COUNTERPOINT

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Disruptive Ruptures

The Necessity of Black/Girlhood Imaginary

Abstract: This article examines Black/Girlhood Imaginary, a transdisciplinary methodology that merges performance studies, Black studies, and education to research and theorize the capacious archives of Black girlhood. What the authors term *Black/Girlhood Imaginary* is a multivalent prism that aids in the recovery of the losses, the undermining, the layered violence, the joys, and the embodied experiences of Black girls. As a methodology, Black/Girlhood Imaginary weaves both the fullness and fissures of Black girlhoods, opening up the space for Black girls to recover their own images. The authors use the methodologies of Black/Girlhood Imaginary to analyze three case studies beginning with Judy Winslow's unexplained disappearance from the popular 1990s sitcom *Family Matters*. The authors then move into a literary analysis of a poem written by Paradise, a student, who theorizes state-sanctioned violence in her community. The authors end with a poem about Daniele, an employee embedded between diasporic economies. These case studies illustrate representations, perspectives, and experiences of Black girls in the kaleidoscope of the Black/Girlhood Imaginary.

Black/. We strategically write "Black forward slash Girlhood" to signal both an abstract configuration and a lived embodied experience of Black girlness that is in dialogue with global imaginings. The oblique line—the American English slash—symbolizes the space, the gap, the expectations, the interruption, the omission, the expansion, the theoretical downward slope, the jubilant upward reach, the implicit fall forward, and explicit push back created within and between culture's reconnaissance of Blackness and girlness. Used grammatically to mark both inclusivity and

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exclusivity, the slash between *Black* and *Girlhood* denotes the broad stroke with which we include varying notions of Blackness—notions that do not hinge on an essentialist notion of Blackness but, rather, a broader stroke, an expansion of the boundaries of Blackness deepened by the breadth and depth of Black girlhood that reaches beyond the flesh, nation-states, and political borders.

Girlhood. Let us pause here to give space to the volume of this word.

Girlhood is a layered mosaic, compounded by girls' experiences within social systems. In writing about girlhood, we are not implying heteronormative notions of girlness or girlhood; we are rather signaling to anyone who experiences life as a girl in mind, body, and spirit. The slash extends, or rather, leans toward girlhood, applying pressure to the word *Girl* with a capital G.

Imaginary. Stemmed from the word *image*, and rooted in the Latin term *imago*—a copy, likeness, equivalent, "im" to imitate. We see Black/Girlhood Imaginary as Jean Baudrillard's (1994) simulacra, a copy without an original. Mediated and circulated, this copy sometimes becomes blurred and fractured, separated into unidentifiable parts, and then mediated and recirculated again. In other instances, it is sanitized and enlarged, plastered on socially constructed billboards to be glimpsed from one's periphery.

Black/Girlhood Imaginary acknowledges the systemic fractures that produce and condition Black girlhood. Accordingly, Black girls strategize to subvert the sanitized image of society's failures mapped on to them to focus on the pixelated interstices where they live, theorize, and survive. Black/Girlhood Imaginary is the copy without an original—reconstructing sources of rupture into repair for the Black girl whose image then becomes her own.

Where We Enter

> To understand the complexity of black girlhood we need more work that documents that reality in all its variations and diversity. . . . It's vital then that we hear about our diverse experience. There is no one story of black girlhood.
>
> —bell hooks, *Bone Black*

We are a collective of Black women at top research institutions mapping the coordinates of our own spatial and material realities. From this

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position, we take up this work. As a collective, we honor the genealogy of other collectives like the Combahee River Collective (2014) and Corrine T. Field and colleagues (2016), whose theories, texts, and intellectual labor have inspired our work. Similarly, our politic is situated in both our Black womanhoods and girlhoods and is informed by how we see, document, theorize, remember, and name Black girlhood.[1] We acknowledge there is a range of complex factors, including body size/shape, skin color, sexuality, hair texture, ability, religion, class, beauty standards, age, and a host of other social structures that shape the way Black girls move through their social worlds. We enter this realm of imaginative study because there is an urgency and value in documenting Black girls.[2] We also understand that Black girlhood is too ephemeral, too capacious, too worthy to fit into the bounds of a theoretical project. As such, we are devoted to a praxis that centers Black girlhood as a nexus of lived and mediated forms of performance. When we sat down to reflect on Black girlhood, we were flooded with emotions, particularly grief. In a way, we felt like we were writing a eulogy. Why? Because writing about Black girlhood felt congruent with writing about death and its many wakes (Sharpe 2016). We acknowledge that our sentiments ranged from that of grief to celebration—and the gradient spaces in between, which both haunted and uplifted our work.

We have developed a transdisciplinary approach by merging performance studies, Black studies, and education to research and theorize the effervescent archives of Black girlhood. To discern the nuances of Blackness and girlness, we started from our own sensibilities as Black girls, which is to gather and talk. We met for several years laughing, discussing, and arguing about our embodied knowledges as Black girls and how to define our often-undefinable experiences. We also ate together, sharing meals while digesting and processing our memories. We celebrated together—birthdays, academic accomplishments, and life milestones. We traveled together, sometimes simply to a local workout class, other times halfway across the world. These intentional acts of love and care helped us cultivate our own Black feminist praxis through which we devised Black/Girlhood Imaginary.

We construct and excavate an imaginative space of Black girlhood that is simultaneously hypervisible and invisible, translucent and opaque. This spectrum of legibility is where we continue to labor. Through our ongoing conversations and research, we succumb to the ephemerality of Black/Girlhood Imaginary.

