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Schoolin' Black Girls: Politicized Caring and Healing as Pedagogical Love

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Abstract

This article explores Black feminist pedagogical practices as a viable intervention alternative to traditional methods of educating Black girls. The authors highlight two qualitative research studies that applied Black feminist praxis to non-traditional urban classroom contexts, in order to facilitate the social and intellectual empowerment of young Black women. Through an explicit focus on love as a central tenet of authentically caring and healing pedagogies, this article seeks to facilitate a more complex understanding of how entangled social identities influence learning. Moreover, by situating the analyses of Black young women at the center of each study, the research described in this article positions youth as experts of their sociopolitical location, and empowers them to push conversations around educational equity forward in the service of all learners who are marginalized within the public education system.

Keywords Culturally responsive pedagogy · Black feminist praxis · Urban education · Black girls · Single-sex education

Introduction

The national reawakening of racial violence against students of color, and specifically Black girls, illuminates the need for a politicized ethic of care and healing as acts of pedagogical love. Research has found that educators focus more on the behavior and attitudes of Black girls than their academic development (Morris 2007). In 2014, the *Unlocking Opportunity for African American Girls* report found

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that Black girls represent less than 17% of all female students but are 31% of girls referred to law enforcement and 43% of girls with a school-related arrest. However, despite the disproportionate rate of criminalization in schools and pushout rates, Black young women continue to succeed. The National Center for Education Statistics reports for the 2013–2014 academic year that 66% of associate and 64% of bachelor's degrees are awarded to Black women by degree granting institutions; outnumbering Black men, and men and women of other races (2017). Despite the level of emotional, physical, and intellectual violence they incur, Black girls continue to show up to schools, not only surviving, but thriving.

Many Black girls and their families are hopeful that school will be the great equalizer, although research continues to reveal a "separate but unequal" system for Black and Brown learners. In re-imagining mainstream education as self-actualizing and participatory, Irvine (1990) purports that cultural congruency can only occur when educators recognize that their lived experiences and gender expectations may differ from those of their learners. Educators must also learn to view cultural differences between themselves and their learners as strengths rather than primarily as problems to be solved. Regrettably, dehumanizing policies and practices against Black girls within the schooling context is often reproduced in these learners' eventual subjugated labor positions and resulting racial and spatial isolation to urban ghettos (Evans-Winters 2011; Henry 1998; Joseph 1995; Power-Carter 2007; Winn 2010).

According to McKittrick, as quoted by Hudson (2014), "learning and teaching and classrooms are, already, sites of pain" (p. 284). Moreover, hooks (2000) acknowledged, "All the great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic" (p. xvii). Hence, the transformation of schools for the equality of marginalized students is an inherent act of social justice. The longstanding history of U.S. classrooms as sites of oppression, evident in the intellectual, physical, and emotional assaults students of color, but specifically Black girls face (McArthur 2018), can only be remedied through educators' intentional embodiment of pedagogical love. Pedagogical love is teaching and learning in the name of love (hooks 1994). According to Berlant (2011), love has the capacity to draw unto it a "genuinely realistic and visionary set of transformations" (p. 684). It is important that educators lead the charge to understand why the "separate and unequal" inequalities exist while, simultaneously, creating strategies and actions to interrupt them. The authors hope to provide a fuller vision of the role of humanizing research methods that employ care and healing to education and educators in the work to undo educational wrongs against Black girls.

The authors employ Black feminist theory and pedagogy in our work with Black girls. A Black feminist conceptual lens highlights a unique matrix of domination that is characterized by Black women's intersecting oppression (Collins 2000). Within the field of education, Black feminist *pedagogy* is the product of a merger between theory and activism. Because Black feminist pedagogy is anti-deficit and anti-pathological, it subverts historically oppressive educational policies and practices, and encapsulates pedagogical love through affirming instructional strategies like othermothering, politicized caring, healing, and positioning learners as change agents (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2002; Lane 2015, 2017; Roseboro and Ross 2009). Applying

