truth’s life experiences, some traumatic, some successful, is apparent in how others wrote about her, and she did not care to include it in her retelling of herself through that image. She did not want to risk being remembered as only a moment of trauma. I see the abject as in opposition to such an act because it leaves power with the viewer, the reader, the finder. As I mentioned, in the case of the narratives written by Walker, Sapphire, and Morrison, I argue the mere presence of abjection in a given retelling transforms the abject to be the most witnessable of a narrative, and thus the location of pleasures(s) as seen through the eyes of subjects such as \textit{Celie}, \textit{Precious}, and \textit{Pecola}, are ultimately overlooked.

**Activating the Traumatic**

In my practice of work and research with Black girls in the Vibrator Project, I have learned that sexual trauma is far too common amongst them. From both group sessions and one-on-one interviews with participants, stories of sexual assault, sexual molestation, and sexual violence emerged. From one group of girls, in particular, I counted eight out of ten of the participants had revealed an experience of sexual misconduct, trauma, or violence to me or to the group at-large. As my work and interactions with the participants developed, I began to take notice of more than and the detail and vulnerability being revealed. I kept asking myself, \textit{what should I do? How should I help? is what I’m doing, the space we are creating, enough?} It became difficult for me, more than them, to focus on the idea of pleasure without

\textsuperscript{94} desublimated constructed as antonym to “sublimated” define to divert the energy of (a sexual or other biological impulse) from its immediate goal to one of a more acceptable social, moral, or aesthetic nature or use”, as crafted in the work, “Embodying Identity: Representations of the Body in Welsh Literature” by Harri Garrod Roberts

\textsuperscript{95} These are characterizations known about Sojourner Truth through print media written about her in her lifetime. Sojourner Truth’s characterization and assumed speech given at the Women’s convention in ____ were written by individuals other than herself, like Harriet Beecher Stowe. In the case of the speech, it was recounted 30 years after she delivered it by
focusing on their trauma. *Is it ever possible to discuss and conjure pleasure with Black girls, and ignore trauma, especially sexual trauma?*

I soon realized (once again) that no one was asking me to save them or to hold these girls’ experiences of trauma, for my own deciding. *I am no psycho therapist. I’m not professionally trained in this. She wants to share with the group. She wants to talk in private. And she, buries the memory of it all— “Can’t let that stuff weigh you down...just better to move on with my life.”* 96 The care that was in my power was, of course, to listen if a girl needed that. But, that same care evolved to be a consideration for how or if a given girl told her story. Even in my work with girls prior to the Vibrator Project, I have shared in the stories of sexual trauma with young Black women and girls. And they, better than I could have facilitated, showed me how we would tackle the challenges of trauma, and *still* make pleasure.

Having been a witness to the many different ways Black girls carry and live with experiences of trauma, one thing has been universally recognized among the girls with whom I have worked— She chooses, still, to function. Hence my expressing, how does she carry it? In thinking about this chapter, The Fantastic Potential… I am compelled to ask the question, what important difference lies between material reality and potential reality? According to Oxford-English dictionaries three main definitions, “material” relates to the physical as opposed to the intellectual or spiritual, having real importance or great consequence, and/or a being of a physical or worldly nature97. And “potential”, put simply, is having or showing the capacity to develop into something in the future; latent; prospective98. Together with the common understanding that reality is different for everyone and is shaped by the individual life experience, I ask, which reality can hold Black girl agency and secure her entitlement to take care of her own-self, her mind, her body, and her own pleasure? I wish to recall my earlier discussions of rememory in narrative from Chapter 2 to begin thinking through this question.

This dissertation serves as an articulation and focus on the rememberer, and in this rememory, the

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96 Statements by girls taken from The Vibrator Project field notes and one-on-one interviews.
97 Definition of “material” as defined by Oxford-English (Dictionary, 1989).
98 Definition of “potential” as defined by Oxford-English dictionary (Dictionary, 1989).
rememberer’s reality is constructed on his/her behalf. I have been intrigued by the qualifiers of potential and material realities; as, like rememory, the distinguishers disrupt the convention of what is true and real, especially in a world where imagining Black girlhood pleasure is not yet realized. With the added layer of the fantastic, I am compelled to investigate girls’ agency in creating and being the subjects of their own narratives and having the freedom to activate their own pleasures. I am trying hard not to designate those experiences as either/or, and to hold space for each girl, to neither have to decide. I don’t want to designate anyone’s reality, as reality, as not reality. Doing so leaves space for freedom. The freedom girls are experiencing by naming (or not naming) their own reality is one where they decide upon their own truth, their own pleasure.

