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A Research Project, Not a Program: Culture of Care in Photovoice Research with Black Girls

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Abstract: Black girls in Kentucky are hyper-minoritized. This marker gives others the notion that Black girls are abnormal, in need of programming, and incapable of narrating their own existence. The D.O.P.E. Black Girl Research Collective—an intergenerational, interdisciplinary research collective comprised of community-centered researchers at the University of Kentucky, Berea College, and the Lexington Housing Authority – conducted an 18-month Photovoice research study alongside Black girls in central Kentucky to examine how and in what ways Black girls define their lives in a post-2020 climate—that is, after the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery amidst the explosion of the COVID-19 pandemic. Using bell hooks' "talking back" framing, this paper outlines a Photovoice methodological approach to conducting research *by*, *for*, and *with* Black girls pushed to the margins in a Southern locale. Our collective research revealed the distinct ways in which Black girls "talk back" while sustaining a culture of collective care.
Keywords: Black girls, Photovoice, Care, American South, Talking back

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This paper details a Photovoice research study methodological process with culturally and ethnically diverse Black girls in a politically, economically, socially, and culturally divided southern state post–2020. We define post-2020 as the period after which funding to combat the rampant spread of COVID-19 abruptly ended, after Breonna Taylor was murdered in her own home, after George Floyd was publicly suffocated, after Ahmaud Arbery was gunned down in Georgia, after the world made performative commitments to combat systemic racism, and the swift renege on those commitments. Examining race, place, and education and how Black girls define their lives post-2020 was the goal of this Photovoice research project. The project took place in a rural Southern city where Black girls are hyper-minoritized and often silenced and ignored, and there is seldom a mention of their position in a Global Majority.

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Throughout this paper, we refer to "culture" as the culture of our collective research project, the culture of the southern locale, and the culture that surrounds us as Black girls in the American South. Additionally, when we refer to "culture," we are not limited by the ethnic diversity of the region or demographic descriptors of the research team but by the culture of a place that automatically assumes that Black girls are in need of programming, not capable of enacting agency in their own lives, or contributing to a research project at a flagship research-intensive institution. Our experience as Black girls in the American South is akin to those of the Global South. There is a presumption of low economic status and low intelligence associated with Black girlhood. Photovoice research allowed us to "talk back" to deficit-laden, uninformed presumptions using our knowledge as an emancipatroy act and our narratives as resistance, thus amplifying our place in the Global Majority.

Further, we outline Photovoice as an intersectional research method to translate the culture of collective care enacted by Black girls as arbiters of their own lives. Next, the authors engage readers with the political, social, and racial context of the research site and descriptively share the ways in which intentional care was enacted throughout the research process to combat such ills. The intentional care offered a double aim in the research process (Fals Borda, 2001; Hightower, 2024; McTaggart, 1997). First, intentional care allowed the authors to develop a level of trust required for intersectional research with a historically silenced and dismissed group, and second, intentional care offered a window into how to articulate findings for an academic audience as well as the communities in which the co-researchers are rooted.

The American South has a particular set of expectations for Black girls (hooks, 1996). The South tells Black girls to labor and be present, but not too visibly. It tells Black girls to clean up chaos we did not create but not complain in the process. The South tells Black girls to mask their emotions and their humanity and not express joy, grief, or anger (Collins, 2022). Black girls, particularly in the Appalachian Kentucky South context of this research study, are "invisible to our America, a country that often wrongly conflates 'Black' with urban" (Wilkinson, 2024, p. 8). It was through subtle whispers and loud contraventions that a collaborative research team comprised of Black women scholars and a local community partner developed a Photovoice research project exploring race, place, and education in the lives of Black girls post-2020 in Lexington, Kentucky.

Centering Delia in Photovoice Research with Black Girls—Theory to Action

To make palpable for our audiences the urgency of Photovoice research *for*, *by*, and *with* Black girls, we centered Delia, a Black woman in Columbia, South Carolina (Figure 1), who is the subject of a daguerreotype—the first commercial photographic process—made in 1850 for the Swiss-born naturalist Louis Agassiz (Rogers & Blight, 2010). Delia, one of seven enslaved persons photographed at the request of Agassiz, was the subject of a study intended to prove the inferiority of Africans. In this daguerreotype, Delia's position as the object behind the camera speaks loudly. Delia's lips are sealed. She is exposed, expressionless. We asked ourselves, who cared for Delia, protected Delia, and provided community for Delia during her most vulnerable times? In homage to Delia and as an expression of gratitude for her power, we read Delia's eyes, saying to us to go forth boldly in the world and tell our own stories. Delia's eyes tell us to care deeply for Black girls and fiercely protect and honor their existence. Most importantly, Delia's eyes tell us to talk back. Photovoice research *with*, *by*, and *for* Black girls in the American South, particulary Kentucky, provided a gateway to meticulously care for Black girls and to conduct research with compassion.

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Figure 1
Delia

Like Delia, Black girls have oftentimes been the object of photography and multimedia in which they have no control. This project countered Black girl objectification through dissident feminisms. Dissident feminism embodies identifying, naming, and resisting power that oppresses those of us who are multiply marginalized. In this case, Black girls are the multiply marginalized not only by their race and gender but also their status as recipients of public education, public housing, and public higher education in a Southern locale. Dissident feminism affords authentic connection with each other, coalition, solidarity, and collective resistance against capitalism and misogynoir. Overall, dissident feminisms push against and challenge hegemonic structures and ideologies. bell hooks (1986, 1989*)* names "talking back" as a dissident feminism and specifically offers the language of talking back, which consists of, "moving from silence to speech." It is also "standing and struggling, side by side as a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible" (1989, p. 9). In many of bell hooks' (1986, 1989, 1996, 2009) writings and commentaries, talking back is an act that Black girls in Kentucky, in particular, utilize to cope with imaginary representations that are negative. Throughout this paper, we propose care as a means of talking back becauseinherently caring for Black girls, dismantles hegemonic notions and praxes in an anti-Black girl world. Hence, this paper details how Photovoice research and care enacted bell hooks' philosophy of talking back.