Black feminist epistemologies, we describe approaches to cultivating humanizing research methods; approaches that counter the harmful conditions that Black girls face in school. Furthermore, as educational scholars, we highlight the necessity for Black feminism to continue in the tradition of responding to the unique needs and experiences of Black girl learners, who are largely overlooked in extant literature. Thus, we offer our research and theorizations as resources for Black feminism to become more reflexive, asking new and sometimes difficult questions that aim to push the theory forward. To this end, we discuss the additional theoretical tools they have drawn on to supplement and evolve Black feminist thought within their work. Offering both conceptual and empirical analyses of educational work among Black women teachers and Black girls, the two studies in this article tackle the following central questions:

1. How are Black women educators engaging in Black feminist praxis as an act of pedagogical love?
2. How does Black Feminist pedagogy operate as an alternative, safe space for Black girls?
3. What are the implications of these questions for K-12 practitioners and teacher educators?

In order to address the aforementioned questions, both authors share experiences in conducting what we refer to as *Black girl work*, which is situated in a Black feminist praxis. A goal of this article is to open political dialogue and reflexivity within conversations centered on alternative pedagogies in urban schooling contexts. In order to address these questions, the authors highlight examples of engaging in Black girl work. The authors are African American, women teachers and scholars who have designed and implemented programs specifically focused on caring and healing to empower Black girls. Each author will provide a brief description of her program, highlighting the experiences of the African American girls in her program in order to underscore teaching Black girls within a Black feminist pedagogical praxis. Following the individual program descriptions, the discussion will include implications of this work for K-12 practitioners and teacher educators.

The first study examines the concept of a *politicized ethic of care*, an ideological posture that is commonly rooted in the pedagogies of exemplary Black women teachers (Lane 2018). Using qualitative data from a larger study of a girls' empowerment program at an urban public high school, the second author elucidates one critical aspect of Black women educators' politicized ethic of care, which she has coined, "fo-real love". Drawing from her experiences as a high school teacher, Monique discusses the potential of "for real love" as a pedagogical tradition, which has facilitated Black girl learners' development of positive social identities and schooling behaviors. The analysis is anchored by the testimonies of the adolescent girl participants, and the findings of the inquiry challenge colorblind and gender-neutral approaches to caring for Black young women.

The second study explores *space and place for healing*, through a critical media literacy collective the first author facilitated at a large urban, southern

university designed specifically for Black adolescent girls, to explore identity construction through their engagement with popular culture. Using qualitative data from a larger study that investigated how Black girls are impacted by hip hop media by providing a platform for Black girls to express their experiences with hip hop in their own voices, the author discusses humanizing research methods and the significance of defining space and place for the healing of Black girls by highlighting the impact and influence of the critical media literacy collective through the experiences of the participants. This collective was intentionally designed to initiate conversations about racialized-gender identities and their construction.

In bringing these two studies together, the authors intend to further a dialogue on teaching and learning practices *within* Black Feminist Pedagogy as well as engaging the tensions and potentials *across* these studies and offering insight on how to utilize an ethic of care, and carve out spaces and places for healing. Each author's brief description of her program is rooted in the testimonies of Black girl participants, who we refer to as research partners, thereby positioning youth as experts of their sociopolitical location and empowering them in the efforts to locate culturally responsive pedagogical interventions in order to underscore teaching Black girls within a Black feminist praxis. We employ the term research partners (Smith-Evans et al. 2014) as the girls were critical in the data collection and analysis process. Developing a sense of critical consciousness—that is the ability to critically analyze the systemic factors that contribute to one's marginalization and the development of skills to pushback against those barriers—is vital to Black Feminist Praxis (Collins 2000); therefore, the authors are intentional in describing these partners as active agents in this Black girl work.