In considering the fact that a mainstream reality of Black girlhood is never unmediated as it is shaped by discourse and the institutional powers of White supremacy, and respectability, I have to shift my concern to center the institutional discourse and power that shapes certain realities. I want to resist that pull away from centering Black girlhood thought. For example, “The Bluest Eye” is readily recapped as one that involves an ugly Black girl who wants to be White, who is raped, and who goes crazy. However, throughout the entire novel, the institution, I would say, relies on Pecola’s going crazy as a manifestation of not loving herself as juxtaposed to whiteness and the term ugly. There is however, from beginning to end, a constant relationship you and I (the reader) have with Pecola’s “crazy” persona. We progress with her as she goes crazier. She doesn’t go crazy as a direct result of being raped. She doesn’t go crazy as a direct result of being considered ugly or wanting to have “blonde hair and blue eyes” (Morrison, 1982). The undercurrent to the narrative is that she has her own story (even if we don’t know it fully). She lives an alternate reality throughout, maybe from birth; which is very different from how she is described and read (even by her own parents). She knows a version of herself that is outside of what the institution has provided her. This is why, in her state of “crazy”, she is able to conjure a plan by which she is granted her blue eyes. The institutional discourse, the material reality can only pick up on a frequency that designates her behavior as crazy, but for Pecola, she constructs the power to remake
herself, and free herself.

A few years ago, one of the nine narrative vignettes in Richard E. Robin’s (2013) film “Girl Rising” immediately struck me. A young Egyptian girl Yasmin delivered the captivating tale He Was Strong but I Was Stronger. At the start of the vignette, the audience is introduced to Yasmin as her mother brings her into a local police station. She is the survivor of a recent abduction, and is assumed to have been molested, raped, or violently attacked by the strange men who took her. Yasmin’s mother brings her to the police station where she and the serving officer urge Yasmin to recount the traumatic experience. After much coaxing from her mother and the officer, and in a surprise twist, Yasmin transforms herself (as the subject of her experience) into one of a superheroine, who had in fact been abducted while walking home from school, but who had not been traumatized. The cinematography shifts that of a cartoon girl action figure, Yasmin, saves herself from the could-be horrors of what a group of strange men could do to her by fighting them off with superb fight-skills and superhuman attributes. By the end of the vignette, the audience is left with but one choice—to triumph in Yasmin’s story of fantasy and imagination despite the material and probability of it as a coping mechanism.

I’ve found support in Yasmin’s kind of telling in the stories and narratives provided by Indigenous feminist scholar, Elizabeth Archuleta (2006) who corrects the assumption that "indigenous women and feminist issues remain under theorized" in her article “I Give You Back: Indigenous Women Writing to Survive”. She argues that “we do theorize our lives but that we theorize differently” (Archuleta, 2006, p. 88) Her work explains that Indigenous women do not rely solely on Western tools, worldviews, or epistemologies as methods of interpretation. In analyzing Indigenous women’s appropriation, reinvention, and use of English and writing as rhetorical sites of power have been one of the tools that has allowed me to conceptualize alternative methodologies for articulating the fantastic potential of Black girlhood pleasure, just like Yasmin’s story, as theory.

Archuleta argues that because “[o]ur voices are still positioned in a particular way, definitely reminiscent of the past silences we know so well, contingent to our colonized position…[we] have spoken
and written powerfully from experiences that [we] have lived or have chosen to relive through the stories
[we] choose to tell” (Archuleta, 2006, p. 59). She claims that their voices, as Indigenous women “rock the
boat and perhaps the world”. She describes Indigenous voice as “dangerous”. All of which is important to
their emerging conversation on Indigenous feminisms, on their ability to speak to one another, to inform
each other and coming generations, to counter and intervene in a constantly morphing colonial system. I
am thinking of it as agency, memory and re-memory, the activities that I are happening at the center of
the black hole (the density). The fantastic through a Black girlhood imaginary is a portal to freedom.

This chapter will continue as an exploration of Black girls’ memory, fantasy work as they have
occurred in The Vibrator Project in their creative writing and artwork that responds to the work of Black
feminist artist, Kara Walker. Through the referencing of girl’s narratives and her own tellings, I explore
how Black girls craft the agency of their bodies and subjectivities through performance of the imaginary.
This chapter bypasses the angle of survival of the abject to highlight genius in Black girls’ ability to
recreate their worlds to ones where they can live and thrive, thus positing the art of Black girlhood
pleasure and fantasy as promising learning pathways for Art Education.
Figure 22: Vibrator Project participant’s response to *framing* photography workshop.
Pow pow pow
Once upon a time on the street corner of overtown stands a d boy waiting to sell his last bag
Pow pow pow
Trying to get home to his family whose means of survival is based on him.
Pow pow pow
The d boy waits on the corner hoping that a customer comes soon watching the crack head turn tricks trying to get a hit
Pow pow pow
A unknown car pulled up asking if he got the goods wanting to go home he sells to the stranger so he can finally get rest
Pow pow pow
A gun is pointed and so is a badge on his third strike he can’t afford to go back to the cell block
Pow pow pow
He runs knowing that his home is a few blocks away Pow pow pow
He see his home Pow pow pow
He feels a sharp pain in his chest Pow pow pow
He hears his mother screaming Pow pow pow
He takes his last breathe Pow pow pow
And his story ends like the rest either in a casket or jail the d boy finds rest.
--Pow Pow Pow

