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They Got the Juice: Understanding Joy among Young Black People is a qualitative community-engaged research study that explored how young Black people (ages 7-15) define and maintain joy. This study was conducted with four young Black community co-researchers with whom the author had existing relationships. Opportunities to explore and practice what brings joy are vital if we are to experience what Charlene Carruthers (2018) calls transformative change—change that dismantles oppressive systems and shifts power into the hands of the community. This inquiry sought to shine a light on and give voice to the stories of joy among young Black people. The significance of this inquiry lies in its micro and macro emancipatory potential of providing counter-stories about the brilliance of young Black people as well as offering an example of space-making with Black joy at the center. Young Black people deserve these spaces—they deserve the respite of space, time, and energy to realize and practice what brings fulfillment. Using a critical arts-based methodological approach, the research team (the author and four young-adult co-researchers) served as participant-researchers in a four-day, art-centered pop-up in a local neighborhood for 14 young Black people to explore, practice, and articulate what joy means to them. The pop-up included: a maker creation/creation station, a photovoice station, a jewelry/game station, and a rest and recline station. Data collection methods included observations, participant-created artifacts, and focus group questions. A multi-layered thematic analysis process produced 4 themes and 8 subthemes informed by the following critical race theory frameworks: Dillard's (2021) framework of (re)membering, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework, and Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) framework on counter-stories. Findings showed that participants found joy in creation, in themselves, and in

connection (interpersonal and cultural). Interdisciplinary invitations for practice and research are offered as pathways for space-making with young Black people that centers joy.

THEY GOT THE JUICE: UNDERSTANDING JOY AMONG YOUNG BLACK PEOPLE

by

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Approved by

Dr. Silvia Bettez
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my former students, especially the amazing J2J researchers.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Erica Jenell Wrencher, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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When I think about the Black Imagination, I am drawn into the creativity that I see and am working so diligently to cultivate in my two Black sons. Each one can often be found creating—generating a new idea or creation in our home. It is such a gift to observe—their giddiness and excitement over bringing their imaginary visions to life. They seem to have an innate knowledge on the next step in their creations and they get more excited every step of the way. For my youngest, creation involves *a lot* of paper *everywhere*, glue sticks, and many pairs of scissors (because they are easily lost). For my eldest, creation involves crafting stories, coding games, or cooking a new challenging dish. No matter the circumstances of our home (freshly cleaned or appearing as if a tornado has just come through), my sons are always choosing to create their own worlds within the world. It is remarkable. Javon Johnson (2015) defines this kind of imagining as Black joy. And I would agree. The moments when my children are generating newness are the moments when I can see the spark of pure delight in their eyes as they share about their latest creation. As a mama-scholar, I find my two sons to be simultaneously the best and most difficult gifts I have been given in life. I am committed to the delicate dance of shielding them from harsh realities of the world, sharing life-saving lessons to protect their black male bodies, and practicing joy and wonder as much as we can.

I desire these kinds of liberatory pedagogical and otherwise (Crawley, 2016) spaces for other young Black people—particularly our high-school-aged youth. Spaces where they can tap into their vast and generative imaginations, to experience joy, matter. I am a high school educator by training and although I've tried to always be about consciousness-raising in my classrooms, my approach to teaching has substantially shifted over the past five years. More

specifically I would say it has opened to the urgent need for centering imagination—particularly the Black imagination and Black joy.

Although I agree that anti-blackness must be resisted at all costs, it is not the problem that led me to the topic of joy among Black young people. I came to joy because I had observed it within anti-black contexts (specifically high schools), and I had questions. I was curious. My understanding of the phenomenon of joy is rooted first in my experiences in the Black church where I witnessed Black people conjuring and clinging to what they called "joy that the world didn't give and the world can't take away." And my experiences with and observations of young Black people while working in high schools has left me with even more questions about the substance of joy—what is it, and how in the world do they maintain it? The joy I observed from the young Black folx in my school settings did not seem to be in relation or reaction to any surrounding oppression. It just was. It existed. So, it occurred to me that even though anti-blackness is the backdrop against which Black students live in and out of school, they still seem to possess something that looks like joy. I am interested in understanding how they define this *something*. Where does it come from and how do they maintain it in the face of an anti-black educational system?

Conceptual Framework

To be concerned with the capacity for young Black people to know and experience joy, to freedom-dream, and to engage in Afrofuturistic thinking and creation is to be committed to an anti-racist framework in education and in the world. Using my particular gifts as an educator and cultural organizer of young people, combined with my agreement with Dillard (2003) on the purpose of research as responsibility, I research because I am committed to creating and uncovering knowledges that have not been given the space to grow or that have been silenced. In

the following section, I offer the conceptual framework that guided this inquiry. This includes my research questions, positionality statement, research paradigm, introduction of methodology theoretical framework, and relevant definitions. The goal of this section is to help readers understand the lenses through which I view this work as well as a snapshot of how I conducted the research. Additionally, I hope for this section to show alignment between my research topic, research paradigm, and my chosen methodology. Although this was a local study, as is standard in qualitative studies, I do hope those who are interested can take it as one model for how to engage in community-based research with young Black people. And I hope the layers of this work will inspire similar projects from Black women researchers who are interested in educational and otherwise spaces for young Black people.

Research Questions

My inquiry centered around the following questions: **(**1) How do young Black people define and maintain joy? and (2) What lessons can young Black people teach about joy?

Positionality

At present, I am a Black, cis-gendered, queer and partnered mother who is a daughter of the Black church and a long line of Black women preachers and community leaders. Part of my positionality is informed by watching the women in my family serve their communities, oftentimes at the expense of their own personal well-being. I consider myself a Black Feminist and Womanist critical, sociological mama-scholar. These epistemological modes are rooted in my experiences embodying the following intersecting and evolving identities: Black woman, daughter, grand-daughter, Black mama, neighbor, educator, Sista friend, and spiritually-rooted cultural organizer. I deeply value knowledge that is (a) produced out of lived experience, (b) in dialogue with Black women across time, and (c) grounded in a deep care for and accountability

to a community (Collins, 1989). These values position me to wholeheartedly believe that the personal is always political. Black Feminist and Womanist epistemological modes have been grouped under what Feminist scholar Sandra Harding (1992) calls standpoint epistemology, which claims that "all knowledge attempts are socially situated, and that some of these objective social locations are better than others as starting points for knowledge projects" (p. 444). I claim Black feminism as distinct from womanism because I believe that any movement for liberation (regardless of that movement's political identity origins) must have, as ancestral scholar and Black feminist bell hooks (2015) wrote, "its fundamental goal the liberation of all people" (p. 13).

I also resonate with Womanist ways of knowing, specifically, with Womanist Ethicist Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas's (2006) expansion of Elder-scholar Alice Walker's definition of womanism. Specific tenets of this epistemological frame include (a) radical subjectivity, (b) traditional communalism, (c) redemptive self-love, and (d) critical engagement (Floyd-Thomas, 2006; Session, 2012). My mama-scholar journey encompasses each of these tenets not because I have explicitly learned and implemented them along the way, but rather in hindsight I can see the thread of the tenets of Womanism in my life from a very early age. I know what it is to have knowledge—a deep inexplicable knowledge—in my body (radical subjectivity) directing me in opposition to the normative timeline and structures in which I find myself. From my days as a public school educator, to my work in faith-rooted cultural organizing, I have always committed myself to work that is rooted in love for and the flourishing of Black people and all marginalized communities (traditional communalism). Furthermore, I am continuously learning how to center love for myself as I move through the world. This has been difficult on my mother-scholaring journey with all the demands that come with this pathway. However, I am grateful for the

community of Black womxn (my Sista friends) and other allies who encourage me to love and take care of myself (redemptive self-love). Lastly, as a socio-critical educator and scholar, I have always asked questions that deal with issues of power, privilege, race, gender and class (critical engagement). I come to any work (especially work with young people) with the goal of being a facilitator on their journey towards conscientization, which Freire and Macedo (2016) characterizes as the "deepening of awareness characteristic of all emergence" (p. 109).

In addition to my alignment with the tenets above, I believe this movement for liberation calls for a deep spiritual commitment outside of the political sphere, outside of the earthly sphere. I resonate deeply with Womanist Scholar Layli Maparyan's sentiments (2012) regarding the transformative power within spirituality. She writes,

> Politics as it is understood and enacted today is incapable of delivering humanity to its own potentiality. Yet, outside politics, this potentiality is gaining expression and momentum in the larger global society among people from all walks of life who are awakening to the power and reality of their own spirituality as well as the spirituality of others and the spirituality of the world around them. As people come to apprehend their own Innate Divinity directly, as well as the Innate Divinity of others, Earth, and all aspects of Creation, they think, speak, and act differently; they expect different things from their world, and they begin to live in a different reality altogether, regardless of what is going on around them. (p. 4)

I have been shaped by these kinds of people. Maparyan names them as those who "own their Innate Divinity"; the Black women who shaped me call it "knowing who I am and whose I am." I cannot overstate the centrality of this as a part of my position in this work. My position begins with Spirit, moves in Spirit, and is empowered by Spirit. Indeed, it is from a deep commitment to

the faith of my ancestors that I "live, move, and have my being" (*New International Version Bible*, 1984, Acts 17:28). I am convinced that Black women across time who have been and are rooted in deep spiritual knowledge, who have been and are both inside and outside of the academy, hold the maps to a better life for all of us, and I am determined to bring the voices of my people (Walker-Barnes & Harper, 2019), especially Black women people, with me wherever I go.

Research Paradigm

At the beginning of my doctoral studies, I was inspired by Dr. Cynthia Dillard's (2003) work on endarkened feminist epistemologies because it validated that my lived experience as a Black girl and woman were real, valuable knowledge. Additionally, I am aligned with Dillard's (2003) metaphorically expressed purpose of "research as a responsibility." This remains a primary motivation for my desire to understand how young Black people are defining and sustaining joy and what possibilities lie in dreaming of more spaces and places for them to fully live into their joy.

In addition to a commitment of responsibility, my motivation for research aligns with the purpose of Womanist discourse—centering "knowledge production that is most necessary for their [Black women's] own flourishing" (Floyd-Thomas, 2006, p. 2). As such, I wholeheartedly and unapologetically believe that Black young people are owed this kind of research—for their voices to be amplified and taken seriously. History has far too long robbed them of the time and energy to realize and practice what brings joy, and I hope this will be one vehicle towards this goal. I seek to magnify their call about joy and suggest ways that folks who hear this call—particularly those in educational spaces—can respond.

Given my Black feminist and Womanist epistemological anchors, I identify as a qualitative researcher who is aligned with interpretivist and critical theoretical paradigms. I claim interpretivism (Glesne, 2016) as part of my framework because I desire first to understand. For this inquiry, this desire is evidenced in my initial research question: *How do young Black people define and maintain joy?* I identify with interpretivism because I hold the ontological belief that our reality is socially constructed and upheld by norms, systems and structures (Glesne, 2016). Our experiences and perspectives are shaped by socio-cultural, historical and political structures. Additionally, my work is situated in critical theory for two main reasons: (1) it is filtered through my standpoint epistemologies (Black feminist and womanist), and (2) part of my goal is to transform educational spaces into ones where young Black people can thrive. Thomas writes, "Critical theory research takes you beyond describing 'what is,' which is the intention of interpretivists, and towards describing 'what could be'" (as quoted in Glesne, 2016, p. 10).

And it does not take much to describe "what is" when it comes to U.S. public high school settings. Unfortunately, the majority of my time as a teacher was production-driven and focused on standardized test outcomes. There was not much space to create, much less co-create, anything in the classroom. However, I do recall that the history hallway of the school where I most recently taught was, in the words of so many of my students, always lit. That is, there was always something about to happen that was sure to draw the attention of the crowd or at least the one or five hallway walkers who made it a point never to be in a class for a full session. To be clear, there seemed to be a collective student desire throughout the campus to be in the hallways and not the classrooms. But I don't blame them. Most of the time, the hallways, pass-throughs, outside over-passes, were the places where you could encounter friends, foes, fights, and maybe even glimpses of freedom. I actually saw so much freedom--to dance, sing, sing together (loudly

from opposite ends of a hallway), cry, hug a crying friend, plan for fun (or in crisis). But there was one class where I saw similar sparks to the hallway freedom that was so commonly present—my third and fourth sections of African American Studies (AFAM). It was not without its challenges, but it was also so much fun and life-giving. Through much reflection, I have come to realize that I had never felt this way about any course in my teaching career. With the green light to design the course, it was a space of (a) co-creation (including community agreements, varied teaching/learning modalities, and Welcome in Wednesdays for community members' wisdom sharing), (b) self-connection (including students choosing topics of personal interest for research, and intentional honoring of African ancestors and elders through a funeral with a repast); and (c) interconnection and transformation (including a research paper, praise reading days, and a social justice expo to showcase student research projects). I observed a huge range of students' emotions in this class over a semester. Happy, sad, and angry tears. Excitement to bring the topics they were passionate about to life through their presentations. Delight at the praise comments they received from administrators and other authority figures about their writing.

After stepping away from the classroom in 2019, I had the opportunity to facilitate a space of cultural expression and education centered on joy (this space was called Journey to Joy), and I had questions. What exactly made those hallways and that AFAM class so appealing? How would the students have explained it? What was it that made a student who was almost comatose in the last five minutes of an English class suddenly come alive and beam with excitement at the ringing of the dismissal bell or the start of the welcome music in AFAM?

So, I returned to graduate school, committed to giving all the energy I could to asking some of these kinds of questions and theorizing towards liberation, towards a better way for young Black people like those that once sat in my AFAM classroom and walked the hallways of

the school where I taught. I mentioned this earlier, but it is important to underscore that the joy I often observed from these young Black people in my school settings was not reactive. It was not often precipitated by events during the school. It just was. It existed.

I committed to asking young Black people about joy. What can their joy teach us all (including themselves) about dismantling oppressive systems that keep us from flourishing? What can I learn about young Black folks' joy that can help facilitate what Freire and Macedo (2016) call a "true praxis" for those moral agents who choose to teach? This kind of praxis is impossible in the all-too-`common undialectical and standardized educational spaces where students (and teachers) are in a vacuum and disconnected from real life. Both theory and practice lose their power to transform reality in these spaces, but in this work I have committed to holding on to the power of praxis: asking questions, theorizing new possibilities, and grounding those theories in action.

Methodology: A Snapshot

Schwandt defines methodology as "a theory of how inquiry should proceed" (as cited in Glesne, 2016, p. 16). I employed a critical arts-based methodology as a process guide for this inquiry. I used this methodology because I believe an arts-based approach offers many pathways to engage with young people and learn from them. I will discuss this further in chapter three. Additionally, I am offering this project in the spirit of the Black tradition of call and response singing. In the following section I will briefly discuss the origins of the tradition of call and response singing, my purpose for using this tradition, and the ways it will show up in this work.

An Overview of Call and Response Singing

The tradition of call and response singing in the United States can be traced back to the spiritual liberation practices of enslaved Africans in the hush harbors—secret clearings within

heavily wooded places surrounding slave work camps (plantations)—where, according to Liberation theology scholar Brandon Wrencher (Salvatierra & Wrencher, 2022), "...enslaved Africans would escape to practice a communal spirituality that challenged them to love their bodies and their heritage…" (p. 29). That heritage included a core practice with West African roots called the ring shout— a collective movement where enslaved Africans danced in a circle together enabling them to briefly transcend the conditions they faced. The dancing was in concert call and response singing. For example, one person would sing "Jesus on the mainline" and then the others gathered would respond "Tell 'em what you want."

Hush harbors, which comprised what Rabateau (2004) called the "invisible institution," evolved into a very visible institution that can be broadly categorized as the Black Church which encompasses many predominantly Black denominations and faith gatherings. This setting was my first and has been my most formative experience with call and response singing. Testimony service—a time to stand and give thanks to God for God's protection and healing and blessings—was often filled with call and response singing. A church member would sing out, "What's the matter with Jesus?" and the rest of the people in the church would respond back, "He's alright." And this kind of call and response singing would continue, morphing into new songs, erupting into shouting, more singing, and more testimonies.

Flowing from interpretivist and critical paradigms, my inquiry will metaphorically mirror the Black church singing tradition of call and response. I have carried the spirit of this tradition into my work for three reasons: (a) this tradition springs from the roots of Africa throughout the African diaspora, (b) this tradition aligns with my conceptual framework, particularly my background in the Black church and my Womanist commitment to following the guidance of Spirit in my life and work in the world, and most excitingly, and (c) I absolutely love to sing; it is

one of the primary activities that brings me great joy, and I desired to embody joy as often as possible throughout this inquiry process.

An Overview of Call and Response Inquiry

Pulling from my lived experiences and observations as a Black mama, a Black woman public school educator, a Black culture organizer of young Black people, as well as my experiences with the call and response singing tradition in the Black church, I am claiming what Glynis Cousin (2010) calls positional advantage or insider status to use this inquiry to give a metaphorical call to young Black people about their definitions of joy. My call begins with my research questions and will include recruitment/marketing advertisement/invitations in specific neighborhoods, interview questions, and facilitating opportunities for young people to create, express, and explore joy.

In the summer of 2023, I along with four co-researchers hosted a four-day arts-based program called The Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience at a local park in my neighborhood. During the four days, young Black people were invited to explore and practice joy through a variety of mediums such as visual art, movement, creative expression/maker spaces, taking photos (and writing short descriptions about them), resting, reading, and eating. Pooling community resources to facilitate different activities in the pop-ups, I engaged mainly as a participant-observer. As I shared earlier, the invitation to engage in this pop-up was essentially a call from me to the young Black people who participated. The arts-based methodology was a part of this call, and the data collected from the pop-up sessions, focus groups, observations, and images is a first response of this inquiry.

I hope for another call and response of this inquiry to be in how I re-present (Dillard, 2021) the findings in defense of this work and beyond. I hope to use the Black tradition of call

and response when I present the data—perhaps creating an actual song using the data that has been collected, or maybe a compilation of the music that inspired the call and the music that emerged from the youth in their response. Ultimately, this work is a call to educators, organizers, and any who care about young Black people. My hope is that they will respond to the stories of joy song that the young Black people in this study.

Theoretical Framework

Since the focus of my inquiry is on joy among young Black people and unfortunately to be Black in the United States is to know (at some point) the violent effects of the social construct of race and the ideology of racism, this work builds on theoretical frameworks that employ critical race theory (CRT). Those frameworks include Dillard's (2021) concept of (re)membering, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework, and Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) framework on counter story-telling.

Critical Race Theory

My positionality includes a critical sociological perspective which means I am always interested in questions that involve power and privilege as it relates to the social connectedness of systems and the agents, institutions, and structures that uphold them. I have always leaned into trying to understand why systems run the way they do, and as a lover of history, I am always seeking to learn about the evolution of systems. Sociology of education scholars insist that we pay attention to how social systems within education are created, to the values and norms that undergird them, and how a diverse range of people (from students to school staff, to community members, to legislators) are choosing to participate in those systems (Johnson, 2008). This critical lens exists as a sort of magnifying glass, enabling one to ask the kinds of questions that could lead to the deconstruction (or at least reform) of oppressive systems with the possibility

and hope of imagining something new—the hope of enacting a liberatory praxis grounded in critical theory and action.

Given my critical sociological perspective, combined with my epistemological modes, I am naturally drawn to the origins and evolution of critical race theory (CRT)—a movement with roots in critical legal studies with foundational scholars like Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw. The evolution of CRT can also be attributed to radical feminism and European philosophers like Gramsci, Foucault, and Derrida, and North and South American radical thinkers and activists like Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, César Chávez, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (Delgado & Stefancic 2017). As with many movements, it is difficult to pin down all the main principles that drive the work of the people within the movement. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) have offered the following six tenets of CRT that are useful to my understanding of this discourse: (a) race and racism are not normal or ordinary, (b) white supremacy causes interest convergence among white people, (c) race is a social construction, (d) minority groups are racialized by white people at different times to meet the needs of white people, (e) people have intersecting and pluralistic identities, and (f) non-white people have a unique perspective and voice. I find these tenets to be useful first and foremost because unfortunately they have been a part of my lived experience as a Black woman in the United States, so I can attest to their validity. Secondly, there is substantial research across disciplines for the tenets to be generalizable without losing credibility.

Centering my inquiry on joy in young Black people takes seriously the CRT tenets mentioned above. Although Black pain and oppression is ever-present and will inevitably come up in the study, I am refusing to center Black pain and oppression for two reasons. First, most importantly and most in line with a Womanist epistemology, I am not interested. I am not

interested at this time because I do not believe that giving more of my personal scholarship energy to Black pain and oppression will lead to the flourishing of myself or my community. Dr. Floyd-Thomas (2006) explains "what characterizes womanist scholarship is that Black women are engaged in a process of knowledge production that is most necessary for their own flourishing rather than being exploited for the enlightenment and entertainment of white psyches and male egos" (p. 2).

Secondly, it has been well studied and discussed (and rightfully so). Furthermore, my work is not explicitly about resisting oppression, although it can be argued that to center the joy of young Black people is itself an act of resistance. I am committed to amplifying the voices of young Black people for the benefit of young Black people first. This commitment leans into the last two tenets of CRT: people have intersecting and pluralistic identities, and non-white people have a unique perspective and voice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Building on CRT in general and narrowing in on these two tenets specifically, I am led to include the frameworks of (re)membering, community cultural wealth, and counter-storytelling. In the following subsections I explain each of these frameworks and how they are expressions of the final two tenets of CRT.

(Re)membering. Over the past 3 years I have begun a journey in self-discovery starting with a deeper look into my family history and uncovering some of the lived history of my grandparents—their joys, and perseverance through hardship. It is as if I am adding to who I am by knowing more about who they were and who they continue to be outside of their physical bodies. I believe a deeper knowledge of myself has also given me the inner space and desire to pay attention to the ways that I am connecting to people around me—my immediate family,

neighbors, students, colleagues. Through being fully present with ourselves and each other, we can determine how to move forward together to positively change our present realities.

Illustration 1. Remember Tattoo

I got this tattoo in the summer of 2019 just a few months before the pandemic changed the world. It was and still is a visible reminder that I am gathering the pieces of myself, my history, my family and putting them back together. I know this is why I resonate deeply with Dr. Cynthia Dillard's concept of (re)membering. Since coming across the concept, it has served as a lens for my personal journey over the last three years—excavating my childhood and background through therapy and reclaiming the spiritual and communal practices of my ancestors. And it has been particularly relevant to my evolving mother-scholar identity. As mentioned earlier, I do research because I carry a deep conviction of responsibility to my people and to the flourishing of my community. Dr. Dillard (2021) carries this spirit of responsibility forward in her latest work, *The Spirit of Our Work: Black Women Teachers (Re)member*, where she writes about the transformation of Black women educators who journey back to Ghana, Africa and the implications of the journey for their bodies and work as educators. She defines (re)membering as

> … both the acts of putting back together (as in (re)membering) and of (re)calling (as in the call or spiritual obligation we answer in becoming a teacher, auntie, or a mother). (Re)membering is also an act of resistance, given the continuous ways that Black people and our presence in the diaspora are rendered invisible within structures of capitalistic, patriarchal, anti-Black structures of domination. (Dillard, 2021, p. xv)

My decision to center joy among young Black people grows out of a belief that I have been called into this work—the work that combines the roles of educator, mama-scholar, auntie, neighbor—to be a cultural leader in a metaphorical call and response that is about (re)membering joy, our capacity to conjure it, and amplifying what young Black people might be saying (or singing, or painting, or dancing, or playing) in response. Both Dr. Dillard's (2022) leadership with students in Ghana and her framework on (re)membering are (re)minders to follow my call to give platform to the stories of joy of young Black people.

I am honored to lift up and lean on Dillard's elder-scholar wisdom as I incorporate her theory of (re)membering into my work. And just as I've sought to create pathways for my sons to learn alongside me in our home and community through a family altar, intentional communal living, and regular connection to the land (see images below), this is the spirit that I carry forward in my inquiry around joy in young Black people. My commitment to asking questions, observing and listening to young Black people is a commitment (re)minding them and anyone who cares about them what I believe they already deeply know.

Illustration 2. Left: Phillip and Morris; Middle: Strawberry Patch; Right: Gathered Strawberries

Community Cultural Wealth and Counter-Stories. Finally, I am drawing on two frameworks within critical race theory: (a) Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and (b) Counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I am utilizing Yosso's work as a part of my framework because it allows for the full acknowledgement of the layered connections and experiences that I draw from (and that young Black people draw from) as a source of knowledge. Yosso names six kinds of cultural capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital—and emphasizes that they are "not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). I am who I am not because of how the U.S. "hierarchical society reproduces itself" (p. 70), but because I belong to a brilliant, resilient, communal people who possess "an array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts" (p. 69) that is passed down through songs, rituals, stories, sermons, conversations, DNA, and living. Additionally, my framework specifically carries forward Yosso's definition of aspirational capital because it refers to the

"ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77); I have seen this ability in so many young Black people. The ability to make a way out of no way and create joy where despair should abound. It is remarkable. My intention to center the experiences and cultures of young Black people is rooted in my belief that educators who care about the flourishing of young Black people have something to learn from how they define and maintain joy.

To concretize this belief through my research, I am committed to foregrounding the stories of joy among young Black people. I intend to amplify alternative narratives about young Black people—counterstories—to the all too familiar majoritarian stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) that are steeped in oppression and despair. I am not adopting counter-storytelling into my framework solely as a means of resisting the dominant narrative. I am choosing to follow the lead of my young Black students as I employ these counter-stories. My students' joy was not limited to anything that was happening in school buildings. They were singing just because they could. Dancing because it was fun. I want to tell their stories of joy because they are worthy of being told. Quoting Ikemoto (1997), Solórzano and Yosso (2002) discuss these sentiments in this way:

> Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. Yet, counter-stories need not be created only as a direct response to majoritarian stories. As Ikemoto (1997) reminds us, "By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse" (p. 136). Indeed, within the histories and lives of people of color, there are numerous unheard counter-stories. Storytelling and counter-storytelling these experiences can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32)

My commitment to counter-storytelling is also connected to a belief that those who are most marginalized in and impacted by an oppressive society have the most to teach about resilience and the possibilities for a different future. I can drive around my under-resourced neighborhood in the Southeast United States right now and observe how, despite intentional underfunding and disregard from the city government, neighbors find themselves gathered for fun, trash pick-ups, resource sharing and solution planning. I can attest to the power of counter-stories. My neighbors are telling, as well as acting out, a different story about our neighborhood and in doing so they are demanding that the city engage this neighborhood and the neighbors more equitably.

Joy: My Definition

People define Black joy in a myriad of ways depending on their experiences and context. In the following section I will share how I have come to my definition of Black joy. I will show that it draws on each part of my positionality as a cultural organizing, social justice educator.

Defining Black Joy

Joy is a substance that connects, empowers, sustains. When allowed to flourish, it taps into our shared humanity and can create openings for breakthrough to flourishing and breakdown of oppressive systems and structures. Much of the literature discusses Black joy as it relates to its capacity to aid in resisting oppression (Lewis-Giggetts, 2022; Williams, 2022; Young, 2019). I resonate with Brittany Cooper's description of joy arising from "an internal clarity about our purpose" (2018, p. 274). This kind of joy—Black joy—seems to have the capacity to conjure pockets of and perspectives for thriving in the most difficult of positions. Abolitionist education advocate Bettina Love (2019) writes,

> There is joy and then there is Black joy. Both are necessary for justice; however, Black joy is often misunderstood. Black joy is to embrace your full humanity, as the world tells

> you that you are disposable and that you do not matter…Black joy is finding your homeplace and creating homeplaces for others. (Love, 2019, p. 120)

Like Love, I am convinced that Black joy is what helps Black people remain grounded in an unsettling society that refuses to acknowledge that Black lives matter. In conceptualizing literacies of joy, Matherson et al. (2023) echo the grounding nature of joy for BIPOC students in the schools, describing them as the "ways of being, knowing, and speaking that enable BIPOC students, educators, and researchers alike to reap, enact, and embody joy amid oppressive circumstances" (p. 561). Black joy is what causes us to sing. To dance. To gather in courtyards, backyards, school yards, and on porches around food and drinks. Black joy does not erase the hardships of Black people—instead, it enables Black people to overcome (or sometimes look over) hardships and call forth the "the reason why we sing" (Franklin, 1993). Justin A. Coles (2023) conceptualizes Black joy in this way,

> … my conception of joy stems from having an awareness of anti-blackness in ways that allow one to not be wholly swallowed by anti-Black oppression. Such interpretation of joy leads one to carry out their life being conscious of anti-blackness in a way that eases their suffering through fully understanding that they are not inherently bad or less than, which sustains their psychological and physical wholeness, humanness. (Coles, 2023, p. 4)

I am incorporating Coles's (2023) articulation as a bridge to a deeper discussion of Black joy as resistance. Although I am not centering resistance in my work, it is impossible to separate the ways Black joy has stood boldly, stared into the face of an anti-black society, and existed in its fullness anyhow. Coles's words remind me of the deep spiritual belief of my ancestors who talked about their souls being anchored on life's ocean—they would sing, "There's a storm out

on life's ocean and it's moving this-a-way, if your soul's not anchored in Jesus, you will surely drift away" (Brown, 1996). Despite being immersed in the anti-black, production-driven and deficit-focused culture of the current educational system (the storm out on life's ocean), young Black people and their allies continue to find and co-create enclaves where they can tap back into their joy. These spaces often look like small lunch groups, daily or weekly meet-ups in that "cool" teacher's classroom, culturally distinct after-school clubs, and so many more. These are spaces where young Black students lean into each other and make meaning of what is going on around them and in their lives. For a few moments in the day, they are able to lower the white, western frames that are imposed by the systems and structures that govern their school day and view themselves and each other through a different frame. And what a sight it was to see! I could feel the excitement, life, joy, hope in spite of all that the school schedule and place brought their way. It was remarkable.

The conceptualization most relevant for my work comes from Sonya Renee Taylor, who shares that Black joy is something that cannot be contained, and that although history has chronicled moments when there has been a fullness of Black joy coinciding with moments of resistance, joy does not only exist in relation to suffering and oppression. Joy just is. In an interview on the Podcast series entitled *Finding Our Way* with Prentis Hemphill, Taylor describes Black joy. She says, "the thing in us that withstands suffering predates us. It was already in existence … To say Black joy as resistance is to put Black joy in relationship to resistance … it erases the fact that Black joy always has been, always will be, cannot be interrupted. It just is. It's is-ness" (Taylor, 2020).

Taylor's articulation of joy reminds me of the joy that the church mothers spoke about during testimony service in church. They would say, "it's like fire, shut up in my bones" as they

described the kind of joy they felt when thinking about how their God had sustained them through hardship. Someone would break out into the call and response song, "I got a feelin everything gonna be alright." And it *would* be alright, because they believed they were connected to something eternal, sustaining—something that could withstand anything.

Building on this ever-generating description of joy, my conceptualization of joy also infuses Audre Lorde's articulation of the erotic. Lorde (1987) writes, "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of lifeforce for women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (p. 89). Joy is a deep knowing of "where yo help comes from," as the church mothers used to say. Like Lorde, they were speaking about the force within themselves that was always there—a joy that, again in the words of the famous gospel singer Shirley Caesar (2013), "the world didn't give and the world can't take away."

My definition of joy as a substance encompasses all these articulations. I am keeping the word "substance" in my definition because I think it has a similar constitution to what the Bible names as faith—"the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen" (ScofieldRG Study Bible III, KJV Bible, 1990, Hebrews 11:1). For my work, I define joy as an eternal, internal, spiritual and cultural substance that exists within a person from birth (but is also cultivated through social learning) that enables them to *find* and *see* and often *be* light and resilient regardless of circumstances. It connects, empowers, sustains. It is not equal to happiness, but it can produce happiness. It is not equal to resistance, but it can act as resistance. The substance of joy is carried through memory and can also be passed down across generations through DNA and also socialization. Joy just is.

Conclusion

The remaining chapters of this dissertation include a review of literature, methodological chapter, two findings chapters, and a concluding chapter. The literature review includes the anti-Black context of schooling, the significance of creating spaces of joy for young Black people, and research on three bodies of extant literature related to my work: Black Joy, the Black Imagination, and Afrofuturism. The methodology chapter includes a detailed discussion on the methodology for this inquiry—a critical arts-based methodology in the spirit of the call and response tradition. Lastly, I will give a detailed description of the population, context, methods of data production (Glesne, 2016), and the limitations and ethical considerations of the study. The findings chapters will share examples from the study connected to four themes that are related to the research questions. The concluding chapter will succinctly answer the research questions and include discussion and implications, invitations for practice, additional limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past four years I have been on a journey in self-discovery starting with a deeper look into my family history and uncovering some of the lived history of my grandparents—their joys, and their perseverance through hardship. It is as if I am adding to who I am by knowing more about who they were and who they continue to be outside of their physical bodies. I believe a deeper knowledge of myself has also given me the inner space and desire to pay attention to the ways that I am connecting to people around me—my immediate family, neighbors, students, colleagues. Through being fully present with ourselves and each other, we can determine how to move forward together to positively change our present realities. Upon stepping away from the classroom, my heart could not release the desire for the students that I engaged each day to (re)member (Dillard, 2021) how to be fully present with themselves and each other and develop a voice from that place. One weekend in 2019, I stayed with a mentor-friend and her family while attending an anti-racist curriculum workshop in her hometown. A brainstorming session on her couch led me to the topic of joy. I was toiling out loud over how I could incorporate resilience and cultural expression into a community educational space for young Black people. I was going to pitch this at the curriculum workshop the next day. Out of nowhere she said, "Why does it have to be about resilience? Black kids *live* resilience every day. We don't need to teach them this. Why can't we talk about joy?" And that was the spark that led me on this current journey. I have had a fire under me related to joy and young Black people since that wonderful, wine-filled moment. I am forever grateful for my mentor-friend.

Anti-Black Schooling Context

The United States of America has never had the flourishing of Black Life (Cooper & Lindsey, 2018) as a goal. In fact, the category of blackness was created to ensure that anyone

who might ever fit this description would have little to no power over their own destiny (Glaude, 2016). Countless institutions along with the systems and structures that undergird them have been intentionally constructed to ensure that centuries-old social stratifications remain intact. This is true for public schools in the United States. In an interview on the state of American education, critical scholar and social justice education advocate Kevin Kumoshiro describes the evolution of public schooling in this way,

> … the very beginnings of public schools in this country were not meant for equal educational opportunity, because we didn't create schools for everyone. We created schools for only the most elite. As we were forced to integrate more and more, we just came up with more and more ways to sort and differentiate them. In other words, although the purpose, sometimes, we say is equal educational opportunity, the function has, historically, been to sort. (Kumashiro, 2018)

This sorting has been detrimental for all students, but especially for Black students. Even the physical markers that are common in many schools are not seen as invitations of welcome or belonging for Black students. From the curriculum to the structure of the school days to the dress code, public schools—as a microcosm of society—reproduce a culture of anti-blackness. When trying to explain this concept to students, I have often described the depth of anti-blackness in schools by pointing to the white cement bricks that are common in many of the schools. I have often named structural racism and anti-blackness as being akin to the very bricks of the buildings. There is no way to get away from it, unless we build a new school. kihana miraya ross describes anti-blackness in this way:

> Anti-blackness indexes the structural reality that in the larger society, blackness is inextricably tied to slaveness. While this doesn't mean that Black people are actually still

> enslaved by white slave masters, it does mean that slavery marks the ontological position of Black people—that the relation between humanity and blackness is an antagonism, is irreconcilable (Grant & Ross, 2021, p. 8).

This structural reality runs deep through many parts of social life for Black people, including the public educational experience. I included the quote above because it offers a clear articulation of the context in which young Black people are existing—in and out of school. The pervasiveness of structural racism within institutions comes because of the anti-blackness origins of this country. Understanding these origins is necessary to understand the imperative for centering something different—in this study, the center will be Black joy. Although they do not most often experience outright racial slurs, Black young people arrive and exist in an anti-black culture for 6–8 hours each day. From the dress code to the learning standard, to the culture of "quiet in the hallways," the traditional school place and day works as a mechanism of control, echoing the discourse of slaveness (Grant & Ross, 2021).

Anti-blackness in school is a reality (and certainly a problem), but it is not the problem that led me to the topic of joy among Black young people. My understanding of the phenomenon of joy is rooted first in my experiences in the Black church where I witnessed Black people conjuring and clinging to what they called "joy that the world didn't give and the world can't take away." Additionally, my experiences with and observations of young Black people while working in U.S. public high schools has left me with even more questions about the substance of joy—what it is and how it is maintained, particularly in young Black people. The joy I observed from the young Black folx in my school settings did not seem to be in relation or reaction to any surrounding oppression. Joy just was. It just existed.

This is not to say that I do not wholeheartedly believe that efforts in anti-racist education, anti-bias teacher training, school culture/climate reform, and experimentation with liberatory models of schooling are necessary. I do. But it occurred to me that even though anti-blackness is the backdrop against which Black students live in and out of school, they seem to still possess a quality that looks like joy. In this study, I have turned my interest and energy towards understanding how they define this quality that I call joy. Where does it come from and how do they maintain it in the face of an anti-black educational system?

It is also important to share that outside of my experiential knowledge and the literature that is shaping my evolving identity thus far, most of the literature that I will draw on for my inquiry will be new literature (to me). Therefore, this review is truly only the beginning of my work in synthesizing extant literature related to the topic.

