Listening to Black Girls: Community Engaged Considerations of Intellectual Humility

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Abstract

This article explores the origins and evolution of HYPE Media, a youth-led media program grounded in Black feminist pedagogy, community listening, and intellectual humility. Through conceptual analysis, reflective narrative, and practical application, the authors examine how co-creation, vulnerability, and dialogic engagement shape ethical community-based research. By centering Black girls' voices, the work offers a model for transformative programming that challenges institutional norms and reimagines education as a practice of care, presence, and liberation.

Keywords: Black feminist pedagogy; intellectual humility; community listening; youth engagement; community engaged research; critical literacies; Black girlhood

One of the girls leaned back in her chair, the kind of lean that signals comfort, trust, and maybe even a little relief. "It's better this way," she said, glancing around the circle. "Now we can talk about the stuff we really care about." It was early 2020, and what had begun as a general youth media program had quietly transformed. The boys hadn't returned after winter break, not out of protest, just drift. What remained was a circle of Black girls, a handful of facilitators, and the beginnings of something sacred. That day, without fanfare or planning, the direction of HYPE Media shifted. The shift wasn't strategic or pre-planned. It was a response. Listening. A moment of clarity born from sitting with what was present, rather than forcing what was supposed to be.

This article is a story about dialogue, listening, and intellectual humility. It is a story about HYPE Media, Homewood Youth-Powered and Engaged Media, a project that began as a university-community partnership and evolved into a living exploration of Black feminist pedagogy. It was a space shaped by listening, built through co-creation, and sustained by the intellectual humility of those willing to learn with and from Black girls as they explored media, storytelling, and digital literacies as tools for self-definition, critique, and joy.

This article is conceptual, reflective, and practical all in one. Through it, we introduce you to the origin story of HYPE Media, focusing on its beginnings and evolu-

tion throughout the project's nascent years. As a conceptual piece, we make theoretical contributions by expanding and applying the theories of community listening and Black feminist practice to the idea of intellectual humility as a unique and novel way to approach community-engaged work. As a reflective piece, we show, through our own words and experiences, how community-engaged work is an act of simultaneous *doing* and *learning*—that the work informs the work, and that it is in the listening and deeply responsive moments of reflection and humility that a project's essence truly takes shape. In this sense, our reflections are demonstrations of inner dialogues and reflective learning on our part as authors, researchers, facilitators, and participants. Finally, it's practical in the explications of activities that we found to be meaningful applications of the concepts and theories we describe.

The practical moments come into focus as we reflect on specific play-based activities that shaped the early weeks of HYPE Media. These moments, though simple on the surface, embody the core concepts we explore throughout this piece: community listening and intellectual humility. Two games in particular, *The Question Game* and *Look Up, Look Down*, function as microcosms of our larger commitments. *The Question Game*, introduced in our very first session, served not only as the first activity but as a call to curiosity, vulnerability, and co-authorship. *Look Up, Look Down*, introduced later, deepened our collective capacity for presence, attentiveness, and relinquishing control. Together, these activities illustrate the power of engaging in open dialogue, embracing uncertainty, and recognizing the shared human experience of struggle. The lessons learned through these games extended far beyond the sessions in which they were played; they were conceptual anchors for our reflections and shaped how we understand the "ethics and practice of community engagement.

Throughout this piece, we argue that intellectual humility is a crucial component of community-based research and co-created programming. It demands that we recognize the complexity and iterative nature of the work, that we resist premature certainty, and that we remain open to being shaped by those we seek to learn with. For us, it also means acknowledging that our institutional affiliations must remain porous, accountable, and responsive. We show how this disposition fosters environments where mutual respect, shared value, and collaborative transformation are not just ideals, but daily practices

While you read, you'll encounter three voices, interwoven: Khirsten, a Black woman community educator, University of Pittsburgh professor, and founding facilitator of HYPE Media whose layers of literacy sponsorship (Brandt) shaped the project; Elise, a White woman trained in library and information science whose critical pedagogical approach invited us to see information as both method and intervention; and Ari, a queer Black woman organizer who grounded the program in a play-driven, abolitionist pedagogy who treats play as a serious and transformative way of knowing. We reflect at different moments in the piece about our involvement in HYPE Media and what we learned about community engagement, community listening, and intellectual humility throughout the process. Though we didn't set out with these theories in mind, they became clear to us through time and reflection as meaningful ways we were enacting the community-engaged work of HYPE Media. Our voices appear as

vignettes that can be read alongside the theoretical and conceptual contributions at the beginning of the piece and the more practical overview of specific moments of community-engaged programming near the end of the piece.