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Critical Musings of Black Girlhood

The field of Black girlhood studies encompasses scholars from many academic disciplines.[3] Accordingly, we acknowledge that there is an array of texts that have been influential to the field. In this section, we examine three monographs that informed Black/Girlhood Imaginary's conceptual framework and methodological interests. Our list consists of *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (2015) by Marcia Chatelain, *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-City Violence* (2009) by Nikki Jones, and *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (2015) by Aimee Meredith Cox. We immersed ourselves in these works while exploring how each author used Black feminist methodologies to highlight how Black girls advanced, subverted, and altered the economies, social structures, and educational systems within the inner city. Each text critically examines specific institutional and interpersonal spaces to interrogate how Black girls are positioned and position themselves.

In *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration*, Chatelain (2015) explains how the construction of Black girlhood shifted in early twentieth-century Chicago in response to the city's economic, political, and social changes. Black girls and young women who had left the Jim Crow South migrated for higher wages and more educational opportunities, and to escape sexual violence in the workplace. However, when they arrived, educational, religious, and community-based reforms sought to rehabilitate and/or co-opt their femininity to advance the race. Black girlhood became integral to the success and progress of the Black community, where protection and well-being were tied to service. Otherwise, girls who were considered wayward[4] were marginalized objects of rehabilitation. The work of Chatelain is an important frame within Black/Girlhood Imaginary to capture how the voices of Black girls are used to elucidate the conditions surrounding their participation in daily life. From this work, we see how the same historical vulnerabilities affecting Black girls in Chicago of the early 1900s still affect the lives of Black girls in Philadelphia a century later.

Nikki Jones's (2009: 19) ethnography, *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-City Violence* captures the ways Black girls and young women in Philadelphia strategize ways to stay safe that contrast with "traditional White, middle-class conceptions of femininity, and the gendered expectations embedded in Black respectability." Jones's commitment to building strong relationships with participants allowed her to explore "situated survival strategies"[5] (2009: 53): situational avoidance (e.g.,

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avoiding certain areas at certain times) and relational isolation (e.g., loyalty to friends and willingness to fight on behalf of the friendship). Her analytical framing provides Black/Girlhood Imaginary with a detailed method to process how vulnerability and violence converge to shape Black girlhood. While Jones is interested in the ways Black girls and young women navigate violence, Cox (2015) examines how Black girls theorize and choreograph their bodies to shift from being understood as a statistic to being seen as human.

Through creative nonfiction, storytelling, and performance, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Cox 2015) weaves the narratives of life-and-death situations experienced by dozens of young women who moved in and out of the Fresh Start Homeless Shelter between 2000 and 2008 in Detroit.[6] Cox conceptualizes the movement of Black girls as shapeshifting to convey "how young Black women living in the United States engage with, confront, challenge, invert, unsettle, and expose the material impact of systemic oppression. Shapeshifting is an act, a theory, and in this sense, a form of praxis that . . . reveals our collective vulnerabilities" (7). Cox intentionally grounds her analysis in theories and knowledge developed by the residents at the shelter. Janice Brown[7] shares her theory of "*missing the middle*," which is "not just surviving like getting a job and getting a degree, but surviving by holding onto our truth. The truth you don't see on TV or in the papers like you should" (10, emphasis in original). Janice's perspective on where Black girls and women are situated in society is an important discovery in Cox's work. This discovery is also a key intersection for Black/Girlhood Imaginary that informs our methodological inquiries on Black girls' perspectives when they are perceived as social problems. Ultimately, Chatelain, Jones, and Cox demonstrate how Black girls survive, subvert, and shapeshift within, through, and beyond the matrices of violence.

Black/Girlhood Imaginary Methodology

> What is required to imagine a free state or to tell an impossible story?
> —Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts"

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2002), Patricia Hill Collins characterizes a Black feminist epistemology as 1) lived experience as criterion of meaning, 2) dialogue, 3) ethics of care, and 4) ethics of personal accountability. Subsequently, researchers

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can incorporate knowledge created and used by Black women as an analytical proposition. Accordingly, we apply the methodology of Black Feminist epistemology—a mosaic, a fusion of creativity—informed by field and archival research, cultural meanings, embodied knowledge, and lived experiences of Black girls. Our methodology is intentional as we move beyond hierarchical rankings of knowledge production. We honor the knowings of Black girls and Black women beyond the realms of constructed sociopolitical and historical measures that fail to account for the epistemologies of marginalized people. Our method is one of making, memory, doing, and simultaneously of unmaking, rememory (Morrison 1987), undoing. For us, this work has more disruptive ruptures than closures.

When writing and engaging the lives of Black girls in various settings, conversations, and performances, their behaviors and theorizations shape our definition of Black/Girlhood Imaginary. In conjunction with our Black feminist episteme, we use writing as a praxis of survival and resistance in honor of our theoretical foremother Barbara Christian (1987: 61) who declared, "I can only speak for myself. But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life." Black/Girlhood Imaginary hinges on the axes of the personal, political, and the performative. It is steeped in the makings of possibility. We write with those of us at the shoreline because this work is critical, urgent, and necessary (Lorde [1978] 2007).

Our methodology is a type of recovery. The emergence of Black girlhood studies excavates, ruptures, and mends disjointed and dismembered histories and experiences of Black girls. Understanding how Black girls are often barred from girlhood, we imagine a space of ethnographies, discourse analysis, theories of movement, and imagery to rectify this rupture. Not meant as an exhaustive description and exploration of Black girlhood, our methodology reconciles the chasm within girlhood and brings to the forefront Black girlhood. We offer an imaginary space to consider several ways (by no means conclusive) to acknowledge, complicate, and engage how Black girls move, resist, and understand what girlhood means to them.