I see this qualitative inquiry project on joy among young Black people located at the intersection of the following three bodies of research: Black joy, the Black Imagination, and Afrofuturism. I focused on these three bodies of literature because they are foundational to understanding the many articulations of Black joy throughout history and because they hold deep significance when thinking about my own understanding of joy. Additionally, my desire to doing this research in the spirit of the tradition of call and response necessitated digging into the connections between Black joy, spirituality, and resistance. However, these connections are not centered. Ultimately, I have centered Black joy, the Black Imagination, and Afrofuturism because I wanted the posture of this inquiry to be one of creation and imagination towards the possibilities for Black Life and living (Cooper & Lindsey, 2018), and not towards an all-too-familiar reality of Black oppression, marginalization, and death. As historian Robin D. G. Kelley (2022) writes in his foundational text *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination,* "We

know what they [today's young activists] are fighting against, but what are they fighting for" (p. 52)? I drew from these bodies of literature because there is a shared motivation of Black flourishing and liberation in each of them. And I had questions about this substance that I had seen in my young Black students—what it might teach those of us who are committed to a liberatory praxis and pedagogy. Additionally, my choice in bodies of literature came out of my commitment to always bring an endarkened epistemology (Dillard, 2003) to the front of my wondering and problem-solving. This looks like (re)membering our way into the future (Dillard, 2021). It is creating anew out of what has always been. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my inquiry was centered around the following questions: **(**1) *How do young Black people define and maintain joy?* and (2) *What lessons can young Black people teach about joy?*

The Significance of Joy

Hard times require furious dancing. – Alice Walker (2013)

Opportunities to explore and practice that which brings joy are vital if we are to experience what Charlene Carruthers (2018) calls transformative change—change that dismantles oppressive systems and shifts power into the hands of the community. This inquiry sought to shine a light on and give voice to the stories of joy among young Black people in the Southeast United States. The significance of this inquiry lies in its micro and macro emancipatory potential of providing counter-stories to the dominant and deficit ones about the brilliance of young Black people. I hope for these stories to be a reference as people imagine and create educational and otherwise spaces to welcome young Black people to exist and thrive, fully free and in the fullness of their joy. Young Black people deserve these spaces—they deserve the respite of space, time, and energy to realize and practice what brings fulfillment. Understanding the phenomenon of joy in young Black people holds possibilities for educators to glean more

ways of being agents of breakthrough and breakdown in their communities; and it could be a useful tool in helping marginalized communities to create pockets of joy-making for current and future generations of Black young people. With a framework comprised of (re)membering , community cultural wealth, counter-storytelling, and Black feminist and womanist thought, I turned towards the first part of my work of understanding joy among Black young people—a general narrative literature review (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016) in which I hoped to provide the most salient and critical aspects of the most current literature related to this topic—Black joy, the Black Imagination, and Afrofuturism.

Literature Review

Discussion and expression of Black joy are not new, but there has been an intentional return to Black joy with increased visibility of long-standing and ongoing state sanctioned Black death and systematic disenfranchisement. From social media, to magazines, to podcasts, and music, Black joy continues to shine through as a way for Black people to hold up light and lightness in very difficult times.

People have been writing about Black joy for decades, discussing Black joy as it relates to culture, resistance, various expressions of Black joy, memory, and story-telling. As a reminder, my work is grounded in the following definition of joy: joy is a substance that cannot be contained; it is an eternal, internal, spiritual, and cultural substance that connects, empowers, sustains. Joy just is. In my review of the literature on Black Joy, the two prevalent sub-themes that surfaced were: (1) Black joy expressed/embodied and (2) Black joy in K–12 education. Most of the research I reviewed is theoretical discussion/reflection and/or qualitative in nature, with studies including interviews, historiographies, multi-case studies, and ethnographic studies.

There is substantially more literature that is reflective and theoretical in nature than literature that follows traditional qualitative research processes.

Similar to Black joy, the Black Imagination is as old as the people it describes. People have been writing about it for at least five decades, relating it often to the ways Black people have created "ways out of no way" during unimaginably difficult periods in history (Diedrichet al, 1999; Takaki, 1993). The Black Imagination has been an inspiration for creative expression within and resistance against a society bent on the destruction of the Black body. In this iteration of the review of the literature on the Black Imagination, the two prevalent sub-themes that surfaced were: (1) the Black Imagination in culture, and (2) Black Imagination and space-making.

Although Afrofuturism is a product of the Black Imagination, I left it as a separate body of literature for a couple of reasons. First, Afrofuturism is vast and has many subtopics that are worthy of standalone research. Secondly, and more pertinent to my research questions, there is a great deal of literature related to Afrofuturism and educational spaces. The two prevalent sub-themes that surfaced were: (1) Afrofuturism and the power of speculation, and (2) Afrofuturism and memory. The next three sections I will describe the relevance of the three aforementioned bodies of literature, critically analyze the literature reviewed, and articulate how the work is connected to the field of Cultural Foundations.

Black Joy Research

The two prevalent sub-themes that surfaced were: (1) expressed/embodied Black joy and (2) Black joy in K–12 education. These themes on Black joy emerged from a review of literature in the Academic Search Complete (EBSCO) database using two main research phrases— "Black joy" and "Black joy and youth." I narrowed the sources based on the following inclusion criteria:

Black joy, critical hope, Black Imagination, imagination broadly, Freedom Dreaming, anti-black context of school, and anti-blackness in general. I did a close reading of the narrowed sources and distilled the aforementioned themes through analyzing my notes from a screening and notes document.

Embodied and Expressed

Another sub-theme that emerged from the literature review was the embodiment and expression of Black joy. This theme yielded the most sources and the greatest variety of modes (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016) within those sources. Additionally, most of the sources in this sub-theme were published/produced within the past five years. I think this is worth noting because it speaks to the zeitgeist of this present time, especially for Black people. In a period of heightened visibility (actual smartphone recordings) of Black death, Black people are still choosing to draw up the possibility and hope that resides in the ancient and deep well of Black joy. The intentionality of posture towards joy speaks to the origins of it—from deep within and unattached to the happenings (Cooper, 2018) of the present moment. In their analysis of Black people's expression of joy on Twitter and Vine social media platforms, Lu and Steele (2019) write about the genius of Black people in using social media to disseminate and surround themselves with Black joy as a "subversive intervention" where Black people have space for a "full range of emotions."

> Black users share and cultivate joy in ways that counter and resist the seemingly omnipresent images of Black death that surround us. Whether on Twitter or Vine (or, more likely, both), users are also surrounded by Black joy. The expression of joy is a subversive intervention insofar as it asserts Black people as possessing a full range of emotion (p. 830-831).

In addition to the display of Black joy through contemporary online technologies, Black joy continues to be embodied and expressed through creative literary, visual, and performing arts modes (Heydonet al. 2021; Holmes, 2017; Mitchell, 2022; Williams, 2022; Yeboah-Kodie, 2021). Embodiment and expression of Black joy have been areas where I have thrived in my personal life and in my teaching career. As an educator who always had music playing in my classroom, I observed how music could bring people into a collective space of ease. This was especially true for many of my Black students.

A conduit for joy across many cultures, and especially among Black people, spirituality has also been a means of embodiment and expression of Black joy. In fact, intentional gatherings for connection to the Divine and to be with each other have long been spaces where Black people have been able to lean into the joy that the world didn't give, and that the world could not take away. They have been able to draw from the spiritual joy well that aids in liberating Black people from the dominant white normative gaze and shifting their gaze towards community, hope and healing.

Evidence of these internal spiritual wells of joy among Black people in the United States can be traced back to the period of slavery. In the hush harbor—a place that served a myriad of purposes--enslaved black people gathered on the edges of the plantations. Primarily a religious space, hush harbors were also sites of joy as enslaved people worshipped their God. Albert Raboteau's (2004) work on the "invisible institution" of the Antebellum South is paramount in understanding the hush harbor as a gathering place of joy and resistance for enslaved Black people. Centering the work primarily around the United States plantation, Raboteau weaves together primary and secondary materials to analyze the transformation of African traditional religions to the invisible religious institution that subverted white plantation-based Christianity

while simultaneously incorporating many of its themes. He lifts an excerpt from a slave narrative that illustrates this point. A former enslaved person, Wash Wilson, recalls his own experience of the "invisible institution":

> When de niggers go round singin' 'Steal Away to Jesus,' dat mean dere gwine be a 'Lgious meetin' dat night. De masters. . . didn't like dem 'ligious meetin's, so us natcherly slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night. (Raboteau, 2004, p. 213)

Dwight Hopkins (2000) illuminates the ways that the hush harbors along with other gathering spaces within plantation life were also places of subversive pleasure and joy. He writes,

> In enjoyment, blacks liberated themselves by merely having fun in a situation that allowed relatively few openings for free breathing by slaves … Former chattel Florence Bailey recounted … 'Sometimes a group of slaves would leave the house and go on the branches to talk and have pleasure among themselves …' The phrase among 'among themselves' is key in this representation of black fun. To be with their own oppressed kind where they could talk, walk, and have pleasure signified the risk of their surreptitious gathering suffering from discovery and punishment. (Hopkins, 2000, pp. 116–117)

This embodied gathering "among themselves" (2000, p. 116)—physical bodies moving to be together in collective pleasure and fun despite the dominant oppressive systems—could arguably be the predecessor to the modern-day Black cookout or the late night Black romantic hook-up. These glimpses into the hush harbors provide a critical lens to see and evaluate the many ways

that Black people have intentionally gathered and embodied joy since the period of chattel slavery in the United States.

Amber Neal-Stanley's (2023) recent work on hush harbors as praxis compares the spiritually-grounded gatherings of the antebellum Southern U.S. to current examples of Black students and Black women teachers creating spaces that center joy and hope within educational institutions. My heritage and consequently my scholarship grows out of this tradition, since my praxis includes creating spaces (building containers) of thriving and joy exploration for young Black people. Neal-Stanley (2023) builds on kihana miraya ross's (2021) conceptualization of "black educational fugitive spaces" as she draws connections between the ingenuity of Black students and teachers within the traditional school setting and enslaved African peoples' creation of hush harbors as fugitive spaces outside of slave work camps. Neal-Stanley (2023) writes,

> …hush harbors were not spatially bound and are irreducible to strict form. As such, they can be found and constructed with/in/as books, classrooms, curriculum, organizations, practices, people, and homes, among others. They are textual, discursive, sociopolitical, and, perhaps more importantly, they are embodied. Hush harbors effectively demonstrate what "slipped through the cracks," what seeped out and slipped in, what was able to live on, and what cannot be easily contained, objectified, or translated. I argue that hush harbors were, and remain, spaces of fierce, sacred resistance. (17)

As I shared in chapter one, I am most aligned with the embodiment of joy that grows from a deep spiritual connection to the Divine and to others. And I am drawn to this practice of space-making for joy within my own praxis simply because it is where I come from. I come from people who know how to create enclaves, shelters in the times of storm. As a child of the Black

church, singing was both my way to embody personal joy and to bring joy to the Black people in the audience—having a bidirectional Black joy impact.

This kind of impact is common when Black people fully express joy. It shows up in a myriad of expressions as Black people take the space to explore the depths of their potential for creativity. A great example of this is Yeboah-Kodie's (2021) recent work in the Harvard Law Journal. They present a qualitative study titled "Meditations on Joy Full Leadership and Black Liberation." Yeboah-Kodie interviewed 12 Black folks from a variety of backgrounds and fields using the same questions, but in varying order depending on context. They presented the interviewees' words along with paintings and word clouds to each interview. See below for some examples from Yeboah-Kodie's (2021) work:

Illustration 3. "Joy" Word Association (p. 65)

Illustration 4. Keona Jeane Wynne (She/Her) (p. 68)

> I am a Doctoral Student; that is a full-time job. My Ph.D. is in population health sciences. I recently declared my minor expertise, which is in trauma violence and coping, and I put in parentheses "(and abundance)." So, I focus on how Black communities specifically interact with racial trauma and violence both with outside forces and then internal forces within the community. How can we engage with the arts for healing and reconciliation which will, in turn, enable us to lead healthy lives? My guiding philosophy is, "If you don't like yourself, you won't care for yourself." … Black people are canvases all the time. I try and live my life as art. I have real boundaries around my academic work. All of my expertise is in trauma, violence, and coping; all my work is on the effect of violence on the Black body. I can't be exhausted moving from these papers; I have to be replenished and come at it from an angle of care and love, as opposed to anger and pain. So, I don't compromise on my self-care. Listen, I'm excited for where the world is going if more intellectuals are engaging in art. (Yeboah-Kodie, 2021, pp. 68–72).

Yeboah-Kodie's (2021) work is an example of the link between Black Joy and the Black Imagination (which I will discuss in the next section) in its presentation and content. They draw on their artistic expression to visualize the stories of the interviewees and by doing so they are simultaneously *living* Black joy and *concretizing* the collective Black Imagination of the interviewees with the finished product. Yeboah-Kodie (2021) writes,

> This is a gift. The kind that when you see it, your eyes widen, you rush to rip the paper open, and then the gift-giver urges you to take your time unwrapping it … Both the process and the finished product highlight the dimensions, the textures, and the layers of Blackness, joy, and the Black liberation movement. (p. 66)

I am highlighting this work because I seek to give this kind Black joy offering to the world. In fact, I've already been offering my gifts through cultural organizing and social justice education. Yeboah-Kodie's work is inspiring because it presents an alternative, artistic way of studying and representing research on Black joy. Similarly, current research includes building art-based spaces for young Black people to explore and practice joy. Neal-Stanley (2023), Ross (2021), and Yeboah-Kodie's (2021) work are echoes of the hush harbor spaces of the antebellum period—each with a commitment to the embodiment and expression of joy through intentional physical and artistically-documented spaces. In the following section, I will discuss Black Joy in K–12 education.

Joy K–12 Education

Although less prevalent as a sub-theme in this review, traditional qualitative studies on joy in K–12 education emerged. These studies discussed Black joy (or joy in general) as it related to necessary interventions in K–12 schooling (Dunn & Love, 2020; Everett & Moten, 2022; Williams, 2022; Jones & Lee, 2022). Pointing to The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture's Junior Scholars program in Harlem, New York, as an example, Dunn and Love (2020) argue for the inclusion of the arts in English language arts (ELA) as a way to center Black joy. They write,

> Language arts education must be a space where students write their future of resistance and joy … The Junior Scholars program is committed to teaching and learning Afrodiasporic historical literacies while engaging scholars in arts-based practices such as spoken word, dance, theater, and the visual arts. On Saturdays, scholars fill the halls of the Schomburg, with fervor and fearlessness, they reclaim their humanity, hone their artistic creativity, and envision freedom. (Dunn & Love, 2020, p. 191)

Dunn and Love present an overview of the ways the Schomburg Center's program facilitates Black joy. I have included this reference because the authors have real-life experience in the classrooms. They were both public school teachers before beginning in the academy. This is significant to me because I know that the lived experiences (especially of Black conscious public school teachers like myself) give such critical perspectives about what can actually move public education towards being a more liberatory space. However, we often do not have the time or tools to conduct the traditional research studies that would give our experiences academic validation. Even so, I resonate with their suggestions for what needs to happen to create educational spaces (specifically ELA spaces in their case) where Black folks can imagine, dream, and take up space (Dunn & Love, 2020).

Another qualitative K–12 study that discusses joy is Everett and Moten's (2022) case study titled, "Looking Back and Learning Forward: Cultivating Robust Literacy Instruction and Joy among Black Elementary Boys." Building their work on historical Black literary societies, the authors (two Black literacy educators) reflect on their implementation of a multidimensional reading model (MDRM) in an all-boys school setting. Emerging from a larger 20-month ethnographic study, this case study included 10 fourth-grade Black elementary boys at a Title 1 elementary school with majority Black students. Data was collected through weekly meetings, semi-structured interviews of the instructor, recorded MDRM lessons, and student reading and writing artifacts. Through inductive and deductive coding, the authors lifted three themes in the findings: (a) cultivating curiosity and joy, (b) building intellectual growth capacity, and (c) making it impossible for the boys to fail through layered literacy modalities (Everett & Moten, 2022). The authors found that the participants' curiosity and joy increased with the implementation of the MDRM lessons. They wrote,

> Joy was also embodied in their curiosities. Joy is such an urgent issue because there has been an intentional historical effort to erase our joy and the truth of Black people (Muhammad, 2022, p. 197). Youth need opportunities in school to explore multiple facets of selfhood, but also to learn about the identities of others who may differ (Muhammad, 2020, p. 67) from them. (Everett & Moten, 2020, p. 320)

Although the study mentions joy increasing for participants, it does not speak to how participants defined or maintained joy. These questions are at the center of my work. However, the study is still important to highlight, because it points to the need for additional research to uncover a baseline on joy from the perspective of young Black people that might be useful to educators seeking to create spaces where young Black people can thrive.

Embodiment and expression of Black joy is central to my work. Through a critical arts-based qualitative study, I highlight stories—counter-stories—of young Black people on how they define and maintain joy. This work is my contribution to this baseline on joy that I hope will be useful not only for educators, but for any adults who seek to create spaces for young Black people to exist in their full selves. My work descends from the secret, joyfully resistance spaces of the hush harbors and stands in chorus with the work of contemporary scholars whose work centers joy among young Black people (often subversively) across multiple discourses—embodied and expressed, in and outside educational settings.

My review of literature on Black Joy is not exhaustive, and the current research I've been able to find is necessary and vital for continued movement towards liberation. My work fits into the gap where actual voices of young Black people are missing. If joy is eternal and internal—and I believe it is—young Black people are born with it, and when given the space and time, they have the capacity to define it for themselves. Employing arts-based approaches in educational

settings is imperative when facilitating space for young Black people to access joy. One way educators who choose to remain in traditional school settings can cultivate spaces of joy is by harnessing the power of embodied cultural expression within those educational spaces. The literature in this section has shown embodiment to be a way Black people have lived into the joy that is already and always within them. In the next section, I will discuss literature on the Black Imagination.

Black Imagination Research

The two prevalent sub-themes that surfaced about Black imagination were: (1) Black Imagination and culture, (2) Black Imagination and space-making. As I mentioned in Chapter I, when I think about the Black imagination, I immediately think about my two Black sons—generating new ideas in their own ways—imagining—embodying Black joy (Johnson, 2015). And although it is often very messy, it is a great gift to witness them fully reclined into who they are; their Black Boy joy is palpable. My sons reveal a truth about the Black Imagination that has been confirmed for me in the literature to follow—that it is living, generative, and vast and has the capacity to save us (save me) from the tendency to retreat into acceptance of any reality that does not include flourishing Black living and Life (Cooper, 2018). The Black Imagination and Black joy are reciprocal—they fuel each other.

The capacity towards this kind of joy necessitates an ability to see what Religious and African American Studies scholar Ashon T. Crawley (2016) calls otherwise possibilities—"the fact of infinite alternatives to what is" (p. 2). Often when I cannot see these possibilities, my boys shine light for me to get glimpses of what they see so clearly. It is one of my greatest gifts. Crawley defines imagination as "the epistemology through which sensual detection occurs—that is, the way we think about the world" (p. 2). He names the necessity of a shift in the imagination

to see otherwise possibilities—a shift that I believe can be led by young Black people as we listen to what they have to say about joy. I am highlighting Crawley's definition of imagination because it speaks to the malleability of the imagination—that one's epistemology can grow and change towards seeing what was once invisible. This definition does not contradict my claim that one's imagination is already vastly expansive at birth (my sons have shown me this). On the contrary, Crawley's definition offers a deeper understanding on how, especially given the history through which they survived and thrived around the world, those who are BIPOC have made it. They have been able to imagine beyond what they could see. I resonate deeply with this definition, and I believe it is made from the same substance as Black joy—an eternal, internal substance.

Delarosa's (2018) work with Filipinix and Black communities explores the lessons that could be learned from the radical imagination of both communities and offers suggestions for policy changes towards more equality within communities of color. Leaning on the definition of social justice education scholar and activist Shawn Ginwright, Delarosa discusses radical imagination as follows: "Radical imagination is not at all a new concept in describing collective hope. Ginwright defines it as viewing and living in the world as it should be, rather than as it currently stands. I argue that this is necessary for our survival as POC" (Delarosa, 2018, p. 83).

I was delighted to find Ginwright's accurate ascription of the radical imagination to POC in general. I wholeheartedly agree. I am including it because it aligns with my Black feminist commitment to understanding the position of and fighting for the liberation of all oppressed people. However, my positionality and heritage, and the history that I have inherited in the United States, necessitates that I explicitly name the bodies that I speak about. Black bodies. Black joy. The Black Imagination. And my work unapologetically centers Black young people

not only because of world history, but also because I have had so much experience with them as an educator, neighbor, and mama-scholar. As such, I have sought to center literature that is grounded in the experience of Black people, and as shared earlier, given the historical and current plight of Afro-diasporic peoples in world history, it is important to distinguish a general or collective radical imagination from the Black Imagination.

The Black Imagination is a radical one. Black Feminist elder scholar Angela Davis (1989) reminded us about the definition of radical—grasping at the root—and Black people have always, in all ways, been brilliant beyond measure to the very core and from their origin. The Black imagination does not begin from a place of resistance against oppression, but the experiences of Black people have necessitated the channeling of Black imagination to create ways when there were no ways and to imagine futures for themselves when death was the only option forecasted.

The most relevant text to my work is prominent historian Robin D. G. Kelly's (2022) foundational text *Freedom dreams: The Black radical imagination*. Kelley's conceptualization of the Black radical imagination comes from historiographic work chronicling radical social movements of the twentieth century and the Black radical thinkers who catalyzed those movements. Describing the Black radical imagination, Kelley (2022) writes,

> When I use the word 'hope,' it does not mean a wishful thinking or even dreaming. The Black radical imagination is not a kind of dream state conjured and nurtured independent of the day-to-day struggles on the ground but rather is forged in collective movements. (p. 13)

Kelley insists that combined efforts of critical analysis and concrete action are necessary to transform conditions. I aim to use the research gathered with young Black people to join the

collective shift of the Black gaze towards Black joy in the broader movement for Black liberation (and all peoples' liberation). I believe the ability to draw up joy is what has and will continue to empower Black people to do what seems impossible. Kelley (2022) goes on to describe Black radical imagination in this way,

> … the Black radical imagination does not stand still; it lives and breathes and moves with the people. The best we can do is catch a glimpse of how people in motion have envisioned the future and what they did to try to realize or enact that future. (p. 34)

Kelley's (2022) book is important to my work for two main reasons: (a) his definition of the Black radical imagination is widely used across disciplines and topics (Ginwright, 2008; Love, 2019; Spaulding et al., 2021); and (b) it discusses examples of current pockets of Black joy, like Black Youth Project 100, and others who engage in Black imagination/visioning and action (Kelley, 2022). As part of my future work, I plan to continue creating these kinds of pockets of Black joy, like the Joy pop-up, in the communities where I live and work.

My work unapologetically centers Black young people not only because of world history, but also because I have had so much experience with them. As such, I have centered literature that is grounded in the experience of Black people, and as shared earlier, given the historical and current plight of Afro-diasporic peoples in world history, it is important to distinguish a general or collective radical imagination from the Black Imagination. Crawley's (2016) understanding of imagination can be bound together with Kelley and Delarosa's work to form multi-layered, multicultural cord for pulling us closer to the future—a future where there are Black people. Crawley's rootedness in the Divine, Kelley's sankofic agenda for liberation, and Ginwright's call towards a unified radical imagination for all POC are the making of what Cynthia Dillard (2021) calls (re)membering. In essence, these works seek to reconnect imagining and dreaming across

time, as well as restoring memories of the strategies of past liberatory movements—all in service to what is necessary for this moment in history. This commitment to (re)membering fuels my commitment to the understanding of joy among Black young people. As a cultural organizing, social justice educator, I have an unwavering belief in the wealth of wisdom that young Black people carry within themselves, for themselves. In the following section, I will discuss literature on the Black Imagination and culture.

Black Imagination and Culture

The Black Imagination and culture is another sub-theme that emerged in this initial review. Some well-known depictions of the Black Imagination include films like *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018) and music albums such as Beyonce's *Renaissance* (Beyonce, 2022), Tobe Nwigwe's upcoming *MoMints* (Nwigwe, 2022), or Janelle Monae's *The ArchAndroid* (Monae, 2010). This sub-theme highlights some of the ways the Black Imagination shows up in society through culture. In a globalized world, attempts at clear-cut and neat definition of culture are heavily criticized (Spillers, 2006). However, for the purpose of this literature review, I am defining culture as collectively understood ways of being of a socially defined group of people, both locally and across geographical spaces. It can encompass everything from shared recipes, to cliches, to contemporary and historical music, to visual and performing arts, to collective worship.

Black cultural creative expression is often a vehicle for the Black Imagination, and examples abound. It looks like challenges from Lizzo to love her fat Black ass (and for us to love ourselves) at a Tiny Desk concert (Mason, 2022). It also looks like provocative and consciously critical hip-hop songs about "selling dope" such as J. Cole's *Neighbors* (Cole, 2016), and poem-conversations like Ebony Noëlle Golden's (2015) *Getting to Joy: Emergence(s) and*

Experimentation/s That Embody Black Imagination. There is no shortage of expressions of the Black Imagination. Black creatives have always shined a light on the visionary and revelatory nature of the Black Imagination by choosing to create towards a reality that may not yet be seen. Kelley (2022) discusses poetry as an example of the Black Imagination having the power to articulate such vivid visions of the future in the present moment. Rocker's (2020) dissertation highlights this kind of imagining. Situated in the discourse of Black Power Studies, this qualitative historiographical study incorporates primary source materials that include a court proceeding transcript, newspaper articles, interviews, autobiographies, organizational documents, and government records and written work produced by Ericka Huggins (a member of the Black Panther Party who became a political prisoner). Utilizing Audre Lorde's conceptualization of the erotic (1984), Rocker discusses how the Black Imagination is expressed in Huggins' poetry. Rocker (2020) writes,

> Throughout her incarceration, Huggins continued to express her visions of freedom and her desire for a connected and liberated community in her poetry. Her poetry, itself a radically imaginative act, offers a space for freedom reimagined through the senses, self-making, and glimpses of brown jouissance as a mode for recovery and survival. (p. 61)

As I shared earlier, I am also drawn to Lorde's conceptualization of the erotic and feel like it is also a fundamental pillar for my own push towards calling out to young Black people in hopes of raising their (and everyone's) consciousness about the power that lies within joy. Rocker captures my sentiments in an excerpt of Huggins's poems:

… maybe the longing for

freedom will soon make

others homesick for our

natural state in/with

earth, air, fire, water

not dead but

living not asking for freedom

— but free (Huggins, 1971, p. 117, as quoted in Rocker, 2020, p. 70)

Many Black people are fighting for the "natural state" where there is complete freedom and liberation from interlocking oppressions of within society. I am most inspired by the ways Black culture amplifies the Black Imagination and catalyzes activism on every level of society. From Black Scyborgs/Ghosts in the machine (Black activist students on college campuses) (Dache, 2019) and groups like the Black Infinity complex (UCLA grad students) (Bell, 2015), to groups like Outdoor Afro (Scheier, 2022) who are committed to Black people getting out into nature, the Black imagination remains in motion, utilizing Black cultural avenues like poetry, music, and visual arts to push us towards a flourishing Black future.

Most relevant to my work is Harris's (2022) work on the "yet to come" (Crawford, 2017, as quoted in Harris 2022) framework of Black culture. This framing has shown up throughout the Movement for Black Lives since 2020. Harris also builds on Hortense Spillers's conceptualization of "speculative gesture" to offer a glimpse into the ways that Black culture (fueled by the Black Imagination) simultaneously proclaims a thriving future for Black lives and recenters the ways that Black people have always been about radical resistance and the flourishing of Black life. He writes,

> … abolition—has come to mean not just the end of policing, prisons, and the carceral state. It names the pursuit of another world altogether, the shape of which we cannot yet know precisely because it is 'not yet here.' (Crawford 2017, p. 3, as found in Harris, 2022, p. 493)

As a lover of history and a trained educator in history, I am most interested in Harris's (2022) focus on the way Black imagination fuels Black culture to connect the "yet to come" back to historical radical Black movements. This work affirms what I was always attempting to do in my history classrooms—help students understand the connections across time and use the lessons within history to take agency and make decisions to affect change for themselves and their communities. The Black Imagination has always been at work and if Black people (and all people) are to gain liberation in the fullest sense, there must be an intentional *sankofic* retrieval of this radical spirit and those ancestral strategies of resistance to push us towards the not yet. I resonate with Harris's summation below:

> … M4BL's unapologetic Black joy and its calls for abolition help crystalize the contours of the present conjuncture in Black thought as rooted in a temporal experience that is simultaneously now, before, and not yet … To put it somewhat differently, in its circulatory, its 'back and forth … flow,' Blackness, Black political thought, and Black culture builds and repurposes rather than simply breaks away … I want to suggest that the movement's rendering of abolition, its alternative vision of Black politics, and its understanding of Blackness itself as performed through and with Black joy are not merely a pronouncement of the 'yet to come' of Black culture but a philosophical 'return to the source.' (Wynter 1979; Cabral 1973, as quoted in Harris, 2022, p. 495)

Part of my praxis—Black joy space-making—is an example of the multitude of vehicles that can bring the regeneration that Harris names as essential to Blackness, Black political thought, and Black culture. The power to repurpose and return to an eternal source is another way of (re)membering what we have learned to forget (Dillard, 2021). Cultivating opportunities for young Black people to explore and experience joy is one liberatory practice that can create space for and harness the power of the Black Imagination.

As a final addition to this section, I was delighted to find the work of practical theologian Corwin Davis (2023) about spirituality and the imagination of Black children. Foregrounding the "spiritual technologies and tools through which Black children both explore and identify faith and its practices" (p. 6), Davis's work maintains that children already possess and have the capacity to grow a vibrant imagination through which they can know the world more fully (and often differently than their elders). Drawing on the work of M. Jacqui Alexander (2005), Davis narrows in on the extraordinary knowing of Black children because Black folks' "spirituality is epistemological" (Alexander, 2005, p. 293, as cited in Davis, 2023, p. 6). My work is very much aligned with this conceptualization of spirituality as an imaginative portal to what is yet to come. Even more, I believe young people have so much teach us about how to access the "not yet" and bring it into the now.

Returning to my conceptualization of culture, this section has offered a sampling of the ways the Black Imagination surfaces in Black culture—art, literature, music, faith—and the ways it provides avenues for Black people to simultaneously experience the brilliance of our now, our past, and our not yet. Harris's (2022) work discusses the spiritual origin of the Black Imagination, while the others offered tangible examples of the Black Imagination and culture. The power of cultural practices of music, poetry, and visual art to transport liberatory energy and

even strategies across time is evidence that whatever the source of these practices and of the Black Imagination, it is a spectacularly expansive source. I have amplified these specific aspects of culture in the literature because they are such a fundamental part of my life and because I have experiential knowledge of the power of cultural practices in learning and community-building. These cultural practices were also imbedded into the joy pop-up critical arts-based container where my research was situated.

The permanence of Black culture is evidence that the substance which sustains it has roots that are thousands of years old. That substance holds the wonders of the Black Imagination, of Black resistance and resilience, and of Black joy. Literature on the Black Imagination and space-making emerged as another sub-theme in this review. In the next section, I will discuss this sub-theme.

Black Imagination and Space-Making

The Black Imagination and space-making emerged as another sub-theme, particularly as I worked to clearly articulate space-making as a part of my praxis. As detailed earlier in the discussion on hush harbors and joy, Black people have been creating spaces for themselves to thrive for a long time. These versatile, multi-use spaces shifted into what they needed to be depending on the moment in history. And these kinds of spaces—of respite, joy, strategizing, just being—continue to be a critical aspect to the survival of Black people, particularly Black young people, in and outside of schools. Although the studies in this review are related to space-making within schools, young Black people are in the practice of space-making in many areas of life.

Doucet and Kirkland's (2021) work on ethnic clubs as "third space sites of sanctuary" emerged as highly relevant to my work. Analyzing the nuances of ethnic racial identity development of Haitian immigrants and Haitian Americans in ethnic clubs, the authors argued

that these spaces could be sites of creation and resistance, writing, "Unlearning lessons to regulate Black bodies, even as one exists in a Black body, to see them and learn how to locate them where they are loved, takes time and ceremony …" (p. 634). My work with young people confirms this claim—that the deep wounds caused by anti-black school systems and structures must first be uncovered, and then slowly mended. I believe space-making with young Black people in and outside of school is one way to help facilitate this healing. I witnessed it during my years of teaching; students creating spaces in hallways, lunch meeting spots, the cool teachers' classrooms, the elective courses where they could be most free. Doucet and Kirkland (2021) described observations of the sanctity of these spaces and possibilities within them:

> When researchers venture into the Third space, that is, into the Black border, Black youth can be seen beyond developing an agency over the Self (Sulé et al., 2021), fashioning selves of their choosing, selves that could oppose or accommodate society's other "truths," where meaning and voice ceremoniously play with and complexly perform a hybrid remixing of life things … (p. 635)

In hindsight as I am learning how scholars in the academy are theorizing and researching about space-making, I have realized that Journey to Joy, the after-school space I started for young Black people to explore joy in 2019, was a Third space. I will share more about this space in Chapter III, but it is important to mention now that Journey to Joy is one of the Third spaces that has most inspired my work—the topic and methodology. Although I was not yet a researcher, I recall the multitude of ways the students took small steps to live into their fuller selves individually and interpersonally. Like the Haitian ethnic club, Journey to Joy was a Third space that allowed students to shed some of the rigidity and protective measures that the school day

required. These kinds of spaces offer young people time to reflect on the parts of themselves that they desire to cultivate and to recognize the ways the engage the world for survival.

Most useful to my research is kihana miraya ross's (2020) work on Black educational fugitive space. This work comes out of her own experience as a Black girl navigating public school as a student, teacher, and researcher. Situating the current U.S. educational landscape as "the aftermath of segregation" due to the endemic nature of anti-blackness, ross posits Black educational fugitive space as "both departure and refuge from the gratuitous violence of the afterlife of school segregation and spawns the possibilities for rebirth and resistance" (p. 48). Finding ross's work provided confirmation for the ways that I had been working to create spaces for young Black people throughout my career.

As a Black student, teacher, and now researcher, I have experienced a range of emotions as I have come to understand just how much my schooling traumatized me—how much I still must unlearn. It is almost painful to reflect upon. And thinking about my sons and other young Black people that I know who are experiencing it right now is unbearable at times. My experience and the experiences of young Black people to which I am connected have been a major motivation for the work that I do—especially my calling to space-making. I resonate with ross's (2020) explanation about Black educational fugitive space here:

> Black educational fugitive space is born, created, and in direct response to the rampant antiblackness in the larger world, and in U.S. public schools; Black educational fugitive space is born, created, and in direct response to the rampant antiblackness in the larger world, and in U.S. public schools; it may serve as makeshift land, and provide makeshift citizenship to people whose humanity is consistently made impossible on the outside. (p. 51)

I knew what Black students were (and are) up against in the schools. I had lived through it and was at times an agent of it. And yet, we (my Black students and I) still found pockets of joy. We created them for ourselves. Finding ross's work also affirmed my Womanist alignment with and embodiment of radical subjectivity (Floyd-Thomas, 2006) discussed in chapter one—the deep inexplicable knowledge in my body which, in this case, directed me time and time again to create the spaces inside and outside of my classes for my young Black students to flourish. For many of my students, these spaces were examples of what ancestral elder scholar bell hooks called homeplace (1990). ross (2020) connects this concept to Black educational fugitive space in writing:

> … if we acknowledge the egregiousness of antiblackness, and the permanence of race demands a permanent move underground, underwater, (outer)space, what then might Black educational fugitive space look like? (pp. 51–52)
>
> [H]omeplaces then, became spaces where Black folks could reimagine blackness and develop healthy Black subjectivities. When considering Black educational fugitive space in the context of afterlife of school segregation, we may consider hooks' notion of marginality as we think about Black space as homeplace. Where homeplaces offer a space for resistance, hooks (1990) argues, "Opposition is not enough. In that vacant space after one has resisted, there is still the necessity to become. To make oneself anew." (hooks, 1990, p. 14, as quoted in ross, 2020, p. 53)

Although I didn't intellectually have hooks's homeplace concept when I was teaching, I remember students often sharing how they felt like the class was home or how the after-school space, Journey to Joy, felt like home. And ross's work builds around this concept as a guidepost for the kind of culture that those interested in facilitating Black educational fugitive space might

aim to foster. Naming these spaces as "radical sites of possibility," ross suggests that the construction of Black educational fugitive space be centered on "its usefulness for being a departure, a refuge for Black students who face the impossibility of Black humanity" (p. 53). As one committed to space-making as part of my praxis, I am encouraged by ross's work because it affirms the journey that I have been on thus far as an educator, and it shines more light on a pathway forward in creating Black educational and otherwise (Crawley, 2016) spaces.

I have been most inspired by literature about the Black Imagination because it has offered the most tangible examples of centering young Black people—in schools and community settings—to learn from their brilliance. Kelley's (2022) work laid the foundation with an understanding of the sankofic nature of the Black radical imagination as it pulls memories of resistance forward to help fuel the collective movement for liberation now. And I was grateful for the way this text centered young people as some of the primary actors who continue the work of creating pockets of resilience and joy. The literature has shown that the work of Black Imagination is multiplied in culture—music, poetry, spiritual practices—and has also been concretized in educational settings through intentional spaces for BIPOC students. The Black imagination is vast and is intertwined in all Black Life (Cooper, 2018). It has the power to start trends that can shift culture. A portal back in time and into the future, the Black Imagination carries an immense amount of power for transformation of people and spaces and places as the literature in this section has shown. It is what helps Black people (re)member (Dillard, 2022) themselves in the present and emphatically proclaim that there are Black people in the future. This is the purpose and work of Afrofuturism. In the following section, I will discuss literature on the topic of Afrofuturism and share its relevance to my scholarship.

Afrofuturism Research

Afrofuturism is a culmination of all that I have discussed so far. It encompasses Black joy and the Black Imagination. It is the refusal to accept a future that holds death as the destiny of Afro-diasporic people. It intentionally creates alternative futures in which black people are completely free from systems and ideologies that oppress them. Afrofuturism is simultaneously an act of resistance against and indifference to a white supremacist heteronormative capitalist society. The two sub-themes that emerged from this body of literature were: (1) Afrofuturism and the power of speculation, and (2) Afrofuturism and memory.

