WE GOT US: THE PROCESS OF ENGAGING YOUTH AS PARTICIPANTS AND CO-RESEARCHERS

Erica J. Powell Wrencher

Abstract

This paper discusses the "how" of conducting participatory research that engages youth as participants and, more importantly, as co-researchers. In collaboration with four community co-researchers, this arts-based inquiry engaged 14 young Black people ranging in age from seven to fifteen years around their definitions of joy. Using a theoretical framework of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and counter storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), the decision to engage a methodology that would be accessible for participants maintained a commitment for the research to make a positive difference in the present material conditions of my participants' communities and beyond. As a community-engaged project, this work continues to produce scholarship useful for the transformation of educational and otherwise spaces where young Black people are welcomed. This article will discuss strategies, insights, and challenges in the process of community-engaged research across adult and youth researcher collaborators.

That which touches me most is that I had a chance to work with people
Passing on to others that which was passed on to me

To me young people come first, they have the courage where we fail
And if I can but shed some light as they carry us through the gale

The older I get the better I know that the secret of my going on
Is when the reins are in the hands of the young, who dare to run against the storm

—From *Ella's Song*

Lyrics and music by Bernice Johnson Reagon
Sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock

Critical research that engages young Black people as participants *and* community co-researchers offers a pathway for developing young researchers while also taking seriously the power of intergenerational knowledge sharing as a process for knowledge production. I am offering this work in the spirit of *Ella's Song* (quoted above), with engaged pedagogy (hooks, 2010) and Black space-making as the driving frames for this work. It includes Black space-making both in and outside of the academy. Given the anti-Black, anti-CRT, and increasingly anti-DEI landscape of higher education institutions, participatory research with young Black people (which is often conducted out of necessity) serves several purposes. An echo of the mandate to "lift as we climb," this kind of research offers onramps into traditional academic processes for young Black emerging scholars while also addressing community-identified priorities rooted in equity and liberation. Bluntly put, this is critical work that must be done—for the continued matriculation of Black scholars through higher education (HE) institutions and for the survival Black communities.

Community-engaged inquiry on joy among young Black people research was a call to create space for young Black people, learn from and with young Black people, and give a collective call to action for those who are concerned about young Black people. It required a commitment to stay in touch with my own humanity and to engage in humanizing ways throughout the research process—from research topic to methodology, to analysis, to representation. Using reflections from the research team's learnings, we seek to offer an example (not a model) for researchers who wish to do participatory research with young Black people as participants and co-researchers. As such, this process paper details the "how" of an arts-based, community-engaged inquiry that engaged 18 young Black people—four of them as co-researchers. Before discussing the process, I will share the conceptual framework for this project, which offers a glimpse into my positionality and the theoretical foundations of this work.

Conceptual Framework

I consider myself a Black Feminist and sociological mama-scholar. This means I deeply value knowledge that is: 1) produced from experience, 2) in dialogue with Black women across time, and 3) grounded in a deep care for and accountability to a community (Collins, 1989). As a critical educator and scholar, I come to any work—especially work with young people—with the hope of collectively journeying closer to *conscientization*, which Freire and Macedo (2016) define as the "deepening of awareness characteristic of all emergence" (p. 109). Following ancestral scholar and Black feminist bell hooks' (2015) lead, I seek the liberation of all people from a Black Feminist standpoint (Harding, 1992) that with the flourishing of all Black life comes the flourishing of all life. As such, I align with the metaphorically expressed purpose of research as responsibility (Dillard, 2003)—conducting all research, through process to product, toward the goal of realizing more equitable, flourishing communities. In the next section, I will briefly share the theoretical framework that informed the study on joy and the decision to involve young community co-researchers.

Theoretical Framework

With community-identified priorities at the center, community-engaged research is almost always multipurposed. My experiences as a Black public-school educator, active neighbor, auntie-neighbor, and Black mama have given me much insight into the needs of young Black people in my community. This work grows out of almost five years of listening to community members express the need for neighborhood-based recreational spaces for young people. It is rooted in a decolonized commitment to do work that is "responsive to the needs, demands, and expectations" (Yep & Mitchell, 2017) of the community.

The container for the work—a critical, arts-based neighborhood pop-up—was intentionally selected to meet this expressed need. As a critical community-engaged scholar, another layer of purpose for this study—conducting research about young people *with* young people—was equally important to the community need because this collaboration was another kind of Black space-making in affirming the organic scholarship of the four younger co-researchers and in learning parts of the often pay-walled traditional research process. Having lived in and listened to the neighborhood for almost five years, I carry my commitments to the neighborhood and to holding the young people (participants and co-researchers') stories and experiences with the utmost care. I am accountable to them first.