In the following pages, each of us draw from our research using the methodologies of Black/Girlhood Imaginary. These case studies illustrate representations, perspectives, and experiences of Black girls within each of our interdisciplinary traditions. Lashon Daley begins by analyzing Judy Winslow's unexplained disappearance from the popular 1990s sitcom, *Family Matters*. Kenly Brown offers a literary analysis of a poem written by Paradise,[8] a high school student, who theorizes state-sanctioned violence

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and resistance. Derrika Hunt concludes with a poetic meditation on the situated knowledges of Black girls by examining her encounters with Daniele,[9] a Black girl whose knowings emerge as a meaningful rupture. In the case studies, we deploy the imaginary at the interstices of Black performativity, state-sanctioned violence, and diasporic geographies.

A Disruptive Rupture within the Home: The "Disappearance" of Judy Winslow from *Family Matters*

Lashon Daley

As a Black performance and new media studies scholar who uses ethnography and object analysis as my primary methods, I reached back into my own Black girlhood to ground my disciplinary contribution to Black/Girlhood Imaginary. Because Black/Girlhood Imaginary privileges the narratives of Black girls, I chose a time during which these narratives were made more visible on the small screen. My experiences as a Black girl and as the youngest sister in a home that felt too full brought my cognizance back to 1989—to the release of the television show *Family Matters*.

I was six years old when *Family Matters* made its debut on September 22, 1989 during the American Broadcasting Company programming block known as TGIF. *Family Matters* featured the Winslows, a middle-class African American family in Chicago, Illinois. The family consisted of Harriette; her husband Carl, a police officer; their three children, Eddy, Laura, and Judy; Harriett's sister, Rachel Baines-Crawford and Rachel's son, Richie; and Carl's mother, Estelle "Mother" Winslow.

Through the lens of Black/Girlhood Imaginary, I record and theorize Judy's representation of Black girlhood, partly because of the popularity of the show, but also because, without this record, Judy's portrayal will continue to be read superficially, not only by fans but also by those who undervalue her representation. Her character embodies what Black girls experience when they are pushed out of their homes, often erased from their family's lineage, leaving an apparition in the familial spaces they once inhabited.

Judy's childhood encompassed a lot of time inside her family home, especially with her older sister Laura, to whom she often played sidekick. When she was not at Laura's side, she could be found with Eddie or somewhere in the home doing what the youngest siblings do best: quietly waiting their turn. For thirteen years, Judy waited patiently for her turn to engage with her family's dynamics. During that time, she made herself

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known through one-liners and quips, followed by running upstairs to her bedroom, where she would often remain until it was time for her next line or until she followed someone else downstairs.

I understood Judy's predicament. As the youngest of five siblings—three brothers and a sister—my status in my household was contingent on the hierarchical status of my older siblings, leaving me feeling like a supporting character.

In season 1 of *Family Matters*, Judy is cast as a precocious nine-year-old with an unwavering love for her family. Her quick wit and vibrant personality made her a steady sidekick to Laura's domestic adventures. Judy's storyline fluctuated between trusted sidekick and annoying little sister. Her jabs, comebacks, and side-eyes were peppered throughout the first four seasons. Then, nineteen episodes into season 4, thirteen-year-old Judy inexplicably vanishes from the Winslow household. Their family life continues as if she had never existed. Judy's disappearance was the first of its kind for a Black girl lead character on a family sitcom.

Season 4, episode 18, titled "Higher Anxiety" (Correll 1993), is Judy's second to last episode. Not having appeared throughout most of the episode, Judy finally makes her entrance from the kitchen at stage left during the final credits as she, her mother, father, and cousin Richie take their seats on the couch to watch TV. Although she is the first to leave the kitchen, she is the last to speak.

Judy waits to take her seat until Richie has taken his. Her mother is the last to sit down. Judy perches on the edge of the couch to create more room for her father. Rather than trying to accommodate his daughter, Carl takes up more than his share of space on the couch. Entering unannounced from stage right, Steve, their neighbor, and the main antagonist, walks into the frame and plops in the center of the group. Played by Jaleel White, Steve Urkel was originally slated to have a single appearance. However, he proved extremely popular with viewers and transformed what was supposed to be a one-off appearance into a star turn. In this scene, his endearing clumsiness gets Judy pushed off the couch, and then her father shoves her to the floor. Like Steve, Carl barely takes any notice. Carl glances at his daughter and then turns his attention to Steve. Judy is the only one who is peeved, yet she remains silent. Steve then begins to talk about the show he wants to watch. Disinterested, Carl, Harriet, and Richie peel themselves off the couch, Judy picks herself up off the floor, and they all exit stage right, leaving Steve to watch TV by himself. The episode ends with another quip from Steve as the audience laughs.

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In episode 19, "Mama's Wedding" (Menteer 1993), Judy's final lackluster one-line question in the first minute of the episode is all that the viewer sees of her until she reappears in the last segment. Here, she is again upstaged by Steve as she prepares to walk down the aisle as the flower girl. After the wedding, Judy walks in procession with her family and is not seen again. For the last five episodes of season 4, Judy is absent. Her quick-witted comments, her need for recognition and validation, and her storylines fade into Black/Girlhood Imaginary, where she is recovered as a simulacra—a representation of Black girls whose narrative is centered on their disappearance and not how they were actually pushed out.