An Introduction to HYPE Media

When we talk about the origins and evolution of HYPE Media, we must begin with place. HYPE didn't emerge in isolation, and it certainly wasn't the only thing happening. It grew out of a neighborhood already rich with commitment. Streets and homes filled with generations of neighbors and educators and artists and organizers and leaders who have long been doing the work of loving Black children, pushing back against systemic neglect, and building futures from what's been left behind. Homewood, Pittsburgh is one of those places. And while we name some of the partnerships that shaped HYPE's early days like Homewood Children's Village and the University of Pittsburgh's Community Engagement Center, we're careful not to center institutions. Instead, we center the energy of collaboration, the ethic of showing up, the slow trust-building, and the everyday practices of listening that made this work possible.

We were invited in, and we learned quickly that presence mattered more than plans. These early collaborations gave us the chance to listen deeply, to be shaped by the desires and dreams of Homewood youth, and to build a program that didn't just respond to a syllabus or a semester schedule, but to the rhythms of the community itself. Those rhythms were not always neat or predictable, but they were honest, teaching us what it means to practice educational justice from the ground up.

In cities like Pittsburgh, neighborhoods such as Homewood have long borne the consequences of systemic neglect, with policy decisions contributing to under-resourced schools, inconsistent youth programming, and a scarcity of opportunities for meaningful engagement (Pittsburgh Gender Equity Commission; Public Source). These patterns of disinvestment are not incidental; they reflect a broader national trend that disproportionately impacts Black communities and limits the educational and developmental infrastructure available to Black youth. But that's not the only story. The other story is the one we witnessed: the abundance of care, creativity, and possibility that emerges when people come together not to fix a place, but to be in relationship with it.

HYPE Media (Homewood Youth-Powered and Engaged Media) was born in 2019 from this spirit. It started as a collaboration between a University of Pittsburgh graduate seminar on Critical Literacies and Pedagogies, a course that aimed to move theory into practice by building with and learning from local youth, and Homewood Children's Village, a community-based organization in Pittsburgh dedicated to supporting the academic, social, and emotional development of children and families through cradle-to-career programming, partnerships, and place-based advocacy (Homewood Children's Village). Around the same time, the University of Pittsburgh opened its Community Engagement Center in Homewood, creating space for partnerships to develop across the Homewood neighborhood with the university (University of Pittsburgh). That timing was real. But the transformation didn't come from

timing alone. Instead, it came from showing up, again and again. What began as a course assignment evolved into something more alive: a practice of listening, of witnessing, and of co-creating spaces where Black girls could speak freely, play loudly, and tell the stories they weren't often invited to tell.

The program was not simply a product of university outreach. It emerged from the intersecting needs for community-rooted learning, critical literacy development, and spaces where Black youth, particularly Black girls, could engage media on their own terms. At its core, HYPE Media was created to explore a question that has since guided every aspect of its work: What happens when we truly listen to Black girls?

Rooted in Pace, Guided by Presence

This guiding question was not rhetorical. It emerged in response to the layered and ongoing systemic inequities that Black girls face both locally and nationally—inequities grounded in racism, sexism, and the persistent societal failure to take their experiences seriously (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda; Morris). Across the United States, and in Pittsburgh specifically, these realities are compounded by histories of disinvestment in Black neighborhoods like Homewood. Black girls in these spaces encounter the compounded harms of *misogynoir*, a term coined by Dr. Moya Bailey to describe the specific intersection of racism and sexism faced by Black women and girls (Bailey, 2010). These harms manifest as disproportionate disciplinary action (Morris, 2016), underrepresentation in enrichment programs like STEM and gifted education (Scott & White), and erasure from youth development initiatives.