Afrofuturism and the Power of Speculation

Bettina Love (2019) borrows some powerful words about Afrofuturism from South African writer and Afrofuturist Lindokuhle Nkosi. Love writes, "imagining yourself in the future is not revolutionary, it is survival" (Nkosi, 2015, as quoted in Love, 2019, p. 102). Speculative fiction has become a tool within the Black imagination to create alternative futures (Jackson & Moody-Freeman, 2009; Mann, 2022). Furthermore, the speculative fiction in graphic form concretizes future Black living because Black future life begins with the illustrated visions and colors on the page. Mann (2022) discusses this "figuring" of Black life in this way: "The graphic form thus uniquely figures Black life, enabling fantasies of aliveness that carry with them determinative investments in decarceration, prison abolition, and the end of anti-Black empire" (p. 640). Other Black Afrofuturistic writers like Octavia Butler and N.K. Jemison have used this strategy of speculation in both imagining and foretelling the trajectory of society—always with Black people at the helm of the stories—navigating life. Their work presents examples of the ways Black people imagine themselves in the futures--because Black people are in the future. Speculative fiction writers offer stories of futuristic Black prosperity and imaginative predictions

of how Black people will survive the outcome of a production-driven and ecologically devastated society (Butler, 2012).

More relevant to my work is Jones and Howard's (2022) work on redefining daydreaming in STEM classrooms using two Black speculative fiction freedom dreaming tools: critical imagination and self-expression. The two Black Feminist authors (who are also cousins) suggest a new framework, "generative-expression," to engage in daydreaming in the classroom that would reenter this act as "an African birthright and a responsibility they have to their communities to imagine a thriving Black future…" (p. 4). They define generative-expression as "the ability to engage with both the design and the language of futurity in a way that creates or supports Afrofuturist technology and artifacts through storytelling" (p. 3). This work suggests that the daydreams of Black students could actually be the beginning of creative speculative storytelling that simultaneously holds the past with the present and creates the future. I see this as such an empowering framework, because it suggests that very many students could be experiencing classrooms as portals into learning through imagination. It argues that learning is still occurring even within daydreaming. This framework speaks to students holding history within their daydreams and assuming the power and responsibility to create alternative, vibrant, and thriving futures out of that history. Jones and Howard (2022) go on to write,

> This is a first step towards redefining what daydreaming means in the classroom. We see it as a generative action that dispels capitalistic expectations of how education should look. The best place to do this kind of exploration is the Afrofuture. (p. 3)

I am drawn to Jones and Howard's (2022) work because it centers the power of young people as storytellers. My work in this inquiry has sought to amplify the stories of joy among young Black people and to create a space, the pop-up, for them to daydream and to see those dreams come

true. I wholeheartedly believe that their stories have a great deal to teach anyone who desires to participate in creating thriving and liberatory educational spaces.

Another useful study was Nxumalo and ross's (2019) work on Black speculative fiction as a tool for imagining spaces in environmental education for Black children. Their work uses speculative fiction to disrupt the dominant narratives that exclude Black children from educational spaces in nature. Situating themselves in hooks's (1990) conceptualization of the margins, Nxumalo and ross seek to "envision a world where Black students and educators resist antiblackness, Black erasure, and settler colonialism in environmental education and center the historical, contemporary, and futuristic Black relationships to the environment" (p. 508). They disrupt narratives of racial innocence and ecological ignorance of Black children as they share fictitious stories of young Black people living in futuristic worlds where they are thriving in nature while overcoming the reality of ecological devastation. Describing the Black fugitive educational space of these stories, Nxumalo and ross write,

> Play, embodied encounters with the outdoors, humor, activism, environmental science, environmental racism, history, Black and Indigenous geographies, and more, are all necessary parts of Black space in environmental education for young children. (p. 520)

My work is rooted in the same Afrofuturistic ground as Nxumalo and ross's. Whereas they are using speculative fiction to imagine Black spaces, as a practitioner-scholar, I am seeking to build these kinds of spaces as a part of my praxis. I have committed to trying to facilitate the "not yet" in the now as a pathway towards thriving futures for young Black people by creating pockets of joy.

Afrofuturistic speculation is a tool of the Black Imagination, and it has been used for a long time to imagine and foretell beautiful Black futures. It creates spaces right now for the not

yet. The studies in this section offered two ways speculation can create spaces for young Black people—speculative fiction literature and daydreaming as speculation in the classroom. I am most encouraged by Jones and Howard's (2022) work because it takes a stigmatized reality that Black students and their teachers live and observe everyday (daydreaming in class) and reframes it away from deficit thinking towards the possibilities that can emerge. Although the studies are discussing different disciplines (creative writing, education, qualitative research), they are each rooted in the unwavering belief that there are Black people thriving in the future and that young Black people can help imagine us into that future. And this imagining is not new. In fact, the act of remembering has been a critical part of survival for Black people. And the strategy of remembering —harnessing our memories as resistance—continues to be a pathway for living into our collective liberation. In the following section, I will discuss the subtheme of Afrofuturism and memory.

Afrofuturism and Memory

Afrofuturism and memory emerged as a second sub-theme in my review. Reaching back to a pillar within my research paradigm, Dr. Cynthia Dillard's (2022) endarkened feminist epistemological frame of (re)membering offers a model for operationalizing memory towards brighter Black futures. She writes,

> Marshaling the prefix (re-) in parentheses is my way of (re)minding all of us that Black people have inherently and always existed as brilliant holders of knowledge, culture, and humanity. Thus, (re)membering is not an initial or original (re)cognition of Blackness: it is used to (re)mind us all of what Black people have always known about ourselves in contexts that consistently act otherwise. (Dillard, 2021, p. xv)

Dr. Dillard's words have been a guiding light to me over the past few years, and though her work is not explicitly situated in Afrofuturistic discourse, her commitment to helping Black people (especially educators) learn to (re)member what they have learned to forget (Dillard, 2012) grows from the same source. Dr. Dillard's latest work (2021) chronicles trips to Ghana with Black women graduate student educators. She seeks to help them regain perspective on their purpose as Black women educators in the U.S. context by (re)membering the origins of their heritage. It is a remarkable example of creating space for the work and healing that comes with memory.

Connecting memory back to joy, theologian, author and artist Sarah Shin (2020) offers a perspective of black joy as a practice of procedural memory-building that subverts and resists the residual systemic violence enacted upon Black people by a dominant white supremacist culture in the United States. She argues that gathering to feast, among other rituals, is a way of creating memories to access for joy making. I am adding Dillard's (2021) and Shin's (2020) work in this section to show the interdisciplinary nature of memory work as a pathway towards flourishing Black futures.

From chronicling the history of Afrofuturism, to tracing and memorializing Black historical figures, to reclaiming and re-envisioning historical Black "mecca" geographical locations, there is growing literature to support the claim that remembering well is a practice in futurism (Davoudi, 2022; George, 2021; Sullivan, 2019; Brand, 2022; Jackson 2022). However, at present there is not an abundance of literature that explicitly discusses Afrofuturism and memory-making. Thus, I was delighted to find J. M. Jackson's (2022) recent work on the militancy of the Black memory in disrupting the dominant anti-Black reality created by white ignorance. Jackson argues that

> … the uncloaking and disrupting of white ignorance via Black resistance and remembering … acts as a countercultural weaponization of Black memory, a form of militancy that destabilizes the status quo and opens up new possibilities for imagining a freer, more just world. (p. 478)

Jackson argues that thriving Black futures can be ushered in through emphasizing collective memory of Black movements across the globe. This claim aligns with my work in continuing Black movement rituals of gathering for joy even when living in deathly situations. Gatherings then become part of the memory, as Shin's (2020) work noted, and create a portal of energy and strength—from past to present and then back to the past. Our pasts hold the healing that we need to live into thriving futures. Yosso's (2005) work challenges us to lean into the wealth of our cultures and communities, and I submit that memory is another kind of capital that minoritized people have as part of their community cultural wealth. When we can remember rightly, we can revise our stories to reflect more accurately who we have always been.

Black people have been calling out to our future Black selves and descendants in so many ways—through speculative fiction storytelling in books, as tools harnessing daydreams, and through harnessing memories to chart pathways. This calling out has simultaneously been a response to our ancestors' longings and dreaming. As Black people continue to imagine ourselves into the future, we are responding to the call of our ancestors—the call to keep going, keep resisting, and keep finding pockets of joy along the way. I am excited for this literature to continue growing with more voices and work from young Black people at the helm. Just as Jones and Howard's (2022) work centers Black students' daydreams in their use of speculative fiction, I look forward to more educational and otherwise spaces helping young Black people recognize this power of speculation and creating spaces for them to imagine into future.

Necessity for This Research

There must be an ongoing commitment to changing the conditions for Black young people right now. There is also a clear call for the continued study of Black joy and life that is not in relation to oppression as well as engaging the Black Imagination in educational spaces (Coles 2021; Dunbar, 2022). But educators cannot wait until our theoretical constructions become reality to step into liberatory praxis and take the risk of iterating between the imagining and the reality. This literature review is part of my attempt to practice what I'm preaching; diving into three bodies of extant literature that inform my topic of joy among young Black people. There is a definite gap in the literature about how young Black people define joy and what they believe to be the source of their joy in their own words. My hope is that my scholarship will begin to fill the gap with the voices of young Black people.

Conclusion

Kelley (2022) argues for a revolution of the mind which unleashes "the mind's most creative capacities, catalyzed by participation in struggles for change" (p. 210). This is the work of freedom dreaming. This literature review has been a personal practice in freedom dreaming. I have no plans to return to the traditional U.S. public school setting, but I do intend to continue educating—my children, my neighbors, the young Black people in my community, people who care about young Black people, myself. I feel called to be a part of this "revolution of the mind" for as many young Black people (and people in general) as I can. Bettina Love defines freedom dreaming in this way:

> Personally and collectively, freedom dreaming for intersectional social justice is what movements are made of; they start off as freedom dreams molded by resistance, self-determination, and struggle. Freedom dreaming is imagining worlds that are just,

> representing people's full humanity, centering people left on the edges, thriving in solidarity with folx from different identities who have struggled together for justice, and knowing that dreams are just around the corner with the might of people power. (Love, 2019, p. 103)

It is important to make the connection between Black joy and freedom dreaming. The "isness" of the two feed off each other; freedom dreams bring joy and then joy reciprocates with inspiration for more freedom dreaming. Love (2019) goes on to say, "Freedom dreams are brought to life through joy and love of dark people's light. Joy makes the quest for justice sustainable" (p. 120). And this quest for justice has often looked like Black people imagining ways out of none. It looks like envisioning futures of thriving black life and living. This imagining and envisioning is itself an act of resistance to the majoritarian foreshadowing of Black death and dying. Our resistance requires all three—Black Joy, the Black Imagination, and Afrofuturism.

Although the Cultural Foundations founders and their successors may not have called themselves social justice educators, they were committed to critical analysis *and* action outside of the academy (Tozer, 2018). I am a cultural foundations scholar and social justice educator with a commitment to a liberatory praxis that incorporates ongoing participation in collective action in the world. In this season as a graduate student, this literature review has been a part of my liberatory praxis. I have shared literature around Black joy, the Black Imagination, and Afrofuturism to situate the critical work of joy among young Black people. I hope to contribute their stories of joy to the conversations around transforming educational and otherwise (Crawley 2016) spaces for young Black people.

CHAPTER III: ARTS-BASED AND COMMUNITY-ENGAGED METHODOLOGY

This critical arts-based qualitative inquiry was centered around the following questions: (a) *How do young Black people (ages 7–15) define and maintain joy?* and (b) *What lessons can young Black people teach about joy?* The data collection for this inquiry was within the context of the latest iteration of Journey to Joy (J2J)—the initiative I discussed in Chapter I that began in 2019 to facilitate space for young Black people to explore joy. The current iteration occurred in late summer of 2023. It consisted of a four-day pop-up titled Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience. It was located in a historically Black urban neighborhood in the Southeast United States to be within walking distance for potential young Black participants.

Methodology

Methodologically, this inquiry process was guided by a critical arts-based approach that incorporated opportunities for visual art, play, rest, movement, music, and just being. In this chapter I present the methodology for this inquiry including the research approach, research plan, trustworthiness and ethical concerns, timeline, limitations, and a conclusion. In the following section I discuss the inspiration for using a critical arts-based methodological approach.

Critical Arts-Based Approach

I love to sing, and I consider myself a performer at heart. It is fitting then, in a critical inquiry around joy for Black young people, that I have foregrounded ways to experience what I believe is joy for myself amidst the physical, mental, and emotional labor that comes with promoting what Susan Finley (2011) calls a "radical and revolutionary aesthetic" (p. 436). I use this term to describe the kind of aesthetic that taps into the deepest well of knowledge that I believe exists within the DNA of young Black people (and all Black people), which causes us to live as if that well of knowledge can materialize to change our often-bleak realities. This

aesthetic is akin to the womanist tenet of radical subjectivity (Floyd-Thomas, 2006)—the proclivity to march to the beat of the drum that does keep step with normative tempo. I have sought to live out this kind of aesthetic as an educator and a cultural organizer.

When I was teaching the high school African American Studies course that I mentioned earlier, Wednesdays were for welcoming community members to share wisdom and knowledge from their lived experiences with the students. One particular Wednesday, Lauren D. Cunningham came in and performed an interactive mini-concert that captivated the students and me. Among many topics, Lauren sang about the hardships of living as well as having a trust in one's creative and imaginative process. One song's lyrics said, "Woke up today, wishing I could fly away. Hopped on a plane, just to realize it was a dream. It's ok to dream, it's ok to fly, it's ok to live, it's ok to die" (Cunningham, 2013). In the context of an elective (non-required) African American Studies class full of Black high school seniors who had never had a class that focused specifically on their history, these lyrics were a call towards a revolutionary aesthetic. It was an affirmation of their brilliance and imaginative capacities and a call to take risks to see their visions come to life.

This is the spirit that I have carried forward into this critical arts-based inquiry on joy among Black young people. I knew from my experiences as an educator and observations of young people in public high schools that if I was going to capture any data, I would need an adaptable methodological approach, and I began my graduate school journey with a desire to understand what I had observed as a high school teacher within my former young Black students. It seemed like joy was a phenomenon that occurred in the five-minute passing periods between classes. I wanted to know how young Black people defined this substance that kept them singing, dancing, smiling, and jovial right up until the ringing of the tardy bell for the next class. And

since I brought questions into this inquiry, it was necessary to find a methodology that could engage young Black people while also providing an enriching experience. An arts-based approach opened possibilities for this kind of engagement.

Harrington et al. (2023) introduced me to Patricia Leavy's (2020) work on arts-based research practices during a conference presentation showing an intersectional praxis that includes engaged pedagogy, arts-based research, and playback theatre. The incorporation of Playback from Harrington et al. gave a clear example of how arts-based research provides many pathways for meaning-making and consciousness-raising. Additionally, arts-based qualitative researcher Keisha Green (2020) echoes these benefits while including the impacts on the researcher. Discussing examples of "otherwise" work, Green (2020) suggests that creative research methods help us challenge conventional ways of working as we reimagine possible new or otherwise practices. I am grateful for the models of and justification for arts-based research practice that I have found in the literature, but I am most grateful for the moments I have had in this degree program where I could make the connection between arts-based research and pedagogy. These experiences, in addition to my experiences as a high school educator, helped cement the necessity of using this approach in this inquiry.

To be clear, this was social justice work grounded in a pedagogy of hope that "enacts a politics of resistance and imagines a utopian future" (Denzin, 2010, p. 111). And although I do not center joy as it relates to resistance, my inquiry embraced an emancipatory vision (Denzin, 2010) towards the transformation of educational and otherwise spaces where young Black people are welcomed. This vision connected my epistemological modes, theoretical framework and research paradigm to a critical methodological approach—critical arts-based inquiry—that aligned with my position as a critical sociological scholar. And beyond this study, I remain

committed to questioning and challenging systems of power and privilege within academia that have historically shut out minoritized people's knowledges and processes. Using an arts-based methodological approach is one way I am living out this commitment as a doctoral student. Arts-based researcher Susan Finley (2008) makes clear the critical nature of art-based research within the academy. She writes,

> By calling upon artful ways of knowing and being in the world, arts-based researchers make a rather audacious challenge to the dominant, entrenched academic community and its claims to scientific ways of knowing. In addition, arts-based methodologies bring both arts and social inquiry out of the elitist institutions of academe and art museums, and relocate inquiry within the realm of local, personal, everyday places and events. (p.2)

I was committed to the flourishing of Black people and (re)membering (Dillard, 2021) my/our brilliance before returning to the academy. My decision to engage in a methodology that would be accessible for participants maintained this commitment. I wholeheartedly aimed for my work to make a difference in the material conditions of my participants' communities and beyond.

Finley's (2008) four features of arts-based research aligned with my commitments: (a) it makes use of emotive, affective experiences, senses, and bodies, and imagination and emotion as well as intellect, as ways of knowing and responding to the world; (b) it gives interpretive license to the researcher to create meaning from experience; (c) it attends to the role of form in shaping meaning; and (d) it exists in the tensions of blurred boundaries. Given my positionality and love of performance, I resonate with these features. Validation of inner knowledge and creating space for diverse expressions of that knowledge are very important to me. And as a researcher who loves performance, I was just excited to create space for the participants to share their knowledge

on questions about their joy. I am still excited about the joy I get to experience as I find creative ways to share the knowledge I've gained in this study.

Discussing the possibilities of knowledge expression through art, Eliot Eisner (2008) emphasizes the vastness of the forms of representation for presenting knowledge and argues that they "give us access to expressive possibilities that would not be possible without their presence" (p. 4). I chose an arts-based approach because I wanted to offer the young people as many forms of knowledge expression as I had resources to provide. I had questions about what I thought may be joy among young Black people, but the assumption of joy was based on *my* position and experience. I sought to understand how the young Black participants in this study would name, define, and maintain what I called joy. My questions and research plan were the beginning of a metaphorical call and response song—my call to young Black people to respond about this substance that I am calling joy. And one primary way I made this call was through facilitating a space for artistic expression as a means of learning and understanding the knowledge that they had to share about joy.

My decision to draw on my lived experiences and weave call and response into this critical arts-based inquiry was inspired by S. R. Toliver's (2022) groundbreaking text *Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork*, in which she explained that she chose to engage Dr. Cynthia Dillard's methodology of surrender by "centering a research process that focused on the synergy" (p. xxv) during the writing workshops between her and the Black girls in her study. Additionally, I am inspired by Toliver's articulation of "methodological piecing" as a central process to determining "how the girls' stories were stitched together, adding to the larger quilt of Black life" (p. xxvii). Finding Toliver's work spurred my imagination and encouraged me to claim the audacity of creation within me. And so, Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy

Art Experience was both my offering of some summer fun and a call from the creative within me to the creative spirits in the young participants.

I joined the long line of qualitative, multimodal researchers (Denzin 2010) who use their pens, voices, paintbrushes, cameras, and bodies to resist rigid academic structures (Finley, 2011). The Joy Pop-Up was the primary container for art-based methods that brought young Black people together for collective embodied and multimodal experiences which welcomed them to feel deeply and fully. I used participant artwork, participant and co-researcher created photos, co-researcher field notes, and my own lived experience of the pop-up as data for making meaning towards the heart of what I wanted to understand—namely, what is the substance that brings young Black people to and sustains them in feeling fully alive, in having joy. Finley (2011) emphasizes that "Arts-based research makes use of affective experiences, senses, and emotions. Its practitioners explore the bounds of space and place where the human body is a tool for gathering and exploring meaning in experience" (p. 444). The Joy Pop-Up was my attempt at a space for the democratization of knowledge production—an opportunity for the young Black people who participated to explore and practice what they know about joy and to do it in ways that included and moved beyond the spoken and written word.

Research Process

The following section will discuss the research process including: (a) the inquiry context, (b) recruitment, training, and preparation of co-researchers, (c) recruitment and description of participants, (d) a snapshot of the pop-up, (e) data production, and (f) analysis. My research plan began as a second iteration of the initiative Journey to Joy, that I discussed earlier. I hoped to create a similar container to conduct research about joy. The research plan went through several iterations as I tried to be realistic about what was possible in the timeframe in which I hoped to

do the research. With the help of peer thought-partners and an academic mentor, I finally landed on the 4-day pop-up idea. As I shared in the last section, I was committed to the arts-based approach, given my experiences. And I was confident it would be well received by young participants. I was less confident about how I was going to execute it all, especially if there would be adults willing to be participants in the experience. Nevertheless, I moved forward with the idea, and I am so glad I did.

Research Context

It is important to share a small note about my process in building the pop-up container before I give the fuller context. What I began to realize just a few months before the pop-up was that although I was going to be observing and asking these young people to think about joy through different mediums, the truth is that I had already begun creating this container in my mind. Fully aware of my insider–outsider positionality, I felt qualified to create this container because I was using my years of experience as a Black woman educator, a Black woman faith-based community-building practitioner, Black woman youth caretaker, a Black mama, and Black auntie to create what I thought would be a welcoming space for young Black people to think about what brings them joy. I knew it was going to be an experiment, inspired by Journey to Joy (the initiative I founded in 2019). In that 2019 initiative, I drew on what I now know as my own community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) (particularly aspirational and social) to create a container that was initially for young people at the local high school. My current research container, The Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience, was another iteration of this joy-making space. I wanted to build a space and fill it with as many options as possible for the young people who would come. And I had been imagining it well before the summer of 2023.

This inquiry lived in the context of a summer experience called the Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience (the next iteration of the initiative mentioned in chapter one). The Joy Pop-Up was a four-consecutive-day experience in the late summer of 2023 at a neighborhood park in an urban city in the Southeast United States. The park is located in a historically thriving Black neighborhood that has been home to many prominent Black community organizers and leaders. Unfortunately, the neighborhood has experienced substantial infrastructural decline over the past half-century for various reasons and many neighbors' socioeconomic positions include financial hardships that sometimes lead to housing and food insecurity. I anchored the inquiry at this park because many of the possible participants had attended programming and events at the park, many of which I have helped to facilitate through the neighborhood association or other faith-based organizations. It has a shelter to protect from rain, a power source for any electricity needs, and has become a familiar place of gathering for young people and their families. It is also the neighborhood in which I live.

I came to this inquiry as a neighbor with existing relationships with the young people I hoped to engage. I have lived in the neighborhood for 5 years and currently serve as the secretary of the neighborhood association (an organization with the mission of community building). I have also participated in summer programming through my faith community and most of the young people who participated in the Joy pop-up knew me and my sons, Phillip and Morris. Both my position and the familiar place (the neighborhood park) where the pop-up was held created the contextual container necessary to engage these particular young people around the concept of joy—to make a metaphorical call to them through the Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience.

Co-Researcher Recruitment, Training, and Preparation

The co-researchers in this inquiry were: Ja'Myah Carthorne, Gabby Simpson, Emmanuel Jones, and Brianna Thomas-Forster. The inspiration to invite co-researchers into this work came from two mentors within the field of community-engaged research. I was encouraged to pull in the former participants of Journey to Joy who had prior knowledge of the concept of collectively exploring joy and also were near peers. This means the co-researchers' ages were close to the participant age range. I knew I would be receiving funding from a departmental grant and offered to pay them $500 each for being co-researchers. I explained that their participation would consist of pre-study research ethics training, being present as a participant-observer during the four pop-up days, and participation in an analysis retreat. They all agreed that they would be in town and present.

Having worked with young people in community-based cultural organizing and having worked with these young people in particular just two years earlier, I knew I needed to keep us connected in the months leading up to the study. So we had several meetups over food as a part of our study preparation. These meetups were very informal, catching up on each other's lives. Amid our conversations, when it was appropriate, I would share any pertinent information about the study or give important reminders. I have included a timeline with images for the recruitment and preparation process as well as co-researcher descriptions.

April 20, 2023—Invitation to the Group. In the spring of 2023, I sent a text message to four former J2J participants. Only three received it because Emmanuel's number had changed. Once we were able to all get on the same text thread, I pitched the idea of having them as co-researchers for this study. This initial text served as an initial ask of the co-researchers into the work. I am including a picture of the text message to show how I communicated with the co-

researchers. Community-engaged work often requires researchers to know how to communicate in non-academic language to ensure community partners fully understand the work.

Illustration 5. Co-Researcher Invitation Text #1

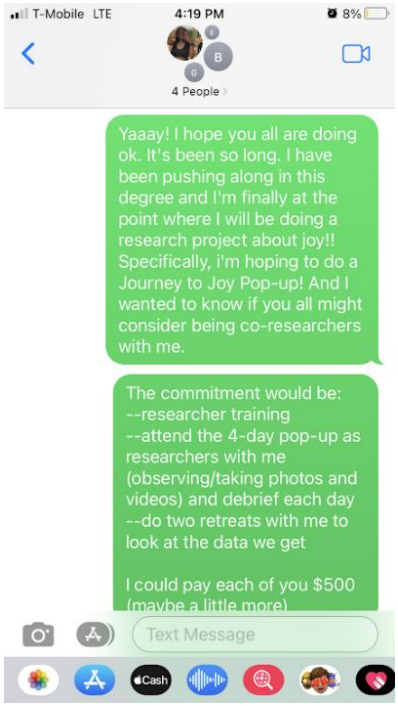
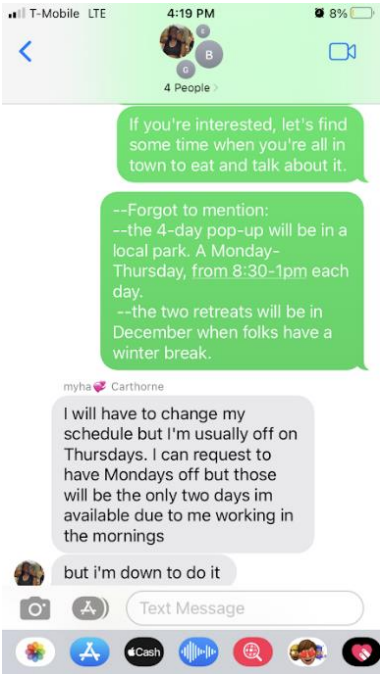


Illustration 6. Co-Researcher Invitation Text #2



May 14, 2023—Connection Meetup at Mellow Mushroom. This meeting had two purposes: (a) to reconnect us, and (b) to get co-researcher confirmations about attending the upcoming research ethics training. I paid for this out of pocket. I sent a follow-up text a few days afterwards.

Wednesday May 17—Community Co-Researcher Ethics Training. The Institutional Review Board process of the UNCG Office of Research Integrity requires that community-based researchers complete research ethics training and receive a background check to be an official UNCG volunteer. Dr. Lalenja Harrington, Dr. Kathleen Edwards, and myself collaborated on how to facilitate the approved research ethics training. To accommodate everyone's schedule, we decided to do a virtual training using Zoom. Our goal was to make it as interactive and accessible as possible. This included using examples and activities that were relatable to the co-researcher. See Appendix A for a copy of the approved community research ethics training. The training lasted 2.5 hours. Each of the four co-researchers received a $25 visa gift card and certificate of completion. I paid for the gift cards out of pocket and delivered the certificates and gift cards to co-researchers' homes the week after the training.

May 19, 2023—Group Name Changed to J2J Researchers. There was a very powerful moment that happened just a few days after the ethics training. I opened the co-researcher text thread and found the group name had been changed. Emmanuel Jones had changed the name of the group to J2J Researchers. I cried. This was a watershed moment because we now had a name. We were a unit and I had not been the one to make this shift, Emmanuel had.

Illustration 7. The Birth of the J2J Researchers

May 31—Connection Meeting at Hops. This was a meeting to stay connected and excited about the upcoming pop-up. I paid for the food out of pocket. We are pictured below eating together.

Illustration 8. Connection Meetup at Hops

July 4, 2023—Connection Meetup. Unfortunately, we did not capture a photo of us all this day. We met over dinner. This was a final meeting to stay connected and excited about the upcoming pop-up and to remind co-researchers to complete the background check process. I paid

for the food out of pocket. We also agreed on the date for the data analysis retreat. I will discuss this further in the data analysis section.

July 5, 2023—Check-in about Background Check. I sent one final text to remind folks to complete their background check paperwork. After everyone's background check was submitted, the J2J researchers were ready to begin the research. In the following section, co-researchers have all answered a set of questions describing themselves, and I have added a note about how I am connected to each person.

Description of Co-Researchers and Their Relationship to Erica

Co-researchers provided a picture of themselves during the ethics training and wrote their own descriptions during the analysis retreat. Their descriptions are provided below along with additional context for how I am connected to each person. They answered the following questions:

What are you doing currently? (employment, school, community work)

What is your connection to this study?

How do you think participating in this study will impact your future?

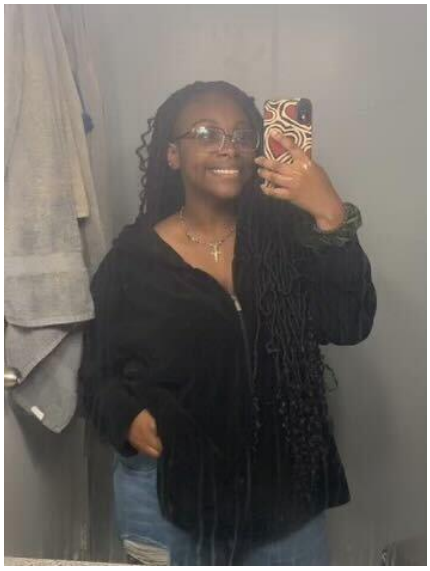
How do you cultivate joy these days?

Illustration 9. Ja'Myha Carthorne

Currently I'm sitting down holding the baby while she sleeps. The connection to the study is that I am one of the researchers. This will impact me in the future because I will be able to easily spot or recognize what joy looks like because of the faces and actions every child in the study did. I hope to do this research again and to be a part of something that brings people, especially kids together. I cultivate joy by seeking positivity in my everyday life activities.

Myha was one of the original J2J members when it began on a local high school campus in the city in the spring of 2020. Once the pandemic hit, she often helped me coordinate the virtual and online gatherings of this group. She was almost at term with her pregnancy when the pop-up occurred and had her baby shortly afterwards. We continue to be connected through impromptu check-ins and occasional babysitting her dear baby girl, who I have lovingly given the title junior co-researcher in training.

Illustration 10. Gabby Simpson



Currently I am in school at UNC-Charlotte in my junior year. I'm an English and Journalism minor and major. I am an old member of J2J with Mrs. Erica. She asked me to

be a part of the research for her study on joy with black youth. This will give me a new mindset and hope for the younger generation. Also, it leaves me a hope for them to keep this support (cultivating love for the youth and the world). Also, it gives them a new point of view to the world. I cultivate joy with my community and doing stuff I love, whether that is sitting in my bed watching TV or something else.

I became connected to Gabby in the summer of 2020 when one of the original members (Ja'Myha) invited her to come visit one of our gatherings. After that first meeting, she began coming to gatherings consistently until they were paused in the Fall of 2021. We continue to be connected via impromptu text check-ins and meet-ups when she is in GSO on break from college.

Illustration 11. Emmanuel Jones

I am currently a secondary education math major at Winston-Salem State University. I am a part of Talented in Motion, a dance organization where I served as the organizational mister for two consecutive years. I am now the public relations and media representative. I'm a former Campus Ambassador and a former member and senate

member for another organization—Student Support and Protection. I am connected to the study through my past relationship to Mrs. Erica and her journey to Joy program. This study will impact me in the future as my career will be with education and kids. I believe it will help me build a stronger connection. I cultivate joy by creating an energy for myself. I believe in energy and I believe if I want a positive outcome, I need a neutral mindset. Life happens, but one bad moment shouldn't ruin my day.

Emmanuel was among several new young Black folks who were invited by Myha into J2J in the summer of 2020. I was and continue to be so grateful that he found us. Of the many gifts he brought to the group, one of them was his mom, Nikki, who was the founder and owner of an arts-based youth empowerment non-profit in GSO. We shared space in a local office building throughout the summer of 2020, and she provided art sessions to the J2J members. Emmanuel is so wise and always keeps a positive attitude. He has helped me hold it together many times.

Illustration 12. Brianna "Bri" Thomas-Forster

I'm giving myself a pause on my school life until next year so I'm working until then. I'm planning on working on myself physically and mentally until then which will go great!! I am a co-researcher that is helping to find what gives young black people joy.

> This study will help me in being able to be around kids without worrying about if they're uncomfortable or if I'm comfortable enough without worrying about if we are connecting on anything relatable. I am happy about this research project and being a part of it. Being able to connect with the people who are a part of this project, like the other researchers and the kids, is helping me more than I realized. I cultivate joy through my thoughts, emotions, and my hobbies. I cultivate joy through stuff that helps me be a calmer and more relaxed me.

Bri is one of the original members of J2J from its beginnings at local high school campus in the spring of 2020. Bri has consistently reminded me to think about those who might be excluded in a space. We continue to be connected through impromptu text check-ins and meetups. Bri is always reminding me to slow down and pay attention to what's around me.

Asking the co-researchers into this work increased my workload in many ways, sinceI had to do a lot of teaching and logistical work to keep us connected throughout this process. However, it was undoubtedly one of the best decisions I made during this research process. They kept me grounded in ways I didn't know I needed to be. They were brilliant in helping to navigate the pop-up space. Their analysis of the data was invaluable. I am eternally grateful for the ways they checked on me and told me how proud they were to be a part of this work. I am humbled that they said yes. In the next section, I will discuss participant recruitment and offer descriptions of the youth participants.

Participant Recruitment and Descriptions

This inquiry engaged 14 young Black people ranging in age from seven to fifteen years old in an urban city in the Southeast United States, who were at least loosely connected to each other through neighborhood proximity and/or institutional connections (i.e., school or church or

other organized neighborhood programming). It is important to note that five additional neighborhood non-participant youth dropped in on the pop-up on one or more days. Since I had not obtained signed consent and assent forms for them, co-researchers did not collect any data related to them. In the early summer of 2023 before the 4-day pop-up began, I recruited participants by hand-delivering a kid-friendly verbal invitation along with the recruitment script (see Appendix B) and consent and assent forms (see Appendix C) about the research study to the young people and their parent(s)/guardian(s). Adult participants also completed consent forms for participation (Appendix C).

Given my relationship to the young people in the neighborhood and my desire to hear from a wide age range of young Black people, I engaged in purposeful sampling (Edmonds, 2019). This means I recruited specific participants across the age range (7–15) of the study in an attempt to gain a larger breadth of data. Participants and their parents were able to ask any clarifying questions about the consent form before they signed it. If they needed additional time, I followed up with them within 24 hours via text or call to confirm whether they consented or declined to participate in the study. Although I had consent and assent forms for eighteen young people, only 14 participated in the study. I later learned that a family emergency prevented the other four from participating. I have included a table with youth participant descriptions including the connection (if any) that they had to me.

Table 1. Participant Descriptions

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Race	Familial Ties	Ties to Erica	Description of the participant disposition
Stephen	13	Black	Related to Isaiah	Direct neighbor; Know from neighborhood association events in the park (known since 2018)	Stephen is the youngest of two siblings. He was initially very hesitant to participate in pop-up activities on Day 1 (chose to feed the neighborhood cats instead on the outskirts of park and then warmed up to

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Race	Familial Ties	Ties to Erica	Description of the participant disposition
					participate). Isaiah is very outspoken and seemed to enjoy bantering with other participants. He spent a lot of time with Kevin (they shadowboxed a lot) and Yariah (whom he knew and had much in common with from school). He spent a good deal of time at the rest and recline station.
Isaiah	15	Black	Related to Stephen	Direct neighbor; Know from neighborhood association events in the park (known since 2018)	Isaiah is the oldest of two siblings. On day 1, he was reserved in talking, but went directly to the art station after he arrived and spent a lot of his time at the art station each day. He was also often seen up dancing or talking and laughing with Nick and Mike (they knew each other from school and from spending time in the neighborhood).
Nick	15	Black	none	Formally met during door-to-door recruitment, but Erica has seen and talked to him next door at Stephen and Isaiah's house	Nick was quiet and reserved at first, but was immediately social with Mike and Isaiah. He spent a lot of time at the art station; but by Day 3, he was up walking around a lot during the pop-up time.
Mike	15	Black	Sibling to Yariah	Formally met during door-to-door recruitment	Mike was quiet and spent most of his time at the art station or up dancing or talking and laughing with Nick and Isaiah (they knew each other from school and from spending time in the neighborhood).
Ashley	13	Black	Sibling of James	None (from VA and visiting father who lives in neighborhood)	Ashley smiled a lot and was quiet. She spent most of her time close to her brother James between the art station and jewelry-making station, frequently talking to other participants who happened to be at the station where she was sitting.
James	12	Black	Sibling of Ashley	None (from VA and visiting father who lives in neighborhood)	James was quiet and spent most of his time close to his sister Ashley between the art station and jewelry-making station talking to other participants who happened to be at the station where he was sitting.