Judy unwittingly becomes a mediated avatar for Black girls who become translucent in their homes. She is seen, but only slightly. Her proxied body is a virtual stand-in for the phenomenon that Cox describes in *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (2015). Cox writes, "As crowded or uncomfortable as a house could get with adults and their children, it always seemed to be the teenage young women who were displaced. Another body moved in, and the first one pushed out and made to figure things out in another place was one of the girls" (45–46). Judy's smiling face lingers in the opening credits until season 5 when Judy becomes a mere trace in her family home. She has no more desires, wants, or needs. She does not get dressed in the morning, does not rush out the door to catch the school bus, or appear for dinner. She does not mature into a young woman. She is not a being who longs to be seen or heard. Rather, she becomes ageless, a fluid body that allows family life to move unhindered through and around her. She does not take up space. Instead, there is more space for others to move about, to talk, and to engage.

Judy's performance in "Higher Anxiety" is the culmination of her reduction from an opaque body as a lead character to a translucent organism who can be pushed off a couch. Her translucency gave the producers a reason to remove her from the show—her value was not visible either to her sitcom family or to the audience. They saw no need to write Judy out of the storyline because it was easier to pretend that she had never existed. And because Steve proved to be so valuable to the show, he soon took over Judy's role. In other words, he became the intensified version of Judy. His ability to out-sidekick, out-sassify, and out-clumsify Judy literally pushed her character, and actress Jaimee Foxworth, out of the show. As a result, by season 5, Carl and Harriet were the parents of two children, in addition to Steve who had, by the end of season 1, begun inhabiting their home as if it were his own.

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In the decades following her disappearance, Judy's face began to reappear in the most peculiar of places: milk cartons, T-shirts, and "missing" posters. As a result of syndication, fans like me, who were now older, were able to question Judy's sudden disappearance during their nostalgic trips down television memory lane. What we had not noticed before about her disappearance now caused us to question the show's choice and express concern. Why had we not noticed that a main character from our favorite television show had suddenly disappeared? Why did she disappear? Why was she not formally written out of the show? Who played Judy Winslow, and where is she now?

In 2021, twenty-three years after *Family Matters* ended and twenty-eight years after Judy was pushed out, fans continue to bombard the internet with theories, criticisms, and questions about her disappearance, and also about Foxworth. Almost every internet search reveals that Foxworth dabbled in the porn industry and became a heavy marijuana user in the years after *Family Matters*. She appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew*, *The Tyra Banks Show*, and 20/20 to tell her side of the story and her struggles after leaving the sitcom. At the beginning of 2020, Foxworth (now forty years old) did a tell-all interview with the YouTuber Armon Wiggins, describing her rise and fall as Judy Winslow. She detailed her audition, her stage fright and anxiety, her marijuana addiction, her move into the porn industry, and her present life and career. It is her most comprehensive interview to date and was long awaited, especially since fans have been piecing together their own versions of her story for years. In addition, she responds to not being invited to the 2017 *Family Matters* cast reunion photo shoot produced by *Entertainment Weekly*. In her interview with Wiggins (2020), Foxworth voiced her frustration:

> Certain people are going to have to speak up on my behalf because I've been speaking for so long. The one that plays Waldo [Shawn Harrison], when they did the whole thing [the *Family Matters* reunion], he actually called me. He was like *Do you know what we did?* I was like *Absolutely not.* He was like *Yeah, I was going to definitely call you and let you know that this happened because I didn't want this to be something that you looked at and it took you by surprise. I wanted you to know that we did this.* He told me the backstory of what happened and what people said while they were there and who stood up for me and all of that stuff. So when I did the interview [with *The Root*], it wasn't from a place of anger. It was a place of like *I have not talked about*

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> *this. I get why they feel like they need to do this but enough!* You get what I'm saying? *Enough is enough.* I was a whole daughter on the show.

For nearly an hour and forty minutes, Foxworth revealed important details about her time as a child star, and by doing so, she reclaimed Judy's story too. To reclaim her story and her image, Foxworth sells Judy memorabilia to nostalgic fans. She has a T-shirt for sale with an image of her as Judy on the front labeled "Missing," "Judy Winslow." The back reads "Found Her!," along with an image of herself as an adult.

Although Judy's narrative within the fandom has centered on her disappearance, Black/Girlhood Imaginary exemplifies how important it is to refract that narrative to find what was once lost and to recover what was once abandoned. Judy being pushed out rather than simply disappearing, puts her representation in conversation with intersectional frameworks like those of Cox and Monique Morris. Through Black/Girlhood Imaginary's refraction, Judy's translucency in the Winslow household is slowly moving back to opacity. As Foxworth and fans of the show continue to question Judy's being pushed out, and bring visibility to it, Judy is not only being given a future, but gaps of her narrative are finally being filled in. Even sites like Fanfiction.net and forums like Reddit.com continue to add to Judy's growing opacity because of fans writing fictional storylines for her. By beginning to recover Judy's subjecthood through Black/Girlhood Imaginary, this theoretical framework provides an opportunity to open conversations on how to begin the recovery process for Black girls like Judy, whose bodies remain apparitions within their family homes.