This Photovoice research project centered Black girls' perceptions of their own lives through photography. For our research collective, care was very particular. We define care as

feeling and having great concern and interest for the welfare of someone. To care is to advocate for the overall health, livelihood, and well-being of someone through consistent actions that provide adequate and culturally competent support. Lastly, to care is to move with certainty and intent so as to prevent harm, damage, and risk.

Photovoice Research Project, Not a Program

Care is also the reason we were intentional about co-designing a research project guided by the voices, experiences, and silences of Black girls in Appalachian Kentucky. Photovoice is a "process by which people can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). Photovoice is a participatory action research (PAR) method aimed at (1) inviting research participants to visually narrate their experiences while (2) using photography for individual and community well-being (Breny & McMorrow, 2020; Latz, 2017). The Photovoice research process entails Black girls talking back by actively assessing community strengths, assets, and improvement concerns, highlighting priorities, interpreting study findings, and applying findings to develop action plans designed to enhance other Black girls' academic, home, and social lives (Hergenrather et al., 2009). In this way, research participants become co-researchers throughout the research process, hence removing the veil separating researchers from participants. In a post-2020 academic climate, one rife with silencing the needs and experiences of the perpetually marginalized, Photovoice provided a method to respond to the following research considerations: How are the children? More specifically, how are Black girls managing? In considering these questions, we are painfully aware that Black girls are over-researched and hyper-critiqued in studies that fail to capture their voices, expertise, and authentic experiences (African American Policy Forum, 2015; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winters, 2011, 2018; Tuck, 2009). Educationally, Black girls are silenced, criminalized, and pushed out of school for behaviors that some find offensive, insubordinate, or too adultlike (Morris, 2015, 2019). Socially, Black girls are often viewed through a singular lens as hypersexual and uneducated (Halliday, 2020). To interrogate this, we were keenly interested in exploring how perceptions of and attitudes toward Black girls have been exacerbated or reduced in educational settings during COVID-19. More importantly, we wanted to understand how, and in what ways, Black girls define their lives post-2020 by amplifying their experiences, expertise, knowledge, brilliance, and joy. To that end, applying Photovoice, as an intersectional research methodology, allowed us to "contemplate, interrogate, name, and simultaneously reclaim and reject that nexus between the known and unknown, invisible and (hyper)visible, and humanizing and dehumanizing" (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022, p. 4) and provided space to assertively detail how we unapologetically made visible and tangible the lives of Black girls in a locale that pushes them to the margins.

The study was designed and administered with an intergenerational, intersectional lens using Photovoice to magnify the explicit needs and desires of culturally and ethnically diverse Black girls (Vangh et al., 2012; Wang & Burris, 1997). As a collective research team, we refer to ourselves as D.O.P.E. Black Girl Research Collective, a community-engaged research partnership of Black women scholars at the University of Kentucky College of Education, Berea College, and the Lexington Housing Authority. D.O.P.E.—Determined, anti-Oppressive, Purpose-driven, Engaged—is an acronym outlining the principles we apply to community-engaged research and scholarship with Black women, girls, and communities across the central Kentucky region. We partnered with the Lexington Housing Authority to conduct this research project and achieve the desired research goals. In conversations with Ms. Tiffany Clark, Manager Specialist with the

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Lexington Housing Authority, she mentioned that she not only works for the housing authority, but she is also a public housing resident with close connections to her community. As such, she has an obligation to protect her community from ill-intention. We honor and respect Ms. Clark, her position, and her community and followed her lead throughout the project. Ms. Clark offered the historical and cultural background of the research landscape and kept us grounded in what matters to residents. Intentionally engaging such a thoughtful research partner kept the research focused, sustained, and impactful as those closest to the community provided vision in research toward action.

Through a carefully crafted and thoughtful research design, our study created a candid environment with open dialogue and a nurturing space for joy, life, and self-sovereignty amid post-2020 adversity. As an illustrative example, Black mothers were considered in their multiplicative roles as breadwinners, nurturers, and protectors, so our research team provided highly rated chauffeured transportation to alleviate participation barriers, allowing Black mothers to rest easy. Healthy but tasty breakfast and lunch options were provided during each research session because the research team cared deeply about the overall health and wellness of each co-researcher. After each research session, co-researchers earned a Visa gift card as compensation for their contributions to the research project. Compensating Black girls for their time and contributions is a radical act, especially in a post-2020 academic climate. The payment translated to adolescent Black girls that we valued their presence and participation and that their expertise would contribute to the collective care of Black girls who could not participate.

Community-Engaged Research

Cahill et al. (2010) posit, "PAR is an embodied commitment by members of the collective to stretch mutually toward collective concerns and hopes" (p. 408). Moving with this understanding and commitment to the integrity of the community-engaged research approach, the project started before submitting a grant application in that the core research team conducted several listening sessions with the community partner to assess their research goals and desires. Listening sessions allowed us to listen intently, sift through, deeply reflect, and precisely identify what resources were being asked of us as university researchers. This was not a clean process, as the business of housing authority residents took precedence during these listening sessions, which meant our sessions happened during lunch breaks, in between phone calls, or when mandatory inspections were complete. There were several listening sessions, though. After submitting a grant proposal, the principal investigator hosted a dinner meeting with the community partner to dine and dialogue in ways that connected us as southern Black women. The dinner allowed us to get to know each other intimately outside of the demands of the ivory tower and the work of the housing authority. Without this dinner, the research project may have struck a disingenuous, transactional tone often enacted by large, predominately white research institutions.

