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Abstract

This dissertation is an autoethnography of my three-year and ongoing participation in Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), a creative organizing collective that focuses on envisioning and creating spaces within the local community that celebrates the complex lived experiences of Black girls with Black girls. In this project, I argue sounds of collective Black girlhood, created in SOLHOT, reveal the importance of collective music-making practices in Black girlhood studies and girl programming. Cruising, Crossings and care, as sounds of collective Black girlhood created in SOLHOT, resound us towards 1) being with Black girls and women across difference in deep love, trust and care 2) remembering Black feminist/women and artists love and care for each other as critical to how we celebrate and organize Black girlhood, together.

I begin with a review of literature of Black feminism, Black girlhood studies, performance studies and sound studies to locate and define the range of research that center Black girls and women's lived experience and power made together, particularly as it relates to organizing a Black girl sound. Treating SOLHOT visual and material archives, Black feminist poetic texts, as well as the digital music productions, art and performances that come from being in intentional relationship and sociality with Black women and girls as primary sources and usable truths. My analysis theorizes from sound and music created in SOLHOT, Black feminist poetic texts, and experiences of being an artist with the collective.

This work addresses sounds and songs that come from doing Black girlhood celebration and function as a way to document, analyze, interrogate and make space

for complex Black girlhood in service of creating a better now and future that get us away from "programming" youth and more into making space/power for us to be fully human, together, across generations and differences. Making a specific contribution to Black girlhood studies, SOLHOT, art education and feminist theory, this study expands how we creatively engage Black girls, Black feminist organizing genealogies and practices, where music-making, poetry and sound serve as ways to remember our relational work and envision spaces and worlds to live out our full humanity.

CRUISING, CROSSINGS & CARE:
SOUNDS OF COLLECTIVE BLACK GIRLHOOD

by

Blair Ebony Smith
B.S., The College of William and Mary, 2011
C.A.S., Syracuse University, 2014

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Foundations of Education

Syracuse University
August 2019

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Universal forces, Gods, ancestors, thank you for holding me through this process, larger than us and within us all, you carry me and those who love me across many mountains.

*To my mother and father
Beverly Boyd Smith and Clarence Orlando Smith
for all the poems/words you encouraged me to write
art to make
freedom songs to sing
jazz funk mixes to make
home(s) to belong to
and people to love
I love you
Don't ever forget it*

To my amazing big sister, LaTonia Denise Smith Cokley, I love you so much. I am so proud of you. You are the best big sister a Black girl could ask for. You believe in me, support me, and love me fiercely. This writing is for you, us. For mom and dad. We did it and we are doing it. We are here living and loving like I know they would want us to.

To my beautiful family, it has been a pleasure to keep to know you more closely and deeply during a very important part of my life, writing process and organizing with SOLHOT. Your love, support, time, cooked meals, rides, money, tears shared and struggles are the reason I am here able and willing to be, write, love, organize, breathe, live. Your love has healed me. The way you see my parents in me and through me and pray for me is the reason I am here. This is for us.

To my brother in law, Conroy Cokley, you are my big brother. Your love for my sister is shared, seen and never forgotten. Your love and support of us during some of the most painful times will always be remembered. I hope that you know I wouldn't be able to write this with you either. I hope that I am able to repay you for all of your support. I hope that you know this is for you, too!

Cuzzo! For you, I have to find the words to explain how much I love you and how proud I am of you. I see you. Your support and getting to know me in the last two years, living closer to you, has been a dream come true. It has not been easy by a long shot and I wouldn't change anything that I have learned with you. You teach me how to live and love more than you know. Your heart is SO BIG. You deserve the world and we need you here with your big heart, amazing worth ethic, and just you for you. Keep going, cuz!

To Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths, in analog, in digital, in intentionality this piece of writing is only the beginning and a hopeful contribution to the ways we do Black girlhood with Black girls. I am indebted to us as a people together ready to make power, make space, make love, and speak truths, laugh, cry, dream and so much more.

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Introduction

In *The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender and Freedom*, Barbara Smith (2000) takes us on a journey of critical conversations about multiplicities of identities and oppression and the struggles and joys of organizing with Black (lesbian) feminists during the 1970s through early 2000s. The most salient theme in Smith's writing was the importance of collective organizing and working with people for freedom. I understand this particular Black feminist genealogy and organizing practice of criticality and celebration created for and by us, not based merely on individual biological identity, through my work with Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT). In SOLHOT, we look to Smith and other Black feminist and women writers and artists as a foundation for organizing critical and celebratory spaces for Black girls and women across difference. We also utilize and bring their names, texts, art, and visions into the spaces we make with Black girls. As a Black feminist artist and scholar, my dissertation project looks to Black feminist and women elder writers and artists as a way to remember and continue our ongoing fight for Black women studies, Black girlhood studies and right to be knowledge producers who take creativity and relationships seriously.

Collectivity in SOLHOT has several layers: organizing physical spaces for and with Black girls' for Black girlhood celebration, knowledge production, and music and art making. Organizing physical spaces for and with Black girls in SOLHOT has functioned dynamically across time ranging from sessions with Black girls in libraries, Boys and Girls Club, after school and at other community institutions. The physical spaces created in SOLHOT also happens nationally and international with Black girls. Knowledge production looks like individual publications and books about Black girlhood celebration. It also looks like co-authorship amongst graduate students, junior and senior faculty, and non-faculty that challenge

student/mentor binaries, academic relationships and isolation. Music and art making in SOLHOT is also knowledge production and range from theater productions, film school, beat making and music recording, DJ'ing, dance routines, poetry, concerts, critical roleplaying, art/photo exhibitions and more. In SOLHOT, organizing, knowledge production, music and art makes takes serious intergenerational relationships between Black girls and women and what is created from making celebratory space that Black girls see as theirs.

This dissertation is an exploration of my ongoing creative organizing with SOLHOT and Black girls. Envisioned by Ruth Nicole Brown in 2006, SOLHOT begun as a local initiative and now well regarded internationally as an impactful collective making space with and for Black girls for Black girlhood celebration. In direct conversation with Black feminist organizing theories and practices of the Combahee River Collective, *This Bridge*, *Home Girls* and many other people, texts and art, Brown (2009; 2013) had vision with SOLHOT to organize spaces with Black girls for the celebration of Black girlhood in all of its complexity. In SOLHOT, Black girlhood is used as an organizing construct for freedom, meaning it is not reliant on biological identity or a singular Black girl story, rather our focus is on the relationships we build with each other to envision our worlds anew. Like the Combahee River Collective, SOLHOT prioritizes collective writing, organizing and art making to create the worlds we want. The ways we dream up new worlds is performed through rituals, art-making and shared imaginations dependent on our ability to be present with Black girls and to give what we have and know.

In SOLHOT, we follow a tradition of Black feminist artists and scholars who created and organized on behalf of creating a better world, for ourselves and other Black women and girls. SOLHOT's intervention in Black girlhood studies, feminism and education takes seriously what it means to say I study Black girlhood. To take the study of Black girlhood serious as I have

experienced it and argue in the dissertation is to bring my talents, heart, knowledge and enthusiasm to organizing spaces with Black girls for Black girlhood celebration. To take it seriously also means to be ready to change my way of thinking about and relating to Black girls, Black girlhood and to myself whom once was a Black girl and remember myself as such. As homegirls/boy write, to take the study of Black girlhood serious is also to take serious, “the relationships of care, service, reciprocity, generosity and love it requires” (Owens, et. al., 2017).

Envisioned in 2006 by Ruth Nicole Brown as an organizing practice of the when, where, and how of Black girlhood celebration with Black girls, Saving Our Lives Here Our Truth’s (SOLHOT) has been described as, “more than an after-school program focused on Black girls and building self-esteem, SOLHOT is dedicated to young Black girls and encourages us to create a space that is all of our own, be it physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. In this space we discuss, dance, reenact, shape, reshape, and reform the politics of Black girlhood” (Brown, 2009; p.4). Analog SOLHOT is a face-to-face medium we use to organize sessions and create physically with Black girls in Central, IL and wherever else we organize and are invited to create Black girl ritual experiences. Analog SOLHOT meets with Black girls in schools, libraries, at the nearby University, local concert venues and institutions where we and other homegirls perform, record in purple curtain studios, coffee shops and wherever our hearts take us together to strategize creating a better world for everyone. There is intentional SOLHOT, where you can do SOLHOT whenever you are using your power, knowledge and truth toward the cumulative benefit of Black girls everywhere. Digital SOLHOT is where you can down/load Black girlhood celebration through the music and multimedia ritual experience that is, We Levitate.

According to homegirls/boys Kwakye, Hill and Callier (2015), since its inception SOLHOT has served as a key means to do the following:

- Center the embodied knowledge of Black girls and women
- Foster opportunities for Black girls and women to speak directly to systemic oppression(s)
- Explore the creative potential of Black girlhood
- Organize Black girls and women for the purpose of unapologetically making/taking freedom” (p. 1).

A definitive description of SOLHOT is hard to make and we often asked for one by well-intentioned people, educators and community members who want to do SOLHOT where they are. What we do know is that the what, how, where and when of SOLHOT depends on who shows up to share their creative gifts and knowledge. SOLHOT has many forms (after school sessions, live performances, sonic and analog archives; photo exhibition) and crosses multiple disciplines, expanding the field of Black girlhood studies. Even though SOLHOT may be perceived by some unfamiliar with the study of Black girlhood as insular and small, we are also vast and worldwide in ways that transgress time and space and contribute to multiple and ongoing conversations about Black girlhood. Being small scale is important to the work of building relationships in SOLHOT. Small scale organizing, similar to ways Grace Lee Boggs organized Detroit Summer, a multi-racial and intergenerational collective working with youth to improve communities, allows SOLHOT to tend to the political, social, economic, local and personal of Black girlhood with greater detail and attention.

The foundation of SOLHOT’s work primarily happens in the form of “sessions” with Black girls that usually occur after-school hours housed in schools and youth-serving non-profit institutions. In these sessions, SOLHOT engages Black girlhood celebration through art, ritual, conversation and knowledge building with those that show up. Typically, those that show up are

interested in working with Black girls and Black girlhood. The way that home girls' and people show up and organizing with SOLHOT has changed over time. Some of us are undergraduate and graduate students working with SOLHOT and/or studying Black girlhood, some of whom have come and went, still here, and come back. There are organizers of SOLHOT range from family members, artist comrades met along the way, Black girl artists and others who share their talents to serve in making something bigger than us. SOLHOT sessions are intentionally organized to represent a structuring of time with Black girls to think about Black girlhood in all of its complexity. Unique to SOLHOT's structuring of time with Black girls, is a profound desire for unified struggle towards emancipatory Black girlhood. Brown et. al (2018) notes, "How we use time in service of a collective and emancipatory Black girlhood is poetry, it is music, it is a living thing; part cyborg, part assemblage, and part weird existential dream. SOLHOT time has a sound..." (p. 398-9). This dissertation and my contribution to Black girlhood studies takes seriously the sound that SOLHOT time has in service of Black girls.

My Introduction to Black Girlhood Studies

As an undergraduate scholar of the community studies program at the College of William and Mary, I was interested in hip-hop feminism and Black women's experiences as music artists via *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop Feminism Anthology* edited by Gwendolyn D. Pough, Elaine Richardson, Aisha Durham, and Rachel Raimist. I found SOLHOT while reading Ruth Nicole Brown's, *Black Girlhood Celebration: Towards a Hip Hop Feminist Pedagogy*. I reached out to Dr. Brown and sent her work that I did with Black girls during a summer research program. My journey with SOLHOT began as I applied to graduate school where SOLHOT was located and continued a relationship with the group. I decided to attend Syracuse University due to financial and family concerns at the time. As a graduate student, I learned more closely about

the struggles and joys of doing work and making spaces for and with Black girls. As a Black girlhood scholar of SOLHOT, working with people in Syracuse concerned with the lives of Black girls, I was frustrated with practices that did not align with the complexities of Black girlhood as an organizing construct for freedom and in my experience where greatly focused on programming the girls and individual identity politics, a limiting politics that Black feminists are often associated with (Nash, 2013). For example, instead of an limited and isolated politics of self, I desired a closer relationship to community and feminist work with Black girls that strove to center our dreams while organizing ourselves towards working with Black girls that always centers what we can create together versus how we can help or what we can teach the girls.

Along with my mother passing in 2014, this frustration sent me searching for home, moving me closer to coalition work (Reagon, 1983) with SOLHOT, reading and asking different research questions, questions more attuned to being with a group concerned with Black girlhood celebration as an organizing. One of the ways I asked questions differently with SOLHOT and grappled with what it means to organize with SOLHOT across various geopolitical physical places/spaces is through sound and music making with girl band, SOLHOT We Levitate. For instance, I questioned whether I could be a SOLHOT homegirl if I lived in Syracuse. I began to ask myself what it meant to be a home girl that did not live physically in the same place where much of local SOLHOT face-to-face with Black girls was happening. I did not know it was possible to do SOLHOT in Syracuse. What I did know and have were home girls who held me accountable to taking the study of Black girlhood seriously. As a member of SOLHOT's girl band, I began to rethink my own involvement and stake in Black girlhood as a home girl living across states. This rethinking meant showing up for Black girls' and Black girlhood celebration wherever I was and also being ready to bring what I know to SOLHOT whenever we met face-

to-face. I began to take more seriously what it meant to do scholarship and art with other Black girls and women and not in isolation.

We Levitate is a sonic force of Black girl sounds and next level practice of SOLHOT concerned with using digital wrongly (Brown et al, 2018) or however we know to use it, to reimagine the collective, resound complex Black girlhood, remember relationships, and reverberate love for self, each other and the new worlds we create. I was asked and invited to join SOLHOT's We Levitate, and was given the name DJ B.E. by an home girl who challenged me to see myself as a DJ and embrace me fully. Her seeing and naming me also reminded me of my mother's dedication and excitement for my love of music and desires to DJ. One of our family's favorite ways of taking care was to make Mix CD's for each other, especially when we could not afford anything else. When I was gifted my first set of turntables my mother bought me speakers to go along with it. I can see the joy and smiles on her face to give and support my dreams in life and in spirit.

My mother would also ways remind me to take care and in this moment, the support of homegirls in SOLHOT, my mother and my gut told me that taking care meant taking a risk and moving closer to people wit whom I want to be and organize with. I so dearly needed to be closer, face-to-face to SOLHOT's particular practice of Black girlhood and organizing with Black girls that I moved from Syracuse, NY to Champaign, IL in 2015. As a DJ and scholar and producer with SOLHOT We Levitate new questions emerged from music and sound made for and with the group. Before joining We Levitate, I did not fully consider myself a DJ, beat maker with Black girls and women and art that could be valued as scholarship, even as I claimed to study Black girlhood. My responsibility to Black girls, SOLHOT, and We Levitate holds me accountable to studying Black girlhood seriously, enthusiastically and intentionally. I started to

ask myself questions about DJ'ing, beat, sound and art making that centered Black girls and women, taking serious the study of Black girlhood. Like, what would a Black girl/feminist beat sound like? Or, what might it sound like to add prompted and sampling voice recordings of home girls' with beats and lectures important to our organizing and celebration? I began to think differently about being an artist that is always with Black girls and women and used my artist practice of sampling and beat making to ask important questions about being with them. I began to know and understand SOLHOT and my artist-scholar practice as a Black feminist endeavor and extension of Black women of color artist-scholar collective genealogies. As DJ B.E. of SOLHOT We Levitate, my artist praxis is concerned with organizing spaces for Black girlhood celebration with SOLHOT and others who do Black girlhood. In that organizing, I make music with We Levitate and SOLHOT homegirls, and curate sound and live playlists that SOLHOT, the band, Black girls everywhere want to hear.

As DJ B.E., new questions about Black girlhood and Black feminist genealogies are how lovenloops, my sampling and beatmaking artist practice became a sonic Black girlhood practice of what homegirl and bandmate, Jessica Robinson (2015) calls “self articulation through the collective.” (p. 18). Self-articulation through SOLHOT, through Black girlhood as something wholly organized with Black girls, allows us who do it, the opportunity to engage remembering as a communal practice to articulate the self. As Toni Cade Bambara wrote, “wholeness is not trifling matter, a lot of weight when you're well.” While I do claim total ethnographic authority in the sense that I want you to know I was really there¹, I do not claim to know it all about Black girlhood or SOLHOT.

¹ To know that I was “really there” is to also know that being their in analog, face-to-face with the group involved making a lot of tough choices that would separate me from institutional and financial support from the school in which I was enrolled.

The modes of communal remembering I focus on in this dissertation are sounds/songs of SOLHOT We Levitate created and recorded with the band as DJ B.E./lovenloops. The analytics that emerge, surface from the songs explored. Revealed in the title, analytics included are cruising, Crossings and care as collective sounds of Black girlhood, revealed in music made with Black girls and women in SOLHOT. It is my hope that this dissertation opens up more conversations, reflections and practices using creative and collective methods to sound our world anew and discover more transformative ways we might make space for and hear Black girlhood. To the people whose shared love and care make this work possible, I hope that this dissertation inspires evolution and a reflection of you, and importantly, us as a “sure thing in our presence².”

In this project, I position myself as an artist-scholar with SOLHOT making spaces for and with Black girls. I argue for Black girlhood and an interdisciplinary study of it, as something to be done with Black girls, collectively, creatively and with Black feminist artist sensibilities. As an artist-scholar-DJ, my work enters Black feminist and Black girlhood genealogies by exploring sound and music making done with Black women and girls. I believe this positioning moves us away from a focus in education and arts-based research on programming girls around individual biological identity and empowerment towards what we can create together in service of a world that sees and hears Black girls and women, together and fully. A Black girlhood studies that sees and hears Black girls and women, together and fully values individual Black girl experience while privileging our shared and layered knowledge, voices and lived experiences.

² “A sure thing is our presence” is a play on word from a We Levitate song titled, “How I Feel,” from the How I Feel EP released in February 2016, “I feel like a sure thing in her presence.” Dr. Brown aka BEEZ and We Levitate member wrote and sings the following lyrics to signify Black girl’s feeling like a sure thing in SOLHOT’s presence, in homegirl’s presence, and in each other presence. In SOLHOT, to remember how sure we are in each other’s presence, we also put the lyrics on SOLHOT’s shirts to celebrate Black Girl Genius Week 2016.

My exploration of sound, music and Black girlhood is interested in Black girls' sound and also what they and we sound, based on our celebration, care, and trust of each other.

Research Questions

My questions have evolved in the dissertation to reflect my changing self and relationship overtime to SOLHOT. In particular, I wanted my questions to reflect what I had found about self in relation to SOLHOT after exploring our collective sounds. I want my growing questions to reflect Black girlhood in a way that shows Black girls and women deserve spaces where we are valued and seen by each other. Interactions, relationships, love and care between Black girls and women, and what gets created and sounded from that are worthy of archival documentation and academic thoughtfulness. My academic thoughtfulness is important and according to Jessica Robinson, SOLHOT home girl, one practice she learned from SOLHOT, is to: tell the story like you care and only tell the story if you care. I care about the story I am telling and the questions I am asking about what a Black girlhood sound means because like Alice Walker mentioned, we care because we also know that the life we save is our own. Donna Haraway in conversation with Octavia Butler informs us, “and as you care, you are changed, so that your questions, change and your partners are different” (). To address sounds and songs that come from doing Black girlhood celebration, I asked the following questions to show a type of care learned in SOLHOT that reflect a changing me, different partners, and changing questions:

1. What is Black girlhood, sound, sonics, and music making and how do Black women and girls express it?
2. What sound, music-making practices do Black girls and those who make space with them engage in SOLHOT collective spaces?
3. What relational sounds come out of small-scale Black girlhood music making?

4. How does cruising, Crossings, and care as sounds made amongst Black girls and women, allow us to understand relationships between Black girls and women as a sound of trust, risk, and care?

Summary of Key Insights

I argue sounds of collective Black girlhood, created in SOLHOT, reveal the importance of collective music-making practices in Black girlhood studies and girl programming. Cruising, Crossings and care, as sounds of collective Black girlhood created in SOLHOT, resound us towards 1) being with Black girls and women across difference in deep love, trust and care 2) remembering Black feminist/women and artists love and care for each other as critical to how we celebrate and organize Black girlhood together.

Cruising, Crossings and care as sounds of collective music making in SOLHOT, centering Black girls and Black girlhood allow for a view of Black girlhood that is not fixed on biological identity, instead dynamic and mobile in ways that rely on remembering our relationships and direct organizing with Black girls to get us where we need together. Literally, “cruising” is heard in our music as we sing, “I love it when we cruising together,” I hear cruising as 1) a literal sound/lyric we produced together; 2) a way to make sense self in relation to past, present and future movement towards Black girlhood (Munoz, 2006) through SOLHOT sonic archives; and a forever promise that we make to each other even when physical, systemic, and oppressive forces get in the way. Cruising sounds like a cover of a shared soul favorite amongst each other originally written by Smokey Robinson and widely known and covered by D’Angelo turned into a chorus of a song that explores our personal and collective histories with living in Champaign-Urbana. Cruising sounds like remembering our most memorable moments on Green St. even if it sounded like drowning in the rush of people going back and forth the campus or the

many boxes it took to move to Illinois to do SOLHOT. Cruising sounds like the complex layers of our voices and experiences, backing each other up in song and in SOLHOT, and remembering what gets us through the struggle, even habits that might not be considered healthy but see us a whole and complex. Cruising sounds like celebration that takes seriously writing love songs, letters, and poems for Black girls and each other. Cruising sounds like resounding our music to remember relationships and lessons that might help us serve each other and Black girls better.

Cruising and listening to SOLHOT sonic archives is what gets me to our Crossings that, “...prepare us for the understanding that SOLHOT is a dynamic space looks and feels different in all time and is dependent on who is coming together, where they have been before, and the embodied knowledge and talents they bring with them” (p. 57). Although cruising our sounds is what gets me to meditations I contribute to remembering our Crossings, our many crossings can also be heard in our music. Crossings sound like bandmates losing parents to cancer the same year, finding ways to grieve together and separately and with SOLHOT. One of the ways we did grief was to practice trust and risk with each other, to write love letters, to look each other in the eyes and say, I love you. Crossings sound like my younger cousin, who has never been to physical SOLHOT, reading about Black girlhood as remembering herself as a Black girl, wishing to live, and with other Black women and girls in mind. In my project, I remember our Crossings as meditations to prepare us for dynamism in SOLHOT and show how personal histories, life experiences, family backgrounds, and ongoing commitments intersect with SOLHOT.

Care is also heard in our music, literally and in the ways we sing, write and perform with each other. Care in SOLHOT sounds like choosing to cover The Internet’s “Under Control” as a way to sing a promise to be reliable to each other and Black girls. Care sounds like holding

homegirls' decisions to move away from physical SOLHOT and to never let go. Care sounds like love poems and songs to remember our relationships. Telling a story like you mean it sounds like care in SOLHOT. Care as a sound of collective Black girlhood, sounded as taking care in our music, allowed me to understand Black girlhood as a form of care, that insists on caring for self in community with others as a way to resist and indict state sanctioned separation, violence and death of Black people. Care in SOLHOT most certainly sounds like Black women and girls who insist on being together despite personal differences and organizing dilemmas.

My artist-scholarship with SOLHOT blurs concepts of digital, analog and intentional mediums through sound and music making and inspires a view of Black girlhood as sonic, poetic, always for and with Black girls. In order to fully interpret experiences of organizing with Black girls and homegirls within this space, I listened to and meditated on sounds that revealed self in relationship to movement, space/place and a relational care that insists on being with SOLHOT, Black girls and each other despite efforts to separate us. In doing so, cruising and Crossing as sounds of collective Black girlhood serve as guide to remember self in relation to being a DJ with Black girls and home girls in SOLHOT. Listening to and crafting meditations based on what I reheard in our music allowed me to understand Black girlhood as never without Black girls, movement towards and with home girls and Black girls, sacred friendship and choosing gathered paths that defy ideas of time, space and place to dream new realities.

Autoethnographic fieldwork revealed that SOLHOT as a group transforms our relationship to how Black girl sound is produced and interpreted which then transforms our relationship to one another by enacting new ways to listen to, care for each other and remembers ourselves in relation to doing SOLHOT with Black girls. In particular, poetic, sonic method and analysis as way of listening to our sounds brought me to a lineage of collectivity and shared care amongst

Black feminist artists, poetics and organizers that used their art to be honest about the socio-political realities of Black people.

My autoethnography traces Black girlhood in conversation with Black women, feminist poets and artists who believed in and practiced creative and freedom together in love and celebration. It is through doing SOLHOT with Black girls that we might know one way of being always, already present and not alone. This knowing is a power that allows for Black girlhood, particularly our collective sounds, to be theorized in evolving and creative ways.

Field Contributions

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary, arts-based autoethnographic sound based study in Black girlhood, committed to conversations with research taking seriously the experiences of Black girls and Black girlhood in educational and women and gender studies as large interdisciplinary bases of research. This project contributes to the field of education as it engages poetics, sound and music making with Black girls and women as a site of knowledge. This is significant because it challenges what we consider as knowledge and allows Black girl sound made amongst Black women and girls to be seen as worthwhile to further study. This dissertation is significant and groundbreaking to scholarly and academic culture that rarely treats Black girlhood and sound as something worthwhile to study unless celebrating individual achievements and production; ways to fix Black girls or change the way they relate to music or each other. Black girls and women can and do love, trust and work across difference and my project works to reveal sounds that show this caring relationship and what comes out of it. My project understands Black girls' and our sound, their sound differently, as something that shares our personal experience and talents to make something bigger than ourselves; something that reveals our power together. My project also contributes to education by demonstrating Black

feminist genealogies of c artist practice and theories of working together as a framework to study of the experiences of Black girls in relationship to Black women and each other, challenging capitalist and individualistic notions of knowledge and knowledge production.

Bringing the fields of sound, performance studies and education is also a contribution of this dissertation. Key to this project is the consideration of Black girl knowledge that is embodied and based in everyday artistic practices. Considering embodied knowledge and everyday artistic practices of Black girls pushes the boundaries of education and arts-based research by drawing on sound, art making and performance as key to reimagining how we learn and create knowledge together. Sound and sonic studies, a burgeoning interdisciplinary field of study provides this project with a basis for understanding sounds connection to Cultural studies and ways to think sonically, asking questions about important cultural moments (Boon, 2015; Bradley, 2015), but does not engage sound studies with education, particularly involving young people, Black girls and women as sonic knowledge producers. Boon (2015) and researchers from disciplines ranging from musicology and cultural studies consider sound studies a field concerned with the aural dimensions of culture, related to how we hear and think about it at the intersections of science and technology. Few scholars in sound studies have explored sound and the sonic's relationship to Black women and girls. Bradley (2014) argues for a "sonic pleasure politics" of Black women and to think more intentionally about what it means to engage sound/the sonic on its own terms, as its own narrative. Bradley explores sound as a signifier of sexual pleasure that is connected to the history of sexual trauma associated with Black women's bodies. She pushes readers to consider Black women's moans and giggles in blues songs as sonic pleasure and sound worthy of study.

In a 2015 essay, Bradley engages sound studies with Black women's sonic blueprint. She mentions in an essay dedicated to Sandra Bland, a Black woman whose loudness cost her life at the hands of the police, "Black women navigate multiple codes of sonic respectability on a daily basis. Their sonic presence is seldom recognized as acceptable by society" ("SANDRA BLAND"). In this multimedia age where western controlling sound and technology narratives continue to persist, it becomes increasingly important to ask questions that explore Black girls' creative engagement with it, as they navigate sonic respectability and communicate things that escape language. This dissertation contributes to sound studies by exploring sound, culture and technology through the ears and hearts of Black girls and women when they are together celebrating Black girlhood in all of its complexity. I contribute arts-based practices that engage sound and music making with young people at the intersections of sound studies and education that reveal how Black girls and women use sound and technology to get to know self, each other, and build collective power.

Additionally, my project contributes to the field of gender & women's studies by taking up the experiences of Black girls and women in contemporary America with a specific focus on collective sound and music making and what comes out of that sound. This dissertation seeks to understand the complex relationships between Black girls and women and how these relationships are revealed through music making that remembers power we create when together. My understanding of our relationships in our music is the focus in order to paint an accurate picture of what Black girl sound means as a Black feminist-organizing construct for freedom where Black girls and women see and hear it as theirs.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

Chapter one, "On This Bridge & Journey, Too: SOLHOT We Levitate" provides

background to SOLHOT, it's girl band, We Levitate as being in direct lineage of Black feminist theories and practices of community arts organizing and community building amongst each other. This chapter describes in detail We Levitate's practice of doing digital wrongly as continuing a tradition of Black and women of color feminist theories and practices of writing and singing that believes in young people and service of a collective desire to change the world.

In chapter two, "Black Girlhood Sonics: A Review of An Interdisciplinary Black Girlhood Studies", I provide a review of theories and methodologies of Black feminist thought, arts-based research, digital humanities and Black girlhood to conceptualize Black girlhood sonics. Building on feminist and arts-based research articulations of collectivity, critical pedagogies, sound and music making as it relates to Black girlhood, I demonstrate the range of research on Black feminist theories and practices that center relationships between Black women's and girls, their art, and organizing. Here, I conceptualize, Black girlhood sound and sonics as intentional engagement with Black girls and women's relation to each other and education through sound, music-making and the digital as valuable knowledge production and new world dreaming.

Next, in chapter three, "Making Our Sounds of Black Girlhood: Methodology & Methods," I discuss methodology used to create, construct, collect and analyze sounds of collective Black girlhood in SOLHOT. The chapter begins with a discussion of qualitative research, particularly ethnography. This discussion of ethnography leads me to engage ethnographic practices that reveal SOLHOT as more than just a physical research girls' empowerment site, where we evaluate and collect data. SOLHOT is a deeply interpersonal way and creative praxis of going about inquiring into the experiences of Black girls that rely on [remembering] relationships and a collective, relational and parterned sense of care. In the

second half of the chapter, I detail the specific method used in this study. In this section, I go into a brief discussion of the methods of analysis as more detailed explanations of specific techniques are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

In chapter four, “Cruising SOLHOT Sonic Archives To Get To The Crossings,” I analyzed music and sounds produced by SOLHOT’s band, We Levitate, to explore cruising and Crossings as sounds that push beyond fixed non-relational notions of Black girlhood for more interdependently reliable and imaginative concepts and practices. Re-listening to our songs and re-reading Black feminist queer theories on molding alternative futures, get me to the meditative analytics of cruising and Crossings in this chapter. I use M. Jacqui Alexander’s (2005) concept of “pedagogies of Crossing” and Jose Munoz’s concept of “cruising” to help meditate on and create a road map for thinking through cruising and Crossings as sounds of collective Black girlhood in SOLHOT attuned to the past, while building alternative futures. Analyzing cruising as a sound of collective Black girlhood revealed ways the ways our music and work with Black girls, are attentive the past and present so that we might create a better future for Black girlhood studies. Cruising as a collective sound is what gets me to The Crossings through meditative relistening and writing with songs made in SOLHOT. Songs meditated on particularly speak to us cruising and celebrating Black girlhood together. Crossings as a sound of collective Black girlhood and meditative lessons reveal our music-making practices with Black girls and each other as a pedagogy that derives from creating moments where we crossover into a metaphysics of interdependence, intervening in the multiple spaces where knowledge is produced. This chapter is important because it demonstrates the ways particular sounds of collective Black girlhood help reckon with and listen to the past, present and self in relation to SOLHOT in ways that love each other through heartbreak and insists on being together across time and space. This

reckoning reveals imaginative, material and embodied realities and possibilities that choose pathways and commitments, personal and collective, to a Black girlhood studies and practice that is never without the girls or each other.

In chapter five, “Care to Take Some Time:” Poems/Songs Dedicated to SOLHOT, We Levitate, All Things Love and Dreaming With,” I analyzed music and sounds produced by SOLHOT’s Band, We Levitate, and Black feminist song and poetic texts to explore care as a sound of collective Black girlhood. Our songs demonstrating a relational care focused on complex friendship and loving each other, get me to analytical insights and poetics in this chapter. Through poetic and creative textual analysis, I contend that taking care, as sounded in SOLHOT follows a vital lineage and practice of Black feminist politics of care and art/sound that fiercely holds and dreams with us, we, the group in of its complexity so that we might create a more human supportive world. My poetic analysis contends with what it means to dream and sing with women like me, past and present, bound in a collective desire to change the world and what M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) calls, “the experience of freedom in boundary crossing” (p. 258). To locate this lineage, I employed arts-based research to create what I am calling poetry, songs and dedications to SOLHOT, We Levitate, and all things dreaming with. I conclude this chapter by discussing the ways a genealogy of Black feminist poetic and song practices unearth a desire to belong to self in community without preoccupation with self, might enable more relational and caring approaches to arts education, community engagement, knowledge and alternative future building.

I conclude this dissertation with chapter six, “Conclusion: Sounds of Black Girlhood After & to the End of the World” to articulate what cruising, Crossings and care as sounds of collective Black girlhood means beyond the context of SOLHOT. I make connections between

Chapters four and five, providing my theoretical and methodological contribution to education and Black feminist solidarity work. I also provide a meditation that reflects on my practice as an artist scholar interested in Black girlhood and sound and the future I am dreaming and singing with others and SOLHOT through studying collective sounds of Black girlhood. This meditation also serves as a call to Black girlhood studies to consider the importance of collective Black girlhood sound as inextricably linked to organizing constructs needed to create power and change in our lives and communities. I offer suggestions for researchers, artists, educators and those interested in working with Black girls and young people.

Chapter One

On This Bridge & Journey, Too:

SOLHOT We Levitate

In this chapter, I provide background of We Levitate, SOLHOT's girl band, but first, I will engage foundational frameworks that underpin this work, Black feminism and Black girlhood. This project is a feminist project and it is important to follow a tradition of Black women's and feminist studies that rely on our collective power. In particular, I am interested in frameworks that rely on theories and practices that follow a Black feminist lineage of making spaces for and with each other, community action and remembering each other, especially through art, writing, poetry and song. This chapter also explores what it means to use Black girlhood as a collective organizing construct. I begin by providing an understanding of major concepts that generate community action, poetry and song from Black feminism and girlhood. I do the work of remembering foundational Black feminist song and texts to provide my theoretical contribution to remembering a Black feminist legacy of using art to be and dream with community, particularly other Black girls and women. Next, I provide background to girl band We Levitate to further explore a Black feminist lineage of community art organizing interested in the contemporary lives of Black girls and women.

Like many who have come to know and belong to self in community, Barbara Smith (2000) and many other Black feminists artists and activists make it known that they are together, making spaces for themselves, "working for liberation and having a damn good time" and "doing it from scratch." To know, choose and imagine a Black girlhood practice and study as theorized through and with Black feminist genealogies and practiced through SOLHOT, is to know it as praxis of transformation (Robinson, 2016).

Upon rereading M. Jacqui Alexander's (2005) chapter six of *Pedagogies of Crossing*, "Remembering This Bridge Called My Back, Remembering Ourselves," I found myself re-remembering deep forgettings of my own mother, and the many ways she used and made Black art to share with me and build bridges to a world that valued the lives of Black girls and women; to know that I wasn't alone. My mother always celebrated me as an artist, writer, and poet and made sure I knew Black women who were also artists. Nikki Giovanni's (1987) *Spin A Soft Black Song* was our favorite children's poetry book to read together and writing poetry, singing songs and making art together was often a way to take care and celebrate each other. She treated home as a set of practices, about understanding and experiencing as familiar and most importantly a genealogy of home that is imaginative, politically charged in which familiarity stood in our shared knowledge of social injustice, Blackness, and practices of freedom (Mohanty, 2005). My mother's chose to belong to self in community, to find homes, and share that with my sister and I by taking us to Sweet Honey in the Rock concerts, a Black women's acapella group committed to organizing sound that negotiated what it mean to be Black, woman, not alone and singing for freedom, shaped me similar to way's Alexander describes as being shaped in a woman of color politics in the 1970s and 1980s. This remembering of my mother and connections with Black feminist organizing of the 70s through 90s, of who I am a student, helps me to explore more deeply my own journey with feminism and work with SOLHOT. We are reminded from Alexander's important remembering of *This Bridge*, that Black and women of color feminisms are rooted in remembering and cultivating a sense of self, community and home that is always in relation to other women of color, imaginative and politically charged. In this way, we might begin to sense home and community as "space in which the familiarity and sense

of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as a vision of radical transformation (Mohanty, 2003, p. 128).