A Disruptive Rupture within Society: Paradise's Social Critique of State-Sanctioned Violence

Kenly Brown

As someone who practices humanist social science and centers Black feminist theories and Black girlhood studies, I examine the ways people make meaning with one another in their social worlds. I use ethnographic methods of participant-observation, direct observation, semistructured interviews, and informal conversations to capture the relationship between people and the communities and institutions they live in, work at, learn at, and move through (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Over the course of years of ethnographic fieldwork, I engaged, witnessed, and learned from Black girls enrolled in a California continuation school, H.B. Stowe Academy.[10] Continuation schools are an opportunity for students to recover academic credits to stay on track to

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graduate while learning in a smaller educational setting. While these schools are presented as an opportunity for students, continuation schools have been used as a "dumping ground" for Black, Native, Latinx, and other nonwhite youth from working-class neighborhoods (Nygreen 2013). Similarly, educators, students, and parents colloquially refer to H.B. Stowe Academy as the school where "the bad kids go" (Naledi, interview, February 7, 2017).

I cultivated a Black feminist love politic to witness and embrace mutual vulnerability with each Black girl to craft an expansive exploration of Black girlhood (Brown 2021; Nash 2018). Over time, I built rapport with a few of the girls to the point where they began to refer to me as a mentor rather than a researcher or ethnographer. The etymology of *mentor* is from the noun *mentos*, meaning "intent, purpose, spirit, or passion" (Snowber 2005: 345). It is with this intention and spirit that I began to learn how Black girls theorized and lived through the ruptures they disrupted.

I met Paradise at H.B. Stowe Academy in Dr. Jackson's Spanish class. At the time, she was a seventeen-year-old Black girl passionate about poetry and urban fiction. Sharing similar experiences with girls and young women centered in the works of Cox, Nikki Jones, Saidiya Hartman, and Toni Morrison, Paradise endured physical and sexual violence, was bullied in school, and experienced the heartache of losing loved ones too soon. She wrote prose to soothe her pain and to imagine what felt like an impossible future.

In one of her classes, Paradise pulled me aside to share a poem titled "My Society." She had written this poem soon after learning about the murder of Michael Brown at the hands of police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. Paradise documents the ways in which Black youth are demonized by society and terrorized by law enforcement. She submitted her poem to a writing competition for students in her school district. Dr. Jackson proudly displayed her poem at the entrance of the classroom. Poetry is an analytic that can tend to the gaps and silences social science research grasps to uncover but cannot fully articulate (Dill, Rivera, and Sutton 2018). Eve L. Ewing (2018: 199) describes this distinction between social science and poetry: "As the social scientist asks *what is*, the poet asks *what may be*; as the social scientist tells what people *do*, the poet tells what people *are*" (emphasis in original). Paradise's poem illuminates what it is like to survive in a world that seeks your demise but also brings to life what it is like to live. Using literary analysis, I understand Black/Girlhood Imaginary's methodology of recovery through the art, moves, and calibrations Paradise expresses in "My Society."

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My Society

Looking in my eyes
my society thinks they see the demon in me
A mother falls to the ground screaming
"I thought I was alive until they took the one thing that was
breathing in me"
american flag tears falls to her ears as she watches blue bullets
seeping in me
lying cold on the ground
a blank soul that took my last feeling from me
hiding behind their vest
afraid of my success
if it wasn't death
i would be trying to cop a plea
So many of my brothers shouting out let me free
We share different pigments but they're all attached to me
So if you weren't just looking in my eyes
you would see i'm a Masterpiece
influencing my youth teaching them peace like that's the key
Instead of watching violence destroy our city like a catastrophe
So as you look in my eyes it's a bright future you see the only
demon in me is this crooked society

Paradise captures the affective and material experiences of Black girls in the slash of Black/Girlhood Imaginary to signify the break between Blackness and girlness. Paradise illustrates this break in the first line to elucidate the friction between the state and herself: "Looking in my eyes / my society thinks they see the demon in me." At the genesis of the United States, slavery situated Black girls and women outside girlhood and womanhood using a "system of gendered and racialized economic exploitation and social control" (Haley 2016: 4). After the abolishment of slavery, legal statutes and social ideologies continued to frame and stigmatize Black girls as social failures. Hartman (2018: 470) unsettles perceived social failures ascribed onto Black girls in her conceptualization of their lives as wayward—"the wild thoughts, reckless dreams, interminable protests, spontaneous strikes, nonparticipation, willfulness, and bold-faced refusal [to redistribute] the balance of need and want and sought a line of escape from debt and duty in the attempt to create a path elsewhere." The wayward

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is the pressure applied to girl Black/Girlhood Imaginary to shatter the sanitized image the state deploys to exclude them from their girlness and constrain their Blackness. Paradise crafts a path elsewhere in "My Society" in her analysis of suffering and resistance from the vantage point of her community and family.

Paradise theorizes the suffering of people in her community at the hands of institutional failures, as opposed to the social failure of the individual: "A mother falls to the ground screaming / I thought I was alive until they took the one thing that was breathing in me' / american flag tears falls to her ears as she watches blue bullets seeping in me." The death of a child at the hands of the state, and Paradise's metaphorical death from the blue bullets, exemplify a linked fate between death and incarceration. I interpret the blue bullets as representative of the thirteen stars on the American flag that pierce her body—thirteen stars that signify thirteen colonies that foreclosed opportunity and liberty for those enslaved. Paradise illustrates the stakes in Black/Girlhood Imaginary to challenge the exclusionary, discriminatory, and violent practices embedded in a social order that thrives on the oppression of Black people. Her imagery of a bereaved mother falling to the ground is informed by her own loss of two brothers to the carceral state. Their incarceration left her mother grief-stricken because she could not protect them.

