

Grieving Out Loud: Towards an Interdisciplinary Understanding of Black Girlhood and Culturally Reflective Trauma Informed Care

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ABSTRACT

Black girlhood creates space for the affirmation of Black girls' lives, voices, and genius. Centering progressive actions for the wellness and future of Black girls, Black girlhood captures lived experience within an upheaval of safety across dimensions, often void of spaces to recover. In this paper, we center geographies of grieving Black girlhoods in moving toward an interdisciplinary framework of culturally reflective trauma informed care that allows the space and time necessary to navigate the grief journey.

Keywords: Black girlhood, trauma, grief and loss, grief process, culturally relevant, trauma-informed care

“Trauma, grief, and oppression don’t just impact a person’s perception of and access to time through physiological shortening. They also restrict access to self, which is to say, they generate massive amounts of grief while dulling the tools required for healing” (Wade, 2021, p. 41).

At the nexus of Black bereavement, healing methodologies, and academic inquiry, it remains imperative to emphasize the profound impact of collective mourning experienced by Black Americans, stemming from America's extensive history of racialization and racist violence (Leath et al., 2022; Parry, 2020; Wade, 2021). Despite the disproportionate burden of grief borne by Black communities, research specifically focused on Black bereavement remains scarce. While early contributions from pioneers in grief scholarship such as Engel (1961), Bowlby

(1961), Raphael (1983), Parkes and Weiss (1983), and Stroebe et al. (1993) provided insights into grief, encompassing both its normative and pathological manifestations, a notable gap persists in understanding grief experiences within culturally significant contexts. Early contributions in grief scholarship have traditionally depicted or have mischaracterized grief as a linear process (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014; Richmond et al., 2021), characterized by a clear beginning and end. However, these prevailing interpretations often overlook the complexities of cultural intersections and lived experiences (Smid et al., 2018; Smid et al., 2021). Recognizing the enduring legacies of loss that have profoundly shaped the Black collective experience, we observe a direct correlation between historical traumas and contemporary approaches to coping with loss (Parry, 2020; Wade, 2021). Grief is understood as a necessary and natural response to significant life events, such as the death of a loved one or major life transitions and is essential for human beings to navigate life's challenges (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014; Richmond et al., 2021; Smid et al., 2021). Creating space for grieving mitigates potential complications and represents a courageous assertion of agency within contexts that may otherwise foster feelings of powerlessness (Grinage, 2019).

Moreover, amidst the enduring aftermath of our present circumstances, characterized by the ongoing global response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated collective losses, we persistently observe the profound influence of this reality on student experiences, academic attainment, and overall welfare. In the wake of disrupted traditional grief practices, students continue to navigate grief experiences fraught with complexity and uncertainty. The upheaval caused by societal shifts, cultural disconnections, and the erosion of communal support structures has profoundly impacted grieving processes. As traditional avenues for mourning, such as communal gatherings, rituals, and familial support systems, have been compromised, students often found themselves grappling with feelings of isolation and disconnection (Castrellón et al., 2021; Gomez et al., 2021; Lively-Endicott et al., 2024; Rice, 2023). The absence of customary practices that once provided solace and guidance has left many feeling adrift in their grief journey (Rice, 2023). Moreover, the challenges of mourning amidst a backdrop of societal upheaval and uncertainty further complicate grief experiences. In this context, students confront the daunting task of forging new pathways for expression and healing, navigating uncharted territory to make sense of loss and find closure. In many ways, individuals impacted by grief have been ushered away from the human need to move through their mourning (Smid et al., 2021; Castrellón et al., 2021; Rice, 2023). Despite these challenges, students demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability as they seek out alternative means of support and connection, drawing strength from within and from the bonds they forge with peers and mentors who share in their experiences (Gomez et al., 2021; Lively-Endicott et al., 2024; Rice, 2023).