Conversely, Alexander demonstrates how remembering other women of color feminists and artists also meant remembering, making a promise to her self, indebted to women who risked their lives to make home(s) for coalition, community and culture. This promise and act of being indebt to other women and our communities works to deconstruct power and requires that the only way we become women of color/feminists is by becoming fluent in each others' histories, resist hierarchies of oppression and the urge to not hear each other's truths. Alexander suggests that in order to be knowers of each other that we must direct our attention on each other in a way that knows "we cannot afford to cease yearning for each others' company" (p. 269).

Remembering that we are each other and that we belong to each other requires that we are not too preoccupied with self and that this requires us to not only vision to help us remember why we work for freedom, but to also practice it. Alexander reminds us that *This Bridge* as a vision "...helps us to remember why we do the work. Practice is the *how*; it makes the change and grounds the work. A reversal of the inherited relationship between theory and practice, between how we think and what we do, the heart of engaged action" (p. 279). We are reminded that our visions are only as effective as our personal and collective determination to practice it; that our daily practices will most effectively bring about the necessary letting go of ideas that make freedom and change possible. This letting go also involves examining our histories, how home shows up and how we might rethink what home means as a deconstruction of power that is reliant on our relationships and how well we know each other's histories, too, as women of color.

This chapter ultimately reminds us to urgently remember our fundamental interdependence, organizing and collectivity, before many more of us die because some of us did

not die and are still here (Jordan, 2002). In dedication to Gloria Anzaldua, “because death ups the stakes,” Alexander urgently asks us, “How many more must die before we internalize the existential message of our fundamental interdependence, any disease of one is a disease of the collectivity; any alienation from self is alienation from the collectivity” (p. 285). To begin to ask these questions, we must listen our call to bring our contradictory selves and yearnings to belong and remember. In order to be connected to a Black feminist artist theory and practice, to become it, we cannot do it in isolation. To become artists committed to solidarity work, we must do the work of creating and re-creating ourselves within the context of community, supporting a world that believes in human life.

Remembering my mother’s battle with breast cancer and Black women feminist artist scholar poets brought me to Audre Lorde’s (1980) important text, *The Cancer Journals*. Written as notes, journals and memoir as she faced her death during her battle with breast cancer, Lorde uses *The Cancer Journals* to write a world for herself and other Black women to not feel alone in their struggles with cancer; that having cancer as a Black woman also meant being human and whole. While much focus of this text is on Lorde’s identity as a cancer patient, she insists on reminding us that “...for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which have me strength and enabled me to scrutinize the essentials of my living” (p. 19). The stories she tells about her relationship to cancer intimately reveals the strength of belong to self while in community with others; that one cannot survive, cannot share their truths without the relationships and interdependence on others. Lorde shares

stories about being bathed in the “continuous tide of positive energies” by the women around her that she was able to convert into power to heal herself (p. 39).

For Lorde, false spirituality does not heal us but takes from us the energy we need to do our work. She insists that the love and women continued to heal her and enabled her to keep writing, creating and dreaming new worlds. Writer, Toni Cade Bambara, diagnosed with colon cancer, mentioned, “...nothing worked—personal advice, self-help books, prescriptions, only Audre Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* made sense” (Ed. Holmes & Wall; p. 23). In particular, Lorde uses the healing power of women to write and dream up a world that questions systemic concerns that seek to destroy us and make us feel guilty; that knows the only real happy people are those of us who work against premature deaths at the hands of the state with all the energy of our living (p. 77). We are reminded that facing death for each and every one of us might mean using all the energy of our living to fight for a just world. As a primary everyday Black feminist artist practice source, *The Cancer Journals*, provides a framework for belonging to self in community rooted in excavating the material realities of Black working class women. She made it a point with her life and work to speak to issues that produced hers and so many other Black women’s death. In a blog post about re-thinking, *low-end theory* notes, “Audre Lorde didn’t die a natural death. She died an institutionally produced one, a death that was generated at the level of social infrastructure...[and] might also serve as a reminder that in the aggregate, Black women bear a disproportionate share of racial capitalism’s propensity to work its workers to death” (“On Audre Lorde’s Legacy”, 2013). With Lorde’s writing, poetry and life’s work, we are encouraged as artists to face death, to practice the personal as political; a practice that cannot be done in isolation or without other women.

Along with Lorde's journals, June Jordan (2003) writer, poet and activist, was considering what it meant to be battling breast cancer and facing death. In "Besting A Worse Case Scenario," a political essay and keynote given at the 1996 Mayor's Summit on Breast Cancer in San Francisco, Jordan writes about her learning of having cancer as a story to "help raise red flags, public temperatures, holy hell, public consciousness, blood pressure, morale—activism/research/victim morale so that this soft-spoken emergency" becomes a top issue (p. 67). Jordan was aware of the institutional oppressions that seek to kill us in a way that also connected her creatively to children, people and communities. In doing so, she committed to "love as the essential nature of all that supports human life, [where] a serious and tender concern to respect the nature, and the spontaneous purpose of other things, other people, will make manifest a peaceable order among us such that fear, conflict, competition, waste, and environmental sacrifice will have no place" (Jordan, 1977; p. 11). She used her art and writing to bring attention to transnational concerns that affected Black people. As she was facing her own pending death and battle with breast cancer, she used her poetry as a call to action to stop the suffering that so many mothers and sisters and daughters were subject to. Jordan writes, "I am heartened because I am hopeful, now/ I am thinking well, maybe, at last/ the worlds out about/ the ultimate soft-spoken emergency/ maybe now/ somebody knows/ maybe somebody will stop the mystery" (p. 74). Her hope turns us towards believing in a world we can create beyond our suffering. Jordan believed in a world where those of who have not died have a destiny to live a life that rallies "...around the emergent/militant reconstruction of a secular democracy consecrated to the equality of each and every living one of us" (p. 14). Jordan not only used her one stories to incite action, she also wrote about comrades and lovers as a way to assert that she is not alone in this world and fight with all her might for the dead and living. In her poem to remember Fannie

Lou Hamer's life, Jordan speaks of friendship, interconnectedness and making home with Black freedom fighters across the nation. She writes, "You used to say, 'June?/ Honey when you gone come down here you/ supposed to stay with me. Where/ else?'/ Meanin home." Jordan goes on to write about the courage it took Hamer to go on living, loving, cooking, and standing up against structural racism in her hometown. She writes of the "homemade field of love" that Hamer created for her and others to organize people from her community and around the world despite several attempts to kill her. Like several of the writers I discuss here, Hamer also died an institutionally sanctioned death where cancer took her life with little to no help from the state.

Considering our pending deaths up the stakes, Black feminist and womanist artists have considered love and what it means to belong in community with each other and make home(s), to be bound by mutual desire, to be with a group, and people committed to making power that sustains us on our struggle towards a world that values us as fully human. In particular, in song and theory, I remember acapella group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, a group of Black woman artists and singers who organize freedom songs that encourage a whole, healthy world. Sweet Honey provides a vision for being an artist within a sound and in song with people and communities who believe in freedom. As an all Black women's group, their sound personally and collectively, relies on their mother's and their mother's mother truth and stands deep within Black gospel and freedom song traditions. Central to their organizing was producing music and albums that spoke to the need to belong in, dream with and long for community. The group placed emphasis on being together across geographical boundaries. On the back of their album cover, *We All...Everyone of Us* (1983), Sweet Honey writes,

“WE COME TO YOU
YOU IN EVERY COLOR OF THE RAINBOW
WITH YOUR FREEDOM AND STRUGGLE STANCES

IN EVERY POSITION OF THE MOON AND SUN
WE COME TO YOU
OFFERING OUR SONGS AND THE SOUNDS OF OUR
MOTHER'S MOTHER
IN LIBATION
TO EVERYONE OF US

THERE REALLY IS AN COMMUNITY

WE HAVE SEEN AND FELT AND BEEN HELD BY YOU
THESE TEN YEARS

THERE IS THIS COMMUNITY WE BELONG TO
WITHOUT GEOGRAPHICAL BOUNDARIES

D.C., ATLANTA, BEREA, CHICAGO, EAST ST. LOUIS,
L.A., TORONTO, CHIBA, THE BAY AREA, NEWARK,
SEATTLE, CHAPEL HILL, BOSTON, FRANKFURT,
LONDON, RICHMOND, LITTLE ROCK, NYC, DENVER,
ALBUQUERQUE, NASHVILLE, BRIXTON, NEW ORLEANS,
VANCOUVER, PORTLAND, BERLIN,
ALBANY, DURHAM, TOKYO, ST. LOUIS. DETROIT, ST. PAUL,
DALLAS, PEORIA, JAMAICA....

THERE REALLY IS A COMMUNITY
LOVERS
SEARCHERS
MOVERS INTO LIFE
FIGHTERS AND BUILDERS
OF A PLACE WHERE
MILITARY MACHINES, HATRED OF WOMEN, ABUSE OF CHILDREN,
HOMOPHOBIA, SOCIETAL MALE SUICIDE, RACIAL BIGOTRY, STARVATION,
WORK THAT KILLS AND CRIPPLES, SOCIAL ORDERS DRIVEN BY GREED,
THE USA INVADING WHOEVER... THIS WEEK
WHERE THIS DYING AND ACTING OUT OF FEAR, ANGER, AND TERROR
WILL FIND NO FEEDING GROUND

I WANNA BE THERE"

-Sweet Honey In the Rock, *We All...Everyone of Us*, Album (1983) Flying Fish Records

Sweet Honey makes a collective statement insisting that "THERE IS REALLY A
COMMUNITY." As Black women artists, Sweet Honey took pride in building coalition homes

and loving communities that also organized with people to dream up a better world. We Levitate, SOLHOT's girl band, as an extension of Sweet Honey in the Rock and many others, uses song and sound with/for each to each other to defy expectation of the academy that suggests Black girls in community with Black women or professors in community with students should not love each other beyond dichotomies, such as mentor/mentee or teacher/student (Garner et al., 2019, p. 193). This dissertation writes with the same fervent belief that there really is a community where Black girlhood is freedom.

I remember Sweet Honey and my mother again. I remember being a young girl and the power and energy I felt from seeing a group of women like me, Black and woman, singing songs that we all could sing to help us imagine new possibilities for human life. To share this joy of Sweet Honey with my mother has introduced me to remembering a world where freedom is organized by Black women. In *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock...Still on the Journey* by Bernice Johnson Reagon and Sweet Honey in the Rock (1993), members of the group, fans, loved ones and community members celebrate 20 years of Sweet Honey community organizing and singing for freedom. They remind us that without our mothers, "...there would not be a journey or songs to sing." The group tells stories about their music-making journeys and reveal ways that singing with Sweet Honey introduced them to a world of singing freedom songs with Black women for Black women, ultimately for everyone else. In *We Who Believe in Freedom*, Toshi Reagon (1993), daughter of Bernice Johnson Reagon, a visionary for Sweet Honey, remembers what it was like to participate in community workshops organized for Black women singers by Sweet Honey to practice really being in touch with their community: "There are many singers who have gotten the inspiration and, maybe more important, a different model for what an artist can be. I include myself. Music is a mode of communicating to and about my

community, a mode of historical documentation, second, and then a mode of entertainment. This philosophy comes from Mom and Sweet Honey in the Rock” (p. 5). Sweet Honey inspired Toshi to form her own group with teenage women who sung many of their mother’s songs, calling themselves, the children of Sweet Honey in the Rock.

We are fortunate to be given a powerful framework by Sweet Honey for Black women artists to follow: an alternative way of being an artist with community where being with a collective gives us the strength to build our own audiences and produce our own concerts and community organizing events. Sweet Honey’s approach to organizing sound and song with communities around freedom and Black women and children’s lived experience is foundational to this project. The women of Sweet Honey, as singers and songwriters who identified with Black womanhood, saw the importance of bringing people together, face-to-face, to organize freedom and celebrate Black women through song in accapella concert, community sing-alongs, songs for children to sing, songs for other Black women poets to sing, and more. We Levitate builds on Sweet Honey’s legacy in the ways we use song to organize Black girlhood. Our organizing of Black girlhood and sound happens in many ways. For example, our freestyle ciphers at the beginning of sessions allow us to pick a concern that is on our minds, and creatively put words together to address the issue and engage the group. During one cipher, the girls’ decided they wanted to freestyle and rap about school being like jail for Black girls. Concerns ranging from the teachers yelling all day, disgusting cafeteria food, and dress codes for Black girls were addressed.

We Levitate builds on this legacy by organizing Black girlhood celebratory concert and live music spaces that share our music that speaks directly to Black girls’ and our love for them and each other as a band. In my own work, I build on Sweet Honey in the Rock’s legacy of

organizing a gendered and raced sound by centering my DJ practice on uncovering Black women and girl's relationship to music, each other and making music and sound. For example, during a Black Girl Genius week, I worked with a group of girls to make our own DJ Playlist. We called it "mixed personalities" and dedicated our playlist to when we are angry, in our feelings, in love, want to dance, and hanging with our friends. There was much freedom felt in our playlist that could speak to our ranging personalities and humanness.

Sweet Honey organized a freedom sound for us to remember our mothers, ancestors, and our dreams in a world that says we shouldn't. This remembering of my mother and Sweet Honey in the Rock came from a need to (re)remember a lineage of art and sound making by Black women that I had always been apart of me. Remembering the concerts that I went to in Richmond, remembering that one of my mother's last wishes before dying was to see Sweet Honey, has helped me to understand my relationship to being an artist with groups of Black women and girls. In Sweet Honey, I see myself and I see and hear SOLHOT, We Levitate as a direct continuation of Black women singer fighters who use their voice/sound as an instrument and feminist artist practice to write songs and sing with each other and community.

The same way Bernice Johnson Reagon describes Ella Baker, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth as political mothers, I look to Sweet Honey, June Jordan, Sonia Sanchez, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara and others as mother, SOLHOT and We Levitate as daughter. In SOLHOT, we value a "we/us" that is never without Black girls, young people and community that believe in them. As We Levitate, we serve Black girls and SOLHOT and one of the ways we do that is through the creation of Black girl sounds informed by what happens in SOLHOT with the girls. Similar to Sweet Honey and so many others, we are organizers who love to make sound and sing together in ways that allow us to feel ourselves loved through each other's voice,

rhythm, and (heart) beat. The next section, will further explore background to SOLHOT and its girl band, We Levitate.

SOLHOT's Very Own: We Levitate

It is important for We Levitate as a song and sound making iteration for SOLHOT to stay firmly connected to what happens on the ground when organizing with girls in sessions. We Levitate formed after an inevitable heartbreak due to a lack of constant reminders and intentional practice of rituals to make Black girlhood differently that what systemic oppression asks us for. For those still present during and after the heartbreak, music became a way to engage heartbreak and resound our healing. The way we go about sound engage past, present and the futures we are building together.

We Levitate comes from lessons in SOLHOT and our love of making music to reclaim the work of organizing with people and relationships meaning more than ideas. Together, as a band, music is fueled by our love for SOLHOT and feeling ourselves beautiful and whole through each other's voice, rhythm and (heart) beats and breaks. We Levitate records/documents Black women and girls' lives and relationships, produces and shares originally created beats and songs, and plays with what a Black girl sound means. Each time I listen to our music, I learn, hear, heal and feel something new about myself, about working with Black women and girls and risks of making spaces for Black girlhood celebration with Black girls.

My involvement with Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), a space practicing Black girlhood as an organizing construct for freedom, has introduced me to collective organizing with scholars, artists, youth, and community members doing essential work. My artistic engagement with sound, particularly organizing around a Black girl sound, comes from work with SOLHOT, more specifically the complexities of living, creating and loving in

collectivity. In particular, I am involved as a scholar and artist with SOLHOT and the creative organizing projects that branch from its roots³. The depth of SOLHOT is nearly impossible to explain to someone who has never experienced it because there are many ways that SOLHOT functions. As the DJ and creative member of We Levitate, this project looks to the sounds heard and made and the ways they function as culturally productive knowledge to further theorize the sounds of collective Black girlhood as an alternative way towards freedom.

³ Here, my reference is about being a creative member with girl band, SOLHOT We Levitate and an organizer Black (Girl) Genius (Week), a SOLHOT multi-media performance-based research project that explores the contemporary politics, expressive culture(s), and creative resistance of Black girls.

Chapter Two

Black Girlhood Sound & Music Making:

A Review of An Interdisciplinary Black Girlhood Studies

Introduction

In this dissertation, I take up Black feminist and Black girlhood interventions that stretch across disciplines such as ethnomusicology, sonic studies, cultural studies, education, and women's studies. I particularly take up theorists who have worked to push hip-hop feminist and girlhood theories and practice and develop new ideas and approaches to demolishing heteropatriarchy and misogyny that directly affect the lives of Black girls and women. Much research bridging Black girls' experiences with music and culture, examines the ways that hip-hop culture and music functions as a way of negotiating Black girls'/women's identities, experiences and literacies. My project contributes to possibilities created when Black girlhood sound is used as an organizing construct to make space for and with Black girls. Moreover, the sonic art practices of Black girls, particularly those practices situated in collective.

This literature review chapter explores research on Black feminism, hip-hop feminism, and Black girlhood, revealing interdisciplinary arts-based research practices that disrupt research on and about Black girls. I start with background of a Black feminist lens in Black girlhood studies and education. Next, I discuss the implications of a Black feminist lens on Black girlhood studies. I conclude with an exploration and framing of Black girl sound and music making in Black girlhood studies, women's studies and SOLHOT.

Black Feminist Lens

In 1986, a group of Black feminist scholars and activists, known as the Combahee River Collective (CRC) published a statement honoring the political origins, struggle, and fight for freedom that Black women have been a part of throughout time. The CRC consisted of artists, performers, activists, theorists, educators and more in 1980s that saw it as important to begin defining and clarifying their politics as Black women and feminists “committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression” seeing their particular task as “the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon that fact that the major systems of oppressions are interlocking” (p. 210). The Combahee River Collective explicated the genesis of contemporary Black feminism; one that is tied to and places lived experiences of Black women at the center of their analysis and organizing. Many of CRC’s members played a huge role in the inception of Black women’s studies (1982) as viable knowledge production and an important area of studies in academia and the world. In addition, Black feminist collectives like the CRC teach us about feminist practice as that operates at levels Mohanty (2006) details as: “the level of daily life through the everyday acts that constitute our identities and relational communities; at the level of collective action in groups, networks, and movements constituted through around feminist visions of social transformation; and at the levels of theory, pedagogy, and textual creativity in the scholarly and writing practices of feminists engaged in the production of knowledge” (p. 5). Feminist practice in education and work with Black girls and women has become a growing need especially for Black women teachers, artists and researchers. Like other Black girlhood studies scholars, I know that “studying Black girlhood should be a political relationship of being in community with and for Black girls” (Owens et al., 2017; p. 118). For

this reason, many of the texts I engage in this chapter are studies by people, particularly Black women, in political relationship and community with Black girls.

Starting with the inception of contemporary Black feminism birthed by organizing and action by Black women is important to understanding what a Black feminist lens brings to education, specifically the way *Black girlhood* (Brown, 2009; 2013) is constructed in discourse and practice. In my dissertation, it is important to understand *and* know, Black girlhood, as “the representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female,” (Brown, 2009, p. x.). Brown asserts, “Black girls’ lives are inherently valuable and so is Black girlhood,” envisioning Black girlhood as an organizing construct that is a boundless political definition built on the traditions of Black feminism and hip-hop feminism.

In *Hear Our Truths*, Brown (2013) explains, “we who come together to organize on behalf of Black girlhood were named homegirls by a homegirl who unconsciously or consciously sought to invoke the brilliance of Barbara Smith and her comrades (1983), as they called themselves homegirls to connote their love for home and reject the homelessness their critics insisted on for them because of their intentional practice of Black feminism” (p. 40) Brown (2013) holds firm to “SOLHOT’s continuation of Smith et. al’s (1983) Black feminist traditions of honoring certain ‘home truths’...[affirming] the challenges of Black feminists before” them. Love for home and complicating it’s relation to coalition politics and belonging (Reagon, 1980), is important to our understandings of Black girlhood in educational discourse and practice, a discourse that often portrays Black girls’ as at-risk and isolated from a community of caring people. Black feminist theories and practices of collectivity and coalition provide a framework for envisioning a beloved community across differences where young people and artists lead the

way. Black Feminist theories and practices serve as theoretical, personal and political blueprints for Black girlhood celebration.

Black feminism utilized as critical theory, literacy and pedagogy with young people has become a way for Black women teachers, scholars, artists, and community members to politicize work with Black girls in ways that honor their full complexity and ways of making knowledge. Building on the legacy of feminism and Black feminism, “hip-hop feminism,” a term coined almost two decades ago in Joan Morgan’s (1999) *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*, claims to expand the focus of the U.S. black feminist agenda toward hip-hop aiming towards self-empowerment for women and girls through political education based on feminist modes of analysis. In this work, Morgan set out to create a new voice of the hip-hop generation that speaks out about the reality of being a black woman in twentieth first century America. Morgan (2000) felt it was crucial to create a feminist theory connected to hip-hop because “hip-hop is not only the dominion of young, black, and male it is also the world in which young black women live and survive” (p. 77). She argues persuasively, “We need a feminism that possesses the same fundamental understanding held by any true student of hip-hop” and that “truth cannot be found in the voice of any one rapper but in the juxtaposition of many” (62). Hip-hop feminist scholars and activists began creative organizing and building knowledge, expanding Morgan’s view on feminism to offer examples of how feminists have begun and continue to deal with, think about and write about rap music and hip-hop culture, particularly as it relates to the lived experiences of Black women and girls in a contemporary world (Pough et al., 2007; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007).

Sharpley-Whiting (2007) a writer who considers herself a feminist of the hip hop generation, is particularly interested in issues surrounding young Black women and hip-hop

culture. In *Pimps Up, Ho's Down*, Sharpley-Whiting, explores the complexities of young Black women's engagement with a culture deemed misogynistic and masculinist. She uses interviews with young Black women working as exotic dancers, groupies, and everyday young Black women to explore hip-hop's alliance with the sex industry and its hold on young Black women's conceptions of identity, love and romance. For the author, hip-hop culture needs to change its relationship to the sex industry in order for young Black women's relationship to sexual identity to change. Groundbreaking work by edited by scholars doing work on Black women and hip-hop, Pough, Richardson, Durham & Raimist (2007) *Home Girls Make Some Noise*, sought to complicate notions of hip-hop music and culture as a male space by identifying women and femmes who were always involved with the culture. In this anthology, authors write critical essays, cultural critiques, interviews, personal narratives, poetry and artwork to explore hip-hop as a site where women and queer people rearticulate identity and sexual politics in a culture dominated by capitalism. Pough et al explore hip-hop as an epistemology grounded in the experiences of communities of color under advanced capitalism. An exploration grounding in the lived experiences of people of color under capitalism is particularly important to addressing the issues affecting hip-hop music and culture and the ways Black women and girls. Without this view, we might miss out on the ways Black women and girls use hip-hop music, technology and culture to defy misogyny and all the places capitalism can't reach.

As a generationally specific theory and praxis, hip-hop feminism has made space within the last decade to have difficult conversations about race, gender, class and sexuality, while paying close attention to the lives of Black girls, hip-hop culture and urban education. Lindsey (2015) brings together studies in education and intersects with hip-hop feminism to explore the continued, but undervalued, significance of hip-hop feminism and urban education. In her essay,

Lindsey contributes several key theoretical interventions of hip-hop feminism in hip-hop studies and urban education that include wreck, kinetic orality, sonic pleasure, percussive resistance, and Black girl standpoint theory. The author focuses on how hip-hop feminism can facilitate better educational outcomes for Black and Brown students. An important argument in Lindsey's (2005) essay is, "If we don't take seriously the pleasure girls and women derive from music, even misogynistic and sexist music, we miss an opportunity to theorize the complexities of women and girls' pleasure and enjoyment" (p. 63). Taking seriously the pleasure and enjoyment and girls and women is critical to how we are able to engage Black girls and women and our contradictions and pleasure and not an issue to be fixed.

Brown (2009) notes in her work,

"It is hip-hop feminism that not only acknowledges Black girls as experts on their own lives, but more than that, hip-hop feminism makes it possible to articulate a complex understanding of Black girlhood—and maybe more remarkably, in the context that black girls might claim themselves: a context of hip-hop" (p. 35).

Brown's (2009) close theorization of narrative discrepancies within hip-hop, feminist, and girl studies' that too often erase the complexities of Black girls' and youth's lived experience is key to understanding what a Black feminist lens brings to the construction of Black girlhood in educational discourse and practice. *Black girlhood* (Brown, 2009), defined as "the presentations, memories, lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female" (p. x) is the first comprehensive text that begins to do the complex but needed work of naming a Black feminist practice that places Black girls and discourses of hip-hop, girls' studies, and girls' programming in conversation with academic/educational discourse and practice.

Specifically, Brown (2009) is interested in naming a framework that addresses the material and complex realities of:

“...Black girls growing up post-9/11, consuming and creating hip-hop, experiencing increased imprisonment and lockup, being educated under supreme court-ordered consent decrees for supposedly desegregated schools, lacking formal for youth by youth community spaces, an ever-expanding inequity of foster care and child protective services, and enduring residential segregation” (p. 36).

Tending to contemporary concerns of Black girls’ material realities is important to changing institutions, schooling and while tending to the narrative discrepancies across disciplines, Brown uses her own reflective creative narrative to further explore Black girls and women’s complex, sometimes “abusive” relationship with hip-hop and girl-empowerment programming. Brown’s complicated hip-hop feminist subjectivity is joined with a refusal to squeeze Black girls and Black girlhood into girls’ studies contexts and practices that do not consider the intersection of diverse categories of identity that do not value Black girls lived experience. She writes, “Dominant girls’ studies paradigms leave a host of questions unanswered, including, and extending beyond, what narratives of girlhood value who Black girls are and who they become as women” (p. 36).

To consider important questions, Brown (2009) points to creative texts like Ntozake Shange’s *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* not being valued in the social sciences as knowledge production and inquiry. Shange’s text, arguable a Black feminist text, utilizes chorepoem and what Brown (2009) refers to as “methodology”, speaking “with great complexity about what it meant to grow up Black and female in the United States” (p. 37). The author’s personal narrative and reflection complicates our conventional

ways of thinking about hip-hop through a lens that renders Black girl's lived experience and creation invisible. The author reflects on her conversations with Black girls in SOLHOT about Black women in hip-hop, "Like so many other hip-hop feminist collective, identifying as hip-hop feminist or not, these conversations are occurring with Black girls and women who too often are not considered experts on the very issues they live, create, influence and are influenced by" (p. 45).

Hip hop feminism reveals the ways in which Black girls and women are speaking to the discrepancies and contradictions in hip-hop and in their own lives. Brown utilizes hip-hop feminism to speak to the limits of girl empowerment programming that claim to value girl's voices, visibility and presence that often do that contrary, seeking to "empower" girls rendering them powerless. She reflects on her experiences with girl empowerment programs and urges readers to consider "humanizing discourses of Black girlhood" (p. 53) that center what Black girls and women have to say extending beyond hip-hop. Brown proudly puts forth her own practice of hip-hop feminism, which she later names hip-hop feminist pedagogy, that is most clearly theorized and practiced SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths). In an effort to redefine hip-hop feminist pedagogy, Brown & Kwakye (2012) redefine a use of hip-hop feminism that is about "seeing us as human beings ever complex and listening to the embodied knowledge from which we make ourselves known, the two things that rarely happen in traditional conversations and discourse on hip-hop feminism and education" (p. 5). Here, a hip-hop feminism lens is able to push readers to think about what it would mean in education to see Black girls and youth as complex people with important embodied knowledge.

In *Hear Our Truths*, Brown (2013) further explores her work organizing under the construct of Black girlhood, particularly offering "a new framework of Black girl organizing, the

creative potential of Black girlhood, to clarify how binary categorizations like the loud versus quiet Black girls are encouraged because of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy but do not function as reliable organizing logics for moving forwards greater collective” (p. 189). This new articulation of Black girlhood is one that is political with the intention of pointing to Black girls, even has we are directed to move our attention beyond those who identify and are marked as Black girls. It is Brown’s hope that focusing on the creativity of Black girlhood will point our attentions to the vastness of visionary and imaginary potential of Black girlhood with Black girls as a space for freedom.

Richardson (2013), based her project with Black girls in “Black feminist teachers’ pedagogy” with themes that include, “Teaching as a lifestyle and a Public Service, Discipline as Expectations for Excellence; Teaching as Othermothering; Relationship Building; and Race, Class and Gender Awareness” (p. 331). Fruitful to the development of critical hip-hop feminist literacies, Richardson’s work highlights the struggle for power among girls and the author in an afterschool context. Richardson’s (2013) “larger goal is to draw adolescence into critical consciousness” (p. 339). In this study, Black Girl Friends (BGF), an after school club and a community of Black female teachers participated and organized sessions with Black girls discussing Black women’s and girls experiences. BGF based their practices and discussions with girls in Black feminist pedagogy. Richardson describes this teachers’ pedagogy as “political, both implicitly and explicitly” (p. 331). In session with the girls, they read about Black women’s lives, watch documentaries and read rap music videos and other forms of media. BGF gathered in a circle where girls felt comfortable about sharing their stories about family, sexuality, goals and dreams. Having food, space to dance, play games, chat and also create art and other forms of social research was central to the club. Here, readers are able to learn the importance of spaces

created for Black girls to be themselves that rely on Black feminism to create environments that validate Black women's and girls experiences. Richardson collected her data through participant observation and also used whole group and individual semi-structured discussions, conversations, and field notes to create narratives that explore Black women's discourse and literacy practice. Discourse analysis based in African American literacies tradition, particularly hip-hop studies was used to make sense of stories in a way that reveals the ways young Black girls read and respond to the world around them (Richardson, 2003; p. 333). Hip-hop feminist literacies and pedagogies allowed the Black women teachers in this study to deeply engage their lives, relationships, and interconnectedness to challenge dominant and oppressive narratives about them. For example, Richardson explores twerking as Black girls' sexuality and how they make sense of it. As a Black adult woman scholar, hip-hop feminist mother and critical literacy educator, the researcher's focus was to "support the girls' development of a healthy sense of sexuality, to problematize how poor Black girls' bodies are read in society, to help develop their critical literacies of self and society, and to support their critical assessment of situations so that they are equipped to protect themselves" (p. 337).

Black women teachers play a huge role in shaping curriculum for Black girls. In a research study on Sisters of Promise (SOP), curriculum based in Black feminism and Black feminist pedagogy, Nyachae (2016) complicates the work of Black women teachers and the role in the lives of Black girls. Given institutional challenges that millennial Black women teachers face engaging systemic racism and race consciousness, while also supporting marginalized students' navigation through mainstream school culture, schools' neo-liberal education agendas effects curriculums created for Black girls in complicated ways (p. 787). The author's notes that curriculum for Black girls by Black women teachers might ignore the complexities of Black

girls' experiences in schools due to the absence of Black feminism in curriculum studies. In her exploration of SOP, Nyachae argues, "that while many intervention programs for Black girls are well-intended, it is important to consider whether their curriculum empowers Black girls and embodies Black feminism and Black feminist pedagogy, or simply maintains a radicalized gendered status quo against the backdrop of teacher context" (p. 787).

Love (2012) brings a hip-hop feminist framework to hip-hop based education (Petchauer, 2009) in her work with high school girls in Atlanta exploring how they navigate and participate in hip-hop culture. A key feature in this work is moving readers beyond thinking of young people as uncritical consumers. In a yearlong dissertation ethnographic study, Love explored how girls make sense of images in rap music and rap videos, rap's contribution to girls' racial and gender identities, and its shape on their lives. Unique to this work is that the researcher's analytics reflect a lens of a Black feminist, hip-hop feminist, lesbian teacher and researcher meaning Love challenges her pleasure of patriarchal rap music as a hip hop feminist (p. 22). Her reflections and negotiations allowed the girls she worked with to see and push her to be herself. In fact, they required her to bring her full self in the space. In Love's analysis of the girls' understanding of rap music videos, she found the girls believed that Black women were inferior to white women and also found ways to resist they received from hip-hop music. She concludes by offering hip-hop pedagogy with Black feminist and hip-hop feminist framework as a tool to engage Black girls in reading the messages they receive from hip-hop and the world.

Hearing Black Girls: Black Girl Sound, Music and Performance

Pough (2004) engages hip-hop studies and Black women hip-hop artists contributions to sound and culture, asking us "What does it mean to be a woman in the hip-hop generation, attempting to claim a space in a culture that constantly tries to deny women voice?" (2004, p.

11). To answer this question, she hopes that her text *Check It While I Wreck It* will call attention to the ways in which the [Hip-hop] culture has been a site of contention for the girls and women who love it, participate, and help it grow. Pough (2004) urges black feminism to take up the cause and utilize the space that hip-hop culture provides in order to intervene in the lives of young girls (para.11, p. 13). With this in mind, it is important to draw the genealogy between hip-hop feminism and Black feminism. Hip Hop feminism is the connection to taking up the space that even though Black women and girls created and utilized for years, had been deemed not a girl space, for creative making. Although black girls and women experience hip-hop culture in complex and contradictory ways, hip-hop is an important context for thinking about black girl sound and music-making in the 21st century. An example of Black girls' making space for their creativity is artist-scholar Enongo Lumumba, musically known as Sammus. She writes about her experiences with sexism in hip-hop and music making. She writes,

“I didn't think my ability to make beats would be so difficult for some people to accept. I never heard anyone asking my male producer friends who "helped them" with their beats. It was through these experiences that I began to wear my production skills as a badge of my feminism—a powerful gift that I could use to counter the assumption that women can't play with computers.”

Lumumba's music making journey began at very young age and continued into graduate school as a PHD student interested in digital and gaming studies. Girls have been creating the sounds we love to hear for years. However, much of what we choose to remember about hip-hop and Black girlhood is the brutality and harm experienced through the culture, rhythm and rhymes, particularly in the context of misogyny and sexual archetypes it puts on Black girls.

Black women as DJ and music/cultural producers are not a new phenomenon, although rarely studied. DJ Lynnee Denise⁴, cultural producer and independent scholar, coined “DJ Scholarship” to explain how “diggin’ in the crates” and “sample chasing” are credible forms of academic research and position women DJ’s as active producers of house music/events. Craig and Kynard (2017) explore to roles and contributions of women hip-hop deejays, producers, hip-hop cultural sponsors, sound theorists and rhetorical innovators. In particular, the author’s inquiry relies on interviews with six deejays that have made major contributions to hip-hop culture. They also push readers to consider a different rhetorical approach than formal university-based qualitative research arguing, “We believe that the very creative and genre-bending nature of what the women deejays in this study do on a daily basis, as soundsmiths, sonic technicians and as gendered subjects in misogynist systems, compel us to push past the usual academic boundaries that dictate how we would present their stories, especially when such institutions have done very little to value and sustain hip-hop culture and/or the kind of women of colour who are centered in this essay” (p. 144). Craig and Kynard use their interviews with women deejays to frame the sections of their essay and use their stories first rather than explaining research methods and reviewing literature. Unique to this essay are the authors exploration of women deejays as technologists through playing with sounds and beats. For example, one of the women interviewed “sees their work as ‘sound-collaging’ where she places ‘sound-materials’ in conversations with one another to write a new text” and “based on these deejays’ very own terminologies for their purposes and processes, we treat their platforms as new technologies that push critical education and informational purposes” (p. 147). Seeing women deejays as technologists in a patriarchal, misogynist world show their abilities to embrace constant

⁴ Here, I reference an interview with Lynnée Denise with Fem Tech Net on “DJ Scholarship” in 2017. <https://soundcloud.com/dj-lynnee-denise/lynnee-denise-interview-on-dj-scholarship>

movement, change and technological transition as active interpreters and players who intentionally make decisions on how they will embody and transform old and new digital cultures in hip-hop.

The authors also explore women deejays as storytellers as revealed in interviews. Pam the Funktress, once of the deejays interviews reads the deejay as a reader of Black culture and creativity that “critically assesses and understands the roles of stories and words in the atmosphere that she creates with each of her deejay sets; her heuristic organizes how she chooses and delivers the stories of music she plays” (p. 150). In this section of the essay, the authors use interviews to explore deejaying as a living document, the deejay mix as a story. Stories told through deejay mixes allow woman deejays to communicate emotionally with audiences as a process for setting texts in motion. For the authors, they mean “motion quite literally since deejays are constantly crossing territories and boundaries with their archives/records in tow, as well as manipulating a variety of sources that rotate turntables [and sound] at various speeds and pitches while reverberating sonically through speakers” (p. 152). The essay ends with a loving call to hip-hop culture to value the public pedagogies of women deejays as theory and practices that challenge and reinvent hip-hop culture and our lives. To do so, Craig and Kynard suggests hip-hop moves towards a hip-hop feminist deejay methodology is a way for researchers of women hip-hop deejays, that does not seek to validate women deejays in comparison to male counterparts but create a space where women can tell their own stories and have those stories shape the research.