Throughout my career I have been fortunate to have mentors who held me accountable to my values and invested in my leadership by inviting me into collaborative research projects. These relationships have provided pivotal opportunities for learning and growing as a scholar, and I feel the mandate to "lift as I climb." This research was an opportunity for me to share space with young scholars to engage in processes that are traditionally paywalled in the academy. Of equal importance to me was their presence during the research, the gifts of their personalities, decision-making and perspectives were invaluable in the cultivating and meaning-making of the pop-up. Having developed and maintained a connection with the four co-researchers for over four years—beginning with their participation in an afterschool initiative on joy that I facilitated—it made sense for us to collaborate on this work. We also had a shared point of reference: exploring joy.

As we co-constructed the pop-up space as a "radical space of possibility" (ross, 2021), I guided our group from my praxis, which lies at the intersection of engaged pedagogy (hooks, 2010), Black educational fugitive space-making (ross, 2021), and specifically Black joy space-making. Given my commitment to research as responsibility (Dillard, 2003), learning and teaching are inseparable. I am always both—teacher and learner—and I am grounded in hooks' (2010) observations on the "movement of ideas, exchanged by everyone, that [forge] a meaningful working relationship between everyone in the classroom" (p. 21) and that this engaged learning in community "makes us better learners because it asks us to embrace and explore the practice of knowing together, to see intelligence as a resource that can strengthen our common good" (p. 22). As near peers to the participants, co-researchers contributed invaluable cultural and generational wisdom in the process. In addition to this expertise, co-researchers' experiences, skillsets, and ideas strengthened the methodology and data analysis of the study.

Finally, this research was guided by two critical theoretical frameworks: 1) Tara Yosso's (2005) of community cultural wealth and 2) Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso's (2002) framework on counter story-telling. These frameworks allow for a fuller acknowledgement of the layered connections and experiences that I draw from (and that young Black people draw from) as a source of knowledge. Intergenerational community-based research necessitates having an asset-based lens—acknowledging and honoring the wealth of fellow researchers and communities and amplifying narratives with this wealth at the center. Yosso names six kinds of cultural capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital—and emphasizes that they are "not mutually exclusive or static but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Young Black people are who they are not because of the way the U.S. "hierarchical society reproduces itself" (Yosso, 2005, p. 70), but because they belong to a brilliant, resilient, communal people who possess "an array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69) that is passed down through songs, rituals, stories, sermons, conversations, DNA, and living. I am convinced that a firm grasp on this concept—the commitment to acknowledging the wealth of community and culture, particularly for marginalized communities—is indispensable in conducting community-engaged research, especially research that engages young Black people as participants and co-researchers.

To concretize this commitment in the process and product of research, I set out with three commitments: to offer a counterstory as amplification; to cultivate a counterstory with the hope and resilience of a better future at its core; and to craft with my co-researchers a place for knowing together. The voices and stories of the young Black people engaged in the work serve as an alternative narrative about young Black people that runs counter to the all-too-familiar majoritarian stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) steeped in oppression and despair. Participant-researchers' and young co-researchers' experiences throughout the research process—their stories—are also worthy of being told, and in the telling become a critical link for scholars committed to a critical, community-engaged praxis. These stories and experiences keep us closer to the community and able to resist complacency within the academy. Ikemoto (1997), Solórzano, and Yosso (2002) likewise emphasize the necessity of counter-stories in a way that connects to this work: as a way to "strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance."

Additionally, this work serves as a counter-story in process and product, because I believe that those who are most marginalized and impacted by oppression in society have the most to teach about resilience and possibilities for a different future. Yep and Mitchell (2017) name this quality of counternarrative as foundational in an ethnic studies orientation to community engagement—having a "focus on recentering the community (and specifically communities of color and other marginalized communities) as the primary decision-maker in the collaborations" (Yep and Mitchell, 2017, p. 301). The decisions to research joy among young Black people and to collaborate with young Black people as co-researchers grew out of a belief that I have been called into this work—the work that combines all of my identities to be a cultural leader in a metaphorical call and response song that is about (re)membering (Dillard, 2021) joy, the capacity to conjure it, amplify it, and study it. This call also includes the work of space-making and building the capacity of others to make space on all sides of the research

(as participants and researchers) for young Black people. This capacity-building is part of my responsibility as a community-engaged scholar—to leverage my resources, position, and knowledge in service to the common good of my community partners and the community.