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Race	Familial Ties	Ties to Erica	Description of the participant disposition
Zion	14	Black	Sibling of Zena	None—not from the neighborhood (recruited by Danielle)	Zion was quiet and stayed close to his sister Zena for the first day that he attended the pop-up (he came on Day 2). On days 3–4 he was often up walking around between the rest and recline areas and the jewelry table. He seemed to float between talking with Mike, Nick, and Isaiah and then with Stephen and Yariah. He often was carrying some kind of fidget tool in his hand.
Zena	14	Black	Sibling of Zion	None—not from the neighborhood (recruited by Danielle)	Zena was gregarious and talkative. She spent most of her time at the jewelry station dancing, talking, and attempting to make jewelry with Danielle. On day 4 she spent a lot of time running/chasing Isaiah.
Danielle	14	Black	None	Know each other from neighborhood association events in the park (since 2018)	Danielle was quiet and spent most of her time at the jewelry table talking and attempting to make jewelry. She spent most of her time with Zena.
Kevin	13	Mixed Race (Black and White)	None	Erica has seen and talked to him next door at Stephen and Isaiah's house; know each other from neighborhood association events in the park (since 2020)	Kevin was quiet and spent time with Stephen walking around talking or shadowboxing. He spent most of his time in the rest and relaxation area and had his cell phone out more often than other participants.
Yariah	14	Black	Sibling of Mike	None (recruited by sibling Mike)	Yariah was very talkative and seemed to enjoy bantering with participants (particularly Stephen whom she knew from school). She spent most of her time in the rest and relaxation area on a bean bag chair talking.
Elise	8	Black	Sibling of Leron,cousin of Adrianne	Formally met during door-to-door recruitment	Elise was very social with most participants. She spent a lot of time doing yoga moves in the rest and recline area with other participants. She also spent time each day at the art station and a considerable amount of time at the jewelry station (enough to create a pair of earrings that she showed off to several folks). She also

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Race	Familial Ties	Ties to Erica	Description of the participant disposition
					spent a lot of time running around on the playground and through the sprinklers with her brother Leron.
Adrianne	11	Black	Cousin of Elise and Leron	Formally met during door-to-door recruitment	Adrianne was very talkative to older participants. She spent a lot of time at the art station and some time doing yoga with her younger cousin Elise. She seemed to have a posture of responsibility for Elise and Leron.
Leron	7	Black	Sibling of Elise, cousin of Adrianne	Formally met during door-to-door recruitment	Leron was quiet but always moving. One Day 2, he found the bubbles and blew them for the remainder of that day and days 3–4. He was often running in the playground or in the sprinklers in the grass with his sister Elise.

The study also included 12 adult participants. These participants were recruited from my personal network on my university campus as well as from my community organizing community. I was grateful to have the adult participants because they were often able to help younger participants with materials, reading in the quiet section, yoga practices, or just being available to talk. Since adult perspectives were not the focus of this study, their creations and experiences during the pop-up were primarily used to support or give context to new learning that emerged about the young participants' perspectives on joy. In the following section, I will offer a snapshot of the pop-up.

A Snapshot of the Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience

The pop-up took place Monday–Thursday from 9 am to 12 pm in the neighborhood park. The city park services had arrived early to drop off the trash and recycling cans as was required by the city permit. There were four trash cans and three recycling ones on the northwest side of the shelter. The port-a-potty had been delivered the day before also. It was placed on the

southeast end of the park near a tree and a fairly new black wooden food pantry box. I had come out the day before to put a lock on the door because I wanted it to be clean for the next day. The under-resourced reality of this area of the city has resulted in a large houseless population as well as a large number of neighbors with substance dependencies. I struggled internally as I realized that I was locking a resource from which many unhoused neighbors could have benefited. My decision was not in alignment with my value that everyone should have access to what they need, but instead was more aligned with the institutional systematic disappearance of those who are not seen as useful or credible agents of the institution. I still feel guilty about this. I had also come back to the park the evening before Day 1 with two dear friends and their two kids to place the nails that would hold the signs up. There were two multi-colored signs for the two ends of the shelter. They read *Welcome to the Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience.* I have added an image of the sign below.

Illustration 13. Joy Pop-Up Sign

Day 1 participants set the precedent for how the pop-up stations would look for the following three days. Adult participants, some youth participants, and co-researchers huddled up on Day 1 (and each day) for introductions. I introduced and shared the station guide for each station, then expressed that folks could use their wisdom to set up each station based on the materials that were available. And they did just that.

Each station took on a life of its own. The Tik Tok station was set up on the northeast side of the shelter with the pop-up sign and a teal curtain as its backdrop. It had a dinner tray with a table phone holder in front of the backdrop ready for participants to use their phones to create a tik tok. The station sign rested on the ground facing the backdrop. The art station spanned two tables on the west side of the shelter. There were six chairs on each side of the two tables, and an easel and a canvas in front of each chair. The station sign rested in the middle of one of the tables. Acrylic paint bottles, small paint palettes, and various stencils were spread across both tables for participants to use if and as they wished. The photovoice station (see explanation below) was on the southeast side of the shelter adjacent to the TikTok station. Two iPads, several clipboards and pencils, and the station sign were placed on a picnic table under a multi-colored beach umbrella.

Finally, the rest and recline station was constructed out in the grass in the shade of two trees on the south end of the park. On top of two outdoor rugs, there were three bean bag chairs, two floor meditation pillows, and a gray box of materials. Inside the box there were books, fidgets, affirmation cards, and a handheld wooden maze game.

The southwest side of the shelter has the only source of electricity in the park. As a result, the large speaker was plugged into the outlet here and this is also where an easel with a big sticky note pad titled Joy Playlist was placed. Diagonally across from the speaker on the opposite

side of the shelter (just beyond the TikTok station) was the food table. This table held the day's morning snacks and had a cooler with water beside it. This table was also a central location for participants to sign in, for any new people to complete consent and assent forms, and to pick up a nametag (if desired).

When participants walked into the park and under the covered shelter area, they walked past one of the two large banners that had been hung the night before. I called this space a pop-up because it is not a regular occurrence in the park and there is precedent for the concept of pop-ups in the neighborhood. When Covid-19 prevented indoor gatherings, the neighborhood association hosted pop-ups on various street corners where neighbors were invited to come craft, eat and hang out together to keep the community connected. The Joy pop-up had a similar feel to past neighborhood pop-ups with opportunities to create, eat and hang out.

The pop-up was the primary space to implement the art-based data production methods for this inquiry. Each day was centered around the same two central questions: *What is joy to you? How do you find joy?* After group check-ins and introductions, a brief framing of the day around the central questions, and a sharing each of station guides, participants were able to choose how they wanted to spend their time in each pop-up in four main ways: (a) a maker/creation station with paint or clay, (b) jewelry station (which emerged on day 2 after the Day 1 debrief), (c) a visual image/photovoice station, and (d) rest and recline station. On the first two days of the pop-up, there was also a TikTok station. But after no participants engaged in it on Day 1 or 2, co-researchers made the collective decision to replace it with card games beside the jewelry station. During each pop-up day, participants had the option to create with various art materials including mini-canvases, cameras, paint, plain and colored paper, pencils, pens, stamps, scissors, markers, and colored pencils. For movement and music, there was a co-created

living Joy Playlist, to which participants could add songs to sing and dance to. Bri, one of our co-researchers, became an unofficial DJ for the pop-up days—taking song requests and choosing songs based on how participants were vibing in a given moment.

Participants had the opportunity to take photos or videos of the joy they saw or felt around them and write a short explanation about their images. This method of data collection is called photovoice—which Glesne (2016) defines as a process in which "images are created by participants and give voice to their perspectives, apprehensions, and desires about aspects of their lives" (p. 89). I incorporated this method into the pop-ups as a station because I wanted to offer as much agency in expression to the participants as I could. This method allowed the participants to, in the words of ancestral elder-scholar Audre Lorde (1984), define themselves for themselves. Participants were encouraged to focus on the central prompts when taking photos. Each station had a visible table stand with the central prompt of the pop-up to guide participants as they engaged in the station activity. Finally, participants had the freedom to sit and read, talk, or walk/run and play in the park. In the following section, I provide a description of each station at the pop-up. These descriptions were created by co-researchers during the data analysis retreat that I will discuss in a later section. Co-researchers chose a station to describe and answered a set of questions to give a full description of the station. I added additional description if I felt it was necessary.

Table 2. Station Descriptions

Questions	Description
Jewelry Station (as described by Bri)	
What was available?	Bracelet-making materials like string, beads, jewelry pieces and rubber strings to make bracelets

Questions	Description
What did participants do for the most part?	The participants mostly talked and worked on their bracelets, especially the rubber bracelets. I (Bri) mostly helped with starting the bracelets and made a few for the little ones.
What was most popular at the station?	The rubber string bracelets. They needed help with the starting but afterwards they had it down packed without much help.
Which participants spent most of their time there?	It was mostly Zena, Danielle, Zion, James, and Ashley. Every once in a while there would be a few people coming over then leaving.
Rest and Recline Station (as described by Emmanuel and Erica)	
What was available?	This station had yoga mats and was further away to keep a quiet scenery. There were also meditation cushions, a box that included books, a plastic Tupperware container of fidgets, a mirror, and a few handheld games. There were also affirmation cards.
What did participants do for the most part?	Participants were mostly sitting and talking, doing yoga, reading, playing with fidgets, or blowing bubbles.
What was most popular at the station?	The yoga mats, most definitely.
Which participants spent most of their time there?	Kevin, Yariah, Stephen, were often in the rest and recline area. Elise was often seen doing yoga in the recline area.
Art Station (as described by Gabby)	
What was available?	The art station had painting materials—canvases, brushes, plastic cup, Clorox wipes, hand wipes. There were two chairs on each side of the two tables. On Tuesday, clay was added, and participants didn't make many creations from it. This station was in the middle of everything under the shelter each day and served as the unofficial center.

Questions	Description
What did participants do for the most part?	Most participants started at the art station on all the four days. Several participants returned to create more art, which mainly was on the canvases throughout each pop-up session
What was most popular at the station?	Most of the participants liked painting canvases using the stencils or other materials provided to create shapes on their canvases.
Which participants spent a majority of their time there?	Isaiah, Adrianne, Elise, Leron, Ashley, and James. Nick and Mike spent a substantial amount of time there too.
Photovoice Station (as described by Erica)	
What was available?	The photovoice station had two iPads, several clipboards and pens, and photovoice explanation cards.
What did participants do for the most part?	When participants approached (or sometimes were recruited) to the station, they were invited to take a photo of something that brought them joy. Then participants completed an explanation card for the photo.
What was most popular at the station?	The iPads were the most popular.
Which participants spent a majority of their time there?	This station didn't have as many participants naturally wandering over to engage. Each participant completed at least one photo and explanation card during the pop-up, but several participants engaged multiple times.

Data Production

I used the phrase data production (Glesne, 2016) instead of data collection because the co-researchers and I were active in "*producing* the data … through questions and social interactions" (Glesne, 2016, p. 44) that occurred throughout the pop-up. We used the following data production methods: (a) participant observation, (b) participant-created products (images and other art creations), and (c) focus groups. I leaned into Ellingson's (2009) crystallization

framework for data production, which "combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon" (p. 4). My choice in methods was grounded first in my desire that the young Black people (my neighbors) who participated would have an amazing summer experience where they would have fun and be inspired. Secondly, as a critical qualitative researcher I also desired to have a variety of data types to more fully understand and best represent the perspectives of those who participated.

Observations. During the pop-ups, members of the research team were participant-observers—falling mostly toward the observer side of this spectrum (Glesne, 2016). Co-researchers received a fieldnote journal to record observations and share during the debriefs that occurred each day after the pop-up ended and participants had left the park. The research team used an observation guide (see Appendix D) to guide our observations during each pop-up and to systematize our debrief sessions. While participants and pop-up facilitators engaged in the activities of the pop-ups, the co-researchers and I took observational notes to capture how participants were showing up in the different areas of the pop-up.

Each morning before the pop-up started, co-researchers and I reviewed the observation guide to reorient us to our role of participant-observers. We also discussed where we would focus our observations. We did not station ourselves in particular places around the pop-up because we agreed on Day 1 that it would feel too rigid. We agreed to move around and take observations from positions that made sense in relation to how we were engaging with participants. I took care to remind co-researchers to move around at times when I noticed they were sitting together. After all, they are friends, and it was natural to gravitate towards each other. Debriefs after each day helped me create detailed descriptions of the pop-up settings and

capture more dynamic social interactions than if I had been the only researcher. The observation guide helped all researchers to carefully observe, systematically experience, and consciously record as many details and patterns throughout the pop-up as possible (Glesne, 2016).

Visual Creations (Participant and Researcher Created). Visual artwork and images created by participants was an additional source of data production. These artifacts looked like many painted canvases, earrings and bracelets, photovoice images, a sidewalk chalk of the word J-O-Y, a 3-D letter, and images taken by researchers. The research team decided that we would each take images as we needed and share them in our secured online drive. Each day, the research team encouraged participants to complete a photovoice image and explanation card as well. It was challenging at times to get participants to come to the photovoice station, so by Day 2, we agreed to periodically take the iPads and explanation cards around to other stations to ask participants into the activity. Thankfully this yielded more photovoice images and explanations. There was an abundance of painted canvases—most of which participants took home. Aside from photovoice images, participants created more painted canvases than other tangible creations.

Photovoice. Photovoice is a methodological technique grounded in three understandings: (a) Freire's critical education approach—that anyone is capable of looking critically at the world, (b) feminist theory—which seeks to foreground minoritized voices in the public sphere, and (c) a community-based perspective on using photography for social change (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). This method is closely aligned with my theoretical framework and naturally flows from my Black Feminist and Womanist epistemological commitments because it offers a megaphone to the voices of those whose perspectives have been historically silenced in academia—young Black people. Furthermore, as a community-engaged scholar, I find that photovoice offers a

pathway for research that is community-engaged—growing from the participatory action research (PAR) principle that emphasizes research *with* participants as co-creators of knowledge for the possibility of community transformation. Although participants were given the option to choose how to engage with the stations during the pop-up, as mentioned in the previous section, each participant was encouraged to create at least one image and write a short explanation each day. Participants used the provided iPad to take pictures.

Focus Groups. I had hoped to have focus groups in the format of party dialogues where participants would have the opportunity to view and engage with each other's images and videos through guided discussion. However, after challenges confirming participant recruits, and uncertainty about attendance at the pop-up each day, I made the decision to incorporate focus group questions into the pop-up days. I used the popcorn strategy for asking questions. This looked like asking a question and waiting for participants to answer at will. I asked questions on Days 2 and 4 during lunch time. I have included the amended focus group questions in Appendix E. All images were stored in a password-protected drive. Additionally, recorded focus group discussions were transcribed and then stored in a password-protected drive. My decision to use focus groups as a method aligns closely with my position as a consciousness-raising, cultural organizing educator.

Although I made the decision to pivot the format of the focus groups, I leaned on the multifunctionality (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011) of this method in this inquiry, particularly the pedagogic and research function. As a critical pedagogue, I take seriously Freire's call to harness the power of dialogue in search of collective freedom (Freire & Macedo, 2016), and I believe the co-creation of knowledge is done best in communal spaces. This aligns with the community-based epistemological principle that knowledge production comes from community

assets (Shah, 2020); I believe the young Black participants' narratives and knowledge are the assets in this inquiry because they can best tell their truths.

My hope with the focus group discussions was to glean more from participants than the research was able to get in observations alone. In their work on analyzing talk and text, Perakyla and Ruusuvuori (2011) share that interviewing allows the researcher to "reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes," and is a "convenient way of overcoming distances both in space and time" (p. 529). I am glad I included this method because I wanted the participants' perspectives and experiences to be central as I moved toward meaning-making in analysis of the data.

Data Analysis: A Multilayered Approach

The first layer in the process of thematic analysis (Glesne 2016)—searching for themes and patterns—occurred during the 4-day pop-up as data was produced. The research team kept field note journals for thoughts, observations, and the necessary reflexive work that critical qualitative inquiry requires. As a participant-observer, keeping my sociological muscles engaged, I looked early on for themes, patterns, and connections between interactions as the pop-up unfolded. Glesne (2016) emphasizes that an intentional effort in analysis at the beginning of the study will ideally lead to "new observations and questions" in preparation for the "more concentrated period of analysis" after data production is complete (p. 134).

Once each day of the pop-up ended at noon, and the U-Haul was packed, the research team debriefed the pop-up session beginning with a 10-minute silent journaling period followed by a 30–40 minute discussion guided by the following questions adapted from those suggested by Saldaña and Omasta (2018): (a) How am I feeling about today? (b) How does it compare to what I was thinking before the day? (c) What do my observations communicate about the

participants and joy? and (e) What do I think needs to change for tomorrow? By using the same debrief questions after each day in addition to facilitators having individual field journals, we were able to capture initial patterns emerging across the participant group.

A second layer of meaning-making from the data was reflective memos from my observation notes, co-researcher journals, and debriefs. Although I did not get to spend as much time as I had planned due to other responsibilities arising, I took time to reflect in my journal on the day—how I was feeling and any thoughts and observations I had about the day. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) define analytic memos as, "extended researcher commentary stimulated by field notes (and other data such as documents and interview transcripts) … sites for researchers to 'dump their brains' freely in their own words about what they've observed" (p. 54). In my personal time, I engaged in a similar (abbreviated) process as in the research team debriefs—asking myself the same questions as the co-researchers. Having this process helped me reflect on each day in a systematic way, which added to the overall rigor of the analysis. The next layer of analysis would begin at our scheduled data analysis retreat about one month after the pop-up.

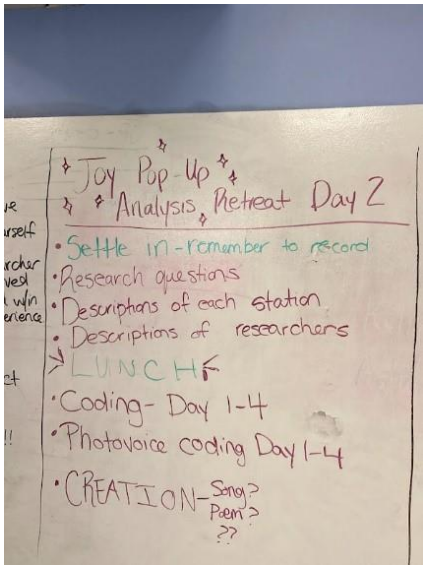
Data Analysis Retreat. Earlier in the spring, the research team had agreed on a weekend that we would all be in town to do the analysis retreat. We planned for the retreat to last from Friday evening through Sunday afternoon. Using my institutional connections as an employee at the local university, I reserved a room on campus for the Friday night session. On the Friday of the analysis retreat, Bri and Gabby and I were in person while Emmanuel and Ja'Myha joined via zoom. Everyone brought or ordered their own food, and I provided brownies and tea. The goal of this session was to reorient ourselves with our field observation journals and the research questions. We took time to look through our journals and share first thoughts about what was coming up for us. Some initial thoughts that came out in relation to the questions were:

community, culture, being outside, trying activities together, and culture. I have added an image from the first day of the analysis retreat.

Illustration 14. Day 1 Analysis Retreat at the University

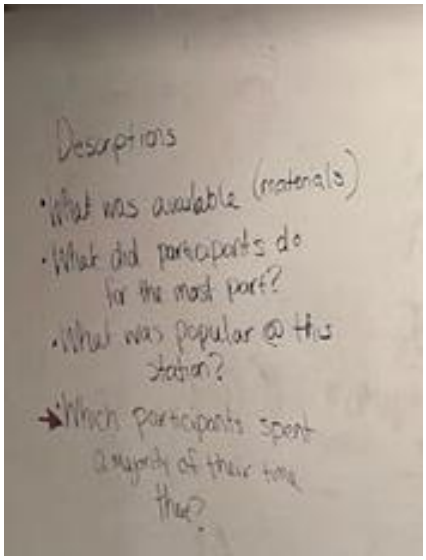
On the second day of the retreat (Saturday), Emmanuel, Gabby, Bri and I met in person at a local community organizing office space. Ja'Myha joined us online via zoom. We posted the research questions and an agenda for the day on the white board. I have shared an image of the white board and the agenda below.

Illustration 15. Analysis Day 2 Agenda



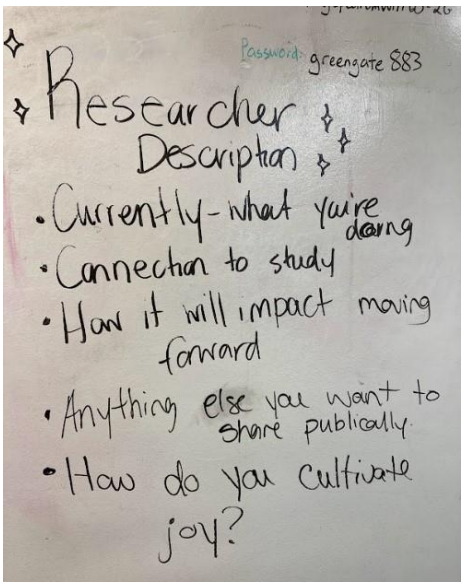
Over donuts, other snacks, and coffee, we started the morning writing the descriptions of the stations that were shared earlier. Each researcher chose a station and answered the questions in the image below.

Illustration 16. Station Description Questions



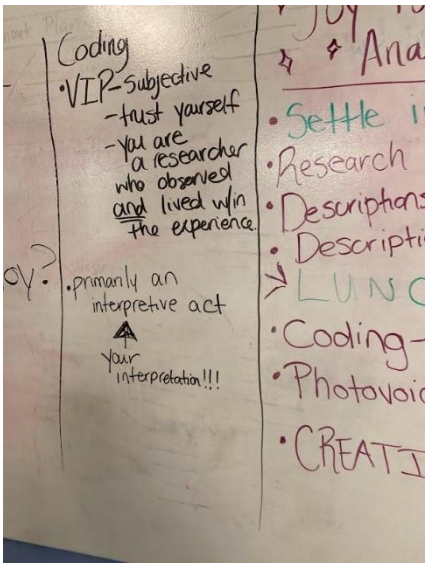
After completing station descriptions, each researcher completed a research description using the questions below as a guide.

Illustration 17. Researcher Description Questions



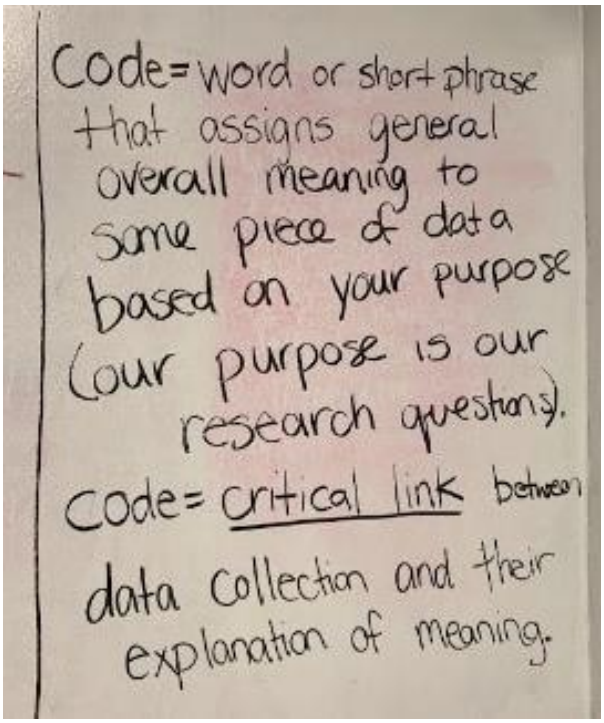
After lunch, we shifted to the process of making the initial codes. We began the afternoon session with a brief discussion on coding. Before co-researchers learned the definition of a code, it was most important to me for co-researchers to understand the subjective nature of the coding process. I wanted them to know that I trusted their intuition. I also emphasized that they needed to trust themselves in the coding process. I have included an image with bullet points that guided our pre-coding discussion.

Illustration 18. Explanation of Coding



Saldaña (2016) defines a code as "a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes … data and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes" (p. 4). Using Saldaña's (2016) text, we discussed the definition of a code (pictured below) and then practiced coding using some of the exercises in the text.

Illustration 19. Definition of Code

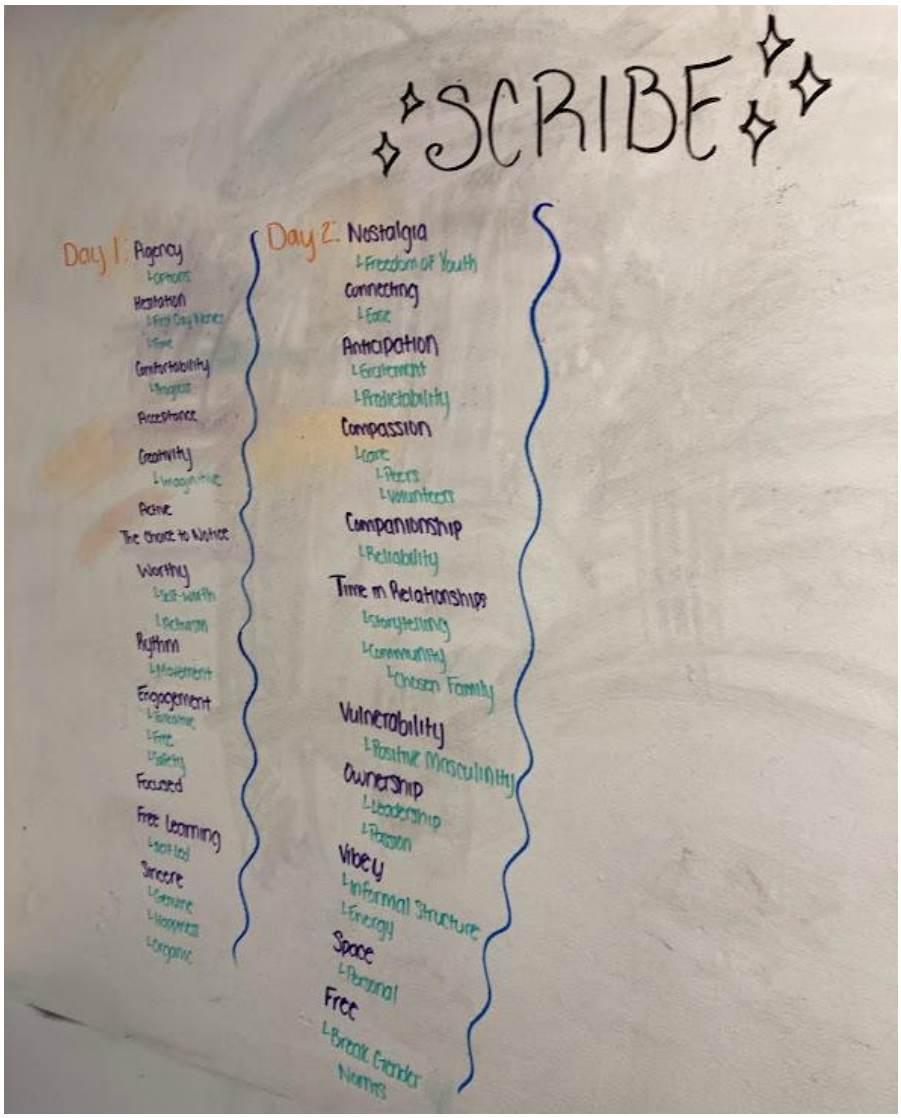


After practicing and building confidence, we turned to our observation journals and began to create codes from the Day 1 observations. We used the following process:

- 3-minute silent read of 1-2 pages from Day 1
- Rotated reading or paraphrasing our observation and giving our code
- Offered how it connected to the research questions.

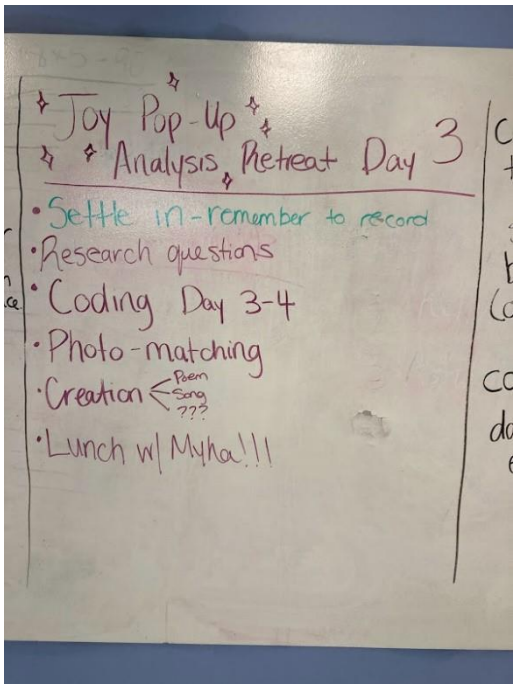
We completed three rounds of the steps above for Days 1–2 and produced the codes in the image below.

Illustration 20. Codes from Days 1-2 of Observations



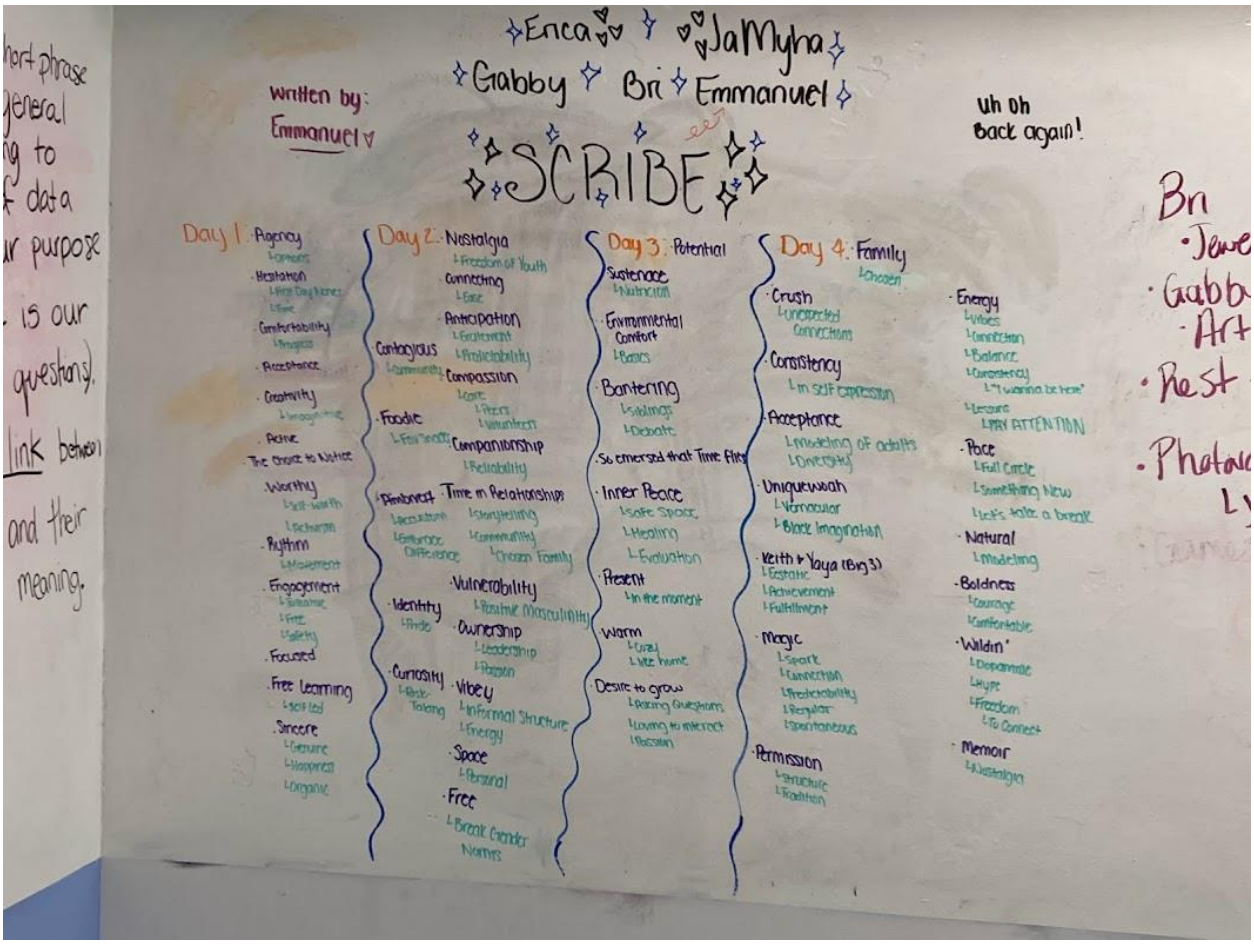
Because we started late on Saturday morning, we did not have time to create codes for Days 3–4 or complete the remainder of the agenda. We were also unable to collectively code the photovoice images and explanations or co-create a poem or song from all the codes. To ensure we would get through coding the journals, we agreed to start an hour earlier the next day. Our agenda for Sunday morning is below.

Illustration 21. Analysis Retreat Day 3 Agenda



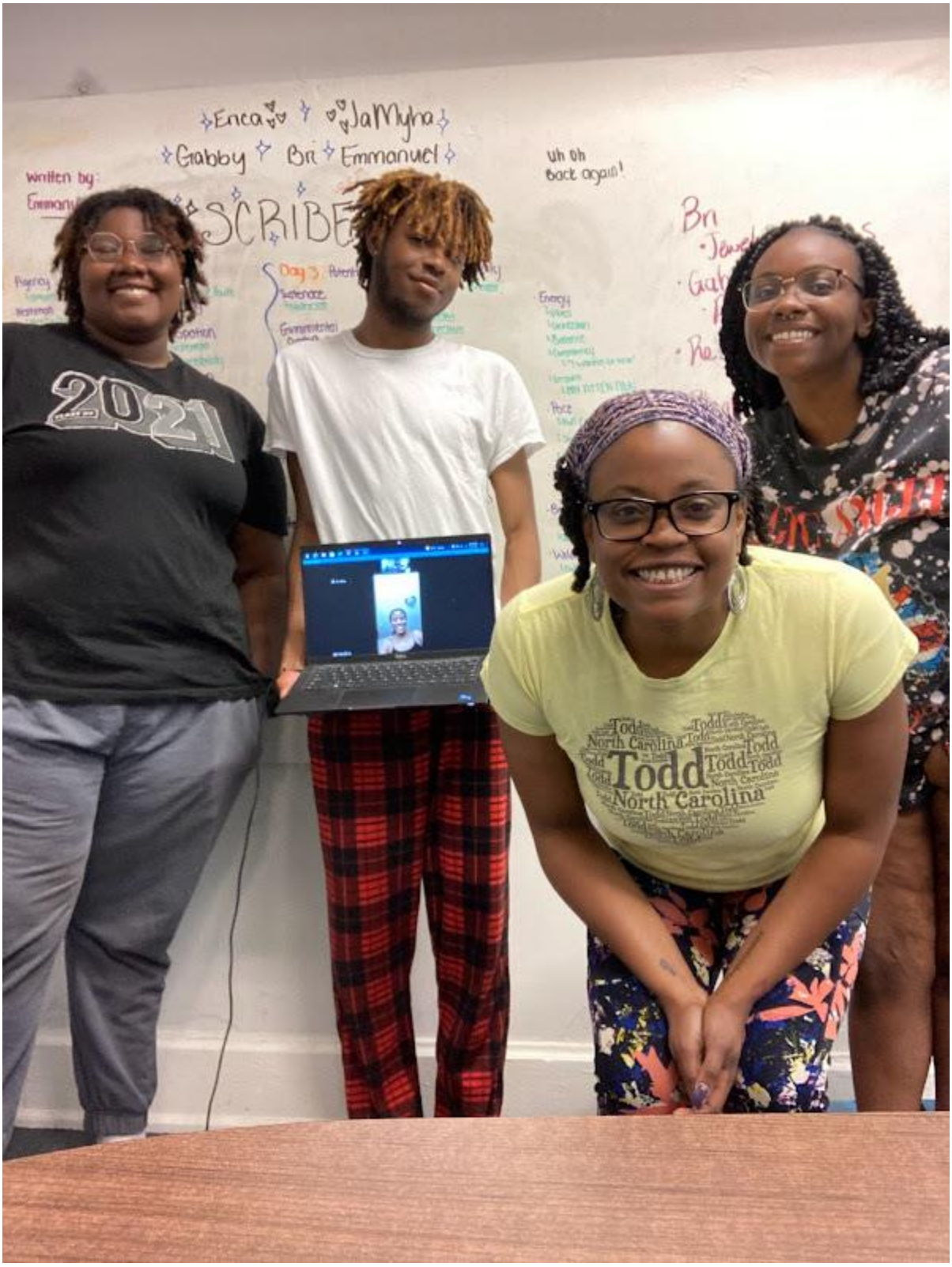
After reviewing the research questions, we completed the coding (pictured below) for Days 3–4 on Sunday morning. Ja'Myha had joined us via zoom for the entire retreat, so we made the collective decision to order pizza and go eat lunch with her at her house. This meant that we would again not have time for photovoice coding or co-creating a song or poem. Eating with Ja'Myha was more important. I have provided an image of our completed co-created codes below.

Illustration 22. Codes from Days 1-4 of Observations



We decided to take a picture in front of our completed codes from the observation codes.

Illustration 23. Research Team Day 3 of Analysis Retreat



We were finally able to get a last picture of the research team at Ja'Myha's place before we departed for the weekend (see image below)

Illustration 24. Research Team in the Sunshine

Individual Coding, Word Clouds, and Themes. After entering codes from the retreat into the codebook (Saldaña, 2016), I coded photovoice and explanation cards, art artifacts, and researcher-created photos for each day. Following the same process as the retreat, I looked at and/or read each piece of data and attached a code to it. Additionally, I completed Nvivo (Saldaña, 2016) coding of focus group transcripts for Day 2 and Day 4—attaching codes to participants' words, phrases or quotes. Once all data was coded, I used word cloud software online to discern patterns across codes.

I added each day's set of codes to a word cloud generator and distilled which ones appeared the most. This step allowed me to group the codes into larger categories across the four days. I have added the word cloud images below.

Illustration 25. Word Cloud Day 1

Illustration 26. Word Cloud Day 2

Illustration 27. Word Cloud Day 3

Illustration 28. Word Cloud Day 4

From the categories, I distilled four overarching themes that I connected back to the research questions. All codes, categories and emerging themes were kept in the codebook for reference throughout the analysis process.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Doing research with young people presents a unique set of ethical considerations. Given the fluid nature of my position as an insider-outsider (Thomson & Gunter, 2011), it was imperative to take measures to minimize risk of exploitation of them as humans and the assets that they bring to this research. These measures included gaining their informed assent and the informed consent of their parent(s)/guardian(s) to participate. Recruitment of participants included house visits where I shared the lay summary, consent form and a Joy Pop-Up invitation with the logistical details of the 4-day pop-up. Having the research team present during the 4-day joy pop-up sessions helped maintain the safety of all participants.