Ethnomusicologist Kyra Gaunt (2006) describes in her book *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip Hop*, that when it comes to Black popular music culture, “girls are its primary agents” (183). As a foundational and generative text, *The*

Games Black Girls Play, explores the racial and gender socialization and ethnic identification within African American culture that is hidden within the seemingly trivial and mundane of Black girl games like double-dutch and hand games. The author takes seriously Black girls' "play" and the songs that make and represent the sounds of their girlhoods. This opens up a space to take Black girls seriously as cultural producers in ways that critically explore the games they create as girls as sites where we make sense of defining aspects of Black culture and music production. Gaunt uses ethnography to examine Black girls and women whose girlhoods spent in regions across the United States to argue that the performance and musical games such as double-dutch, songs, hand-clapping, stepping, body-patting, cheers and call-and-response are contributions to Black music. This text is important because it is useful to scholars interested in studying Black girls' musical production as embodied practices that inform their girlhoods.

To study Black girls' embodied and musical contributions, Gaunt collected data over a span of six years that included a wide range of game-songs from various settings with Black children in Michigan and a double-dutch competition in South Carolina. Along the way she interviewed seventeen African American women ranging from ages eighteen to sixty-five who were also working and studying at the University of Michigan. In introduction, the author asks readers, "What if black girls' musical play was a training ground for learning not only how to embody specific approaches to black music expression, but also to learning to be socially black?" (p. 19)? While making sense of her dissertation research on Black women's embodied musical experiences, Gaunt realized that the beat, rhythmic patterns and multilayered textures that made Black girls' music games sound like Blackness were also connected to hip-hop.

In Chapter five, Gaunt includes the voices of women talking about their musical lives and the importance of their own musical games. She challenges our perception of gender roles in the

Black community by questioning the perceptions of Black girls not being capable of making music or participating in hip-hop culture. Gaunt even goes on to question why a Black girl game like double-dutch is not an element of hip-hop. Her theorization of the intersection between race, gender, and music is essential to examining contemporary hip-hop music culture and the way power gets played in conversations about women and men artists. For explain, the author challenges *The Hip Hop 101 DVD* which has been named as a tool for surviving the hip-hop world. The DVD included interviews from well-known hip-hop artists but women artists are not shown or given space to share their experience.

The one artist who happened to be a woman shared her experience and felt that women in hip-hop needed to use sex and domination to make it in the industry. Gaunt noted from the film that, “women game’s involve sleeping with men, while men’s games are more serious business” (p. 117). While observing women’s complicated with a misogynic hip-hop culture, Gaunt also explores women’s lyrical assertiveness and the ways it has allowed them to construct themselves as sexual subjects, rather than remaining trapped in the sexual objectification of songs by male artists. She pushes readers to consider various kinds of music-making styles by Black women and girls. In interviews with more than fifteen African American women to tell their musical life stories, women reveal coming of age stories and living life as a Black and female human being. For example, a woman artist interviewed, talks about growing up and the musical games that were apart of her girlhood, “Whoever had jump ropes brought ‘em out. And most people were out...its like most of the girls that I would have been hanging out with, we would all be there...and the games were all predicated on rhythm. [You] jump to patterns. You were cool and you had rhythm” (p. 124).

Gaunt uses her interviews to open up readers to the embodied practices of Black girls as music making. In particular dance, has been a way for Black girls and women to connect with each other, to the beat and connect to Black cultural and musical ancestry. Seeing dance as a form of Black girl music-making opens us up to view Black music as many other things besides singing and vocal recording. For Black women and girls in this study, music became a way to address race, class, and gender concerns of their African American experience through Black musical games. Gaunt concludes by encouraging researchers of Black popular music and performance studies to consider the embodied games that Black girls and women play as contributions that need to be studied beyond song lyrics, musical styles and genres.

From a transnational perspective, LaBennett's *She's Mad Real: Popular Culture and West Indian Girls in Brooklyn* (2011) explores youth culture and performance by West Indian girls in Brooklyn, New York. In particular, the author asks, "How do gender, ethnicity, class and access to education influence how Black teenagers form their subjectivities in relation to consumer culture and the city's public spaces? Through ethnographic research, LaBennett commits to learning about girls from their own perspective. To do so, she invites readers into Brooklyn, taking us through a downtown train where Caribbean immigrant and African American teens in the neighborhoods performatively face their gendered and race-based realities. Girls of color in this study, find authenticity in popular culture and hip-hop by claiming public space to create and perform. Sound and music plays a big role in how the girls make space in public and private. LaBennett describes a scene on the train where a ten-year-old girl as a part of a crew does back flips, cartwheels, and handstands. Not only has dance and playing with sound and music made space for young people to create, it has also served as working class youth of color's way to deal with and make money in communities where lack of employment and

resources causes them to be creative about survival. For the young people in this study, it is a risk to dance and play music on the trains; some of them even are arrested and spend time in jail. LaBennett calls this practice Black youth's engagement in (illegal) play labor with dance and music, that do not fit neatly into hegemonic society's notions of young Black people as at risk, needy and dangerous (p. 10). LaBennett finds through her study that one of the ways we can challenge problematic notions about young people is by listening to their stories which often comes from the art they create and share.

Exploring Black youth's narratives more closely, In *Black Girls Are From the Future: Essays on: Race, Digital Creativity and Pop Culture*, Renina Jarmon (2013), pushes readers to acknowledge Black girl artists' engagement with time travel. She argues, "Black women artists are invested in narratives of time travel because it allows us to conceptualize subjectivities/perspectives of Black people in general, and Black girls in particular as people who can change their circumstances by moving through time and space" (p. 81). For Jarmon, Black girls challenge notions of them as lesser than and subordinate by making interventions with music and other forms of digital media that ask important questions about justice and freedom. For example, Jarmon makes sense of Janelle Monae's "Q.U.E.E.N." and a musical multimedia freedom experience, stating, "Monae is making a connection between social justice struggles, the consumption of art and the ability to find freedom. Janelle Monae is making an intervention with her music" (p. 81). In this particular essay on Black women and time travel, Jarmon makes her own intervention on Black girl artists' and what they do with sound as time travel. *Black Girls Are From the Future* opens us up "...to imagine a new social order, new relationships, new ways of being for everyone—not just Black girls" (p. 85). Black girls use music for many different

forms of expression that offer more human and complex ways we might live and reshape our world together.

In “Sexual Knowledge and Practiced Feminisms: On Moral Panic, Black Girlhoods, and Hip Hop,” Carney, Hernandez and Wallace (2015) explore Black girls’ complex sexual knowledges through the performance of group, P.T.A.F.’s “Boss Ass Bitch” song and video. The authors ask, “How are Black girls expressing their sexual knowledge through Hip Hop? What are the moral panics concerning Black girls’ consumption of Hip Hop music circulating? What does the space of popular culture music production offer to girls that standard pedagogical and social service spaces do not?” (p. 414). These questions are important because they charge readers, educators and those who work with Black girls’ to understand and acknowledge the ways that Black girls express themselves through music that value “the DIY underground production of Black girls’ sexuality explicit Hip Hop [allowing] for an erotic self-determination that has cultural impact and refuses to be suppressed” (p. 414). The authors push for an understanding of respectability politics that rely on racist, sexist, and classist disapproval and how that affects how we see and work with Black girls. Black girls’ and women expression of sexuality through hip-hop has created moral panic that labels them as deviant and non-respectable. In particular, the authors look to the ways Black girls’ performance of practiced feminisms and culture production through hip-hop create safe and healthy learner-constructed spaces to explore sexuality by Black girls, while working to reject respectability politics and moral panic. Practiced feminisms “...draw attention to how the musical practices of Black girl emcees who do not identify as feminists nevertheless expand representations of Black girlhood sexuality that otherwise tend to focus on danger and deviance through an unabashed emphasis on pleasure” (p. 422). Carney, Hernandez, and Wallace provide examples through their own work with Black girls that re-

envision pleasure and desire in girlhood space(s). For example, Hernandez and Wallace facilitated a workshop engaging a classroom of mostly Black girls in a conversation about pleasure by creating pleasure timelessness, as a painting visual art project and exercise in memory exploration that invites each participant to examine her past and make connections with experiences of pleasure (p. 423). Their experience with pleasure timeline workshops and exploration of negative responses to “Boss Ass Bitch” revealed that Black girls are fully aware of how their sexuality is policed by adults in their lives and by institutional and social forces; and discourse circulated through social media. In conclusion, the authors imagine the work of artists like P.T.A.F. that generate an archive of Black girlhood that is unbound to notions of respectability and documents their music as fruitful for the growing exploration of Black girlhood and pleasure.

In SOLHOT, we make it a serious concern to understand Black girls as creators and innovators of sound, working from pleasure. The scholarship in this section will be useful to my dissertation by considering the importance of Black girls as cultural producers of sound, play and music, particularly girls of the hip-hop generation. It is also useful to go deeper into what is created when Black girls engage in sound, play and music making together and when they use time to travel. With the later texts as examples, I am able to situate the creation of space for Black girlhood and sound in my research and practice in anti-respectability politics centering ways Black girls and women are in community with each other and what is sounded from the relationships we create.

My dissertation’s intervention to scholarship on Black girl sound, music and performance is engagement from a positionality that places me as DJ, Black girl sound artist and scholar in community with Black girls and women. As a DJ and scholar working with Black girls and

invested in Black girlhood studies with SOLHOT, I have first-hand perspective on what we hear when we hear Black girls and women in community together. As a home girl with SOLHOT, who engages the music we make with each other and Black girls during the beat-making, writing, recording, mixing and performance processes, I have access to archives to parts of our sonic archive that tell stories about community between Black women and girls, that the songs cannot tell. This access, more importantly, the relationships built I've with Black girl and women cultural producers in SOLHOT, allows for rich scholarship that does not write about only write about Black girls but also actual relationships with those I intend to study. My research and practice contributes to valuing sound, music and art as important elements of qualitative research and Black girlhood studies. The next section goes deeper into the practice of sound and music making in SOLHOT.

How Black Girlhood, Sound, Art & Music-Making Show Up in SOLHOT

One the ways in which SOLHOT homegirls are challenged to listen is in art making. The arts are what allow SOLHOT to explore diverse and controversial nature of Black girlhood. In *Hear Our Truths*, Brown (2012) digs deeper into the black girl genius, art and creation that make up SOLHOT. As a Black woman artist, scholar and activist, homegirl and SOLHOT visionary Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) relies on her theory, poetry, playwriting, performance and legacies of women-of-color feminists, artists, performers, and others that speak to Black girl creativity as a mode of knowledge production genuinely engaged in the complexity of Black girlhood.

Brown builds and writes a foundation for engaging performance, collective and creative memory, photo-poems, and sound to push those working with Black girls to move beyond monolithic and binary conceptualizations of Black girlhood through SOLHOT. Given

stereotypes that Black girls are too loud or too silent and undisciplined, Brown (2013) argues that we are not hearing Black girls' or their truths because their sound is misunderstood and often framed problematic. To combat problematic framing, Brown presents a soundtrack of Black girls' expressive culture as ethnographically documented in SOLHOT in the form of original music. In doing so, she proposes a new frame called "The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood" thinking through labels of how Black girls are heard, in the context of Andrea Smith's (2006) piece pushing readers to see how binary thinking hurts women of color organizing. The creative potential of black girlhood is where, potential serves as energy, and invoked as a property of collectively because too often Black girls are seen as valuable for who they will become, instead of who they are as people marginalized, with the protection or privileges of being defined as an adult. What is key to framing the creative potential of Black girlhood, is a Black girl sound that nobody can organize into categories and archives that limit a wider lens of how Black girls sound as a potentially creative source of knowledge (Brown, 2013; 188).

Brown, continuing her use of hip-hop feminist pedagogies, sees Black girls as media makers, especially music making, a context not often seen in academic literature. In her analysis, we are able to see sonic themes that portray the various ways oppression shows up in a Black girl's life, particularly their frustration with power and authority that often silence their truth and experience. She asserts, "Ms. Understood" [a song on the SOLHOT CD] means imagining a world where it is possible for those in positions of power and those in relationship with black girls to admit to not knowing" (p. 199).

Black girl sound is a concept that has been furthered by other homegirls in SOLHOT. We are in conversation through the work we do with Black girls, scholarship, friendship and music we make together. Homegirl Jessica Robinson (2015) provides a working definition for sonic

Black girlhood in a project that re-creates a popular hip-hop song by group Outkast called “Jazzybell Retell/Tale.” Robinson defines sonic Black girlhood as:

- “1) the expression of Black girl truth through music;
- 2) interrogates the relationship between Black girls and music making, consumption, and performance;
- 3) privileges the sound of Black girl play, labor and artful living as a site of knowing;
- 4) informed theoretically by Black girlhood (Brown, 2009), and hip hop feminism (Brown & Kwakye, 2012; Durham; 2009; Pough, Richardson, Durham, & Raimist, 2007) as well as by the relationships of Black women and girls working in community with each other” (p. 43).

“Jazzy Belle Retell/Tale” as a song for Black girls and sonic Black girlhood serves as praxis of Black girlhood that values collective music-making, art and performance practices. I do not claim sonic Black girlhood as my contribution but I do use it as foundational to how I analyze collective sounds of Black girlhood in this dissertation project.

Another example of SOLHOT’s engagement with Black girl sound is Black Girl Genius Week, a multi-media performance-based research project presented exploring contemporary politics, expressive culture(s), and creative resistance of Black girls. In a write up on Feministing.com about Black Girl Genius week, SOLHOT homegirl and scholar, Sesali Bowen (2014) describes the use of sound during this Black girlhood organizing experience writing,

“Our studio session allowed participants to collaborate with We Levitate on afrofuturist sounds and beats, created by and for Black girls. Bars were spit. Poetry was read. Songs were sung. Using sound and lyrics we addressed patriarchy, anti-blackness, sexism, hoe shaming, violence, death, oppression, capitalism, racism, and a range of other issues that Black girls resist.”

The spirit of Black Girl Genius Week has moved homegirls and others to hear Black girls differently and explore their own music-making practices, including my own. Rynea Soul, homegirl and beatmaker, created The Initiative for Creative Arts that music production to provide youth with artistic means of self-expression and tools to build self-confidence and foster creativity as a product of her experience organizing with the Black girl genius project. Local MC’s, Klevah and T.R.U.T.H. were inspired by their time at Black Girl Genius Week as well as organizing with the Black Lives Matter movement and joined forces to create duo and powerhouse, Mother Nature. The later stories reveal the power of Black girlhood as organized in SOLHOT as generative to how Black girl and woman artists see ourselves as individuals, artists and apart of worldwide coalition work.

Framing Black Girlhood Sound and Collective Music-Making Methods

My involvement in SOLHOT has introduced me to organizing with scholars, artists, educators and community members doing essential work. We rely on Audre Lorde’s (1996) definition of “the erotic” as a source of power, a source within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed feeling...a feeling that is usually connected to our deepest need for liberation (p. 53). Our need for liberation and the feelings that are connected to this need is found in our rituals (methods) of taking care. In placing value and importance on collectivity and the erotic, I am staying close to unpopular interdisciplinary methods that are disruptive and interpretive (Brown et al., 2014). As an artist and scholar situated in education, women and gender studies and queer studies, which writes for

more that career achievement and profit, I find myself split between many disciplinary “homes,” many of which have strict borders. Lorde (1996) reminded us that “poetry is more than a luxury” and Brown (2009) reminded us of the importance to write to connect with others who are split at the root. This requires me to employ methods that help communicate and show the dynamic relationship between insider and outsider perspective (Boylorn, 2013), particularly as a creative member with SOLHOT and We Levitate.

To reveal this insider/outsider relationship dynamic, I use arts-based ethnographic methods that utilize music creation and “sonic narrative methods...as a tool through which to conduct social research” (Leavy, 2009; p.106), more specifically a tool for reimagining Black girlhood (Brown, 2013; 2014). It is my hope that my art-based methods and meditative, poetic analysis addresses the limited, but growing research in Black girlhood studies that utilize Black girlhood (Brown, 2009) as an organizing construct for freedom that relies on our relationships and the power we can create together. The methods I use rely on how we make space and make sound that accounts for a collective Black girlhood in all of its complexity, not as a static individual identity construct. Arts-based, music as method, will allow for the knowledge we create to reckon with the increasing corporatization of learning and teaching, intragroup dynamics between Black girls, Black women, and our allies, and use of the arts, digital, and our imagination in ways that transcend burnout, identity politics, expertise, hierarchal governing structures, personality conflicts, and institutional cooptation. Our embodiment of Black girlhood enables those in attendance to listen and sense Black girlhood differently, not as stereotype but as a creative soundscape that can literally and figuratively move us towards a greater justice. I also rely on methods that recognize sound/music and visual performance as inquiry and reveals resistive and political potential that may or may not be activated within different performance or

listening contexts (Leavy, 2008; 2015; Rollings, Jr., 2013).

The Black girl sound we produce as a part of and in SOLHOT challenge academic notions of research methods and how knowledge is organized in the academy. We demonstrate the use and usefulness of a sonic ritualized creative practice of critiquing ourselves in relation to the work we did based on how sounds arrive to us and what we brought to it. One way we demonstrate the usefulness of our sonic power making is through “doing digital wrongly” (Brown, Smith, Robinson & Garner, 2018), a method that disrupts qualitative inquiry, allowing us to use “...ritual, collective organizing, and (dis) orientation to technology to reimagine the collective as not without you, to resound Black girlhood as not biologically determined, and to reverberate love for what was there, who is still there, those who left, those who ain’t never leaving, and for those of the future who will come like they’ve always been apart” (p. 396). To do digital wrongly, We Levitate makes the assumption that we are already wrong as Black girls and women doing digital and sonic work, using each other as our most human and audible instruments and whatever technology we can afford. We privilege people and relationships over what might be considered proper technique, skills, talents, tools, and suitable technology. We use the practice and theory of doing digital wrongly in a way that allows us to critique ourselves in relation to the work we do together based on how sounds arrives to us and what we bring to it. In our article, we write, “We do digital wrongly to undo the categories and to disorganize the archive, so that there is no official limit on what is possible to do together and how Black girlhood can organize us to move rooted in our rhythms” (p. 410). Doing digital wrongly undoes categories and disorganizes the archives, paying less attention to a linear story of SOLHOT and more on what is collected when you were there in the flesh. Doing digital wrongly to organize a

Black girlhood that can organize us to move rooted in our rhythms means undoing strict relational binaries that do not serve us like student/mentor and adult/youth.

We assume we are wrong, acknowledging that the girls know much we do not know and there is always something to learn and explore. We doing digital wrongly because we as Black girls and women, are already assumed to be doing it wrong (vs. the white, male, able-bodied, financially able way). This process enables us to use and theorize a wider range of sounds that account for and resound beyond the moment. In our play with Black girl sound, we come to hear and learn each other through rhythms, ranging from organizational confusion, personal grievances, falling in and out love, facing death and creating life.

SOLHOT's play with sound is based on our cultural work with Black girls and women, using sound as a way to speak, listen, hear and be together, in a place/space that's says we shouldn't. Our play with what a Black girl sound means, makes audible our love for each other and the ways in which we need to theorize Black girlhood, and be on a wavelength, together. In "Doing Digital Wrongly" (2018) we state: "As conductors of Black girl sonics and [soundwaves], implicating the intersection of Black girlhood, sound, and technology our music transformed and brought to us the very things we needed to conceptualize Black girlhood in ways that could account for not only what we did and thought, but also how we felt while also pushing us to interrogate the conditions that set us up, for heartbreak, for love, and the in-between-ness of them both" (p. 396).

An important implication for our understanding of the complexities in Black girls and women's lives in educational and women and gender studies research will be finding new ways to engage Black girls and sound that further complicate how we hear Black girls and what we think we know about Black girls and what they know. With Black girlhood in mind, I turn to

Durham et. al's (2013) concept of "percussive feminism" which allows for creativity that ensues from placing modes or objects of inquiry together that might not traditionally fit, hip-hop and feminism being only the most obvious example" (p. 724). My dissertation places two modes of inquiry not traditionally linked together, sound and Black girlhood, to allow for creativity that happens amongst Black women and girls despite the world's tendency to deny us the pleasure of being our full selves and each other. I use my focus on Black girlhood sound and music making as a means to build on theories and practices of music's relationship to Black girlhood, Black feminism and arts-based educational research.

Conclusion

The literature informing my dissertation explores Black girl creative and collective genius in order to interrupt academic research on and about Black girls, sound and music making. In the development of DJ B.E./lovenloops as my way to make sense of my relationship to Black girlhood and SOLHOT, I think of Black girl relationships to music and sound, as a sonic and creative living. Black girlhood in practice with theoretical considerations from Black feminism and hip-hop feminism provide a lens for centering Black girls and women relationship to music as dynamic in community and cultural production. An exploration and framing of Black girlhood, sound and music making allows us to center Black girls as knowers, creators, technologists, and story tellers that are well versed on their experiences, allowing them to create and shape their lives.

Chapter Three **Making Our Sounds of Collective Black Girlhood:**

Method and Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I detail the methodology and method used in my dissertation research. In the first section, I explore ethnography and autoethnography as for qualitative research. Next, I detail interdisciplinary, and Black feminist artist methodologies that inform my study. The second section of this chapter defines participant observation through music making as an approach of ethnography and the sites in which I collected data and organized with. In addition, I detail the method of this study by discussing participants, what counted as data in this project and how I collected and analyzed data. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study.

Ethnography

Ethnography, a method of qualitative research, known for its inception in anthropology, has an objective to explore and understand the everyday functioning and values of a culture (Stake, 1994). Many anthropologists refer to their ethnography as “fieldwork,” while some researchers refer to their approach as “ethnographic” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; p. 3). Traditionally, ethnographic research and fieldwork, through objective detailed descriptions is known for capturing the essence of an experience and most often inviting readers into the researchers thoughts about their descriptions of particular social realities. Leavy (2009) argues, “Although historically even qualitative researchers such as ethnographers were charged with rendered ‘objective’ accounts of social reality, it is now well accepted that ethnographers are positioned within the texts they produce” (p. 36). Researchers invested in qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) have discussed and engaged nearly eight historical moments operating

and crosscutting practices in qualitative research. These moments include the traditional; the modernist; blurred genres; the crisis of representation; the postmodern; postexperimental inquiry; and the fractured future (para. 3). Ethnographers have found arguments, discussions, and engagements with diverse practices fruitful in each moment.

Ethnography in the 21st Century

Changes happening within qualitative research during this time are particularly important to understanding how more reflective and autobiographical ways of doing ethnography began to surface that introduced a variety of new interpretative methods including (most notably for this essay) cultural studies and feminism (para, Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). While culture had gone postmodern, multi-identity, multinational, ethnographers began to blur disciplinary bounds calling for more reflexive forms of writing and theoretical practices. Writers and researchers were starting to be questioned about their traditional presumptions that present an objective, non-contested account of the other's experiences (p. xi). More specifically, as (Denzin, 1994) puts it, "those we study have their own understandings of how they want to be represented" (p. xiii). Furthermore, qualitative research's exploration of a more reflective and interpretive ethnography is one that discovers multiple and layered truths, one based "in the worlds of lived experience" (p. xv).

This exploration brought on autoethnography, "an extension of ethnography," (p. 39) a viable method "of self-study in which the researcher is viewed as a viable data source" (Leavy, 2009, p. 37). Chang (2008) pushes for descriptions of autoethnography that distinguish it from ethnography as a method, while arguing that autoethnography is ethnographic. The author contends that autoethnography "should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation" (p. 48).

Communication scholars Boylorn & Orbe (2014) “define autoethnography as cultural analysis through personal narrative” that encourages “a critical lens, alongside an introspective and outward one, to make sense of who we are in the context of our cultural communities” (p. 17).

Reflective and autoethnographic methodologies are not without contradictions and critique. More reflective and experimental versions of ethnography are often criticized for being too reflective, narcissistic and not scientific (Denzin, 1994, p. xv). Ethnographers and qualitative researchers, taking on feminist research projects, particularly those interested in the material lives of Black women and girls (Brown, 2009; 2013; Boylorn, 2013; Taaffe, 2013; Wallace, 2014) put their own personal narratives, auto-scholarships, lived experiences and contradictions up for critique. They have also found ways to write, practice, and theorize through the risks it takes to present truths, often ignored, and rarely heard.

Auto/Ethnography “with” Black Girls & Women

Here, I discuss the logic of ethnographic approaches and theorizing coming out of projects, particularly those exploring the lived experiences of Black girls and women, utilizing Black feminist methodologies and theories. I also discuss autoethnography, as an intervention in Black girlhood and Black women’s studies, across social science disciplines. Ethnographic methods taken up in Black girlhood and Black women’s studies as a particular context and framework, will be useful for understanding and explicating how an auto-ethnographic approach is most appropriate and useful, informing my dissertation research.

Robin Boylorn trained ethnographer and storyteller came to do and know autobiographical (autoethnography) and narrative ethnography through experience of feeling “lost in what felt like exclusive white male gazes and interpretations” (Boylorn, 2014, p. 13). She began to write narrative ethnographies from her “particular raced, classed, gendered,

sexed positionality, identifying the distinctions between how and why she viewed the world through her lens and what made it different from others” (Boylorn, 2014, p. 13). Black women ethnographers exploring the lived experiences and truth of Black girls and women have utilized various reflective, interpretive and disruptive (Brown et. al., 2014) ethnography practices that include but are not limited to poetry, storytelling, choreopoems, ethnodramas, short stories, photo-essays, political/personal essays and performance plays.

Researchers and writers chose ethnographic research methods for various reasons. Scholars interested in the lived experiences of Black girls and women take to on number of ways to research and write. For example, Boylorn (2013) chose narrative inquiry as her ethnographic method of chose for *Sweetwater: Black Women and Narratives of Resilience*. *Sweetwater* explores rural black women’s lives and their truth telling, relies on “relational ethics” (p. xiii).

According to H.L. Goodall, Jr, scholars describe relational ethics in ethnography as

“the choice of how to *evoke* a sense of place (and in the case of *Sweetwater*, the place she still calls ‘home’) and how to *represent* the always complex, nuanced, and deeply historical lives found there (lives of people she has known and in some cases loved and/or feared) is less a choice strictly driven by the dictates of method and more one that is informed, and complicated, by ‘relational ethics’ (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).”

In *Sweetwater*, Boylorn (2013) is not concerned with a “pure ethical stance,” that does no harm, rather; the book serves as narrative inquiry, “...teaching us how the writer came to understand her subject as a part of that research process” (p. xiv). In doing so, Boylorn (2013) shakes up our narrative ways of knowing, while also questioning her ways of knowing about Black women’s truths in *Sweetwater*, moving readers to do similar self-reflexive work. *Sweetwater* is a product of nonconsecutive 3 years of research using a variety of methods including “auto/ethnography, participant observation, interactive interviewing, in formal focus groups, and traditional archival

research to collective stories and other information about Sweetwater, North Carolina” (Boylorn, 2013; p. 117).

Particular to Boylorn’s (2013) narrative inquiry is a description of herself as an “involved observer”, having a “personal history and connection with the people in the community” she is studying. As an “involved observer” Boylorn (2013) attended “church services, going to the store and post office, picking up children from school, visiting the homes of community members, sitting on the porch and having conversations with passersby, watching the local news and soap operas so as the have a foundation for common conversations among women...” (p. 118). She also conducted archival and historical research and reviewed research, novels and films that detailed the lived experiences of rural Black women in the South. Zora Neal Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, to name a few, are quoted and live throughout the narratives in *Sweetwater*.

A key aspect of Boylorn’s relational ethic approach to narrative, as her ethnographic methodological practice of choice involves, “maintaining a critical, self-reflexive awareness of our place in a community as well as of the implicit power imbalance that grants to the writer a narrative authority to define persons, places, and things that, even if ‘true’ in an empirical sense, may be interpreted differently by those whom we write about” (p. xiv). Although self-reflexivity and awareness of power imbalance are best practices, Boylorn (2013) does not shy away from talking difficult truths that emerge in her narrative inquiry. In doing so, Boylorn (2013) was able to produce a nuanced and creative text, taking on autobiographical writing and character-driven narrative ethnography. More specifically, Boylorn (2013) brought readers into visceral stories that negotiated “gendered, raced, and classed oppression” showing “[participants] fragility and vulnerability, as well as their strength” (p.114). In doing so, *Sweetwater* “suggests that black

women can learn generalizable truths from their personal lived experiences and theorize about their lives through storytelling (p. 116).

Particular to Boylorn's (April, 2013) ethnographic narratives and theorizing with her community in Sweetwater, North Carolina and The Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC) is realizing she "was surrounded by reluctant feminists whose involvement in my success, happiness, and well-being was informed by understanding that didn't require academic degrees" (p. 73). It is important to note that Boylorn (2013) as a blogger and community member with CFC, "emerged as an alter ego that allowed [her] to write black feminist (auto)ethnography without the shield of the academy, this enacting and inserting an embodied and performative identity as a black feminist PhD with rural roots" (p. 77). Here is it important to think about the ways in which Boylorn uses her blogger identity to insert herself into public space to think through oppressions most notably affecting the lived experiences of Black women and girls.

Durham (2014), hip-hop feminist communications scholar, also utilizes Black feminist texts and writers, integrating "poetics in poetry and prose", engaging "another kind of representational politics in which "literature" (as art) is often housed outside ethnographic research (as science). In *Home with Hip Hop Feminism*, Durham (2015) argues that Black feminist ethnographers like Zora Neal Hurston and Audre Lorde "...push the boundaries of ethnographic textuality and ethnography and force us to reconsider the ways that theory and method are embodied processes" (p. 15). Durham positions her work as an extension of interpretive interactionism and black feminism, privileging auto/ethnographic, emotive and poetic devices, "fleshing out the interrelationships between the home/body <-> text<-> body/body that inform, mediate, and create the physic and material conditions of black women's lived experience" (p. 15).

The author's site for the book is her hometown neighborhood and public housing community, Diggs Park, in Norfolk, Virginia. With Diggs Park as the background, Durham (2014) situates a discussion about hip-hop that is local and lived through that body. In doing so, she adds to conversations on black urban girlhood challenging entertainment and media news representations of blacks body's from the hip-hop generation (p. 20). A key element of Durham's (2014) ethnographic practice is the integration of various devices including reflective interviews as performance ethnographic; conversation between the researcher/ed body and memory of home; interpretation through poetic transcription; and a choreopoem featuring five self-enclosed autoethnographic performance narratives. She also calls attention to the "centrality of media and popular culture representations" by engaging auto/ethnographic experiences with media texts like Latifah, Beyonce', and *The Wire*. Durham (2014) most courageously writes herself into home offering ways to reimagine hip-hop, feminist politics, and urban black girlhood livelihood.

Boylorn and Durham's work is a great introduction into autoethnographic texts existing in Black girlhood studies, a particular study and practice, informing this study. The transgressing of public and private boundaries, as well as static notions of theory and practice is key to Black girlhood studies. In particular, Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) takes on personal narrative, purposely situating her research "...squarely within a tradition of intellectuals who view the practice of writing as more than a way for academics to talk among themselves, who realize the radical possibilities of writing to create communities, transform ideas, and inspire people within and outside of the ivory tower" (p. 12).

Black Girlhood Studies. *Black Girlhood Celebration*, which positions itself in direct conversation with hip-hop feminist texts, adds the personal experiences of a Black woman scholar and political activist to issues and lived experiences that resonate with Black women and

girls growing up in the time of prominent hip-hop and Black feminist legacies (Brown, 2009; p. 7). Brown (2009) challenges readers with her own personal narrative and logic for using narrative and autoethnographic methods. She highlights her experiences as a trained political science, finding herself “...split at the root...at home in multiple disciplines...claiming [herself] as an interdisciplinary scholar” which does not often translate to academic security (p. 13). Leaning on Black feminist writers, artists, thinkers and activists like SOLHOT homegirl, Nikky Finney, Toni Cade Bambara, and Audre Lorde, Brown (2009) utilizes creative an interpretative approach of culture and social action that is personal, poetic, dramatic and embodied (Denzin, 2003). The author notes her method of choice as ethnography with particular focus on autoethnographic practices. For Brown (2009) autoethnography started with her reflections on participation in and observations of SOLHOT [a space for black girlhood celebration], and incorporates analysis and contributions of other SOLHOT participants.

Emerging “through the autoethnographic delight of singularity”, Brown (2009) writes for and about those people who were apart of SOLHOT consistently and carefully. In doing so, Brown (2009) provides an artistic, performative, embodied and detailed account of Black girlhood celebration as a construction of hip-hop feminist pedagogy with fruitful translations to programs and educational settings that resist “programming” girls, particular centering Black girls (p. 14). *Black girlhood celebration* uses interpretive methods featuring poems, rants, conversations, raps, dance breaks, reflections and more to theorize a possibility of celebration black girlhood in all of its complexity. Brown (2013) pushes her work in Black Girlhood Celebration further with interpretive methods that challenge and rethink possibilities presented in SOLHOT. Black girlhood, music, performance and organizing are main ingredients for qualitative methods I utilize in this study. In particular, Brown (2013) describes her “praxis” as

one “traveling from, between, and within practice to theory, and theory to practice” (p. 189). “Praxis”, what Swar and Nagar (2010, p. 6) describe as a process of meditation through which theory and practice become deeply woven with one another. The author informs my interests in Black girlhood and music, particularly creative and autoethnographic methods that document music made in SOLHOT. The music made and the creative process of how it was made becomes practice. Brown (2013) then theorizes from this practice, to address how the creative process of Black girls’ music production in context of SOLHOT represents hip-hop feminism and informs girls’ studies (p. 189).

Another example of autoethnographic and creative methods that utilize sound and performance to celebrate Black girlhood is Robinson’s (2015) “Conjuring Ghosts: Black Girlhood Hauntings and Speculative Performances of Reappearances.” In this text, Robinson theorizes “Black girlhood hauntings” through the creation and process of performance, “Kasi to Her Homegirls” in response to Kasi Perkin’s murder trial after being killed by her boyfriend. She traces SOLHOT’s practice of knowing and remembering through Black feminist texts and SOLHOT performances as a collective self-articulation of Black girlhood as imaginative versus notions of time and gender that are static (p. 4). Through her creative text and self-articulation within the collective, the author is also in conversation with Black feminists such as June Jordan and M. Nourbese Philip’s about the limits of language to create a “verbal and sounded performance which moves the knowing and remembering to an embodied experience [allowing] for not just which is to be seen but which is to be felt and heard to be considered knowledge as well, as learned through SOLHOT” (p. 18). To make for an embodied experience, Robinson performed “Kasi to Her Homegirls,” making her life and death ever present, while also imagining self in community that refuses neoliberal demands of individualism and self-reliance.

Robinson's practice involved her creating her text, performing it, and then exploring her practices and theories in autoethnographic and scholarly form.

The latter ethnographic and autoethnographic texts provide this study with fertile context and knowledge to further argue autoethnography and creative methods as a productive and useful method. Particularly, these texts provide insight into methodologies that inform this project's exploration of arts-based, embodied and creative autoethnographic methods.

Interdisciplinarity: A Caveat. My auto/ethnographic and creative arts methods explore Black girlhood as "personal, poetic, dramatic and embodied" (Denzin, 2003), using sound and music making as research. Disruptive education inquiry is strategic, one that is aware of the risks, limitations and critiques of disciplinary boundary pushing, and takes the chances anyway, being the possibilities outweigh the tensions (Brown et al., 2014). Interdisciplinary and diverse forms of narrative methods will allow me to disrupt rigid epistemological and methodological boundaries. Furthermore, I will rely on ethnographic, specifically critical autoethnographic methods (Burdell, P & Swadener, 1999; Boylorn, R.M. & Orbe, M. P., 2014) to make sense of what I have experienced in SOLHOT.

Poetry as a creative method also plays an important part in my methodology and analysis. In particular, I use poetry as ethnographic method to highlight fieldwork by illuminating, retelling, and framing of embodied experiences with a poetic sensibility and inquiry (Faulkner, 2018) that shows home and the sacred are one on the same, representing for us places that matter to us plus something as dear as the self to cherish as part of them" (Denzin, 2008, p. 525). As a form of feminist ethnography, I use poetry as a creative means of doing, showing and teaching embodied reflexivity (Faulkner, 2018) remembrance that focuses on relationships to be celebrated beyond our collective struggles. This is surely Black feminist poetics and evidenced in

poetry written by Black feminist writers during the 1970s that specifically wrote to, for and with each other. As Gumbs (2010) notes, “the poetry created by Black feminists in this moment insists on a relationship that goes past the brutal reality they have witnessed” (p. 30). It is this moment in Black feminist writing and poetry that I use to guide my own poetic inquiry along with the sounds that come out of SOLHOT. It is my hope that by staying true to Black feminist poetic and alternative relationship genealogies that my methods and analysis reveals the importance of inquiry that takes serious interrupting narratives of capitalism with relationships, art and poetry. I am staying close to unpopular interdisciplinary methods that are disruptive and interpretive in nature.