Methodology

Methodologically, this inquiry process was guided by a critical arts-based approach that incorporated opportunities for visual art, play, rest, movement, music, and just being. Conducting research about young Black people *with* young Black people required a methodology that would allow the most opportunities for participants and co-researchers to express their knowledge.

The four co-researchers and I had a previous collective experience around this concept of joy. About four years prior to this study, while they were all in high school, I began an after-school initiative on their high school campus that centered joy. It was an educational space that centered joy cultural expression through art and movement and centered on joy exploration (this space was called Journey to Joy). All the co-researchers, who were college age at the time of writing, had been a part of this after-school space and had reference for how they felt and what they did to explore joy. We remained connected through the COVID-19 global pandemic and through the summer of our research collaboration.

We carried this spirit from Journey to Joy forward into this critical arts-based inquiry on joy among Black young people. In addition to our experiences together, I leaned on Patricia Leavy's (2020) work on arts-based research (ABR) practices in pooling data collection methods. Leavy (2020) defines ABR practices as:

> ...a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during any or all phases of the research...These tools adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address researcher questions in holistic and engaged ways in which theory and practice are intertwined. (p. 4)

This was social justice work grounded in a pedagogy of hope that "enacts a politics of resistance and imagines a utopian future" (Denzin, 2010, p. 111). And although we did not center joy as it relates to resistance, this work embraced an emancipatory vision (Denzin, 2010) towards the transformation of educational and otherwise spaces where young Black people are welcomed on all sides of the research—as participants and as co-researchers. In this work, the co-researchers and I joined the long line of community-engaged qualitative researchers who use their pens, voices, paintbrushes, cameras, and bodies to resist rigid academic structures (Finley, 2011), leaning into what Kress and van Leeuwen's call multimodality, or a "mixed set of...modes for meaning-making," (cited in Denzin, 2010, p. 80).

Arts-based researcher Susan Finley (2008) makes clear the critical nature of art-based research within the academy. She writes:

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

I was committed to the flourishing of Black people and (re)membering (Dillard, 2021) my/our brilliance before this study. The decision to engage a methodology that would be accessible for participants maintained this commitment. Additionally, arts-based qualitative researcher Keisha Green (2020) echoes these benefits while including the impact on the researcher. Discussing examples of "otherwise" work, Green (2020) suggests that creative research methods help us challenge conventional ways of working as we reimagine new or otherwise possible practices. Community-engaged research methodological processes often must be unconventional by traditional academic standards because the work often is not created for and does not live in the academy.

Finley (2008) offers four features of arts-based research: 1) it makes use of emotive, affective experiences, senses, and bodies, and imagination and emotion as well as intellect, as ways of knowing and responding to the world; 2) it gives interpretive license to the researcher to create meaning from experience; 3) it attends to the role of form in shaping meaning; and 4) it exists in the tensions of blurred boundaries (p. 2–3). Validation of inner knowledge and creating space for diverse expressions of that knowledge are very important to me. Working with young co-researchers required a commitment to this validation and space-making. It required an immense amount of reassurance from me to co-researchers that their ideas, connections, and questions were valid and necessary.

Research process

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

I came to this inquiry as a neighbor with existing relationships with the young people I hoped to engage. At the time of writing, I lived in the neighborhood and was currently serving as the secretary of the neighborhood association (an organization with the mission of community building). I also participated in summer programming through my faith community and the majority of the young people who participated in the Joy pop-up knew my

family. This part of the community-engaged research process is often overlooked. It was, quite frankly, the step before the first step in the research and was the foundation on which all the work rested. It involved morning walks with my neighbors, neighborhood association meetings, planning and executing neighborhood events, and leveraging my social networks to help with said neighborhood events. It involved a lot of invested time—almost five years.

Co-researcher recruitment, training, and preparation

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

Having worked with young people in community-based cultural organizing and having worked with these young people in particular just two years earlier, I knew I needed to keep us connected in the months leading up to the study. So we had several meetups over food as a part of our study preparation. These meetups were very informal, catching up on each other's lives. Amid our conversations, when it was appropriate, I would share any pertinent information about the study or give important reminders. Again, it is important to underscore the time I took with co-researchers *before* the study began—to reconnect, build momentum, and keep this study towards the top of their priorities. I had the privilege of this study being a main priority for me, and although they were interested in the topic of joy, that was not the case for the co-researchers in the same way.