HYPE Media was created as an intentional interruption of these patterns and rooted in the love, strategy, and the recognition that Black girls deserve spaces that nurture their creativity, leadership, and freedom. Although the program was initially open to all youth, it organically shifted its focus in early 2020 when only girls returned for the spring session. From that point forward, HYPE Media became a space not only for media creation but also for identity exploration, critical literacy, and empowerment through storytelling. The program embraced Black feminism as its method, theory, and ethic (Morris, 2019), grounding itself in lived experience, intersectionality, and co-construction as the foundation of its pedagogy and purpose.

HYPE Media's origin story, and this article, are deeply intertwined with the broader question of what it means to engage dialogically with communities, particularly through the lens of Black feminism and critical engagement with whiteness. Whiteness, as both an ideology and a structural system, perpetuates practices that marginalize Black girls by centering dominant cultural norms, erasing their voices, and rendering their experiences invisible in education and community programming (Crenshaw et al.; National Women's Law Center). These practices manifest in punitive educational systems (Morris, 2016) and societal narratives that pathologize or overburden Black girls with stereotypes of resilience, strength, or defiance (Bailey, 2010; Girls for Gender Equity).

By grounding HYPE Media in Black feminism and reflexivity, we demonstrate how theory and praxis can work together to disrupt these dynamics and foster transformative growth within community settings. The program intentionally centers the

voices and experiences of Black girls, providing a space to counteract the erasures and exclusions upheld by whiteness. Intellectual humility emerges as a central method in this exploration, encouraging a shift from imposing solutions to co-creating spaces of liberation and possibility. Through HYPE Media, we engage dialogically to challenge and dismantle the systemic practices of whiteness, building pathways for more equitable, inclusive, and resonant community programs.

Tracing the Roots: A Founder's Narrative from Khirsten L. Scott

The origin story of HYPE Media is deeply tied to my own journey. This is not because the program reflects me, but because it grew out of the questions I was carrying and that were shaped by experience, dissonance, and hope. Before it became a project, HYPE was a longing.

In the fall of 2018, I moved to Pittsburgh to begin a tenure-track position in Composition and Rhetoric. I was the first Black woman in that role in my department. On paper, it was a milestone. But underneath, I was still searching for rootedness, for intellectual and cultural alignment, for a community that could hold me with both care and accountability as I navigated the layered pressures of academic life. I was looking for more than a position; I was looking for place.

That search began, quite literally, with trying to live. I needed to know where to get my hair braided, where to worship, where to find food that felt like home. One day, while visiting a local coffee shop in Homewood, I met a young Black girl who offered to help me find someone to braid my hair. She didn't just give me a recommendation; she offered me an entry point into conversation. And when I came back, she was there again. Our relationship unfolded slowly, through casual visits and small talk that grew into something more. It was a connection built not through programming or planning, but through noticing and returning.

In one of those conversations, I asked her what she liked to do in the neighborhood. Without hesitation, she told me, "There's nothing for me here." I was puzzled. There was a YMCA nearby. There were community sports. After-school programs. But she clarified, "There's nothing for *me*—for Black girls." That moment stopped me. She wasn't talking about availability. She was talking about belonging. I didn't have the language for it then, but that conversation became integral to my teaching of community listening as a practice as I navigated Pitt and Pittsburgh. She helped me understand that listening isn't just about hearing what's said: it can also be about honoring what's missing, what's felt, what's needed, and what's been repeatedly overlooked.

That same year, the University of Pittsburgh opened its Community Engagement Center in Homewood with intentions to foster university-community partnerships. I found myself drawn there, not because I had a plan, but because I had questions. What does it mean to engage ethically? What does it mean to be present without taking up too much space? What kind of engagement does a community like Homewood actually want?