Furthermore, for those who experienced unexpected parental loss across the pandemic timeframe, directly or indirectly related to the COVID-19 context, COVID-related restrictions, and risks upended many normative grieving processes (Rice, 2023). Traditional ceremonies related to remembering and honoring loved ones and community members were largely inaccessible or were facilitated virtually (Weinstock et al., 2021). The pausing of traditionally practiced grief traditions, thus,

served as an additional layer of loss for many and complicated the experience of traumatic loss for others. These added layers of trauma related to the pandemic evidenced the impact of a global pandemic on those who also experience historically rooted oppression, leaving relentless harm in the wake of those most vulnerable (Stroebe & Schut, 2021; Turner & Stauffer, 2023).

According to an estimate published by the PEW Trust (2022), nearly 170,000 American children had lost a parent or caregiver due to COVID-19 by the end of summer 2021—meaning that one in roughly every 500 children lost one of the most important adults in their lives (Hillis et al., 2021b). Nearly 25% of those lost during COVID-19 were parents or caregivers, with caregivers of color representing nearly 65% of caregiver deaths (NIH, 2021). Hillis and colleagues (2021) noted that Black children were orphaned at nearly 2.5 times the rate of White children. Wright (2021) also posits that due to recent estimations of loss amongst families, including families who faced multiple periods of overlapping losses within a matter of months, there is a heightened need to prepare school systems to respond to the accumulation of grief that Black students have overwhelmingly experienced (NIH, 2021). In addition to COVID deaths, Black PK-12 children also bore witness to anti-Black violence and murders during a time when a horrifying global pandemic was already enough. As schools begin to question factors that impact students' academic success, it will be essential to note the role of safety, the deleterious impact of trauma, and the disenfranchisement of the well-being of Black PK-12 students during a time when access to stability was scarce.

Research also suggests nearly all students have experienced some challenges to their mental health and well-being during the pandemic, with further disparities based on intersections of identity and lived experience, explicitly centering on race, gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ identity, and other factors (DOE, 2021). Educational resources to address these challenges were administered through various streams, including the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund; OESE, 2023a; OESE, 2023b; Tawa, 2021).

Black Girls Wailing: Grief and Black Girlhood

“Black girls and women’s liberatory practices have been and will continue to be rooted in the spaces that we demand, seek, create, and cultivate” (Butler, 2018, p. 30).

Grief is complicated, no matter the loss.

Black girls continue to be held within the constraints that Black women are forced to occupy (Brown, 2022), leaving little space to attend to their well-being. Through the navigation of trauma experiences, Black girls experience an upheaval of safety across dimensions (Wheeler et al., 2002; Bloom, 2013) and are often denied spaces to recover (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1995). In considering the vulnerable lived experiences of Black girls, this paper aims to centralize an instrumental approach toward the potentiality of grieving out loud and without interruption. Centering grief and loss amidst the realities of both the pandemic era and the racial

tensions of society and accounting for the lessened consideration of the psychosocial impacts of grieving (Leath et al., 2022), this paper presents a segue toward the deleterious effects of trauma in grief journeys for Black girls. By asking questions about how cultural knowledge informs grief journeys for Black girls and acknowledging trauma as structural, historical, intergenerational, interpersonal, and embodied, we conceptualize healing actualized in response to and within culturally reflective trauma-informed care (Haynes-Thoby, 2022) for grieving Black girlhoods (Brown, 2022). As cultural perspectives shape people's reaction to a traumatic experience (Haynes-Thoby, 2022), explorations in grief negotiation and expression are embedded in traditions that draw from many cultures and ethnic and religious backgrounds. More directly, in the histories of Black communities impacted by enslavement, structural inequality, historical and ongoing racial violence, and staggering amounts of loss across the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and life loss of loved ones and community members, more capacity becomes needed in Black grief across intersections of identity.