Black Feminist Theory and Black Feminist Pedagogy

This article seeks to explore the authors' use of Black Feminist Theory as a corrective lens for interpreting the disillusionment Black girls experience in schools. Researchers have utilized a variety of theoretical approaches to understand the schooling experiences and achievement of Black girls. Among those explored, Black feminist theory remains one of the most comprehensive socio-historical lenses for framing the educative lives of Black girls in light of the intersecting oppressions they face. As a critical social theory, Black feminism posits that Black women have perpetually faced interlocking forms of oppression, which include economic, political, and ideological stratification (Collins 2000; Lorde 1984). From labor and sexual exploitation, to denial of the rights and privileges extended to White male citizens, and the reductive and demeaning stereotypes of mammies, jezebels, welfare queens, and emasculating sapphires—Black feminist theory argues that African-American women in the United States have been violently positioned as the objectified other (Collins 2000; Davis 1983; Hurston 1937). Moreover, functioning as collective, oppositional knowledge, birthed at the margins of society, Black feminist praxis operates in the interest of freedom for all oppressed people; however, it centralizes

the dialectic of Black women's oppression and activism by placing them at the locus of analysis.

As Black feminist thought continues to illuminate the broader political reality of Black women's race, gender, and class vulnerability, educational scholars reveal how societal disassociation with these women is reproduced in schools through various means. Perhaps most notable is the longstanding inequitable access to a high-quality education and persistent race-gender marginalization that disproportionately channels Black girls into educational pathways that lead to criminalization (Crenshaw and Ritchie 2015; Ladson-Billings 2006). The historically permissible mistreatment of Black girls is especially disturbing in *urban* educational settings. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) maintain that when race and gender oppression are combined with class inequities, Black women and girl learners face compounding disadvantages. Because these students are more likely to live in economically dispossessed communities and attend poorly funded schools, their exposure to apathetic educators, deficit teacher ideologies, and culturally irrelevant pedagogies and curricula is heightened (Darling-Hammond 2007; Lane 2017; Valenzuela 1999). The totality of these structural factors often erodes the self-concept and overall identity development of young Black women—rendering their pursuit for self-actualization especially precarious and therefore difficult to sustain.

For centuries, the constituency of U.S. Black feminist scholars has shed light on the entangled forms of oppression African American women endure, both inside and outside of educational institutions. However, it is critical to note another principal aim of Black feminist thought. That is, Black women utilizing their collective, oppositional knowledge as a means of resisting their prescribed subordination (Collins 2000). In the field of education, Black feminist *pedagogy* is one byproduct of African American women educators' collective consciousness. Its liberatory stance challenges the tradition of inequality in U.S. education, and empowers youth through affirming instructional strategies (hooks 1994; Joseph 1995; Lane 2015, 2017). According to Dixson and Dingus (2008), Black women teachers enter the profession "as part of a legacy of Black feminist activism" that simultaneously prioritize community uplift, youth's social and intellectual development, classroom management, and pedagogical skill (p. 832). Themes of Black feminist women teachers include: "Teaching as a Lifestyle and a Public Service; Discipline as Expectations for Excellence; Teaching as Othermothering; Relationship Building; and Race, Class, and Gender Awareness" (Dixson 2003, p. 225).

Historically, research centered on Black feminist pedagogical practices has highlighted the experiences of Black women educators, or Black learners, respectively. However, a few important studies have illuminated the instructional use of Black feminist pedagogy—as an alternative and empowering instructional practice— in contexts in which Black *girls* were the foci. Mogadime's (2000) study is a harbinger of this work. Her research documented the experience of one "*community othermother*" in Southern Ontario who embraced the task of developing a separate lunchtime and afterschool drama program for Black girls to resist the largely Eurocentric school curriculum. Mogadime draws on Henry's (1998) definition of *othermother*, which emphasizes Black feminist educators' "commitment to the survival and wholeness of the communities" that these women serve (p. 223).

Moreover, the South African/Canadian teacher *othermother* in Mogadime's study embodied an authentically caring disposition necessary to promote trust and vulnerability between instructors and students, and to combat the racialized gender exclusion that the high school aged participants regularly encountered. In sum, the Black girl-centered curriculum described in Mogadime's scholarship included numerous counternarratives, which functioned as a "pedagogy of hope" that strengthened the transformative potential of the students' lives (p. 229).