After dinner, there was an alignment of goals, values, and interests with the Photovoice research project, and a palpable level of commitment and care reverberated beyond the core research team to additional members of the housing authority. This reverberation brought a shared interest in the success of the project. For example, a housing authority senior administrator provided a sponsored tour of all housing authority communities and single-family homes. She also arranged a meeting with the office staff at two housing sites to familiarize the research project across communities. There was also a recruitment meeting with the entire staff, including the maintenance team, to acclimatize everyone to the research process and to recommend any potential participants. Unsurprisingly, several housing authority stakeholders we encountered called the

research project a program. One staff member remarked, “Black girls are not interested in these types of programs because we had a program at our church, and only boys participated. The girls were not interested.” Her comment implied that Black girls should take whatever is thrown their way despite any disinterest or desire to participate.

Nevertheless, we appreciated the small nuances before starting recruitment because it gave us insight into the types of deficit ideologies Black girls in public housing often face. These anti-Black girl perceptions helped us contextualize the importance of our study in a mid-sized college town where housing authority residents are often the object of research versus producers of knowledge. These anti-Black girl declarations also illuminated the ways in which we should approach the research to promote autonomy, agency, collaboration, and intentional care. The deficit-based views of Black girls also provided insight into ways to promote project retention.

Project Recruitment

Project recruitment was laborious but instructive. The core research team designed and printed over 1,200 recruitment flyers, adhering to the housing authority and the university’s marketing standards. It was a generic flyer that did not denote who our target audience was—Black girls—as strictly recruiting Black girls using housing authority resources would have been a violation of the housing authority’s policy (it is important to note that 95% of the housing authority’s residents are non-white). The initial flyer also lacked a human connection (Figure 2). It was stoic. Our community partner stuffed 1,200 envelopes and mailed them to every resident. The community partner also leveraged her relationships with the local school system and hand-delivered flyers to high school counselors. After two weeks, there was minimal interest. There were several potential participants who gave insight into the lack of response—Black local communities do not trust the university. Some respondents learned to counter their distrust for the institution by simply responding to research studies with compensation. Our research collective reconvened to think through an alternate recruitment approach. Collectively, we decided to knock on doors across three housing authority communities, where several teenage Black girls resided, and update the recruitment flyer to speak directly to Black girls (Figure 3). We mailed the updated flyers from the university, and the community partner delivered the second batch to the local school system. Ultimately, we enrolled six Black adolescent girls who lived in a housing authority property and attended school in the local district (Table 1). It is important to note that three of the six participants expressed interest through their own volition.

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Table 1
Participant List

	Age	Role/Grade Level	Ethnicity
Core Research Team	43	Principal Investigator	African American
	29	Co-Principal Investigator	African American
	23	Research Assistant	African American
	19	Research Assistant	African American
	46	Community Partner	African American
Co-Researchers	18	12th	Congolese American
	17	12th	African American & Mexican
	15	9th	African American & Mexican
	15	9th	African American
	14	8th	African American
	15	10th	African American

Figure 2
Initial Recruitment Flyer

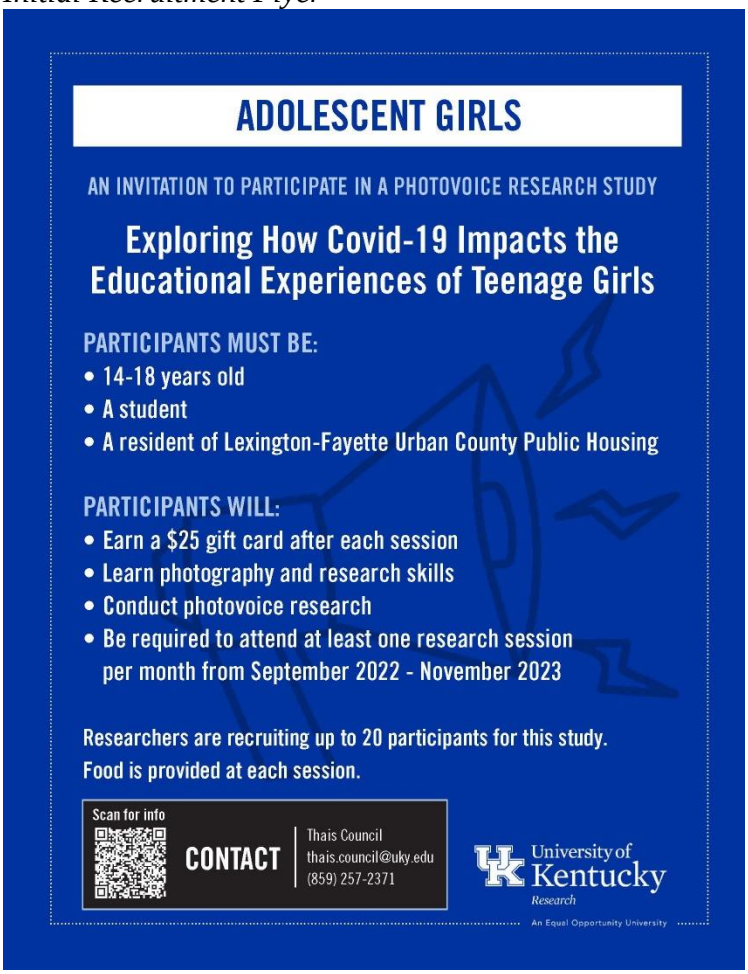

Figure 3
Updated Recruitment Flyer

Sowing Care–Home Visits as Project Enrollment

Keeping present the distrust the Black community expressed for the local institution, from the onset, the core research team decided to be intentional about sowing care and developing trust within and across the research process. Our first session was a home visit, in which we visited the homes of each co-researcher, meeting with their mothers, grandmothers, sisters, brothers, and sometimes pets. The home visit allowed the co-researchers' caretakers to "lay eyes on us" and decide whether to trust us with their Black teenage girls. Concurrently, home visits afforded us a window into participants' lives at home—observing how they share space, any opportunities for solace, and their responsibilities, including their general quotidian lives. We also conducted home visits to articulate and model through our consistent presence the level of engagement and intentional care we intended for a community-engaged study. We used home visits to chorale and consider caretakers' multiplicative roles and responsibilities and we incorporated a symphony of compassion through a collective care ethos into the research process moving forward.