Understanding the nature of grief in varied stages, phases, or spatial reckonings troubles the idea that there is simply a universally acceptable or “correct” way to grieve. As we broaden the dialogue and capacity in grief research and scholarship, we need to ensure that we are contributing to conceptualizations or grief expression that extend studies that solely capture adults in “mainstream” culture as the dominant representation and “standard” for how people and communities grieve and how we might support them. This extension in the scholarship challenges us to reach beyond the limitations. It brings into conversation our current realities and perspectives that support how people of different beliefs, ages, cultures, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, and experiences experience grief. These spaces of inquiry provide extensions in grief scholarship that leverage the ancestral knowledge of grief practices and expressions navigated in communities near and far, like the Second lines in New Orleans and the wailing mourning rituals of the women in Akan of Ghana (Aborampah, 1999; Leath et al., 2022).

Schools, Communities, and Grief Negotiations

Exploring Black girls' social-emotional learning (SEL) in schools is paramount for numerous compelling reasons (Brown, 2022). Firstly, it underscores the principle of equity in education, affirming that Black girls, like all students, merit access to a comprehensive education that nurtures their holistic development, encompassing social and emotional well-being. Secondly, delving into SEL enables educators to confront and rectify the persistent disparities evident in academic outcomes and disciplinary actions experienced by Black girls, unveiling and addressing underlying factors such as racial biases and systemic inequities. Thirdly, it prompts the cultivation of culturally responsive practices tailored to honor Black girls' unique identities, experiences, and learning styles, fostering an inclusive and validating school environment. Moreover, fostering social-emotional skills in Black girls is crucial for enhancing their academic success by fostering resilience, stress management, positive relationships, and perseverance amid challenges.

Additionally, exploring SEL serves as a proactive measure to address the distinct stressors and traumas stemming from racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination that Black girls may encounter, thus promoting their mental health and well-being. Lastly, SEL empowers Black girls to advocate for themselves by honing self-awareness, self-confidence, and effective navigation of systems, amplifying their voices within educational settings. Ultimately, prioritizing the social-emotional learning needs of Black girls not only promotes equity and fairness but also cultivates an environment where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

In her text, *Grieving While Black: An Antiracist Take on Oppression and Sorrow*, Wade (2021) asserts the importance of centering grief and loss within the complexities of the lived experience. She posits this as central to the varied experiences of loss as beneficial to understanding variations in definition. In these varied definitions of grief, we better understand the many ways to grieve and that there is no “right way” or “wrong way.” It is also important to acknowledge the centuries-long exemplars that have laid the foundation for grief journeying, which removes stigmatizing expectations and judgments on others, creating barriers rather than relational connections and perceived support. These complexities necessitate exploring what it means to grieve and how grieving translates into our most basic connections with the self and others across different contexts. Black girl epistemologies create ways of knowing and possibilities for safe spaces of lived experiences for Black girls that are collective and center intentions on progressive actions of understanding, support, and motivation in the realities of Black girls.

Typically ascribed to adult Black women, the wailing woman was a professional mourner in ancient societies that is still present in some contemporary cultures (Aborampah, 1999). Skilled and trained in grieving for the community, the wailing woman helped the community face its death, name its tragedy, and express its grief (Aborampah, 1999). Engagement in grief and mourning processes can aid loved ones in navigating grief processes (Hernández-Fernández & Meneses-Falcón, 2021). As a nation working through collective grief triggered by the tragic killing of George Floyd at the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, we also are in tandem spaces of loss. We are still lamenting the disproportionate rates of death of Black and Brown people at the hands of COVID-19, the pace at which has not always allowed the space or privilege to grieve adequately (Leath et al., 2022).

More directly, at racialized and gendered intersections of lived experience, McKittrick (2006) posits spatial realities as historically salient in Black women and girls’ experiences across location, considerations of humanity, and within the significance of Black women’s struggles against complex definitions of Black loss. McKittrick’s (2006) contributions bring into conversation ideas from both Anzaldúa (1987) and hooks (1984) that center spatial power to engender a new consciousness; rather than relegating experiences of Black women and girls’ struggle to marginal spaces, spatial struggles for memory work and tradition become central. Space-making thus actualizes as a metaphor for the geographic struggles of racialized and gendered oppression that require a rise toward a need for survival. Specifically, through an intersectional perspective, when it comes to grief and grieving, we have the potential to be helpful or harmful. As Black mothers and daughters, our minds, bodies, and spirits have been tested to the limits. Between COVID-19 and social