In elementary school, Paradise was inspired to write poetry when she heard Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" and learned about the civils rights movement. She was moved by the vulnerability and honesty of Holiday's protest lyrics and protesters in the civil rights movement to stand up against state violence. In "My Society," Paradise honestly and vulnerably captures the meaning of death and fighting for one's life in her contemporary moment in the following lines: "hiding behind their vest / afraid of my success / if it wasn't death / i would be trying to cop a plea." While the I in Black/Girlhood Imaginary is capitalized, the *i* in Paradise's poem embodies the truncation of self and tension between precarious freedom and survival for Black children and young people. While the *i* is lower case in Paradise's poem, the power of *eyes* holds the imaginary, in which the pixelated images of her girlhood come into view to unsettle society's image of Black girls as inferior.

The state weaponized this image to absolve itself of accountability to protect and serve them and their communities. Returning to Paradise's first line, "Looking in my eyes / my society thinks they see the demon in me," I understand *eyes* as initially mirroring back to society what it thinks it

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sees in Paradise—a demonic girl. She subverts this societal perception of her into a refractive image in the last line of her poem, "So as you look in my eyes it's a bright future you see the only demon in me is this crooked society." Thus the image refracted back to society from her eyes is in fact her light and their brokenness, corruptness, and demons.

Using poetry, Paradise refracts the violent conditioning of a social world that attempts to undermine her humanity by externalizing her own understanding of who she is and her community. Her poetic devices uncover social atrocities and iniquities to waywardly recover her perspective and love for herself and community within the slash, the chasm, the imaginary. In the following lines of her poem, "So if you weren't just looking in my eyes / you would see i'm a Masterpiece / influencing my youth teaching them peace like that's the key," is where the bend of the reflection refracts to create possibility. It is in the bend and the rupture where Paradise and I continue to cultivate and imagine a world through the prism of possibilities. She is now a mother to a beautiful Black son whom I met the day he was born. I saw her eyes reflect awe, caution, and resolve to raise and educate her Black son in a violent world. Paradise continues to write and theorize about a world that will not protect her or her son, and she persists to write a bright future for them in honor of their lives.

A Disruptive Rupture within Diasporic Dreams: Daniele and the Politics of Knowing

Derrika Hunt

As a Black feminist scholar who qualitatively studies the plural relationships between schooling, education, and knowledge production, I disrupt the commonsense that schooling is the most legitimate entry to knowing. I illuminate how schooling has come to signify a set of dominant cultural meanings that valorize it as the most viable pathway toward knowing, while simultaneously erasing the historical and political implications of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism embedded within the institution of schooling (Bowles and Gintis 2011). I attend to these nuances by situating the knowledges of Black girls as legitimate and valuable entry points to knowledge production. As such, I employ the Black/Girlhood Imaginary framework to accentuate how the kaleidoscopic mosaics of Black girls' knowings move across time, space, and geographic boundaries to offer valuable knowledge. To do this I reflect on a particularly moving experience that has shaped and informed my formal ethnographic work.

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When I met Daniele, a sixteen-year-old girl working at a hotel resort in Jamaica, I observed how Black girls like her navigate interlocking systems of oppression and, specifically, how they know beyond schooling. While Daniele was only sixteen, she worked full-time at a hotel resort because she could not afford to attend school—the costs were too high materially and personally. It is in tracing the poetics of Daniele's particular experiences and axes of identity that I came to know the multitude of Black girlhoods beyond a U.S.-centric framework. Daniele's subversion of systems of oppression is an important reminder that the multiplicity of Black girlhoods warrants study and careful attention to get to the heart of Black/Girlhood Imaginary—a kaleidoscope through which we have the opportunity to zoom in to get a close look; the opportunity to zoom out to see from different angles; and finally, the opportunity to notice the dazzling patchwork of shapes, colors, and patterns collaging into what we deem Black girlhood.

Conventional theoretical works might position Daniele as an uneducated worker, but through the prism of Black/Girlhood Imaginary, I zoom in on the minutiae of pixelation to animate a new way of sensing Daniele—as a producer of significant knowledge and as a teacher (Alexander and Mohanty 2010). Positioning Daniele as a teacher disrupts the hegemony of a teacher requiring formal education to offer valuable contributions to theory and knowledge production. Daniele's life experiences and her keen sense of her own positions within the global world are valuable entry points to theory. Black/Girlhood Imaginary allows me to recuperate these misunderstood knowings and to reimagine them as important ruptures through which to imagine knowledge production (Valenzuela 1999).

Black/Girlhood Imaginary makes space to recuperate Black girls' ways of knowing as crucial spaces of education and knowledge production. Therefore, in my work, the distinction between schooling and education situates my own political commitments of working toward praxes of education that center multiple ways of knowing (Collins 2002).

Thus, I bring together poetry and personal experience to get a glimpse into the interiority of Black girlhood by way of Daniele's epistemology. I intentionally move beyond a U.S.-centric paradigm to investigate the plurality of Black girlhood imaginary beyond geographic and political borders. That is not to say that Daniele's story is representative of all Black girlhood, but it is to suggest that her story is an entry, a rupture, and a place of possibility where we can meditate on a mere fragment of Black girlhood.

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This necessary meditation echoes Collins's suggestion that investigating subjugated knowledges is a critical intervention to disrupt conventional paradigms of knowledge production. Thus, we take seriously the task of centering Black girls like Daniele, because we believe that in doing so we are privy to insights that might otherwise be missed. All in all, investigating the plurality of Blackness and girlness ruptures static notions and makes space for us to see, feel, think, and imagine gradations of Black girlhood within and beyond.