Co-researcher descriptions

Each co-researcher answered a set of four questions designed to better understand their place in life now and how they cultivate joy in it, and their connections to and hopes for the study ahead. The co-researchers described their motivations for joining the work in varied, but similar terms. JC, who was one of the original J2J members when it began on a local high school campus in the city in the spring of 2020, joined the work with hopes to be able to more easily spot joy in children, and to be able to replicate pop-ups of her own in the future as a community leader to "bring people, especially kids, together." GS joined a neighborhood gathering as a friend of one of my students and described their hopes for the pop-up in broader terms, describing an intention to find "a new mindset and hope for the younger generation." For themselves, they also expressed a hope that being involved would help them "keep this support (cultivating love for the youth and the world)," and "[find] a new point of view to the world." EJ saw the upcoming event as one that would help *her* build resilience—not just the

younger children who joined in: "I believe it will help me build a stronger connection. I cultivate joy by creating an energy for myself. I believe in energy, and I believe if I want a positive outcome, I need a neutral mindset. Life happens, but one bad moment shouldn't ruin my day." Similarly, BF saw the study as an opportunity to develop new skills for connection with younger kids: "This study will help me in being able to be around kids without worrying about if they're uncomfortable or if I'm comfortable enough without worrying about if we are connecting on anything relatable."

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

Participant recruitment and descriptions

This inquiry engaged 14 young Black people ranging in age from 7 to 15 years old in an urban city in the Southeast United States, who were at least loosely connected to each other through neighborhood proximity and/or institutional connections (i.e., school or church or other organized neighborhood programming). In the early summer before the four-day pop-up began, I recruited participants by hand-delivering a kid-friendly verbal invitation along with the recruitment script.

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

The pop-up took place Monday–Thursday from 9am–12pm in the neighborhood park. City park services had arrived early to drop off the trash and recycling cans as required by the city permit. There were four trash cans and three recycling ones on the northwest side of the shelter. The port-a-potty had been delivered the day before also. It was placed on the southeast end of the park near a tree and a fairly new black wooden food pantry box. I had come out the day before to put a lock on the door because I wanted it to be clean for the next day. The under-resourced reality of this area of the city has resulted in a large houseless population as well as a large number of neighbors with substance dependencies. I struggled internally as I realized that I was locking a resource from which many unhoused neighbors could have benefited. My decision was not in alignment with my value that everyone should have access to what they need, but instead was more aligned with the institutional, systematic disappearing of those who are not seen as useful or credible agents of the institution. I still have guilt about this. I had also come back to the park the evening before Day 1 with two dear friends and their two kids to place the nails that would hold the signs up. There were two multi-colored signs for each end of the shelter. They read *Joy Pop-Up: A Black Joy Art Experience.* I have added the image again below for convenience.

Figure 1: Outside at an open-air shelter with a red metal top, cement floor and picnic tables. There is multi-colored a sign with black letters that read "Welcome to the Joy Pop-up: Black Joy Art Experience."

Data production

I used the phrase data production (Glesne, 2016) instead of data collection because the co-researchers and I were active in "*producing* the data...through questions and social interactions" (Glesne, 2016, p. 44) that occurred throughout the pop-up. We used the following data production methods: 1) participant observation 2) participant-created products (images and other art creations), and 3) focus groups. I leaned into Ellingson's (2009) crystallization framework for data production which "combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon" (p. 4).

Data analysis: A collective multilayered approach

The first layer in the process of thematic analysis (Glesne, 2016)—searching for themes and patterns—occurred during the four-day pop-up as data was produced. The research team kept field note journals for thoughts, observations and the necessary reflexive work that critical qualitative inquiry requires.

Once the pop-up day ended at noon each day, and the U-Haul was packed, the research team debriefed the pop-up session beginning with a 10-minute silent journaling followed by a 30–40-minute discussion guided by the following questions adapted from those suggested by Saldaña and Omasta (2018): 1. How am I feeling about today? 2. How does it compare to what I was thinking before the day? 3. What do my observations communicate about the participants and joy? 4. What do I think needs to change for tomorrow? By using the same debrief questions after each pop-up in addition to facilitators having individual field journals, we were able to capture initial patterns emerging across the participant group.

A second layer of meaning-making from the data was reflective memos from my observation notes, co-researcher journals, and debriefs, similar to those Saldaña and Omasta (2018) define: "extended researcher commentary stimulated by field notes (and other data such as documents and interview transcripts)…sites for researchers to 'dump their brains' freely in their own words about what they've observed" (p. 54). This process helped me reflect on each day in a systematic way, which added to the overall rigor of the analysis. The next layer of analysis would begin at our research team data analysis retreat about one month after the pop-up.