Scholar’s Note

I. Richard Iton (2010) insists that the words “black” and “fantastic” are redundant. He offers a way of breaking boundaries between political mobilizations of the concept of Blackness and the cultural and performative mobilizations of Blackness. His book “In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era” is a critical quest interpreting the historical harmonization and discord of Black aesthetics and Black politics. “Black Fantastic” is provocative, and suggests something wicked, magical and deliciously sinful and; for Richard Iton, the fantastic serves as a space of the other, both spatially and racially. He uses it to “destabilize” and fragment the arenas of what he calls “rational modernity”, and what I see as material reality via “underground”, “deviant’ strategies” (Iton, 2010, p. 216). Though Iton’s evocation of the “surreal” is broad, I utilize the fantastic, which encompasses African-American cultural production over the last half century; to connect to the idea of Black girlhood creativity as cultural production.

Treva B. Lindsay (2013), noted Black girlhood scholar also connects the fantastic and Black girlhood in her article “One Time for My Girls: African American Girlhood, Empowerment, and Popular Visual Culture”. She focuses on debunking “the stereotypes and the development of a ‘cogent and cohesive discourse’ of Black girl empowerment (Lindsey, 2013) by calling for an intervention led by and

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99 Poem written and shared with author by Vibrator Project participant Quen (2012)
on behalf of Black girls and Black girlhood. She writes about creating

a counter public, popular culture space for dismantling stereotypes and
challenging established ideals and norms as one of many ways this
discourse can be created and propelled. She too, looks for support in
Richard Iton’s work which she argues “illuminates the political importance
of black popular culture” (Lindsey, 2013). She extends this understanding
of Black popular culture to Black girls, and replaces “political” importance
with “empowering possibilities”, or as I would add, potential realities. As
subjects, Black girls and adolescents do not
have traditional political power such as voting or holding political office,
however, Lindsay argues for Black girls popular/public culture to depict a
fantastic potential that will challenge the stereotypes negatively affecting their
lives. “Being visible, being heard, and being fully actualized
through representations are equally important to the empowerment of Black
youth as it is to Black adults” (Lindsey, 2013).

And finally, Lamonda Horton Stallings (2015) takes Black
fantastic to the level I seek by connecting it to the erotic (or in the case of
this work, pleasure) in her book “Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetic and Black
Sexual Culture”. She argues the fantastic, in her case funk,
“remains and African diasporic philosophy about transition, movement, and
embodiment as it relates to art, work, sex, gender, and race, and national
boundaries” (Horton-Stallings, 2015, p. 6). Hers is a philosophy that debunks
the “truth of sex” as it has related to the histories that have
confined Black bodies and Black sexualities. For me, her understanding of the fantastic as pleasure elucidates the potential for Black girls imagining and creating (or recreating) sexuality for themselves.

In contrasting the work of Lindsay and Stallings with that of Richard Iton, I am trying to contextualize how I am using the fantastic as an enlightened mode of understanding how Black girls craft pleasure narratives. I use the three of them to create a foundation for the imaginary. Imaginary is my extension of the common use of the term “fantastic” as “extraordinarily good or attractive” in order to encompass a potential reality that is all inclusive of good, imaginative and fanciful, and that centers the lived and/or realized experience of Black girlhood. I am trying to mobilize the imaginary, and I am using the fantastic to support that mobilization as I observe it already happening in Black girlhood spaces. Connecting the fantastic to pleasure, girlhood, and Blackness, is my iteration of afrofuturistic thinking. I am borrowing from these three different ways of mobilizing the fantastic in order to validate the alternate reality(s) created in Black girlhood when pleasure is centralized.

The image exhibited in Figure 22 is one taken by a project participant in the Vibrator Project as a part of a photography workshop/ exercise on framing. After being given a tutorial on framing through the camera lens, girls were asked to take home disposable film cameras, and to frame things/ people/places they felt were important, worthy of
At the end of a two week stint with her camera, each girl’s images were developed, printed, and juried for a group exhibition. This is one of the images chosen from what a participant had captured.

I chose to match this image with AnneMarie’s “Pow Pow Pow” poem because the image read like her words did—of Blackness and as evidence of the imaginary. To me, the picture looks, on the surface level, like a stereotypical perception of what is was like to live in a neighborhood like the Patterson Terrace community I wrote about in Chapter 3—a long brown car, speeding down the street, on thick and shiny rims; being tracked by an anonymous point of an extended, little, arm. Hey! Stop! Ooh... There they go! or Read: Danger! Its viewer might guess a million different scenarios, maybe all befitting to stereotypical belief about what hood-life, life in lower-income communities produces. But to peer deeper, to listen more intently (or should I say more freely?), I notice that this image belongs to a child. It is her home. It is her community, the place where she learns, has fun. Someone is pointing because something exciting is happening. The image belongs to the girl. This is what she felt was important enough to capture, a captivating capture. The “Pow Pow Pow” poem, written by another, was shared with me because she and I were having a conversation about how our framing