I highlight the ways Black girls know, and I then situate these ways of knowing as sophisticated educational spaces that offer insight into another depth of knowing. The depths of knowing I am referring to are revealed when Daniele takes me to school—not to a building, but to the imaginary where she and I engage in deep study during our encounter (Harney and Moten 2013). Examining Daniele's racialized, geopolitical, and classed experiences offers a meaningful way to understand how Black girls' knowing disrupts the hegemony of knowledge production and serves as a prism through which to envision new possibilities for situating education, schooling and knowing. Daniele defies my own commonsensical notions of Black girlhood as she shares her own formulations about Blackness and girlness with me. Daniele necessarily disrupts static ideologies of Black girlhood, and it is by studying Daniele's disruptive rupture that I build a bridge toward recovery. This bridge is a site of possibility, a site of futurity, and a site to reimagine how the Black/Girlhood Imaginary offers Black girls space to learn each other, to see each other, and to ultimately recognize each other. I imagine that during our encounters Daniele and I began to recognize each other and witness firsthand the vastness of Black girlhood. The methodology of Black/Girlhood Imaginary equipped me with the tools to recover Daniele's knowing through a diasporic, spatial, and geographic lens. In this effort, I thread together a poetic musing of what I learned during my conversations with Daniele.

A Poem for Daniele

This is for Daniele.
and "*likkle Caribbean*"[11] girls everywhere
I can still hear Daniele's sharp laugh as
she looks at me and says,
"*Your American tongue, don't say words right.*"

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We both giggled.
But deep down I felt uneasy.
"Say likkle again. And this time take out the "t" sound.
This is how we say it."
I practice saying "*likkle*," betraying the vernacular rules
that have been beaten into me throughout my life.
"*And say my name like this, Dan-yell*," she emphasizes.
I repeat after her, trying to teach my tongue to unlearn
the English imperialism ingrained in me.
Still looking through me, she smiles, and we both stare out at the
ocean as the waves come and go.
This poem is for Daniele and *likkle* Caribbean girls.
Daniele has the most beautiful brown eyes I've ever seen,
eyes that seem to be longing for something more.
She has a smile that lights up the dimmest room.
I met her when she greeted me as I walked into the lobby of the
hotel I was staying at.
"Hello ma'am" she says
with a sweet smile spreading across her face
being called "ma'am" feels strange
but how could I resist such a sweet invitation.
I walk over to the desk where she is sitting.
She invites me to sit,
as she gestures toward
the seat across from her.
I sit
and we talk for what felt like hours
with the Caribbean Sea roaring behind us.
Daniele—
the girl with the most beautiful brown eyes I've ever seen
Daniele—
the girl
with arms reaching for lands, they may never touch.
She tells me of her dreams to travel the world
with a heart that yearns for places it may never see.
She tells me that dreams like that don't come true
for girls like her,
girls born into poverty

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Daniele—
Her dreams are still lingering in my heart.
Every time I walk to the lobby
I hold my breath and scan the space looking for her
and there she is each time.
Today she is sitting on the veranda of the hotel
watching the cruise ships as they come and go
"Whenever I can get a break, I love to sit out here in the breeze
and dream."
Day after day,
month after month,
year after year,
she watches,
she dreams.
Dreaming of one day coming and going like those ships,
dreaming of one day pushing through the waves
and overcoming the tides.
Daniele is a dreamer.
Today she tells me about her mother.
She laughs as she recounts her mother bickering about her being in
la la land.
Daniele is sitting, perched on the edge of the veranda
hoping, but deep down somehow knowing
in a way that only Black girls can know
that she may never be lucky enough to touch gold.
She peels away her dreams
the way she peels the flesh of a ripe mango
with her teeth
like swords
cutting through raw flesh
pushing her tongue through the ripeness.
"Oh, don't be silly," she says
"I'll be lucky if I even get to see the inside rooms of this resort."
She takes the mango seed and tosses it in a small wooden trash can
the same way she scatters her dreams overboard.
Looking at the ground, she fingers the creases in her blue uniform
skirt.
I wonder what she is thinking.

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She's got sky-wide dreams
that only her heart can hold.
She casts them into the Caribbean Sea
leaving them to drop away
like her—
our ancestors did.
I wonder if those dreams will float back to Daniele
I want to tell her that she can be anything in this world,
but I'm still trying to work out exactly what that means.
in that moment I realized that while we are both Black girls
our lives, our realities are worlds apart.
I touch her hand,
offering my touch as a communion
and as I write this poem in her honor
I hope that by writing these words
I make a bridge toward Daniele.
This poem is but a small offering,
an ethereal request
for miracles to tide
in the Caribbean Sea for *likkle* girls like Daniele
because they are waiting at the shores of possibility.
As this poem breaks, so will Daniele and I.

Daniele, a soft-spoken worker with deep-brown eyes, who has a fragile relationship with economy that taught me something theory could not. She has learned how to maneuver the tangled webs of capitalism and imperialism. In her lived experiences she forges a critique of these systems while simultaneously navigating them. In the geography of her experiences, she intimately, painstakingly knows that capitalism, imperialism, and geopolitics are the very things that have constructed her as a worker while barring her from the paradise of her own home. Black/Girlhood Imaginary insists that girls like Daniele have much to teach about the precariousness and poetics of Black girlhood.