I am most grateful for the impact that this pop-up had on the participants, their families, and my neighborhood. I agree with Potts and Brown (2015) about the central tenet of anti-oppressive research—relationships. This was most important to me—my relationships with the young people and with their parents. I believe that the value of any research is directly related to

the "usefulness to the community in which the research occurs" (Finely, 2011, p. 435). I committed to using my resources in this inquiry to create an experience in my neighborhood for my young neighbors to have fun, create, feel, and be together. These kinds of summer experiences are not often available to youth in the neighborhood and because I hold research as a responsibility (Dillard, 2003), my responsibility in this inquiry lies first in the value that it added to the lives of my young neighbors. A secondary point of responsibility in this inquiry is the authentic representation of the data from this research. My goal has been to make it accessible and useful to people who engage regularly with young Black people.

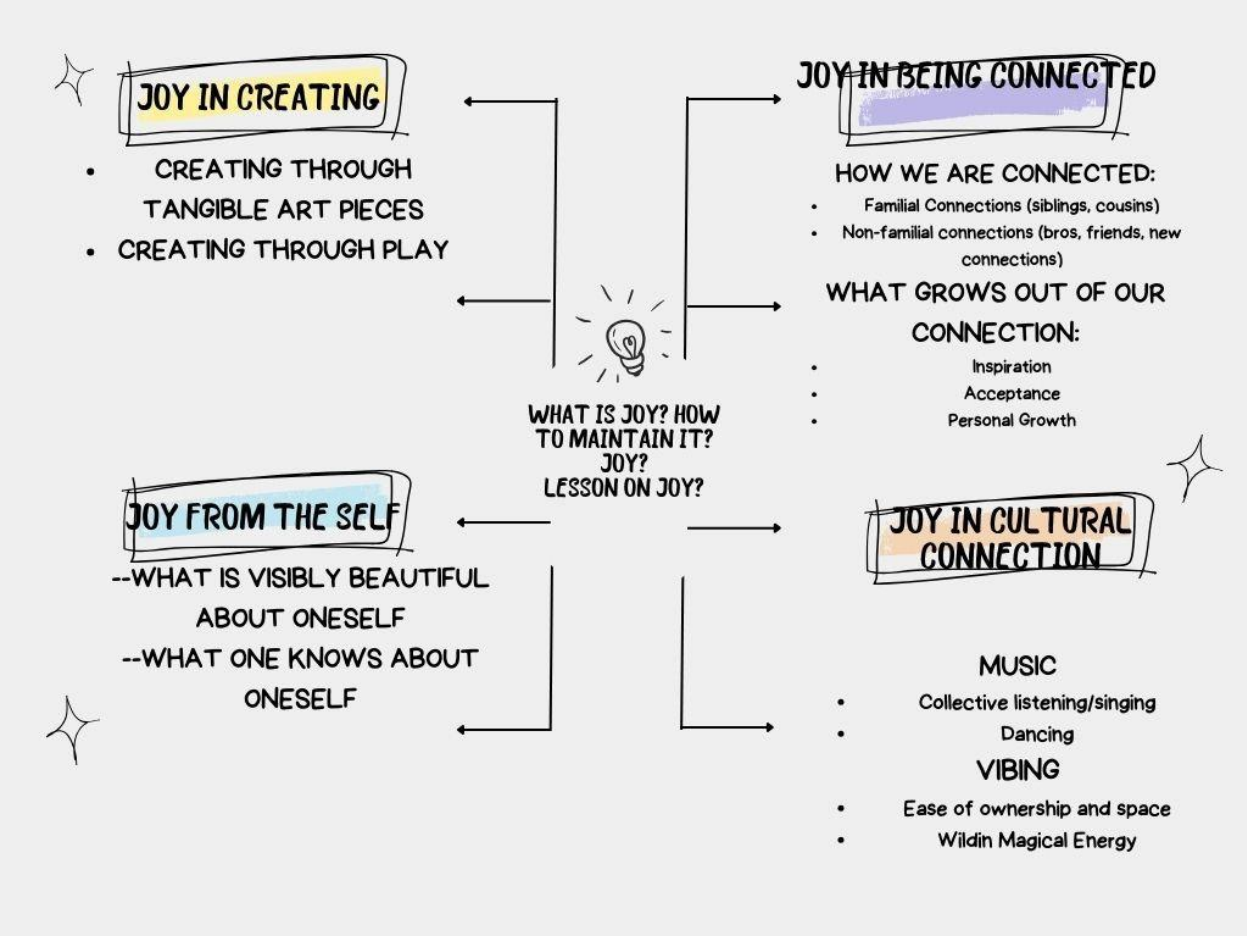
I have also considered my position along the insider-outsider continuum (Potts & Brown, 2015)—as a neighbor with lived experiences with the participants as well as an agent of the university. This position required ongoing reflexive practices that pushed me to question how my power and privilege were showing up as well as how I was holding to my values as a neighbor who is also a researcher. I had hoped to do walking meditations with a recorder, but due to other responsibilities and exhaustion in the afternoons, I was not able to take these walks during the days of the pop-up. Challenged by Hesse-Bieber and Piatelli's (2012) suggestion to practice reflexivity in the moment throughout the research process, I tried to do this through my reflective writing in the afternoons each day after the pop-up. Although not as full as I would have preferred, these brief moments to journal helped me to name the impacts that the research was having on me, the way I was showing up, and if I thought the research was progressing well or not. I am grateful for this record of how I was being transformed through this work. Finally, sharing the responsibility of observations and analysis with the research team was one of the best decisions in this work. It mitigated against the possibility that my perspectives would be overly

represented in the final product due to my relational connections to participants and/or my position.

Ethical Considerations in Methods. I was aware of the many factors that impacted the filter (Saldana & Omasta, 2018) through which I observed at the pop-up. Among these were my values, beliefs about the world, background, and even my disposition on a given day. Additionally, my decision to act as a participant-observer came with the challenges of maintaining the balance as I tried to maintain authentic relational connections along with my responsibilities of systematic observation. I was also constantly holding the tension of being a neighbor-auntie to some of the participants, and I had to do a lot of internal labor to constrain my disciplinarian side and let them be their full selves. The practice of keeping consistent field notes (including information on how my position was impacting my observations) was critical to maintaining the trustworthiness of my observations. Additionally, the debriefs with the research team about their observations strengthened the trustworthiness of observations. We kept the commitment to debrief after each pop-up using the following questions as mentioned earlier.

Trustworthiness. A member check gathering occurred on January 1, 2024 at the park. After contacting all the parents of the participants to schedule a gathering, Gabby (a member of the research team) and I met with participants who were able to make it to the park. Over pizza and hot chocolate, we gave an overview of what the research team had learned and asked for participants' feedback. We provided each participant with a theme tree (pictured below). We described each theme and discussed examples from each category, taking care to share direct quotes or representations from those participants who were present that day at the park for the member check. I have added an image of the theme tree below.

Illustration 29. Thematic Map



Completing this step of member checking (Glesne, 2016) was very important to me because I am accountable to my neighbors and myself to translate the research with full integrity—ensuring it will cause no harm to my participants and will hold their humanity and the knowledge they have chosen to share with care.

Research and Dissertation Timeline

Grant Submissions and Grassroots fundraising for Summer Research Funding: March 2023–May 2023

Proposal Submission: April 2023

Proposal Defense: May 2023

IRB Submission: May 2023

4-day Joy Pop-Up with focus groups incorporated: Summer 2023

Research Team Data Analysis Retreat: Late 2023

Ongoing Data Analysis: Fall 2023

Dissertation Writing and Revisions: November 2023–February 2024

Defend Dissertation: March 2024

Graduation: May 2024

Limitations

There were a few primary challenges over the course of this work. One challenge was getting IRB approval in time to conduct this research in the summer of 2023. After completing the process, I was glad to finally get this approval and move forward with the research. Another limitation was with funding for the pop-ups. Although the first iteration of Journey to Joy had some remaining funding, I relied on the SELF Fund at UNCG and community donations (in-kind and financial). The variety of activities available to participants during the pop-ups, as well as the capacity to pay living wage-based stipends to co-researchers, was dependent on the funding I was able to secure prior to summer 2023. The timeline in receiving the SELF funds caused some delay in paying co-researchers, but eventually I was able to compensate everyone.

The transitional nature of young people in the neighborhood during the summer was another challenge with recruitment and with participation. Without the anchoring routines of the traditional school day, young folks in my neighborhood are often spending time with various relatives and loved ones in the summer while their parents/guardians go to work. There were challenges with confirming recruits and attendees at pop-up. However, I am still convinced that having the pop-up over one week during morning hours at the centrally located neighborhood

park allowed for the fullest participation. The 9–12pm timeframe (with lunch included) attended to a real need for summer enrichment for my neighbors because it was a camp-like experience. In addition to the limitations of funding and the transitory nature of the young Black people in the neighborhood during the summer, one additional limitation emerged around focus groups.

After following the recruitment protocol outlined in the IRB approved process, I had planned to bring participants back together at the park for small party dialogues. These were initially planned to hold space for focus group discussions. However, after difficulties in communication around participation in the pop-up and uncertainty about who would actually come each day, I made the decision to merge focus group questions into the pop-up days. I asked questions on Days 2 and 4 during the lunch time.

Although I am grateful for the foresight and skillset to be able to adapt my plan, the change in format did impact the quality of data I was able to capture. I used a well-known strategy for questioning—the popcorn method—where participants could call out answers at any time. I used this format often as a classroom teacher, so it was instinctual to use to try to capture as much information from participants as possible. However, I am aware that this strategy can create the possibility of capturing mostly dominant voices in a group setting. Ultimately, I am thankful I was still able to capture a broad range of participant responses after the decision to combine the focus group discussions into the pop-up days.

Conclusion

To be concerned with the capacity for Black people (particularly Black young people) to know and experience joy, to freedom dream, and to engage in Afrofuturistic thinking and creation is to be aligned with spirit of the field of Cultural Foundations—a spirit that incorporates several interpretive lenses, asks critical questions, and creates openings for what

could be, for what ought to be. And the implications of understanding and seeking to foster space for what ought to be has the potential to be revolutionary for educational settings, pre-service teacher programs, and anyone desiring to build equitable spaces for young Black people. This is critical work that requires a commitment to theoretical rigor, critical analysis, and action. I do not take lightly the line of inquiry that I am seeking to understand. It is absolutely a matter of social justice and survival for young Black people that they be reminded of what they already know, and that they are given the time and space to experience joy. The remainder of the dissertation will present chapters dedicated to the findings of this inquiry as well as a concluding chapter with implications and recommendations for further research. One major goal I had for this work was to create a representation of what I learned that is accessible for educators and others who choose to curate spaces (educational or otherwise) for young Black people. It is with all this in mind that I return to the research questions: (a) *How do young Black people define and maintain joy?* and (b) *What lessons do young Black people have to teach about joy?*

CHAPTER IV: JOY IN CREATING AND JOY FROM THE SELF

Frequently Asked Questions

Thematic analysis (Glesne, 2016) yielded four interconnected themes related to the way participants defined and maintained joy. These themes are joy in creating, joy from the self, joy in being connected, and joy in cultural connection. As a reminder, my work is grounded in the following definition of joy: joy is something that cannot be contained; it is an eternal internal, spiritual, and cultural substance that connects, empowers, sustains. Joy just is. As I discussed in the methodology chapter, I arrived at these themes through collective reflection and coding with co-researchers, followed by my own additional rounds of coding, categorizing, and theming of data. Joy in creating highlights the ways participants were observed to find and maintain joy through tangible creations as well as creation through play. Joy from the self describes what participants see as visibly beautiful about themselves, and what they recognize and love about who they are. Joy in being connected focuses on the ways that particular types of connections seem to influence participants' joy, and also on what grows out of (or results from) participant connections. Finally, joy in cultural connection seeks to capture the ways the shared cultural elements of music and vibing influenced participants' joy.

Echoing chapter one, I am making sense of this data within a frame that combines counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). This study holds stories: it began with my story; was joined by the stories of co-researchers; which combined to seek and amplify the stories of young Black people who were participants; and were all joined by a host of other participants who came together and co-created a 4-day joy pop-up—The Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience. Though held by individuals, these stories are held together by a few threads: (a) first and foremost seeking to offer a pocket of joy for young Black

people in a neighborhood, (b) seeking to understand how young Black people define and maintain joy, and (c) seeking to share their stories of joy and any lessons they can teach, with the hope that more people create and recognize spaces of joy for young Black people. This study also holds possibilities: the possibilities of making visible more of what makes young Black people thrive—of uncovering more cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) to consider when taking inventory of the cultural wealth that is within them.

In summary, in the next two chapters, I will discuss the following themes: joy in creating, joy from the self, joy in being connected, and joy in cultural connection. I have chosen to group joy in creating and joy from the self together because both themes deal primarily (not solely) with the tangible and visible aspects related to defining and maintaining joy for the participants. Joy in being connected and joy in cultural connection are grouped together because they carry the thread of connection as it relates to joy for the participants, both in the present and across time. Although interrelated, each of the four themes provides unique insights into how these young Black participants define and maintain joy. Abundant joy was created within the container of our four-day art pop-up, beginning with *creation*, which forms the foundation of the discussion that follows.

Young Black People Define and Maintain Joy in Creating

This section will discuss joy in creating as one central theme that emerged from data analysis. Joy in creating captures data of participants doing two similar, but discrete, things: creating tangible art products and creating through play. I distinguish play as a mode of creation because it is a way to create the moment or experience that one desires, and participants were consistently observed creating these moments during the pop-up. The opportunity to create (both through tangible products and through play) seems critical in creating spaces where young Black

people can experience delight, fun, and joy. This was evidenced by the various tangible products that were created and the many moments of creation through play.

As a critically-grounded arts (Finley, 2008) container, the pop-up yielded numerous participant-created tangible art products. Before diving into these products, it is important to reiterate the critical nature of this container. As stated earlier, although I am not centering joy as it relates to resistance in this inquiry, my choice in methodology (a Black youth-centered pop-up on the topic of joy in an under-resourced neighborhood) decenters "beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice and democracy" (Usher, 1996, as cited in Glesne, 2016), which in turn can make those beliefs and practices apparent to the critical eye. Over the course of the four-day pop-up, most participants created at least one painted canvas, and some created two to three each day. Some were more invested in creating jewelry, and there was even one 3-D product. Because many of the participants chose to take their tangible products with them, co-researchers took pictures documenting the products. In the following section I share some examples of the tangible art products created during the pop-up and offer insights on how art-making connected to joy for the participants.

Creating Tangible Art Products

About one hour into Day 1 of the pop-up around 10am, a young man and his father walked from the street on the northeast side of the park down to the shelter. Once I realized they were interested in what was going on, I went over to explain and said they were welcome to participate. The father asked his son (James) if he wanted to stay, and James said yes—with a main focus on the art station (which had canvases and paint materials set up). Since James had not been recruited, I guided them over to the sign-in table to complete consent and assent forms. James settled in at the table adjacent to the art station and began prepping to paint. A few

minutes later, his dad approached me and said he was going home to get his daughter and would be back. About fifteen minutes later, the father came back with his daughter, Ashley. We went through the consent and assent process again and Ashley joined her brother's table. Adult participants quickly helped them get the materials needed to begin painting.

Before continuing with Ashley and James's story, I think it is important to take note that these two participants were walk-ups. Something piqued James's interest to join and for their dad to go home and bring Ashley back. Perhaps it was the opportunity to paint on canvases or the sense of welcome, given the location and the gathering of people at the park. I believe these two felt the energy of the park, full of young people that looked like them listening to music, creating art, talking, laughing, running. Also, Ashley and James were not the only unrecruited young people to walk up to the park. I think this walk-up phenomenon is connected to the energy that comes from cultural connection. I will share further about this energy (co-researchers named it as vibing) in the next chapter.

Each station had a similar guide for participants to refer to as they engaged. This pair of siblings spent most of their time on Day 1 at the art station, where participants used the following station guide as starting place for whatever they wanted to create.

Illustration 30. Art Station Welcome Stand

In the image below, Ashley had joined her brother who had already completed his first canvas with the letters BLM before she arrived with her father and was now working on a second multicolored piece. Ashley appears to be beginning with a rainbow on her canvas.

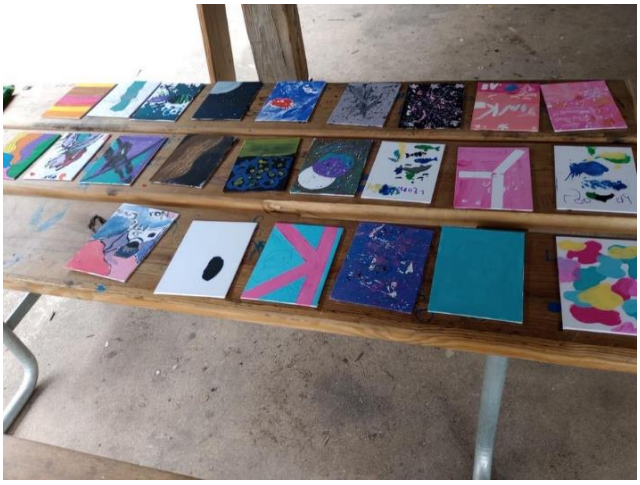
Illustration 31. Ashley and James Painting

I heard James talking to an adult participant, explaining that the letters BLM stood for "Black Lives Matter." And I had to pause and take in the moment. James had happened upon a neighborhood event in the park that was asking questions about joy. After a brief orientation to the questions, his first choice was to create a canvas with an anthem that had taken root in the

world just a decade earlier in 2013 when Trayvon Martin's murderer was acquitted. A 12-year-old, James had been just two years old when the BLM burst onto the world scene. He had made a declaration—that joy for him was connected to creating pieces in colorful artwork and including the fact that his life and all Black life mattered.

In the photo, there are fifteen additional canvases drying on the adjacent picnic table, and other participants are creating more canvas pieces at a table across from James and Ashley. Although no other participants explicitly included BLM, James's declaration was in line with several other participants on Day 1 who chose to create colorful paintings on canvases when thinking about what joy meant to them. And the painting declarations continued each day. The image below from Day 4 shows 24 drying canvases—each one a unique, tangible expression of joy.

Illustration 32. Drying Canvases



The blank canvases functioned as portals to imagination for the participants. Filling the canvases seemed to create pathways—bringing parts of their imaginations into view. Witnessing participants' range of behaviors while they created and sometimes showcased their artwork seemed to reveal a possible connection between creating art and a life-giving creative force

within them. Although they did not use the word joy as they created, it was evident through the smiles, show-and-tell moments, and the beautiful chaos of the art table (see image below) that they participants had a sense of accomplishment, happiness, and pride in their art pieces.

Illustration 33. Vibrant Art Table

Although painted canvases emerged as the primary tangible art piece produced during the pop-up, other tangible art declarations emerged as participants felt inspired to create—specifically 3-D art, jewelry, and photovoice images. Webb, an adult participant skilled in creating 3-D art pieces, brought these materials (scrap foam and glue) on Day 2 in case participants wanted to create art from it. The jewelry making station was added on Days 2–4 as an additional activity to add variety. The photovoice station was available each day of the pop-up.

On Day 3, the youngest participant, Leron (7), chose to create a 3-D piece of art in the shape of the first letter of his name using scrap pieces of foam board, glue, and red paint. The image below shows him finishing the L with red paint while Webb stands beside him ready to assist. After finishing this piece, Leron stood it proudly up on a picnic table to let it dry—his face beaming with pride.

Illustration 34. Big Red L

Leron's bright red initial L was another declaration in joy. For Leron, joy grew out of creating art that was attached to his name—which, from the amazing smile on his face, included a sense of inner pride and accomplishment. Leron's creation foregrounded another layer of meaning in joy that I had not thought about until that moment—joy for Leron was not necessarily the absence of challenge. Joy could exist alongside the challenge of creating something that would be a representation of who he was—his name, in shape and in color.

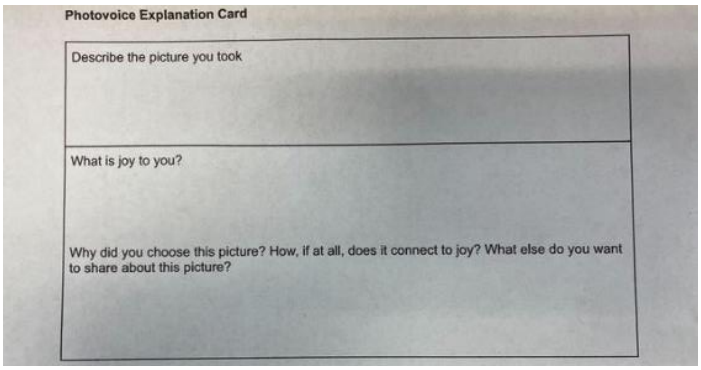
This layer of challenge in creating also showed up on Day 4 with Elise, Leron's sister and the second-youngest (9) participant, with a pair of earrings. Elise had just completed a pair of pink and white earrings after having worked on versions of them for 2 days. The image below shows Elise wearing her finished product. Although her face is not shown here, she is standing beside the jewelry station underneath the shelter and is slightly leaning in towards the camera to showcase the earrings. She has "chest out proud" look on her face.

Illustration 35. Earrings for Elise

Like Leron, Elise had worked with an adult participant—Megan—to finish her creation. They were often seen together—blowing bubbles, creating jewelry, or doing yoga. Their unique connection throughout the pop-up will be highlighted in a later theme. The earrings were a labor in patience. The little pieces had to be placed one by one on the loops. Megan mentioned to me that she had added most of Elise's pieces to her loop, and although it was a lot of work, she was glad they had accomplished it together. She said, "it took a long time, but we stuck with it." It is important to emphasize that the need for assistance in creating did not negate the joy in creating for Elise. Elise's request to take pictures of them illuminated an inner feeling of delight that she had after completing such colorful creations. Joy was in the tangible product that she had been inspired to make—with the colors and loop she desired. Elise and Leron's creations are a declaration about themselves—identity and style. And their processes shine light on possibilities that adults can participate in joy expression for young Black people.

Finally, photovoice images and corresponding explanation cards form another group of tangible art pieces created by pop-up participants. The photovoice station was not as popular as the other three stations, but with encouragement (that often looked like adult participants soliciting participants to come engage at the table) participants produced a substantial number of images and explanation cards (see image below).

Illustration 36. Photo Explanation Card



Because participants completed open-ended questions about joy on the explanation cards, photovoice creations are most explicitly connected to participants' words of joy. To give space for participants to speak for themselves, I have reserved my analysis until after this photovoice sampling. The following images and explanation are through the eyes and in the words of the pop-up participants. Their language, capitalization, punctuation, and usage are directly transcribed.

Illustration 37. Trees and the Sky with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 2 Stephen (13)	Tree with sky in the background. Trees.	Black	It looked aesthetically pleasing; pretty things bring me joy

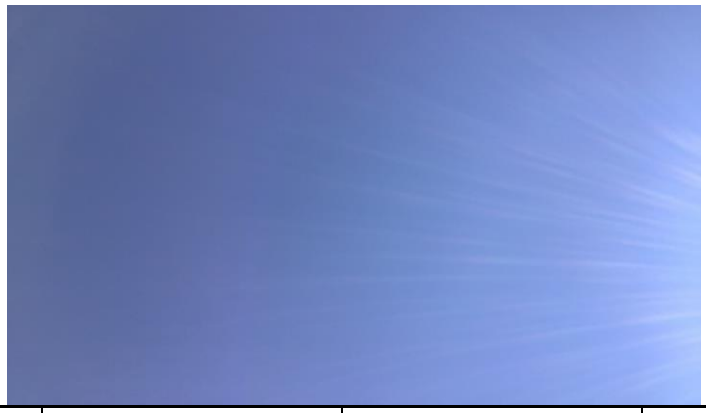
Illustration 38. Ashley's Picture of Joy Pop-Up Sign with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 1 Ashley (13)	The joy pop-up sign—pretty, the colors, feeling happy	excited, at peace	I like the colors they make me feel happy

Illustration 39. Leron's Picture of Bubbles with Description

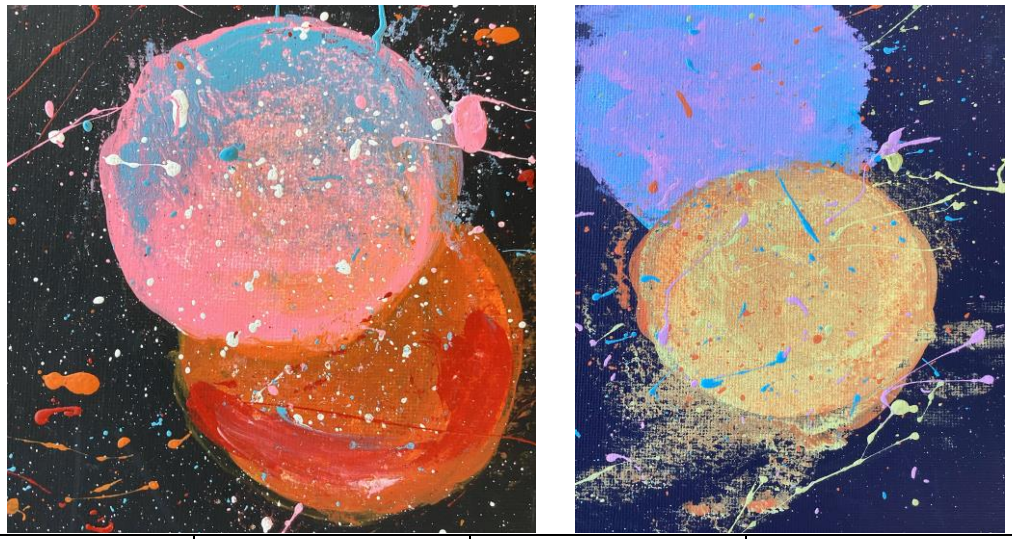
Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 2 Leron (7)	Picture of bubbles	seeing the bubbles	I like taking pictures of bubbles

Illustration 40. James's Picture of Bubbles with Description



Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 2 James (12)	Joy and pretty. The oxygen that we get	happiness, beautiful, pretty, dance, cheer	It was the cute rainbow

Illustration 41. Left: Isaiah's Picture of Multicolored Planets #1; Right: Isaiah's Picture of Multicolored Planets #2 with Description



Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 3 Isaiah (15)	two planets and stars artwork.	Rush of dopamine	to show my talent

Photovoice photos and explanation cards provided a unique and more explicit window into participants' imaginations and musings on joy. Stephen and James's images of nature are representative of several participants' images that expressed finding joy in nature, particularly

naming it as being beautiful. Stephen's, James's, and others' photovoice creations are a window into an internal gauge that can find beauty in nature (and likely other places) and connect it to the feeling of joy within them. Ashley's photovoice image of trees and explanation also speak to the presence of this internal gauge. Excitement and peace—her definition of joy--was captured in her image and expressed as the feeling "happy."

The bubbles were an addition to the pop-up on Day 2. This came because of the Day 1 debrief in which the research team made the collective decision to add some more options that participants could use outside of the stations. We added a few balls, some card games, and some tubes of bubbles. Leron loved the bubbles. In fact, from the moment he arrived on Day 2 until final goodbyes on Day 4, he had a tube of bubbles in his hand either waving or blowing the wand. His photovoice bubble image and explanation captures almost perfectly what we were able to witness each day—sheer bliss and excitement at the number and size of bubbles he could blow or wave, curiosity at how they were able to last for so long or the patterns that they made, and sometimes even disappointment that a batch would pop so quickly. Essentially, we witnessed his freedom in childhood. One of the co-researchers, Emmanuel, described it in his Day 2 journal notes this way: "Leron is blowing bubbles so peaceful." Like the painted canvas creations, Leron's photovoice creation (bubbles floating) is a declaration that his joy is connected to freedom—both the freedom of bubbles moving in the air and of himself, blowing bubbles, catching some, watching others float away.

Finally, Isaiah's photovoice image and explanation highlight joy from a distinct perspective. Naming joy as a "rush of dopamine," Isaiah's image is a declaration in his power to conjure joy from within. I will delve further into this connection—joy from the self—later in this chapter. But Isaiah's image is included here because it is a tangible creation that points to his

ability to create joy as opposed to reacting with joy from an external influence. Whereeas photovoice creations presented earlier in this section focused on external connections to joy, Isaiah's images and explanation revealed that he carried the knowledge about his ability to give himself a dopamine rush—he could bring joy to himself—through his own talent.

In summary, it was no surprise that tangible creations were a visible way to learn about participants' definitions of joy. Participants' canvas painting, 3-D letter making, jewelry making, and photovoice images were declarations about what joy looked like and felt like to them. These creations also gave a glimpse into how participants accessed joy through certain external and internal motivations. It is clear that their internal gauge is there. One question that rises for me is this: How and when are young Black people being given the space to access that internal gauge? The creative pieces within this section show that when given the right space, these young people are able and desiring to reflect on what brings them joy and create tangible declarations of it. In the following section I will build on joy in creating with examples of creating through play.

Creating through Playing

The pop-up was also a space for so much playing. With the open green spaces of the park so near at hand, it became common to see participants (especially the youngest two) running throughout the mornings. On the last two days of the pop-up, participants of all ages were running through the green spaces, in and out of the sprinkler. This was a different kind of creation—creation through play. Again, I am naming their play as creation because these moments of play were crafted by the participants into what they wanted to experience. They were creating the atmosphere in which they wanted to exist in the moment—building their own temporary world within a world. In this section I will share instances of participants creating during play.

At the end of Day 2, Webb, one of the adult participants, offered the idea of bringing a sprinkler the next day. Although we had tried to position each station well within the shade each day, the summer mornings were still quite hot and humid at times. Co-researchers thought it would be a terrific addition. So, the next day Webb arrived with a sprinkler and a long hose to connect to the water. Before going any further, it is important to share more context about water at the park. For the past six years I have participated in neighborhood events at the park. It has never had running water. After following the city's procedures to have the 4-day pop-up, when I arrived on Day 1, the water pump was working. This was a huge deal. Running water, a resource that could be used by all neighbors, came as a by-product of getting a city permit that included the need for running water. It is unfortunate that it took an agent of a local university (myself) to get the basic life-sustaining resource, but I am grateful to have been a part of helping it to happen. The image from Day 4 below shows Leron running in the grass excitedly under the sprinkler.

Illustration 42. Leron and the Sprinklers

This image shows Leron's imaginary handiwork. As he ran under the sprinklers, it was clear that he was trying to avoid getting completely drenched, but at the same time wanted to feel

a bit of the cool shower of the sprinkler. Although Leron's face is hidden, he has a beaming smile and is waving his arms with joy as he creates this space for himself with the help of the sprinkler.

The sprinkler was an instant hit, especially with Leron (7) and his sister Elise (8), but eventually with other participants also. On Day 4, Isaiah (15) came up to me, pointed to the speaker and asked, "Can I run?" to which I replied, "That's what it's for." After running through the sprinklers for a couple of minutes, he ran back over to me with a drenched white t-shirt and said, "that's the best time I've ever had in my life." Isaiah is my direct neighbor—I've known him for five years now, and I am privileged to know a bit more about his personal life. At the time of the study, he was a rising ninth grader at a local high school with aspirations to be an artist. This was a remarkable moment at the pop-up. This 15-year-old first asked for permission to run through the sprinklers and then declared that it was the best time of his life. What had been unleashed inside of him in those moments running in the grass under the sprinkler? Something that he felt the need to ask for permission to do—go run and play and create his own piece of joy for a moment. And he did just that—created the "best time" of his life. Like Leron, Isaiah had created his own pocket of joy.

The playground was also a welcome place of creating through play. The most popular piece of playground equipment for playing was the swings. Many of the young Black participants and even some co-researchers found their way to the swings at some point during the four-day pop-up. The image below shows siblings Stephen (13) and Isaiah (15) on Day 2 swinging in the park.

Illustration 43. Brothers Swinging

Day 4 brought more swinging fun. At one point in the early part of the morning, I noticed Danielle (14), Elise (9), Yariah (14), and Stephen (14) swinging over the course of about 10 minutes. There were lots of smiles and high swinging and loud talking. I have personal reference from my childhood to the imaginary opening that swinging can create. Choosing to go swing was an act (sometimes conscious, sometimes not) of creating anew from my present reality. In the same way, when participants chose to go sit or swing at the pop-up, they were creating an alternative reality—at least one in motion—that could be opening for more imaginary fodder—more joy.

On Days 2–4, I occasionally saw another alternative reality being created between Kevin (13) and Stephen (13)—shadowboxing. When Kevin showed up on Day 2 of the pop-up, Stephen seemed so excited to see him—he ran over and dapped him and they visited the pop-up stations together each morning thereafter. Multiple times each morning I would catch them shadowboxing each other. This looked like standing face to face about one foot apart and looking each other in the eyes trying to anticipate the other person's body movement to "defend" against

the other person's "attack." There was never any physical contact, but it seemed like they were in deep concentration whenever they were playing. And it was mesmerizing to watch them create their own little imaginary arena wherever they happened to be standing—among other participants or out in the grass by themselves. It was apparent in those random shadowboxing moments that Kevin and Stephen were creating something where they were the center of each other's attention. And from the look of the smiles, belly laughs, and yells of satisfaction from the winner after each session, they were co-creating short, joy-filled shadowboxing moments.

In the same way the swings and shadowboxing were a mode of creation through play and as I have discussed earlier, bubbles were another way participants created through playing. Elise (8) and Leron (7) are pictured below blowing bubbles with an adult participant, Megan, on Day 2.

Illustration 44. Elise Blowing Bubbles

For Elise and Leron, it was as if the bubbles acted as tiny portals into their own expansive worlds—following the bubbles wherever the wind took them and then creating more and more. Their joy in creation was obvious: through their play, through their smiles and wandering after runaway bubbles, and because they kept blowing them again, and again. It is also important to

point out that of the young Black participants, the two youngest used the bubbles the most. I do not have an explanation for this, but it did make me think of my youngest child (8) who currently has such a love for bubbles and can spend hours (or until he accidentally or intentionally pours them out) playing with them. I remember my oldest child (10) loving them when he was younger also, but not so much at this age. I think Elise and Leron's choice to create through playing with the bubbles juxtaposed with the choices in playing of the older participants indicates that the ability to create through play does not change—it evolves.

The context of the pop-up—outside in the neighborhood park—was a welcome environment for running, spinning, chasing, blowing bubbles, and shadowboxing—for creating through playing. In the first two days of the pop-up the two youngest participants—Leron and Elise—were most often observed playing (running, playing on playground equipment, blowing bubbles). However, as the days progressed, participants of all ages were observed creating little moments in time through play. In playing, the participants were tapping into an inner sense of happiness and excitement—joy.

The theme of *joy in creating* foregrounds the act of creation as a way that these young Black participants experienced joy. In creating tangible art products and creating through playing the participants were observed to be happy, energetic, willing to engage, and even willing to be challenged. Additionally, this theme highlights an important observation about agency. When participants had agency over themselves (which in this instance meant the opportunity to decide how they wanted to spend their time at the pop-up), co-researchers observed a general positive disposition in participants. Participants consistently chose between many options to spend their time during the pop-up. Whether they were actively creating a product or not, that power to choose what they did with their bodies and time kept participants engaged in the pop-up in some

way. Although options for exploration depended on the resources available, participant agency to choose between the options seemed significant to their overall dispositions. As we shift our focus from the theme of *creation* of joy to the theme finding *joy in the self*, we look more closely at individual participants' experiences and embodiment of joy.

Young Black People Define and Maintain Joy from the Self

This section will describe the theme of joy from the self. It articulates the ways participants' words and behaviors about themselves revealed a deep sense of self-love, pride, and inspiration. Joy from the self is divided into two categories: (a) what participants see as visibly beautiful about themselves, and (b) what they recognize and love about who they are. It seems, for this group of young Black participants, that the definition of joy and the capacity to find and maintain it is connected to their selves. Observations of participants' shared experiences show that these young people are always carrying at least a portion of what they need for joy because they are always with themselves, and they bring joy to themselves. In the following section, I will share examples from the pop-up that connect joy to my second theme, joy from the self, by recounting what participants saw as visibly beautiful about themselves.

What Participants See as Visibly Beautiful about Themselves

I was delighted to see several participants referring to themselves, particularly their physical appearances, when discussing joy. Some participants also chose to take images of themselves with the explanation that they "bring themselves joy." From selfies, to requested group photos, to personal descriptions on photovoice explanation cards, participants consistently connected the concept of joy to what they found to be beautiful about themselves. The power of the pop-up was the space it created for documentation and reflection on what the young folks already knew about themselves.

Day 1 of the pop-up ended with an abbreviated focus group that served as both a time of closure and a different form of engaging participants' perspectives on joy. While waiting for our pizza lunch to be ready, we circled up under the red-roofed shelter. The focus group took the form of a question followed by an array of popcorn answers from participants. Isaiah's responses to the first two questions shed light on his physical appearance and joy. I asked, "So what pictures did we take?" After a few others yelled out their answers, Isaiah yelled out, "my shoes and outfit." After a few others yelled out answers and there was a lull in response, I jumped in and said, "Here's the other question—if you could share one thing about what is bringing you joy today in this space to someone who's not here, just call it out—what would you share?" Again, participants began giving responses. Isaiah was the second to respond with "my shoes, my outfit, the bros are here and drawings."

For two separate questions, Isaiah's answer referred to his personal appearance. This is important because both answers connected to his perspectives on joy—first the joy that he had chosen to capture in his photovoice image (planet artwork), and second what was bringing him joy at the pop-up that day. Joy for him was connected to a pride around his style of dress. And this key noticing should not be overlooked in Isaiah's story of joy. His delight in his choice in shoes and clothing was a declaration just as the painted canvases had been—he was pleased by his aesthetic.

Similar to Isaiah's perspective, Elise (8), Zena (14), and Danielle (14) produced photovoice images and explanations that connected joy and personal appearance. Keeping in line with my commitment to let participants speak for themselves as often as possible, I am again reserving my analysis until after this photovoice sampling. The following images and

explanation are through the eyes and in the words of pop-up participants, and their language, capitalization, punctuation, and usage are directly transcribed.