\(^{100}\) Here I nod to artist Lorraine O’Grady’s (Who is also discussed in this workshop) Art Is...performance art series where, through her belief that Blackness is worthy of being high art, she and her collective walk the streets during an African American Day parade holding frames up to people/places/things they felt were worthy of being high art. (September, 1983)
homes teach us so many things that school and formal education do
not. The walls of our homes (just like the walls of the prison) teach us. Our families, broken or otherwise, teach us; the sounds, the street lights and the sirens teach us. And we become skilled masters of these people/ places/ things that are never once mentioned or evaluated in school. All of these ways that we learn to survive and take care of ourselves, that are not legible to formal institutions, like school, like prison, are devalued. She said, “I know exactly what you mean!” She said that pow pow pow is the noise she goes to sleep to; and talked about how it was soothing for her to fall asleep at night because she was at home. Home belonged to her; and at home she could be an expert101.

AnnMarie’s narrative in this chapter, acts as the curator of Black girls imagining and reimagining their political power and cultural contributions where they are the experts, on what is pleasurable, on what is soothing, on what is home. This philosophy is rallied by Treva Lindsay’s talk on Black girlhood, Lamonda Horton Stallings’ funk ing the erotic, and Richard Iton’s Black fantastic, whose contributions to an afrofuturistic consideration of Blackness, and in the case of Lindsay, girlhood, vocalize the making of a Black girlhood imaginary. This creative voice matters because often times, such images, writing, and lyricism are cast off as broken and/or remedial, most especially in formal education sites; they are however, the “deviant strategies” that

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101 From one-on-one interview with Vibrator Project participant Quen (October, 2013)
carry the fantastic about which Richard Iton theorizes (Iton, 2010).

In recalling Ruth Nicole Brown’s work to understand Black girlhood outside of institutions and social thinking that inscribe upon them labels of deviancy, trouble-maker, and promiscuous, I understand the fantastic in Black girl imaginary as an alternative lens to read and receive Black girlhood narratives, and to challenge reliance on the abject.

In the Vibrator Project, the artist we call upon to help us imagine the possibilities of the fantastic that grapples with, but is not anchored by the abject, is Kara Walker. While Walker and her work are similarly criticized for their deviancy and re-inscription of negative, racial stereotypes, they are, in fact, bearers and translators of the fantastic. And for Black girls in the Vibrator project, learning about and responding to the work of Walker provides avenues for questioning reality, history, truth, and their roles in all of it as story-tellers.
Lesson: Kara Walker
The lesson is: She was a girl in California, until the age of 13
until her Daddy got a new job at Georgia State University we learn that
Kara was plagued with nightmares

Well, what do you think a girl moving from California would think about moving
to The South?
what images come to mind?
what might provoke a nightmare?
...are the prompts Ms. Anya asks us to talk about.

The images she saw in those nightmares
of the how-The-South-happens-to-Black-bodies
become the images we see today in her large-scale, cut paper, room installations
in her dancing Shadows only,
She finds a way to fashion them into
how-Black-bodies-happen-to-The-South images!

Can we have fantasy? Have it be
our own?
Even with a factual history like that? a lived
reality like that?
or perhaps
the potential realities...forgotten? purposefully left behind?
Kara finds them.

II. Kara Walker’s art is read and understood in many ways, but
is presented to the girls in the Vibrator Project by way of her intent-
a satirical performance of history specific to “the individual”. In an
interview with “Irreverently” an on-line publication, Walker describes, the
“individual” as “imagined not only as the artist but also as the fictional
historical other” (Badran, 2007). The “individual” constitutes her intimate,
imagined, histories, literally. And there is, indeed, the risk of perpetuating
negative stereotypes, which may appear less satirical to some than to others.

Walker’s work is simultaneously political and fantastical, pleasurable,
and rage-filled, and has elements of both material and potential U.S.
American racial history. The spectrum between real (historical, factual) and
imagined (a-historical, fantasy), are exhibited through Kara Walker’s defining
her own spectrum. Perhaps, she herself is the spectrum.

Another starting point to reading the work of Kara Walker, is to
acknowledge her work as artist and curator by way of the controversy it has
stirred, as it has simultaneously moved (activated) many people. Walker is
noted for her dancing, yet disturbing paper cutouts that depict sex and
violence between master, mistress, slave, adult, child. More recently,
Walker’s “A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby” public installation
unsettles the public imagination about labor, lust, workers, and sugar
plantation history and politics. As it was housed in the old Domino Sugar
Factory in Brooklyn, New York in the late spring and
She brings them home.

It makes some Black people mad. and makes some of Us squirm like the dancing Black, paper, cut-out of the little pig-tailed girl like me who looks as if she will put her mouth on that little white boys penis!

But I don’t look away I don’t want to!