My dissertation is also in creative tradition with Black girl and women artists-scholars, beat-makers, producers and DJ’s like Sammus, MC/producer that use their love for video games in her music and research; Thee Satisfaction, Black girl do it yourself music-making duo; DJ Lynnee Denise, scholar-artists who coined “DJ Scholarship” as a tool “to explain DJ culture as a mix-mode research practice; Jessica Lauren sound artist/scholar, We Levitate girl bandmate, developing “sonic black girlhood” as unmarking framework (Robinson, 2014); and Moor Mother Goddess, Black quantum futurist musician/scholar that uses Black sound, voice, poetry and collage to time travel. The latter Black girl artists continue to push our ears, hearts, and minds into complex sonic worlds that challenge how we hear and listen Black girls/women and the communities that hold dear. The latter artists engage Black feminism in nuanced ways that connect with their situated community knowledge in performance, interviews, workshops, and online social media networking.

Theorizing method: Black feminist and queer methodology. Like so many others in SOLHOT, I am also a student of Black woman feminist writers, artists and teachers. In

particular, June Jordan has been a major part of theorizing and practicing what happens in SOLHOT and what comes from our sound. During our anti-conference, known as SOLHOT Presents: Black Girl Genius Week (BGGW)⁵, poet and student of Toni Cade Bambara while at Spelman Nikky Finney told stories and shared messages from Toni Cade and Lucille Clifton about love and truth. These stories ensure us that our creativity and art, especially as Black women and girls who are often not heard, must go on without permission and that we must hold on to those who are reliable and committed to dreaming with you.

My methodological process of praxis and writing embraces the joys and frustrations involved in theorizing, practicing, art making, organizing, and performing and the insanity that comes with doing it all over again (Brown, 2013; p. 9) and “having a damn good time” (Smith, 2000) on behalf of Black girls and Black girlhood. This process means I embrace the unknown and look to epistemology, theory, method, analysis and praxis forgoing academic trends; processes that are connected to what I already know and what I know to give to a group of people that are reliable to me and Black girls everywhere. It also means producing creative work and knowledge that holds me accountable to myself and to relationships that hold me accountable; further speaking to the problem with approaching Black girls as work to be worked over; the distinctness in Black girlhood celebration; the requirements of those who do the work to create space for the celebration; and the various media, artwork, knowledge’s, individual and collective, that innovate form and transform us (Brown, 2013; p. 4). Theorizing my method through Black feminism artist practices keeps in mind that my knowledge of Black girlhood has

⁵ SOLHOT Presents: Black Girl Genius week, although an experience that defies norms of time and space, was an anti-conference, black girl freedom land, concert, teach-in, ritual experience and more that took place November 3-9th, 2014 in Champaign, IL. Will discuss in detail later and in larger dissertation project.

most to do with my participation in SOLHOT, where Black feminist knowledge, organizing and art is foundational to how we make space, practice and theorize our work with Black girls.

“...let’s not let the danger of the journey and the vastness of the territory scare us---let’s look forward and open paths in these woods...Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks!” (Anzaldua, 1983).

Cruising and Crossings. In general, cruising can be defined as sailing, traveling, driving, moving about with no destination and usually with friends. Specifically, cruising and Crossings, as key inquiries/praxis’ of Black girlhood, are made possible by engagement with feminist and queer theorists. In Chapter four, I explore cruising and Crossings as practiced, theorized, and sounded in SOLHOT as a way to build on and be in conversation with work that intentionally listens deeply, attentive to the past and present, for what is learned about ourselves and the world with the production of meaningful and intimate relationships. In SOLHOT, we know that it is our relationships with each other and Black girls that make our attempts to organize better worlds more possible.

Our *bridges*, ones we’ve promised, built, sang, burned down, rebuilt, as Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga (1981) and other women of color feminists created, continue to get and keep US/me there/here, as Toni Cade, as we believe(d)⁶. SOLHOT continues to dedicate ourselves to being a coalition “...determined to be a danger to our enemies, as June Jordan would put it...to discover in the mirror, in the dreams, or in the path across the bridge. The work: to make revolution irresistible” (Bambara, 1983). The relationships and bridges remembered and sounded in SOLHOT are intended to build on conversations on Brown’s (2013) theorizations of

⁶ M. Jacqui Alexander in conversation with Toni Cade Bambara on being well, women of color feminisms, *bridges*, and remembering. (275)

time and memory in SOLHOT as an extension of theorizations by M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) in *Pedagogies of Crossings* where she writes in honor of Gloria Anzaldua and the legacy of *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. With the guidance of Alexander's (2005) exploration of metaphysical systems employed by spiritual practitioners to explain their sense of self as rooted in memories of personal experiences as sacred and subjective, Brown's (2013) "Black Women Remember Black Girls" chapter, she remaps and highlights the function of memory, time and the sacred as it relates to Black girlhood and collective memory labor in SOLHOT. I utilize Brown's (2013) remap of Alexander's pedagogies of crossing (2005) to continue a conversation about the functions of personal memories, nonlinear collective time and the sacred in SOLHOT as modes of cruising that can be heard in our sounds of Black girlhood, freedom and genius. Whereas, Brown (2013) relies primarily of interviews of homegirls' experiences of SOLHOT to discuss how Black women remember Black girls and SOLHOT, I look to our sounds, songs and images to discuss how we remember Black girls and our relationships to each other and making spaces/places for Black girlhood. For instance, cruising as a concept and doing is made audible in the music we create together in SOLHOT. The act of cruising down "Green St" in memory, recording, and resounding is what moves me to the meditation that allows me to realize and remember particular Crossings and moments of connection and self reflection with SOLHOT. Cruising allows me to focus in on remembrances and frequencies that problematize neat demarcations of our relationships and our past, present and future dreamed realities.

Our cruising comes directly from our practice of digital, intentional and analog SOLHOT, where we can then theorize from and with great possibility, evolve our practices of Black girlhood in the now and future. Typically, in a scholarly context on racialized and

gendered politics, cruising is mentioned in the context of gay male rights and cruising for sex, cruising performance studies archives for its utopian possibilities (Munoz, 2002). Cruising as theorized and practice in SOLHOT relies on sensibilities that know, “Whether the vision is simply [articulated] as the celebration of Black girlhood in all of its complexity, or revised and elongated as...SOLHOT as utopia, SOLHOT as dismal failure, and SOLHOT as a mostly everything in between is about foregrounding complexity in collective and creative work with Black girls and women” (Brown 2013).

In the context of SOLHOT and Black girlhood, our cruising together drives this thing, our thing towards infinite and complex possibilities of making spaces to celebrate Black girlhood in all of its complexity with Black girls creating our world anew. Keeping movement, cruising and Crossings that accounts for difference and what is made possible when Black girlhood operates as an collective organizing construct in mind, I theorize cruising as ritualized and sounded articulation, an aesthetic and imaginative way of organizing and knowing each other more deeply, through which we might remember our Crossings and fully humanness with no disgrace, a grammar of Black girl futurity, here and now, for the purpose of travel, building supersonic future world(s) capable of reproducing and maintaining ourselves for Black girls and people everywhere. The mode of cruising, as a sounded articulation of Black girlhood in SOLHOT, an alternative practice of getting together⁷, is movement to, for and with each other; movement that insists on the essential need for an understanding of Black girlhood as collectivity. Sounds of Black girlhood and cruising are made audible literally and imaginatively, in the songs we have made and in our making space for and with Black girls. Cruising as an alternative sonic register of Black girlhood (Brown, 2013) knows that we are better together than

⁷ Hartmann, S. (beyond the outdoors interview)

we are alone (Brown & Kwakye, 20).

Our cruisings are Black feminist, queer futurities that move us and are attentive to our pasts, while taking a hard, critical look at our present. The Black girlhood mode of cruising is also “actual queer sex” because we fuck shit up, in every way, including gender and sexuality (transgressing gender binaries, hoochies, hoes, jazzy belles). Our collective enactment of Black girl futurity as Black girlhood cruising and boundary crossing—in relation to our makings of Black girlhood—prepare us for understanding our that SOLHOT as a dynamic (energetic) space looks and feels different in all time and is dependent on who is coming, where they have been before, and the embodied knowledge and talents they bring with them.⁸

According to Brown’s (2013) remapping of SOLHOT’s pedagogies of Crossings, “the Crossings allow for dynamism within SOLHOT as the practice of making a space of Black girlhood celebration undoubtedly reflects different parts of homegirls’ personal histories that they/we may have never even imagined mattered, until the time it did matter, in SOLHOT” (p. 57). The process of music-making, a pedagogy of crossing⁹ is a ritual to remember and articulate our Crossings. For example, “Studio,” as a key collective imagining concept, can happen anywhere SOLHOT (analog, digital and intentional) is, where we go through our process of music-making. The practice of making music together is a pedagogy that derives from our Crossings, as a claiming and making of sacred place/space. Our Crossings are material and intangible pathways, spaces and places, where we cruise and cross over into metaphysics of interdependence, intervening in the multiple spaces where knowledge is produced (p. 6). The Crossings are undertaken through a few mediums. Our process of making music in SOLHOT evokes/invokes our Crossings. In this process, our sounds serve as imaginative, material and

⁸ Brown, 2013, p. 57

⁹ Alexander, 2005, p. 8.

embodied realities asking important questions on ways of being and knowing in loving relation to one another and organizing Black girlhood that get us closer to celebration. In Chapter 4, I analyze data and sounds of SOLHOT through a series of meditations that reveal cruising and Crossings as sounds of collective Black girlhood and work to remember our processes, creative productions, organizing and complex relationships that keep us moving towards our dreams and each other.

Taking Care. Taking care is a sound of SOLHOT and theorizing methodology that I explore in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. In SOLHOT, our praxis of care is dependent on our evolving relationships with each other and our service to Black girls, each other and making space for Black girlhood celebration. Our care is dependent on the deepness and our presence in the love we share. It is also in tradition and an extension of Black feminism that values care that is made collective and with young people and children. In the “Creative Spirit: Children’s Literature,” June Jordan (1977) writes,

“I see love as the essential nature of all that supports life. Love is opposed to the death of the dream. Love is opposed to the delimiting of possibilities of experience. When we run on love, we love and change and build and paint and sing and write and foster the maximal fulfillment of other lives that look to us for help, for protection, or for usable clues to the positive excitement of being alive...” (p. 11).

In this same tradition, SOLHOT seeks to expand a Black feminist praxis of care that is centered on intergenerational Black girlhood celebration with Black girls. In SOLHOT, we write a lot of love poems, letters, songs, notes to each other and Black girls through song, in our freestyle cypher’s, through batty dance, analog writing sessions, We Levitate love trilogies and dedications, and so on. As a collective, we learn through a genealogy of Black feminist care,

love-politics and poetics that understands Lorde's famous quotes "poetry is not a luxury" and "...to care for myself in not an act of self-indulgence..." is only as alive as the poem or songs we write for SOLHOT, for Black girls, for our homegirls, for our lovers, for a better world. We know that "the difficult miracle of poetry" is the actual embodied present writing and resounding of June Jordan's "something like a sonnet for poet Phyllis Wheatley". We know that the poetry we write for each other can change dominant narratives about Black girls and might lead us towards a Black girlhood (studies, practice, pedagogy, epistemology, theory) that resists imperialist girl-programming, always has the group in mind, that writes for the group, that sings for the group, that sings/dreams for/with our beloved communities. Taking care as an intentional word/sound of and practice in SOLHOT is essential to how we sustain our dreams and current practices/work, and contending with power structures that intend on killing us.

I am most interested in a Black feminist genealogy that pays close attention to love-politics (Nash, 2013), collectivity (Brown, 2013) and poetics (Wynter, 1976) as an alternative form of sociality (Gumbs, 2010) that reaches us all. Wynter's idea of the poetic in "Ethnos or Socio Poetic", as something that creates new relationship between people, each other and our worlds as a way to describe what those relationships are and can be, also disrupts how relationships function transactionality under capitalism and a neoliberal academe. In this way, I am attuned to SOLHOT's use of the poetic to create, build and hold on to each other, and describe our worlds and relationships. In the age of self-promotion and neoliberal articulations of care, self-care and self-love and longings to heal our mental, physical, spiritual and emotional selves, it is can be easy to get lost in the idea that care and love is only for self, mainly, only, first as a luxury and not as the complex ways we care for one another in beloved communities. It is also quite possible to forget that Lorde's and many other Black women and writers and artists

wrote and talked about self-care as prosecution of health care systems in the United States (world) and the racial, gender and class politics of health, care and state violence. Self-care as a concept and practice is often used by well-intentioned people, teachers, scholars, activists, often Black women and women of color, to claim our right to self-care and freedom but it often to limited to individual, anti-relational and branded versions of care. In SOLHOT, we'd like to remember Lorde's quote in "Poetry is Not a Luxury", "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 2017) as a care that is dependent on being with people.

Taking Lorde's thoughts on care and June Jordan's important question one step further, We Levitate's music ask, "who are you loving for?; because it can't be exclusively yourself, although self-love and care allows us to be well enough to love each other. Jennifer Nash (2013) echoes this by saying that a love politic helps us to "transcend the self and move beyond the limitations of selfhood." Nash in her brilliant work points us to self love being the absolute and I think somewhere in our move beyond identity politics we turned to self-care and that is not quite it either because in many ways self-care focuses on our wounds and damage that cycles us back into an identity politics that focuses on individualism and fighting over oppressions. In fact, according to us in SOLHOT "self care is overrated and we need another collective care...[as in] homegirls who will love you religiously." The transcendence that Nash points us to happens when you learn to love yourself in community with other Black girls and women and not waiting until you have it all together to then come back to the very thing you denied while in distress and conflict. For We Levitate, taking care meant being in service of others, sharing joy, showing up for each other, despite grief, struggle, and pain. Lorde's and Nash's thoughts on love and care help me think through SOLHOT's practices and sounding of care that is reliant on joy and

relationships to move us towards freedom. This has led me to Black feminist poetic texts and word to help theorize my method and analysis of taking care as a practice among Black women artists and writers. In particular, I study deeply poems and word written in Sonia Sanchez's *Like the Singing Coming Off the Drums* (1998), *Shake Loose My Skin* (1999) and *Homegirls and Handgrenade* (1984); Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* (1980); June Jordan's *Haruko/Love Poems* (1994) and *Passion* (1980); *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* (2008); Sweet Honey in the Rock's *We Who Believe in Freedom* (1993) and *B'lieve I'll Run On...See What the Ends Gonna Be* (1978). Within these texts, I look to poems, dedications, love letters and writings for and about relationships between these writers and other Black women artists to help guide me through creating my own poetic analysis, text, dedications and songs written in remembrance of doing SOLHOT, our sounds of taking care and intimate relationships. With my poetry analysis of taking care, I wish to get on board this Bambara train of the spirit, soul, the ways Sonia Sanchez (1998) writes,

“doing what Audre Lorde said:

Forever moving history beyond nightmare

Into structures for the future....” (p. 127).

Making Music & Performance With SOLHOT as Participant Observation

Ethnographers utilize participant observation as a way to collect data. According to Watson & Till (2010) participant observation “...requires that ethnographers pay close attention to, and sometimes partake in, everyday geographies so they can become familiar with how social spaces on constituted in different settings (p. 11). Paying close attention to and being apart of the community and everyday world around you allows the researcher to be open to possibilities for collaboration, participatory projects, and political action.

The Image of the Sound: THE SITE

Homegirlin' doesn't have anything to do with identity, age or any demographic. Its means showing up and being ready to give all you have in celebration of Black girls even when you don't feel ready. It means being ready to listen and unlearn. Doing your best and giving all you got to a Black girl celebratory "space." Some might call it a "hip-hop" methodological or pedagogical "tool." Some call it an after-school program. I once simplified it as simply the latter things, but it's bigger than a method, research site or tool to be "explored" for academic and educational consumption. Homegirlin' is what Black girls and women do to survive. Its what we do in SOLHOT. Its how we DO SOLHOT. (expert from written reflection, Dec, 15, 2014).

Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT). SOLHOT, as a research site disrupts normative ideas of space, therefore much of this project takes place wherever SOLHOT is organizing, whether it be a local middle school, local library, academic building or in the SOLHOT music studio.

As a "site", SOLHOT is the reason that countless of scholars interested in Black girlhood have decided to come to graduate school. I am one of those scholars and artists that centered graduate school applications around interests in Black girlhood as learned through SOLHOT. As a junior in college, I had no idea of what I would do after undergrad. I knew that I was interested in hip-hop feminism and community studies and began to take courses that led me to research and reading about SOLHOT and Black girlhood celebration. SOLHOT's work led me to participate in PhD preparation programs, do community-based work with Black girls and figure out ways I could pursue this work further. What I did not know then is that my journey towards SOLHOT

would take many twists in turns and regardless of where I landed physically; SOLHOT would always be in the center of my heart, organizing and artist-scholar dreams.

Here, I will try to provide a more descriptive image of SOLHOT time as a sound based on how I have experience this space and our organizing over the past four years. I have come to know SOLHOT as a arts-based practice that honors loved ones and our creativity while centering Black girls and celebrating Black girlhood. When I say SOLHOT is an arts-based practice I mean that everything that happens when we structure organizing time is art. Before SOLHOT sessions and public events, we typically have plans and are not always sure how they will happen in terms of resources, who shows up and what will be made. Resources and people pending, we learn that we able to create powerful things with sometimes little money, people and time. When we organize our sessions after school in analog SOLHOT we always enter the space with a curriculum that is based on creative activities we have created from what we hear and learn is important to the girls which could include local and global headlines, or even what happened to the friend next door.

SOLHOT is largely the way that I understand and know how to inquire about Black girls and Black girlhood as a collective organizing construct. Similar to participant observatory methodologies, SOLHOT is concerned and centered on what we hear when we listen to Black girls. As you read in chapter one our sound comes out of what happens and what is heard in SOLHOT with the girls. This is important and as a co-organizer, artist and researchers in SOLHOT, as DJ I am always interested in what the girls hear, want to hear, and how they want to hear themselves recorded and sounded back to them. For example, during my first experience in analog SOLHOT during Black Girl Genius Week (BGGW) a weeklong public campaign of Black girlhood celebration, I was asked to provide music for the girls during our sessions. I

prepared a playlist of present day songs that I had heard with young people that the girls might like. Little did I know, my plans would go out of the window as the girls had their own list of things they wanted me to play for them. This is important because often DJ's concerned with the art and practice, are dismissive of audiences and people they curate music for the request songs. In the DJ world it is disrespectful to a DJ's craft to take requests.

I am fortunate to say that SOLHOT is the way that I have learned to be a DJ scholar. SOLHOT has taught me to begin with what Black girls say they want to hear; to begin with a practice that honors all the Black girl artists in the world. This is important because it allows me to be organizer, artist and researcher and engages the ways of researching in SOLHOT organized spaces draws a blurry line between researcher and participant. While we are aware of our roles as homegirls, the girls are not concerned with our titles or roles as researchers. For the girls, I know that when they see me walk into the room in SOLHOT, the first thing they want to know is where are the speakers and what phone or computer can we play music from. This shows that the girls are less concerned about our roles as graduate students and doctors and more concerned about our commitment to co-creating a space that enables them and us to celebrate girlhood freely.

SOLHOT has taught me about change and evolution that happens through all of the organizing. My close involvement with SOLHOT came during and after an extreme reorganizing period also known as heartbreak. I do not claim to know all of what this heartbreak meant for SOLHOT and those who still continued to organized after it, but I have been involved in (re) organizing SOLHOT from this point of rupture. From my perspective, during SOLHOT's major heartbreak I was also experiencing one of my own with the passing of my mother, and I found the importance of making sound with SOLHOT as a way to heal all of our interconnected

heartbreaks. It also opened me to a world of lessons and realities of organizing Black girlhood celebration in SOLHOT that I had not experienced living in Syracuse, New York. For one, SOLHOT, a ten-year and counting vision, had its history and relationships long before I became DJ and moved to Illinois. I honor the fact that I had the privilege of coming into an organizing that already had a strong history and firm relationships. This did not matter for SOLHOT. What mattered is that I wanted to show up and share what I was given with other Black women and girls who valued my voice and art as much as I valued theirs. What matter's most is that SOLHOT trusts me with our sound and I trust them with mine.

We Levitate. What might it mean to be apart of a group that values your sound just as much as you value theirs? I am involved as a DJ, scholar and producer with Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown, Dr. Porshé Garner and Jessica Robinson, as known as We Levitate. We explore how Black women and girls record, produce and share originally created beats and sounds that resists Black girls and women's' systemic invisibility and erasure in education and playing with what a Black girl sound means. In our article, "Doing Digital Wrongly," we write about the promises we have made to love each other in a place that says we shouldn't, to be artists without form and scholars without method, and to be misunderstood and still determined to persist. To love each other, to be artists without form and scholars without method, and to be misunderstood and still determined to persist is how we do digitally wrong. To make promises to each other as Black women working together and make it worthy of academic attention is doing digital (humanities) wrongly.

We listen and hear each other in many ways. For one, as organizers of SOLHOT, we listen to and plot on dreams the girls and each of us have about SOLHOT and making spaces for Black girlhood celebration. We listen to each other when we are tired and cranky, happy and sad.

We listen to each other sing birthday and dedication love songs. We listen to each other sing our Black girl songs. We listen to how each other listens to girls in SOLHOT. This listening takes shape and is sounded in our individual and collective music making and sound practices. Individually we make up a group of singers, songwriters, DJ's and noise makers. Jessica is also known as F.M. Lourdes, what she calls a Black feminist sound art practice that theorizes and plays with Black girl sound as noisemaking. Listening, creating, and loving with F.M. Lourdes teaches me the value of an artist practice lead by a vision of Black Feminist art and a practice of Black girlhood that honors Blackness and girlness without shame. She also teaches me the power of Black funk music is also the power in honoring the girls and people who come to SOLHOT funky. As a homegirl, lover and friend, F.M. Lourdes teaches me that a sonic love letter to a partner miles away is the kind of thing that knows music is sometimes the only way to make it real, especially when you date a DJ (Robinson, 2015, p. 6). Porshé also known as Pretty Black teaches me how to sing with my spirit and trust your voice. I always prefer to layer my vocals with hers, to hear my voice sing with hers. To hear my singing voice layered with hers reminds me to have faith that our sound and love will never part ways. Pretty Black teaches me the power of a happy birthday song voice note as a practice of care and celebrating your homegirls. Dr. B also known as Beez, aka DJ Humble aka Sarah Grace, teaches me how to hear and be a part of a collective with grace. Because of her I know that student advising and mentorship has a sound of humility, and it sounds like a vision where students and Black girls are encouraged to wildly share their gifts and creating a space to share yours, too.

We call each other bandbae's rather than bandmates to show our love and interconnectedness beyond ideas of what it means to be in a band. We know that our artistry without form and scholarship without method is reflected in our relationship as homegirls, lovers

and friends which is more than most can say of their relationships with other graduate students and professor. As a band, our relationships to one another are often misunderstood as too close, too intimate or ethically complicated and we also know that our love for one another is what makes our sound and makes each of us and another world possible.

Discussion

Role of the Researcher. To describe what feminist researchers claim as positionality (Madison, 2005), I offer a sonic personification of my positionality with SOLHOT that goes by the name(s), lovenloops and DJ B.E. By sonic personification I mean, lovenloops and DJ B.E. traces the personal/individual in relationship to the practice of analog, digital, intentional SOLHOT. Sonic personification in this sense is a reflexive method that disrupts sonic codes and assumptions that subject Black women and girls to codes of respectability and violent narratives (Bradley, 2015; Brown, 2009; Carney, Hernandez & Wallace, 2016). This is important because it allows me to use my artist practice with sound to check-in within myself and consider what I bring with me into SOLHOT. Lovenloops and DJ B.E. as artist practice(s) allow me to grapple with the relationship between the researcher/artist (me) and the researched (SOLHOT).

SOLHOT has exposed me to making a sound both familiar to my roots and contemporary sounds that Black girls enjoy to hear and make. It was homegirls who believed in the sounds I made, however offbeat, however Richmond, VA it sounded, who were to committed to making music and playing it back, even if it sounded like we were under water. My sound artist practice would not be possible without homegirls and SOLHOT's belief in what I could bring to SOLHOT. They saw me as a DJ long before I would ever even call myself one. As an act of ethnographic disruption, vulnerability and betrayal (Brown, et al., 2014; Leavy, 2009), lovenloops and DJ B.E. makes transparent you alongside the group, you with a self in relation to

the collective, your own preoccupations, personal experiences, creativity and so on in the doing of this work and play.

As DJ B.E. of SOLHOT We Levitate, my artist practice and process is concerned with organizing spaces for Black girlhood celebration with SOLHOT and Black girls. In that organizing, I make music with We Levitate and SOLHOT homegirls, and curate sound and live playlists that SOLHOT, the band, myself and Black girls everywhere want to hear. Scholarly essays, DJ mixes, interactive performances and EP's with SOLHOT and band We Levitate are a few examples of my artistic output as DJ B.E. As lovenloops, I sample, mix and blend music and voice, particularly bandmates, Black girl and women artists, writers, family and loved ones. My collection of Black soul, folk and funk records and sounds, serves as a politic and methodology sounding visions of a world where Black girlhood keeps the dream alive, creative, and interdependent on our love and relation to each other and who raised us. lovenloops is an intentional, personal sound art engagement with the Black girls, SOLHOT, homegirls as a way to remember Black girls and our particular practice of listening and remembering ourselves together. As a homegirl with SOLHOT in the most holistic analog, digital and intentional ways, remembering my Black girlhood and my relationship to music, sound and home, the spirit and the sacred, and need to create something not there, lovenloops and DJ B.E have become a ritual, a practice of everyday intentional Black girlhood that remembers our relationships and reverberates this connection through sound. Many of the sounds produced and explored in this dissertation and made in SOLHOT are produced and created under alter egos, lovenloops and DJ B.E.

The girls do not know me as lovenloops or DJ B.E. nor is that a priority for me. The girls have gotten to know me as Blair or may not know my name. I see that they see me as the one

that always twerks during our dance cipher, the one who brings the music and speakers and more than I would probably ever know. I have been able to meet a number of girls during my time with SOLHOT and do not always remember their names. Names are important to getting to know someone but it does not take away from who and what girls came to SOLHOT to share whatever they have to give. The fact that we do not know these facts about each other does not mean we were not there. In so many ways, we use memory of what each other shared and keep both physical and metaphysical archives. One of the ways I use memory to remember what we shared in SOLHOT is through sampling and finding/making music for us to sing, rap and record our lived experiences as Black women and girls.

For example, the girls once shared their loved Kodak Black's music. During this time, Kodak Black, a famous rapper had been in the news for disrespectful comments about and relationships with Black women. He was also in jail at the time and the middle school girls we worked with wanted him free despite the comments he made and his mistakes. Not only did they want him free, they insisting on being in conversation with him, to sing and rap over music that he might use. I personally didn't care if Kodak Black was free or not and Black girls taught me to care about all our freedom regardless of our mistakes. When it was time for us to make music together in our session, I brought a Kodak Black inspired beat found on youtube for free as an option to record with. After hearing the beat, the girls responded, "this joint go hard," which also means they heard the music as something that they could hear their own voices over. It also meant they trusted me enough to choose a beat, sound that would best fit their lyrics about friendship amongst each other. This particular moment is defining of Black girlhood celebration, showing us Black girls can free us all with their openness to other's contradictions and humanness. Also, a defining moment for my contributions to Black girlhood celebration with

Black girls, I learned through this experience in SOLHOT that to be a DJ studying Black girlhood also meant that I needed to take care more deeply Black girls' song requests and love for complicated hip-hop artists.

My time with SOLHOT has been more than doing research at a research site. SOLHOT is a home for me, a journey that has also allowed me the opportunity to live, work and organize with Black girls in Champaign, IL and across the nation. Regardless of name or alter ego, I am a person that is both ethnographer and homegirl with SOLHOT. My short time with SOLHOT is documented through fieldnotes in the form of songs, love letters, studio notes, emails AND text threads that reveal joy, pain and everything in between. All of these forms of data are very real and material. I did not choose to belong to SOLHOT with sound fully in mind. I remember when I started sharing music with SOLHOT; I was insisting that the music was separate from my community organizing and scholarly work. To be honest, I think SOLHOT, especially the members of We Levitate let me believe it and come to my work on my own and this allowed me to really sit with what I had to give to and do with SOLHOT. For me, this project has been a way to tap into my writing and sound art in way that brings me closer to loved ones and community. It has brought me closer to a desire to write and make sense of how I experience self, not a preoccupation, with SOLHOT and it has not been an easy journey. To have homegirls who challenge your writing and art in community with each other makes the writing and freedom journey a lot less lonely.

Method

Research Design

Participants. Participants in this study are based on who shows up to SOLHOT and those who also gave consent for participating in SOLHOT, Black girlhood organizing events and the research project. SOLHOT is self-selecting and this means that the girls may elect to be apart of SOLHOT by filling out the permission slip (Appendix A). During my time working closely with SOLHOT and the girls in session, self-selecting was true to our recruitment process at a local middle school. The girls have typically been middle school students between the ages of 11-14. We also have adult participants who are often associated with the University, local non-profit, organizing and arts communities in the Champaign-Urbana community. Typically, adult participants are a called and call each other homegirls. I am most familiar with working with SOLHOT during a time where we held two-hour sessions with girls in one particular middle school.

Methodological Tools

The structure I used to determine data in this dissertation has been unorthodox and non-linear. This means I used data from our SOLHOT sessions as well as the music of SOLHOT that did not follow any particular structure and relied more on allowing the data to be whatever we created, particularly sound and music. To follow, I detail our music making process.

Studio. Studio is a key collective imagining concept and practice in SOLHOT that can happen anywhere we are and organized for it to happen. In more simple words, studio is our process of making our music and sounds and typically happens with digital music recording tools. Studio became a way for SOLHOT homegirls still present after the heartbreak to hear each other and heal. Those homegirls decided to call themselves, We Levitate and studio, the process

of making music and where it happened continued to evolve and largely depends on who shows up and also who offers their resources. Studio sessions are typically hosted by We Levitate and have become a way for us to make our own sound but also collaborate as artists invested in the lives of Black girls. Local artists have hosted We Levitate in their studio to record and We Levitate has brought their own equipment into spaces to collaborate with the people. Studio started primarily at Dr. Brown's office in the Gender & Women's Studies house, which was named the purple curtain studio after the purple curtain gifted by a homegirl to block outside noise while recording. Studio has also happened in SOLHOT sessions with the girls. When I moved to Illinois, we did a lot of studio sessions at Jessica's apartment and sometimes we dreamed and recorded in Dr. Brown's living room. During studio, what we contribute and put on record may sound and look like silence, breathing, singing, talking, laughing, rhyming, pettiness, nature sounds, babies crying and so much more. In studio, we rely on each other's dreaming, what happens with the girls in SOLHOT, and our spirits to guide what we write and record.

Typically, in sessions with We Levitate members only, we brainstorm concepts, dreams, and visions prior to having studio where we record. We then challenge each other to come to studio with written words and ideas for how we want to arrange the sound. During my time with SOLHOT, I have been responsible for bringing beats and music for us to record to. Typically this means we use originally made music from lovenloops or as DJ B.E., I am able to find free music or artists interested in collaborating with us. For studio, our first goal is to be with a Black girl sound, so we are always looking for and interested in collaborating with other Black girl artists. In sessions where we collaborate with other artists, we bring beats/music and concepts usually centered on Black girlhood, community and art, and then we come together and write our concepts. After narrowing down our concepts, we listen to and choose a beat that we want to

record to first. Once we choose a beat, we typically take about 30-45 minutes to write down what we want to record individually. In studio with other artists there can sometimes be between 10-15 people ready to record. When our writing time is completed, we typically give artists and ourselves a chance to decide who is ready to record first. On most occasions who follows in the recording process is up to who is ready and willing to step to the microphone. Sometimes, we have worked with local artists who engineer music to record our studio sessions. Once moving to Illinois and joining We Levitate, I gave my music recording experience, however imperfect, to We Levitate studio, collaborations with artists, and with the girls in our sessions. In Studio with the girls, we have brought music based on what the girls like to hear. The girls don't always like my originally made music and we found a way to compromise where I find free music that one of their favorite artists might record over and let them choose what fits for their voices. In studio with the girls, Porshé and other homegirls has played a big part in helping the girls write down what they want to record. We have found that girls typically like to record with a friend or homegirl by their side and sometimes you might hear multiple voices on one track as if more than one person were on the microphone at once. Studio can look like many things and we focus on curating a space where Black girls and other artists are prepared to share their sounds.

Lovenloops as a methodological tool. This dissertation utilizes various tools and processes to create sonic art as research. As lovenloops, I am concerned with a sound art and writing practice that remembers where I came from sonically and politically and making sense of self in relation to working with SOLHOT. Lovenloops has been a way to write and sound myself into places I call and create home with, particularly SOLHOT. To act on this practice for data and music collection in this project, I typically used a Roland pattern and sampling sequencer to make music with SOLHOT and We Levitate. In hip-hop, “samplers [are typically known as]

computers that can digitally duplicate any existing sounds and play them back in any key or pitch, in any order, sequence and loop them endlessly” (Rose, 1994, p. 73). Like many sample-based artists, what I dig for, collect and sample is made a priority. Recordings and samples I typically dig for and use in my music are from jazz, soul and funk records that my parents used to listen to, vocal recordings from We Levitate studio sessions, drums, voice recordings from bands and family, and other arts, Black women writers and feminists. Initially, lovenloops started as a way to connect with a place and sound in Richmond, Virginia that raised me. I grew up around electronic beat music. In Richmond, what can be described as lo-fi sampled based loop music, is a growing sound that artists from around the world want to tap into. As a first year graduate student also in conversation with creative practices of homegirls in SOLHOT, I started making beats as a way to connect to Richmond roots and also contribute to a Black girl sound. I wanted to hear beats and loops that were not there, sounds that addressed Black women’ and girls’ concerns. Before lovenloops, I called it Black feminist beatmaking and played around with other inspirations and names.

The sound and music has evolved as I continue to work and create with SOLHOT. Homegirls, along with my mother were the first people to ever hear and love my music. We Levitate were the first artists to make a chose to record with my music even if they didn’t quite understand it. The sounds that come out of lovenloops reflect conversations, dreams, and desires that are heard and organized in SOLHOT and my connection to many homes and loved ones. In my practice, I am intentionally about what I sample and what might be heard. I want the sounds to reveal that I am here and not alone. For the purposes of this dissertation, I am focusing on lovenloops as sonic personification of my participation in SOLHOT as a methodological tool of arts-based and sonic research. As a methodological tool, lovenloops allows me to sonically

reflect on my relationship to SOLHOT and prepare my heart, mind and sound for organizing.

Data Collection

To interpret the sounds of collective Black girlhood in SOLHOT, I used qualitative methods that considered the fact that the community in which I was observing was also one in which I lived, worked and loved. I do not have an exact number of hours to convey an estimate of my time with SOLHOT for this project or in life for that matter. What I can say is that the quantitative measure of my time feels less important to the qualitative measure of my time with SOLHOT. I am methodologically refusing to use a number to describe the time spent collecting data in a community and space in which making, taking and disrupting static and linear notions of time are important. I am also aware of the fact that my work with SOLHOT goes beyond this project and dissertation and that the data collected and sounds made here show only a small part of my relationship. Some researchers might view this as a limitation to research. This project as a living document is more concerned with sharing a body of writing's that conveys how the sound made in this moment tells stories and lessons we all need to hear about organizing Black girlhood with SOLHOT. This dissertation also relies on We Levitate's sound and music as data and object open to inquiry, and one that reveals resistive and political potential that may or may not be activated within different performance or listening contexts (Leavy, 2008; 2015; Rollings, Jr., 2013).