Illustration 45. Danielle's Curls with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 3 Danielle (14)	my beautiful curls	finding what makes you happy	I love my natural curls and they're so define[d].

Illustration 46. Zena in the Sun with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 3 Zena (14)	I look like I'm enjoying the sun	I think it's being happy and enjoying what's around you.	I took it because I like to pose and I think I looked good

Illustration 47. Adrianne's Selfie in a Paint Smock with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 4 Adrianne (11)	I took a Happy Face ☺	cute picture	I bring myself joy

I met Danielle (14) at this same park during a neighborhood public safety event in 2019. I had lived in the neighborhood for just over a year and this was my first event in the role of secretary of the neighborhood association. Danielle and her mother are natives to the neighborhood—her mother served as president of the neighborhood association at one point. Everyone knew them. Since that time, I have shared space at several annual neighborhood events with Danielle and have watched her grow up into an adolescent young lady with so much style! At the time of the study, Danielle was a rising 9th-grade student at a local high school. On Day 3, Danielle chose to take a picture of her curly hair, naming it as "beautiful" and attaching a declaration that joy is "finding what makes you happy." Danielle practices what she preaches. Her beautiful hair is a source of immense pride and happiness for her—enough to choose it as her photovoice image in response to the prompt on joy. I was ecstatic to find this picture during data analysis. Danielle, growing up in height of the Black Lives Matter movement, with its groundbreaking legislative decisions like the Crown Act that empowered Black women to live

into their full natural beauty, was standing firm in the truth of one source of joy—herself—specifically the beauty of her naturally coiled hair.

Zena (14) and her brother Zion (14) arrived at the pop-up by car with their mom on Day 2. I had never seen them before. They walked up to the park and shared that Danielle had invited them to come the night before. Just as I had done with Ashley, James, and their father, I guided them over to the sign-in table to complete consent and assent forms. Zion and Zena were walk-ups in a different sense—they had received invitation to come from Danielle, who had been recruited for the study. They did not live in the neighborhood. Zena chose to center herself in her photovoice image, specifically her face. Wearing a patterned bucket hat, white framed sunglasses, wooden earrings in the shape of Africa and a green tank top, Zena is confidently posing for a selfie and names in her explanation that she likes to pose. Zena is not new to this. She leans into what she defines as joy—"enjoying what is around you." In that moment, she was enjoying the sun and delighting in herself because she knew she "looked good."

Although other participants, Elise (8) and Isaiah (15), took selfies for their photovoice images, I chose Adrianne's (11) image for display in this section because there was a clear connection to her personal appearance and her definition of joy. She poses with a beautiful smile and eyes that are looking downward into the camera that she is has positioned to capture her entire face and tilted head. With paint on her cheeks, she declares herself to be cute with a confidence that needs no affirmation. Adrianne is the literal embodiment and source of her joy—and she knows it.

Pop-up participants' words and images in this section offer a clear connection between their personal appearance and their definitions of joy. Participants were inspired by themselves—their style, their hair, and their smiles. It was so refreshing to witness them as they bore witness

to the visible beauty of themselves. In a society that constantly dehumanizes and denigrates Black bodies to be unattractive, pop-up participants were telling a different, truer, and age-old story—that Black has always been beautiful, and Black people have always known it. Beyond the vitality of finding beauty and joy in reflection on the physical self, participants' joy also connected to what they described about their interests and knowledge. Keeping with the theme of joy from the self, in the next section, I will offer examples from pop-up participants' joy as it relates to what they recognize and love about who they are.

What Participants Recognize and Love about Who They Are

In addition to connecting what they saw as beautiful about themselves to their definitions of joy, pop-up participants also made connections between joy and what they recognized and loved about themselves. These connections were evident in observation and focus group responses, but as in the previous section, they can especially be seen in photovoice examples in which participants specifically named how their pictures connected to joy. Two distinct subcategories emerged within this category: (1) being fully one's self and (2) valuing one's self. I will begin with examples related to joy and participants being fully themselves.

Being Fully One's Self. As the pop-up days progressed, participants increasingly seemed to show up being more fully themselves. I will discuss the intangible ethos and/or feeling of this phenomenon in a later section on vibing, but I am including this section because there are particular instances where participants' words or behaviors seem to connect their capacity to be fully themselves to their concepts of joy. This showed up primarily in focus groups, but also in observation data. In this section, I will share these examples related to joy and participants' being fully themselves.

Around 11:45 on the final day (Day 4) of the pop-up, participants and co-researchers gathered under the shelter to wait for the pizza lunch to arrive. I began asking focus group questions as both a movement towards closure of the pop-up, and also to capture more of participants' perspectives on joy. I asked, "If you could teach a lesson to adults in schools about joy, what would it be?" Yariah (14) yelled out the very first response. She said, "I was just gone say tell them off—I don't mess with them—so I wouldn't tell them nothing." I responded to Yariah with a follow-up question, "Would you share how they could do something different?" She gave a very matter-of-fact response, "No I don't like them." Yariah had arrived at the pop-up on Day 2. She was the younger sibling of Mike (15). I will share more about Mike in a later chapter.

Yariah, always carrying a colorful blanket around her body, was quiet and stand-offish on her first day of the pop-up, moving from station to station, but not necessarily landing in one place. By Day 3, she seemed to spend the majority of her time in the rest and recline area located in the grassy area on the south side of the park. I often observed Yariah joking around with other participants that she knew or venting about shared school experiences. By Day 4 and still carrying her colorful blanket, Yariah's disposition shifted. By then she had painted several canvases and had developed an ease in talking to and/or bantering with those around her—both adults and peers. She brought out a range of emotions in me as I observed her behavior and interactions. I never knew if I was going to step in to de-escalate banter, sink into grief at something she said or did, or laugh out loud as her unfiltered hilarious personality shone through in jokes and expressions.

Her quick and comfortable blurted-out response to my question was evidence of this shift. Yariah's response was a lesson for the listening critical ear. Her emphatic "I don't mess

with them" showed the necessity of trust within a connection first before the question of joy could come to the surface. Trust is needed for Yariah to be her full self, and it was clear that her relationships at school were missing this critical link. I think it is also clear that the pop-up created space for that trust to expand.

Another series of responses from Nick and Isaiah to a similar question shed light on the connection between joy and participants' perspectives on being fully themselves. The question broadened beyond adults in school spaces to include adults in other community-based settings. I have included the excerpt from the transcript below.

> Erica: So the lesson I'm hearing there is like care for each other, show care? Right? What other things would you teach people who are not in schools. Adults. People who want to create spaces for you?
>
> Nick: Be free
>
> Isaiah: Be free yeah be free
>
> Erica: Be free—what does that mean?
>
> Nick: Be who you are
>
> Isaiah: Yeah, be who you are. Like don't let nobody hold you down.
>
> Ashley: Be open.
>
> Erica: Ashley said be open—what does that mean Ashley?
>
> Ashley: Umm … Just like…I guess it's like … be more open
>
> Erica: Yeah, be more open, similar to like being more free?
>
> Ashley: Yeah.

This exchange gives a more explicit picture of these participants on the necessity of being able to be fully themselves. And for these young Black people, being fully themselves meant that they

could be free and open—not being contained by systems, structures, or people. In Isaiah's words, not letting "nobody hold you down." Participant responses indicate that the capacity to be intellectually, creatively, and physically free is necessary for any space that seeks to welcome them—that seeks to center their joy.

My hope in the methodological offering of a pop-up was to create the kind of space where young Black people in my neighborhood could embody this freedom and openness that Nick, Isaiah, and Ashley had described. I think most participants were able to do this. And sometimes they became so comfortable being fully themselves that it resulted in tension. One example of this happened around mid-morning on Day 4 with Leron. One of the adult participants, Joanne, walked over to me and mentioned that Leron (8) was sharing his discontent with Yariah's (14) language (it was often filled with expletives, as was the language of many of the pop-up participants), and that he was going to tell her to stop. Johnette mentioned that she suggested he change stations if he didn't want to hear her language. Leron did not take Johnnette's suggestion. Just a couple of minutes later, I noticed Leron walk over to the rest and recline station where Yariah, Kevin and Stephen were sitting. I did not hear what was happening, but I noticed a defensive shift in Yariah's body (from sitting to standing) and some elevated voices. I walked over to the station and Yariah said, "He betta stay in his place." I knew right away that Leron had shared his feelings about language, and I gently guided him towards the shelter. A crisis had been averted!

Although this was a tricky situation to de-escalate, in reflecting on the situation, it was also clear that Leron was being his full self. He felt the freedom to share what he thought with Yariah and others without fear of repercussions. He made a moral declaration. And although a different age and developmental stage may have led him to behave differently, in that moment,

he was being fully himself. Leron's actions showed that finding joy within himself required the space to be fully himself—even if it opened the possibility for tension with others.

One last example (of many) of participants being connected to being fully themselves was from a brief exchange I had with Yariah. Towards the end of Day 2, Yariah happened to be walking between the rest and recline area towards the shelter. This was her first day at the pop-up. I asked how she was doing and she quickly responded "good." I told her I was glad she decided to come to the pop-up (she had missed Day 1). Then she smiled slightly and said, "I'm not my best self right now." Our exchange speaks to Yariah's deep knowing of herself—she knows she has a best self—I would argue her full self. And in just under three hours at a neighborhood arts-based pop-up, she was able to (re)cognize (Dillard, 2021) this.

Examples in this section have showed participants naming, and in some cases living, into what they believed is necessary for joy—that is the capacity to be fully one's self. This looked like declarations and embodied moments of being free and open. And this capacity seemed to create space for openings (much like the portals discussed earlier) that could lead to more insights on joy and even the world they want to see. I think the capacity to be one's full self is a critical step in realizing and harnessing cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) within. In addition to this capacity, a deep valuing of oneself also emerged. In the next section I will build on examples of full embodiment of self with the deeper assignment of value to self.

Valuing One's Self. There are examples from each area of data collection of participants' valuing of themselves. Their valuing of themselves was most visible in the photovoice data because, as stated earlier, this method was where participants most often explicitly named themselves as the source of their joy. Bearing witness to this is one of the greatest gifts I am taking away from having done this study—participants' deep and confident

knowing that what they needed to thrive already resided inside them. In this section, I will share examples of the ways participants' positive valuation of themselves was connected to joy.

On Day 1, Adrianne (11), along with her cousins Leron and Elise, spent most her time at the art station painting canvases. Just about an hour into the day, I heard Adrianne say, "the vision ain't visioning." She was looking frustratingly at her canvas and then shifted to get a different color and stencil to use. Adrianne is very aware that she has a vision—even if it is not showing up on the canvas in the moment. To know and name that her vision was not yet fulfilled, and then take action to fulfill that vision, was evidence that Adrianne valued herself. Her statement also indicates something about the space of the pop-up in that moment—it had allowed her to (re)cognize (Dillard, 2021) her own capacity for greater. She was able to access her inner well of creativity. This (re)cognition was necessary as she sought to create from a prompt about joy.

Day 1 focus questions also yielded examples of participants valuing themselves. Responding to the question of which photos they chose to take, both Ashley and Isaiah yelled out, "myself." For the second question I asked, "If you could share one thing with someone who is not here about what is bringing you joy today in this space, what would you share?" Again Ashley responded, "myself." These one-word responses carry so much meaning. They most explicitly show the value that participants place on themselves—enough to name themselves as the center of their joy.

Participants' photovoice images offer more examples of participants valuing themselves. The following three images and explanations are through the eyes and in the words of pop-up participants. Their language, capitalization, punctuation, and usage are directly transcribed.

Illustration 48. James and the Sprinkler with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 4 James (12)	It looks like me ♡ [James requested this picture be taken of him.]	Ocean, beach, me	I chose this picture because I bring joy to myself

Illustration 49. Elise's Handstand with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 4 Elise (8)	I took a picture with my partner doing a handstand. [Elise requested Megan take this picture be taken of her.]	I love doing handstands	Because the handstand makes me feel like I'm upside down and powerful.

Illustration 50. Sprinkler with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 3 Ashley (13)	It looks like water … Good water.	Art. water. myself	It's Hot. I need water

Although James's image and explanation (Illustration 48 above) could fit into all categories within the theme of joy as self, I am placing it here because of the unique nature of the image. James's image is one of two images (Elise's is the other) in which the participant asked another person to take the picture while they posed. Not only do James's words place himself at the center of his joy, the choice to have someone else capture the fullness of his body in action underscores the how highly he values himself. Elise's image (Illustration 49 above) follows suit as she's pictured doing a handstand on a yoga mat in the rest and recline area. I am not sure how many attempts Elise made before this picture was captured, but her desire to show her skill in this image speaks to her understanding of her value—a value that she expresses as feeling "powerful."

I have chosen Ashley's (13) image and explanation (Illustration 50 above) to complete this section because of the distinctive way she expresses her self-value—by naming her need. Ashley names that her body needs water, and in doing so, she demonstrates the value that she holds for herself. Water—whether it was for drinking or for running through—was a part of

Ashley's definition of joy. Her going further to name water as a need sheds light on the way Ashley values her body and the impact that valuing herself has on her capacity for joy.

Participants' words and images indicate a clear connection between joy and the value that they have for themselves. From Adrianne's framework of acknowledging one's vision, to James and Elise's pictorial declarations that they were the center of their joy, to Ashley's clear understanding of her needs, participants' valuing of their selves showed up as an important part of having joy from the self. And since participants are always carrying this value, they are also always carrying part of their sources for joy.

The theme joy from the self offered examples from the pop-up that highlighted how participants defined and maintained joy from within themselves. This included what they saw about themselves as visibly beautiful and what they recognized and love about who they are. The examples presented in this theme offered such an opening of hope—a hope that comes through the capacity for someone to know that they are carrying their own source of joy with them. This theme most directly aligns the definition of joy that grounds this work—joy is something that cannot be contained; it is an eternal internal, spiritual, and cultural substance that connects, empowers, sustains. Joy just is. This substance—isness of joy—was both visible and palpable in the participants during the pop-up. Although their joy came from various places, it became clear that their joy was also rooted in a shared cultural connection. In the next chapter I will discuss the theme of connection, both cultural and relational.

In our pop-up experiences, I attempted, along with co-researchers, to do my part to put my cultural organizing, social justice educator experience to use in creating an environment that would offer young people the space to connect with themselves and each other around the concept of joy. I was grateful to observe that connections between participants, both cultural and

relational, were a major source of joy throughout the pop-up. The cultural connections, including music and vibing, could be felt just as much as they could be seen each morning of the pop-up. There was dancing and bantering, as well as an ease of just being in the space among each other as the days progressed. Many of the relational connections seemed to already contain the capacity for joy before the pop-up, so that the space allowed the joy to flourish. In this chapter I explored the creation of joy and its embodiment in the individual; in the next, I will explore joy in connection.

CHAPTER V: JOY IN RELATIONAL AND CULTURAL CONNECTION

Young Black People Define and Maintain Joy in Cultural Connection

In this final findings chapter, I offer examples of participants' joy in relational and cultural connection—beginning with cultural connection. Although cultural connection could be drawn out from each of the other themes, I am choosing for it to stand alone as a separate theme to honor the ways that the space was constructed and sustained through shared cultural elements. This theme is divided into two categories: (a) music and (b) vibing. As the examples in this theme will show, cultural connection was a thread that ran through participants' experiences and contributed to many moments of excitement, ease, happiness, and joy. The intangible energy/ethos of each day (articulated by co-researchers as vibing) also seemed to be a fertile space for joy for the participants. Additionally, music consistently connected participants and co-researchers regardless of age. I will begin by discussing examples from the category of music in the following section.

Music

Music stands alone as a lens through which we can evaluate participants' experiences because it played such an integral part before, during, and even after each pop-up session. It also stands alone as a category because of its vitality in Black cultures for self-expression, intergenerational connection, and joy. This generalization proved true throughout the four-day pop-up. Co-researchers consistently described the participants as being "hype" while collectively listening to music, and it was clear from Day 1 that through continuous song requests and sing-a-longs and dance-a-longs, participants would make this aspect of the pop-up—the music—their own. The music provided pathways of connection between participants even if they weren't previously connected to each other. It became commonplace for a song beat

to drop and the entire area under the shelter to join singing in unison. In the following section, I provide some examples of the ways joy was fostered through music as a cultural connection.

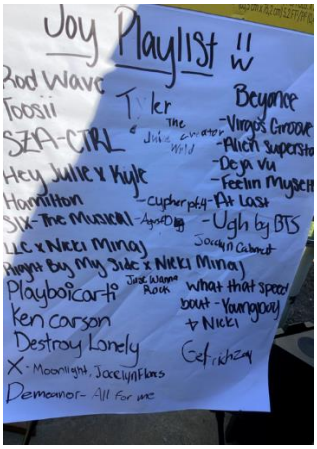
Each morning, I was the first to arrive at the pop-up in the U-Haul, which was home to all the materials for the week. While waiting for co-researchers to arrive, I took out the big speaker and played some music as I checked the cleanliness of the bathrooms and picked up any trash. Once co-researchers and adult participants began arriving, we would collectively unload the U-Haul while listening to music. My music choice usually included a song from one of my favorite genius groups, Sweet Honey in the Rock—whose songs have been an inspiration for and in my cultural organizing and scholarship for quite some time. Once co-researchers arrived, Gabby or Bri would kindly offer to "change the music" to something that participants would like. I was more tickled than offended by this offering because in those moments the co-researchers were living into one of the core reasons I needed to have them as collaborators in this work—they were near-peers to the participants and had a wealth of popular cultural competency needed to create a welcoming environment for participants.

One of the ways to engage and accommodate participants' desires in music was through the Joy Playlist. This idea stemmed from J2J (the first iteration of the joy pop-up that I discussed in Chapter I). See below for a picture of the joy playlist from that 2020 J2J experience.

Illustration 51. 2020 Journey to Joy Playlist

The 2023 pop-up playlist was compiled on a giant flipchart using black sharpie marker. At the beginning of Day 1, I explained that folks could come up and add songs that brought them joy—as many as they would like to add. Each day adult and youth participants, as well as co-researchers, could add to the list. Bri, a co-researcher, became our unofficial pop-up DJ. Most of the songs were added by Day 2—almost filling an entire 25-by-30-inch giant sticky note. Bri did an amazing job of playing the actual songs from the list as well as music that aligned with the list. I am forever grateful that she chose to take on this very important role. See below for two pictures of the pop-up Joy Playlist.

Illustration 52. Left: Pop-up Playlist Placement; Right: Joy Playlist Songs and Artists



The playlist offered another tangible and visible space for participants to make the pop-up their own—for them think about and then share publicly the music that they associate with the concept of joy. And this song-naming process grew into something quite beautiful—beyond the joy playlist. It became commonplace for participants to yell out a song title and Bri to respond back that this would be the next song. And often the beat drop of a song would literally cause part of the shelter to erupt with a big, "ayyyyyyyyyeee," accompanied by jumping up and down to the tempo or a combination of the latest dance moves. The music provided instant connections of excitement evidenced by smiles, shoulder bops, eye connections with collective finger

pointing. At one moment on Day 3, I observed Isaiah, Zena, Mike, as well as co-reseachers Bri and Gabby, having a collective "ooohhh that's my jam" moment. This looked like eyes closed, huge smiles or expressions akin to those one makes when eating really good food. And though each person was having an individual moment of joy, this was a collective moment of *vibing* to the same music. I will discuss the concept of vibing further in the next section, but this moment was an example of the way music was a conduit for a palpable joy-filled pop-up atmosphere. Music helped to bring the vibe.

Often, I had no idea of the artist or the song playing through the loudspeaker. Honestly, I found myself regularly having mini-internal crisis moments because the music was often full of expletives. And in my position as an insider (neighborhood auntie)-outsider researcher, I had to hold the tension between letting the participants be free to listen to their music in its original often explicit form and keeping a level of social acceptability for a youth-centered space. This was an ongoing tension for me throughout four-day pop-up, but I made the conscious decision to let the music play as the participants desired because it was clear after just one day that music would be a point of cultural connection and collective and individual joy.

On Day 2 of the pop-up, I observed Mike (15) in a moment of joy connected to music. Mike's demeanor had mostly been quiet on Day 1. He had neighborhood and school connections prior to the pop-up to Isaiah and Nick, and he moved around with them during most days of the pop-up. On this day, he was standing at the northwest corner under the shelter with his friends when Beyonce's song *Ego* began to play on the speaker. Almost immediately Mike began a full out dance routine as if he had studied Beyonce's choreography to this song. Mike's dancing was intriguing to me. In the moment, all I could do was smile and excitedly note that this young Black man felt enough freedom to allow the Beyonce moves that he had obviously danced before

to come up so unashamedly. He was consumed in the song, with each movement connecting to a lyric. It was beautiful and was the perfect picture of the power of music as a culturally connecting conduit of joy.

On Day 3, I captured a video of one of these shared moments of joy between Zena (14) and Bri. With the song *Cruisin' for a Bruisin'* playing over the speaker, the two were under shelter dancing and singing, "*Bubblegum cherry pop, go to the hop. Hanging with my brother 'cause his friends are so hot. While they're cruisin' ...*" When the elongated "crusiiiinn" part played, both Bri and Zena's arms both moved in rhythm with the word, and they smiled big smiles at each other. It didn't seem to matter to them that other participants were not singing and dancing along with them—they had both had some life experience with this song (maybe the movie) and there was sheer delight in singing it together.

Another moment of collective joy came on Day 3, and I was lucky enough to know the music—it was Michael Jackson songs. Just before lunch, Bri played *Wanna Be Starting Something,* and I noticed Zena and Isaiah up doing Michael Jackson dance moves as well as other folks singing and swaying to the music. I felt so excited to be in the moment swaying and singing too. After that first song, Bri played at least three other Michael Jackson songs to which we all sang and danced our best MJ moves—adults and young people alike. It was magical—a shared intergenerational moment of cultural connection filled with lots of laughing and smiling—filled with so much joy.

During our Day 3 researcher debrief, I asked Bri how she had decided on the Michael Jackson marathon. She said, "I just noticed a lot of people were singing, so I decided to keep playing those songs." Bri made this choice more times than I could notice during the four-day

pop-up. Her connection to music was such a gift throughout the days. Her photovoice image and explanation offer more insight into this connection to music.

Illustration 53. Bri's Speaker Picture with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 1 Bri (co-researcher)	The picture I took involves a speaker (main focus), a fan, and a type of metal post behind the stereo.	Joy to me is being at peace, doing whatever you're doing or being where you at. Whether that be mentally, physically, emotionally, etc.	I chose this picture because it involves a speaker, which means to me that music is my connection to joy. There's a fan in the picture, also being cool and chill brings me joy.

Although other co-researchers created photovoice images with explanations, I shared Bri's photovoice image and explanation because it gives a glimpse into just how much joy she derives from music—that she literally took a picture of the speaker. And this was important in observing and understanding what joy looked like for participants. Bri's attention to the cultural connections that participants made to certain songs or genres was invaluable during the pop-up.

Music was a common thread woven through each day of the pop-up from beginning to end. From the joy playlist to the Michael Jackson music marathon, to solo and collective dancing and singing, a shared love of music and movement with music seemed to be a primary part of how participants experienced feelings of excitement, happiness, and joy. These feelings were

also connected to the general energy and ethos—the vibing—of the pop-up. In the next section, I will share examples related to joy from cultural connection in the form of vibing.

Vibing

Another magical moment of collective dancing happened on Day 2. Bri played the song Cupid Shuffle (Cupid, 2007). And we all started to move in sync under the red-roofed shelter—"to the left, to the left, to the left, to the left …" There was a moment when everyone was dancing—young participants, adult participants, co-researchers, even some parents that had arrived early for pick-up. "Now kick, now kick, now kick, now walk it by yourself…" This moment gives one of the clearest depictions of vibing. It could be argued that vibing overlaps and supports other themes, and it would have been quite possible for all the data in this category to have been spread throughout other sections. However, I am choosing for this category to stand independently because it is calling out a distinct part of cultural connection that could be observed and felt during the pop-up. Although difficult to capture with words, during the pop-up, vibing looked like participants having a sense of recline, of comfortability and cohesion and unmitigated free-spiritedness. It looked like everyone finding their space regardless of age/gender, as well as the ability to move freely across spaces at the pop-up. The next section will be divided into two subcategories: (a) Ease and ownership of space and (b) Wildin' Magical Energy. This section will offer examples to give some sense of something that was really only possible to *see* and *feel* in the moment. You just had to be there.

Ease of Settling into a Comfortable Space

The co-researcher debrief on Day 2 revealed an interesting consensus that participants seemed to have an ease of settling into the pop-up quickly. Gabby mentioned that everyone "just knew where they wanted to go," and Bri chimed in that it "didn't take long and everyone was

already at a station." Myha also offered that participants were going "freely from station to station." This comfortability continued through the final two days of the pop-up, with young participants even taking the initiative to clean and pack the U-Haul on Days 3–4. The feeling of ease looked different for the various participants. For some it looked like peace in the rest and recline station, while others felt an ease to take more ownership over parts of the pop-up. The following examples are examples of ease in the rest and recline area. The first image from Day 2 shows Yariah (14) and Stephen (14) listening to Natashua (an adult participant) read a story. The second image from Day 3 shows Zion, Kevin, Yariah and Stephen sitting in the rest and recline area.

Illustration 54. Left: Listening to a Book; Right: Reclining and Resting


Although there were several Black-centered books available in the rest and recline area throughout the pop-up I was not able to catch a glimpse of participants individually reading any of the texts on any of the four days. However, Yariah and Stephen's willingness to sit and listen as Natashua, an adult participant, read shows a level of ease in being at the pop-up. This ease had created an opening for Yariah and Stephen to do what they may otherwise have been too embarrassed to do—recline into the culturally connecting experience of having a story read

aloud to them as 13-year-olds. This ease was part of what made for an atmosphere of vibing. The ability to let down one's guard and be fully present, sometimes doing what may have been socially unsafe in another setting, but what just *felt* right and safe at the pop-up.

In a similar way, the image with Yariah, Stephen, Zion and Kevin shows an example of the ease that became so prevalent at the pop-up—that is the ease of just being, no matter the station. There may be small talk or silence, but there was a choice to recline together while talking or in silence. Zion did not spend most of the time in the rest and recline area, but he is pictured here sitting comfortably with three others who were observed spending more time in this section. This ease in movement between areas, and the ease to sit and just be, were fundamental ingredients to the pop-up vibing feel. It carried a sense of settledness and opening for connections—from commiserating about shared school life, to talking about current pop culture, to current neighborhood happenings.

This ease and comfortability also looked like participants taking ownership over parts of the pop-up. The image below shows Elise (9) coloring in large chalk letters that spell the word JOY.

Illustration 55. Giant Joy

Webb, one of the adult participants, decided to use part of the cement area close to the shelter to write the word joy. Immediately Elise oversaw the project—weighing in on how large the letters needed to be and which colors they should be. Shoeless and with concentration, Elise colors in the letters of this visual joy declaration. And in doing so, she became a great example of what was often felt and not seen at the pop-up—the evolution from participant to co-facilitator/producer of the space.

A brief exchange between Elise and Megan, an adult participant, provides another example of ease and ownership, Elise spent most of her time on the yoga mats in the grass near the rest and recline area. She loved doing yoga moves with anyone who was around, but especially Megan—an adult participant. On Day 2, after spending some time doing yoga with Elise, Megan came over and sat by me under the shelter and shared that Elise had said, "I'm the head of the department." She was referring to the rest and recline area. Elise was clearly passionate about yoga and had assumed ownership over this area of passion. The ease with which she cemented her place in the pop-up—to take the lead on yoga from a place of joy—grew from leaning into the cultural alignment of a vibing pop-up. I was elated to hear Elise's proclamation.

I shared a similar moment of ease and ownership with James on Day 3. Around 9:45 James boldly asked me, "What are we eating for lunch?" This may seem like an ordinary question coming from a young person at a neighborhood camp. But it was more than that. First, James had confidence to know that there would be lunch. Food had been abundant for the first two days—there had been snacks and plenty of water in addition to lunch. There was not a doubt that there would be lunch today. Additionally, James felt comfortable enough to inquire to me about what kind of food there would be for lunch. James's question, particularly his inclusion of

himself in the pop-up collective, was evidence that he was owning the space. Agency allows for an ease of asking for what one needs. And James's question was evidence that this ease was free flowing.

On Day 4, Elise (9) and Leron (8) provided another example of how ease and ownership grew from the vibing atmosphere of the pop-up. The following image shows the siblings serving snacks to a park visitor (non-participant).

Illustration 56. Siblings at the Food Table

Taken on the final day of the pop-up, this image is a great example of the power of the vibing essence that existed from the beginning of Day 2. Elise and Leron had moved from experiencing the pop-up as participants to actively welcoming others in to experience the space. It is important to note that the food table/tent served as an unofficial welcome place for folks who walked up to the park to find out what was happening with all the music, smiling, and fun. This image shows a culminating moment of ownership that grew out of the ease Elise and Leron had experienced all week—the ease that prompted them to run freely through the sprinklers and

be bold with the yoga instructing and bubble blowing. As snack servers, they were making decisions because of the vibing that they'd been experiencing all week—owning a space where they felt creative, joyful empowerment was just the natural thing to do.

In summation, the ease of movement combined with ownership were visible signs of the vibing that co-researchers described during debriefs and data analysis. By the beginning of Day 2 participants did not need guidance on what they wanted to do or where they wanted to be. They found their way in and out of spaces as they felt comfortable—even moving to claim ownership in certain areas. This ease and ownership were even underscored by some white adult participants who realized (and in some instances were told) that their whiteness had to take a back seat. One example was when Megan, a white woman participant, asked Adrianne what she had done for the fourth of July and Adrianne replied, "You wouldn't understand." Even though Megan did not name the interaction as an example of vibing, Megan had immediately recognized that there was indeed a comfortability, ease, and ownership among participants related to being culturally connected.

Furthermore, the energy—a wildin', magical energy as co-researchers described it—displayed by participants was a constant visual reminder of vibing at the pop-up. In the following section, I will share examples of this wildin', magical energy from the pop-up.

Wildin' Magical Energy

By Day 2 of the pop-up there was an energy at the pop-up that lasted through Day 4. It was an energy that could often be seen and heard, but most often was felt. It was the kind of energy that you just had to be there to feel. During collective data analysis, co-researchers described this kind of energy as wildin', magical energy. From free-flow bantering to spontaneous running and chasing in the grass, to noticing how fast time was going, to making

unlikely declarations in joy, participants maintained an energy that fueled a vibing atmosphere at the pop-up.

When Bri brought materials to make jewelry on Day 2, that table evolved into a gathering place of singing, chatting, and bantering. In the image below, seven participants and two co-researchers are gathered around the jewelry-making table. Some are standing (Nick, Isaiah, Zion, and Mike) and the others are sitting. They all seem to be listening at the moment to co-researcher Bri whose hands are crossed in mid-air she seems to be in mid-sentence. Bri's face-and-body expression in this image was a common one to observe when a group was gathered at the jewelry table—I often caught her in mid-banter about something that was bringing joy to the group.

Illustration 57. Gathered for Banter

This bantering could sometimes be heard over the music and occasionally it felt like there were some serious disagreements being hashed out. But there was never an escalation towards anger or frustration. This is common in many Black family and friends' gatherings—banter is a sign of connection, passion and joy. The jewelry table banter was a snapshot into this shared Black cultural connection—a visible and audible sign of the pop-up vibing, of feeling safe and like family.

On Day 3, Gabby, a co-researcher, highlighted another example of wildin', magical energy in the bantering between the sibling participants James and Ashley. She said, "Ashley and James were bantering a lot today but still chose to sit near each other." It may be easy to dismiss this as normal sibling interaction, but it is important to remember Ashley and James's entry point into the pop-up. They were both walk-ups and they are not from the neighborhood. They were visiting their dad for the summer in the neighborhood. They did not know any other participants. Their background gave every reason for them to reserve these typical sibling interactions for elsewhere. But they did not reserve them. This was the power of wildin', magical energy—energy that allowed space in the presence of complete strangers for siblings to lean into the cultural connection, familiarity, and perhaps safety that is found in bantering. This was fertile ground for letting down guards enough to recline into joy.

Other visible signs of this wildin', magical energy could be seen in the new ways participants were choosing to engage each other. As the pop-up days progressed, participants who had not chosen to run or chase in earlier days seemed to be more comfortable with freely running after, chasing and playing with each other. One example of this came on Day 4 when Isaiah (15) picked up Zena's bucket hat and began running towards the grass. Immediately Zena (14) ran after him yelling. They both had big smiles and seemed to be enjoying the running and chasing. Isaiah ended up running through the sprinklers with Zena's hat and getting it completely soaked. Isaiah's photovoice image and explanation below shares insights from his perspective after this interaction.

Illustration 58. Isaiah with Zena's Hat with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 4 Isaiah (15)	My vision of how Zena felt when I took her hat	making Zena mad	Shows what Zena felt.

Isaiah shares that he is deriving joy from imagining Zena's irritation about him running away with her hat. I am aware that these actions might be categorized as immature or as flirting in certain settings and that quite possibly may be what was happening. But instead of categorizing their engagement based on dominant social standards, I am choosing to lean into what motivated their engagement—asking the question *what made them feel so free to engage in this way*? This question points to the intangible force that was the wildin', magical energy at the pop-up. This force opened the way for participants to be free in their desires to run, chase, play, flirt—especially participants who may not have engaged in this way in another setting. Isaiah and Zena's engagement (and others like it)—their running and smiling and freedom—are signs of joy growing from a vibing atmosphere that included wildin', magical energy.

As the pop-up progressed, participants continued to let down their guards and flow in wildin' magical energy in other less visible and tangible ways. One example came on Day 3 around 11:00 am. I was sitting under the red-roofed shelter and Stephen walked past me and said, "Man it's already 11:00." He sounded surprised and perhaps a bit disappointed at the realization

that there was only one more hour left for that day. Stephen had gotten so immersed in the energy of the pop-up that he was not even aware of the time passing. Stephen's words shine light on the intangibility of wildin', magical energy at the pop-up—the energy that is hard to describe except to say it is the kind of energy that makes one forget about the time.

This energy made room for participants to act and speak freely, even if it was hard for those around them to understand what they were saying. Stephen (13) offered consistent examples of this freedom. During focus group questions on Day 1, he gave the answer "chicken" or "chicken wings" for the first two questions that were asking about (a) the photovoice pictures folks chose to take, and (b) one thing participants would share with someone about what was bringing them joy in the space that day. Stephen had not taken a picture of chicken, but it was clearly on his mind and he felt the freedom to call it out twice during the discussion.

This is the wildin' kind of freedom that was attached to the energy at the pop-up, and if I'm completely honest, it was not always endearing for me. In general, I am not a fan of nonsensical talk or behavior. However, in reflecting on Stephen's answers in the moment, I realized that this is the kind of freedom that fosters and grows one's inner capacity to realize and name what matters to them as it relates to joy. Clearly for Stephen, really good chicken was undoubtedly related to his concept of joy. It is also clear that there is joy and comfort for him in being able to offer goofy, nonsensical answers.

The connection between freedom and joy came up again on Day 4 during the focus group questions. Below is an excerpt from the transcript.

Erica: "What else? What lesson would you teach? What do you want people to know about joy?"

Nick: No boundaries

Isaiah: No judgment. And it can't be forced.

Stephen: yeah that's what I'm saying, it can't be forced

Nick, Isaiah, and Stephen's responses offered a lesson on what was necessary for joy for them. This freedom looked like the ability to fully live out who they are without constrictive boundaries or judgements. It was organic and unforced. This is what they needed for their joy to thrive.

This wildin', magical energy was participant-created energy—their response to a joy pop-up at their neighborhood park. It was an energy that came along with ease and comfortability and ownership and freedom. It was the energy that kept a vibing atmosphere throughout the pop-up, and although I have tried to concretize it as much as possible in the last few examples, it was so much more than I could ever reflect in words. It was the kind of energy that you had to witness for yourself with your whole body.

Vibing was a phenomenon that could most accurately be grasped only by those who were present—those who were there to witness those serendipitous moments where everyone knew they belonged (were welcome to be their full selves) and could just flow from space to space with ease. It was an invisible connecting thread woven between each person (adult and young person) that made space for varying iterations ease and comfortability, and for wildin' magical energy. Vibing at the pop-up highlighted the cultural connections between participants while holding space for each individual to shine and flourish.

In summation, in offering the examples above connected to joy in cultural connection, I have sought to capture the intangibles of the pop-up that were both observed and felt by co-researchers during the pop-up. Vibing speaks to the incredible energy and ease of being that participants sustained throughout the four days of the pop-up. This was evidenced through such

observations as their ease of settling into activities as the days progressed, their free-flow bantering, their forgetting about time, and their increasing moments of "wildin'" as the days progressed. Participants seemed to become increasingly freer and more willing to run, to chase each other, to sing and dance together. Cultural connection was palpable in so many ways; it was an undeniable part of joy for participants. In the following section, joy in being connected, I discuss participants' relational connections, and what grew out of those connections during the pop-up.

Young Black People Define and Maintain Joy in Being Connected

The final theme that emerged from data analysis foregrounded the ways that participant connections seem to influence their joy. Joy in being connected is divided into two categories: (a) how we are connected and (b) what grows out of our connection. The connections between the participants—both the kinds of connections and what seemed to grow out of those connections—seem to support the claim that having various kinds of connections to their peers contributes to the likelihood of this particular group of young Black people engaging in activities, exhibiting happiness and excitement, cultivating spaces of welcome, and working on self-improvement. In the following section, I will discuss the category describing *how* participants were connected.

How Participants are Connected

Relational connections played a pivotal part in participants' experiences at the pop-up. Participants came to the pop-up with established connections and formed new ones over the course of the four days. Several had become connected as friends because of attending the same school, others had familial ties, and many were connected in more than one way (e.g., school and neighborhood). New connections were also made—between youth participants, and also between

adults and youth participants. This section will be divided into three subcategories: (a) Non-familial peer connections, (b) familial connections, and (c) new connections. I provide examples of the distinct types of connections between participants and how these connections were related to the participants' joy.