With respect to Black girls' deep desire to be noticed and valued in traditional educational settings, Henry (2009), Sears (2010), and Richardson (2013) found that unorthodox spaces rooted in Black feminist pedagogical practices facilitate Black girls' engagement in what Hooks (1989) coined as "coming to voice." One of the intriguing findings of all three studies is that when Black young women were challenged to unlearn the ascribed, gendered behaviors of passivity and conformity, these learners were intellectually empowered by their ability to problem-pose and problem-solve effectively around issues relevant to their unique identities. As an extension of the aforementioned studies, the research presented here highlights the struggle for collective empowerment among Black girl learners in non-traditional educational contexts, and centers the voices of youth in our analysis of the potential strengths of Black feminist pedagogical practice.

A Politicized Ethic of Care and 'Fo-Real Love'

Scholarship delineating the attributes of Black feminist pedagogy routinely emphasize Black women teachers' political lucidity as an essential component of their teaching practice (Henry 2009; hooks 1994; Mogadime 2000; Sears 2010). Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) maintained that Black women educators' belief that they are both '*ethically and ethnically*' accountable for preparing Black youth to transcend socio-political injustices—is a philosophy that is heavily reflected in their curricular and pedagogical choices (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2002, p. 77). Subsequent literature by Roseboro and Ross (2009) drew on a womanist pedagogy to examine the role of colorblindness and care theory as it relates to classroom practice. The authors observed that Black women's "liberatory ethic of care" is unique due to their specific ideologies and practices around (1) work and care, (2) freedom and choice, and (3) authority and power (Roseboro and Ross 2009, p. 34). Hence, the unambiguous acknowledgment of the political nature of teaching is at the core of Black feminist educational praxis.

Black women's philosophy of teaching as a political endeavor is further complicated by these educators' deep emotional attachment to the students and the communities they serve. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) characterizes Black women practitioners' "embrace of the maternal" as one measure of their emotional commitment to the success of every student (p. 72). An example of Black women's "embrace of the maternal" is reflected in the tradition of othermothering in African American communities, which has an extensive history as a practice of freedom, dating back to the earliest days of slavery in the United States (Davis 1983). Defined by Collins (2000) as "women who assist blood-mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities,"

othermothers in the larger social context customarily cater to the needs of neighborhood children as a means of assisting biological parents who *may* or *may not* lack the resources or the ability to properly care for them (p. 178). In educational settings, othermothering is commonly exhibited by home visits, frequent collaboration with parents, and overall student advocacy—as Black women's othermothering is not simply interpersonal but "profoundly political in intent and practice" (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2002, p. 77).

In sum, the historicized understanding among Black feminist educators to equate work with care gives rise to a concurrently political *and* emotional framework for the instruction of Black learners. Author 2 has referred to this framework as Black women's *politicized ethic of care* (Lane 2018). The following discussion extends previous scholarship on the teaching practices of Black women educators, and illuminates Black girls' distinctive responses to Black women practitioners' *politicized ethic of care*. The data presented are part of a larger study examining the impact of Black feminist pedagogy on Black girl learners' identity development and orientations toward school. The 2-years investigation of the framework utilized in Black Girls United (BGU)—a girls' empowerment program that Author 2 established at an urban public high school in Los Angeles—revealed that a *politicized ethic of care* engaged the intellectual aptitude and self-actualization of the research participants. In the discussion that follows, Author 1 highlights the testimonies of two young women to explicate how Black adolescent girls distinctly respond to and benefit from 'fo-real love'—a central tenet of the *politicized ethic of care* that Author 2 embodied in Black Girls United.

'Fo-real Love'

> I knew you cared about us. Like really cared because you were always there to help us. We didn't even have to ask a lot of the time cuz, you'd be like, "You look tired [Tanya]. You hungry? You want some carrots?" And then you'd go to the fridge lookin' for some food. Or just, like, you'd see somebody just wasn't their usual self and you would step away from everybody and talk to that person separately. You know? You went out of your way. Or if somebody was havin' family drama you would ask about how they were doin'. Or even being nosey and asking about people's grades all time. Just checkin' in with people *all the damn time*. It was about showin' concern. Like, you were uncomfortable when we were unhappy. It made *you* uncomfortable. Or, like, even if we came to you about a problem and you didn't have the answer we knew we could come to you anyway cuz you always connected us with whoever had the answer. -Tanya, Black Girls United Participant.