Daniele signaled our vastly different realities when she told me solemnly, "You will go, and I will continue working here." While sitting with Daniele's declaration of my own privilege to "go" while she did not have access to the same opportunities, I came to see the slash, the chasm, the fissures in Black/Girlhood Imaginary. Daniele knows that, while we may

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both be Black girls, our realities are an ocean apart. Daniele's declaration speaks to Black/Girlhood Imaginary's insistence that Black girlhood is too capacious to be confined to singular storylines, and it illuminates the complex ways Black girls navigate the conditions of their lives. Our lives detour at the site of economy and geopolitical location: Daniele being born in Jamaica, and I being born in the United States; Daniele's labor is demanded in a tourist economy that crafts Jamaica's beaches as vacation havens for the privileged, while ignoring the inaccessibility and exploitation it demands from girls like Daniele—the same inaccessibility and exploitation that allowed me to meet Daniele (Mignolo 2011). In our last encounter, Daniele and I discussed our experiences. "Just don't forget me," she said softly, half-smiling. I can still see her. *Daniele, I did not forget. Thank you for challenging me and compelling me to imagine the layers and complexities which I have now collaged into the Black/Girlhood Imaginary*—an imaginary that holds space for the poetics of Blackness and girlness, both lived and mediated within and through invisibilized systems of power.

Conclusion

In this article, we explored three case studies of Black girlhoods: the subjecthood of Judy Winslow and the lived experiences of Foxworth, an analysis of Paradise's poem on her vulnerabilities to state-sanctioned violence, and the poetics of Daniele's experiences and knowings. Black/Girlhood Imaginary works toward recovering and reconciling the narratives and experiences of Black girls. Through ethnography, discourse analysis, and theories of embodiment, we stand alongside—and sometimes in opposition to—various constructs and confines of Black girlhood. We readily imagine the (im)possibilities of Black girls' lives within the dialectics of young Black life. As a prism that refracts and reflects, Black/Girlhood Imaginary pursues the restoration of the simulacra—the copy without an original.

We refuse to see the lives of Black girls simply as abstract analyses. Instead, we see Black girls along the spectrums of hypervisibility and invisibility, opacity and translucency. Analytically, each of our interpretations and understandings of Black girlhood speaks to a co-current illustration of loss and dream making that is negotiated within the Black/Girlhood Imaginary. When Judy disappears from the Winslow household, it creates an opportunity to ruminate on why television writers and producers need to be held accountable for their narrative choices. Yet through

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Black/Girlhood Imaginary, Judy becomes centered, and her narrative is understood not just as a disappearance but also as a Black girl who was pushed out of her home and, subsequently, a Black actress who was pushed out of Hollywood. Informed by the methodological intervention of Black/ Girlhood Imaginary, Paradise's poem is taken up as a theoretical analytic. Her work explores how law enforcement conditions the life chances of Black youth, while illustrating how Black girls voice their position and resistance. Black/Girlhood Imaginary acts as a telescope through which to explore the constellations of Daniele's life, mapping how geopolitical, imperial, and capitalist desires shape her. Daniele intuitively resists. Daniele—your story reaches beyond the borders that seemingly divide us. Paradise—your prose shows us how Black girls can make meaningful words out of painful experiences. Judy—your lingering presence haunts the show that tried to erase you. We write this text with their collective knowledge as our guide. Thank you for helping us forge a methodology out of chaos.

Our transdisciplinary engagement with the work comes from a place of conviction that Black girlhood, in all its manifestations and complexities, deserves and requires our attention, support, and care. We recognize it is a challenge to untangle the totality of what could or should be covered within Black/Girlhood Imaginary. Nonetheless, we invite opportunities for further reflection, conversation, and analysis. As we conclude, we ask: What does the future hold for Black/Girlhood Imaginary as praxis and analytic? How should we continue to theoretically engage these deliberations as individuals and collectives? What tensions remain for us to tease out and puzzles for us to ponder as we move forward? What interventions are still required? What is at stake if we do nothing?

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Notes

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1 Ruth Nicole Brown (2013: 9) informs our articulation of Black girlhood in *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood* where she "deploy[s] Black girlhood as a political articulation that intentionally points to Black girls, even as I mean for Black girlhood to direct our attention beyond those who identify and are identified as Black girls."

2 "To be without documentation is too unsustaining, too spontaneously ahistorical, too dangerously malleable in the hands of those who would rewrite not merely the past but my future as well. So I have been picking through the ruins for my roots" (Williams 2013: 22).

3 Scholars are Ruth Nicole Brown (2013), Tamara T. Butler (2018), Marcia Chatelain (2015), Venus E. Evans-Winters (2014), Corinne T. Field, Tammy Charelle-Owens, Marcia Chatelain, LaKisha Michelle Simmons, Abosede George, Rhian Keyse in Field et al. (2016), Dominique C. Hill (2019), Monique W. Morris (2016), Savannah Shange (2019), and LaKisha Michelle Simmons (2015).

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4 Here we use Saidiya Hartman's (2018: 475) conceptualization of *wayward* as "riotous, queer, disposed to extravagance and wanton living. This promiscuous sociality fueled a moral panic identified and mobilized by the city's ruling elite to justify the extravagant use of police power."
5 Jones (2009: 53) defines *survival strategies* as "patterned forms of interpersonal interaction, and routine activities oriented around a concern for securing their personal well-being."
6 Pseudonym.
7 Pseudonym.
8 Pseudonym.
9 Pseudonym.
10 Pseudonym.
11 All quotations are taken from my conversations with Daniele.

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