Data analysis retreat

During our connection meetups, the research team had agreed on a weekend that we would all be in town after the pop-up to do the analysis retreat. We planned for the retreat to last from Friday evening through Sunday afternoon. It was important to gather in person for two reasons. First, we sought to challenge the post-pandemic realities of life-on-screen and be fully present. Additionally, the co-creation of knowledge is done best in communal spaces, with community assets (Shah, 2020), and I knew the co-researchers' experiences and observations from the pop-up would be invaluable assets in this inquiry. By holding a retreat, we sought to facilitate a space where they could best share their knowledge.

Using my institutional connections as an employee at a local university, I reserved a room on campus for the Friday night session. On the Friday of the analysis retreat, BF, GS and I were in person while EJ and JC joined via Zoom. Everyone brought or ordered their own food, and I provided brownies and tea. The goal of this session was to reorient ourselves with our field observation journals and the research questions. We took time to look through our journals and share first thoughts about what was coming up for us. Some initial thoughts that came out related to the questions were: community, culture, being outside, trying activities together, and culture.

On the second day of the retreat (Saturday), EJ, GS, BF, and I met in person at a local community organizing office space. JC joined us online via Zoom. We posted the research questions and an agenda for the day on the whiteboard. I have shared an image of the whiteboard and the agenda below.
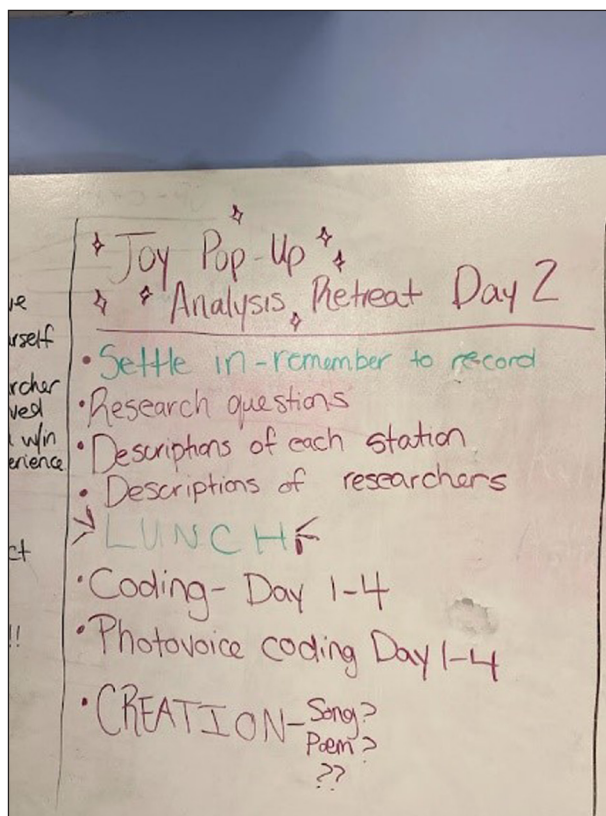
Figure 2: Image of a white board with a listed agenda that reads from top to bottom as follows: Joy Pop-Up Analysis Retreat Day 2, Settle in—remember to record, Research questions, Description of each station, Description of researchers, Lunch, Coding—Day 1-4, Photovoice coding Day 1-4, Creation (song, poem, ??).

Over donuts, other snacks, and coffee, we started the morning writing the descriptions of the stations. After completing station descriptions, each researcher completed a research description.