Through an analysis of Black feminist curricula, in-class video footage, student artifacts, and interviews with former members, Black Girls United (BGU) members exposed how educators at King High School regularly displayed insincere forms of caring. From the learners' perspectives, these teachers—many of whom identified as Black or African American—were emotionally disconnected, and did not regard urban youth of color as a valuable investment of their time or worthy of

sincere affection. The inability of these educators to nurture culturally responsive and authentically caring relationships with King High School students demonstrates Picower's (2009) assertion that even in cases of racial or ethnic congruence, there are well-meaning yet misguided practitioners who disregard oppressive social conditions and jettison the cultural assets and skills that racially and linguistically diverse learners bring into the classroom. Consequently, the behaviors of these alleged uncaring King High School faculty contributed to the overwhelming sense of invisibility that the members of Black Girls United routinely experienced at school.

Contrastingly, my teaching practice in Black Girls United was anchored by an authentic love and concern for the social and educational wellbeing of every learner. In my second individual interview with a former member named Tanya, she described my disposition towards learners in Black Girls United as an "actual and fo-real love." When I asked Tanya to elaborate, she responded with the opening excerpt. From her perspective, my efforts to provide individuals with the necessary supports to thrive in both their personal and academic lives (i.e., emotional support, rides to school, home visits, and feeding learners), was evidence that I "really cared" for the BGU participants.

Similar to other Black feminist educators, I exhibited care through the convention of othermothering (Collins 2000). That is, sharing mothering responsibilities and exhibiting authentic concern for students' holistic development beyond the bounds of the classroom. In my conversations with the participants of BGU, numerous individuals attributed their improved schooling behaviors, at least in part, to the affective pedagogical traits that I engendered. In the following transcript, Ashanti recalled how my efforts to provide a wake-up call each morning improved her school attendance. She noted:

> I remember it was on a Friday cause I was like this lady ain't gon' call and wake me up, she gon' forget. And I remember that Monday morning you called at like 5 o'clock in the morning. I was pissed when my phone was going, I'm like what?! I'm like she really called my phone, like she *really* called my phone and woke me up! And it was like after that, everyday you called and woke me up and I was on time. *Every single day* after that I was on time…Sometimes I just wanted to cut my phone off, but I'd be like I gotta go to school, I gotta go to school….You took the time out of your busy mornin' to call me. Like, it kind of made me open my eyes a little more or kind of push me. Made me want to do better.

Calling Ashanti each morning provided the push she needed to attend her classes regularly. As her teacher, I was not surprised by the shift in Ashanti's behavior considering the persistent, disempowering schooling conditions that Black girls regularly confronted at King High School[1]. The tough, motherly love and daily wake up calls that originated in my English class continued throughout the 2 years in which Ashanti participated in Black Girls United. Moreover, through my relentless nurturing and demands for excellence, we had developed a closeness built on mutual

[1] Pseudonyms for individuals, the school, and the city are used in this article to preserve confidentiality.

respect and personal responsibility—qualities that Brock (2010) deems essential for the "effective/affective teaching" of Black girl scholars (p. 108).

Feminist theorist bell hooks (2003) discounts the dehumanizing yet conventional system of extracting emotion from the practice of teaching. One drawback of pedagogies devoid of an emotional connection, namely love, is that such methods prevent teachers from gauging and attending to the emotional climate of their students, which could potentially interfere with a students ability and/or desire to learn (p. 133). hooks alleges that teaching with love provides educators the clarity to appropriately tailor the mood of a classroom, set the foundation for building community among students and instructor, and move beyond prescribed boundaries. Essentially, a deeply rooted emotional anchor to one's practice is central to Black feminist teaching philosophy, and a critical component of Black feminist pedagogy (Collins and Tamarkin 1990; hooks 2003).

In sum, following the tradition of other Black feminist educators, the *politicized ethic of care* that I espoused in Black Girls United was "infused with love, humility, passion, and power" and demonstrated by unrelenting displays of personal accountability and collective responsibility (Roseboro and Ross 2009, p. 36). The testimonies offered by the young women in BGU provide insight into the kinds of caring attitudes and behaviors that Black adolescent girls respect and value among educators in urban schools—which, in turn, leads to more positive educational outcomes and schooling attitudes. Moreover, my *politicized ethic of care* in BGU involved offering young Black women ample opportunities to rally in favor of their own self-interests, and "dream their way into individual and collective freedom" (Sears 2010, p. 145).