If they are silhouettes, “image[s] of a person, animal, object or scene represented as a solid shape of a single color, usually black, with its edges matching the outline of the subject”102 how then, do you know who is Black? who is not?

Ms. Anya asks, to make me dig into my “critical” mind “By the lips!” I shout or the nose I see, that looks like me *smile* “By the hair the swoops, and don’t curl”, says my friend-girl, two-desks dow

Kara shows me how to make my own fantasy that is I can have it, be all mine

I can free myself from capture slit a throat if need be I can be the subject of white love and admiration

summer of 2014, featured the epic of sugar as narrated by artisans from the cane fields, plantation kitchens, and sugar factories. Nato Thompson, chief curator, described the work as a “massive sphinx-turned-mammy, she stands mute, looking outward, acting perhaps as a guardian, perhaps a monument, perhaps, like the Greek sphinx of old, a devouring female terror” (Thompson, 2014). (An example of Vibrator Project participants’ response to the Marvelous Sugar Baby appears in Figure 25.) “Walker’s paper shadows and sugar mammys tend to linger in our collective recesses as an American audience; sex and violence, like American history, can be understood only viscerally, not cerebrally, as absurdist terror” (Denmead and Brown). But Walker, in AnneMarie’s retelling of her, finds a way to leave from for potential realities, free play, the what- if.

Like Walker, Black girlhood has had its critics; and reimagining, the fantastic in the abject, by way of the imaginary seems to provide the perfect ammunition for their activation (movement). In 1997, artist Betye Saar led a letter-writing campaign against Walker, arguing that her representations of Blacks as victims and aggressors cater to the Black-or-White American psyche. Black girlhood through the imaginary, exhibited here as AnneMarie’s response to Walker’s work, invites us to sense violence or trauma from its opening wall. The imaginary opens up the possibility of cultural production that occupies and expands positions that do not yet have reductive and dogmatic political positions ascribed to them; if those positions have been ascribed as, say, one of aggressor, then

102 Wikipedia definition of silhouette used to describe Kara Walker’s artistic practice to girls.
the imaginary invites us to exploit these categorizations as Walker does through “violently passionate” forms of “self-determination. (2014 , para. 1)” Such performances and productions might become a means and an outcome of exploring alternative, affirmative, and—yes, even destructive ways of assembling in spacetime. This learning/living refuses to accept the limits of social space and positioning defined by White supremacy; it is neither here nor there, it goes underground—or, as Walker puts it (2014, para. 1), “mines under” dominant norms--White supremacy, patriarchy, and Black respectability—that are violent in and of themselves.

Ruth Nicole Brown (2014) and Tyler Denmead (2014) in their scholarly contribution to Art Education, “Ride or Die” reviewing the Kara Walker show “Ruffneck Constructivists” hold Art Education accountable for taking up and taking seriously the magic and realness of Black women’s art. They remind us that:

> From John Dewey to the late Maxine Greene, art education yearns for imaginary openings—new futures constituted with hope and absolved from suffering. But this social reconstructionist vision of art education is a White bourgeois fantasy, treded upon a trail of beads, tears, and botanicals, and spoken from a not-so-open mic. This hopey-changey-social-justicey-art-ed fantasy hinges upon excluding othered imaginaries: those born out of anger, injustice, and the phantasmagorical absurdity that Jim Crow is still singing and

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103 Poetics based on layered data analysis of field notes from the Kara Walker workshop in the Vibrator Project.
* Example responses to the Kara Walker workshop are exhibited in Figures 23 and 24.
dancing his way through North American life. (Brown and Denmead, 2014, p. 48)

In her response to the Kara Walker art workshop facilitation in the Vibrator Project, AnneMarie considers how learning about someone like Kara Walker can disturb and provoke her own imaginary. As a scholar, I consider how Black girls response to the work of Walker can disturb and provoke the field of Art Education more broadly. Walker draws on a reimagined tragic history,” to consider architectural forms and meanings that contain all the “angst and braggadocio and ego and rage” that Black girls have brought forth in their art, writing, lyricism, and imaginations, “thug life,” and spiritualism” (Walker, 2014, para. 1). The elements are Black girls’ political and cultural productions. In writing this work, I imagine those who will take up these lessons and orient themselves toward the outside, risk-inclined, and politicized spaces of Black girlhood. They will be those who are committed to educating beyond the borders of formal education, where the “marginal--the working- class and low-income freaks, queers, weirdos, rebels, punks, and ruffnecks”, as argued by Brown and Denmead, “construct free spaces, third spaces, counter publics, undergrounds, and other homesteads and unsteady homes out of, but more importantly, beyond the exclusionary practices of White supremacy” (Brown and Denmead, 2014, p. 51).