injustice/unrest, we have experienced grief and trauma up close and from a unique point of view. Historically, the visibility of women's negotiations with public mourning has had a long-standing and powerful impact across the globe (Celeste, 2018). Scholars have aimed to uncover these impacts through expressions of grieving by Black women's wailing in many cultures and its importance in the collective grieving processes of healing. A space little explored from a racialized and gendered lived experience that, through ancestral centering, can inform the grieving process by helping communities respond to the traumas and harms in more culturally authentic ways.

Stemming from Black feminist epistemologies, Black girlhood is also closely connected to creating safe spaces for the voices of lived experiences amongst Black girls. The makings of these safe spaces are a collective work that centers on progressive actions of understanding, support, and motivation in the realities of Black girls. At the core of this research is the intentionality of doing exactly what Brown (2013) articulates, which is central to advancing Black girlhood studies, centering the lived experience and voice of the Black girls in grief journeying. In Hull et al.'s (1982) groundbreaking work, *But Some of Us Are Brave*, we are offered a bold declaration that insists that Black women were worthy of having their field of study in the academy. Over three decades later, the same level of urgency is evolving around the experiences of Black girls and space (Butler, 2018; Owens et al., 2017). Butler (2018) argues, as she extends McKittrick's scholarship explicitly on Black girls' experiences, the use of Black girl cartography as a tool to better understand and reveal inquiries and interlocking oppressions navigated by Black girls. In acknowledging the invisibility of Black girls within the dominant culture and through the works of scholar-activists like Joyce A. Ladner, Rebecca Carroll, and Ruth Nicole Brown, as pioneers and contributors in the field of Black girlhood studies, scholarship continues to garner a historic and cultural lens into the academic culture around the exploration of Black girls. These contributions also serve as foundational and essential in space-making for grief journeys and ways of knowing in grieving for Black girls. Black girlhood epistemologies offer strength in the challenge of preexisting subjugated knowledge created by suppression within different social institutions and schools of thought. This approach to inquiry holds space for centering grieving Black girlhood's voice and considering the possibilities for institutional and structural accountability.

EMBODIED BLACK GIRL GRIEF: AFROFUTURISM AS ANTIDOTE

Afrofuturism, as a methodological tool for Black liberation, provides a means to imagine reality through a lens defined by culture, allowing space for self-abolition and healing (Womack 2017). As such, Afrofuturism creates space and power to manifest the nuanced understandings of Black cultural knowledge, diasporic ways of being, and an embodiment of resistance in the wake of ongoing anti-Blackness and misogynoir. In this effort, Afrofuturism supports the creation of frameworks that enable Black girls to grieve and *exist* through culturally reflective methods that facilitate healing and encourage flourishing. Afrofuturistic framing necessitates first recognizing our existing beliefs about the world, ourselves, and how these realities influence our actions (Womack, 2017), allowing us to create within or transcend

them. By employing Afrofuturism as a methodology, Black girls gain the opportunity to envision, engage with, and establish grief spaces that are culturally reflective and pertinent, promoting healing after trauma.

Conceptualizing Afro-Feminist Futurity as Disrupting Performative Okayness

The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not but must be. It's a politics of pre-figuration that involves living the future now – as imperative rather than subjunctive – as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present (Campt, 2017, p. 17).

In many ways, the act of grieving serves as evidence of the love that has shaped a part of how a person understands the world and who they are within it, “which for [B]lack youth traumatized by racial oppression in schools, a similarly structured formation of grief exists through the haunting remnants of centuries of racialized loss produced by the enduring legacy of white supremacy” (Grinage 2019). While the process of grieving has been redefined over time, we now recognize that grief is not pathological (Breire & Scott 2015). Grief is not curable. But over time and with productive attention to our grief, we learn to experience it, manage it, and acquire the strength, vigilance, and hopefully, the courage to embrace a goal of hope and happiness.

