

Love, Loss and Loyalty

A Black Feminist Reading of Black Girlhood



Introduction



The emotional realities of Black women and a politics of love ground Black feminist sociology (BFS) and de-center deviance while studying Black girls and women. This study of Black childhood contributes to understanding the survival strategies of Black girls in the face of intersectional oppressions. To see the full pictures of two Black girls lives, Brown established an open and caring relationship with them. These girls, Paradise and Ashley, have found community with each other in an environment that has been unsupportive and violent to them. Paradise and Ashley have experienced trauma but have been sustained by their mutual love.



At a continuation school, Brown connected with Paradise and Ashley, young Black women "familiar with life's pitfalls" (p. 201). Steadfast commitment to each other and unconditional love sustained their friendship. Both girls experienced the death of a mother figure at a young age and had few role models to help them understand their circumstances. Paradise and Ashley created an enclave for each other when they had no other support systems.



Writing to Explore Visibility



Affect & Black feminism



Brown describes affect as "a material consequence of how Black girls feel in their social worlds and physical bodies" (p. 200). BFS prioritizes the "felt life" of Black girls and women as a source of knowledge and a manifestation of their oppression (p. 200). Brown uses ethnographic methods to better understand the life circumstances that lead two young Black girls to feel like Black women are uncared for and are constantly relearning how to survive (p. 201).

Paradise also coped with her grief and abusive parents by journaling and writing fiction. She often wrote about complex female protagonists that were inspirational but not unattainable. Paradise's talent for writing stories grounded her and helped her envision how it might feel to be fully seen and visible. Paradise's and Ashley's stories to exemplify that support and love can be found in times of pain and loss. Honest and vulnerable representation of Black girls is not easy to find in mainstream media nor mainstream sociology. Brown works to combat the invisibility of Black girls and women and reveals how their support for each other and an emancipatory imagination help them survive.

"Friendship for Black girls is not only about protection against violence and indiscriminate loyalty, but it is lifeline and a way to be seen in a world when feeling overlooked" (p. 203).

Citation:

Brown, Kenly. 2022. Love, Loss and Loyalty: A Black Feminist Reading of Black Girlhood" Pp. 197-206 in *Black Feminist Sociology*, edited by Z. Luna and W. N. Laster Pirtle. Routledge.