Therefore, AnneMarie’s curating is also a call-out for institutional forces of White supremacy, patriarchy, Black respectability, and incarcerated
class relations to not only consider her voice, but to consider her art
(responses), as a portal for beginning to work pedagogically with Black girls,
and their teachers, like Walker, like Weinberger, like Fazlalizadeh, like Ms.
Anya. The artistic movement (activation) which theorizes Black girls’
responses to artists and teachers like Kara Walker, centers their pleasure. The
things that feel good to them, looks good to them, and even taste good to them
are worth noticing for a moment. This is what Walker contends with her
fantastical renderings. All in all, these expressions move to neutralize White
supremacy, patriarchy, and Black respectability, the very systems we are all
trying to combat.
Figure 23: Vibrator Project participant’s response to Kara Walker workshop, #1.
Figure 24: Vibrator Project participant’s response to Kara Walker workshop, #2.
Figure 25: Vibrator Project participant’s response to Kara Walker workshop, #3.
The Black Girlhood Net
Black Girls bear witness in tennis-shoes
in flip-flops
in boots with the fur in Ruby slippers

How is it that we are the hypervisible and simultaneously the erasers of our own selves?

Is the transgression in this groove that I call myself a Black girl? or that I demand in my speaking that this work be called that? Black Girl Work the Black Girlhood Net

Dare to accent it Pink in the process Speak it

Pink wig thick ass give ’em whip lash/ I think big get cash make ’em blink fast

While intervening activating saving
You never once called her name my name

III.

Q:\textsuperscript{104} What is The Black girlhood net?

A: AnneMarie’s Blackgirlhood Net is a creative re-articulation of a quote by American naturalist John Burroughs, “Leap and the net will appear”.

I want the work that I do to be that net for Black girls, to jump freely, to create freely, and to risk prioritizing their desires over anyone else’s. The poem here is written to remind me (Ms. Anya), the scholar, of the risk(s) that come with innovation, and centering what has been over looked.

Q: What is Black girl work?

A: This is the work Black girls do for all of us, the work of their creation that not only goes unnoticed, but goes unattributed. Black girls’ story-telling is work, the factual and the fantasy. Black girls’ rage is work-- the things that make us write them off or feel the need to put them in their places; it is actually their work that goes unrecognized, and makes us think, it activates us all. Black girls carrying the weight of deviancy, promiscuity, young-motherhood, old motherhood, planned parenthood, and unplanned, and makes and moves us, activates us, drives our programing the resources we feel the need to create, that makes us feel good about ourselves. Black girl work drives our work, our care, our concern, and our service provisions. Black girl work is the fantasies they create to reinvent themselves over and over, to keep surviving, in the

\textsuperscript{104} To conclude this section of the Chapter, I share an interview in which I am questioned, as author of The Black Girlhood Net. The interview was conducted by Sarah Stefana Smith on July 5, 2017.
But the award goes to ____________
Your Name

But they are Black We are
(but don’t ever dare call Black for the whole)

I call myself a Black girl because I am I call them
Black girls because they are I call it Black Girl Work

scholarship Love
because it’s not wrong not an ugly word
and they must know you too.

In this moment, I am not afraid She never

met Anne Marie
We were never friends Anne Marie is not my name

I did not want her there
I did not need her reminding me of the Blackness I belonged to or that belonged to me
showing me

telling me of this trappedness

You see Girl Scouts could be Black

wake of our continued watching, policing, surveying, imprisoning, and following them.

Q: Who are you referencing, “Pink wig, thick ass”? Why does she matter?

A: AnneMarie references Nicki Minaj here in her lyrics from the track “Monster” that brought her initial celebrated fame. Nicki’s contributions on “monster” not only theorize Black girlhood deviancy and Black girls’ monstrous bodies; but it is also an interjection of Black girl voice into a patriarchal and male-dominated track that was originally situated to only articulate Black men as being perceived of as monstrous. I, AnneMarie, want you to know that she can own both, both Nicki-type freedom and Fanon-type freedom, articulated together in the same writing and lyricism, they are the same kind of freedom. She is breaking away from the trappings prescribed upon her.

Q: Why is “AnnMarie not my name”?

A: “Anne Marie is not my name” evidences that in all the work done to police and survey in the name of Black girlhood, we still don’t know who she really is. We haven’t asked her name. (And maybe she would never tell us.) We make it up, and go.

Q: Expose, Morrison and yearning? What does this have to do with the Black girl fantastic?

A: We are intrigued by the expose of Pecola wanting to be White, but we never acknowledge her brilliance in recognizing that White, from her
just not want to be

She snapped and stole
hid those prints away
not quite understanding what she had wanted what she was looking for in the first place These images have never been exhibited

_The Revolution will not be televised_
or funded

Not sure what she was looking for asking for asking ME to come forward or maybe we could together?

Exposé somehow exemplify the nightmare at the heart of Toni Morrison’s Pecola’s yearning?

“No”, it seemed I was saying. And she was forced to oblige.

We would not learn each other’s names
We would not wrap our arms around one another in the trust fall
not be friends not that day

viewpoint, has the unmitigated opportunity and access to pleasure for which she is yearning. She creates it.