I didn't find immediate answers. But I did find people—neighbors, organizers, youth workers—who were already asking their own questions, doing the work, and

holding the complexity. It was in that in-between space, between my own longing and the ongoing work of others, that the early seeds of HYPE Media were planted. Not in isolation. Not in response to a grant or a syllabus. But through the accumulation of small moments: hair braiding suggestions, shared coffeeshop conversations, invitations to return, and the slow, sometimes uneasy, process of building trust.

Partnerships and Place-Making

My questions sharpened when I met Dr. John M. Wallace, Jr., a senior faculty member and endowed chair in the School of Social Work whose long-term presence in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood created pathways for connection. Through him, I was introduced to his colleague Dr. Jamie Booth and, eventually, to Homewood Children's Village, a nonprofit deeply engaged in youth development and community-based work. These introductions didn't chart a path, but they offered me one layer of instruction as I began to find my way as a new professor attempting to do community-engaged work with care, humility, and responsiveness. Wallace added another layer of literacy sponsorship, bridging connections and offering financial support for early programming through the School of Social Work.

As the partnership developed, Homewood Children's Village became the primary community partner, following the Community Engagement Center's model of connecting university projects with neighborhood-based collaborators. Dr. Booth served as a faculty partner whose research and programming focused on overlapping youth populations, particularly around questions of safety and spatial justice. We didn't enter the work with identical projects or priorities, but we found shared ground through dialogue about youth work, about responsibility, and about what it means to design something with, rather than for, a community.

Following those initial introductions, we held several meetings where we discussed our respective projects, timelines, and values. There was no rush to define the work. Instead, we spent time learning about one another's commitments, sharing possibilities, and identifying needs from both sides. These early conversations became a kind of groundwork. Before anything was solidified—before there was a name, a plan, or a formal partnership—we were already practicing the kind of listening and reflection that would come to define HYPE Media. Eventually, we agreed to align the emerging collaboration with my graduate seminar, allowing the seminar and the program to grow alongside one another, each informing the other in real time.

At the time, I was preparing to teach a graduate seminar on Critical Literacies and Pedagogies. My background in writing studies, literacy theory, and digital culture provided a point of connection to questions already circulating in the Homewood community. I saw the course as an opportunity not just to teach theory, but to practice it and to build something responsive in collaboration with local youth, educators, and graduate students who were also longing for meaningful engagement.

But meaningful engagement required movement, literally and socially. I asked students to leave Oakland, to move beyond the university's core, and to pay attention to the journey. Each week, I encouraged them to take a different route to our seminar site in Homewood, whether by bus, carpool, bike, or walking, and to observe what

they noticed internally, externally, and contextually. This wasn't just about getting from one place to another. It was about cultivating presence. We set aside time before and after each session for discussion and sensemaking. Those reflections became part of the learning. They helped set the tone for the kind of community-engaged work we were trying to do, which was work grounded in observation, reflection, and critical attunement to place.

The seminar eventually gave rise to what would become HYPE Media, which was then emerging to be a co-designed youth program that extended far beyond the seminar's curricular goals. But from the beginning, the work was not about placing a course in the community. It was about disrupting the assumed boundaries between university and neighborhood, theory and practice, research and relationship. It was about imagining what it means to approach literacy not only as skill, but as a method of liberation. The program offered a way of reading, naming, critiquing, and remaking the world.

Co-Theorizing Curriculum and Community

That vision shaped every design decision. I invited graduate students into the process not as assistants, but as co-designers. We centered storytelling as a method of learning and resistance. We built lesson plans around what the girls brought into the room—music, language, memories, silence, critique. We listened. We adapted. We stayed with the questions. And in doing so, we allowed the curriculum to emerge not from institutional expectation, but from what felt real, necessary, and alive.

While I had the deep honor of working alongside Black women who knew firsthand the demands and violences of the academy, I was also aware of the institutional realities. Black women remain statistically underrepresented in doctoral programs at Pitt and nationally (NCES; The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education). As a result, the graduate students who joined HYPE brought a range of racial identities, disciplinary trainings, and life experiences. What united them was a curiosity about what community-engaged learning could look like beyond the university, and a desire to move with integrity between theory and practice. Together, we established something that could hold that complexity, a space where we could learn by listening, build by co-creating, and show up not with answers but with a willingness to be changed.