After lunch, we shifted to the process of making the initial codes. We began the afternoon session with a brief discussion on coding. Before learning the definition of a code (Saldaña, 2016), it was most important for co-researchers to understand the subjective nature of the coding process, and for them to understand that I trusted their intuition. I also emphasized that they needed to trust themselves in the coding process. This took a particular kind of courage and surrender from all of us. I had to practice what I had been preaching—yielding to their wisdom perspectives as organic researchers—and resist the urge to encourage them to perform the traditional academic research process. This resistance grows from the heart of my praxis—engaged pedagogy that demands a posture of learning from and with and being proximate to my community. Part of my work in this research was to de-mystify as much of the traditional process as much as possible so co-researchers and I could be in true mutual collaboration. The image below shows the bullet points that guided our pre-coding discussion as well as the definition of a code.
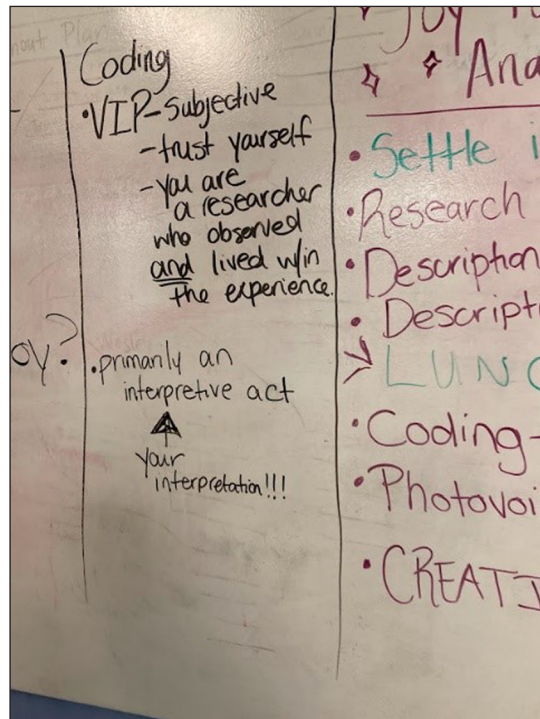
Figure 3: Image of a white board with information about coding. It reads from top to bottom as follows: Coding, VIP (subjective, trust yourself, you are a researcher who observed and lived within the experience), primarily an interpretive act (your interpretation).
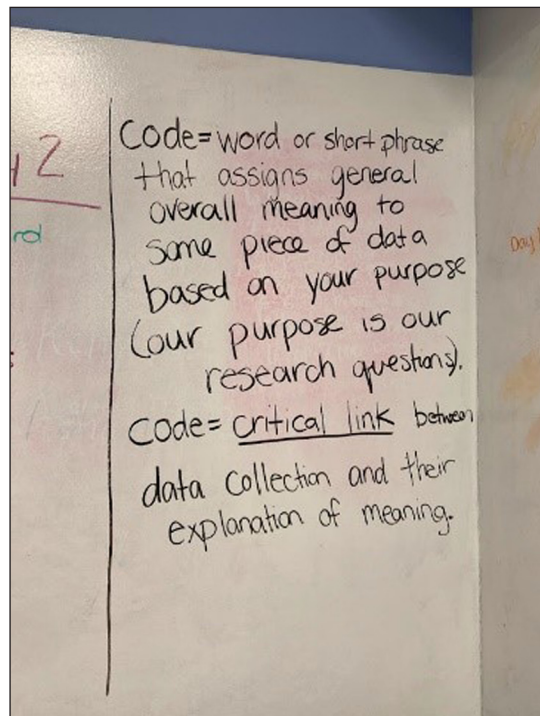

Figure 4: Image of a white board with information about coding. It reads from top to bottom as follows: Code=a word or short phrase that assigns general overall meaning to the same piece of data based on your purpose (our purpose is our research question). Code=critical link between data collection and their explanation of meaning.

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

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

We completed three rounds of the steps above for Days 1–2 and produced the codes in the image below. To ensure we would get through coding the journals, we agreed to start an hour earlier the next day. Our agenda for Sunday morning is below.
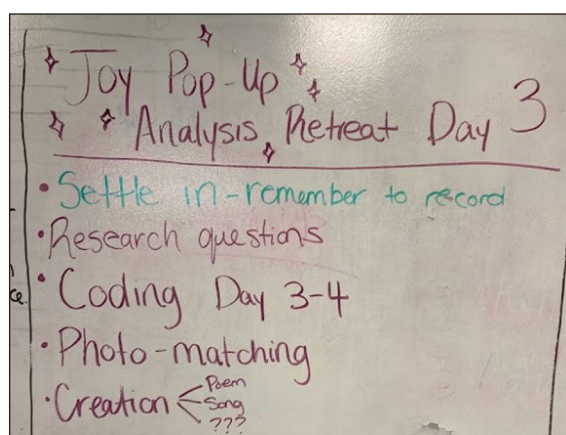

Figure 5: Image of a white board with a listed agenda that reads from top to bottom as follows: Joy Pop-Up Analysis Retreat Day 3, Settle in—remember to record, Research questions, Coding—Day 3-4, Photo-matching, Creation (song, poem, ??).

After reviewing the research questions, we completed the coding (pictured below) for Days 3–4 on Sunday morning. JC had joined us via zoom for the entire retreat, so we made the collective decision to order pizza and go eat lunch with her at her house. Though this meant additional delays in coding, the continuation of community was more important.