Directly correlating the realities of Black women and girls and their grief journeys, these frameworks give language to what we may consider as theory to practice in actualizing pedagogies of humanity. Considerations that trouble the voided possibilities of Black girls and grief and that disrupt and center the potentiality for space-making in safe, healing-centered, and natural manifestations of grief journeying. An embodied Afrofuturistic centering of grieving Black girlhoods can further inform these concepts (Brown, 2022) and allow us to consider a new realm of possibility that can inform the borders of Black girlhoods (Butler 2018). In all of Afrofuturism's many forms, we can extend the literature in centering loss in experiences of Black girls into a future of healing; whatever our plights, a better world is possible. Our potential to center grief journeying through culturally reflective, trauma-informed care recognizes what actualizes when Black girls (re)imagine wielding spatial power that embodies the individualized creativity of grieving Black girlhoods without economic, political, or social resources. A potentiality that informs what we can continue to inquire about when we think through what happens when we make spaces and are allowed the time to remember how to grieve. This work conceptualizes a framework and recommendations for culturally reflective trauma-informed care for grieving out loud. The following sections highlight our primary areas of analysis: (a) making space in the body (Grinage, 2019), (b) identifying grief spaces and community (Wade, 2021), and (c) remembering how to grieve (Watkins & Shulman, 2008) as the framework for culturally reflective trauma-informed care in grief journeying for Black girls.

PATHWAYS FORWARD:

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TEACHERS AND COUNSELORS

As we chart space for how we might envision this collaborative work in creating grief negotiations out loud, we uplift the collective response across both teacher educators and school counselors. As faculty in colleges of education that sit at different and similar intersections of preparing key stakeholders in schooling contexts, we center this work on grief journeying and youth in schools to be the priority of both teachers and school counselors alike. This priority is done with one another to support the students, families, and communities' academic and emotional well-being needs. We also posit that this work extends to current in-service teachers, educators, and practicum and internship school counselors.

In the domain of grief work, it is essential to recognize that this process is not linear. Educators must take into account the context of their students. Similar to adults who have been compelled to abandon their grieving practices and, in many cases, continue without adequately acknowledging their grief, our students experience similar challenges. This indicates that educators and counselors can effectively manage the requisite tools to facilitate safe grieving environments while simultaneously recognizing their own experiences. In this context, we present our collective insights regarding the emphasis on individual, relational, and cultural considerations that must be acknowledged as we assist our students in navigating their emotional processes of grief.

Individual: Making Space in the Body

Noting the multifaceted negotiations of grieving that are equal parts pain and joy, the intersection between grief and agency highlights a yield of positive agency internally and externally that happens when we give grief space to be actualized out loud. Being grief-informed at this intersection brings into conversation the politics of bodies that are in tandem with societal expectations of what it means to feel and express in and out of the body (Grinage, 2019; Haynes-Thoby, 2022). A method of expression that creates capacity for the type of agency that taps into cultural knowledge and, in the case of this work, diasporic explorations that acknowledge how grief is both collective and individual and an agency that troubles societal expectations that would posit the contrary.

Being able to make space in the body for culturally reflective trauma-informed care reinforces the fact that grief is not solely an individual experience but rather an expression that is interwoven in a sociocultural context, influenced by family, community, and other social systems. Acknowledging and addressing the sociocultural and historical factors that impact grief can reduce disparities and promote the opportunity to create a pathway to healing practice for communities often void of consideration in grief scholarship. Grinage (2019) posits the centrality of understanding the effects and need for “asset-based, healing-centered approaches for enacting racial justice in education” (p. 227). Being able to center the possibilities for grief journeying for Black girls rests in our ability also to contextualize the internal reflection necessary in the body to be attuned to one's physical need. People often adapt the beliefs and values of their culture to meet their unique needs and

circumstances. As a result, grief responses within a culture vary from person to person. In grief, we can start to feel incredibly disconnected from reality—our world has been flipped upside down, and very few things make sense, especially in those first days and months.