Some of the graduate students had worked in neighborhood and educational spaces long before pursuing doctoral study; others were still learning how to navigate the ethical tensions of partnership and presence. I created room for all of them to lead. This meant taking their questions seriously, honoring their prior knowledge, and inviting them to design the program *with* me and *with* the youth—not for them.

During that first semester, all of the enrolled students participated in shaping the early weeks of the program. There was never an expectation that they continue after the course ended, but several chose to stay and deepen their roles and relationships as the work evolved. One of those students was Ari Brazier, my doctoral advisee, who hadn't initially been enrolled in the seminar but joined us as the project was taking shape. Ari, a queer Black woman organizer and scholar, brought an expansive, play-first, play-driven, play-everything philosophy that transformed how we understood

both curriculum and community. She challenged us to treat play not as an accessory or a strategy to reach youth, but as a central mode of knowing. Through her leadership, we explored how much we learn about ourselves, each other, the world, and the future through play. Her abolitionist commitments and collaborative methodologies pushed us to unlearn many of our assumptions about structure, authority, and linear progress.

Elise Silva, a White woman with a background in library and information science and a deep investment in critical pedagogy, offered a different but equally generative perspective. She helped us recognize the role of information, not as an afterthought but as a rich site for analysis, emotional processing, and grounding. Elise invited us to see information as both method and intervention, and to ask how we, as facilitators and participants, take in, circulate, question, and make meaning from the world around us. Her contributions challenged us to slow down, observe more closely, and articulate what was happening in real time (Silva and Scott).

Though Ari and Elise entered the work at different moments, they helped build HYPE Media's intellectual and cultural infrastructure. Their contributions were foundational. Together, we cultivated a dynamic learning environment grounded in joy, rigor, and accountability, while committing to shared values: equity, imagination, and co-creation.

I saw this as part of a broader commitment to mentorship as community-building. The graduate students were not present to study the community. They were part of it. We practiced reflexivity together. We wrote fieldnotes together. We processed missteps and celebrated insights together. We honored the intellectual labor of the youth and of one another. In doing so, we blurred the lines between teacher and learner, between facilitator and participant. We became co-theorists of a space that remained in motion.

This is how HYPE Media came to be, not simply as a program but as a methodology. It did not begin as a project to be implemented, but as a question to be lived. That question, and the listening practice it demands, shape the direction of this article.

To fully understand the theoretical and methodological foundations of HYPE Media, it is important to place this work within the broader scholarly landscape that informed its development. In the following section, we engage literature across Black girlhood studies, Black feminist thought, critical literacies, and community-engaged research. These frameworks provided grounding for our design choices and our critiques of dominant paradigms. They also clarify why HYPE Media is not merely an intervention. It is a refusal, a refusal of extractive research practices, of deficit narratives, and of disengaged institutional approaches to community work. Instead, HYPE Media offers a model of co-created, critically informed, justice-oriented engagement that places Black girls not on the margins of research and programming, but firmly at its center.

Review of Literature: The Landscape of Community Listening

Scholarship

In their foundational work on community writing and community listening, Fishman and Rosenberg call for more scholarship "modeling the complex, messy work of authentic engagement with community writing" (5). They emphasize that community listening must consider power dynamics, positionality, and the collaborative creation of meaningful partnerships. This approach moves beyond passive hearing to active, intentional engagement—engagement that involves communities in shaping research agendas and fosters spaces where individuals feel valued, heard, and empowered. Their work serves as a critical entry point for this discussion, particularly as it intersects with our methodological intervention on community listening and intellectual humility.