Non-Familial Peer Connections (Friends/Bros/Chosen Family)

Stephen, Nick and Mike's friendship connection—described as bros and chosen family—offers an example of the non-familial friendship connections of participants at the pop-up. These three knew each other from both living in the neighborhood and going to school together. This became clear on the first day of the pop-up. I asked, "… if you could share one thing with someone else about what is bringing you joy today in this space to someone who's not here, what would you share?" Nick responded, "uhh … my friends." Nick's answer during the focus group time solidified a direct connection between his friends and his joy. And this connection was visible as the pop-up days continued. Below are two images from Day 2 and Day 4, respectively, that highlight how they were connected at the pop-up.

Illustration 59. Left: Bros Eating Together; Right: Bros Hanging on Playground

Isaiah arrived at the pop-up first on Day 1 with his brother, Stephen. He spent first his few minutes at the art station. Once Nick and Mike arrived, Isaiah's countenance changed. He was smiling and chatting with more energy. It was clear to me that they had a deep connection that preceded this pop-up space. For the remainder of the pop-up days, the three spent most of their time together—at the paint table, sitting on playground equipment, taking group selfies, or just standing and sitting around talking. They seemed to glean energy from each other—sharing familiar stories, vibing to music together, bantering in delight, and leaning into their friendship connection in this new neighborhood space centered on joy. Their connection already contained joy—the pop-up seemed to be a space where it could thrive freely.

This friend connection was highlighted again on Day 2 when Isaiah requested the following image of him, Nick, and Mike be taken as for his photovoice picture.

Illustration 60. Bros Posing #1

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 2 Nick (15) Mike (15) Isaiah (15)	"The Bros" It is a picture of the family I've chosen [Isaiah requested that this picture be taken of him, Nick, and Mike.]	It is a dopamine rush	They are who I go to when I'm upset and they know what to say

Describing his picture as “The Bros” and “the family I’ve chosen,” Isaiah offers a glimpse into a deeply meaningful connection that brings him joy—or a “dopamine rush” as he defines joy. At any given moment during the four pop-up days, these three were with each other—talking, eating, dancing, bantering, or just sitting and listening. Isaiah’s photovoice image is a collective joy declaration from all three friends because Nick and Mike agreed to be in the photo. Each of them is posing with a confidence in who they are standing with. Isaiah (wearing black shirt with colorful graphics of contorted faces) is standing with his head slightly tilted looking at camera to the side in a Tupac-like stance with his hands crossed in front with crocs. Nick is looking at the camera hands clasped hands with a grin, wearing a brown t-shirt with a graphic of a lion. Mike is standing with fists at chest level clinched with a colorful looney tunes sweatshirt, looking like he is in mid-shoulder rock of a dance. Although Isaiah orchestrated this particular image in response to the photovoice joy prompt, all three poses tell a story of love, connection and joy.

Nick highlighted this connection again in a story he shared on Day 2. I was sitting under the shelter writing notes in my field journal and the three friends were standing and taking group selfies. As they were snapping pictures, I overheard one of them say to an adult participant, “we are not friends we are family.” Then Nick told a short story of how he and Mike became friends. Although I was not able to catch the entire story, I heard Nick say, “Mike came over one day … and he was like I didn’t know you listened to that music … and we became friends.” With an origin in cultural connection (music), their friendship had evolved into a deep “bro” connection.

Familial Connections

In addition to established friendship connections like Mike, Nick and Isaiah’s, there were also examples of joy related to familial connections. Out of all participants, there were five sets

of siblings and three cousins. The sibling sets were Isaiah and Stephen, Elise and Leron, Ashley and James, Zion and Zena, and Mike and Yariah; Adrianne, Elise, and Leron were cousins. Familial connections were obvious in how participants entered the pop-up space for the first time. Those who were kin stuck together. This was true of most of the sibling groups. Zion and Zena sat together at the jewelry table for the entire morning on Day 1. Once they completed the consent and assent forms with their mom, they both migrated to the jewelry station, sat down, and attempted to make a bracelet. Zena worked on a bracelet the entire time, but Zion eventually stopped and just sat listening to the conversation at the table. Regardless of what they were doing that day, they were together—likely because this was a new space and there was comfort and familiarity with each other. This comfort opened space to engage other participants and pop-up activities.

Elise, Leron and Adrianne (cousins) also shared this familial comfort. They were the first to arrive at the pop-up each day—before the official start time. On Day 1 they spent most of the time at the art table and eventually drifted to doing activities separately. Throughout the remaining pop-up days, the cousins, particularly Elise and Adrianne, often engaged in activities together—including art and yoga. The image below shows the cousin group on Day 1 at the art table.

Illustration 61. Cousins Painting

Adrianne, Elise and Leron were dropped off early each morning by their grandmother—a well-known neighbor who actively works to care for the unhoused neighbors of the community. I learned on Day 1 that the three arrived early because their grandmother had to be at work soon after their drop off. They gravitated to the art station and immediately began a canvas creation. In typical elder cousin fashion, Adrianne reprimanded Leron and Elise a few times in the first few minutes after sitting down because they were asking for several paint tools and colors. An adult participant assured Adrianne that there was plenty of materials to go around. Soon the three were intently working on their individual canvases. The familial connection was very apparent in these initial moments at the pop-up as the three (a) engaged this new pop-up space together (at the art table) and (a) as Adrianne's protective reflexes emerged to help her younger cousins "properly" navigate this new space.

As the days progressed and each cousin found their individual spaces of comfort at the pop-up, they always seemed to find each other again. Elise and Adrianne spent time in the rest and recline area doing yoga each day. It became apparent from the beginning of Day 2 that they both loved yoga and they loved doing it with other people. The image below from Day 2 shows the cousins attempting the same yoga pose (knees on elbows) on yoga mats in the grass.

Illustration 62. Cousins Yoga

The comfort and courage in their familial connection opened space for them to practice what they both loved and lean into the joy in that practice. I will discuss the courage that emerged in general among participants in a later section. In the following section I will discuss the connections that emerged during the pop-up.

New Connections

New connections formed between youth participants, between adult and youth participants, and between co-researchers and participants. The new connection most observed during the pop-up was between adult and youth participants. These synergistic connections formed organically and seemed to serve different purposes for participants. Stephen (14) spent the first 2 hours of Day 1 sitting on the northwest outskirts of the park by the stairs engaging the neighbor cats. When he finally migrated to the shelter, he sat at an empty picnic table and began talking to Holden, one of the adult participants at the art station. Although I did not hear their entire exchange, I heard Holden ask, "If you could do anything in the world, what would it be?" Stephen replied, "I'd play video games." The two continued to go back and forth about possibilities for creating art that included video games before Stephen walked away to the rest and recline area.

Day 2 brought a slightly different interaction between the Holden and Stephen. This time, Stephen sat down at the art table and began creating a canvas using large circle stickers. He and Holden continued to sporadically talk about video games and other random topics until Stephen dropped his canvas on the ground. I could not tell if it was intentional, but he picked it back up and Holden noted that it looked cool. Stephen was noticeably pleased with Holden's comment. He smiled and said, "I know, I know." I migrated over to see Stephen's canvas and he eagerly showed it to me saying, "I added the dirt for texture." We both smiled at each other in silence.

Stephen and Holden's new connection seemed to create an opening for Stephen—an opening to banter freely, to walk away, to create art.

These kinds of connections—between adults and participants—emerged among others during the pop-up also. The image below shows Elise (9) and Megan, an adult participant, doing yoga together.

Illustration 63. New Connections Yoga

Megan and Elise formed a noticeable connection on Day 1. As noted in earlier sections, they bonded over jewelry-making and yoga. Although the new connections between adult and youth participant served different purposes, each shared the thread of finding and exploring what brought joy. Stephen's love for video games led the way with Holden, while Elise's desire for unique earrings and her passion for yoga were prominent in her connection with Megan.

Pop-up participants were connected in both familial and non-familial ways. Although I have chosen to highlight the bros, the siblings and cousins, and the new connections, these were not the only kinds of connections. They were the ones most prominently observed. All except two of the youth participants were also connected to each other geographically—they lived in the

neighborhood surrounding the park. Additionally, youth participants shared connections because several attended the same school. Finally, regardless of familial, geographical, or institutional relationality, the pop-up connected participants around this shared art experience centered on joy.

The ways that participants were connected to each other appeared to have a significant influence on their sense comfort, of happiness, peace, excitement, and overall engagement in the pop-up. These connections allowed for a recline into doing what would bring joy. In the following and final section, I will build on this section by discussing what grew out of the connections during pop-up.

What Grew out of Participants' Connections

I am most excited to share about what grew out of connections at the pop-up—that is, what happened because of the connections present at the pop-up. This final category connects to the category of vibing discussed earlier. Vibing was the visible and often invisible signs of what was growing out of the connections at the pop-up. In this section, I am naming *how* the vibing came about—from what grew out of the connections at the pop-up. This section is special because it speaks to what is possible when young Black people are given the opportunity to recline into what brings them joy together. This section is divided into two categories: (a) inspiration from each other, (b) acceptance, and (c) personal growth. I begin with examples of participants being inspired because of their connections.

Inspiration from Each Other

Established and new connections opened pathways for how participants engaged each other at the pop-up. The actual space of the pop-up gave additional pathways—providing several opportunities to be with each other (creating, quiet, yoga, music-listening, talking, playing). As participants leaned into established connections and new ones, they inspired each other to create

and engage in activities during the pop-up. The following image from Day 1 shows Isaiah, Nick and Mike at the art station. Nick and Mike are sitting in front of canvases while Isaiah is standing.

Illustration 64. Bros at Art Station

Isaiah (15) was a self-proclaimed artist. When he wasn't walking around and talking with Nick and Mike, dancing, or bantering, he was usually at the art table creating a piece of art. In the image above from Day 1, Isaiah had already completed one canvas by this point. The first canvas was drying and his decision to stand at the end of the table with a paint cup in one hand and brush in another shows his comfortability with the process of painting.

Isaiah's pride in his work (as evidenced by him walking around and showing it to several participants before laying it on the drying table) had drawn his friend group over to the table. Isaiah's two bros had come to the art table after viewing his first piece of art piece on the drying table, and they were inspired to make a creation of their own. Nick created at least two additional canvases after this initial one—evidence that he had indeed been inspired by Isaiah's excitement and passion for his artwork. Having been inspired by Isaiah on Day 1, Nick and Mike spread the

inspiration. On Day 2, I heard the three bros encouraging Stephen to try creating a painting while also encouraging each other to try different techniques on their own artwork. As I shared earlier, Stephen eventually painted a canvas that day.

The rest and recline area also brought moments of inspiration between participants. Elise (9), Megan (an adult participant), and Stephen (14) were not previously connected before the pop-up, but they shared a moment of inspiration on Day 1. The images below show Elise doing yoga with Stephen removing his shoes and then Stephen doing a yoga pose.

Illustration 65. Left: Elise's Sphinx; Right: Stephen Doing Yoga

About 2 hours into the pop-up on Day 1 after Elise had finished her first art creation, she and Megan found their way over to the rest and recline area and started doing yoga. They are pictured in a previous section side-by-side doing yoga. In the lefthand image above, Elise was showcasing some of the yoga poses she knew for Megan, and Stephen is removing his shoes. As discussed earlier, Stephen had spent most of Day 1 on the outskirts of the park playing with the cats until finally finding himself in the rest and recline area. After watching Elise and Megan

practice yoga for a few minutes, Stephen removed his shoes and attempted a pose (righthand image above). Stephen had been inspired by Elise and Megan to engage in yoga.

Another moment of inspiration came on Day 4 between Kevin (14) and Yariah (14) in the rest and recline area. The three of us were sitting on bean bags in the rest and recline. The two of them were sharing stories about school, and I was mostly listening. Kevin was playing with a wooden maze game and suddenly yelled out, “I got it!” The following image is of the game Kevin was playing.

Illustration 66. Handheld Maze Game

Kevin had gotten one of the tiny silver balls out from the maze game. His pride and sense of accomplishment were on full display. With a beaming smile, he leaned further back in his beanbag and rolled the ball in his hand. Right after Kevin proclaimed his win, I congratulated him with saying, “Wow, way to go!” Then Yariah picked up the game—determined to get the other silver ball out. Eventually she got it out and her face lit up with the brightest smile. I shot her a huge smile and said, “Ok look at you!” She looked down and smiled. Maybe Yariah had been moved by Kevin’s achievement and reaction, or maybe she wanted affirmation from me. Regardless of the motive, she had been inspired to attempt the maze game. And she had conquered it.

.Although there were many small moments of inspiration between participants over the four-day pop-up, these examples give a clear view into the ways participants inspired each other to engage new (sometimes difficult or uncomfortable) activities. These moments of inspiration were beautiful signs of the connections at the pop-up *and* of the power of the pop-up space itself. These moments of inspiration were evidence that the pop-up was a portal into possibilities—a cultural container where there was space for noticing and for exploring. There was space for inspiring and being inspired. There was space for joy to emerge and be shared. Just as vibing was felt and seen, so too could inspiration within and among participants be seen and felt throughout the pop-up. In the next section I will discuss another aspect that grew out of participant connections—acceptance of each other.

Acceptance of Each Other

Over the course of the four-day pop-up, participants' actions and words revealed that acceptance of each other was very important to cultivating an environment where joy could thrive. Acceptance looked like affirmation of others' ideas, bodies, and choices. It looked like declarations of how things ought to be. It looked like moments of practicing and receiving acceptance. This showed up from the very first day of the pop-up. During the focus group questions on Day 1, Isaiah made a declaration on acceptance. Below is an excerpt from the focus group transcript.

Erica: So what pictures…What pictures did we take?

Stephen: a tree, yeah

Adrianne: myself

Isaiah: myself yeah, my shoes, outfit…

Ashley: the park

Stephen: a piece of chicken, the park…

Kendra (an adult participant): A book.

Several participants respond "OOOOOO I don't know about that … I don't know about that …" (waving hands and shaking heads)

Kendra: I'm a book nerd so … (audio trails off)

Isaiah: Be who you are. Be who you are.

This occurred at the end of the first day, and we were waiting for lunch and discussing participants' photovoice choices of the day. I shared this example because Isaiah's response for Kendra to "Be who you are" offers a glimpse into how he thought folks ought to have responded to her choice in photographing a book—with acceptance. After an emphatic, collective disapproval of Kendra's response on Day 1, Isaiah's response is more aligned with how participants began to show up as the pop-up days progressed—with acceptance for each other.

Yariah's photovoice image and explanation from Day 2 offers a similar declaration on acceptance from her perspective. Illustration 67 shows the red shelter area of the pop-up on Day 2, which included the photovoice, art, and jewelry station. When defining joy, Yariah made an explicit connection to what it means to practice acceptance. She wrote, "It [joy] is understanding other people's perspective." A local to the neighborhood, Yariah was aware of the effects of poverty—fighting over resources is one effect. I am highlighting this example in this section because she chose to capture a moment because it was how things ought to be—it was what joy looked like. For Yariah, joy included people existing together in peace. And peace necessitates acceptance of each other.

Illustration 67. East Side of the Pop-Up with Description

Day and Participant	Photo Description	Joy Description	Why Description
Day 2 Yariah (14)	Everybody being happy outside	It is peaceful. It is being in control of anger. It is understanding other people's perspective.	Because people are usually fighting outside and people were peaceful and being happy

A cultural unwritten rule of acceptance of each other continued each day of the pop-up. It was beautiful to witness the ways participants were making intentional choices to *see* one another. Emmanuel, a co-researcher, offered another example of participants practicing acceptance of each other. During the Day 3 debrief he shared about a moment involving James. Around 10:45 Ashley told James to 'go out there and show them your cheer.' James walked to the middle of the shelter and cheered, and everyone told him that he had done a good job.

As a reminder, James and Ashley were siblings who did not live in the neighborhood. They had not been recruited to participate in the pop-up. James had walked up first with his dad and then Ashley followed later. They did not have connections to other participants prior to the pop-up. These details are important to reiterate because they highlight the way acceptance had become a part of the cultural container that was the pop-up space. Standing proudly and performing his cheer, James was leaning into the acceptance he felt in this container. James was

able to live into part of what he defined as joy from his photovoice explanation card on Day 2, in which he defined joy as "happiness, beautiful, pretty, dance, cheer."

The focus group during Day 4 (shared earlier) also revealed that the thread of acceptance holds many of their responses together—that acceptance is necessary to feel open, seen, and free. Yariah's comments (about not liking her teachers) may not appear on first read to be about acceptance, but I heard them filtered through my experience as a public educator and cultural organizer. And I've heard countless comments like this before, which, when probed a bit deeper, are directly connected to a student's feeling like they do not belong. Yariah's comment that she "don't mess with them" spoke to her perspective that she did not feel accepted and had therefore resolved that there was no need to engage them in a productive way. Nick, Isaiah and Ashley's responses speak to their need to feel free and open to be authentically themselves. This was a part of what they needed to experience joy. Finally, Stephen echoes Isaiah's sentiments that joy cannot be forced. I am highlighting their words here because they indicate the need for spaciousness to explore and lean into what joy means for them. This spaciousness necessitates acceptance of people's perspectives, bodies, identities.

Caring about Personal Growth

The final subcategory that emerged out of the connections at the pop-up was care for one's personal growth as well as the personal growth of others. Just as examples of vibing could overlap across several themes, examples of caring about personal growth can be drawn from other themes. I am separating this subcategory because it seems to be a distinct part of how participants were connected during the pop-up and is related to the ways they maintain joy. Over the course of the four days, the pop-up evolved into a space where participants challenged each other and expressed ways in which they felt challenged by others in personal growth.

Although there were other examples of participants leaning into personal growth for themselves and others, the clearest examples related to personal growth being encouraged among each other came from the Bros (Nick, Isaiah, and Mike). The image below from Day 2 was shared in an earlier section. I include it again below as a refresher and to highlight one part of their photovoice explanation card related to personal growth.

Illustration 68. Bros Posing #2

Nick, Isaiah, and Mike asked for this image to be taken for their photovoice offering for the day. Although they gave varying definitions of joy, the three had similar explanations of why they chose to use this picture. Isaiah wrote, "They are who I go to when I'm upset and they know what to say." Nick wrote, "They help change my mood to good right away." Mike wrote, "They are the ones who take me out of my comfort zone." Each of these responses share the ways that the participants experience personal growth because of the connection to each other. That the bros articulate feeling cared for within the context of describing joy shows how their connection is a part of maintaining joy in their lives.

Another example of caring about personal growth with the bros came on Day 3. The image below shows them sitting, looking at Juneteenth materials provided by a local artist.

Illustration 69. Bros Listening Together

On Day 3, Karen, an adult participant who is a local artist, shared some printed materials about the 2023 local Juneteenth celebration. Everyone gathered under the shelter to listen, and the bros sat together as they read the materials. After Karen shared a bit about the celebration, Isaiah asked, “Are there jobs for young people to do at Juneteenth”? Karen responded that there were many ways for young people to participate, including having tables and selling their products. The three friends looked at each other with smiles and eye raises, and I heard one of them say, “ok bet.” This seemed to be an unspoken agreement between them about showing up in some way at next year’s local Juneteenth celebration together. The three had a moment of inspiration to use their collective talents (likely artistic) to work together towards something good for each other them—a pathway for personal growth for them all.

Connections at the pop-up also made way for participants to articulate care about themselves. On Day 2 adult participant and local artist, Holden, brought a beat-making machine and shared about their music production. We all sat under the red shelter listening, and finally Isaiah asked, "What is a word you would say to someone who wants to make beats?" Holden shared that they would encourage the person to follow their dream and never give up even when there are not a lot of resources. Isaiah gave a nod of acknowledgement to Holden and said, "you right, you right." This exchange is an example of Isaiah demonstrating care for himself through wanting to understand more of the process for music production. Although Holden and Isaiah did not know each other prior to the pop-up, this exchange shows how new connections at the pop-up created space for participants to think about how they could grow personally.

Finally, a similar exchange on Day 1 between Stephen and another adult participant and local hip-hop artist, Justin, offered another example of connections creating space for care for oneself. After sharing with participants about his travels as an artist, Justin asked if there were any questions, and Stephen excitedly asked, "Where was the place that was most surprising that somebody liked your music?"

As a researcher, a community member, and a mother, I found so much hope in witnessing what was possible when young Black people are given space and ways to explore what brings them joy. There seemed to be an unspoken permission to tap into their most free selves—drawing inspiration from each other, accepting each other, and caring for each other's and their own personal growth. These examples hold much more nuanced interpersonal unspoken rules for ways of being within each of them——compassion, vulnerability, emphasis on equity and peace, and room for constructive criticism These are all essential in a recipe for the kind of healing that

the world needs in this moment as we witness ongoing atrocities domestically and abroad, and they are all essential for cultivating a space for joy.

In this final theme—joy in being connected—I have offered examples of how various types of participant connections, and the growth that came from those connections, were integral to how they maintained joy during the four-day pop-up. Whether they were familial or non-familial, connections at the pop-up made way for incredible ways of being together for everyone involved. These ways of being were the ground from which a culture of vibing could grow. Additionally, it is important not to minimize the actual container in which these kinds of relationalities existed. The cultural container of a critical arts-based four-day neighborhood pop-up, with a primary goal of providing space for young Black people to think about and experience joy, must be included when thinking about the implications of and hope from this work. People who are interested in creating spaces for young Black people to explore and experience joy should take seriously the practice of building these kinds of spaces and experiences.

In conclusion, in this findings chapter I have shared the themes of joy in cultural connection and joy in being connected. Although they overlap in some ways, it was very important to show the distinction between participants' interpersonal connections and what grew out of those connections, on the one hand, and ways in which participants were connected through culture, on the other hand. As I shared earlier, I was most delighted to capture the ways participants showed up for themselves and each other in the pop-up space—vulnerability, acceptance, and care abounding as the days progress. In the final chapter I will offer a recap of the themes, placing them in conversation with some of the literature in Chapter II. I will also succinctly answer the research questions and offer interpretation through the lens of the

conceptual framework chosen for this inquiry. Finally, I will offer invitations for practice and future research and concluding thoughts.

CHAPTER VI: TOWARDS SOMETHING ELSE

For this work, I have poured myself into an inquiry around joy and young Black people. In my pursuit to understand how young Black people define and maintain joy, I also sought to give an offering to the community that I call home. The Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience was both my container for research and my offering. In terms of research, it included a community-based space (a local neighborhood park) for young Black neighbors of the neighborhood (ages 7–15) to explore, practice and articulate what joy means to them. It included four stations: (a) a maker creation/creation station, (b) a photovoice station, (c) a jewelry/game station, and (d) a rest and recline station. It also included time for me to ask explicit questions about joy. This space was also an offering because it is my home. I knew most of the participants and their families. It was a summertime camp-like opportunity that is, unfortunately, uncommon in my under-resourced neighborhood. I am grateful for the chance to facilitate the space.

This critical arts-based container was my way of embodying what Black Feminist scholar Patricia Hill-Collins (Collins, 1994) calls "visionary pragmatism" and what Freire and Horton (1992) describes as "making the road by walking." It was my way of "calling things into being that were not" (Romans 4:17, Bible, New International Version). As a high school educator in traditional public schools, I observed a phenomenon (that I named as joy) among the Black students. It was not in reaction to anything the school had to offer. In fact, most days, the joy that I observed was in direct opposition to the environment in which students were required to exist. But joy existed. And it was remarkable.

On returning to the academy, I sought to amplify how young Black people defined and maintained joy. Metaphorically, and in honor of my heritage, I have framed this work within the call and response singing tradition. As I shared in Chapter I, when I think about call and

response, my upbringing in the Black church is what first comes to mind. One person would start a song and everyone knew what their response was right away. The lyrics did not have to be taught. We had these words and rhythms inside of us—they were in our DNA. As this degree program progressed and as I worked on a literature review and a methodology chapter, I (re)membered from Dillard (2021) that call and response has always been connected to my ancestors' ways of being and their ways of surviving chattel slavery. Call and response songs and chants were used to signal events, movement, warnings, and worship. Call and response was often used to send a message, and a response was given so that the messenger could know that the message was received. It was a strategy to ensure that everyone knew what the next action was. The goal was real freedom—in body, mind, and spirit. This goal did not have to be spoken aloud. The spirit of freedom was inside of them already and always. It was in their DNA. Everyone desired it, even if they could not see past the false security of plantation life.

My work follows the spirit of call and response from beginning to end, including the topic, methodology, and representation. My decision to center joy among young Black people in this inquiry is a message about this moment in our history, especially as it relates to our young Black people and the spaces we create for them. It is time to center the joy of young Black people because I believe that this could be an important way forward. I do not need to teach them about joy—it is already in them. The arts-based methodological approach to this inquiry provided many mediums to see this truth—as we called out to them and asked them about their joy, we observed that they (re)membered it from within. Each day of the pop-up felt like call and response—in their decision to return, in Gabby's gentle takeover over the music in the mornings when she arrived, in Bri's decisions to play a Michael Jackson marathon of songs, in our decisions to listen to what participants needed and bring more card games, balls, and bubbles.

The call and response in their choice to come back. The leader changed with each day, and we all consented to respond to the new song. The goal in this work is to tell the stories of their joy, as another call, to those who care about young Black people, with the hope that they will begin to center Black joy in the spaces where young Black people are welcomed. Therefore, one goal in this work is to tell the stories of their joy, as another call, to those who care about young Black people, with the hope that they will begin to center Black joy in the spaces where young Black people are welcomed.

My research yielded findings about joy that were related to creation (making things and creating play), the participants' selves, and connection (interpersonal and cultural). Though interconnected and reciprocal, each theme offered a unique perspective into the ways the participants defined and maintained joy. Joy in creating surfaced two main categories related to creation—(a) tangible art pieces and (b) play. Examples within this theme offered amazing glimpses into the creative spirits of participants who produced both tangible creations and intangible moments through play—creating the world as it should be.

I distilled two categories within the theme of joy from the self: (a) what is visibly beautiful about oneself, and (b) what one knows about oneself. I was especially pleased to see the deep love and admiration that participants expressed about themselves and how it connected to joy for them.

The third theme surfaced the ways participants defined and maintained joy through relational connection. Focusing on the literal connections between participants as well as how the connections impacted the participants' interactions and behavior in the pop-up space, this theme was a glimmer of hope for me because it highlighted what is possible when young Black people are connected in a space created for them—possibilities that social justice educators desire to see

in all spaces where young people are welcome. As the pop-up days progressed, participants showed great care for themselves, each other, and the space—taking risks, supporting each other, all while maintaining their authentic voices.

The final theme—joy in cultural connection—was the most difficult to capture in words and images. It highlighted the intangible aspects of the pop-up that could best be understood by being there. Centering music and vibing as two categories, I attempted to lift the most vivid examples to communicate the magic of the short four-day pop-up. I sincerely hope my examples have done this theme justice.

Research Questions Answered

I began this work with the following research questions: (a) How do young Black people (ages 7–15) define and maintain joy? and (b) What lessons can young Black people teach about joy? The first question can be answered using the following broad categories: creation, self, and connection. Young Black people in the study defined and maintained joy through being able to freely create. The young people who participated in the pop-up created many things in the short four-day pop-up—tangible visual products, a vibing atmosphere through music, dance and free conversation, and mini alternative worlds where bubbles and the breeze were in charge. One very interesting collective observation from the research team concerned participants' limited use of the available technology. Most of them had phones, and we even offered a Tik Tok station that went unused. By contrast, participants' modes of creating at the pop-up most aligned with literature in my review that documented the ways Black joy continues to be embodied and expressed through creative literary, visual, and performing arts modes (Heydon et al., 2021; Holmes, 2017; Mitchell, 2022; Williams, 2022; Yeboah-Kodie, 2021). Joy looked like painting about topics that were meaningful to participants—like cherry blossom trees, colorful planets,

and the Black Lives Matter movement. Joy looked like running through the sprinklers until they were soaked or shadowboxing while standing less than one foot apart. Their joy in freely creating was sometimes loud, sometimes quiet, always vibrant.

Findings also showed that young Black people defined and maintained joy from admiring and connecting with themselves. From participant-created photovoice images with explanations to researcher observations, numerous examples supported the claim that participants understood and maintained joy in connection with themselves. In defining joy, participants consistently chose to capture themselves doing something or just being. This category does not fit neatly within or among the analytical categories in the literature I reviewed because most of the literature did not speak specifically to the connection that young Black people made to themselves and joy. The closest was Everett and Moten's (2022) work, which highlighted how young people expressed joy through their body language after an educational intervention. However, my work differs in that it offers examples where participants connected the concept of joy to what they saw as beautiful about themselves and what they knew to be true about themselves.

In addition to joy in creating and joy from themselves, the participants in the pop-up defined and maintained joy in being connected to each other. Familial and non-familial connections and the things that grew out of those connections surfaced as critical aspects of joy for young Black people. From the "bros" connection to friendship connections rooted in school settings, to brand new connections that emerged during the pop-up, participants' connections with others were reported and observed to be an integral part of experiencing joy. Familial connections offered a sense of familiarity and comfort as participants forged new connections during the pop-up. Much of the literature around space-making aligns with this finding. I find

Doucet and Kirkland's (2021) work to be especially salient to the theme of connections because they speak specifically of individual and interpersonal developments because of connections in ethnic-specific spaces.

Cultural connection emerged as another way pop-up participants define and maintain joy. Music and vibing were important parts of the pop-up that connected participants in visible and often invisible ways. From the collective playlist to line dancing, to collectively belting out songs, music was an almost instant point of connection for pop-up participants. It yielded the most outbursts of laughter or banter throughout the four-day pop-up and helped sustain the energy that co-researchers named as "vibing."

Although I completed analysis and interpretation for all the data, answering question number two—about the lessons young Black people can teach us about joy—required additional layers of interpretation because much of the data did not yield explicitly articulated lessons from the participants. Therefore, as a critical qualitative researcher, I combined *a priori* data and observational data to answer the question: What lessons do young Black people have to teach about joy? This question can be answered using the following broad categories: (a) agency and (b) space. From Day 2 of the pop-up, researchers observed participants settling into the area where they felt most comfortable. Some participants chose to spend most of their time in the jewelry-making area, while others spent most days in the rest and recline area. Others (like Leron) roamed between activities each day. The most important part of the pop-up for participants did not appear to be the variety of activities, but the agency to decide what they were going to do. Focus group answers in response to questions about what joy looked like to them, or the lessons they wanted to teach others about joy, confirmed the importance of participants' agency as evidenced by phrases like "be free" or "be who you are" or "be open." The research

indicates that to lean into whatever joy looks like for them, young Black people need agency over their bodies. It is no surprise to me that this desire for agency is confirmed by much of the literature about Black joy and the Black Imagination. To experience freedom in the context of the U.S. (in and outside of school), Black people have had to claim their agency to dream and make those dreams realities.

Another lesson that Black young people can teach about joy is that they need space to think about and experience joy. Space in this sense does not mean leaving them alone. The participants' attendance and participation in the four-day pop-up offers a lesson to those who are interested in creating spaces for young Black people—the lesson being to create spaces for young Black people with intentionality. I will share more insights about space-making in the section for discussion and implications, but to be intentional means in addition to having basic needs like food and water, young Black people need purposefully created spaces that consider as much of their diversity as resources allow. To be clear, this does not mean a lack of structure, but it does mean allowing time for choice to engage or not engage. And it also means centering the young people's needs when offering choices. In this study, I centered what (I thought) would help them feel into their joy because I believe (and research has shown) that joy is necessary for Black people (and all people) to flourish.

Although joy is possible in spaces that are not centered on young Black people, participants' experiences in this inquiry show us that it is possible to create spaces where joy can show up freely—where young Black people can flourish together. And I could hear echoes in the joy I observed at the pop-up too. I could hear echoes from the antebellum south clearings where enslaved young Black people gathered, and despite the dismal reality of plantation life, they lived into alternative worlds of freedom and hope, if only but for brief moments. I could hear

echoes from the pockets of joy I observed in Black church services during my childhood where people were singing about and conjuring up the joy that the world didn't give and that the world couldn't take away (Ceasar, 2013). Although these moments occurred across time and in various locations (hush harbors, the Black church services during my childhood, and the pop-up), joy was there each time. The Black Imagination was there each time. And both grew from a source that insisted on nothing less than Black people living into full humanity despite a societal reality that deemed—and deems—Black people as disposable (Love, 2019).

Implications

The implications for this study span K–12 educational settings and beyond. If we are concerned with practices and places that welcome young Black people, we must be committed to investing in Black joy. To invest in Black joy is to also create space where the Black Imagination is not censored, and freedom dreaming is unbound. Joining my work with research that has been conducted around Black educational spaces, I am offering the following conclusions: (a) the capacity for young Black people to experience joy impacts the ways they show up in the world, (b) cultivating spaces for young Black people to explore joy is part of a liberatory praxis, and (c) when young Black people thrive, their communities thrive.

The young people showed up at the pop-up with curiosity, excitement, and skepticism. As the days progressed, there was a noticeable shift in participant dispositions. They developed an ease about the space and moved about the pop-up as if it were their own space. And in a sense, it had become their space because we were actively co-creating the atmosphere by just being—singing, dancing, running, bantering, playing, creating. As the days continued, participants shared more about themselves—how they were feeling, how the space impacted them, what they hoped. They began to recline into what I call the heart space—the space that

holds hopes and desires not only for themselves, but for the people and place around them. The heart space opens into one's vulnerability and is the place where tiny shoots of new perspectives, insights, and life emerge. As the days progressed, the heart space was made more visible—for example, in Yariah expressing how she realized she was not her best self, or in Isaiah expressing that his bros help him push out of his comfort zone. The participants were showing up in the pop-up—in the world—differently. With the time and intentional space to explore and practice joy, they were accessing parts of themselves that the world needs—but more importantly, they were accessing parts of themselves that they needed. Participation in the pop-up had opened a pathway for the young folks to walk differently—show up differently—expressing more openness, more vulnerability, and more care for themselves and each other. To be clear, the young people never lacked the capacity for any of this expression, but I believe the space and time at the pop-up helped them to access it.

The second conclusion for this study focuses on educators or any adults who wish to create spaces for young Black people. Unfortunately, this study confirmed what many have come to believe about most young Black people's ideas of joy in schools—that it is not possible. Focus group responses to the question about lessons for adults in schools showed that joy was not associated with school or school requirements for participants. Yariah's emphatic "I don't mess with them" (describing her relationship to teachers) and the collective shout of "noooo" in response to an adult participant's joy from a book, are two examples of the explicit disconnect between joy and school for the participants. In hindsight, I think even my strategy for questions (popcorn strategy) was a reminder of school for some participants because the tones seemed to take an antagonistic shift that I could feel embodied in those moments. They were not interested in teaching anything to anyone in the school setting. Discerning this led to the shift in my

questions to focus on a lesson for any adult. This shift yielded more constructive responses on the lessons participants had to teach.

I can understand why the participants responded with such resistance about school. As a teacher in high schools, I often found myself deeply desolated at the pervasiveness of anti-blackness that seemed to be built into the cinder block opaque walls of the buildings. And, at times, I slipped into thinking there was nothing I could do on the inside as an agent of the institution. If I am completely honest, I still wrestle with this possibility of effecting change in a system that was not created for Black people at all. I have since learned that I am not alone in my sentiments on the im/possibility of reforming the system. With the anti-black reality that our young people face each day in schools and communities, it is important for critical educators and adults who seek the flourishing of young Black people to know that space-making for joy—cultivating spaces for young Black people to explore joy—is part of a liberatory praxis.

Intentional space-making centered in joy is an intervention that critical educators can use towards creating more equitable educational and otherwise (Crawley, 2016) spaces for young Black people. I will share more on what this could look like in my invitations to educators.
My last conclusion is a declaration—that joy among young Black people translates back to their communities. When young Black people thrive, their communities thrive alongside them. There are so many examples—hearing feedback from participants' parents on how their young people were engaging differently at home, getting running water repaired in the park, neighbors walking or driving up to the park with curiosity and joy that there were children gathered for something good. The joy that pop-up participants embodied in those four days brought a vibrance to the neighborhood that reverberated for weeks. It was as if the tiny world we created at the pop-up

had managed to break out into the neighborhood and was creating new pockets of joy. This is one of the greatest gifts for me in this work.

Returning to My Position

As I shared in Chapter I, this work is growing from my position as a Womanist and Black Feminist, critical sociological mama-scholar with the belief that it is my responsibility to frame all the work I do through a lens that will call into question the power and privilege of social systems and the agents, institutions, and structures that uphold them. This means I am always leaning into the wisdom of the Spirit, my ancestors, and a multitude of Black women in and outside of the academy—ultimately, I am seeking the liberation of all people regardless of their identity. These epistemological modes have been an internal compass for this inquiry from the planning stages of this work. And I attribute my capacity for conceptualizing this pop-up in part to the wisdom I have gleaned over my life from Black women about how to create welcoming and inclusive spaces. Where I am from, it is called "knowing how to treat people" or "treating people right." I am so grateful for the wisdom of these Black women—my mama, grandmothers, and aunties, as well as many Black women scholar-mentors and colleagues.

The idea of the pop-up also arose from my own lived experience. The structure—including the location, the 9–12 morning timeframe, multimodal options, music, and food—came as result of having been connected to young people in many ways—as an educator, cultural organizer, mama-scholar, and neighbor auntie. While I did not have the terminology until researching for this project, I have been in the practice of creating Black educational "fugitive spaces" (ross, 2020) for a while, and this experience was invaluable in co-creating the Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience. This explanation is not to diminish participant and co-researcher roles in co-creation, but to name how my position shaped the conception of the pop-

up. I believe it took this kind of intentionality to create space for the joy that emerged: joy in creating, joy from the self, and joy in relational connection, and joy in cultural connection. In the following section I offer interpretation that connects these themes to the broader theoretical framework for this inquiry.