Grounding yourself by simply reconnecting with your body can help identify where grief is rooted. In practicing how we can make space in the body, we can start to explore how grief impacts us personally. There is no right or wrong way to feel grief. There is no right or wrong way for it to show up for you. And there is no right or wrong way to deal with it. What is important is recognizing what is happening for you and in you. You can then use that information to seek out ways of helping yourself care for yourself, body, and mind or to simply acknowledge what is going on. As posited by Grinage (2019), there is a constant negotiation in the interrelationship between grief and the body, and it is in the ability to contextualize those moments of body agency that we can envision resistance.

Numerous culturally significant processes have been demonstrated to facilitate the processing of grief, loss, and feelings of overwhelm within the body. These processes encompass voluntary and involuntary movements, including dance (Akunna 2015). It is imperative to provide opportunities for physical movement that align with the individual's preferences and within contexts that ensure the safety of Black girls as they navigate their experiences. Black girls deserve space to experience physical, psychological, social, moral, and spiritual safety as they navigate grief within the body, especially as grief may be perceived as a threat to safety across dimensions. Black girls can be granted the space to process through bodywork, but this work will require the employ of others to ensure safety across dimensions and settings.

Relational: Identifying the Grief Spaces and Communities

Despite this standardization of the event of death, mourning practices in Western countries, especially in the United States, remain highly individualistic and variable. The norms and institutionalized conventions that govern these practices are less readily apparent when people live in large heterogeneous communities in relative isolation from extended families than in more homogeneous communities of persons with the same ethnic and religious beliefs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, cultural traditions around grief spaces and community were interrupted as families and communities navigated either virtual interactions of what once was or were unable to create spaces for community amidst the grief. Traditionally, the experience of losing a loved one is often accompanied by ritualistic and spiritual practices, which serve as a way for people to mourn the loss and begin the grieving process. This initiated space and community to begin the grief process but was interrupted. Physical distancing limitations have led grieving families and funeral providers to face a limited set of perhaps unfavorable options, including hosting funerals online, restricting funerals to very small in-person and/or outdoor gatherings, or deciding to postpone funerals until after restrictions are eventually lifted (CDC, 2020; Eguiliuz et al., 2022; Omonisi, 2022). With this knowledge, we must consider opportunities to better support and engage in culturally reflective trauma-informed care that recognizes the challenges

perpetuated by this new normal in grief journeying. Wade posits that, beyond the complexities of grief journeying for Black communities, there must be space for fluid consciousness that acknowledges how these complex grief journeys must be relegated to space and community for processing.

Those who fulfill healing, co-journeyer, and comforter roles, such as counselors across K-12 schooling and community spaces, when supporting grief processes for Black women and girls, have the opportunity to facilitate reconnection and to bear witness to cultural meaning (Haynes-Thoby, 2022; Taliaferro et al., 2013). Grief leaves many seeking grounding, direction, and support as they navigate the next steps. As Black girls navigate grief processes, journeying toward re-grounding often co-occurs with competing responsibilities and role fulfillment, such as school, caregiving, and formal work obligations. Counselors in school and community spaces can support Black girls through the affordance of space to reconnect with themselves and others using culturally reflective and responsive practices.

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as teaching that utilizes “cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives” (Gay, 2001; 2021) to facilitate learning; similarly, culturally responsive counseling must utilize clients’ cultural components, lived experiences, and world views to facilitate healing through grief journeying. This means that counselors must not only acknowledge the cultural strengths and cultural knowings (Haynes-Thoby, 2022) that Black girls carry within them as a starting place for counseling that can be described as culturally responsive, but counselors will be called to utilize characteristics of culture, experiences, and understandings to promote healing and health for Black girls. Black girls possess wisdom drawn from personal experiences, ancestral insights from family and community elders, and evolving perspectives as they progress through their early developmental stages. Counselors can leverage these elements to better understand Black girls’ values, promoting cultural traits that deserve to be celebrated rather than merely tolerated, overlooked, or corrected.