Documentation of my time in the field was taken in the form of songs, fieldnotes, personal photography, sound recordings of SOLHOT/Studio sessions, and collecting creative artifacts. My study focuses on participant observation and audio field recording during public Black girlhood organizing events, teach-ins, invited performances and studio sessions with SOLHOT roughly from 2014-2017. The goal of field recording, along with reflexive journal

writing and other Black girl sonic art forms, was to record moments and action that capture Black girl sound and movement in its essence. This dissertation also represents data collected since starting graduate school and working with SOLHOT to fully paint a picture and interpret sounds made along my journey with SOLHOT. During the data collection process and making of our sound, with SOLHOT as DJ B.E. and lovenloops, I created with SOLHOT an EP and a loop-based project that included We Levitate. These particular projects and the sounds of collective Black girlhood that accompany them are very important data and make up a major part of the data that I analyze in Chapter's four and five. I will discuss those music in detail in those respective chapters.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this dissertation is interpretative and experimental in its implementation. Arts based research reflexivity data analysis method (Schenstead, 2012); hands-on, heuristic approach to inquiry and analysis with sound. I also used photography and images to help tell stories about the sounds we made and interpret data. Making our collective sounds audible is important to how we learn that which we need to know, reflect on best theories and practices, dream with and for each other. I am exploring complexities that surface in my relationship to self and other Black women and girls, because I am one. In each chapter of my dissertation, I rely on different qualitative methods to present and analyze the data. In this section I provide a brief overview of those methods. In the chapters that follow I provide the particulars of the method and in this chapter I explain how each tool contributes to my practice of ethnography that is autoethnography and arts-based.

In this dissertation, I analyzed sounds of collective Black girlhood that resonated with me. Rather than following a structure how I interpreted and analyzed data, I sat with our sounds

and relied on my intuition about our relationships to each other and making space with and for Black girls to guide what resonated and resounded. In particular, I used a meditative analysis and remembrance of our relationships to make sense of cruising and Crossings in SOLHOT. Cruising as a concept, came from my analysis of songs we made in SOLHOT. Two of the songs analyzed in the chapter mention cruising, in particular as a desire to be with people in places, dreaming of new futures and worlds. After realizing cruising as a theme of our collective sounds, I was then brought to explore and meditate on what cruising meant for SOLHOT. For SOLHOT, cruising as a praxis for love, cruising for the “varied potentialities” (Munoz, 2009; p. 18) within our interconnected and personal relationships, paths and stories means being able to imagine and dream futures that where we are always together and organizing. Crossings as sounded in SOLHOT were not voiced in our music in the literal sense and cruising, relistening to SOLHOT’s sonic archive gets me our Crossings (ie. Meditations). What I found in analysis, was the Crossings, similar to the way Alexander (2005) believes its message to be “the urgent task of configuring new ways of being and knowing to plot the different metaphysics that are needed to move away from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectively premised in relationality and solidarity” (p. 7-8), is that Crossings, revealed as meditations, are sounded in our music in ways that reveal our interconnectedness. Crossings also reflect different parts of homegirls’ personal histories (my own) that may have never even imagined mattered, until the time it did matter, in SOLHOT (Brown, 2014, p. 57). I expand on the ways that our sounds of collective Black girlhood get us to cruising and Crossings in SOLHOT as relational and future bending theories and practices.

My analysis also called on the use of poetry as ethnography and a method of arts-based research and Black feminist art and organizing. Arts-based research as an extension of qualitative

research and poetry is an engaged method of writing that evokes emotions, promotes human connection and understanding, and may be politically charged (Faulkner, 2005). Poetry has a way of revealing truths to create a vivid and sensory sense that compels the reader, teaching us about something particular aspect of social and relational experience (Leavy, 2009). To create poetry from the data and songs I relied on an intuitive approach. After transcribing the songs and listening and coding for themes of care, I created poetic text from the sounds and data as dedications to caring and dreaming with SOLHOT that resonated from the coded listening. The art making in this project informs the structure of the research and analysis itself. Ethnographic poetry and art making also reveal a ritual, daily practice and training myself as a poet and artist (Marynard & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010, p. 12). This daily practice throughout my dissertation project has been flexible and intuitively rigorous.

Here, I acknowledge possible limitations of this dissertation. For one, I'd like to point to the working and material conditions from which this dissertation was written and produced. By this I mean, a conscious and political decision to move across states after my mother passed away, with no institution or financial support, to live and study with SOLHOT has shaped time and possibilities limited by lack of material resources. Moving to Illinois to live and study with SOLHOT required me to find ways to make ends meet for living, health and food, that took away from time that could be spent with SOLHOT and going deeper with ideas and organizing. Regardless of material conditions, I am pleased with how this dissertation contributes to Black girlhood studies and education. In the future, I hope to earn funding that will enable me to give more time to study and research with communities.

Another possible limitation of this dissertation is my engagement with the music and sounds explored. As a sound scholar, I am still finding ways to engage music, to make sure the

music is also felt and heard through the language and words used to resound music made. This can also become a formatting issue, as external links might not flow with the writing in the document. This project is very much analog in a sense that it relies on language and writing to primarily theorize sounds of collective Black girlhood. I have often thought about what a digital dissertation beyond pdf links would mean in the context of a sound-based research project and/or a possible external mix that includes songs. Consideration of diverse formatting methods might allow this project to be more performative, a/r/tographic (Springgay, Irwin & Leggo, 2007) and layered to show engagement with various mediums as an artist, researcher and teacher. In addition, I would like to further explore this project as one that deeply explores the connection between art and text, revealing “where theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication intentionally unsettles perception and knowing through living inquiry” (xxi). Extending this project beyond the dissertation might include ways to embed and include music and sounds in this project so that readers can engage sound while reading in more user-friendly and digital ways.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology and method used in this dissertation. My three-year and on going autoethnographic field research experience allowed me to disrupt and work through the layers of ethnography, particularly participation observation as a member of the group. During the process of collection and analysis, I found the writing, re reading and listening processes to be an important part of revealing cruising, Crossings and care as sounds of collective Black girlhood. I concluded this chapter discussing limitations of this dissertation as they relate to time, resources and possibilities for digital formatting. In the future more research

could be conducted that explore sound practices, format and publication options in research that centers Black girlhood.

Chapter Four

Cruising SOLHOT Sonic Archives To Get To The Crossings

“We’re going to fly away. Glad you’re going my way. I love it when we cruisin together” - We Levitate, “Green St.”, How I Feel EP (2016)

“...we just crusin’ down janhke, puffin on the dank...” - hightimes productions “Janhke Rd. Wit My Cuzzos”, Don’t Ever Forget It (2016)

“Blair is always right there with us, even though she did not live in the same town as the rest of us. Physical location only mattered in the sense that those who were here doing the work did not know Blair, as I did. So while in my mind and heart she’s been in SOLHOT, there are multiple origin stories. Because Blair had been making music, sending me these Black feminist sounds over beats way before We Levitate, way before the most major SOLHOT heartbreak to date, I think she pre knew what was going to be needed. That she later moved to Champaign-Urbana and we now share physical time and space, is real quantum. Of course, We Levitate did not really get off the ground until Blair came on as our DJ. I asked her and she said yes. Levitation.”
- (Ruth Nicole Brown et al. forthcoming)

Introduction

It is true. I’ve always been right here with SOLHOT/We Levitate everywhere and nowhere, full of complex truths and co-created imaginations of Black girl futures (present and distant), starting with us and reaching far. SOLHOT unsettles fixed notions of Black girlhood, cruising and Crossings (Alexander, 2005) with analog, digital and intentional principles and practices pushing Black girlhood beyond a static, non-relational identity. This unsettling allows us to puzzle our new ways of undisciplined, unknowable, unrehearsed, unacceptable modes (mediums) of being together, organizing alternative doings of Black girlhood. We are South Chicago Suburbs, St. Louis, South Side Chicago, South Side Richmond, Champaign-Urbana, world and universe wide. We represent “the contradictions and contradictory possibilities of space...” (McKittrick 226) and place that “...reach far beyond the nation or existing maps, and on

the other hand, rest on very specific locations such as women's bodies, sexualities and subjectivities" (225). *We are here*, living contradictory lives in complex and evolving bodies, lived experiences, s/places and reinventing ourselves under and beyond racialized and gendered social constructions/systems. We be non-static, our sound and movement, supersonic, in fact. We cruisin'. We're here to celebrate.

This movement together forces us to be creative about the ways in which we reinvent and ourselves and make analog, digital and intentional space for Black girlhood, as Black women and girls, people in relationship with one another in a current neoliberal world context that says we shouldn't love each other. One of the ways in which we make space and practice reinvention in SOLHOT is through a creative process of music making—sounding our imaginations to envision a Black girlhood that means freedom (Brown 1), something like Toni Cade Bambara's freedom--*-unavailable for servitude, back stiff with conviction* that is bound and unfree from those and that which we want holding us forever. SOLHOT, creativity, in particular music-making as a ritualized knowing, being and telling brings individual people together to make space in a critically engaged way, activating the potential of the collective, where Black girlhood operates as an organizing construct, not as a static category of identity. This chapter keeps in mind that, "Black girlhood as an organizing construct is sound that moves us closer toward interrogating how the state works in and through us, challenging institutions that do not see us even when we are present, and practicing love" (p. 211). Drawing from participation and music-making with *Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths* and SOLHOT's girl band, *We Levitate*, as DJ B.E. and *lovenloops*, this chapter analyzes, interprets and theorizes, the process of sounding articulations of collective Black girlhood, cruising sand Crossings, "family as liberated zone," using a meditative analysis and remembrance, where photography that tells visual stories about the

sound we made, intimate engagements with Black feminist texts, sacred SOLHOT archives and first person narrative are utilized to remember self in relation to community. To remember self in relation to SOLHOT as a community is the work of naming personal experiences, along with interpersonal dealings, discussions and responsibilities to inspire collective movement. Utilizing Black feminist frameworks, this chapter insists on Black girlhood not only as a way to categorize time, age, gender or race but as a spatial organizing construct pointing to freedom as the kind of idea that comes from a labor of space-making for imagining the creativity of Black girls (Brown, 2009), making room for and a path to wholeness (Finney, 2017).

What comes of our relationships and remembering our relationships include a range of complexities, wholeness, truth and tension. Cruising to remember our bridges get us to freedom in border crossing (Alexander, p. 258), to remembering and joyfully moving on the fact that, “we are women without a line. We are women who contradict each other” (Moraga, 1983, p.). I use two key concepts, cruising and crossing, that emerge from analysis of data¹⁰, to denote sounded articulations and remembering of Black girlhood in all of its complexity, as practiced in SOLHOT as a way of being dependent on “the art of homegirling”¹¹, friendships/squads, “the group” (Bambara, salt waters) and the knowable and found remembrances, cruises, Crossings and voyages to move ideas and people and most wholeheartedly ourselves, to teach and articulate what we most need to learn and know that which we already know. This chapter builds on the ways in which SOLHOT has and continues to access time travel and space/place as a unique resource to the past as a pathway to change the future in the present moment (Brown, 2013, p. 51). Making time and space/place to remember Black girlhood is particularly important

¹⁰ grounded theory literature

¹¹ Here I am writing with SOLHOT and Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) thinking through “the art of homegirling,” SOLHOT as sacred.

for working class Black girls and women whom living under particular anti-Black and capitalists structures are often forced to grow up too soon and take care of everyone except themselves, ourselves (Gonzalez, 2017).

With cruising and Crossings, we might further evolve our creative potential (Brown, 2013) into greater action/movements that continues to insist on us being together (in whatever ways humanly possible) making space to celebrate Black girlhood in all of its complexity. In this regard, it is my hope that this chapter asks of us and those invested in the lives of Black girls and doing Black girlhood to ask important questions of our work that will allow us to continue on paths that do the labor of making space/place and time traveling to celebrate Black girlhood in all of its complexity and bringing us together to become a “we,” in all the ways we can dream and imagine possible. For instance, what sounds of Black girlhood, freedom and genius become audible when we are attuned to the analog, digital and intentional frequencies of SOLHOT? The images and sounds of SOLHOT in this chapter echo accounts of doing SOLHOT that rely on paths, cruising and the Crossings that continue to choose Black girlhood and Black girls as complex and whole.

This chapter travels the following roadmap: First, I discuss the significance of what is made known through sound and Black girlhood, as practiced through SOLHOT mediums followed by a discussion of key concepts and theoretical frames and an explanation of methodological decisions based on my positionality as a homegirl, lover and artist/scholar organizing with SOLHOT. Next is analysis and interpretation of SOLHOT songs, enacted through a meditative living memory of doing SOLHOT that utilizes Black feminist texts, performance theorists, and Black girlhood imaginations and movements on making space to celebrate Black girlhood, particularly through music-making. The following meditations signify

the Crossings and cruising SOLHOT's sonic archive is what gets me there. To conclude, the roadmap takes a turn towards bigger pictures, conversations, ideas, and practices that continue to evolve and move Black girlhood celebration as practiced in SOLHOT.

Significance

This chapter demonstrates one way sounds and music made by Black women and girls imagines and embodies Black girlhood as an experiment in un/freedom and productive un/knowing that requires us to remain on our toes, touch each other, catch the beat, blow our minds, [cruise], [Cross], pivot and awaken our bodies so that leaning on each other become more familiar and acceptable--like in a slow [ride/walk/memory down Green St./Janhke Rd.]; while organizing towards a greater repertoire of actions and articulations that affirm differences among Black girls and differently sounding Black girl knowledge (Brown 2013). It is my hope to have readers and myself as a researcher and writer to ask more questions and build more oppositional practices and pedagogies of Black Girlhood, as collectivity, in all of complexity, within and across multiple simultaneous spaces/places and lifetimes. I evoke the Black girlhood spirit of cruising¹² to and with the sounds of SOLHOT¹² in an effort to see the anticipatory illumination of SOLHOT and our Crossings.

I show the process of sounding articulations of Black girlhood, cruising and Crossings to provoke discussions and responsibilities that inspire collective movement and bend cartographic rules¹³ that attend to Black girlhood geographic evolutions, place and space makings (Butler, 2018). This evolution has to do with prioritizing the creation of spaces/places to celebrate Black girlhood in all of its complexity with Black girls where Black girlhood is collective potential and

¹² Munoz, "cruising the fields" (p. 18, 2002).

¹³ McKittrick (2006) on Black female subjectivity and cartographies of struggle

not solely an identity. The following analysis looks to do what Tina M. Campt (2017) calls, “attending to the lower frequencies” in order to be “attuned to the connection between what we see and how it resonates” (p. 33). Cruising SOLHOT and Black girlhood studies archives to attend to our lower frequencies, remember and get us to our Crossings are central to my analysis. This analysis explores the process of making music as revealed through Black girls and women who are listening and responding to each other, “bound in a collective desire to change the world”¹⁴ by making spaces and places out of our dream worlds so that we can be free together, and unfree from those who want to be holding us into forever.¹⁵ What comes of the listening, remembering and responding conveys logics and pedagogies for improving our daily practice of SOLHOT by amplifying our cruising and Crossings and repeating over and over again the ways in which we want to be well. What is made known in and through the music moves sound, bodies, and ideas, in useful poetically articulate and aesthetic ways, that music we create together, can. In the next section, I discuss key concepts and theoretical frames, followed by methodological decisions made in the process of this project.

Method

“...In case all else fails and it probably will, I just want to say, I am always already present and I am not alone.” -We Levitate, “We’re Here to Celebrate”, *Don’t Ever Forget It* (2016)

When We Levitate experienced heartbreaks of community organizing, we turn to creating music as a way to make healing promises and get to know each other over and over again. For example, In the age of neoliberalism, increased anti-Blackness and static identity constructs in

¹⁴ M. Jacqui Alexander, 2005 p. 258. *Pedagogies of Crossings*

¹⁵ Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown on humility, SOLHOT, and the evolution of DJ Sarah Grace aka DJ Humble

the name of Black girlhood, we seek promissory pedagogies and alternative modes of wrongness and the digital (Brown et al. forthcoming) to deliberately create a Black girl sound that sounds like us, that can't be organized as too loud or too quiet (Brown 2013) or as a static [Black girl] biological identity. Our analog SOLHOT sessions with the girls, public events, private conversations, love letters, lived experiences and histories are all apart of what shows up, is articulated, processed, sounded, and heard in documenting and remembering each other and what we make. The promises we make to each other and to making spaces to celebrating Black girlhood in all of its complexity with Black girls can also be heard in the music we create together.

“Studio” as a method and practice of digital SOLHOT is the process of music-making (and perpetual resounding), sacred space/place where we put down and discard the unnecessary in order to pick up that which is necessary; in order to hear each other more deeply and intimately; to be together. It is a Black girlhood created space where we invoke spirits of cruising together to imagine us together in space and place, more complexly and intimately. It is the imaginary evoked from the collective sounds created from which we dream/cruise to craft new compasses, pathways to Black girlhood celebration and pedagogies of crossing. A set of conflictual convergences of my own (our) migrancy and cruising together, rendered more fragile under empire, and genealogies and repertoires of Black feminist and Black girlhood, all reside here (the Crossings). It is a reckoning with self in relation to Black girlhood and Black girls. The music that is then produced and shared from studio reverberate as perpetual sightings and listenings of our cruising and Crossings that are revealed through performances, our forevers, relationships and commitments to Black girls and Black girlhood in all of its complexity.

When starting my dissertation data collection process, I knew that sound and making

music with SOLHOT We Levitate would be apart of the data. What I did not know is what that would look like and did not come up with a concrete data collection plan. Instead, I decided to let our organizing and relationships guide my data collection. For example, upon moving to Illinois, I started organizing with SOLHOT after school with Black girls and started studio sessions with We Levitate. We were not sure what we were going to create but did know that we wanted to make a short project to lead into our second Black Girl Genius Week (BGGW) in 2016. This project turned into what we know, perform and call the [*How I Feel EP \(2016\)*](#). Consisting of five tracks, the EP features themes of taking care, being together, trust and risk, facing death, and being fully human with no disgrace. The *How I Feel EP* is a part of SOLHOT's archive and is a music production by We Levitate to digitally explore our relationships and sound what happens in analog SOLHOT. After creating this project, I decided to focus in on songs from this EP to be a apart of my data collection and making since of self in community.

SOLHOT We Levitate

How I Feel EP

How I Feel

Take Care

Green St.

To Be Honest

Under Control





After recording the EP with We Levitate, I began to also think about how I wanted to curate sounds under alter ego, lovenloops. At this point, I had been playing with sounds and making sample-based music under lovenloops for three years and was encouraged by the band and other artists to make a sound project. To be honest, I was content posting songs on SoundCloud and didn't really want to get into the fight of trying to sell music. This fear quickly turned into exploring lovenloops as a sonic project that also worked to grieve the death of parents, while also complicating home, relationships and organizing with SOLHOT. As an extension of the EP and efforts to engage intentional and digital mediums of SOLHOT, I created [*Don't Ever Forget It \(DEFI\)*](#) as lovenloops, seeking to create and engage ideas of Black girlhood and alternative articulations of freedom. Consisting of fifteen loop-based tracks, *Don't Ever Forget It* was created with vocal collaborations with We Levitate and family, featuring sonic themes of home, belonging, love, and destiny. Similar to the process of the EP, I did not set out

to make this project with any plan and let the sounds I had already created and what I was currently experiencing and living to guide what sounds were made. With this project, I was intentional about creating sampled beats and loops juxtaposed with Black feminist texts and voices of family and We Levitate. Bandmates and family sent recorded vocals as voice recordings to arrange with the samples of the lecture. I heard them, we heard each other, because we are here to celebrate, tonight, and every day, in as many as ways that our doing of Black girlhood makes possible.

In this particular chapter, I am interested in songs from both projects that when resounded in full view, get us closer to cruising and Crossings in SOLHOT, closer to a knowing of where we meet, touch, where we don't and the in between. The *How I Feel EP* and *DEFI* both function as forms of Black girl media and show how music made in or as a articulation of doing SOLHOT "...makes possible an articulation of Black girls' thought, particularly a feminist critique of practice" (Brown 2013 p. 191). The evidence I offer are the songs and sounds included from the EP and *DEFI* in this paper, "We're Here to Celebrate," "Green St.," and "Janhke Rd. Wit My Cuzzo," post a direct challenge to narrow notions of creativity and humanness, that are based on biological fixed identity and leave collective Black girlhood out of the conversation, sound Black girl cruising and Crossings, visions/movements of being here, together, imagining and enacting new ways of knowing and being together and creating worlds we want to see and live in. The process of making the *How I Feel EP* and *Don't Ever Forget It*, as forms of Black girl media, is instructive for scholars interested in Black girlhood as an organizing construct and creative production. I utilize lyrics and listenings from the songs, for example, "...I am always, already present and I am not alone," to prompt myself into meditation and respond with remembrances and stories that add to a litany of listening practices that move

us closer to pedagogies that arrive from our cruising and Crossings. It is my hope that this section of this chapter reads as a backward glance, a practice of cruising, to meet us at our Crossings and enact future vision¹⁶. The analysis that follows center on what is heard and remembered (echoed) in the process of making and (re)sounding Black girlhood that offer an epistemological, ontological, and pedagogical unsettling of interest to scholars of girlhood, sound, arts-based research and digital humanities.

The theories that emerge in this chapter arrive from an analysis of data that privileges the collective envisioning, creative process and production of the *How I Feel EP*, performances with We Levitate, memorized and recalled lyrics (or could've been lyrics, sing alongs, cruising in the car and at Riggs Beer Company), and intentional processing and meditations with the EP, alone.

Analysis/Evidence: Bending Cartographic Rules

As a writer with SOLHOT, my goal for this analysis is to tell the truth and to face our love with a reckoning of self in relation to creative organizing Black girlhood together and makings of other worlds. I look to Durham's (2014) description and practice of textual experience: "...an active, interpretive process of bridging lived experience with living memories embedded in words, acts, objects, or sounds to generate temporal, plural, partisan, and partial meaning that is filtered..." in this case through particular SOLHOT, Black girlhood and Black feminist speaking positions. Here, I use the sounds we create together to guide living memories and meditations that serve as a road map, a guide towards self-articulation within Black girlhood, revealing the power in moving with SOLHOT no matter the time and space. The following meditations offered as road maps illuminate alternative spatialities of power and knowledge obsessed/possessed with being together with Black girls for Black girlhood celebration and the

¹⁶ Munoz (2009) Cruising Utopia

ways this obsession/possession travels through sound, the borders we cross, the spaces we make, and the epistemologies/pedagogies we construct and practice.

The way we create and the reasons why we make music/sound and the pedagogies we use to put what we learn into practice, and vice versa, tell stories of gendered, racial and sexual bodies together in co-created public and private spaces attentive to intentional, analog, and digital Black girlhood practices that destabilize the position of the academy, state institutions and knowledge hierarchies. This analysis is in conversation with Black, queer, transnational and women of color feminisms drawing attention to “different academic and activist sites as differentiated geographies of knowledge production...attentive to the spatialities of power and the ways in which they operate in and through the academy” and political movements (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010).

The meditations that follow look to map Black girlhood practices attentive to personal histories, spaces, places, and locations and the politics of knowledge production. I am offering meditations/stories as road maps as the Crossings, that bend cartographic rules¹⁷ as a reckoning of self in relation to Black girlhood and doing SOLHOT that account for socio-political and historical instances and repertoires that shape our evolving geographies. Travel of knowledge across makings of spaces for Black girlhood celebration in all of its complexity provide an alternative means of locating, living and remembering our Black girlhood geographies and coalition/home building. Similar to Durham’s discussion of class as the notion of hip-hop as homeplace (2014), the stories that follow also opt to tell and retell which necessitates a space-time travel that reflects unsettled memories that rely on our archives and repertoires--of physical and spiritual home(s) and how we/I come to do this work with SOLHOT while in graduate

¹⁷ Eds. Mckittrick and Woods (2007). *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

school at a predominantly white anti-Black university and world (p. 25). The stories and knowledge that travel through time and space are specifically meditated on through lyrics and sounds of Black girlhood as created and practiced with digital, intentional and analog SOLHOT.

Track 1: [“We’re Here to Celebrate \(We Levitate Special\)”](#)

I’d like to start our cruise with the reality and faith in our dream that we are here, wherever we are, together, and not alone, loving each other when everything in the world tells us we shouldn’t¹⁸. The here in which we are present and not alone is no place in particular and at the same time, very particular places that speak to our personal and complex collective histories and interconnections. “Here to Celebrate (We Levitate Special)” is featured on *Don’t Ever Forget It* (Summer 2016). In creating an album under alter ego, LOVENLOOPS, there was no way this alternative form of knowledge and art making would happen without SOLHOT, without the breaths and voices of We Levitate, without critiquing and theorizing from our practice and complicated present. Our sounds, creations which come from critiquing our analog, intentional and digital practices of Black girlhood celebration, serve as sonic stories and alternative modes of doing research that help us to interrogate our personal histories and evolution with SOLHOT. While making *DEFI*, I’d been thinking about samples and conversations that the band had been having. As a girl band and group, we talk and write often with Fred Moten and Angela Davis. Listening to and engaging lectures with each other is important to our pedagogy and sacred praxis¹⁹.

In particular, during that time we watched and talked about a lecture with Angela Davis, Fred Moten and Melanie Cervantes about “Abolition and The Radical Imagination,” where they

¹⁸ Brown et. al. (forthcoming). Doing Digital Wrongly.

¹⁹ “Sacred praxis in SOLHOT is represented in the time homegirls dedicate to theorizing from our practice, practicing consistently, and practicing theories subsequently created. This reiterative process is how we come to know something more about Black girlhood than when we first began”

discussed the importance of art in our critique and celebration and being experimental and collective with our responses to dehumanization. One thing that stood out sonically while listening to the lecture was, “But, we’re here to celebrate tonight.” I point to this quote because I decided to repeat it over and over for reasons that evolve every time it is resounded. Beyond repetition and looping in a Black arts and hip hop tradition sense, SOLHOT homegirl, Nikky Finney continues to reminds us intentionally and digitally and by showing up in analog as a homegirl that, “repetition is holy.²⁰” We also know and learn from a Black feminist art, poetic genealogy (Sanchez, Jordan, Clifton) that repetition is used for more than just a literary device but a way to say and remember: I love you and I mean it, over and over again. Here, repetition reminds us that at the end of the day, we are here to celebrate the relationships created in SOLHOT and that practices enacted in the space we make. Celebration is not new to SOLHOT.

Dr. Brown reminds us during a We Levitate listening party:

“With the work that with do with Black girls in SOLHOT, we have a lot of joy and celebration and celebration is a hard discourse to traverse--for people to take you seriously unless you are a man in a patriarchal position of power and privilege but otherwise it just looks like you’re having too much fun instead of doing serious intellectual engagement. We know that this is a lie. Naive it ain’t, we done struggled and tried. I think that is what’s super important is that we don’t necessarily see ourselves as martyrs of the academy.”

We know celebration through our practice of doing Black girlhood in all of its complexity, by being with and remembering Black girls in celebration. I wanted to hear what the band (We Levitate- Dr. B., Porshé and Jessica) in this moment, had to say about celebration, about art and critique, about how we might love each other more deeply, more fiercely. Particularly, this need to love each other more deeply came during a moment where We Levitate was attempting to heal from SOLHOT organizational heartbreaks, while also experiencing the death of two parents. We

²⁰ Finney, The National Book Award Acceptance Speech for Poetry (Nov., 16, 2011)

continued to learn and sound our choice and desire to be together, creating something that might free us all.

Meditation/Crossing: Always, Already Present & Never Alone

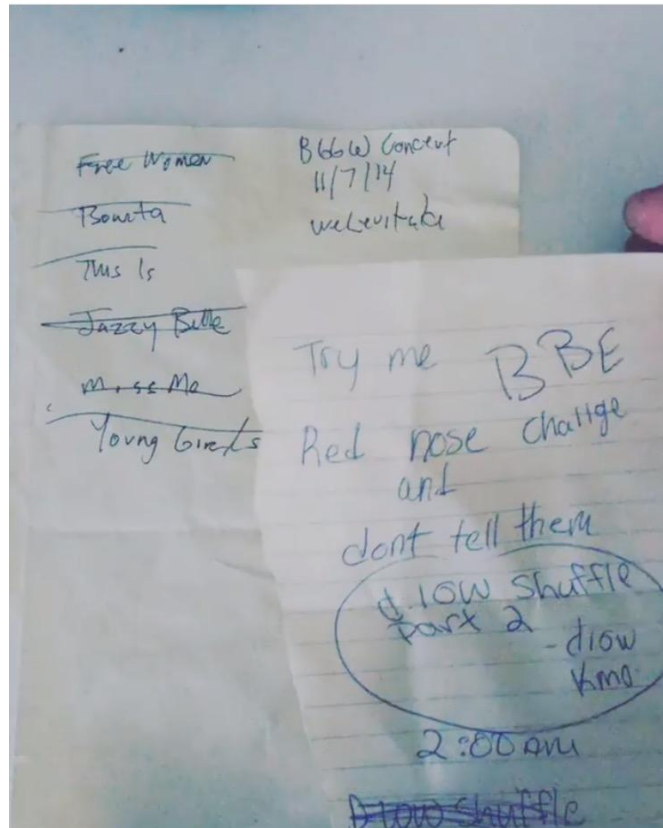
*“Okay so/ in case all else fails/ and it probably will/
I just want to say/ I am always already present and
I am not alone²¹”*

One of my very first experiences working with analog SOLHOT, face to face was during Black Girl Genius Week (BGGW), a week-long campaign that interrogates racialized and gendered articulations of genius that began in 2014. Later, I learned it was a planned funeral. My mother planned her homegoing arrangements that same year. In an imaginative and celebratory sense, homegoing meant celebration, moving forward, to another existence, existences. In celebration of the life of my mother, SOLHOT asked what I needed. To be honest, that was one of the first times I'd even thought about what I needed. I know I needed to show up and be present for organizing SOLHOT presents: Black Girl Genius Week later that year and every year, for that matter.

²¹ lyrics from “We’re Here To Celebrate (We Levitate Special)”, *Don’t Ever Forget It* (2016) curated by DJ B.E. aka LOVENLOOPS. This song is a collaboration with We Levitate (Beez, Pretty Black, Queen Jessica, beat made by DJ B.E. (me)) and features vocal samples of an Angela Davis, Melanie Cervantes, Robin Kelley and Fred Moten titled, “Abolition & The Radical Imagination.”

Okay so
in case all
else fails
and it probably
will/ I just
want to say
that ~~the~~ I am
always already
~~always~~ present
and I am
not alone.

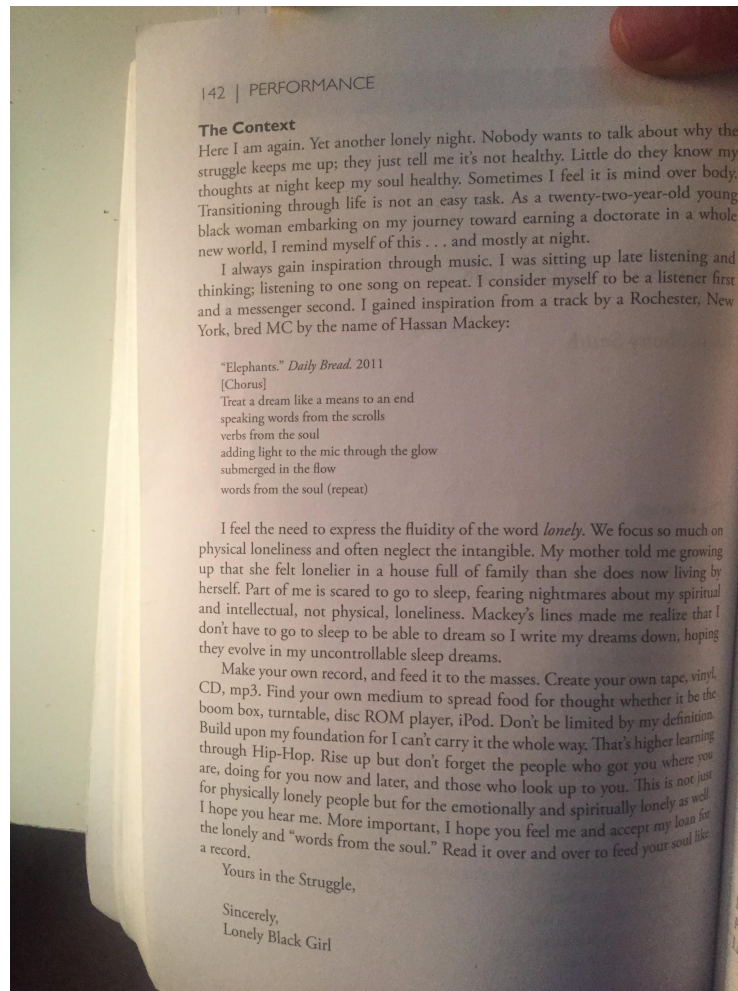
(Figure 1: Written words from "Here to Celebrate (We Levitate Special), Summer 2016)



(Figure 2: We Levitate set list for Black Girl Genius Week 2014; DJ requests from the girls for SOLHOT dance party, November 2014)

During BGGW, along with studio sessions, teach-ins, kick-backs, and music-videos, we had sessions at a local middle school. I had forgotten the music once and I wasn't going to let my homegirls down. To close out our week, we had a dance party in SOLHOT and I learned something about being a DJ in a space where Black girls see it as theirs, where Black girlhood is celebrated in all of its complexity. The hip-hop purist DJ's, mostly men, swear by not taking requests during their DJ set. Black girls teach me to resist patriarchal dance party politics that don't listen to Black girls, don't hear what Black girls' want to hear, don't move to what Black girls want move. The girls came ready with their song requests to move and dance to together, to celebrate. The band, We Levitate, had a set list ready to sing love songs and celebrate our collective genius during our concert to close BGGW. Our subversion and rebalancing of power

comes in our belief of the dream that we are to celebrate and are not alone. I am learning that to homegirl means to, “remember all the ways they are not alone but connected to others, ancestors, kinfolk, spirits, and communities whose honor it is of to recall, respect and remember as part of the work of doing SOLHOT. To homegirl is to commit to a very since practice of remembering Black girlhood as way to honor oneself and to practice the selflessness necessary to honor someone else, remembered whole.



(Figure 3: Wish to Live, "Black Girl Night Talk", photo taken in reflection of Crossings on May 22nd, 2017)

On my return to Syracuse after BGGW 2014, I felt very lonely but I was not alone. During a teach-in that week, poet and homegirl Nikky Finney talked to us about what it meant to be a writer. She said "it's not just the writing, you are responsible for each other." Finney also told us that loneliness was a part of the work, strongly suggesting we find and hold our reliable people and find ways to make ourselves whole spaces that don't want all of us. I heard that. I felt that. A major shift on the voyage happens. I was reminded to not leave the arenas to those fools and to go where my reliable people are and committed to Black girlhood as collectivity. SOLHOT, which means analog in Illinois calls for me to come home and as I look back in full view, I'd be

remiss if I ignored the many calls of SOLHOT, particularly during my first few years in graduate school. Initially, I was embarrassed to go back and read “Black Girl Night Talk” (pictured above) featured in *Wish to Live: Hip Hop Feminism Pedagogy Reader*. I wrote this piece during an awkward insomniac night during my first year of graduate school while in Syracuse, New York. The things I did in the dark to understand that “my legacy of imagination is not lost” and that I was not alone turned into a performative piece in company of SOLHOT homegirls and Black girlhood studies scholars. *Wish to Live*, similar to *This Bridge Called My Back*, a space made to remember our collectivity, to reimagine ourselves and Black girlhood anew.²² When I relisten and cruise with “Here to Celebrate,” I am able to think about loneliness from a new connection, a new set of reconfigurations, a new site of accountability, a new source of power: US (Toni Cade Bambara, *This Bridge Called My Back*, p. vi).

My loneliness was not only about me, but political-- a symptom of systemic isolation of Black people and communities. In order to treat and heal the symptoms of isolation, I had to find ways to believe the dream is real, to make and choose SOLHOT as my reality of reliable people who were hell bent on knowing each other better and teaching each other our ways, to mutually and imperfectly care and cure each other into wholeness²³. Healing as practiced in SOLHOT is not linear, nor a one time deal, nor is loneliness something that goes away and might be experienced from time to time. Similar to Anzaldua (1983) “We are learning to depend more and more on our own sources for survival, learning not to let the weight of the burden, the bridge, break our backs” (p. v). I am having a full circle moment of Crossing, in the moment of writing this meditation. I am realizing that this whole time I've longed and dreamed with SOLHOT, of being

²² *Wish to Live*

²³ TCB

with homegirls asking important questions with no answers in sight, still asking nonetheless. While living in Syracuse, I did the best I could to find others taking serious the study of Black girlhood celebration as an organizing construct for making spaces for and with Black girls. During my time in Syracuse, I was able to lead my own Black girl centered sessions with Black girls in a local English high school classroom, work with the Dark Girls Program, seeking to work with Black girls and find ways to organize with SOLHOT. I realized that what I was missing was a face-to-face experience of homegirling with other Black women interested in creating intergenerational spaces with Black girls.