Individual coding, word clouds, and themes

The research team was able to collectively analyze our field journals but still needed to analyze the photovoice and explanation cards, art artifacts, and researcher-created photos. Working alone, I coded the remaining data. Following the same process as the retreat, I evaluated each artifact and attached a code to it, then completed Nvivo (Saldaña, 2016) coding of focus group transcripts for Day 2 and Day 4, attaching codes to participants'

words, phrases or quotes. Once all data had been coded, I used word cloud software online to discern patterns across codes.

By using the word cloud generator, I could group the codes into larger categories across the four days. From the categories, I distilled four overarching themes that I connected to the research questions with a theme tree (images below).
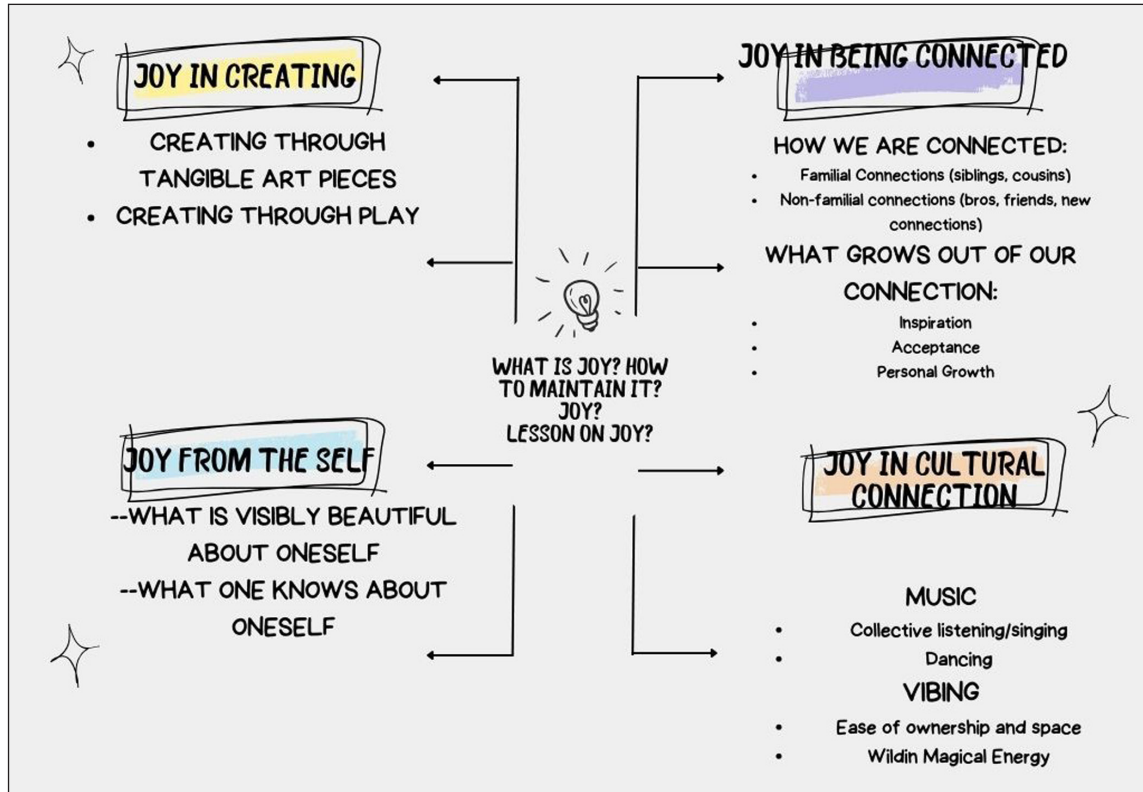

Figure 6: Image of themes tree-map.

Co-researcher experiences

My co-researchers and I had accomplished a remarkable project that highlighted the stories of joy of the young Black people who participated. Equally important, we had been changed in the process. We had learned from and with each other in the process. In this section, I share an overview of the co-researchers' experiences in the study based on their answers to a set of questions.

One common theme in their committing to be a part of the study was the shared experience of Journey to Joy, a relationship with me, and believing they had the power to be agents of change. GS noted, "I knew the vision Ms. E had and wanted to help bring her vision alive" and JC shared that "J2J was one of the best experiences of her life." Co-researchers were eager to jump in and be a part of co-creating a space like what they had experienced. Another common thread within co-researcher experiences was the need for this kind of research, that it is filling

a gap. BF shared, "I feel that this topic is something that people never really think about much, even within our own community," and GS noted, "We don't talk about this topic often and seeing joy among the young black youth is amazing to see." Co-researchers also emphasized the utility that this work could have in educational spaces. EJ shared, "I definitely think a lot more people would bond better and have an idea about others that prevents them from judging," and BF echoed similar sentiments noting, "It can for sure help in the school/education system because teachers will see that these students aren't lazy for no reason but they just need the energy and passion for what they want or should do and finding out what they like can help them feel better and want to do what they need in school."