Q: What does the thin line between witness and spectator have to do with the fantastic? With AnneMarie?

A: The difference between a witness of Black girlhood and spectator of Black girlhood is the ability to see her through her own makings, her fantastic potential.
I would like to get to know if I could be/
the kind of girl that you could be down for

It seems the only folks actually trapped in this white Black binary are Black folk
Not even white folks

“the fungibility of the Sadiya Hartamn’s captive body… [black body]
the precariousness of empathy
and thin line between witness and spectator”

And so we are taught proximity not withstanding
if there’s an opportunity to distance one’s self, then all who can, do
should
at one point or another

Brownness isn’t encompassing enuf for Latina girls Arab girls don’t wanna be
women of color,
“I was never a woman of color until I came to the United States” or so I’ve been
told
“But Egyptians aren’t Black” or so I’ve been told

I knew what it was that it was
that no one wants to be black
or brown, or grey—colors, too close to black
and because no one else is trapped
not trapped like
me like Anne
Marie and PTAF
and Nicki
and
Raven
and Tiny
no one else is restricted to but one lane of the rainbow no one
but black

No. The rainbow is not enuf

Which is probably why you don’t know that
Black girls cough pink
and bear witness in Ruby slippers
only visible
heard
on Black girl frequency

Too close to
black too scared
can’t say it
I do understand
It’s one of the things I kind of appreciate about @badDominicana I am

more than black
than
brown
than grey
more than my respective lane in the rainbow
more than trappable by the theoretical confines of whatever it takes to
indicate nonwhite
of Course I am
she is
but black don’t have the option to mobilize from such categories
That’s how we have spoken talk to Black girls
Black girls that cough pink
and bear witness in Ruby slippers
to Raven
and to PTAF
and to Nicki
and to Kim
to Tiny
and to Anne Marie
as if black is their trap
doom

You want to fly
but black is their trap?

Others of the colors are close
even fun
but never trappable like black

Trans will never be the new black
Black girl
because Raven could transition and be embraced
held tightly
before she could ever escape the trappings of black She
ain’t know y’all
that she could try
to shed all the labels she
wished all except black

We know
that I could never be just Southern,
just Caribbean
just Pink
when black is my
tag doom
But others can be
or at least say they
are are not
try their hands at mixing all of the colors of the rainbow
on their pallet

Proximity to blackness allows access for some
temporary though it may be
to use pieces, parts of my Black
without having to put on
try on trappedness
Only black is trapped.
And if I’m honest
aren’t we all running to some extent or have
tried
or should?

Myra says: “WHYYYYY must everything women (especially women of color) do be
sexualized ... Why can’t we be BOSSES cause we take
care of business...It’s ok that they are taking control over their sexuality
but i feel like they are furthering the stereotype of what it means to be a
woman of color: ghetto, weave wearing, head smacking sexual tool, who
thinks she has control of her body when in reality men are controlling
her...i Own the chorus because of how i define BOSS ASS BITCH and i reject the verses for that same reason.. i don’t support taking nobody’s partner ... or using the term i used to up lift me to tear down someone else ...that’s kind of hypocritical don’t you think ..and i hate double standards”

Is she right
as she extends the pole that furthers distance between her
and her Blackness my
Blackness?

_Broke bitches so crusty/ disgust me_...

The “Look a Negro!”
or as in Fleetwood’s theorizing
“the Fanonian moment
[as marking]
a primal scene in which the black
subject comes into self-knowing
through the traumatic recognition
of an other’s eye”
is so

“No but what are you?”
“Because… you’re hair
I mean your accent…
you and Ms. Shakeh aren’t _just black_”
Forced trauma/ Blunt/
You play the back/ Bitch I’m in the front
...Like a dungeon dragon

The groove is that I’m a Black girl and in these trappings
we cough Pink
and bear witness wearing Ruby slippers
and though often times are made to feel like we should want to be something
other than her whether we can
or cannot be
The groove is that I want to be

You say fuck love/ I say hey
Nigga fall back/ I’m made for the game

Say it Black girl Black girls Black girls

Because I am that I know
have smelled tasted
of Pink sputtered coughs
I know that she is watching in her tennis-shoes
boots with the fur
in her Ruby Slippers
ready to leap

How else will I be her net?
If in the shadows
in her glow
I refuse to answer to a name that’s not my own
you know?
~AnneMarie
Chapter Wrap-up

Chapter 5 asks *what, exactly, is a Black girlhood story?* And how do Black girls perform the world they’ve been given? I use Black girlhood stories and narratives presented to me since childhood, like Toni Morrison’s “The Bluest Eye”, Alice Walker’s “The Color Purple”, and Sapphire’s (1970) “Push” to explain how Black girlhood in the public sphere has been mostly taken up through the lens of the abject. To offer an alternative, this Chapter revisits the tool of rememory as a method for recognizing how Black girls use their fantastic potential to combat trauma, to combat being constructed in the abject.