Being present for analog SOLHOT meant listening and opening myself up to the lessons that come while making space for Black girlhood celebration with Black girls. For one, SOLHOT has taught me the transformative power of redemption, forgiveness and friendship, of having your homegirls' back, forever and ever, even through heartbreak. Homegirls²⁴ that organize with SOLHOT have taught me through friendships, the ones we share with each other and have on our own, ways "...to depend more and more on our own sources for survival, learning not to let the weight of the burden, the bridge, break our backs" (Anzaldua, 1983; p. v). The burden of living under white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy for Black girls in SOLHOT often resurfaces as fighting in school and at home and typically empowerment programming, mentorship or anger management/therapy are suggested remedies (Brown, 2013).

In SOLHOT, we use creative means to address our collective concerns with each other and the world we live in. The girls often use our time as a space to creatively resolve their issues (Brown, 2013). For example, we created a song with the girls, in which they wrote and recorded about friendship, titled "SOLHOTFRIENDS."

²⁴Homegirls in this sense mean older, adult participants, graduate students, community members, artists.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_42oqxGzzXg&t=3s) Before our session that day, there had been an issue with one of the lil homie's and another student at the school. The girls brought energy from their 'fight'²⁵ to SOLHOT and we dedicated our afternoon to roleplaying difficult friendship scenarios. The scenarios took us through movement and imaginations that put us in practice of making difficult decisions for ourselves and friends, whether it be over a disagreement, jealousy, or resentment. The focus for the girls was how to be the best friend that they could be, how could they have their friends' backs, even in difficult situations, even when everything is telling them they shouldn't. After acting out and making decisions on what they might do in a tough situation with a friend, they used the studio time for the day to write a song about friendship. The first line they wrote and the song's chorus, "My friends got my back (my baccckkk) and that is a fact (a facccctt), forever and ever and that will be that"--open us up sonically to what Cherrie Moraga describes as, "stretch...or die" as a way to continue to refuse individualistic notions of relation and care. In conversation with me, SOLHOT homegirl and bandmate, Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown describes the girls' adlibs on "SOLHOTFRIENDS," "...as levitation; a learning of how not to die in a trap intended to capture Black girls' genius by separating us from each other." Black girls promising each other forever places Black girlhood outside of value, implicates us all, and turns suspension rhetoric into levitational practice, something other than what separates and punishes us for our complexities. The adlib "my backkkkk" then also becomes about trust, having your homegirls' back through it all. In this way SOLHOT creates a will to trust, "the girls have homegirls' (adult women) who they can trust, but also, they learn to trust other girls' and themselves." Our trust of each other as homegirls, the girls trust of each other, and their trust of homegirls is crucial to what we create and how we

²⁵ "Bad Days" Brown (2013), *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

build relationships in SOLHOT. Our music-making allows us to resound our trust for one another, to create a sound of trust amongst Black women and girls, defying stereotypes that Black girls do not know how to be friends with each other.

Meditation/Crossing: Trust & Risk

“Like Fred said, we’ve come to celebrate our very own, DJ. B.E. also known as Ebony. 2010 Beez linked us in and we’ve been sisters every since. She’s the only one that can call me sister...Mixing that theory and practice for our sonic pleasure. For our sonic pleasure.” - Pretty Black, We Levitate



(Figure 4: We Levitate Performance, Black Girl Night Class, Black Girl Genius Week 2014, date)

SOLHOT has taught me to rethink and know the trust and risk it takes to call someone your sister and also be willing and choosing to back it up with loving action and whole human celebration. I’m learning about trust, risk and taking care from being in relationship with Black

girls and women in SOLHOT. I am learning to trust that I am not alone and to listen and hold promises made so that they continue to move me, move us. I am learning about the trust it takes to allow someone to call you sister in a world where all of us ain't real. With great risk, care and trust comes joy; joy in a practice of listening, that I know to be true because of collective Black girlhood and radical #bandbae love. Often times risk, care and trust comes with great fear and pain of how deep the love can go. The joy, along with the pain cannot be forgotten; with it comes great transformation, connection, and intimacy that resists systemic ideologies and practices designed to separate us, that keeps us from drowning in resentment, that holds our contradictions without running away.

Through SOLHOT, we/I know intimate fears, pains, and joys that come with knowing and organizing with Black women and girls complexly. To keep choosing each other and SOLHOT in spite of the pain and fears of organizing under current systems of inequality is the dream we wish and continue to live. In a personal letter, Cherrie Moraga (1981) writes, "Barbara says, 'it's about who you can sit down to a meal with, who you can cry with, and whose face you can touch'" (p.xvii). With our meals, tears and touch, we dream of and build bridges that articulate a Black girlhood, frame of organizing that is complex and recognize how we contradict each other (to be honest) in the most human possible ways. With great faith and unwavering love, we keep cruising and Crossing, crossing imaginary borders, creating movement that surely saves our lives over and over again.

One of the ways I have learned the importance of trust and risk is through organizing and performance with SOLHOT and We Levitate. Moving to Illinois with no financial support would have not been possible without testing our love, trust and risk for each other or our obsession with organizing spaces with Black girls for Black girlhood celebration, knowing that whatever

lessons needed to be learned and experiences that needed to be had, would happen. Our trust and risk dates far back and important to reflect on the ways we have put faith in each other and our work. The girls in analog SOLHOT trust us to show up, bring snacks and meet them where they/we are. To be trusted to bring sound, music to dance, create, and record with, intuitively digital²⁶ by design in celebration of Black girlhood with Black girls is next level commitment to the living. Here, I remember the trust that fueled the beat for our “SOLHOTFRIENDS” track:

*Kodak Black type beat
When everything is telling us
We shouldn't
Trust and risk means listening to Black girls
what they want to hear/feel
without reservation
Squad, posse song
Smiles wides, joyful and entangled
A SOLHOT trap sound
Trust means having our backs forever and ever
That's a fact.*

²⁶ We Levitate's exploration of “doing digital wrongly” calls us to be present in our intuition. Our digital and music-making practice is made possible by intuitive design.

*live libations
like rum
pepsi and wings
so good you gotta do it
again and again” - Queen Jessica, We
Levitate*

Again and again, over and over, we want to be possessed by this thing we call levitation by way of SOLHOT. Nikkey Finney reminds us in her 2011 National Book Award Speech that, “repetition is holy.” We Levitate, knows and does repetition as variation, variation as levitation, levitation as Black girlhood, as collectivity, practicing over and over again the ways in which we know and want to be well and together, because it’s so good and sacred. Sometimes we make and bring goodness and love/live libations to each other in the form chicken wings and our We Levitate specials on ice.²⁷ Sometimes we have tattoo parties and get Black girl genius tattoos that serve as a way to know each other and the ways we want to be well. Going down the same road, over and over, to get to us- leads in Green St.

Track 2: [“Green St.”](#)

“Green St.” featured on We Levitate’s How I Feel EP is one of those special tracks that we weren’t too sure about before our studio session. The beat, a LOVENLOOPS creation for/with We Levitate, swings with sampled squealing horns and alluring vocals that loop over and over again. When we played to beat to write with it, the first thing I thought about was moving to Champaign and picking up my boxes at the Fedex on Green Street, so I wrote and shared with the band, “I got my life in boxes/Just cruising down Green. St.” Our writing process allows of time and space to run ideas across each other and piece them together at the end.

Green Street is a major street that stretches the length of the university also a crossroad

27

where many SOLHOT homegirls intersect wide and far. We recorded this track and the EP a couple months upon me arriving in town. In retrospect, almost 2 years later after recording the track, performing it, discussing it with the band, and checking in with myself, I think there is a lot there. For one, I'd only visited Green St. before moving. To visit and to live in local proximity to SOLHOT and Green St. meant something different; felt different. This time, I had a different view of Green St. and I was challenged to listen and know more about the bands pathways down Green Street. In particular, We Levitate challenged my knowings of Green St. and notions of home, place and its fundamentally relational and political nature. This relationship as sounded in "Green St." is dynamic and always changing. One thing that remains are the relationship with people and the memories of being together and get together even with we "*got some places to me, like to the building where they hate me, hate her, her us, hate them.*"

Now, I had to think about doing SOLHOT as a resident, living in the same local as homegirls and where analog SOLHOT takes place. It was no longer just the street I went to pick up my boxes from after moving to Illinois. We made a moment on "Green St." that required me to think bigger than me. I'd have to face all that comes with moving to Illinois and sometimes this facing provoke resistance and openness to the ways SOLHOT would continue to change our lives, individually and collectively. *My life in boxes, just cruising* signifies the uncertainty and mystery of our paths and futures, to have faith in our individual and group processes. Our cruisings signify a chose to be together, doing the work we know to do, on the many and various paths SOLHOT may take. Though we all know Green Street (literally and figuratively), we all arrive and meet each other at different points based on our personal histories and experiences. Without making "Green St." with We Levitate, I wouldn't know this road as a crossroad, a border to be undertaken in criticality and celebration, to be cruised in rejection of anti-

relationality, and remember ordinary Black life on campus across time. This knowing and unknowing of place and space through “Green St.” meant choosing a particular care for the land and the people that build it, make it and nurture each other. This care for me was built through my relationship with SOLHOT and We Levitate and making other relationships with local organizing efforts. Meditations on “Green St” moved me to remember the specifics of doing Black girlhood in central, Illinois after moving from Syracuse, NY.

Meditation/Crossing: Moving Towards Home(s) & Each Other

“We’re going to fly away/ glad you’re going my way.”

I have dreamed of bridges and roads that get me closer and face to face with SOLHOT. Gloria Anzaldua, in her foreword to the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* asks us, “Why not learn to bare baskets of hope love, self nourishment and to step lightly?” If I could describe what levitation means, it surely has a lot to do with hope, love, nourishment and stepping lightly, flying, moving, pivoting towards each other as connected and interdependent people invested in celebrating Black girlhood and Black girls in all of its complexity. The kind of levitation that is reliable, that feels like relativity, interdependence, the way June Jordan (1985) writes about it:

“My own motion
does not satisfy tonight and later
in the daylight I’ll be speeding through the streets
a secret messenger a wakeup agent walking
backwards maybe walking sideways
as well as every other whichway
in your absolute
direction” (Jordan, 1985, p. 124).



(Figure 9: Photo taken with personal iphone. May 26, 2017 at 2:49pm)

Every possible which way towards the direction of SOLHOT, in an analog sense, meant meeting myself whole on Green Street, taking the time without rushing to feel it, arrive at it, and remember where we meet and cross. This feeling is in the freedom of boundary crossing, again and again. This time from another space and time zone, taking a cruise to reflect on what I'd learned since moving and living here with analog SOLHOT. For one, cruising is surely made for love, for resonant love, "as conjured in SOLHOT in the name of Black girlhood means aesthetic valuations of Black girlhood as fluid premised on what those who show up says it means, how it harms and loves them. The "us" is who shows up to make space to celebrate Black girlhood. This is neither a biological argument nor one attached to chronological age. The "us" obscures

Black girls and them we love, but that's our preference." (p. 19).

Meditation/Crossing: What Gets Us Through

*"Rush, rush
everyone going somewhere important
than me
rush rushing
if you must
turkey and cheese, 5.49
rum and coke, 2 bucks
what gets me through this is cheaper than food
i'll take two
i'll take two"*

Sometimes the only thing that gets homegirls through are our being together with our favorite vices, which may or not be seen as respectable or professional. While doing SOLHOT, we take and teach courses with Black feminist pedagogies to most white and Asian students, we work, we mother, we daughter, we help out with family and so on. There is always somewhere to go and someone to be, some form of capitalism demanding we labor on its behalf and not love. I learned that "I'll take two" means showing up at our favorite local bar/spot to make space as homegirls and graduate students to vent and laugh and be together. It also means showing up at the local park with the squad to walk two laps around. Repeat.

"I remember cleaning up. I don't know if you remember that but Mom and Dad would put on records, some Grover Washington, Anita Baker and we would clean the apartment like it was a palace. You know mom ain't have no dirt but I loved it. I remember thinking that, that was what bonded us" - Big Sister, "Don't Ever Forget It"

Meditation/Crossing: (Un)knowable Terrain

*“Rollin through prairie land
caring because I built this land
First here in 94’
My crew called The Rollaz
would be on green
at the Burger King
or stay checking
for Zorbas
back since 05’
and now I’m trying to avoid her
because she entirely too busy
plus they built it up
can’t afford her
I thought Follett hit the wallet”*

We Levitate’s experiences with and on Green St. stretch wide and far. I’ve learned what it means to living on and with a land, with people dedicated to making space for Black girlhood. We build it up. Living in Illinois while doing SOLHOT, making the EP analog/digital wrongly style, person, face to face, makes the experience something in particular. After the process of creating it, the process of remembering what we built and remembering us looks and sounds like performance, travel, memorizing works, practice, sharing with loved ones, going to analog SOLHOT, recalling memories across space and time captured by lyrics, the “How I Feel” video, and countless meditations on our many Crossings. Our making of “Green St.” allows one to see our paths on this road from different times and places as always interconnected and met with related obsessions with Black girlhood and doing SOLHOT.

Track 3: [“Janhke Rd. Wit My Cuzzos”](#)

In SOLHOT, the Crossings and crossroads represent the ways in which our personal histories, life experiences, family backgrounds, and ongoing commitments intersect with SOLHOT. When I remember the ways the Crossings lead me to parts of my personal history that

I may have never imagined mattered, until the time it did matter, in and because of commitments with SOLHOT. Family is of major importance to SOLHOT. Our many familial and political connections to home and family are a big part of how we bond and get to know each other deeply. It is through SOLHOT that we know sharing families and reaching far and wide to extend of experiences of home and family are important and also political. It is it through SOLHOT rituals, conversations, grieving, healing and face-to-face connections that I am able to remember and be connected to home(s) and families in the most restorative of ways. Doing SOLHOT intentionally, brought me to my cousin who believes in transformative potential in creating something together, to remember each other and our connection, to cross borders, to do Black girlhood celebration, to learn each other and get to know each other better. I reunited with my cousin for the first time in 10 years when my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. This unsettling memory along with doing SOLHOT challenged me to remember and create experiences with my cousin that meant moving to Richmond, a homeplace that greatly informs my experiences of growing up as a Black girl, sound and music.

It wasn't until a cousin on my father's side of the family connected us that we realized we lived on opposite sides of Jahnke Rd. for almost 3 years. I'd also been away at graduate school and my mother still lived off of this road where'd we'd lived since my father passed 10 years earlier. When I first talked to my cousin, my mother didn't want us talking but we insisted on maintaining our relationship. Shatisha, the oldest of two cousins and children of my mother's oldest sister, is teaching me a lot about the complexities of Black girlhood, and memory. "Jahnke Rd. Wit My Cuzzos" is a sonic sighting of our connection to a crossroad that we crossed to get to each other a road that included a fierce knowing and doing of Black girlhood. The process of creating "Jahnke Rd." was as an intentional doing of SOLHOT, using voice, art and spirit toward

to the benefit of collective Black girlhood everywhere. Cruising, as a collective mode of travel and movement comes up in this track, too. There is more to the story, let's cruise...

Meditation/Crossing: There is no chance that we will fall apart.

“Family on this one. We don't care how you feeling.” - Cousin

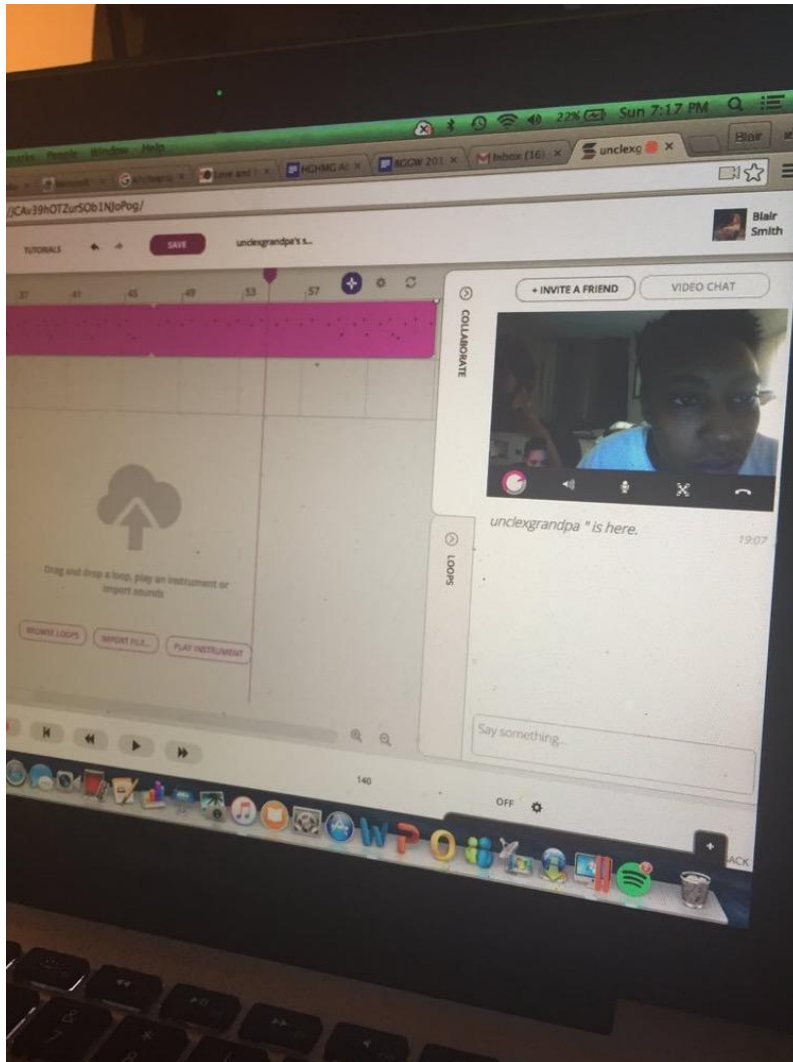
“Hey Blair, It's Gran, didn't want anything. Just calling to see how you were doing and to say I love you” -Gran

In 2014, We Levitate experienced the slow and premature death of two parents, both from cancer. The same year my cousin read the *Wish to Live* Reader as expressed how she resonated with Black girlhood. For her, it meant and continues to mean the power to create and be apart of something bigger than herself. I'd say the same for myself. She told me about a story of her high school basketball teammate and best friend who was killed by her boyfriend and how all of her teammates have matching tattoos in her honor. I couldn't help but think about how they already knew Black girlhood, how something as ordinary as getting a tattoo to remember a homegirl, was also organizing our freedom and healing.

She heard our music digitally and connected virtually with Black Girl Genius Week and expressed how we had always wanted to make music. *Hightimes productions*, a perpetual sighting of Black girl genius (Brown, 2009), intentional and digital in its production, came out of collective energy and potential of Black Girl Genius Week. My cousin started to send me all types of music that she recorded from a broken Google chrome computer and a free online music creating social network, called Sound Trap.²⁸ I'd get an email from her almost everyday that'd say, “unclexgrandpa [my cousins Sound trap handle] wants to create music with you.” The

²⁸ <https://www.soundtrap.com/>

cruising and sound trapping has always been about the US and so intentionally SOLHOT in the ways my cousin insists on creating and celebrating Black girlhood, a being together, by any means.



(Figure : Making music on soundtrap.com with my cousins making music, 2016)

Making a decision to reconnect with family and move back to Virginia, the place of my childhood and college days, to write and work on my dissertation meant experiencing and doing SOLHOT in more ways that didn't and doesn't always feel certain. It also is a reflection of this project as a living and loving document, that literally moves with me and also stays. The

transition from doing analog SOLHOT to now living in another state miles away, surely has been a process of continuing to choose SOLHOT, moving but not leaving a place. For me, this has meant choosing and doing digital and intentional SOLHOT and making time to travel to Illinois to make space for Black girlhood with SOLHOT when it is possible. Another thing for sure is the work that we do to make space for Black girls as a foundation in Illinois travels with us wherever we go and evolves even as we continue to organize and think through ways to make SOLHOT possible with Black girls in Illinois. Being in Richmond, a shift in place, space, and time (zones), creates a new landscape for me to reflect on our experiences and continue to make more moments, wide and far.

*“There is no chance that we will fall apart
There is no chance
There are no parts”* (Jordan, 1994, p. 61).



(Figure : My cousin taking a picture of a Black Girl Genius Week sticker that has been on their front screen door since the first Black Girl Genius Week in 2014, Richmond, Virginia)

Quantum bandbae travels or something like Jordan's "New Physicality of Long Distance Love," doing SOLHOT in multiple spaces/places through various mediums, aren't new to us and this fact of the matter and choosing is reassuring to our insistence on being together, writing, creating and doing scholarship and art for and with each other, with Black girls. Physical distance informs us as a collective of individual artists, scholars, professors and researchers in ways that keep us on our toes and in touch with each other--to be well. We continue to find ways, like keeping in touch and writing through walkie talkie app, Marco Polo and organizing performances and time for us to be together in physical space. It is a choose to keep creating moments and making connections, to hold on and let go of SOLHOT in ways that might keep us

whole and well. At times it is a chose to live with and hold our various contradictions, without running away. We don't have all the answers and are figuring it out along the way. Figuring it out, at this point, while in Virginia, for me means staying committed to loved ones, SOLHOT, and our work with Black girls, communities and students everywhere. The dream here is that we might take our time, in Toni Cade Bambara's sense of taking time to learn how to practice freedom daily wherever we might land on the map at any given point, to organize spaces and ourselves with Black girls and community that keep in mind, "the way we construct and the pedagogies we use to put curricula into practice tell a story--foregrounding the links between [our various] sites, locations and the production of knowledge."



(Figure: This is a photo of a refrigerator poem that my cousin left on the fridge. I woke up to it my first morning living in Virginia. August, 2017).

I am thinking about SOLHOT homegirl Nikky Finney’s (2013) description and decision to leave the University of Kentucky after teaching and writing there for over twenty years to move closer to her family home in South Carolina as a “daughter’s decision.” I am in no way comparing or insinuating that my short life on this earth is similar to Nikky Finney’s but I use this thought to think about my connection to SOLHOT, to Black girlhood, to being a daughter and what it might mean to move back to Richmond, a homeplace, with myself as a Black daughter in mind and toe. The urgency and patience in Finney’s “A Daughter Goes Home” felt similar to the urgency and patience in Bambara’s fictional writings that speak to the need to take

our time and there being no time to waste (Gordon, 2007, p. 265).

In both cases, meeting of collective forms of time, Black family time, and individual forms of time, never linear, bring me to lessons and learning with SOLHOT that insist on collective time together and being connected to family and ancestors as a way to share what I know and love with the collective in the here and now. This time in a different physical location, doing SOLHOT has also taught me a particular practice of being present with family in ways that are complicated especially in a world fueled by anti-Blackness. The SOLHOT way of getting to know Black family means getting to know the people you love, blood, spiritual and chosen and loving them, remembering them fiercely as being a part of a beloved community.

One of the more public ways SOLHOT has organized our dreaming of worlds and gathered homegirls across the world to curate collective forms of time, is through Black Girl Genius Week (BGGW), a weeklong campaign of Black girlhood and voyage to Champaign-Urbana for a series of organized rituals, performances, concerts, teach-ins, dance and writing workshops, studio sessions, skill shares, homegirl kickbacks, private sessions at the local middle school and much more. To date, there have been a total of 3 BGGW's (November 3-8, 2014; February 22-27, 2016; October 21-28, 2016). BGGW is a space and time for Black girl artists and SOLHOT homegirls from around the world and the local community to use creative practice based in the everyday experience of Black girls to intently reimagine, celebrate, create culture and ideas and be free to express racialized, gendered articulations of genius as fully human, complex, beyond state violence and static biological identity categories.

During the October 2016 BGGW, we intimately discussed what it meant to be reliable and keep reliable people around. Poet Nikky Finney shared a story of a conversation she had with poet Lucille Clifton. Finney asked Clifton if she had ever been called a nigger before and if

this had made her want to fight. I know in that moment, I was thinking (and hoping) Clifton’s answer would be “yes, I wanted to fight (and sometimes I did)”. Clifton responded to Finney’s question with a no; she found those people (that would try to harm her) unreliable. Through this story, Clifton urged Finney to “keep reliable people around.” Finney learned a lesson about showing up whole, being seen, and knowing and keeping those who are reliable to show up with you.

As a follow-up, Finney asked us, “*Once you know who is reliable, then what? When you know someone is reliable you show up in a certain way.*” Following BGGW this fall and in continuation of our private sessions at a local middle school, I have been meditating on and thinking a lot about what it means to be reliable with SOLHOT. As I write with SOLHOT (music, songwriting, poetry, love letters, conference papers, publications, etc.) through my work as a graduate student, I am learning about writing (and creating) as a way to be reliable in SOLHOT and ultimately the world. I’ve always considered myself to be a writer (artist) but it wasn’t until I began to write and create closely with SOLHOT that it made sense why, what and with whom I need to write.

While living in Syracuse/Illinois and doing SOLHOT with people who were raised in that particular place, I learned that home in a political sense had less to do with the place and more to do with the people whom you are reliable to and whom are reliable to you. For me, a political home was found with SOLHOT and others who made me reliable to Black girls and making celebratory spaces for and with each other.

Meditation/Crossing: Grounded; Hunkering Down Together in Levitation

“Just cruisin down Jahnke lookin’ for the dank, yea.” - Cousin, “Jahnke Rd. With My Cuzzos (Don’t Ever Forget It)

“You’re cousin keeps us grounded.” - (personal message from Porshé)

I’d like to profess that cruising and Crossings, in many ways, keeps us grounded along our individual and collective journeys. This groundedness is part wreckless (Brown, 2014) and raunchy (Hernandez, 2016), a grounds that knows and intuitively speaks and lives our truths to power, like freestylin’ in the cypher for all the homegirls’, “School is jail!,” deviantly, refusing, while choosing to be present with each other in the moment. We honor Black girls’ deviance and our refusal of servitude as grounding us in the ways that we want to be well, the ways we create and imagine new worlds, for and with Black girls that might feel a lot less like jail, “enacting futures in the present that counter state power” (Munoz, p. 62).

When I was in high school, I was not physically in touch with my cousin. After reconnecting she told me about the basketball paper clippings she used to keep of me. I now know metaphysical interdependence and relationality in a way that even as I know it, still exceeds my comprehension, while keeping me grounded in personal and unified purpose. We might listen to “Jahnke Rd With My Cuzzos” and interpret in various ways. For the purposes of this meditation, I’d like to honor grounds for collective levitation, a crossing. Since living in Virginia and closer to birth family, ancestors (my parents in particular) sharing a living space with my cousin, organizing with SOLHOT in digitally and intentionally has kept me grounded on our journey and present, loving and learning, where I am now, in the analog, local sense in new ways. My cousin came up with *hiqhtimes productions* as a way to name a shared way of life and music making that saw our relationship as cousins as most important. When I asked her why she used the “q” instead of “g” to spell high, she explained that it just looked/felt better and she didn’t want people to only associate it with smoking weed. From there, we realized hiqhtimes

productions was actually about levitation, something like a call for *lifting time, a hunkering down, leaning hard into the high(s) with everything we have*²⁹, intentional Black girlhood practice of celebration that remembers and moves us together and values/chooses our interconnectedness as necessary for our ascension. I cannot confirm what my relationship to SOLHOT and family would be without this grounding. I do know that SOLHOT has made me a wiser big cousin, person, listener, lover and that my cousin keeps me wise and choosing SOLHOT in the ever present moments as we continue to evolve and bloom, *until the next lifting time*.

BGG



(Figure: My cousin wearing a SOLHOT We Levitate shirt circa 2014.)

²⁹See Nikky Finney (2011) *Brown Girl Levitation, 1962-1989* in *Head Off and Split* for poetic reference to grounding in Black girl everyday realities, genius, joy and togetherness.

Discussion: Getting together to drive this thing³⁰.

*I want to go there
To the places they say we shouldn't be with the
people they say we shouldn't love
doing the things we shouldn't love to do
Loving imperfect people, imperfectly
Holding on for the ride and never letting go
They think we insane
And I want them to
take me to the SOLHOT asylums
On a space rocket
No endings in sight
Supersonic cruisings and Crossings
I seek asylum in US, in Black girlhood as an
organizing construct
In Saving Our Lives and Hearing Our Truths
over and over til the wheels fall off and even when
there ain't no more wheels - Reflections on
cruising with SOLHOT in preparation for our San
Diego performance and studio session, Summer
2017*

In 2017, we performed in San Diego and decided to each prepare to share a piece of written work about our work with SOLHOT. I knew that this would be one of the last performances together before I moved away from Illinois and I wanted to capture some of the emotions and intentional dreams for the future, our future together, and individually, as artists/scholars committed to making space to celebrate Black girlhood in all of its complexity. There we engaged communities, scholars and artists in critical conversations with performance and music-making about our practice of doing digital wrongly that offers alternative sonic registers of Black girlhood. I present this analysis and meditation knowing there are many important and needed listenings that might get us to hear, feel, touch and do Black girlhood

³⁰ This title is a spin on a lesson from *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* (2008) by Kristen Hunter Lattany. In her remembrance of Cade, she writes “Know where you are coming from. Know where you are going. Get some folks to ride with you. And drive this thing!” (p. 141)

differently, with Black girls; that might also allow us to tell even more truths together and know each other more deeply.

Cruising and crossing, as sounded and practiced in SOLHOT is one of infinite alternative practices of getting together to imagine our world differently. They are the points on our journeys where we make space and create art when we are attempting to understand our theories and practices better. SOLHOT's cruising and Crossings, as sounds of Black girlhood, freedom and genius are made audible through SOLHOT, reveal the varied imaginations, potentialities, articulations and mediums within SOLHOT and Black girlhood studies (p. 18). It is through our variation that we grapple with precarity, while maintaining a personal and relational commitment to the labor of Black girlhood as an organizing construct as practiced in SOLHOT, revealing the digital, analog, and intentional as thematic principles in preference to conceptualizations of Black girlhood based on a fixed biological identity. The tracks made audible and remembered in this chapter reveal digital, analog, and intentional SOLHOT as distinct but related mediums through which we create an alternative future by living the future we want to see, while inhabiting its failure, because it probably will. By theorizing from our songs and praxis, we reimagine relationship notions in the academy and communities determined to separate Black women and girls and seek to undermine Black girl knowledge and collective power. Cruising and Crossings entail a burning patience to choose Black girlhood, freedom, and genius as to build better unearthings that can only be lived, whose texture consists of honesty and discipline which entail the desire to forge structures of engagement, which embrace the fragile, delicate undertaking of revealing the beloved to herself and to one another (Alexander, 2005, p. 18).

The ways in which we articulate cruising in our everyday complex speech and alternative collective acts as practiced in SOLHOT offer us ways to (and asks us to) remember each other

and our Crossings, to remember and envision what might happen when Black girls and women come together to create, to articulate a non-static gendered and racialized identity. We cruise in order to see ourselves as/in/with SOLHOT (whether analog, digital or intentional), complex and ever changing, growing and dependent on saving our lives and hearing each our truths. Cruising, in the name of Black girlhood, challenges us to reconsider the ways in which ideas of identity, celebration, freedom and genius are amplified when Black girlhood is activated as a collective organizing construct, rather than a single static identity, that grapples with precarity of capitalism while staying committed to the labor of creating alternative worlds. Cruising defined and sounded in SOLHOT, challenges scholars of Black girlhood to reconsider ideas such as Black girlhood, from a renewed sense, carefully cruising for the varied potentialities of Black girlhood as more of an organizing construct, a praxis, than a static identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that cruising and Crossings as sounds made in SOLHOT are important to Black girlhood and the ways we remember our relationships and making of power together. To demonstrate cruising and Crossings, I used a meditative analysis to make connections between what is sounded in our music-making by tracing self-movement, saving, remembrance and sound creation from my time and organizing with SOLHOT. In conclusion, I wonder what it might mean to move towards home(s) that are feminist, historical and political, stretching our energies toward interconnectedness, friendships and having each other's backs, to insist on not being alone. In the next chapter, I explore what these particular moves and stretches toward each other might mean through an exploration of taking care as sounded in our music. I also explore taking care as a practice of collectivity that in an extension of and grounded in Black feminist organizing song, poetics and art making practices. This grounding in Black

feminisms is integral to sustaining our relationships and Black girlhood organizing in SOLHOT.

Chapter Five “Care to Take Some Time...”

Poems/Songs Dedicated to SOLHOT, We Levitate, All Things Love and Dreaming With

“The question is not an issue of self-care but being in love with homegirls who can love you back religiously/The question is not about them who get on your nerves doing the work but rather the violence you are complicit in when you don’t share what was given to you”- Beez, “Church, We Levitate feat Homegirls

*“Care to take some time to reevaluate your life/
So that you can do the work of taking care of others/
You never know, never
Know when it will be your turn...” - Pretty Black, “Take Care”, We Levitate, How I Feel EP
(2016)*

Introduction

Organizing SOLHOT with Black girls and homegirls has introduced me to a practice and theory of care that values what we can create with and for each other artists in community with each other. In the song lyrics above Pretty Black and Beez (also bandmates), theorize and sing taking care as something you do with your homegirls, as a practice of sharing what you know, as being in service to others. In SOLHOT, one of the ways we practice care for and with each other by making music and sounds that reimagine and celebrates Black girlhood, that celebrates the collectivity of Black girls and women across generations. As I began to think through and write this chapter, I made connections with SOLHOT’s practices of care to genealogies of Black feminist artist politics of care, particularly care expressed through song and poetry that focused on being in love and relation with each other as Black woman writers/organizers versus an individual identity politics. Following a Black feminist poetics and politics of care allowed for a layered analysis expressed through poetry, while remembering a lineage of art by Black women as a way to love and remember each other and invoke practical, joyful and loving solutions for confronting oppressions.

In this chapter, I analyze the sounds and music of SOLHOT We Levitate's archive/repertoire similar to Chapter 4, which explored cruising and Crossings as sounds of collective Black girlhood. Here, I explore *taking care* as an organized sound and archive/repertoire of collective Black girlhood through performative text. This chapter will include "*Care To Take Some Time...*" as a poetic (auto) ethnography and creative analytic dedicated to SOLHOT, We Levitate, and all things love and dreaming with/in the group/sound. Through poetic and performative textual analysis and exploration of SOLHOT songs, I contend that taking care, as sounded in SOLHOT, demonstrates and extends a vital lineage and practice of Black feminist care poetics and Black girlhood celebration that fiercely holds and surrenders to collective, us, we, the group, so that we might create a more human and caring world together. This holding and taking care of the collective reveals itself in what we are about, how we do Black girlhood as specifically practiced in SOLHOT. Collectivity that centers and remembers our relationships is always important to taking care. Taking care shows up in how we arrive to analog SOLHOT, what we allow ourselves to share what was given to us with the group, grieving our parents together, how intently we do the batty dance, and so much more.

Significantly, it is our sound and our songs resounded, that get me to the Black girlhood analytics on cruising, crossing and taking care. I choose song, our songs to get me to analytical insights and poetics in this chapter as a way of continuing a practice of rethinking Black girlhood, organizing relationships in the context of Black feminism, hip-hop feminism (Brown, 2013), sonic/poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2017). Much like artist, activist and group member of Black woman's acapella group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Bernice Johnson Reagon, I chose SOLHOT's song as the method and poetry/song as the analytic as they are something that, "...not only pull[s] us together, but [becomes] our articulate collective testimony to all who

stood [and are still standing] within the sound” (Reagon, 1980). Keeping our sound as something that pulls us together and articulates our collective testimony in mind, I write my analysis as poetry/song that is imaginative of our collective possibilities and dreams.

This chapter and our songs resounded to make sense of our relationships are not be possible without SOLHOT’s undying love and permission. I rely on poetry/song made with SOLHOT We Levitate and Black feminist writers/ poetic texts. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, Black feminist poetics texts, dedications, love poems to other Black woman writers that I write with include works from: Sonia Sanchez’s *Like the Singing Coming Off the Drums* (1998), *Shake Loose My Skin* (1999) and *Homegirls and Handgrenade* (1984); Audre Lorde’s *The Cancer Journals* (1980); June Jordan’s *Haruko/Love Poems* (1994) and *Passion* (1980); *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara* (2008); Sweet Honey in the Rock’s *We Who Believe in Freedom* (1993) and *B’lieve I’ll Run On...See What the Ends Gonna Be* (1978). In particular, I am interested in the ways the latter poets and texts wrote for, with and about each other through song, poetry, journal writings and essays. While researching love poems and writing published by the latter Black woman poets/writers, I was in search of texts written for and about each other that speak to the creative ways they cared for and were in relation to each other. Black feminist creative genealogies of care is evident in the poems and writing dedicated to one another and other Black women poets, artists, feminists and organizers during their time. For example, both Sonia Sanchez and June Jordan wrote and publish love songs/poems for Black women’s acapella group Sweet Honey in the Rock. Each of these artists’ shared stories, songs and poems about activist, singer, Fannie Lou Hamer. The stories they shared about each other always had something to do with art, struggle and the Black relationality of it all. A few of the poems were then sung and performed by Sweet Honey. In the particular

poetic texts I use, Jordan, Sanchez, Sonia Sanchez, and Sweet Honey in the Rock share stories of their relationships, lessons learned, and calls for freedom by honoring, writing and singing for each other.