Additionally, several of the research team members have been traumatized by "Sis!" Sis is an abbreviation for sister, intended as a term of endearment. Given the dearth of attention and lack of care or concern for the minds, ideas, habits, beliefs, values, and desires of Black girls, Black women and girls often compete for attention. This persistent, intentional, and careless lack creates

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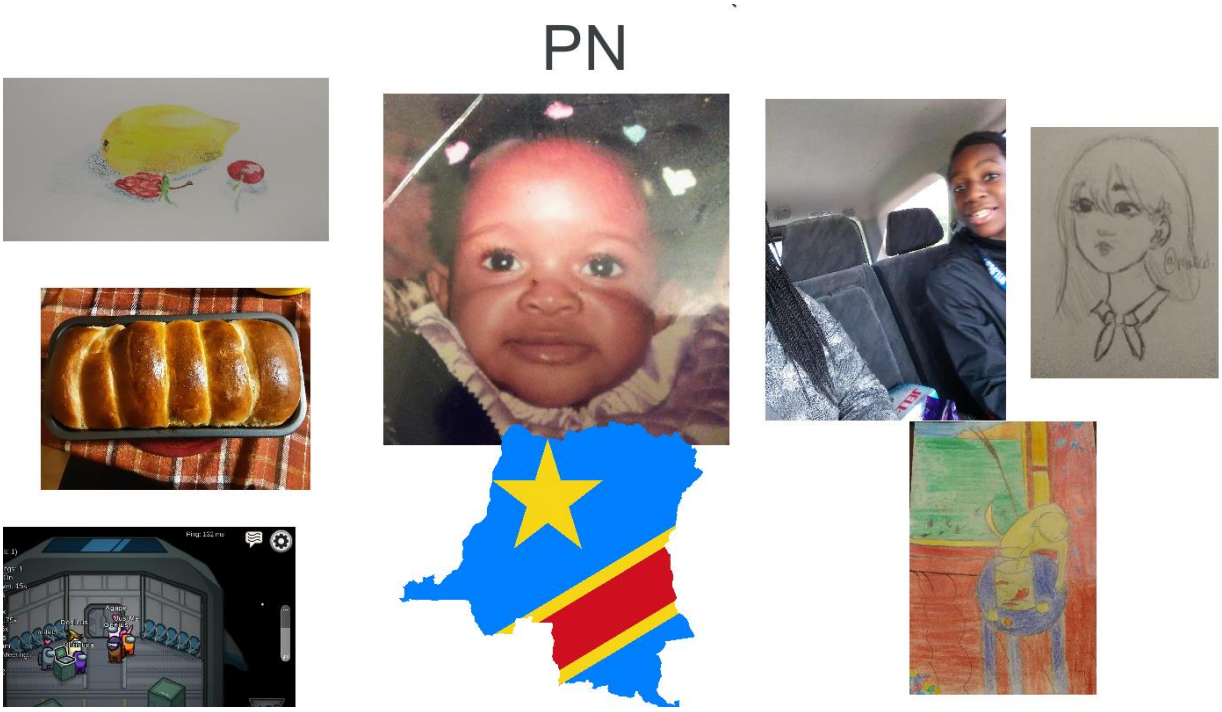
a scarcity mindset amongst Black women and girls, which leads to an insular toxic competition, cattiness, and stratification. Because Black women and girls must participate in a capitalist, white supremacist, imperialist patriarchy as an act of survival, some (un)wittingly revert to uncritical habits of mind that promulgate infighting and severed relationships. The infighting, coupled with the political, social, and racial context of place, projects a culture onto Black girls, where they are constantly given scripts that inscribe for them to be quiet, go with the flow, or participate in social networks instead of disrupting the status quo. The isolation and persistent (self) silencing provoke anxiety and other social, emotional, and mental health disorders.

As a research collective, we also recognized the present but unstated need for trust among one another. We understood that asking the co-researchers to trust each other and trust the core research team meant we needed to model that trust. Aside from regular meetings with co-researchers, the core research team explicitly shared our opinions on academic trust and where we stood with the notion of trust within our core research team. Two things became clear. First, a plethora of experiences within academia breeds natural distrust among professionals as they navigate their careers. For burgeoning academics, there is an unspoken, almost inherent trust within work teams and the mentors you rely on because of the coded nature of academia. Second, trust is an ongoing process, requiring an acknowledgment of the different stages each person might stand in is the first step to growing it. Our team had to decide how to navigate the varying levels of trust throughout a project, requiring our words, values, and intentions to converge with integrity.

The core research team considered this context, discussed it, and made provisions to circumvent this persistent culture within the research project and design. As an intergenerational research team, we extended cross-generational care to Black girls, which has not been extended historically, particularly in this locale.

Figure 4
JamBoard Introduction



To build trust within and across the collective research team, we created multiple and varied opportunities to share intimate details of our lives. Using JamBoard, we shared pictures of our families, our hobbies, our travels, and our favorite things (Figure 4). This exchange allowed us to see each other and to see ourselves in each other – the aligning interests, the traumas, the familial connections, etc. We shared our name preferences along with the rationale and importance. As we spent more time together, the things we shared became more personal. We shared how we were treated as Black women and girls across social and institutional contexts in our shared place. For instance, during our fourth research session, we engaged in a mapping activity in which we detailed our academic, personal, and professional aspirations. The map allowed each of us to see the ways in which our families' noble actions sometimes have unintended consequences in our trajectories through their cautious support. The process overall intentionally helped to grow a collective culture of care within the research process and team.