Space and Place for Healing

This study utilized Black feminist pedagogies and womanist ideals. A characteristic of womanism is "communitarian," referring to the state of "collective well-being" as the objective of social change (p. xxv). Phillips (2006) states that "womanist methods" are those that ". . .seek to heal wounds and imbalances" (p. xxvi). She continues, "Womanist methods of social transformation cohere around the activities of harmonizing and coordinating, balancing, and healing," (p. xxvi) and are composed of methods like dialogue and align with Mogadime's (2000) notion of "othermothering." These intentional methods were employed in Beyond Your Perception (BYP)—a critical media literacy collective Author 1 co-created and facilitated—through each sessions' opening act of checking in.

Working with eight Black girls, Author 1 led a 14 weeks critical media literacy collective, BYP, with the intention of providing space for them to voice their authentic selves and interrogate Black girlhood representations in the media, considering the ways their real lives counter the metanarrative presented by and through media. Historical attention was given to the experiences of Black women in the U.S. with discussions on the global impacts of colonialism on Black people's identities. Author 1 interviewed each research partner reflecting on the primary question: What does it mean to be a Black girl? One research partner, Sy, responded: *Black girls are broken.* This simple declaration illustrates the necessity of the need for spaces and

places for Black girls to heal from the experiences presented within their social contexts. McArthur (2019) states that Black girls need "both physical spaces and psychological places" in order to best make meaning of their everyday lives, decoding "the messages they receive from the world around them, contextualize and decontextualize their lived experiences, and understand society and how and where they fit in it." Schools, as physical spaces for learning, have few places—the meaningfulness of that space (Cook 2005; Kitto et al. 2013; Schwartz 2014) for Black girls, making schools counter-places for Black girls to learn. Schools should be sites of social transformation, and can be if educators are critically conscious about the curriculum they employ and their pedagogical position in empowering learners to be conduits of social change. Especially in these sociopolitical changing times, education requires an obligation to the holistic well-being of all children and youth. Instead, schools remain cold spaces, where learners of color, specifically Black girls, are taught to shrink themselves. Brown (2013) states:

> Taught to be unseen and unheard, their silence may be self-imposed or sanctioned. Silent Black girls have a lot to say; however, without time, good relationships, and patience, their voices remain a backdrop to conversations about them" (p. 184).

Brown (2013) implores scholars not to confuse silenced Black girls with "personality characteristics like shy or apathetic," continuing that "silent Black girls may be willfully lost in fearful power struggles that position them as mute" (p. 184). It is critical that educators are intentional in creating space and place for Black girls to define and redefine themselves. Johnson (2017) encourages us to consider what happens to the self when it does not recognize its own absence. When educators discount the importance of identity construction they fail to equip learners with the knowledge that they can create their own definitions of self. Black girls are experts on their individual experiences, thereby listening to and opening space for their voices significantly advances the tapestry of girlhood and Blackness, and advances instruction for all students.

"Checking in So We Don't Check-Out!"

> Check-in were pauses, essentially. They allowed me to stop, think, and rationalize my day, yesterday, and even the previous week. They made me be present because I was asked questions that were pertaining to myself and my emotional, mental, and physical state at that specific time and location. So, check-ins for me were the equivalent to the deep breath you finally take after talking non-stop for 5 min. I think we all needed check-in. . .checking in so we don't check out!–Sy.

> To me a check-in was a moment to truly express yourself, free of interruptions. It allowed me to be open. Whether my check in was positive or negative, it allowed me to express myself in a judgement free space. It was also a form of therapy. If my check in was good, I would be praised and it allowed me to really feel like I accomplished something. If my check in was negative because

> something upsetting happened, I was able to be comforted. It was a way to keep my spirits lifted in good times and in bad.—Audrey

> Check-in meant a great deal for me. They were a place for me to speak my mind, share my story and be more open than I'd ever been; especially with people who I wasn't necessarily close to at the time. I can be a very closed off person and don't tend to share my thoughts with most people but I was able to open up and share parts of my life with BYP in check-in. It was also great to hear from the other girls and learn more about them and become a part of their story; as they had become a part of mine.—Dakota.