While doing research on the poetic relationships between Black woman artists and poets, I made connections to SOLHOT We Levitate as an extension of Black women and feminist art/politics that use song and writing to practice relationality and working across difference to fight oppressions and celebrate each other. In doing so, we also refuse a Black girlhood that relies heavily on biological identity and instead value Black girlhood with Black girls as something that gets up together to take on serious practices of celebration and freedom. I rely heavily on texts, songs, and poetry written and published by Sweet Honey, Sanchez, and Jordan to guide me through poetic inquiry and analysis of We Levitate songs. Through close re-listening of We Levitate songs and rereading of Black feminist poetry written for other Black women artists, I create poetry based on themes found within our songs that contend with care and dedicated to each other. I contend that it is taking care as sounded in SOLHOT that demonstrates the ways collective sounds of Black girlhood are an extension of Black feminist poetics/politics of care and move us to sing, imagine and love each other and Black girls more intently and gracefully. Later in the chapter, in a discussion section, I explore poetic analysis as learned collectively through Black feminist poetics as a way to explore the felt life of Black feminism and Black girlhood and important to feminist research in education and women's studies.

Significance: What We Mean When We Sing Take Care?

I don't remember the exact way that "Take Care" as a song came about but I do remember that moment, one that we made, as a band, in Jessica's apartment (also where I lived)

in November of 2015. I had only been living in Champaign, IL by the way of Syracuse, NY for a couple of months. On this particular day, in the studio with SOLHOT We Levitate as we embarked on creating our first project together with me as DJ/producer, I remember being nervous about what I could produce or share so intimately and face-to-face. Coming for Black Girl Genius Week and sending music digitally was one form of intimacy that I was accustomed to. Care in the context of what I had learned with SOLHOT had most to do with sharing what I know and creating something with homegirls that contributes to changing our worlds.

That August, I moved to Illinois to be closer to my lover at the time (also bandbae) and do analog SOLHOT. This was the year after my mother passed and making a tough decision that intellectually and creativity I desired to physically move on from Syracuse and work face-to-face with SOLHOT. I remember thinking about taking care as a concept and the words my mother always spoke and wanted to speak on her hospital bed. I remember bandbae, Porshé's reflections about her father who she had lost the same year to cancer. Writing, producing and recording "Take Care" was a practice of grieving our parents. Take care was something my mother said to me often before leaving or after our long-distance phone conversations. I knew that her expression and concern to take care, as a Black mother to a Black daughter meant she wanted me to be in community with people that took care of me, who loved me and let me love them religiously no matter the pain or struggle, that I could grief with, and people that I chose to be with because my heart desired it. I am imagining and living with the collective, taking care as more than a cliché closing or farewell, and also a deep intentional practice of dreaming, searching, moving towards and with SOLHOT as a continuation of our mother's dreams (Black feminist foremothers' included).

After she passed, I was obsessively in search of the group, and collective care that would hold me through grief. Even while living in New York when my mother passed, SOLHOT taught me how to hold on and let go without running away. My decision to move to central Illinois to practice freedom, dream and be with SOLHOT was more like running towards dreams, coalition work with Black girls, and freedom. This move halfway across the country was as a way to live with the grief of my parent's death by sharing joy and what was given to me by my mother. Continuing to obsessively choose, cruise and cross with SOLHOT is taking care. My imaginative and literal move towards analog SOLHOT as a practice of taking care, was also due to a need to be with people who do Black girlhood, as a continuation of Black feminist art and politics, as collective freedom beyond biological identity, engaging young people and communities.

To uncover and analyze "taking care" as sounded in SOLHOT, first I provide further theoretical and methodological context for looking to particular SOLHOT We Levitate songs and poems/songs of Black feminist poets, songwriters of the 1970s-90s, to help craft poetry dedicated to doing SOLHOT and being in conversation with Black woman feminist poet foremothers. This context further grounds the connection I seek to make through writing poetry and songs for the group, for Black girlhood, for SOLHOT, for lovers; that poems/songs/love letters are Black feminist intuitive and performative acts of taking time to imagine new worlds and dream with, ultimately, taking care together. Next, I provide the performative text written as a poem book, which I have separated into three sections named after the title of three We Levitate song explored through poetry. Within each section are a series of poems/songs that remember and intentionally dreams and remembers self in relation to the group. Black feminist poets' writings on love and poetry, for, about and with each other serve as a means to be in critical conversation with Black feminist poetic genealogies of care, SOLHOT, Black girlhood,

and organizing our dream worlds. At the center of my historical poetic/song analysis in this chapter--- Sweet Honey in the Rock, June Jordan and Sonia Sanchez--love and care act as a collective, relational and imaginative doing that transcends individualistic and violent efforts of the state to separate us insists on joy and celebration while also critical of power systems.

My analysis is decidedly poetic, performative, and arts-based. For example, I utilize We Levitate's song "Take Care", experiences doing SOLHOT and memories of making the song to prompt myself into poetic song writing, reflection and meditation that merges theories/words from our songs, Black feminist poetics of love and care; and SOLHOT memories and proclamations towards the end of the world and new world creating (da Silva, 2014). The goal with each poem is to reveal the relativity, sociality and care of a collective Black girlhood revealed in our songs, that transcends individualistic self-care concerns. Each section includes poems/songs/dedications/letters written for SOLHOT and with SOLHOT and We Levitate in mind and heart.

It is important to note that in writing these poems from meditations on We Levitate lyrics and my experiences doing SOLHOT, I am not diminishing the power of the song. I'd like to treat the poems produced in this chapter as a way to continue writing creatively with SOLHOT and Black girlhood studies that insists on the group and our relationships as most generative and possible. This chapter is a lead into future creative writing with and for SOLHOT that relies on dreaming with the collective, exploring self and taking care through and with the group. The poems that follow however, are not the definitive way of knowing and exploring the concept of taking care but it does allow us in SOLHOT to be creative about troubling ideas of the archive/repertoire and keeps it growing as well as attuned to our growing relationships and a growing SOLHOT.

Black (Woman) Feminist Care Genealogies: A Poetic Theory and Method

*“What an honor it is for me to write a poem for some downhomeupsouth sweethoneyintherock women, keeping us alive, showing us how to be touch and soft as we walk towards love and liberation...What an honor to write a poem for some women who have loved us with their sweet honey breaths” (“SWEETHONEYINTHEROCK” by Sonia Sanchez in *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock...Still on the Journey*, 1993).*

There is no need to reinvent the wheel of Black feminist poetics. For this reason, our work with SOLHOT is greatly moved by a particular genealogy of Black feminist poets and writers who risked their lives to write and most certainly wrote and organized creatively with and for each other through the 1970s-2000s. In 1970, Toni Cade Bambara, writer, scholar and activist, edited a feminist/ womanist anthology, entitled, *The Black Woman*. In this anthology, she writes, “Our [Black women] art, protest, dialogue no longer spring from the impulse to entertain...what typifies the current spirit is an embrace, an embrace of community and a hard-headed attempt to get basic with each other” (p. 7). Black women writers, artists, poets and literary critics stood in relation to the Black Arts movement of the 1960s through the 1980s and their creative productions and teaching are studied and utilized in literature, women’s studies and black and ethnic studies programs (Clarke, 2005, p. 2).

The collective care and love spirit of Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, Fannie Lou Hamer, Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, Lucille Clifton, Alice Walker, Sonia Sanchez and countless other Black women poets has influenced many Black women scholars, particularly those interested in the lived experiences of Black girls, women, and community organizing for freedom. June Jordan, essayist, poet, teacher, mother (Kinloch, 2006) speaks of the love and relation of Black women writers in Cade’s work in “Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person.” In *Moving Towards Home*, Jordan speaks on teaching her first university level class, (1989) writing, “Toni Cade Bambara walked with me to my first class. ‘Are you nervous?’ she asked. I

laughed, nervously, ‘anything you have to give, give it to them, she said. ‘They’ll be grateful for it’”(Jordan, 1989, p. 20). The founding evolution of poetry and writing; art, political essays, radical love, storytelling, intellectual organizing and collective care has been key for embracing Black girls and women lived experience in complex and full ways and in what we do in SOLHOT. Particularly, we utilized creative ways to organize Black girlhood with Black girls to celebrate our lives and critique systems of power and oppression.

Poetics as theory and method in SOLHOT, in the spirits of many Black woman poets, utilizes “performance poetry” (Brown, 2013, p. 140) to share and tell Black girls’ stories, particularly our collective stories of the work we do with Black girls. Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) writes, “Black girls’ lives must be inextricably linked to institutional and personal visions of the future. Poetry gave us a way to be in the now of the moment and the future, simultaneously, with us [Black girls/women] both present and whole” (p. 179). Poetry has also given us a way to rewrite narratives on Black women and girls’ care for each other, girl empowerment programming, reorganize Black girl sounds and most certainly a way to remember and love each other even harder, using it as a “methodology of bringing people with us into the future.” While transgressing, researching, doing and being all that is Black girlhood, with direct connection to Black woman/feminist scholars who paved the way, SOLHOT prioritizes creativity when teaching to resist privatization in higher education. We look to Black woman/feminist poets and their creative organizing practices to make space with Black girls and to love each other as homegirls. The following sections will serve as a closer historical analysis of Black feminist poetics and connections with Black girlhood studies and organizing (Brown, 2009; 2013).

In *Hear our truths*, Brown (2013) explains, “we who come together to organize on behalf of Black girlhood were named homegirls by a homegirl who unconsciously or consciously

sought to invoke the brilliance of Barbara Smith and her comrades (1983), as they called themselves homegirls to connote their love for home and reject the homelessness their critics insisted on for them because of their intentional practice of Black feminism” (p. 40) Brown (2013) holds firm to “SOLHOT’s continuation of Smith’s et. al’s (1983) Black feminist traditions of honoring certain ‘home truths’ ...[affirming] the challenges of Black feminists before” them. Love for home is important to our understandings of Black girlhood in educational discourse and practice, a discourse that often portrays Black girls’ as at-risk, where “home” is an issue to be fixed and/or changed. Black Feminist activists, artists, and writers such as June Jordan, Toni Cade Bambara, Nikky Finney, Lucille Clifton, Ntozake Shange and Audre Lorde serve as theoretical, personal and political blueprint for Black girlhood celebration.

Important to the methods that get me to the analytics and poems of the chapter is this idea and practice of writing and singing for and with a group and world we call ours, as a necessary process of building coalitions (Reagon, 1998). This process of coalition building is a lineage of Black song, singing together for freedom, as freedom, is a tradition that members of Sweet Honey in the Rock were deeply immersed during the Civil Rights Movement. In *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock...Still on the Journey*, Reagon (1993) talks about an experience of being arrested with other marchers and having to go to jail: “People were not necessarily changed but singing collectively creative more space to be together in cell with no space” (p. 156). In SOLHOT, we often sing together, in this same way, in a world, in spaces where it really isn’t much space for us. Song is one medium of choice to make more space, transform spaces into SOLHOT, into spaces that celebrate Black girlhood in all of its complexities, to take care as a group in a world seeking to kill us. We know that our collective voice makes much more space for love and care than just one voice. I look to Black women’s

acapella group with Black gospel/church, song fighter traditions, Sweet Honey in the Rock for guidance, reference, and sampling on what it means to sing with and for homegirls; to be a “we” that believes in freedom. I also reply on poets and writers, also Black women, feminists, who wrote songs, love poems and dedications for and with Sweet Honey and other Black women artists and writers during the 1970s-00s.

My late mother used to try and take my sister and I to Sweet Honey in the Rock concerts whenever they came to Richmond. I remember being very young and experiencing Black women make sound together. I did not know that I’d be able to make connections between Sweet Honey in the Rock and my own experiences being with a group, choosing a group, specifically a group who loves Black girls and women and creates sounds/song that speak to our material conditions and organizing together with song, if it were not for my mother and her insistence on knowing a group of Black women who sung and labored to “...create a healthy world. Healthy being another word for just” (Alice Walker, Preface to *We Who Believe in Freedom: Still on the Journey*). In reflection, I acknowledge sacrifices my mother made to create a healthy world for me, to be able to choose to sing, to travel and write and love and be with SOLHOT in the many ways that I am able.

Not only did Sweet Honey give themselves permission to sing and labor together for a more just world, they also make it their mission to sing songs and tell stories written by and dedicated to other Black women. For example, “Ought to Be A Woman,” written by June Jordan after a conversation with Bernice Johnson Reagon about her mother, was recorded and sung several times, told with a story about this conversation between them. In a 1980s speech about Black women’s issues, Reagon sings, “A way outa no way is too much to ask/ too much of a task for any one woman” from June Jordan’s poem, tells a story about Black women’s labor and the

ways we, as young people, as daughters, have to continue to make ways for a more just world and to dream with a group. Sweet Honey (1993) wrote, told stories, sung songs about Fannie Lou Hamer, activist, singer and freedom fighter and her mother; and others obsessed with organizing and creating with communities much like we do in SOLHOT. In Sweet Honey's song to her Hamer, they write and sing of her voice and how "*her song would fill the air*" and remind of us her legacy of leading and gathering people with song (p. 162). For Sweet Honey in the Rock and so many other Black women writers, singers, poets, and artists with many forms and without form, singing for their lives also meant singing for and with Fannie Lou Hamer and other freedom fighters. These women were also part of a community of artists who organized and imagined new worlds face-to-face, in living rooms, on the phone, through the mail, told stories, wrote poems and sung love songs about and with each other. I believe SOLHOT's practice of singing, song writing, dedications and poems in SOLHOT and the ways that shows up face-to-face and resounded in our many ways, gets us closer to taking care in a way that is reliant on the voices, sounds, hearts and creativity of who shows up ready to give when we do SOLHOT.

This chapter takes seriously the definition of poetry and song as articulated by June Jordan, Sweet Honey in the Rock and so many others that We Levitate's poetry and music, as influenced by a genealogy of Black feminist poetics and song writing together, as care, as housework (DeVeaux, 1981). In this tradition, taking care as sounded in We Levitate's music allows for a invention of care beyond capitalist and individualistic notions, important to how we might move on dreams that end the world as we know it and create new worlds, together. Our poetry and song about care demonstrate the importance of taking care as being practiced and theorized through and with the group as a way to insist on collectivity, coalition building and singing for freedom.

Method

Poetic inquiry as a feminist methodology has been utilized in women and gender studies as a research method that values “doing, showing and teaching embodiment and reflexivity...[as] a catalyst for social agitation and change” (Faulkner, 2018, p. 1). To make explicit what was shared between us, I created a series of poems, dedications and letters to reveal a layered and interconnected analysis of taking care as sounded in SOLHOT. To craft poetry, songs, and dedications through our songs, I listened to three particular songs that reveal SOLHOT practices of taking care made by We Levitate in our discography recorded while I was living in Illinois from 2015-2017. The songs explored deeper through poetic analysis include, “Take Care” and “Under Control” from *How I Feel EP* (2016) and “It’s Our Very Own (DJ B.E. dedication)” recorded by bandmates as a dedication and going away to Virginia tribute.

To write a series of poems dedicated to loving the collective and loving us, I used several guides. I separated data and analysis into sections titled after each song that include poems, dedications, and love letters written to SOLHOT. Each of these songs allow me to complicate care, group risk, and politics of home as having a lot to do with people and coalition work more than anything else. This sitting with our songs and re listening to them allowed me to center in on the complexities of what I had learned about taking care as sounded through our analog, digital and intentional love for SOLHOT. I am not a formally trained poet and also take serious a study of Black feminist poetry, SOLHOT and a poetic practice that is embodied, truth telling, and a way of life (Gumbs, 2005). Rather than just writing poems, dedications and love letters based on the exact lyrics of the song, I meditated, walked, sang, ran, listened to with the band and performed songs during live performance to create an embodied experience, enabling me to write a poetic analysis not separated from SOLHOT, our relationships and collective creative

organizing. I use poetic inquiry—narrative poetry, haiku, poetic transcription of We Levitate songs, and poetic analysis—as feminist inquiry. Specifically, my poetic inquiry uses short poems and haikus, Black feminist poetic texts written by Jordan, Sanchez and Sweet Honey, and narrative poetry of my embodied experiences of listening and organizing with SOLHOT to demonstrate my analysis process, to show the care of making Black girl sound, and to connect writing as embodiment to (auto)ethnographic practice (Faulkner, 2018). Additionally, I referred to my field notes from studio, personal emails/letters, and listened to voice recordings of our studio sessions to craft poetic text and analysis. In this chapter, narrative and poetic inquiry as a Black feminist method shows how taking care in a collective relationship with Black women and girls influences Black girlhood and education discourse beyond individual and biological identity, into a collective knowing, transforming self, the collective, and world.

In the following sections I present the poetry through as a series of love poems called, *Care to Take Some Time: Poems and Songs for SOLHOT, We Levitate, All Things Love and Dreaming With*. I developed *Care to Take Some Time* through We Levitate’s music, poetic reflections of self in relation to the collective and Black feminist poetics that make taking care as sounded in SOLHOT felt. Here I am most concerned with writing with SOLHOT in a way that takes care of our practice and relationships without the slightest tinge of resentment, intent to search, discover self in relation and move towards and choose the collective over and over again. This taking of care, also means being ready, in ways that only being with analog SOLHOT with Black girls has taught me. Being ready takes time and time takes care.

“Care To Take Some Time”

~ *Poems and Songs for SOLHOT, We Levitate, All Things Love and Dreaming With*³¹ ~

Blair Ebony Smith

to SOLHOT and Beez and Pretty Black and Queen Jessica

³¹ Grateful acknowledgement is made for the permission from SOLHOT and We Levitate to reprint, rewrite, sample and write with our songs, sounds and archives particularly “Take Care,” “Under Control” from our *How I Feel EP* (2016) and “It’s Our Very Own (Dedication to DJ B.E.).”

*Sections*³²

Take Care

Under Control

It's Our Very Own (DJ B.E. Dedication)

³² section headings include links to listen to each track

“Take Care”

“And the contracts we creative combatants will make to mutually care and cure each other into wholesomeness. And the blueprints we will draw up of the new order we will make manifest. And the personal function we will discover in the mirror, in the dreams, or on the path across This Bridge. The work; To make revolution irresistible” (Toni Cade Bambara, This Bridge Forward, p. viii).

(Re)evaluate

When my sound
merges with

your sound

I am a lot less lonely.

our voices made entangled flesh

wrapped like tight hugs

like mamas vibrant scarfs

The SOLHOT way of being with Black girls

that know and remember

doing the work

taking time to take care of others

we got more time when we share it

more time to share hearts

more time to share truths

more time to share what we know

more time to create

what is time, even?

Especially when we don't take it for each other

to be together

making our sounds

one collective sound

Our Turn

We be like the singing

coming off

whatever we got

when we together
cuz we neva know
never know when it's gone
be
our turn
we all gotta go someday
so we remember
to take real
good care

Death Ah Grow You Up Realllll Quick

It's a strange thing to tell a young parent
it is okay to die
to rest
to continue to live on in their memory
to choose a life that gives and gives
despite state sanctioned violence and death
we are growing up
now

Self-Care is Overrated

The stakes is high
I mean
death really ups the stakes
I done seen my mamma best a worse cast scenario like June
don't know self without care without homegirls without organizing
an everyday people

Move to Make Magic

A collective recipe for “Black Girl Magic” (a recipe without form):

1. take unlimited legendary lessons
2. put them into practice
3. use your hearts and hands with your homegirls to make collective care
4. repeat until...

Haiku

(on dreaming with SOLHOT)

when we dream
and dream together
we will be well together

Singing Together as Care

Looking death in the face
while looking each other in face
ready to take some time
to take care together
to sing
we sing
we sing

My mother's obsessions

I watched you read and read and read
learned how you took care of yourself
you probably read Toni Morrison Beloved
more than I could count
I watched you read and read and read
J California Cooper
Alice Walker

poems

prose

short stories

Black women's fiction was your favorite

you'd read with/to us or just wait until we open ourselves up to
the shared bookshelf up the stairs before I entered my room

Haiku

(on walking with We Levitate in Meadowbrook Park)

prairie land trail walks

where we write

and dreams walk us free

Haiku

(dedication to the back bending Black girl artists)

flexibility

bend better

reaching towards you

Holding On To People

Trust is a sound

absolutely

holding on to the we

the us

the ours

without us

without the people

without the girls

there ain't no spaces

to create and be for Black girls

our trust is a sound

is a risk

is a way to give
a way to grow
a way to be
is a way to give
a way to grow
a way to be
free
and still holding on

“Under Control”

The Day I Found Sweet Honey, Again

I found sweet honey
in the rock again today
sittin by the rocky James River
a family/home space where momma and daddy used to take us
to learn about the history of slavery
and the dream new dreams
before I arriving
I picked up a passenger through lyft
Reagon's speech coming through the car speaker about dreaming, Black mommas and coalition
building
The Black woman I picked up
Heard it too and asked, "Who is this speaking? I need to hear this over. We all need this"
To be heard, seen
I heard us
Heard the group
Heard Black girlhood as collective voices and truths
Heard my mama singing and smiling
Still on our journey
Believe we'll go on
Runnin' until the end

II

Sing to your homegirls/lovers while looking them in the face
practice makes practice
dreams made into dreams
made into reality of being together
singing for us
for SOLHOT
for Black girls everywhere

The Sound of Trust

a homegirl sees you

knows how to see you

Like those who raised you

Swept the floor around you

Like they see you

July 19, 2017 (We Levitate Wednesdays)

We Levitate forever

SOLHOT teaches me

My homegirls

Wherever we go

Whoever we be

Individual, always together

Collective

Joy (and everything in between)

New ways of freedom

As a state of being

As Black girlhood

Cuz we know this to be true

Making space/time

Analog, digital, intentional

Conjuring ghosts

Cruisin

Revelations

Gospels

Phantom subjectivity

This is our day!

Everyday is!

As it Unfolds, We Got It (A Love Letter to Beez)

As it unfolds....

I need you to know that the first time we performed “Under Control” during our Black Girl Genius Week 2016 concert and we looked into each others’ eyes singing, I feel into love with SOLHOT, with you, with us, without sound, deeper and deeper.

I need you to know that you’re smile, your laugh, your grace, your toughness, your tears, your heart is SO BIG and that I have never knew a “advisor/student” love like this. I don’t care what anyone has to say about you and us. You are ours, and because of you, I have an amazing example of what it means to be a fierce, God loving, unavailable for servitude, mentor, advisor and friend to other Black women/girls/femmes/feminists coming under and with me. I need you to know that I believe in you and us, forever!

I need you to know that the sounds that I make have always and will always be in conversation, with and for SOLHOT, for analog SOLHOT, for the Black girls that show up, that Black girls that keep coming, and the Black girls that I am always challenged to bring with me.

I need you know that SOLHOT has changed my life. I know you hear this often from all of your students and people you don’t even know and I just want you to know that SOLHOT has changed my life in a way that moves me to always do the work of Black girlhood with Black girls in ways that organize our freedom. I don’t know where life/work will take me but I am never letting go. I promise to remain dedicated and true to our genealogies and ways of reimagining Black girlhood and our world. I promise to organize, write, create, love, be with communities and people, whenever I go.

I need you to know that this dissertation would not be possible without your constant love and support. Without you reminding me that SOLHOT is for me, too, even after personal heartbreak. Every word is intentional, thought out, and ready to be explored beyond.

I need you to know that I cried, and smiled and laughed and dreamed writing this to you, that I miss you. I miss our walks in Urbana parks. I miss coming over to be with you and the kids. I miss we levitate specials with you and the band. I miss coming to analog SOLHOT in Champaign. I miss you checking in on me up close like you know my mother would want. I miss your crab boils. I miss DJing your house parties. I miss watching you and your family. I miss Amel and Addis, and KK, and Maya Sanaa and seeing Getu off to work during our sessions at night.

I need you to know that moving to Illinois was and will always be for SOLHOT, for Black girls, for the many ways I have come to know do and love SOLHOT, homegirl and be and learn myself in our community. I need you to know that I would move and do it all over again, without question.

I need you to know that I will never stop dreaming and making music/sound with and for us.

As it Unfolds, We Got It (A Love Letter to Porshé Renee aka Pretty Black)

As it unfolds...

I need you to know that I've learned so much about SOLHOT, about homegirlin', about Black girls and Black girlhood, through and with you.

I need you to know that I have never put you on a pedestal and I also look to you for guidance, mirrors, and the incredible passion you have for doing SOLHOT and being with Black girls. To watch you do SOLHOT and do SOLHOT with you has always been a dream come true.

I need you to know that when I first visited Illinois as an undergrad and you greeted me with so love, realness, that I knew you were a master teacher on taking care and being in service to other people.

I need you to know that watching you accomplish so many things, embrace your leading genius, falling out on the floor, being your own Scorpio self are all a part of the reasons I love you so much and so deeply.

I need you to know that your constant love and supporting, holding, lovingly critiquing, praying, singing, laughing, true petty turn up and so much more moves me to continue on dreaming, writing, creating, singing, loving, doing Black girlhood, everyday.

I need you to know that I believe in you. I believe in your words. I believe in your art. I believe in your incredible heart to live a life that you want to live, that you feel is worth living, full of joy no matter the circumstances.

I need you to know that I love you and support you always, through all of your choices, and I believe in your heart's practice to find those places, people, things meant for you and also let those things in when they come your way.

I need you to know that your work on Black girlhood is foundational and game changing. Your dissertation, its award is only the beginning of what you will write for the people and us and I am so excited for your scholarship to continue on regardless of academia's decision to honor it.

I need you to know that I want you to hold on your dreams, however crazy they maybe, especially when things are bleak.

I need you to know that I love you and envision a world where our most deepest, truest dreams come true.

Ps. I am so excited about this Black girl film fest dream. However, it becomes a reality, I am always here to support and be with you in your dreams.

As it Unfolds, We Got It (A Love Letter to Jessica)

As it unfolds...

I need you to know that our time together, face-to-face, in love and doing SOLHOT has been one of the most amazing moments in my life and because of you I am a better person and lover. I know deep, divine, and lasting moon love through you.

I need you to know that being with you has taught me to never give up on love, to never give up on me.

I need you to know that I have learned so much from you as a lover, friend, homegirl, artist, mother, human. Your grace and strength and creativity are parts of you that move me to be my fully human self.

I need you to know that I appreciate the ways you made space and home for me during a very hard time in my life. You created a space for me to live safely, create and be closer to SOLHOT. I will never forget the seven hundred something miles you rode with Ru and I from Syracuse to Illinois straight into amazing unknowns. Because of our love, I know surrender, trust and listening to my heart in truer ways. I appreciate you for holding me tight and also letting me go to love in new ways.

I need you to know that I believe in you and your words, your art, your sounds, the ways you love, fiercely. I am so excited, patient, and supportive of your graduate work and the amazing ways you will continue to share what you know about Black girlhood and being with Black girls. I need you to know that Jazzy Belle Retell will always be one of my favorite SOLHOT sounds.

I need you to know that I am grateful for the times you have critiqued me and challenged me to think and dig deeper, to open up, to see myself fully.

I need you to know that our individual and collective sounds continue to teach me how to dream and be with SOLHOT, loved ones, and in the world.

I need you to know that you teach me how to speculate, how to self articulate within community. You teach me how to be how to prep my heart and mind to be with SOLHOT, to be in the world.

I need you to know that I love your random petty text messages and check ins.

I need you to know that I see you, too.

I need you to know that I trust your visions, dreams, fears, and unknowns.

I need you to know that no matter how far, I am always here to love and support you with whatever I can.

“It’s Our Very Own (DJ B.E. Dedication)”

“It must become necessary for all of us to feel that this is our world.” (Reagon, 1998, p. 250)
Make sure that “our” includes you and everybody else that’s in the room

This is yours just as much as it is anybody else’

It’s yours for what you give and share with us

With Black girls

With SOLHOT

Belonging got more to do with showing up and giving what you can than yo feelins’

A dedication to being yours, always

‘No. Don’t never go looking for love girl. Just wait. It’ll come. Like the rain fallin’ from the heaven, it’ll come. Jus’ don’t never give up on love’ – Mrs. Johnson in “Just Don’t Never Give Up On Love” by Sonia Sanchez, Homegirls & Handgrenades

Letting go/Holding on

this mix is for Black girls who believe in love

this mix is for Black girls who don’t never give up on love

we are better when we are together watching

learning

reading

making

something already good for us through us

from the past

to the future

lasting

homegirls and handmade grenades (Tumblr post, Nov. 2, 2015)

time passes

somehow we still

together

learning reading making

all the things we know to be good for us

teaching me how
never let go to throw away
hold on
let go to embrace us in full everlasting love
on one condition
I'm always yours
we always ours
never giving up/in

Moving From NY to IL With Your Lover to Do Analog SOLHOT Can Humanize You
You ever literally drive into the unknown?

neither of us had even driven or ridden this route across stolen lands
mixed terrains
mountainous to flat
the sun sets different in the east
versus when you in central Illinois
the horizon wider
no place for the sun to hide
no place for me to hide
either

Dedications to Homegirls and Handmade Grenades³³

Black girl freedom art
collective care
co-levitation
made in/for/with love
creation over critique
knowin' and rememberin'
cruisin' and crossin'

³³ hyperlink to Homegirls and Handmade Grenades (HGIMG) tumblr curation by Jessica (bandmate) and I. We created HGIMG as a way to bridge our love for SOLHOT, Black girlhood, sound and art making. Within this project, we made mixes, curated a blog to share our work and art of other Black girl artists' we know and love. Click link.

a sonic everlasting love

Chat & Boo Mix³⁴

Where Chat & Boo meets Richmond, VA and Midwest sonic Black girlhood
spitting lyrics in unison, “Where them dollas at?”
memories of riding around in a classic whip bumpin the Memphis shit
prolly doing something we ain’t got no business doing (our Taurus mommas would say for sure)
to the now
where there are no clear answers for why we are here
together
creating
living truth
making love
reaallll deep and reallll good

Mixing/Mastering as Listening to Get to Know You Better³⁵

figure out which vocal has melly mel in the first hook

Maya 3

Edit Maya 2

Porshé try to cut the “I love it”

Take Care (static control)

Under Control

Add Jessica and Dr B to all chorus

the track not the same without Amel’s baby chatter

noise we keep

Porshé sing I love it over and over

³⁴ hyperlink to “Chat & Boo Mix” by Homegirls & Handmade Grenades included. Click link.

³⁵ This poem/text is presented as notes written while mixing and mastering We Levitate’s How I Feel EP. The process of edit and mixing our music after we recorded as always be a challenge and learning process as our DJ, called to lead some of our sound work. Through this process, I have learned trust. The band always trusts my ear, what I hear and willing to add their suggestions and what they hear, what to keep, edit, add and so on. This process has always been a way to get to know homegirls better, to hear them better, to listen attentively to a sound each of us creates together and make decisions on how we want to share that sound with the public.

a spell
Maya on the track and I want to know what she hears back
adjusting levels
we all sung melodies on this
a layering only getting to know us
our sound
can produce

Super Powers (Poems for SOLHOT 12/2/16)³⁶

My super power is...
breath, touch, breathing, feeling
deeply
never alone even in my feelings of loneliness
it's true, I'm living, we living together
together we got superpowers

Homegirls, Lovers & Friends

Made home, handmade

adorned in our mommas favorite garments

our daddy's love for sound

a love only SOLHOT could bring together and pull apart

in the most whole, changing and loving ways, still on the journey ways

because of you, because of us

of what we made and continue to make

I know not to go looking for love

It'll come, it's right in front of me, of us

³⁶ This poem was written during a SOLHOT session with girls in Champaign Illinois. Our task was to create a poem book for SOLHOT with three themes. The poem I chose to use in the chapter is called "Super Powers." The prompt for this poem was for us to write a poem about our super powers.

I know a homemade, handmade love that never gives up

Always Home

It is within this sound

I find many homes

Within it

I find my momma and my daddy's sound

Happy feelins'

Everybody loves the sunshine

I know what it feels like to be held whole

Never let go and let go

Learning how to leave a place

But not really leave

Returning

Heart prepped

Face first into the group

How to Leave and Not Leave a Place

SOLHOT starts in Champaign today.

I am not physically there for this stage of SOLHOT

I am here living in Richmond

a place that raised a big part of me

a home of many, a birthplace

Illinois, too

calling me towards major unknowns

to dig deeper, in a new way

to just BE

our love is quantum

we stay in more places at once

I CAN continue to be intentional and digital about my doings

holding my own contradictions of being away

leaving

I can, have and will make myself available to come back, to be with SOLHOT, Black girls and homegirls

plotting to envision with community analog SOLHOT where I am and wherever I will be stay open to receiving

I can continue to write, to sound, to remember us, to dream and be ready

to leave and to not leave a place is to be ready to come back when you are called

Discussion

I want to return to M. Jacqui Alexander to think more about a genealogy of Black and women of color feminisms that stood collectively and used poetry and writing as a way to remember each other and themselves, as a way to turn our rage and isolation into practicing a deep love for each other. Alexander (2005) remembers “Poets on Location” a 2000 event to honor poets and to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *This Bridge Called My Back*. In their program notes they wrote: “These women poets have scrutinized their lives, wrestled with their different inheritances of geography; of place; with race, class, sexuality, body, nationality, and belonging, and molded it all into sources of insight and wisdom.” In this creative coalition work, Black and women of color feminists have complicated our ideas about home as familiar and also a political choosing (Mohanty, 2005). In this chapter, I contend with taking care as grounding towards home, towards coalition that is political and stays together across time, place, and space.

Like June Jordan, Audre Lorde, M. Jacqui Alexander, Toni Cade Bambara, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Sonia Sanchez and many other Black (feminist) women artists, poetics and

writers/critics of the 1970s-00s, SOLHOT insists on knowing and remembering people who have died and commitment to all the living as practice of taking care, as a choice to be haunted by that which we know will keep us well. For us committed to doing SOLHOT in all its theories and practices of care, transgressing ideas/practices of mentor/student relationships, youth programming, neo-liberal university-community politics, and space and time, we know that celebrating Black girlhood in all of its complexities and evolution, with Black girls keeps us well, keeps us taking care of ourselves, each other and our people. We also know that poetry, writing poetry to each other, with each other, through song, through cypher, through body, through prose, through play and so on keep us taking care, keep us as inspired poets/prophets reimagining and recreating a world where we can be fully human, no disgrace. Each of these rituals and practices center us in what Toni Cade Bambara has been remembered for as, “everything in time,” an importance of taking our time to practice freedom daily (Holmes & Wall, 2008, p. 264).

Extending the work of taking time to practice freedom and remember Black feminist and Black girlhood poetic genealogies of care amongst each other, my poetic inquiry and analysis presented here seeks to reimagine the felt life of Black feminism (Nash, 2018) and Black girlhood within women’s studies and education. This means, I am arguing for an imagination that considers a multitude of ways of feeling Black feminist, other ways of being Black feminist and doing Black feminist labor in the academy that avoid resentment and defensiveness (p. 32). Poetic analysis, in particular makes me a better (auto)ethnographer of education and women and gender studies. My goal was to be an (auto)ethnographer who uses poetry as research to show connection between researcher artist and community, a poet researcher who provokes emotional and felt responses, and furthers theory through the use of poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2018). Poetic

analysis also allows me to hear Black girls' and our voices differently because I am able to also remember lineages of Black feminism important to SOLHOT's organizing, as I explore self as an artist and researcher within our community. This exploration and Black feminist felt knowing relies on theories and practices not attentive to or used in education and women and gender studies; even as these disciplines rely heavily on the everyday experiences of Black women and girls.

Being in poetic conversation with Black feminist poets and people I love and organize with allows me to have an arts-based feminist conversation that I think is useful for an interdisciplinary scholar trained in education. Black feminist poetics has much to offer education and women studies as it allows scholars to consider that research can be a complexly felt and community organized experience. Particularly as Black feminist educators and researchers that work with young people, communities, Black women and girls, consideration of our whole and complex selves requires us to show up, give what you have and know and be present. A Black feminist and Black girlhood politics of care and taking of care is felt "like the singing coming off the drums" and must be analyzed by relying on many disciplines, theories, and scholars that intersect education and women and gender studies. This particular politics of care is one effective practice as it allows for more anti-disciplined human-life collective focused fields and art without form that many Black women, feminist of color artists have laid groundwork for and is extremely helpful for the future of education and women's studies. It also allows students, artists, organizers and educators to know that they encounter felt experiences with their research and the people they do it with, allowing for growth of embodied knowledge, requires that we master getting to know ourselves ourselves and those around us. A genealogy of collective Black feminist poetic and song practices unearth a desire to belong to self in community without

preoccupation with self, might enable more relational and caring approaches to arts education, community engagement, knowledge and alternative future building.