Cultural: Remembering to and How to Grieve

The COVID-19 pandemic and physical distancing limitations have profoundly impacted funeral practices and associated grieving processes. This impact also affects how people understand and remember their needs in the grief process. These challenges are compounded by the broader social isolation and psychological distress of Black youth that we know are experiencing a disproportionate loss (Hillis et al. 2021a; Hillis et al. 2021b) in community and family. As youth have not yet gained a wealth of life experiences, they are less able to harken back to historical evidence of their ability to navigate grief processes, as their own lived experiences are still quite limited due to age. Black girls can lean into the practices of their elders and communities, but they will need support and space to navigate while leaning into cultural knowledge. Every culture has its own beliefs that describe how the world works and people’s roles in the world. Each culture has its own beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life and what happens after death. These beliefs inform how people in those cultures approach death. For example, people may find death more bearable if they believe in a life after death. In some cultures, people believe that the

spirit of someone who has died directly influences the living family members. The family members are comforted by the belief that their loved one is watching over them. In general, beliefs about the meaning of death help people make sense of it and cope with its mystery (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

Grief historically has been whitewashed despite the disproportionate impact of grief on Black communities. With limited research on Black grief at large, the circumstances and emotional histories of Black loss become even more convoluted within intersections of current lived experience. This further highlights the depth of grief expression and scholarship, which extenuates the impact of the currently limited spaces for acknowledging the culturally significant markers that make these grief journeys different. In many ways, the act of grieving serves as evidence of the love that has shaped a part of how a person understands the world and who they are within it, “which for [B]lack youth traumatized by racial oppression in schools, a similarly structured formation of grief exists through the haunting remnants of centuries of racialized loss produced by the enduring legacy of white supremacy” (Grinage, 2019). While the process of grieving has been redefined over time, we now recognize that grief is not pathological (Breire & Scott, 2015). Grief is not curable. But over time and with productive attention to our grief, we learn to experience it, manage it, and acquire the strength, vigilance, and hopefully, the courage to embrace a goal of hope and happiness. Discussions on grief and loss create autonomy for advanced thought in the power and implications of cultural roots and contexts that could help traumatized populations and families regain control of their lives.

Grief can be brought forth through a multitude of means, including unexpected loss, the anticipated loss of a loved one, or a traumatic loss. However grief comes about, the process of journeying through it can be destabilizing, and this is especially true for Black girls who have not had the opportunity to accrue many years of lived experiences that adults hold. The experience of destabilization is made much more critical through the lack of space to acknowledge, process, or *be* within their grief journey. The omission of spaces necessary to aid Black girls as they traverse their grief experiences can contribute to challenges for Black girls as they find their way back to themselves, back to important connections to their communities, and a way forward through grief and beyond.

The necessary support for journeying through grief navigation for Black girls will require the partnering of culturally responsive and truly trauma-informed care. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014) describes trauma-informed care as situated in a recognition of the signs, symptoms, and prevalence of trauma and that operates from a space of integrating that knowledge while working to avoid re-traumatization intentionally. Operationalizing trauma-informed care for Black girls will require acknowledgment of the whole of their identities to avoid re-traumatization appropriately. Teachers and counselors who serve in spaces where Black girls exist must also engage in trauma-informed care work using tools that are rooted in cultural responsiveness. Instead of working to fix or address culturally rooted grief responses, affirming and acknowledging Black girls’ grief reactions and expressions can support Black girls to appropriately move through grief in ways that promote health and grounding. This allows teachers and

counselors to provide supports and services that are not only culturally responsive but also reflect and affirm the cultural strengths that Black girls hold.