At the beginning of each Beyond Your Perception session, Author 1 opened the floor for anyone to check-in, or to state any expression of accomplishment, fear, failure, joy, hurt, frustration, or humorous situation. Check-in enabled all the research partners, including the co-facilitator and me, to vent about anything that had occurred since the last time we were together. We shared our "Praise Reports," or good news, and our not-so-good news when we were frustrated, overwhelmed, angered, or hurting. Not only did check-in enable all research partners to share anything that may have occurred between sessions, it also provided an equal status context because the co-facilitator and Author 1 also, genuinely, checked-in. By allowing the girls into our lives, they were more comfortable allowing us into theirs. The research partners knew as much about my life, at the time, as a financially struggling, graduate student and new mother as I knew about their lives navigating adolescence as high school seniors. This humanizing practice, destabilizing the power differential between facilitator/participant, researcher/researched, adult/teenager, mobilized the collaborative nature of the collective and bolstered communal healing.

Hill (2009) defines wounded healing as a practice wherein "people bearing the scars of suffering shared their stories in ways that provided a form of release and relief for themselves and others" (p. 248). Check-in was individual and collective, or wounded, healing. Audrey referred to check-in as therapy and throughout the collective, the girls described Beyond Your Perception as "therapeutic." Hill (2009) defines healing as the "storytelling practices that enabled learners to recognize the commonality of their experiences" (p. 259), as Dakota explained that she was able to learn more about the research partners and "become a part of their story; as they had become a part of mine." BYP immediately became a space and place where we could see ourselves in our sisters, and they could see themselves in us.

The healing act of BYP has extended past the space of the collective and became a desire of the research partners to ensure that other Black girls could find a similar wounded and communal healing. For example, Sy, a recent college graduate, created "Healing Circles" on her campus. Initially, the circles were created after 2015, when many Black and Brown people were losing their lives to police brutality and she wanted to create a space for learners of color, on her campus, to openly share their feelings. When Sy shared her intentions of creating Healing Circles with me she explained:

> You created a healing circle for us. . .I revealed things about myself in the group sessions that I hadn't with many other people and through me revealing

> those things, I was able to come to terms with many truths and grow and learn about myself in a multitude of ways. . .my healing circle is basically an extension of the format of our check-ins".

Several of the other research partners have been in communication with me about doing this kind of work for girls in middle and high school. The healing that occurred in Beyond Your Perception, as highlighted through the voices of the research partners, was cultivated through the simple acts of listening and valuing their voice. Opening a space and place for Black girls to share their truths and lived experiences aided in countering the harmful conditions they faced in school, at home, and in the community. By understanding that Black girls are hypervisible—regarding deficits in the Black community—and invisible—their unique positionality being excluded in research initiatives based on gender and race—Author 1 employed a healing as pedagogical love by embodying an authentic ethic of care, encompassing a holistic well-being of her research partners. I employed "othermothering" within and outside of the space of BYP, often text messaging the girls the simple phrase: "check in," to which they would respond with whatever they chose to share at that time. The therapeutic nature of check-in was so powerful, that 4 years later we still send check-in text messages to each other; all eight research partners, the co-facilitator, and myself.

For African American girls, specifically in areas of neglected spaces like the schools many of them occupy, significantly less attention has been given to socioemotional places to assure Black girls are able to heal and are empowered to thrive. Within the context of their everyday lives, Black girls often lack the authority to establish places that affirm or address the complexities of their identities and the authors have espoused pedagogical love by ensuring through Black Girls United and Beyond Your Perception to establish those spaces and places for their social, emotional and intellectual empowerment.