Research Sites

During the first collective session, in which the entire core research team and the co-researchers were present, we were adamant about sharing that this was a research project and not a program. There was a palpable silence after this declaration. We attributed this to the novelty and radical nature of the idea of Black girls contributing to and defining a research project. The co-researchers lived in this community their entire lives yet had not experienced a group of highly accomplished Black university women who did not want to "program" them but simply learn from them. The distinction became important to note, to reiterate that our goal was not to change the participants, but solely to draw from their Black girlhood experiences within a Southern locale, hence the focus was to amplify their voices and produce emancipatory knowledge.

Considering the racial context and anti-Black girl histories of certain campus and community spaces, the core team intentionally identified spaces we would invite co-researchers to occupy. We included field trips intended to provide reciprocal aspects of care, especially after co-researchers talked back to the core research team, sharing their limited photography opportunities within their locations. Co-researchers also expressed a desire to go beyond home and school to explore Black girlhood post-2020. With that, one of the first field trips was to a University sleep lab—led by a Black woman neuroscientist—where the team explored the psychology and neuroscience behind the importance of sleep and caring for their bodies (Figure 5). The team traveled to Louisville, Kentucky, to experience the Muhammad Ali Center, the role of Black resistance in Kentucky, and the care Ali took for himself and his community through the six core principles that guided his life (Figure 6). The team also visited the bell hooks' center at Berea College (Figure 7). One of the last places we traveled to was the University of Kentucky (UK) Arboretum, primarily because co-researchers indicated how much they loved outdoors and parks, and access was limited from their residential and academic location. The UK Arboretum is an overwhelmingly white space, and for a collective of Black girls to freely occupy this space while expressing joy served as a beautiful reminder that we belong (Figure 8). Here, co-researchers were free to roam the landscaped grounds, eat together outside, play with bubbles, and draw with chalk. At each site, each team member was free to explore and define care for themselves while being shown explicit examples of Black professionals navigating anti-Black girl spaces.

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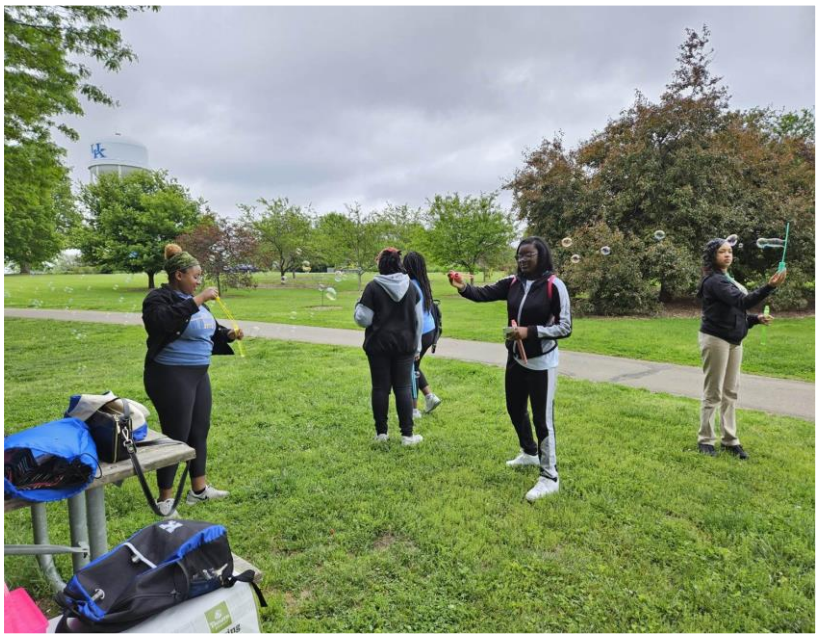
Figure 5
Sleep Lab Field Trip

Figure 6
Muhammad Ali Center Field Trip

Figure 7
bell hooks Center Field Trip

Figure 8
UK Arboretum



To that end, we will share how and in what ways care became a defining and necessary factor in Black girlhood post-2020.

Talking Back as Care

As a core research team, we were intentional throughout the process of enacting care by telling—and showing—that the voices, experiences, thoughts, and ideas of Black girls mattered.

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Living in public residences with regular inspections and externally created rules to follow can be uninviting, disruptive to emotional development, and erect barriers that imply Black girls do not belong and have no agency in their own lives. We have detailed how care was intentional throughout the research process, and we did not forego this level of care throughout data analysis. Next, we share three distinct ways care occurred in the research data. Because we are talking back as Black women and girls, it is important to note that we share research findings using the voices and narratives of Black girls themselves. This means we share the nuances and meaning-making process the co-researchers and the core research team employed to depict for readers the enactment of the research goal—exploring how Black girls define race, place, and education in their lives post-2020.

We assert talking back through care in three distinct ways. The first distinction is talking back to positivist or objective research ethics in the academy, particularly in an anti-Black girl academy that persistently attempts to discredit our intellectualism and oppositional frameworks (Collins, 2022). The second distinction is talking back to the stakeholders in Black girls' lives. In particular, the local school system, the housing authority, and the higher education institutions. The third distinction is talking back to the exhibits of care. We challenge the dominant and capitalistic notions of care, especially in an era of commercialized self-care.

Talking Back to Positivist Research Paradigms

The first way that this project talks back through care is by talking back to research ethics. The entire research process, particularly the data analysis approach, created space to talk back to positivist research paradigms that pervade academia. Data analysis was ongoing and iterative throughout the research process. Working from a Black girl lens as an intergenerational research team, we each have a Black girl who lives within us, our inner Black girl child (Smith-Purviance et al., 2022). In our quotidian lives as Black girls, we are constantly analyzing and reading the world as a method of survival (Collins, 2022; Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). As such, our research collective created space to dream together.