Connecting the Frameworks and Methods

This research process tells many stories. It tells stories that counter mainstream ideas of the typical researcher, research process, and/or research outcome(s) and puts on display the cultural wealth of each co-researcher. We needed each other—our specific perspectives—to curate an example of a Black educational fugitive space and to make meaning out of the data we collected about joy in young Black people. Community-engaged scholars understand that this part of the work—the process—cannot be diminished as only a means to a finished scholarly product. The process is part of the product. Looking back, I am certain that I employed an immense amount of my own cultural wealth—aspirational, navigational, social, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005)—many times needing to use them all at once as a Black mama, Black woman graduate student, and Black woman employee of a higher education institution. Additionally, in the many pivotal decisions we made during the pop-up, the research team also made use of our aspirational capital. From the decision to remove stations and add others, we were following signs of participants' joy. This is important for those who wish to facilitate Black educational fugitive spaces—a willingness to pivot based on what emerges.

It was very important to me for Yosso's work to be a part of the framing for this research—both for the research team and the participants. Epistemic oppression (Dotson, 2014) necessitates explicitly naming the ways that BIPOC people survive and thrive in knowledge production despite the challenges within traditional academia. Otherwise, our distinct stores of "cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69) become invisible—rarefied and assigned very little value.

Challenges

Participatory action research can take many forms, often changing shape in real-time as the research unfolds. Calls for action from this inquiry are still in process, given that it was conducted recently, and I have had reduced capacity and time constraints. However, we are still committed to a primary goal of PAR—bringing calls to action from our collective research to those with the power to change. Conducting research about young Black people, with young Black people as co-researchers, presented many challenges. The logistical

work to get us all reconnected and prepared for the study was a massive undertaking in addition to the institutional processes required to conduct research with community partners. Even though I had the advantage of knowing the co-researchers prior to this study, we had not shared space in a while. We needed to reconnect. At the time of writing, GS and EJ were in college and no longer lived in the city. This meant we were confined mostly to weekends to meet up, which meant additional time away from my personal life outside of normal weekday working hours. Although working during nontraditional work hours is common for community-engaged scholars, conducting research with young community co-researchers often narrows the window opportunity even more as they navigate additional challenges like transportation, time management, and prioritization.

There was also the challenge of funding. I personally funded some of the meals we shared during the connection meetups before the study. Although this presented only a small financial challenge, and it is common for community-engaged researchers to use personal resources in their work, working with young community co-researchers often means carrying more of the financial load because they don't have self-sustaining income. I was thankful to have the financial resources to be able to provide shared meals, as I believe sharing food is one way of maintaining and fostering deeper connections with others.

Fortunately, I received a department-based research grant for this study, but institutional processes would only allow me to receive disbursements during the academic year. The study took place during the summer months, when it would be most beneficial and convenient for participants and co-researchers. This institutional funding timeline meant co-researchers—three of whom had taken off work for a week to be present at the study—were left waiting for months after the work to receive their parts of their stipends.

An invitation

Although not completely absent, there is a deficit of community co-researchers doing research with scholars. In conclusion, I am offering an invitation for fellow community-engaged researchers who are interested in understanding more about joy among young Black people. These also serve as recommendations for future research. We must conduct research that centers the voices and experiences of actual young Black people—on all sides of the research—as participants and as co-researchers. This will require a change in typical thinking about how we (de)value knowledge from young people. We know that this shift cannot occur solely through theorizing in the academy. We must commit to proximity—being and working with—those who we seek to learn from and with. It is without a doubt more work to bring on community research partners, especially young people, but doing so takes seriously the power of intergenerational knowledge-sharing as a process for knowledge creation. Community-engaged research requires researchers to make different methodological choices. This includes working within the schedules of young research partners, often sacrificing non-work hours to accommodate their availability, and having to be very creative with funding. Researchers should always consider how community partners are being compensated—even if the work is for liberation. There needs to be equitable—not mutual—benefit and reciprocity. This means that researchers, even if they are social justice-minded, need to realize that

they are agents of institutions—often with more resources than people in the community. And people should always be centered over institutions.

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

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