Pedagogy of Love: Implications for Classroom Practice

Educators of other positionalities can employ a Black feminist pedagogy through subverting deficit ideologies and practices and enacting a pedagogical love through affirming instructional strategies like the othermothering, politicized caring and healing, and positioning their learners as change agents as the authors have demonstrated in their work through Black Girls United and Beyond Your Perception. Educators can employ a similar pedagogical love in their classrooms, by beginning class sessions with check-in, allowing learners to air grievances from the weekend, the night before, or the previous class, or share praise reports. As educators, we can be conduits of social change, advocating for the needs of our learners by first understanding what our learners need. This begins with listening to their lived realties. The act of sharing, and seeing our stories within each other, also aids in the communal and wounded healing that many Black and Brown learners face, especially with the physical, emotional, and intellectual violence that targets them within the national school to prison nexus. Intentional, deliberate, and authentic acts of caring

can influence the identity construction, and shape the lived and schooling experiences, of our learners. Especially for urban youth, schools, classrooms, curriculum and our pedagogies should be a political and social intervention to inequalities. For many urban youth, schools are their only social safety net. By excluding Black girls from educational research, policies, and practices, we seem to assume Black girls are immune to the impact and influence of their social contexts and the message that is sent by that exclusion. We, the authors, align with Dixson and Dingus's (2008) belief that we bear a responsibility—as Black women educators and intellectuals—to be a part of social change. Drawing on Black women teachers' acts of pedagogical love moves us through and beyond Black girls' historicized oppression, and illuminates "imaginative responses" to the injustices burdening these learners (Collins 2000, p. 12). Bearing in mind the goal of this article—which is to inform future understandings of Black feminist pedagogy within urban educational contexts—it is critical to divulge the social, psychological, and physical consequences of embodying a pedagogy that is driven by a larger politic of social justice. Roseboro and Ross's (2009) hypotheses are instructive here:

> …care-sickness may stem from an imposed navigation of systemic oppression, inherited interpretive Black tradition(s), and an ideology of liberatory education that creates for Black women educators the responsibility of racial uplift (p. 36).

The social construction of Black women educators' "self-sacrificial strength" is a recurrent theme in Black women's personal, political, and professional lives (Harris-Perry 2011, p. 21). Considering the well-documented propensity for burnout among Black women teachers specifically—and educators of color, in general—another aim of this article is to ignite a fruitful dialogue that considers ways for practitioners to engage a *politicized ethic of care* and healing pedagogies healthfully and sustainably. These pedagogies aided in a collective well-being as much as they were for the girls and the authors.

The pedagogies and positions of the authors of this article is a mode of solidarity, collective struggle, and a social bond to community engagement and pedagogical love. Establishing space and place for Black girls and employing a *politicized ethic of care* helps to articulate a shared sense of community through the creation of spaces that honor their identities, intellectual talents, and cultural wisdom. Moreover, through the centering of non-White racialized female experiences, we position Black girls as experts of their sociopolitical locations, and empower them to push conversations around educational equity forward in the service of all learners who are marginalized within the public education system.

Conclusion

The research presented here responds to the unique needs and experiences of Black girl learners, who are largely overlooked in extant literature. The authors are Black women teachers and scholars whose pedagogies are firmly rooted in Black feminist ideology, and designed and implemented to specifically focus on the social,

emotional, and educational development of Black girls. Through our intentional creation of spaces and places through Black Girls United and Beyond Your Perception, the authors were deliberate in employing a *politicized ethic of care* and healing as acts of pedagogical love. We have birthed this article in response to the current sociopolitical climate: students are physically assaulted in schools by peers, teachers, and school police officers, learners fear deportation as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has been repealed, and education policies increasingly center Whiteness and marginalize our most vulnerable student populations. In light of the current state of education, we declare that love is a political act; an embodied practice that the authors have employed, unabashedly, as classroom teachers and facilitators of Black girl work.

Love, according to Daniels (2012) is ‘‘a strong and deep commitment to protecting, caring for, and empowering students in the face of social barriers and oppressions that surface in their everyday lives, as well as a political passion to inspire and support marginalized youth’’ (p. 10). Love must be the center of our classrooms and instruction. It must be at the center of our interactions with children and youth. Love is transformative and is an act of social justice. As such, pedagogical love liberates and transforms young learners, and lies within them as they are emboldened to transform the world.

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