There were three stages of data analysis throughout the project. PHOTO narration was perhaps the most important analysis. PHOTO is an acronym representing how each co-researcher analyzed and explained their photography choices during each research session. PHOTO stands for (1) Describe your **p**icture, (2) What is **h**appening in your picture, (3) Why did you take a picture **o**f this? (4) What does this picture **t**ell us about your life? (5) And how can this picture provide **o**pportunities for us and other Black girls to improve life? PHOTO narration was an important form of data analysis because it created space to hear directly from co-researchers through their lens in their own voice and own words. PHOTO narration also allowed us to celebrate, challenge, and connect with each other, often by asking clarifying questions, responding with support, and praising achievements (Figure 9).

Figure 9
PHOTO Narration

The second data analysis stage involved using ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), to colletively memo and code transcripts, including PHOTO narration, from each session served as on-the-spot research training and collaborative data analysis for the core research team, which in turn promoted transparency and generalizability. Throughout CAQDAS, each core research team member closely read transcripts, paying attention to the narrator's words. We applied a grounded theory coding method, applying an open, axial, and theoretical coding scheme (Charmaz, 2006).

We moved into member checking, the third stage of data analysis, but not as a finality. Instead, member checking involved conversations with the community partner and co-researchers. We shared emerging theoretical frames and asked about the accuracy of interpretations, asking, did we get this right? If not, where did we go wrong? Can you point us in the right direction? Is this what you all meant by your words here? Did we accurately capture the conversation? Is this the type of theory that you would produce from that conversation? This consistent and persistent asking, checking, and intentional inclusion of Black girls not only showed that we conducted research with integrity but that Black girls carry an intellectual prowess that we value and nurture (Collins, 2022).

Talking Back to Stakeholders

Three stakeholders for Black girls in Lexington are Fayette County Public Schools, the University of Kentucky, and the Lexington Housing Authority. The project required focused attention to the labor that Black girls give to their school communities, their families, their home communities in Lexington in general, and the Commonwealth of Kentucky. But at the same time, there is little to no support strictly for Black girls. The dearth of attention to Black girls implies that few seem to care about their health and well-being in schools. Few seem to care about their housing or schooling environments in general. Photovoice created a pathway to create a space for Black girls to narrate their lives unapologetically, without judgment, without expectations, and without criticism. Because this space has been co-created, not just by the core research team, but

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by the co-researchers as well, they have shared a few ways in which stakeholders in their lives display a blatant disregard for their lives, and their well-being, while contrarily, Black girls display care for these institutions and stakeholders.

Lexington exists as the second most populous city in Kentucky yet retains its rural culture in political, social, and racial demographics. Within the heart of the city sits the flagship university of the state, an island of liberal arts amongst its conservative locals. The Black girls who are transplants often spend their time dreaming of leaving, and the native Black girls often plot ways to explore a world beyond. At the same time, Lexington is a beautifully scenic town catered to the wealthy, white adults that line its pockets. Lexington and surrounding areas are also a place in which "a cultural politics of white supremacy separates poor southern black folk from their white counterparts with whom they share a common class reality" (hooks, p. 58, 2009). For the disenfranchised Black folk who find themselves stuck here, reality is a constant reminder that their accomplishments, their joy, and their mere presence is an act of resistance.

According to a core research team member, attending the flagship institution in the state comes with a unique perspective of the intricacies of being a Black girl in white spaces, specifically, in the college of education, classes are often catered to white peers' cultural backgrounds and knowledge. Attending this university during the era of COVID-19, the murder of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, and the 2020 election created a division of perspective amongst students and faculty. While white students continued the normalcy of their everyday lives, Black students had to face explicit racism hanging over their heads while completing tasks as college students. Black students had to ask permission to process the traumas of public murder trials in the middle of white professors' lectures, where all other students continued their normal routines. On the contrary, the Photovoice research project created connections, experiences, and joy beyond the institution.

> As a research assistant and sophomore on this project, I am highlighting three things to depict the ways in which care was shown to me. First, compensation. I joined this project in October of 2022, so it was the third month of my freshman year. I was really struggling. I could not find a community. Your first year of college is a lot. I just happened to be scrolling on Instagram one day, and I saw a flyer for this club whose goal was to support and retain future educators. I was like, okay, I can get some free food and maybe meet some people. I am in college. Free food will get college students anywhere. I attended the meeting, and I was not looking for anything but a community and food. There, I met Dr. Council. We talked, and she said, "I want you to come to my office so I can talk to you about a research project I am working on." I agreed. Within the next week, we meet in her office and talk where she told me all about this amazing project, and I agreed to join as a research assistant. Dr. Council shared that I can get paid to do research, and I got excited because I know so many of my friends who conduct research, spending hours in labs or working with their research mentor, without compensation. When I learned I could get paid, I said to myself, "my time is valued here!" I am actually contributing something that's worthy of pay. It was definitely care shown to me.
>
> The second way that I experienced care was in a community. Like I said, I was a freshman when I started. I asked myself, "what am I going to do on this project?" I've done a couple research papers, but I'm not a researcher. So I said to myself at our first meeting, "I'm just gonna sit, and learn." No! The research team encouraged me to speak. Like the co-researchers, I

> attended Fayette County Public Schools, I grew up in public housing, and I had similar teenage experiences. They really valued my opinions and the information I offered and it really made me feel like a researcher. I was respected, and I was valued on this project because they were constantly pushing me. Amica, what do you think? Amica, how do you feel about that? This community, this culture of we are all researchers. We are all working together really showed that I am valued, and there is care on this project.
>
> The last thing I will highlight is care through providing opportunities. I am a stressor. I stress about everything. Every little detail about school. I do not take breaks. If I am not doing something academic, I am not productive. It has been a hard adjustment, figuring out what you have to balance. You cannot be successful in your academic life if you are not taking care of yourself in your personal life. From this community, they pushed me out of my shell to experience new things. The pushing and funding allowed me to travel to a city that I longed to go to, New York City. I went to Broadway. I tried new food. I saw my favorite artist, Taylor Swift. (Talking Back – Amica Snow).