Having been a witness to the many different ways Black girls carry and live with experiences of trauma, one thing has been universally recognized among the girls with whom I have worked—She chooses, still, to function. Through AnneMarie’s narrative and curation, this chapter explores Black girls’ memory and fantasy work in The Vibrator Project, which includes their creative writing and artwork responses to the work of Kara Walker. Kara Walker’s work is a model for girls to grapple with and question the blurring of fantasy and the historical traumas of slavery in the U.S.

AnneMarie’s response to the Kara Walker art workshop facilitation in the Vibrator Project becomes a consideration for how learning about Black feminist artists like the ones I have presented in this dissertation (Shoshanna Weinberger, Tatiyana Fazlalizadeh, and Kara Walker) can disturb and provoke not just Black girls’ imaginary, but any student of art. I offer how Black girls’ responses to the world around them can thus disturb and provoke the field of Art Education more broadly. The work of Ruth Nicole Brown and Tyler Denmead is sourced to elucidate that in Art Education, there has been a history of yearning for imaginary openings—“new futures constituted with hope and absolved from suffering”. AnneMarie’s curation is the call-out for institutional forces of White supremacy, patriarchy, and Black respectability, even within a field such as Art education, to not only consider Black girl voices, but to consider the creativity sparked by Black girlhood, their activity, as a portal for transforming the
pedagogical imprint of art.
Chapter 6

Conclusive Statement: Curving Spacetime: On Performance, Pleasure and the Imaginary in Black Girlhood Sexual Politics

This dissertation has provided a theoretical study of Black girlhood identity in space and time, as spacetime. I have provided that a study and focus on Black girlhood identity and space(s) amidst the powerfully constructed layers of space and time established by whiteness, patriarchy, and respectability give context for how Black girlhood—Black girls performing such interpretations of themselves and the spaces they inhabit—bends what has been constructed to contain them and quite possibly what is being constructed by way of their pure existence.

In this work, I have envisioned Black girlhood (includes the spaces Black girls inhabit) as a black hole where their execution (performance) of art-making, interaction with one another, and the cultural production initiated by their work—their intellectual and physical labor—and their play are explosive sites of convergence. Referencing density as the thing that makes black holes unique, this study argues that Black girls’ location amidst the backdrop of White supremacy, patriarchy, and respectability is what makes the site of Black girlhood the densest of matter. With the foundation of Einstein's theory of general relativity, I argue how the activity of Black girlhood as an extreme point of density is a kind of matter “tell[ing] spacetime how to curve”. (Ford & Wheeler, 2000, p. 235). I reason that Black girls’ innate bending is a major element in the black hole make-up as they are not only guided by space and time—the spaces they are moved and bounded to, such as prison walls—but simultaneously guide this interest by way of their movements, interactions, aesthetics, and performances.

I consider this dissertation a reinvestigation of space(s) I created with Black girls, which I named The Vibrator Project. The Vibrator project was created as an arts-based participatory research site to facilitate the study of pleasure with Black girls ages 14-21. The convergence of space and time I explored,
I name throughout as Black girlhood. And my specific interest in investigating these sites has been to explore the explosive quality of the interactions happening within Black girlhood as a marginal space.

As any black hole at its farthest limit of density will eventually explode, I have argued that so do the interactions of Black girlhood in what feels good, what tastes good, and what sounds good. I have exhibited these qualities as pleasure (and rage); and in this dissertation, have sought out how the sexual, physical, and emotional pleasure(s) generated in Black girlhood spaces steer the convergence of space and time in and beyond Black girlhood spaces, ultimately revealing the fantastic potential of Black girlhood on social movement(s), aesthetics, and systems.

I have done this through an exploration of how Black girls’ performances of space circulate mass and social media by way of language, aesthetics, music, and performed interpretations of the American dream. I have shown this through referencing the works and celebrity of Black girl performers, actresses, and political pundits such as PTAF (Pretty Taking All Fades) and Nicki Minaj whose performed celebrity subjectivities remain under extreme and constant scrutiny by Black and non-Black audiences alike due to their positioning either too far within or outside notions of Black respectability. This work has explored how these Black girl subjects have resisted being theorized as the objects of girlhood, but rather subjects. I have also explored their disruption of the very idea of a single and fixed subjectivity that has tended to swallow Black girlhood identities and bar their access and entitlement to pleasure.

I have explored Black girlhood pleasure and the imaginary through the narrative and voice of AnneMarie, who is a representative for girls having participated in The Vibrator Project. I have used this tool to maintain what I consider to be Black girl voice, our purest connection to the explosive center of the black hole, a site of truth and abundance. Through the imaginary present in AnneMarie’s story; experiences, occurrences, and histories have been reimagined in order to creatively and effectively contribute to an evolving U.S. American education system, to Art, and to Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Here, I have provided that from her vantage point in spacetime, the Black girl and her story are key to concentrated truths and vital in crafting the sites of a progressive world future.
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