Taking care as a concept, a way of living, a sounded-word aesthetic as Garner (2018) describes, is important to what we do and how we love each other in SOLHOT. Care for self and others have a lot to do with how we do labor in SOLHOT. Garner notes, “In thinking with SOLHOT and the ways that our labor is sacred as it relates to centering Black girlhood freedom, it only possible to do self-care in community with others” (p. 121). SOLHOT has taught me about practices of care it takes to build essential elements of movements/organizing on a small scale that allows us to develop the type of critical connections--of both ideas and people. Building critical connections with people committed to doing SOLHOT has taught me more about practices of making space for Black girlhood celebration, the possibility of making time to redefine our home(s) to become reliant on group care despite the persistence of forms of violence reliant on Black death.

Conclusion

In this chapter I argued it is taking care as sounded in SOLHOT that demonstrates the ways collective sounds of Black girlhood are an extension of Black feminist poetics/politics of care and move us to sing, imagine and love each other and Black girls more intently and gracefully. The poems that come from the sounding of our collective care taking demonstrate self knowing within the collective, how our love, sounds and singing transforms us and me and how we continue to take care despite changes in locations, dreams, deaths, births and unknown futures. My analysis ultimately allows us, as Black feminists with Black girls, to love deeper, more poetically, presently and intently. Taking care, to care for others, to be of service to something else, share joy, celebrate, know and remember, dreaming with as a way to live with

beyond the pain, struggles and grief of this world. This analysis extends scholar in education and women and gender studies and shows the ways a Black feminist poetics is useful to extending how we think about learning, civic engagement, and community organizing.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Sounds of Black Girlhood In & Through & After the End of the World

Introduction

“HAIKU
[on passing Toni Cade Bambara’s house]

how are we here one
day gone the next how do we
run fall down to death?” (Sanchez, 1998, p. 24).

In the poem that introduces this chapter, Sonia Sanchez remembers Toni Cade Bambara’s life in a way you could see and feel. I literally felt myself riding with her pass Bambara’s house contemplating her death and life after. She gets us to consider what it feels like to remember another Black woman artist whom she was in conversation and in love with. Sanchez also gets up to consider that fact that death ups the stakes and that we must continue to write create and remember each other. The purpose of this dissertation project is to extend and continue a very similar practice of Black feminist poethics (Ferreira da Silva, 2014) towards SOLHOT and a consideration of (auto)ethnographic practices in education and women and gender studies that values a Black girlhood, Black feminist felt life (Nash, 2018), and a wide range of living, being and existing as an (auto)ethnographer.

I’d like to consider the implications for this project on the future of Black girlhood studies. In my analyses, I explored cruising, Crossings and care and sounds of Black girlhood that reveal the complexities of our relationships, locations, and politics that move us away from articulations of Black girlhood focused on individual biological identity. I argued that cruising, Crossings, and care as sounds of Black girlhood extends and remembers an important genealogy

of collective Black feminist poetic song care practices amongst each other, homes, coalitions and political communities. SOLHOT's extension of Black feminist poetic care practices makes room for an envisioning of Black girlhood that are concerned with a wide range of possibilities for knowing, doing, existing as Black feminist artists, critics, educators and organizers attuned to what is made possible when we come together to dream new worlds beyond capitalism and get to know each other deeply. We are committed to dreaming of and practicing Black girlhood in a way that stops time for Black girls and for us dedicated to Black and women of color feminist histories and practices. Through my analysis I found that it is our song and poems that guide our imagining of political reality for living in and through and after the end of the world and makes cruising, Crossings, and care felt and tangible (Ferreira da Silva, 2014). Not only are we able to hear Black girlhood as collective, always in relation and with Black girls, but our poetic and song practices allows us to love each other and resound that love in new ways across time, space, physical closeness and distance.

It is important to note that several parts of this dissertation were written while physically living in different locations and across different years and time zones. I began writing my dissertation while living and organizing with SOLHOT in Illinois. In 2017, I decided to move to Richmond, Virginia to finish my dissertation and be closer to my blood family and connect with a place that raised me as an artist and lover. Like my bandbae Beez aka Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown says in "It Our's Very Own", "it's been calling you, you've been seeking it, now you doin' it." This decision to move to Virginia is still one that I contemplate as I write about the politics of home and what it means to make home as a Black feminist women of color scholar artist. In this moment, I have decided to hold my own contradictions to move away from a place that I also

call home and where my political commitments to celebrating Black girlhood with Black girls is made clear and tangible.

What physical distance from SOLHOT, from the face-to-face, everyday realities of SOLHOT in Illinois has taught me at this point in my dissertation, is that Black girlhood as collective organizing allows me to consider a Black feminist poetics in and through and after the end of the world; to be connected to a community of scholars, artists, and young people committed to creating a new world that leans into the unknowns of Black girlhood and how we do it. For example, while in Richmond, in the midst of a personal and collective future unknown, I make certain to stay close to digital and intentional ways of doing SOLHOT. I have made my feeling, creating and writing my dissertation about belong to SOLHOT a priority while also continuing my artist practice as DJ and sound maker. In 2018, We Levitate released [“Jayla’s Tronomo”](#) and [“RoundTilThen.”](#) In 2019, I have done SOLHOT with homegirls in South Carolina and Chicago as a part of our public campaign, Black Girl Genius Week. Along with making music with SOLHOT, we continue to perform and organize Black girlhood in Illinois and across the nation. I have also continued to explore my myself and artist practice as lovenloops in relation to SOLHOT and my own life as an Black girl artist (auto)ethnographer with SOLHOT in the form of DJ sets, performances and interviews that always make sure SOLHOT, Black girls and Black feminist poetics are heard and remember.

Ultimately, this dissertation project and my continued organizing with Black girls and SOLHOT has allowed me to see and hear the ways music-making as a collective Black girl artist practice and the sounds that come out of that practice have implications for spaces, groups, and collectives extending beyond SOLHOT. In the section that follows I explore implications for

Black girlhood studies and think through the ways our music making practices move Black girlhood studies and scholars towards collective, digital and poetic ethnographic practices.

Listening To & Learning Each Other Ways

In *Pedagogies of Crossings*, Alexander (2005) asks us, “Did [*This Bridge*] it coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning other’s ways of seeing and being? Who are we now, years later? Why do we need to remember?” In remembrance of the monumental women of color feminist text, *This Bridge Called Our Backs*, Alexander’s charges us as feminists, artists and teachers to remember our important relational genealogies while also getting in the habit of getting to know each other. *This Bridge* has been utilized in classrooms, community spaces and research across disciplines especially intersections of education and women’s studies.

SOLHOT’s way of listening to and learning each other through music making is not the only way to do this. I am also interested in the ways my music making and poetic inquiry gets me to continue attempting to create together and live in ways that listen to and learn each other, where dedication to our collective relationship make a new world possible.

What I am learning through this dissertation project is that a obsession with listen to and learning SOLHOT’s ways requires a preparation, knowing and remembering that is embodied and felt deeply. In, “Crank up the feminism: Poetic inquiry as feminist methodology” by Sandra L. Faulkner (2018) argues for poetic inquiry as a feminist methodology, revealing her use of poetry as research method over a 13 year period. In her examples, she details how poetry as research offers Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies scholars a means of doing, showing, and teaching embodiment and reflexivity. Her essay argues that poetic inquiry can be feminist research methodology because of what poetry can reveal to the study of close relationships that engage historical time and collective memory. For example, in her poetry collection, *Knit Four*,

Frog One, Faulkner wrote in various poetic forms to tell stories of family narratives and grandmother-mother-daughter relationships composed from family artifacts, feminist research, and systemic recollections. She also used haiku poems as field notes, poetic and poetic transcription of interviews with women runners, and narrative poetry of her embodied experiences of running to demonstrate her analysis process. Poetic inquiry as analysis in this instance was to show the rhythm of running, and to connect writing as embodiment to ethnographic practice. As researchers, poetic practice returns us back to our bodies that show the ways theories come through a felt and embodied experience.

In my analysis chapters, I attempted to use meditations on songs and poetic inquiry to show the felt and embodied experience of (auto)ethnography that explored self in relation to SOLHOT, Black feminist and Black girlhood organizing, and my own artist practice. The meditations and poems I wrote reveal poetry as analysis, as representation, and as embodiment (McCaughey, 1997; Velija et al., 2013). My poetic inquiry also allowed me to practice (auto)ethnography as an embodied experience that requires listening to and learning homegirls' ways of being and seeing. For example in my meditation on We Levitate's "Green St.", my re-listening and reflection on Green St. allowed me to make connections with each of our experiences with home and place that was also non-linear and other interconnected and at particular meeting places to be remembered. I was able to feel and experience Green St. as a crossing, a literal and imaginary SOLHOT meeting place to dream new worlds. I heard stories about Green St. in the 90s, the systemic chaos of capitalism and working as a Black woman at the university and how we come together in spite of it. Their ways of seeing and being with Green St. allowed me to reflect on my own crossing of Green St., moving towards SOLHOT by actually moving to Illinois, and interconnections with others who organize. I had to feel Green

Street figuratively and literally and taking a picture on the exact street (see page 118) helped me to embody the meditations I wrote in reflection of that sound.

As a Black feminist poet, artistic and ethnographer, writing and doing research in ways that point to the level of daily life through the every day acts that constitute our identities and relational community; collective action in groups centered on feminist visions of social transformation' and to theory, pedagogy, and textual creativity in the scholarly and writing practices of feminists engaged in the production of knowledge is extremely important to my personal and collective feminist practice (Mohanty, 2005, p. 5). Our sounds as collective action that point to daily life and the ways we seek social transformation in our theory, pedagogy and textual creativity in scholarly and writing practices. It was in my poetic text in Chapter five, *Care to Time Some Time*, that I explored our collective sounds of taking care in the form of love poems and dedications to SOLHOT. This process what extremely scary for me as I don't consider myself a trained, well-written poet. What I am most concerned with is poetry as a way to tell the truth, to remember what and whom needs to be remembered, to remember myself as always being with and in love with not only their work and art but with the people they love and do it with. I encourage scholars to express and show that love and research in whatever form of writing they want to explore, that reveal Black girlhood and feminism as a genealogy but also a way of feeling.

Taking my own advice, the following section poetically explores the idea of collective music making and theorizing from its practice and sounds moves us towards a felt life in Black girlhood studies. To do so, I offer written song reflection on the ways collective music making might move us towards a felt life in Black girlhood studies attuned to our practice as an important way of feeling being and doing Black girlhood and feminist labor beyond

defensiveness and resentment towards an academy, world and people who don't value Black girls, Black girlhood and its collective possibilities (Nash, 2018).

**Black Girlhood as a Way of Feeling:
Collective Music-Making Moves Us Towards A Felt Life**

Death ups the stakes
How do you plan on remembering your loved ones?
Yourself in love
In motion
In feminist practice with
How you gone' do Black girlhood as a way of being, feeling, existing
We know of too many that done died
Hell
they'll prolly say the academy killed us, too
We done struggled, lived alongside and within spaces of death
We write and sing and sound our love and life stories, still
Interconnected ones
Of dreaming with
of doing with
Of being with
Of learning each other with
Your ways of seeing and being
Looping, resounding an immaculate fractal design
Our love stories critique power over musical tracks
In studio we get to explores our ways of feeling
Black girlhood celebration as a way of feeling
And being
Concerned with making each other our own
Over ideas and analytics

APPENDIX A

List of Songs (with lyrics)

“Here to Celebrate (We Levitate Special)” lovenloops with Beez, Jessica & Pretty Black (We Levitate)

Sample

Angela Davis

“I can’t imagine a world without art”

Fred Moten

“But we’re here to celebrate tonight” (hmm mmm)

Beez:

“Okay, so, in case all else fails and it probably will

I just wanna say that I am

always

already present

and

I

am not

alone”

Fred Moten sample

“That means that poetry and art is always engaged in this really delicate balance between critique and analysis on the one hand and celebration on the other”

“But, we’re here to celebrate tonight”

Pretty Black:

“Like Fred said, we’ve come to celebrate our very own, DJ. B.E. also known as B.E. from Ebony. 2010 Beez linked us in and we’ve been sisters ever since. She’s the only one that can call me sister.”

“But, we’re here to celebrate tonight. hm mm.”

“Mixing that theory and practice for our sonic pleasure. For our sonic pleasure”

Jessica:

“Mhmm mmm

celebration is like being possessed by this thing we call levitation by way of Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths

Black girl feminisms in constant creative loops for crafting worlds

Reuse, de, re-construct lovenloops, to show me the way to know.

love libations

live libations

like rum
pepsi and wings
so good you gotta do it
again and again”

“Green Street”

Rush Rush
It’s clear to me
that everyone else is going somewhere more important than me
Rush Rushin if you must
The turkey and cheese was \$5.49
Rum and cokes \$2 bucks
What gets me through this is cheaper than food
I’ll take 2
I’ll take 2

Where’re gonna fly away
Glad you go my way
I love it when we’re cruisin together

All the brown, black and purple people eaters
Eating and chiefing
But not on that cheese
Doing lines and crossing lines
Nobody paying attention
In hurry but you cant go
All the time see
I got some places to be
Like to that building where all they do is hate me
Hate her
Hate us
Hate she
Hate them
Two squares
Two squirrels
Bumping
And you can miss me with that
I aint studying yall
Just be stuntin on em
I’m just cruising and passing through

Got my life in boxes
I love it
I’m just cruising down green street

I love it
Got my life in boxes
I love it
I'm just cruising down green street
When we're cruisin'

Rolling through prairie land
Caring cuz I built this land
First here in 94
My crew called the rollas would be on green
At the burger king
But stay checkin for zorbas
Back since 05
And not im trying to avoid her
Cuz she entirely too busy
Plus they built it up cant afford her
I though follete's hit the wallet

Got my life in boxes
I love it
I'm just cruising down green street
I love it
Got my life in boxes
I love it
I'm just cruising down green street
just cruise
just cruise with us
just cruise
just cruise with us

“Jahnke Rd. With My Cuzzos”

ShaTisha:
I'm just cruising down Jahnke looking for the dank
Aye
I'm just cruising down Jahnke puffin' on the dank
Yea
We just cruisin' down Jahnke looking for the dank
Well alright

Rashad:
Rashad on this one man
Family this one this one
We don't care how you feelin' man

“Take Care”

(recorded as track 2 on How I Feel EP by We Levitate (2016))

Pretty Black:

Care to take some time to reevaluate your life
So that you can do the work of taking care of others
You never know, never
Know when it will be your turn
But don't worry
It's coming
When you can share your time taking care of others
It's a service to be a service of someone else
Looking death in the face can grow you up real quick
We all gotta go
Someday
so make sure you take real good care

DJ B.E.:

Take good care of you
That's what she use to tell me
Can't get it outta my head
It was cold
Like late february
I looked in her eyes and she said
Take good care
Take good care
of you

Take care
Take care
Build a new
Legendary lessons
Put into practice
Using Hearts and hands
And we move to make magic
Stakes is high and self care is overrated
Done the work
And now I need another
Collective care

Beez:

I remember the day I let go of the idea and held on to people
It's much riskier now
I really want to take care not drown in the resentment
Do the SOLHOT thing, grow it
All from here
There is no justice in a Black girlhood without the girls
I wanna take some care in the questions I ask
give
Give
Give
Give
In ways to make it last
Create the spaces more spaces
the spaces more spaces greater spaces
For Black girls to create and be
Cuz their approval cant wait
I'm not interested
asymmetry
My weight is heavy
Cuz I'm trying to be great
Not a media shine
Not a retweet
But a shine that's a piece of mind
Struggle over pedestals
don't pedestal me
Struggle with me
Struggle over pedestals
don't pedestal me
Struggle over pedestals
Grace Lee Taught me

Take good care of you
That's what she use to tell me
Take care
Take care

“Under Control”

(covered and recorded as track 5 on How I Feel EP by We Levitate (2016); original by The Internet, Ego Death (2016))

I woke up impatient
And anxious
Chasing dreams in my sleep
Got me feeling like I made it
Then I wake up and see
Frustration chasing for payment
Thankfully they know me
Cant get enough of the paper
Cant get enough

I know you love it baby
Cuz Im risk
But if you put it on me
Imma win
And if you give it time
I wont forget
When Im a legend baby
And we're all rich

I need you to know
It's under control
WE got it
And as it unfolds
I got you I promise
I promise, Im on it

I cant help but feel like Im wasting precious time in my life
Worried about my behavior
Sometimes I think I'm too nice
I know I'm destined
For greatness
Fuck a critic's advice
They hating cuz Im a player

I know you love it baby
Cuz Im risk
But if you put it on me
Imma win
And if you give it time
I wont forget
When Im a legend baby
And we're all rich

I need you to know
It's under control
WE got it
And as it unfolds
I got you I promise
I promise, Im on it

When it's all said and done
I said all that I want
Ohhh ohh oh
Yeah
And you know Im telling the truth
When I say I'll take care of you
Yeah
Yeahayaaa

I need you to know
It's under control
WE got it
And as it unfolds
I got you I promise
I promise, Im on it

“It's Our Very Own (DJ B.E. Dedication)”

Beez:
She comin'
She so fresh
She so like
She fresh to death
She so fly
She is a treat
That's my girl
Blair Ebony

Pretty Black:
Chorus:
It's our very own
It's our very own
It's our very own
It's our very own
It's our very own
It's our very own
DJ B.E.

She's so sublime in everyway
Her music captivating
Spend spells with her words and sounds
She got us all swayin'
Within the woods
We lead the way
We got a little deeper
To understand her righteousness
Bumpin us in ya speakers
Feelin' as her compass
Through this thing
Her life
Shes so gracious and so gentle
And sometimes a little stinger
Hey
Time and love couldn't bring us any closer
because she'll always be DJ B.E.

Chorus:
Repeat 2x

Beez:

Hey Blair It's Dr. B
You know I love you so much
I just want to say
I'm so glad you came
I'm excited about whats to come
Richmond, VA
You been calling out
It's been seeking you
Now you doin it
Claim truth
Hoody whoo
Blair
Forever
My love
My heart
She always there
With a adlib like
Unh nah nah nah nah
So many things
I'm so excited we had this time together
To really get to know you

To get to see you
To get to look into your eyes
To have you sing to me
To watch how you do
Just how you be
That's your greatest power
How you BE
Around the people
You affect them
You move them
They wanna know you
They love you
Blair what you doin' to the people
That energy
It exudes you
You know yo mamma give it you
I'm so glad that you was here
Forever and always
Bandbaes

Jessica:
I be forever thankful for B
She being everything little piece of
Peace, energy and trappin with a backwood
B so gracious and gentle
With every bit of a southside Richmond
She goin back
Granola bear salads with a side of jimmy deans
Mixing message like backs and bridges
Blair love be divine
Following like religion
Home like home
And she the homie
Lovers and friends
Zero to one hundred
And everything in between
Believe you me
DJ B.E. got love on loops
Givin' love in loops
The OG
How its supposed to be
Bring yo mamma and cousins and them
For them loops
What your mouth about her
She's ours

Forever
Don't ever forget it

Maya Sanaa:
Hey Blair
How are you? I miss you too? Because you been gone for a little while
And you are not here but you are always in my heart
In my heart

Beez:
And you know what mamma say
You can always come back home

APPENDIX B
Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT)
Permission Form

Dear Parent and/or Guardian:

Your daughter has been invited to participate in Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), a program designed to celebrate Black girlhood, discuss issues that are important to their lives, and use the arts and performance as a tool of self-expression and collective empowerment. We will meet at Franklin Middle School on the following days from 3pm-5pm:

SESSION DATES INSERT

Participation in SOLHOT is entirely voluntary. Your child may participate in one or all of the week's event. There is NO COST for your child to participate.

To participate, please ask your child to bring one copy of this completed form to Mrs. Saunders. If you have any questions about SOLHOT, please feel free to contact me either by mail, e-mail, or telephone.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown
i.am.solhot@gmail.com
217-333-2900

Consent Statement

I have read and understand the description of Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT).

____ I give permission for my child to participate in SOLHOT.

____ I do not give permission for my child to participate in SOLHOT.

Parent/Guardian printed name

Date

Parent/Guardian signature

Student printed name

Date

Student signature

PHOTO PERMISSION and RELEASE

I give permission for my child to be photographed during scheduled SOLHOT sessions for the purpose of program activities involving media production as created by SOLHOT participants (including my daughter) and for the sake of SOLHOT's publicity.

_____ YES _____ NO

Parent/Guardian printed name

Date

Parent/Guardian signature

Student printed name

Date

Student signature

I give permission for my child's image to be used for the purpose of a public presentation about SOLHOT that may occur at the school, and at conferences and workshops within the greater Champaign-Urbana community and beyond.

Parent/Guardian printed name

Date

Parent/Guardian signature

Student printed name

Date

Student signature

APPENDIX C

Parental Consent Letter

Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT): Exploring the creative genius of Black girls

Dear Parent:

My name is Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown and I am a professor from the Department of Educational Policy Studies and Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Illinois. Your daughter has been invited to participate in SOLHOT, a program designed for African American girls to create music, photographs and stories about their experiences living in Urbana-Champaign and going to middle school. At the end of this project, your child will have the opportunity to be a part of a public exhibit to showcase their work.

In addition to participating in the program there is also research portion that we would like to include your daughter in. The research part of SOLHOT will involve observations of the program participants and teaching them how to use photography, poetry, dance, and performance to show what is important to them about their lives and education. Research will take place at each SOLHOT session that meets at your daughter's school. The general purpose of this study will be to provide convincing evidence to help professors, teachers, and cultural workers make better sense of how Black girls' identity and culture matter in school settings so that they are best supported in their academic goals.

It is our hope that results from this research will be shared in academic presentations and publications. We would be happy to provide you with a summary of the research, if requested. Student related projects may also appear on exhibit at your daughter's school and may later be turned into various formats, including a book manuscript and doctoral dissertation.

Participation of your child in this program and the research portion is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your child from the program and/or research portion at any time. Leaving the research portion will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is entitled to as a middle school student. The decision for your child to participate, decline or withdraw from participation in the program or research portion will also have no effect on your child's grades or your/their current or future relations with Franklin Middle School or the University of Illinois. You may choose for your child to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation in the SOLHOT program and/or in the research portion of SOLHOT at any time. If you choose to not let your child participate in the research portion of SOLHOT they may still participate in the regular program sessions. Your child's responses will not be recorded or documented. To withdraw your child from any part of SOLHOT, simply contact Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown or Porshé Garner or Jessica Robinson or Blair Smith using the contact information presented below.

In the research portion we will not reveal personally identifiable information about your child in any publications based on this research with exception of those appearing in photographs. It should be noted that images in photos may be individually identifiable. Pseudonyms will be used to replace real names and every effort will be made to protect their confidentiality. Your child's

actions or the things they say may be presented publicly without specific reference to them, reference only by pseudonym, or combined anonymously with the actions and words of other participants.

Your child's participation in this project should not involve risks beyond those of ordinary life. Your child will participate in a pizza party for their participation in SOLHOT. There is no direct benefit to you and/or your child from being in the research portion. However, your child's participation may help others in the future as a result of knowledge gained from the research. It is hoped that by participating in this research project you and your child will be contributing to the knowledge on African American girlhood, and how to create spaces for celebration and support in school settings that speak to the specific needs of Black girls.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate whether you do or do not want your child to participate in this project. Ask your child to bring one copy of this completed form to Porshé Garner. The second copy is to keep for your records. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact us either by mail, e-mail, or telephone.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown
Responsible Principle Investigator
rnbrown@illinois.edu
217-240-3370

Porshé Garner
Research Assistant
pgarne3@illinois.edu
217-240-3370

Jessica Robinson
Research Assistant
jrobins5@illinois.edu
217-240-3370

Blair E. Smith
besmit03@syr.edu
Research Assistant
217-240-3370

Consent Statement

I have read and understand the description of this research project, including information about the risks and benefits of my child’s voluntary participation.

I give permission for my child to participate in SOLHOT and the research project.

I give permission for my child to participate in SOLHOT and not the research project.

Signature

Date

Print Name

I consent to my child being audio taped and photographed during scheduled SOLHOT sessions for the purposes of research and program activities involving media production as created by SOLHOT participants (including my daughter).

_____ YES _____ NO

Signature

Date

Print Name

I also consent to the use of my child’s image for the purpose of a public that may occur at the school, and at conferences and workshops within the greater Champaign-Urbana community and beyond.

_____ YES _____ NO

Signature

Date

Print Name

If you have any questions about your daughter’s rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu

APPENDIX D

Assent

Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT): Exploring the creative genius of Black girls

Hi! We are here from the University of Illinois to do a program called SOLHOT that is designed for African American girls to create visual and performance art productions and stories about their experiences living in Urbana-Champaign and going to middle school. At the end of this program, you will have the opportunity be a part of a public visual art production exhibit to showcase your work.

Your participation in this program is voluntary-this means that you can decide whether or not you want to participate. If you want to stop doing the program at any time, you can stop. In addition to participating in the program there is also research portion that we would like you to participate in. In the research portion we will take notes during our SOLHOT sessions and use the things you create in the session such as poems, stories, and music. The information we collect and the photographs we take will be kept in a locked file cabinet and only people who work with SOLHOT will be able to look at them.

We expect to share what we learn in an academic conference, book, and dissertation. We would be happy to provide you with a summary of the research, if requested. Also, your projects may also appear on exhibit at Franklin Middle School.

If you choose to participate in the research portion, we will not reveal any information about you that someone who knows you will be able to recognize in any publications based on this research unless you want to appear in photographs. If you appear in a photo someone may be able to identify you as a participant in SOLHOT.

In the case of observations, no records will be created or kept that could link you to your name. Your actions or the things you say may be presented but we will use a pseudonym, a name you may make up instead of your real name, to insure that the research is confidential.

Your participation in the program and research portion of SOLHOT should not involve risks beyond those of ordinary life. You will be given a pizza party for your participation in the research portion. We hope that by participating in SOLHOT and the research portion we will learn more about being a African American girl and how to create spaces for celebration and support that address what kinds of support Black girls need in schools to be more successful.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate whether you do or do not want to participate in SOLHOT and/or the research portion. You will be given a copy of this form to keep. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact us either by mail, e-mail, or telephone.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown
Responsible Principle Investigator
rnbrown@illinois.edu
217-240-3370

Porshé Garner
Research Assistant
pgarne3@illinois.edu
217-240-3370

Jessica Robinson
Research Assistant
jrobins5@illinois.edu
217-240-3370

Blair E. Smith
besmit03@syr.edu
Research Assistant
217-240-3370

Assent Statement

I have read and understand the description of this research project. I give permission to participate in this research project.

____ Yes, I want to participate in SOLHOT and the research portion. ____ I wish to only participate in SOLHOT session and not the research portion.

Signature

Date

Print Name

I give permission to be photographed and audio recorded during scheduled SOLHOT sessions.

_____ YES _____ NO

Signature

Date

Print Name

I give my permission to have my photo's displayed at conferences, workshops, community events, etc.

_____ YES _____ NO

Signature

Date

Print Name

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Bureau of Educational Research, 217-333-3023, or the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu.

Bibliography

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Velija, Philippa, Mark Mierzwinski, and Laura Fortune. 2013. "It made me feel powerful":
Women's gendered embodiment and physical empowerment in the martial arts." *Leisure
Studies* 32: 524–41.

Vita

Blair Ebony Smith

Educational Background

Ph.D in Cultural Foundations of Education, 2011-2019

Syracuse University (SU)

Certificate of Advanced Studies: Women's and Gender Studies

Chair: Dr. Gwendolyn Pough & Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown

Dissertation Title: *Cruisings, Crossings and Care: Sounds of Collective Black Girlhood*

B.A. in Sociology, May 2011

The College of William and Mary (W&M)

Major: Sociology

Minor: Community Studies

Concentration: African American Studies

Honors and Awards

Visiting Scholar, Fall 2016- Spring 2017

Gender & Women's Studies, The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

University Fellow, Fall 2011Spring 2015

The Graduate School, Syracuse University (SU)

Creative & Research Grant Award, 2013 (\$600)

School of Education, Syracuse University (SU)

PAGE (Publicly Active Graduate Education) Fellow, September 2011-Spring 2014

Imagining America, Syracuse University (SU)

Archive Co-Founder, 2011

William and Mary Hip Hop Collection, The College of William and Mary (W&M)

Leadership Award, 2011

The Hulon Willis Association, The College of William and Mary (W&M)

Senior Diversity Award, 2011

The Center for Student Diversity, The College of William and Mary (W&M)

Research Interests

Black Feminism and Black Girlhood; Arts-based research and pedagogies; Critical Youth and Cultural Studies (Black Queer Feminist Geneologies/Geography); Sound Studies; Digital Humanities; Alternative Qualitative Methodologies, Public Humanities

Research Experience

Artist/Scholar, 2014-present

Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT)
Various Locations, Champaign-Urbana, IL

Scholar, 2009-2011

Community Studies Scholars Program
Williamsburg, Virginia

Publications

Articles

Brown, R.N., **Smith, B.E.**, Robinson, J.L., & Garner, P. R. “Doing digital wrongly.” (forthcoming, 2019). In *American Quarterly*, Special Issue: Toward a Critically Engaged Digital Practice: American Studies and the Digital Humanities.

Smith, B.E. (Winter 2016). “Doing SOLHOT as a reliable way of life.” *The Public I*.
<http://publici.ucimc.org/doing-solhot-as-a-reliable-way-of-life/>

Smith, B.E. (2013). “To be young, black, queer, female and a basketball player.”
<http://elixher.com/to-be-young-black-queer-female-and-a-basketball-player/>

Invited Book Chapters

Robinson, J.L., Brown, R.N., Garner, P.R., & **Smith, B.E.** “Jazzy Bell ReTell/Tale: Betrayals of Black Girlhood, Methods and Southernness.” (in press). In Regina Bradley (Ed.), *Outkasted Conversations Reader*.

Smith, B.E. (2012). “Black girl night talk.” In R.N. Brown and C.J. Kwakye (Eds). *Wish to live: The hip-hop feminism pedagogy reader* (pp. 141-161). New York: Peter Lang.

Relevant Courses Taught

Instructor (Self Developed Syllabus), Spring 2014

Syracuse University (SU). Syracuse, NY.

CFE 362: Youth, Schooling & Popular Culture (Cross listed: Sociology & Women & Gender Studies)

Teaching Assistant, Fall 2012-Spring 2013

Syracuse University (SU). Syracuse, NY

EDU 310: The American School. Taught by Dr. Mario Perez

Online Adjunct Instructor, Summer & Fall 2013 (Terms)

Empire State College, The Center for Distant Learning. Saratoga Springs, NY

243554: Hip Hop America (Historical Studies)

Conference Presentations

Smith, B.E., Brown, R.N. (2018, April.) “Phantom Subjectivities: Sounding Black Girlhood, Listening for Levitation, and Feeling Each Other and the Collective. American Educational Research Association National Conference. New York, NY.

Smith, B.E., Brown, R.N., Garner, P., Robinson, J. (2018, April.) Roundtable: Doing Digital Wrongly. Modern Popular Music Conference. Seattle, WA.

Smith, B.E., Brown, R.N., Garner, P., Robinson, J. (2017, Nov.) “Welcome to our land...”: Sounding Black Girlhood, Collective Dreams, Imaginations and New Worlds. Roundtable. National Women’s Studies Association Conference. Baltimore, MD.

Smith, B. E. ““Just Cruisin’”: Sounding Black Girlhood Cruisings and Crossings.” (2016, Mar.) Women’s History Symposium, Champaign-Urbana, IL.

Durham, A., Robinson, J.L., Brown, R.N, **Smith, B.E.** (2016, June) The Politics and Poetics of Hip Hop Feminism. Allied Media Conference, Detroit, MI. June 2016.

Brown, R.N., **Smith, B.E.**, Robinson, J.L., Garner, P. (2016, Mar.) SOLHOT Presents: Black Girl Genius interactive performance/workshop. Hip Hop Literacies Conference. The Ohio State University. Columbus, OH.

Smith, B. E. (2015, Nov.) “LOVENLOOPS: Exploring Black Girlhood & Beat-making” National Women’s Studies Association Conference. Milwaukee, WI.

Brown, R.N., **Smith, B.E.**, Robinson, J.L., Garner, P. (2014, Oct). Black (Girl) Genius, Performance presentation/panel at the Imagining America National Conference, Atlanta, GA.

Smith, B. E. (2014, Nov)” Black Girl Feminist Beats.” National Women’s Studies Association Conference. San Juan, PR.

Invited Speaking Engagements

Virginia Tech Students of Hip Hop Legacy & University Libraries Presents: Digging in the Crates Hip Hop Studies: Gender & Hip Hop

April 19, 2018

Virginia Tech University

Blacksburg VA

Students of Hip Hop Legacy: Misogyny in Hip Hop
February 20, 2018
The College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, VA

Art, Activism, and Academia: Critical Gender Studies Perspectives on Intersectional Resistance
The Asylum: Alternative Registers of Black Girlhood
May 31, 2017
University of California- San Diego
La Jolla, CA

Art, Activism, and Academia: Critical Gender Studies Perspectives on Intersectional Resistance
The Asylum: Alternative Registers of Black Girlhood
June, 1, 2017
University of California- San Diego
La Jolla, CA

GWS: Hip Hop Feminism
LOVENLOOPS: Beats, Home and Remembering
April 12, 2017
The University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
Gender and Women's Studies Department
Urbana, IL

Black Girl Genius Week Teach-in
Nov, 2014; Oct, 2016; Feb 2016
The University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
Urbana, IL

Invited Performances

Performer with SOLHOT We Levitate. April 2016
Learning to Breathe: Black Feminism, Performance Pedagogies & Creative Praxis
The Winton Chair Cornerstone Event Series
We Levitate: Making Music to Save Our Lives & Hear Our Truths
University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, MN

DJ, Co(Beat)Performer & Teach-In Panel Participant. March
2015
Crank Up The Noise: Youth, Voices & Activism
Performance with Girl Band and Colleagues, We Levitate
<https://soundcloud.com/solhotnextlevel>
Miami University (Ohio). Oxford, OH

Artist Skillshare Organizer.

December 2013

Punk and Hip Hop Symposium, The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign UIUC)

Organized a “Beat Skillshare” as a performer and participant in the symposium. Worked with other organizers and youth participants co-creating beats and sounds from sampled records

Conference & Event Curatorial Experience

Co-Organized. “Black Girl Genius Week III”,

October 2016

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Co-Organized. “Black Girl Genius Week II”,

February 2016

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Co-Organized. “Black Girl Genius Week I”,
2014

November

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Co-Organized. Imagining America National Conference,

October 2013

Syracuse, NY

Work Experience

Program Coordinator for “Open Scene”, NEA Our Town Grant
July 2017.

September 2016-

The Urbana Champaign Independent Media Center. Urbana, IL.

Creative Works

[SOLHOT We Levitate](#) as DJ B.E.

The Asylum (digital mixtape in progress)

[“SOLHOTFRIENDS”](#) recorded, shot and created with SOLHOT (2017)

Video [“How I Feel”](#) shot and created with SOLHOT (2016)

[SOLHOT WE Levitate Performance @ Exile on Main St \(Champaign, IL\)](#)

Black Girl Genius Week Studio October 2016

[How I Feel EP](#) (Digital Mixtape 2016)

Black Girl Genius Week Studio February 2016

Black Girl Genius Week Studio 2014 Performance tracks

[We Levitate “Miss Me” Music Video shot by Chris Smith \(Two Brainz\)](#) (2014)

[lovenloops](#)

[Don't Ever Forget It](#) (released July 19, 2016 via [Soulvember Records](#))

Service

Director. CNY PAGE (Publicly Active Graduate Education) May 2014 Imagining America Syracuse, NY	March 2013—
Facilitator. Intergroup Dialogue Spotighting Justice Spring 2013 Nottingham High School Syracuse, NY	Fall 2012-
Facilitator. Writing Our Lives Program Fall 2013 Syracuse, NY	Spring 2012-
Selected participant. Collective Impact Workshop. Syracuse University The Center for Institutional and Social Change. Columbia University Imagining America. Syracuse, NY	March 30 th , 2012