While dealing with the macro and microaggressions of their white peers, academically, Black girls find themselves repeatedly forgotten. Black girls become conditioned to understand that research opportunities will not come their way if not for the few Black professors sprinkled across campus. Black girls' accomplishments will be attributed to affirmative action, not their natural intelligence and hard work. Diversity scholarships are careful to find ways to include white students so as not to jeopardize funding or invite criticism. Lexington has many beautiful spaces and exciting developments, but it is not shy about centralizing those spaces in whiteness.

> Living through 13 years in the education system taught me that there is a lack of care in the school setting. While there may be some care, the care displayed often felt superficial. It is often mocked by students who feel a lack of sincerity and preferential treatment towards other students. As a result, a disconnect develops between students and teachers. I noticed that students who are able to build connections with teachers and staff gained advantages that other students did not have. An example of this would be access to academic information that could be very important for others. This lack of resources leads to some students being more academically college-ready than others (Talking Back – PN).

Talking Back to Exhibits of Care

In a society that has shifted responsibility of mental, emotional, social, and physical health care as self-care to its citizens, the research process revealed the multiple ways in which self-care leaves Black women and girls "holding the bag." For example, during a particular PHOTO narration, one of the co-researchers remarked how expensive it was to be a Black girl (Figure 10):

> It is just being a person of color with curly hair and textured hair. When I get the gift cards, I buy expensive hair products because I do not spend my own money on them. I buy Carol's Daughter. She is expensive. I buy the hair melt. I have two Shea Moistures. I have the smoothie. I have the leave in conditioner. I have my eco gel. All my hair ties. Oil. I feel like it

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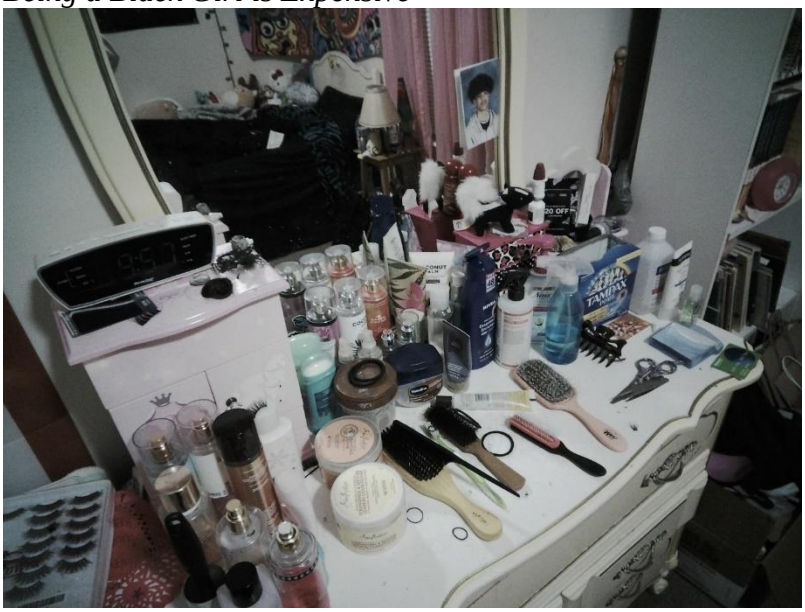
> represents a lot. I have all my perfumes – a bunch of perfumes. I have a little too many. Tampons, I am not afraid to say it. I mean, this is who I am. What being a girl is. Especially a Black girl. Smelling good, good hair, all that. (Talking Back – MSH).

Figure 10

Being a Black Girl is Expensive



To counter the literal and figurative expense of Black girlhood, even if in small portions, we tried to promote a collective care ethos. One of the research assistants explicates how the collective ethos was enacted in her experience.

> A community blossomed as care for one another presented itself. I watched every member check in with each other. Each session started with a check-in, which means we might pose a question to the team or simply ask how are you doing? What is going on in your life? Give us an update. During check-ins, the entire research team, including the co-researchers, came out of their shells. I have witnessed everyone share details of their lives and struggles while also witnessing extended support. The check-ins moved beyond simply creating space to share and transformed into a space to receive intentional and reciprocal care. Care happens when an opportunity for support for others is given within a community. It shows up through what we have learned, what we learn of one another, and how we often offer support. It shows up through the opportunities for both vulnerability and joy. (Talking back – Haley Brents).

Unsurprisingly, a co-researcher expressed similar sentiments of communal care as a powerful exhibit:

> Black girls show us that care is a communal endeavor. We care for not only the self in this way that is very formulaic in what we may see in mainstream pop culture, but Black girls also care for their communities in ways that nobody else can. Black girl care is not just an individual endeavor. It can

> be, but it is also caring for siblings when Mom has to work. It is also caring for our big sisters if they are going through a hard time. It is also caring for our mothers if they are going through a hard time. Care is also sometimes helping to manage classrooms. Black girls also care about space for the past, present, and future. If you care about Black girls, you have to care about what is the historical past. What is the context of Black girlhood? What is actually happening? What are the barriers, but what are the spaces in which Black girls thrive? What do their futures look like? But talking back to meanings of care tells us that Black girls care about themselves and their communities, and they, I think, have the key to figuring out what care is (Talking Back – PN).