As we acknowledge the depth and complexity that Black girls experience grief and loss, within culturally responsive trauma-informed care, we center grief expression that rests heavily within the culture. Culturally responsive trauma-informed care in the face of grief for Black girls provides an opportunity for cultural reflection that invites a celebration beyond tolerance and that sustains Black girls' safety and well-being.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS: CULTURAL KNOWINGS AND SEEING GRIEF IN SCHOOLS

In centering the futurity of Black girls' grief expression in culturally reflective trauma-informed care, we posit the creation of spaces and practices that support the needs of grieving Black girlhoods. With Black Americans continuing to be impacted disproportionately and experiencing grief more often and earlier in life, the response for conceptualizing new approaches and making bereavement a needed health disparity of its own should continue to be centered on supporting Black girls. A Black girl future that centers restoration in negotiations with grief and loss recognizes and responds to the cultural values and builds upon practices that draw from ancestral knowledge of Black girls. By acknowledging that Black girls need to grieve out loud, we also conceptualize and propose the inextricable linkages of grief and loss to traumas embedded in the Black girls' experiences, thus taking a collective step toward undoing this act of emotional oppression and ensuring frameworks of support and service that exist centered in and through the Black gaze. These theoretical contributions further challenge mainstream society's value and preference for independence in moments best suited for collective response. As such, collective engagement can create possibilities for leaning back into grieving traditions that are not often restricted from occurring "within the individual." A troubling of the unrealistic pressures for Black girls, who need approaches to grief negotiations that value interpersonal support in grief journeying. Approaches and connections in the journey with others who are understanding and compassionate, especially when difficult and painful things happen.

This work encourages us to consider how we might operationalize a culturally reflective trauma-informed practice and lends an opportunity for us to be grief-sensitive. It welcomes us to consider the grief and trauma that Black girls are often left alone to comprehend, process, and experience. As we continue to witness grief negotiations of Black girls in and out of school spaces, we must tend to theoretical applications and processes that both deal with trauma, which is helping people deal with something that happened as well as support their dealings with grief, which is supporting Black girls as they face the loss of someone or something important to them. We need to understand just how prevalent issues of loss and grieving are impacting the lived experiences of Black girls. No one person grieves in the same way, but everyone deserves the freedom to grieve out loud and, in the community, especially Black girls. Black girls deserve the opportunity to be restored and to have their well-being affirmed.

Implications for Practice

As K-12 educators work to hold space for Black girls and their students more broadly, it will be essential to consider the importance of more fully holding space for educators. While adults will fundamentally have greater control of their daily lives than the students that they serve, societal contexts impact us all. As the country moved “back to normal,” even as individuals, families, and systems struggled to engage in necessary grieving processes, educators are undoubtedly a part of the community of people who were moved to do the same (Esteves et al., 2021; Reich et al., 2020). Educators were pushed to move systems forward even while facing traumatic losses alongside their students (Jordan et al., 2022; Reich et al., 2020). Teachers are expected to create safety within the classroom context, and school counselors and other school mental health professionals are expected to expand that safety across the school setting more broadly.

Moving forward, it will be important to note that when we hold space and allow space for the full humanity of Black girls, we are, in fact, holding space for all children. Using a trauma-informed lens invites us to acknowledge that trauma-informed care benefits individuals impacted by trauma as well as those who have not experienced trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). Centering the needs of Black girls allows us to operate from a place of humanity (McKittrick, 2015). We propose that this space to grieve and heal will welcome space for educators, school counselors, and their Black girl students might usher in new possibilities for movement through the grieving process. Even during a time when acknowledgment of our human experiences has been pushed back upon, the embodiment of trauma-informed care that reflects the beauty of who Black girls are can allow space for reciprocal healing.

Implications for Future Research

As we chart our research trajectories, we emphasize the importance of examining the enduring effects of mental health policies on students, families, and educators. By integrating policy analysis into our forthcoming studies on grief negotiations within educational settings, we aim to enhance our understanding, guide evidence-based interventions, and champion policy reforms that bolster grieving students' welfare and educational attainment. These prospective investigations offer a platform to engage stakeholders across the educational landscape in policy advocacy while providing rigorous evaluation, innovative approaches, and impact assessment opportunities. Through these efforts, we endeavor to dismantle obstacles and barriers hindering the healthy expression of grief, ensuring continual progress toward our collective goals.

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