Returning to the Theoretical Framework

These four themes tell a story. In fact, there are many stories within each theme—stories that are counter to the mainstream stories that might show up about the youth in this particular neighborhood. These are stories of joy—(re)membering joy, joy in spite of, joy just because. As a reminder, my work is situated in critical race theory, and the frameworks shaping this study were Dillard's (2021) concept of (re)membering, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework, and Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) framework on counter-stories.

Just as this inquiry was conducted in the spirit of call and response, Dillard's framework of (re)membering has been a spiritual thread within this work. As the pop-up days progressed and participants leaned into the joy they found in themselves—in connections, paintings, selfies, yoga poses, singing and dancing—they were also gathering pieces of themselves from within themselves—(re)calling—and piecing them back together—(re)membering. This spiritual thread grew and became more apparent with each day—naming the sanctity of the bros as "not friends, but family," enjoying a sunshine selfie because "I look good," declaring agency over the rest and recline area, taking time to swing, following bubbles in the wind. These moments offered glimpses into participants' whole selves—full of joy.

Honestly, I wanted the pop-up to be a counter-story. As I write this conclusion there have already been five homicides in or around the neighborhood. There is an increasing number of displaced and unhoused neighbors. And there is ongoing substance abuse because people must

cope with these realities in some way. I wanted the pop-up to be a counter-story to what outsiders (those who do not live in the neighborhood) often hear and sadly perpetuate about the neighborhood—my neighborhood.

I believe the pop-up was a counter-story, and I'm grateful for reverberations of the story in the neighborhood. I am also grateful for the individual counter-stories of joy of participants that made up the larger story of the pop-up. For example, over the course of the four days, participants rarely were observed sitting on their cell phones even though most participants had a phone. The research team even decided to discontinue the Tik Tok station because no one engaged it for the first two days. In choosing to create through painting, dancing, running, swinging, shadowboxing, bantering, or making jewelry, participants had authored a counter-story that technology is not all-consuming for young Black people: when resourced with other life-giving options, they choose differently.

Furthermore, as participants insisted on highlighting the beauty and joy they found in themselves, they were authoring a counter-story that young Black people have an innate love and pride in themselves—that they always carry joy and are capable of finding it outside themselves. And they can find it in connection to each other. The qualities that grew out of the participant connections—courage, vulnerability, authenticity—offered a counter-story about what is possible when young Black people are invited into spaces that are intentionally created for them. Finally, the story of cultural connection among young Black people is not uncommon. It can be observed inside school hallways as students go to classes carrying Bluetooth speakers, singing, and randomly breaking out in dance. It was palpable at the pop-up because this space allowed for this connection to freely exist without policing through school policies and hidden curricula. To be clear, I have intentionally amplified the counter-stories and not placed them in relation to the

dominant ones, because they do not need to be created "only as a direct response to majoritarian stories" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Joy just is. It exists. So too should these stories.

The pop-up was a beautiful collective counter-story made from many individual stories of joy. Although these stories can stand alone—worthy of being told because they matter—the pop-up can also be seen in the light of the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that brought it into reality. In fact, I had employed my own community cultural wealth before the pop-up began as I followed institutional research protocols, gathered resources for the space, recruited neighborhood participants, collaborated with co-researchers, acted as a liaison between the community and the institution, and honestly just maintained my mental and physical health. Community-engaged scholars (Shah, 2020) understand that this part of the work—the process—cannot be diminished as only a means to a finished scholarly product. The process is part of the product. Throughout the process I employed aspirational, navigational, social, familial, and resistant capital—many times needing to use them all at once as a Black mama, Black woman graduate student, and Black woman employee of a higher education institution.

Although participants' community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) was not central in this work, it was very important for me to have situated this study within this framework. The anti-black realities of this country necessitate explicitly naming the ways that BIPOC people survive and thrive in the face of these realities. Otherwise, our distinct stores of "cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69) become invisible—rarefied and assigned very little value.

Although I worked hard to have a variety of options for participants at the pop-up, materials were limited. However, there was still an abundance of engagement (creating, movement, ownership) with each station despite the limited pop-up resources. It became clear

over the course of the pop-up that Isaiah (15) was a skilled artist—creating abstract pieces that drew the attention of many participants and co-researchers. On Day 2, Isaiah had vision for a piece of art that he wanted to produce, but there were no dispensable circles. And then Isaiah found a solution—he repurposed circular nametag stickers from the sign-in table to paint several planet themed canvases. Full of aspirational capital, Isaiah was very confident in his identity as a visual artist, but also as a performing artist. I recall him asking one of the adult participants what advice they would give to someone who wants to produce music. Isaiah's posture towards possibilities was observed in others also.

Aspirational capital abounded. Despite being in the middle of a heavily under-resourced neighborhood, at a park that had not had running water in over 10 years, with some even experiencing substantial hardships at home, participants were observed being courageous in their paint creations, brave in trying new yoga poses, and inquisitive about opportunities for young people in the city. Pop-up participants were not just focused on what they hoped and dreamed for their futures (Yosso, 2005), they were living out the not yet in the moment.

In the many pivotal decisions we made, the research team also made use of our aspirational capital. From the decision to remove the Tik Tok station, to the addition of jewelry and card games, to addition of bubbles and yard toys, we were following signs of participants' joy. This is important for those who wish to facilitate Black spaces of joy—a willingness to pivot based on what emerges.

The theme joy in relational connection offers insight into another kind of community cultural wealth that was present—familial capital. From biological connections to the broader kinship connections observed in the bros, there was apparent cultural knowledge that brought comfort and familiarity for several participants. Geographical (neighborhood proximity),

institutional (school), familial (sibling and cousin relationships), and friendship connections created space for participants to engage more authentically with each other and in pop-up activities.

Lastly, Yosso's (2005) articulation of resistant capital shined throughout the pop-up days. It showed up in Stephen and Nick's insistence that their joy was connected to fairness in school and Yariah's declaration that she "don't mess with them," indicating that there is no baseline of trust to talk with her teachers about joy. It could also be seen in participants' artwork in which there were glimpses of knowledge about speaking truth to power, like James's BLM canvas. There were countless examples of community cultural wealth threaded through the counter-stories during the pop-up. Although it was not intentionally a space of resistance, the pop-up was a clear message about what was possible despite dismal realities. It was a collective (re)membering (Dillard, 2021) of joy. With these broader theoretical connections to the study in mind, in the following section I will offer invitations for practice to educators and community organizers.

Invitations for Practice for Educators and Community Organizers

For those who seek to create a more equitable world—from the classroom to the community center, to the corporate boardroom—creating spaces where Black people across the diaspora can explore and experience joy is an essential part to realizing this world. I want to encourage three groups with invitations for practice: (a) educators, (b) community organizers, and (c) researchers who identify as Black and are doing research with/for young Black people. These groups of practitioners are already holding a lot of critical responsibilities in the movement for the liberation of all people. Therefore, I am framing the following offerings as invitations because I know it is difficult to add even one more thing to a plate that is already full.

And to be clear, my invitations are not limited to these groups, but I am centering these groups because I am connected to each of them in this season of my life. I will discuss my invitation to educators and community organizers in this section and then speak to my invitation to education researchers in the next.

To those on the front line of education—those critical classroom teachers who are serving in the trenches of our current public K–12 educational system and seeking to be agents of change from within—I offer this work not as a model, but as a tool. I understand that my community-based research will likely not fit into the confines of a traditional classroom space. I am aware that many classrooms include a diversity of students and that my work centers the experience of Black students. No matter the demographic makeup of the classroom, I want to invite educators to prioritize creating regular pockets of joy within the microcosms that are their classroom spaces. This will look different depending on the social location and teaching context of the educator. In addition to employing culturally relevant teaching practices (CRT) (Lawson, 2023), I invite educators to seek to understand the differences among ethnicities within socially-constructed racial categories—a practice that opens pathways for cultivating joy for a diverse student body. This means refusing the racial monolith myth and seeking to truly understand the nuances of students' experiences through intentional listening. This looks like allowing students to speak about who they are and where they come from early and often in classrooms. And then facilitating learning with this knowledge at the center.

Although most minoritized people share a history of marginalization and oppression, I cannot underscore enough that each person has a unique story. I understand fostering this kind of space inside traditional school settings is hard, but students' stories need to live free and alive in their educational spaces. It is hard, but it is also possible. Studies cited in this dissertation (see

Chapter II) as well as examples from my own teaching experience are proof that with a lot of relationship-building, ingenuity, and flexibility, these spaces can be created inside classrooms. In addition to individual classroom settings, I invite educators to find other critical educators to co-create or support those spaces of Black joy within their school buildings. This can look like offering space and time before school, after school, or even at lunch for pockets of joy to emerge. The original Journey to Joy was born from the collective work of myself and another like-minded educator in my former school. Making this space a reality required that we both use our social capital—hers as a white woman teacher with more experience at the school, and mine as a Black teacher with community resources and skills for creating the space. I acknowledge that it may feel like going above and beyond one's duty or capacity to create these Black-centric spaces of joy, and I am not advocating that everyone can do it. It *is* going above and beyond in an already exhausting and thankless job, but I believe it is what is necessary when working within a traditional school setting.

The second group I want to encourage with invitations for practice is community organizers. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said that "the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice" (Craig, 1964, p. 4). That means change is slow and not without obstacles. And there is no social change without confronting these obstacles. Community organizing is about asking people who are impacted by injustice to take responsibility for changing their conditions by stepping into leadership with others, such as educators. Thus community organizers and the leaders that they bring together must cultivate and create spaces and practices of joy because (1) they deserve it, and (2) it will give them the fortitude to overcome inevitable obstacles. The fortitude comes from the collective. It springs out of joy that is already within people, but that may be covered with layers of historical intersecting oppressions. Gathering to

practice joy creates moments for tapping into that joy and strengthening people in their resistance. These practices could look like celebrating as many small wins as possible. It could also look like taking time to gather to collectively celebrate the journey (even when wins have been sparse). It also looks like creating pockets of joy—through sharing encouraging words, singing and chanting together, collectively reading texts to remember movement history, sitting in silence together, showing acts of kindness in times of loss and grief, sharing meals together—alongside the grind of building power with people towards positive change. Educators and community organizers share many commonalities in their work of developing leaders and change agents. It is important to intentionally include the practice of cultivating joy as a part of that development, with the understanding that this practice can sustain us through the most difficult of times.

Recommendations for Future Research and Final Thoughts

There is a dearth of youth voices telling their stories about joy in the research literature. My final invitations are for fellow Black researchers who interested in understanding more about joy among young Black people. These also serve as recommendations for future research. We must conduct research that centers the voices of actual young Black people—both in and outside of traditional school settings. This will require a change in typical thinking about how we (de)value knowledge from young people. And to be clear, this change will not occur solely through theorizing in the academy. We must commit to proximity—being with—those whom we seek to learn from and with. Additionally, researchers should consider collaborating with young Black people as community co-researchers as they seek to understand how to cultivate spaces of joy for young Black people. It is without a doubt more work to bring on community research partners (especially young people) but doing so takes seriously the power of intergenerational

knowledge-sharing as a process for knowledge creation. This kind of research—community-engaged research—requires researchers to make different methodological choices when conducting research. This looks like working within the schedules of community partners, often sacrificing "non-work" hours to accommodate their availability, and having to be very creative with funding. Researchers should always consider how community partners are being compensated (even if the work is for liberation). There needs to be equitable (not mutual) benefit and reciprocity. This means researchers, even if they are social justice-minded, are generally agents of institutions. And people should always be centered over institutions.

Additionally, this kind of research takes time in relationship-building. The fact that I have known the co-researchers since 2020 should not be overlooked. We trusted each other. Doing this kind of research is a commitment to live into what hooks (2010) calls engaged pedagogy—where the process of learning is horizontal between all researchers. In this study, I had very technical aspects of research along with experiential knowledge to share with the co-researchers. In the same way, their near-peer cultural brilliance as well as their experiential knowledge was critical for me.

Furthermore, in line with good ethical standards of qualitative research, researchers should always consider the tangible ways that their research will meet needs in the communities where they will conduct research. In this context, I lift up Dillard's (2021) call to (re)present our researching in ways that are affirming of our identities and epistemologies. I believe that community wellness and authenticity to community ways of knowing and being should always be primary research values.

My next invitation to researchers is to consider researching the topic of understanding joy among young Black people in various settings. It is important to return to the purpose of

research—as responsibility (Dillard 2003)—when we think about the topics we choose to research. There is so much to be uncovered about joy among young Black people. I invite researchers to consider topics such as how Black youth are cultivating joy in anti-black settings, how adults in their lives are helping them to find joy, and how having joy impacts the way they live. Ultimately, researchers need to know that centering joy in young Black people in their research is movement work. It is a revolutionary declaration about what matters in the academy.

Following in line with good ethical standards of qualitative research, researchers should always consider the tangible ways that their research will meet needs in the communities where they will conduct research. Additionally, and again, we should practice leaning into Dillard's (2021) call to (re)present our researching in ways that are affirming of our identities and epistemologies—our scholarly products should always center the dignity and brilliance of those connected. I believe these should always be primary goals.

In closing, as I shared earlier, I offered invitations to practice for the three groups (educators, organizers, and researchers) because they are relevant in my life in this season, but I want to encourage any person who chooses to engage in this work. Since we understand that school is not the primary place where young Black people have the space to practice and explore joy, it is the responsibility of the collective, which includes every person in the community who cares about young Black people, to create these spaces. As I mentioned earlier, I am a neighborhood auntie to many of the participants. This is a mantle that they have given me. I am a part of a collective of neighborhood aunties, uncles, grandparents, mamas, and daddies who create these spaces with and for the young people in the neighborhood. I am sharing this to encourage each of us to work together. We must move in chorus, and combine all our skills,

strengths, and the wealth of our cultures to achieve the spaces that we want for ourselves and our children.

I want to underscore my "why" in my liberatory praxis with and for young Black people. I am reminded of the 2022 R. Freeman Butts lecture at the American Educational Studies Conference. I was well into my PhD degree and was gearing up to submit a proposal for research in the spring. Dr. T. Elon Dancy II and Christopher Wright (2023), then a PhD student at the University of Pittsburgh, had a critical conversation about the deficient interventions of higher education liberal institutions following global uprisings after George Floyd was murdered by the state. As scholars in Afropessimism, their discussion offered a dismal and accurate characterization of the anti-Black state of the university (broadly speaking). I remember feeling their call to resist the urge to look away and smooth over the pain, death (on many levels), and struggle of Black people in and outside of the academy. It was a heavy, depressing conversation. I could feel my energy leaving my body as they were closing. During the Q&A portion of the lecture, an audience member asked Wright if he could offer ways forward out of this sad reality. Wright responded (and I am paraphrasing) that Afropessimism seeks to show us the intricacies of the ugliness of anti-Blackness so we can be diligent in understanding what our history tells us not to do, and instead, do something else.

I began this dissertation discussing my two Black sons as an inspiration for my mama-scholar journey, and they remain a primary motivation for my commitment to do "something else." My work fits into this space of "something else" that Christopher Wright suggested we do while existing in and seeking the abolition of anti-blackness and all that sustains it. My faith—the faith of my persevering ancestors—demands that I do "something else." This inquiry was not the beginning of my social justice work, but it represents a milestone in securing a broader

theoretical underpinning for an ongoing liberatory praxis that combines engaged pedagogy (hooks, 2010), Black joy space-making, and theorizing in the movement towards a freer and more just world. I am committed to practicing joy, cultivating spaces of joy for young Black people, and working with others who are also seeking to do "something else." And in the wise words of genius sista-artist, India Arie (2002), I think I am headed in the right direction.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH ETHICS TRAINING

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Community Partner Research Ethics Training and Certification

Community PARTners
Partnering to Assist Research and Translation

University of Pittsburgh ctsi CLINICAL + TRANSLATIONAL SCIENCE INSTITUTE

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

You are invited to participate in a research study to discover how young Black people ages 7–15 define and maintain joy. I am passionate about community building and community education particularly among young Black people. This research is being done as part of my work as a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

I am inviting you to participate because I believe your personal experiences as a young Black person could help me understand how you describe joy, what makes you feel full of joy, and how you find joy in hard times. Furthermore, your perspectives on how these spaces have helped you overcome or endure hardships would also help me to better understand the ways that these spaces impact one's sense of hope in the face of oppression. I am conducting the research because: (1) I have seen glimpses of what I think is joy in school spaces where young people of color have expressed a sense of aliveness and joy, and it was absolutely remarkable and (2) I am committed to sharing what I learn from you to help make school spaces better. Your participation in this study may help me and others to create more educational spaces where more young Black people can be their fullest selves and explore what brings them joy despite the hard parts of life.

You will be invited to participate in four summer morning session pop-up art spaces at Arlington neighborhood park located at 1201 Bellevue St. There you will have the chance to create art, dance, sing, take photos, and play while you think about what brings you joy. I along with some co-researchers will use a few methods, or strategies for gathering information as you engage in the pop-up activities. We will observe and take notes, take photos and videos, ask that you take photos and videos and write brief sentences about them.

After the four days of the pop-up, you will be invited back for two party dialogues. These are also called focus groups. At these focus groups, we will have food and I will ask you questions in groups about what you did at the pop-up and what activities brought you joy. We will have the focus groups during the first two weeks in August in the park—the same location as the pop-up. You will also view images and videos from the 4-day program and talk about the activities you participated in.

Your real name will be replaced with your preferred pseudonym (a different name that you want to be called) and you can choose to not have your word or pictures or videos included at any point during the study. I will ask for permission before I record written notes and to record (voices only) our focus groups. Taking notes and having a recording for reference will only be for me and my co-researchers to recall our conversations/my observations to give a correct representation of all contributions from participants. I will also ask your permission to take photos of items that could be useful to have as artifacts in the study. I will blur any identifying information out from all artifacts. All identifying information will be kept confidential. Focus groups will last no longer than one hour, and all observations will vary based on the duration of the activity/session that is being observed.

The risks of participating in this study are low. There is the risk of increased emotions when conversing about various hard situations in life. You can choose not to participate in any part of the pop-up session and choose not to answer certain questions in the focus groups. You can choose at any time to have images/videos you have created or appear in removed from data. The potential benefits are the possibility of building relationships, engaging in creative activities, and creating more spaces that consider joy for the participants and for the broader community.

This is the consent form for this study. [show consent form] Could we go over this form so I can be sure we're on the same page? Once you fully understand it, I'll need you to sign and date it in order to participate. We can revisit this form at any point, and you are welcome to withdraw consent at any point as well.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS

Informed Consent Form for Minor
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT
Project Title: Understanding Joy Among Young Black People
Principal Investigator: Erica Wrencher
Faculty Advisor: Silvia
Bettez Participant's Name:

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

Your child will be asked to take part in a research study. Your child's participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose for your child not to join, or you may withdraw your consent for them to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to your child for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose for your child not to be in the study or you choose for your child to leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship or your child's relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about your child being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the study about?
This is a research project. Your child's participation in this project is voluntary. The purposes of this research is to understand how young Black people (ages 7–15) define and maintain joy and to gather lessons that educators can learn from young Black people about sustaining joy (as defined by young Black people) in educational spaces. Your child is invited to participate in this research study by participating in a 4-day Journey to Joy Pop-Up arts-based program Arlington Neighborhood Park and participating in 2 focus group interview sessions at Arlington Neighborhood Park.

Why are you asking my child?
I am asking your child because they identify as Black, are between the ages of 7–15, and live in close proximity to Arlington Neighborhood Park.

What will you ask my child to do if I agree to let him or her be in the study?

Each day of the pop-up we asked you to think about two questions: *What is joy to you? How do you find joy?* After group check-ins and a brief framing of the day around the central prompt, each day your child will be able to choose how they want to spend their time in each pop-up in four main ways: (1) a maker/creation station, (2) a movement/music station, (3) a visual image/photovoice station and (4) a free choice station. During each pop-up, your child will have the option to create with various art materials including: mini-canvases, cameras, paint, plain and colored paper, pencils, pens, stamps, scissors, markers, colored pencils, poster board, and butcher paper, and magazines. For movement and music, your child will have the option to move their bodies through guided movement sessions and listen or sing-a-long during mini-concert sessions. Your child will have the opportunity to take photos or videos with provided cameras of the joy they see or feel around them and write a short description and explanation of their images. Study team and participants will take pictures and videos of objects at the park. Your child will be invited back to the park for two Joy pop-up party dialogues (also called focus groups). Each party will begin with food and music for thirty minutes, followed by an approximately 1.5 hour long focus group session. During each focus group, your child along with other participants and I will view images and video clips from the pop-up. I will ask your child and other participants questions and the group will have a discussion about the images and videos to try to understand what they mean. Your child can choose to stop participating in the pop-up sessions or the focus groups at any time.

Is there any audio/video recording of my child?
Because your child's voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, confidentiality for things said on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

The study team will take observational notes, photos and video during the 4-day Journey to Joy pop-up program as data for this research study. The study team will audio record focus group interviews and transcribe the recording for the purpose of accuracy. The study team will share all images, videos, and words with participants to ensure accurate representation of your child's perspectives before they are published. At the end of the study, the focus group audio recordings will be erased or destroyed. The study team will assign your child a different name on the focus group interview transcripts. Your child's real name will not be used at any point of information collection or in my research study. Your child can reach out to Erica Wrencher and choose to have images/videos/quotes removed from the study at any time.

What are the dangers to my child?
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. There is low risk that your child's perspectives could be misrepresented. I will share all images, videos, and words of your child with participants to ensure accurate representation of your child's perspectives before they are published. At the end of the study, the audio focus group audio recordings will be erased or destroyed. Your child can reach out to Erica Wrencher and choose to have images/videos/quotes removed from the study at any time. There is low risk of increased unpleasant emotions when discussing hard situations in life that are about joy. Your child can choose to stop participating in the pop-up sessions or the focus group interviews at any time.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Erica Wrencher who may be reached at (910) 364-8661 or ejwrench@uncg.edu and Silvia Bettez who may be reached at scbettez@uncg.edu. Also, if you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855) 251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of my child taking part in this research?
The potential benefit to society may be contributing to knowledge that could be used to create more joy-filled educational spaces for young Black people.

Are there any benefits to *my child* as a result of participation in this research study?

The potential benefits may be building relationships, engaging in creative activities and understanding personal definitions of joy. Another potential benefit may be the creation of more educational spaces that consider joy among young Black people for your child.

Will my child get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything for my kid to be in this study?
There are no costs to you or payments to you or your child as a result of participation in this study.

How will my child's information be kept confidential?
All data will be stored in UNCG approved data storage locations as outlined in the UNCG Data classification policy. Currently, UNCG requires that data be stored for five years following closure of the study. Participants can reach out to Erica Wrencher and choose to have images/videos/quotes removed from the study at any time. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Any video and voice recordings of participants will be destroyed immediately after transcription. All transcripts will be de-identified. This means that I will assign your child a different name on the focus group interview transcripts. Any video and voice recordings of participants will be destroyed immediately after transcription.

Your child's real name will not be used at any point of information collection or in my research study. At the end of the study, the audio focus group audio recordings will be erased or destroyed after transcription. Your child can reach out to Erica Wrencher and choose to have images/videos/quotes removed from the study at any time. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Will my child's de-identified data be used in future studies?
Your child's de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent or your child's additional assent.

What if my child wants to leave the study or I want him/her to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to allow your child to participate or to withdraw them at any time,

without penalty. If your child does withdraw, it will not affect you or your child in any way. If you or your child chooses to withdraw, you may request that any data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your child's participation at any time. This could be because your child has had an unexpected reaction, has failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to allow your child to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by legal parent or guardian of Participant:
By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read it or it has been read to you, you fully understand the contents of this document and consent to your child taking part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child who wishes to participate in this study described to you by Erica Wrencher.

If your child was harmed while participating in the study, who would pay for the necessary medical care?

In the event that your child suffers a research-related injury, your medical expenses will be your responsibility or that of your third-party payer, although you are not precluded from seeking to collect compensation for injury related to malpractice, fault, or blame on the part of those involved in the research.

Date: _____
Participant's Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature

Participants' Parent/Legal Guardian Contact Phone Number _____

(NOTE: this number will only be used to follow up if a participant is absent or in case of emergency

Assent Form for Minors 12–17
Project Title: Understanding Joy Among Young Black People
Principal Investigator:

Why am I here?
We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. Research studies are done to find better ways of helping and understanding people or to get information about how things work. In this study we want to find out more about how young Black people (ages 7–15) define and maintain joy and to gather lessons that educators can learn from young Black people about sustaining joy in educational spaces. You are being asked to be in the study because you are Black, between the ages of 7–15, and live in close proximity to Arlington Neighborhood Park. In a research study, only people who want to take part are allowed to do so.

What will happen to me in this research study?
If it is okay with you and you agree to join this study, you will be asked to (1) participate in a 4- day summer program Monday through Thursday from 9–12pm and (2) participate in two group 1-hour focus groups. The 4-day program is called Journey to Joy pop-up. Each day will be centered around a central prompt: What is joy to you? What does it look like? Sound like? Feel like? Taste like? Smell like? How do you find joy?

After group check-ins and a brief framing of the day around the central prompt, you will be able to choose how you want to spend your time in each pop-up in four main ways: (1) a maker/creation station, (2) a movement/music station, 3) a visual image/photovoice station and (4) a free choice station. During each pop-up, you will have the option to create with various art materials including mini-canvases, cameras, paint, plain and colored paper, pencils, pens, stamps, scissors, markers, colored pencils, poster board, and butcher paper, and magazines. For movement and music, you will have the option to move their bodies through guided movement sessions and listen or sing-a-long during mini-concert sessions. You will have the opportunity to take photos or videos with provided cameras of the joy you see or feel around you and write a short description and explanation of your images. You will be invited back to the park for two Joy pop-up parties. Each party will begin with food and music for thirty minutes, followed by an approximately 1.5 hour long focus group interview session.

During each focus group, you, other participants and I will view images and video clips from the pop-up. I will ask you and other participants questions and the group will have a discussion about the images and videos to try to understand what they mean.

How long will I be in the research study?
Study participation will consist of four 3-hour days and two 1.5 hr focus group sessions. Study completion timetable is as follows: July 2023: 4-day Joy Pop-Up (three hours each day) August 2023: Two focus groups (lasting 1.5 hrs each). From late August-October 2023 during data analysis, I may contact you to ensure I am representing your perspectives accurately in words and/or images.

Can anything bad happen to me?
The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. There is low risk that your perspectives could be misrepresented. I will share all images, videos, and words of you with you to ensure accurate representation of your perspectives. At the end of the study, the audio focus group audio recordings will be erased or destroyed after they are transcribed. You can reach out to Erica Wrencher and choose to have images/videos/quotes removed from the study at any time. There is low risk of increased unpleasant emotions when discussing hard situations in life that are about joy. You can choose to stop participating in the pop-up sessions or the focus group interviews at any time.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Erica Wrencher who may be reached at (910) 364-8661 or ejwrench@uncg.edu and Silvia Bettez who may be reached at scbettez@uncg.edu. Also, if you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Can anything good happen to me in this research study?
I do not know if you will be helped by being in this project. However, we may learn something that will help people who create learning spaces for other children to consider what brings young Black people joy in the future.

Do I have other choices?
You do not have to be in this study. You can decline participating in any part at any time.

What if I do not want to be in this research study?
You do not have to be part of this project. It is up to you. You can even say okay now, but change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me. No one will be mad at you if you change your mind.

What about my confidentiality?
The study team will do everything possible to make sure that your data and or records are kept confidential. Nothing said in a focus group is confidential. Please do not share anything you would not want to be public.

Will I be paid for being in this research study?
You will not be paid for taking the time to be in this study.

Do my parents know about this research study?
This study has been explained to your parent/parents/guardian and they have given permission for you to be in it.

What if I have questions?
If you have any questions about the study, you can ask Erica Wrencher who may be reached at (910) 364-8661 or ejwrench@uncg.edu and Silvia Bettez who may be reached at

scbettez@uncg.edu. anything about the study. You may also call the Director in the Office of Research Integrity at or 855-251-2351.

Assent

This study has been explained to me and I am willing to be in it.

_____

Child's Name (printed) and Signature

Date Check which applies below

_____The child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_____The child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this
study.

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent Date

Assent Form for Minors 7–11
Study Title: Understanding Joy Among Young Black People
My name is: Erica Wrencher

What is this about?
I would like to talk to you about what you think about joy. I want to learn about what you think joy is and how you keep it. I hope I can use the information I learn to help teachers make classroom spaces better for Black students like you. In a research study, only people who want to take part are allowed to do so.

Did my parents say it was ok?
Your parent(s) said it was ok for you to be in this study and have signed a form like this one.

Why me?
We would like you to take part because you are a black person between who is between 7–15 years old and you live close to Arlington Neighborhood Park.

What if I want to stop?
You do not have to say "yes," if you do not want to take part. We will not punish you if you say "no." Even if you say "yes" now and change your mind after you start doing this study, you can stop and no one will be mad at you.

What will I have to do?
You will participate in a 4-day program called Journey to Joy pop-up Monday through Thursday from 9–12pm each day. Each day will be centered around central questions: What is joy to you? What does it look like? Sound like? Feel like? Taste like? Smell like? How do you find joy? We will have group check-ins and then you will be able to choose how you want to spend your time in each pop-up in four main ways: (1) a maker/creation station, (2) a movement/music station, 3) a visual image/photovoice station and (4) a free choice station. During each pop-up, you will have the option to create with various art materials including mini-canvases, cameras, paint, plain and colored paper, pencils, pens, stamps, scissors, markers, colored pencils, poster board, and butcher paper, and magazines. For movement and music, you will have the option to move their bodies through guided movement sessions and listen or sing-a-long during mini-concert sessions. You will have the opportunity to take photos or videos with provided cameras of the joy you see or feel around you and write a short description and explanation of your images.

Next, you will be invited back to the park for two Joy pop-up parties. Each party will begin with food and music, followed by a focus group interview session. These parties will be 1 hour long. An interview session is where there are questions and talking. During each focus group interview session, you, other participants, and I will view images and video clips from the pop-up. I will ask questions to you and other participants and the group will have a discussion about the images and videos to try to understand what they mean.

Will anything bad happen to me?
Participating in this study poses minimal risk to you. There is low risk that your perspectives could be misrepresented or not communicated correctly. I will share all images, videos, and

words of you with you to ensure accurate representation of your perspectives. At the end of the study, the audio focus group audio recordings will be erased or destroyed after they are transcribed. You can reach out to Erica Wrencher and choose to have images/videos/quotes removed from the study at any time. There is low risk of increased unpleasant emotions when discussing hard situations in life that are about joy. Your can choose to stop participating in the pop-up sessions or the focus group interviews at any time.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Erica Wrencher who may be reached at (910) 364-8661 or ejwrench@uncg.edu and Silvia Bettez who may be reached at scbettez@uncg.edu. Also, if you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Will anything good happen to me?

I do not know if you will be helped by being in this project. However, we may learn something that will help people who create learning spaces for other children to consider what brings young Black people joy in the future.

Do I get anything for being in this study?

You will not be paid money for taking the time to be in this study.

What if I have questions?

You are free to ask Erica Wrencher questions at any time.
If you understand this study and want to be in it, please write your name below.

Assent

This study has been explained to me and I am willing to be in it.

_____

Child's Name (printed) and Signature Date
Check which applies below

_____The child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

____The child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_____

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent Date

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol Title: Understanding Joy Among Young Black People

Principal Investigator: Erica Wrencher
1400 Spring Garden St.
Greensboro, NC 27412
910-364-8661

Key Information

You are being asked to volunteer for research. *Below is some key information to keep in mind when thinking about why you may or may not want to be in the research. Additional details will follow.*

Introduction
The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.

Purpose of the Study
You have been asked to participate in a research study about joy among young Black people. The purposes of this research is to understand how young Black people define and maintain joy and to gather lessons that educators can learn from young Black people about sustaining joy (as defined by young Black people) in educational spaces. You are invited to participate in this research study by participating in a 4-day Pop-Up arts-based program in Arlington Neighborhood Park and participating in 2 focus group interview sessions at Arlington Neighborhood Park.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
Because you are 18+ and a young Black person living in the Arlington Park Neighborhood with close proximity to the Arlington Neighborhood Park.

How many people will take part in this study and how long will it take?
This study will take 15 hours which includes 4 pop-up days (3 hours each day) and 2 focus group days (1.5 hours each day) and will include approximately 30 study participants at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

What will you be asked to do?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to (1) participate in a 4- day program from 9–12pm and 2) participate in two group 1.5 hour focus groups. The 4-day program is called Journey to Joy pop-up. Each day will be centered around a central prompt: What is joy to you? What does it look like? Sound like? Feel like? Taste like? Smell like? How do you find joy? After group check-ins and a brief

framing of the day around the central prompt, you will be able to choose how you want to spend your time in each pop-up in four main ways: (1) a maker/creation station, (2) a movement/music station, 3) a visual image/photovoice station and (4) a free choice station. You will also help to provide snacks and restock the materials at each station as needed. During each pop-up, you will have the option to create with various art materials including mini-canvases, cameras, paint, plain and colored paper, pencils, pens, stamps, scissors, markers, colored pencils, poster board, and butcher paper, and magazines. For movement and music, you will have the option to move their bodies through guided movement sessions and listen or sing-a-long during mini-concert sessions. You will have the opportunity to take photos or videos with provided cameras of the joy you see or feel around you and write a short description and explanation of your images. You will be invited back to the park for two Joy pop-up parties. Each party will begin with food and music, followed by the focus group interview session.
During each focus group, you, other participants and I will view images from the pop-up. I will ask you and other participants questions and the group will have a discussion about the images to understand what they mean.

Your participation may be audio recorded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described in this section. All data will be stored in UNCG approved data storage locations as outlined in the UNCG Data classification policy.

What are the risks involved in this study?
There is low risk that participants' perspectives could be misrepresented. I will share all images, videos, and words that will be used in the study presentation with the participants to ensure accurate representation of their perspectives. You can choose to stop participating in the pop-up sessions or the focus group interviews at any time.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, there may be societal benefits such as learning about joy in educational spaces.

Do you have to participate?
No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in any way. You may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. Nothing said in a focus group is confidential. Please do not share anything you would not want to be public.

You may choose not to answer a question or question(s) for any reason.

If you would like to participate sign and return the form to Erica Wrencher. You will receive a copy of this form.

Will participating in the study cost you anything?
No. There are no direct costs for taking part in this research study.

If you were harmed while participating in the study, who would pay for the necessary medical care?
If you are not a student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and in the event that you suffer a research-related injury, your medical expenses will be your responsibility or that of your third-party payer,

although you are not precluded from seeking to collect compensation for injury related to malpractice, fault, or blame on the part of those involved in the research.

Will there be any travel or other study-associated costs (for example, child care) and will researchers provide any money to cover those costs?
No. You will be not reimbursed for costs, such as travel, hotel, childcare, meals, etc. You will be responsible for covering these costs.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
No. Participants will not be paid.

How will my information be protected?
We will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of study records that identify you, but we cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your information will be viewed by the research team and other people within the University of North Carolina at Greensboro who help administer and oversee research. All data will be stored in UNCG approved data storage locations as outlined in the UNCG Data classification policy. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other identifiable information will not be used. Currently, UNCG requires that data be stored for five years following closure of the study. Participants' de-identified data in this study will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without additional consent or your participants' additional assent. Participants can reach out to Erica Wrencher and choose to have images/videos/quotes removed from the study at any time. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Any video and voice recordings of participants will be destroyed immediately after transcription.

If videos or pictures taken by the study participants include other study participants or other people at the park as part of this study, these images will be described through de-identified written text and then video and images will not be destroyed immediately to maintain confidentiality.
Under North Carolina law, researchers are required to report information about the abuse or neglect of a child or disabled adult to local or state authorities.

Additional Information and Details

Could my information be used for future research without asking for my permission?
Yes. If all identifiers (name, date of birth, etc.) are removed, it is possible that the data collected for this study may be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without your consent.

What will happen if you decide to withdraw from the study?
If you decide to leave the study, contact the researchers so they know. The researchers may ask you the reason but you are not required to provide it. In addition, the researchers could end your participation in this study if they don't feel that it is in your best interest, or if the study is stopped early.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?
Prior to, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher, Erica Wrencher, at 910.364.8661 or Silvia Bettez at 336.334.3475 or send an email to scbettez@uncg.edu for any questions or concerns or if you feel that you have been harmed or injured as a result of being in the research.

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?

Prior to, during or after your participation you can contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG at 855-251-2351 or ori@uncg.edu to:

- Discuss problems, concerns, and questions, including questions about your rights as a person in a research study
- Obtain information
- Offer input.

The Office of Research Integrity at UNCG is not affiliated with any specific research study. You can contact anonymously if you wish.

If you want to volunteer to be in this research, please sign here

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Signature

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. You agree to allow the researchers to use and share your information as described in this form. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

_____ I agree to be audio and/or video recorded and/or photographed.

_____ I do not want to be audio and/or video recorded and/or photographed.

_____

Printed Name

_____

Signature Date

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

_____

Printed Name of Person obtaining consent

_____

Signature of Person obtaining consent Date

APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION GUIDE

Today's date:

Observation Station (which station am I assigned to):
What is the ethos of the day (weather, people's perceived demeanor based on their body language/what they say, concerns or issues with stations or community news that might impacting the ethos):

Participant	What do I notice they are **saying**?	What do I notice they are **doing**?	What do I notice they are **creating**?	What do I notice that **seems unusual**?

APPENDIX E: AMENDED FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Day 1

1. What pictures about joy did we take?
2. If you could share one things to someone else about what is bringing your joy today in this space, what would you share?
    a. What else would you share to somebody who is not here?

Day 4

1. If you could teach a lesson to adults in schools about joy, what would it be?
2. What lesson would you teach any adults about joy?
    a. What do you want people to know about joy?