Talking Black through the Black Girl Joy Fest: A Presentation of a Photovoice Research Project with Black Girls

The communal acts of care and Black girls talking back translated into our photo exhibition. One of the final steps of Photovoice research is typically a photo exhibit. The goal of the photo exhibit is to "present themes and collaborate with community leaders to impact change" (Hergenrather et al., 2009, p. 688). While the exhibition goal is aligned with traditional Photovoice research, our displays and expressions as Black girls do not mirror that of traditional academic approaches. Collectively, we decided to share our photos, themes, and desire to collaborate with community stakeholders through a joy festival, to openly and unapologetically share the care, love, joy, and compassion captured throughout the research project with the larger community as a model for how to develop future projects and research centering Black girls.

Conducting a research study with such a keen and intentional focus on enacting care and building trust, it was important that we carried these principles throughout the community-facing work. After much deliberation and discussion, the collective decision was to host a day-long, community-based Black Girl Joy Fest as a research presentation of the Photovoice research project (Figure 11).

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Figure 11
Black Girl Joy Fest

The development of a Black Girl Joy Fest was radical within itself, and with its inception came the obstacles of institutional whiteness and the continued, courageous audacity we, as researchers, had to press forward to decentralize the needs of our white counterparts. From conceptualization to implementation, the research team faced dwindling funding, indifferent support from uninvested University resources, and the threat of co-option as University representatives could potentially use the event as a photo opportunity without acknowledgment or recognition of the Black women's labor required for an event of this magnitude.

While planning the festival, the importance of co-researcher input quickly became clear. The core research team continued to prioritize the tenets of community-based research, studying *with* and not studying *on*, and the Black Girl Joy Fest research presentation would be no exception. With every planning step, co-researchers actively contributed to the location, space design, pictures selected, and information presented. Co-researchers expressed a desire for a space to be authentically themselves and to share that with their loved ones. Every session captures the joys Black girls experienced throughout the research project (Figure 11).

As a Black girl research collective making such a radical declaration to the community and Black girl stakeholders, we painstakingly understood the magnitude of what we were attempting to convey. Our trim core research team could not host the research presentation without support. We requested support through volunteer solicitation letters. We targeted Black members of our communities and found eager organizations and individuals from the greater Lexington area, specifically local Black college students, who had a desire to aid in the manifestation of Black joy. We hired a Black woman DJ to spin Black girl anthems during the festival, a Black videographer to capture the joy displayed and a Black woman food vendor to provide festival foods. This outward display of Black girl joy was palpable, necessary, and transformative.

Discussion

Delia's eyes gave us the power and permission to conduct this study in an overwhelmingly white space. Black girls are the targets of stares and looks of disgust in our quotidian lives. Boldly taking up space – sometimes as a group – with cameras widened people's suspicions. It was this collective, though, that allowed us to turn "silence into speech" (hooks, 1986, 1989) and accomplish the intent of Photovoice research – to "identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). Delia's eyes also told us that Black girls can narrate and define their lives as intellectual and creative contributors to a research project. Black girls do not require programming.

This study revealed and reaffirmed the importance of understanding and enacting care for Black girls post-2020, particularly in the American South. First, this study offers an intimate understanding of Black girls' desires immediately after a pandemic in a racially hostile landscape and the uncertainties of navigating a predominately white place and space as a hyper-minoritized person. This project contributes to a local context, with intimate knowledge of the lives of Black Kentuckian girls. bell hooks (1996) provided a pathway for Black Kentuckian girls to theorize and narrate their lives as one of the first thinkers to highlight Black Kentuckian girlhood. Here, we highlighted and discussed race, place, and education in Black girlhood post-2020 and the pervasiveness of anti-Black girlness in Kentucky. There is no post-racial society. Racism, classism, and misogynoir still exist, just like when bell hooks was a small girl, and color-blind racism and institutionally promoted Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programming did not make it disappear.

Dissident feminisms and Black girl understandings of care allow us to read a world from a Black girl perspective, which is something everyone needs after a global pandemic. This project also placed care within the context of power and oppression during a time when the most privileged people in this world were referencing care without concrete ideas or resources on how to enact care collectively for others, especially Black girls. Some talk about self care , but what does care look like when we consider multiply oppressed people of a Global Majority through a human-centered lens? This project is important because it looks at how care might, for multiple oppressed folks, encourage researchers to reimagine care in all spheres of our lives, from our own homes and families to more structural spaces like schools and government-subsidized housing, particularly in academic research at PWIs. Black girls' demonstrations of care as a means of talking back could pave the way for us to survive this world. Time and time again, Black girls have embodied community and self care. Care looks like identifying their barriers and needs through talking back to their school and home communities while also dreaming of a future and using their genius to navigate, survive, and boldly thrive in persistent anti-Black girl spaces.

As community-engaged researchers, we acknowledge that research can do more harm than good. Our recruitment struggles made this evident. We were adamant and intentional about not conducting research that tokenizes marginalized communities for our own individual gain. Deliberate considerations of care from the outset kept us accountable. Recounting the numerous ways we enacted care in this Photovoice research should not be a novelty, but a norm. We also acknowledge our Southern locale as a study limitation. We charge future studies to engage Black girls in urban spaces with urban challenges and Black girls with a range of cultural and ethnic identities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

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Amica Snow is a native of Lexington, Kentucky and a graduate of Tates Creek High School where she graduated with an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, a 4.9 GPA, and at the top 10 percent of her class. As a research assistant at the University of Kentucky, her research interests are diversity, inclusion, and educational equity.

Haley Brents graduated from the University of Kentucky in 2022 and is currently a Special Education teacher in Fayette County Public Schools. As she continues to plant roots, she plans to

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Tiffany Clark is a Manager Specialist for the Lexington Housing Authority. She recently joined the community fight against gun violence after her son, Zion, was murdered in 2022. Her involvement with the survivor's group led by Chief Kathy Witt of the Fayette County Sheriff's Department has given her a voice in the Lexington community. She chooses not to call herself a community leader, but a dedicated survivor, a mother determined to be the voice of her son.

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