Yet such "messy" experiences allow for community-engaged programs to be rooted within lived experiences, and allow for all participants, researchers, facilitators, and partners to come together as first and foremost as people, with a willingness to share their own complicated experiences alongside each other (Boyett 30; Love). Given this disposition's underlying framework of Black feminist thought, intellectual humility, co-creation as praxis, and focus on active engagement, community listening is a central, ethical principle in community research and community-engaged programming. As Fishman and Rosenburg suggest, "Community listening arises from the recognition that none of us is ever outside of our communities. We are never teaching or researching or organizingor writing unmoored from the communities to which we belong, from what surrounds us, or from the people with whom we engage" (3). Black feminist thought values the interconnectedness of individuals within their communities and recognizes that meaningful, mutually beneficial research must arise from active, inclusive engagement with these communities. By acknowledging that researchers and participants are inextricably linked, learning with and from one another and their communities, HYPE Media works to center Black feminist principles of relationality and collective empowerment.

Black Feminist Thought as Methodological Intervention

Extending the call to remain grounded in the communities where we teach and learn, we position community listening as a praxis shaped and deepened by Black feminist thought. This orientation challenges extractive forms of engagement by centering the lived experiences of Black women and girls as sites of knowledge, theory, and political urgency. The concept of the "outsider within" offers a lens for understanding how Black girls navigate institutions that rely on their participation while denying their full humanity and insight (Collins, 1986). The framework of intersectionality helps clarify how overlapping systems of race, gender, class, and other social forces structure these experiences in ways that make Black girls both hypervisible through surveillance and invisible within dominant research paradigms (Crenshaw). In educational and institutional spaces, this often translates into being constantly monitored, disciplined, or framed as problems, while their perspectives, capacities, and leadership are ignored or devalued.

bell hooks extends this critique by emphasizing that teaching and research must be rooted in love, care, and healing. In *Teaching to Transgress*, she reframes pedagogy as a deeply relational and political act, one that creates the conditions for liberation rather than control (hooks). A Black feminist approach to community listening takes up this challenge by refusing neutrality or detachment. Instead, it commits to connection, responsibility, and the collective imagining of new possibilities. Listening, through this lens, is not just a method but a transformative act that affirms presence, cultivates trust, and creates space for shared meaning and justice.

By introducing these principles into the framework of community listening, we expand its ethical and methodological dimensions. Black feminist thought emphasizes relationality, collective empowerment, embodied knowledge, and a refusal of epistemic violence. These principles demand a transformation of the terms under which listening and engagement occur. In our work, listening begins with Black girls' lived experiences and unfolds through a recognition of their critical insight, refusal, and imagination as forms of theory. By starting with listening, those creating community programming whether research based, project based, or educationally based, can begin with a shared understanding upon which to build meaningful partnerships. Jennifer Bay considers such an approach as a focus on "immediate human needs" which may be different from what scholarly apparatuses or educational frameworks might assume when approaching a community partnership. In this sense, community listening requires an ability to approach communities with more nebulous objectives that will be shaped alongside communities as an ad hoc process. Such a willingness to iterate, change plans, and revise can be difficult to fit into linear, scientific-methods based, objective-driven research agendas often purported by universities.

In doing so, we embrace writing as a Black feminist research method, "a route to intimacy" through which Black women and girls reclaim voice, knowledge, and connection (Ohito & Loury). This form of writing does not just document experience; it practices intimacy, disrupts erasure, and centers purposefully Black-centered epistemologies. For HYPE Media, storytelling, journaling, and multimodal composition were not only tools for expression but acts of relational knowing, healing, and co-theorizing.

Building on this understanding of writing as an intimate, embodied practice, community listening emerges as a complementary feminist method that deepens the possibilities of relational research. Royster (1996), in "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own," reflects on the ethical tensions that surface when researchers engage across lines of difference. She emphasizes the need for humility, reflexivity, and rhetorical patience, particularly when the researcher is not the cultural or experiential insider. Her work urges scholars to attend closely to power, positionality, and the histories that shape interactions with communities. Ratcliffe (2005), through her concept of rhetorical listening, extends this commitment by offering a specific methodology for engaging across difference. Rather than listening to respond or to affirm one's own position, rhetorical listening calls for a sustained openness to others' frameworks and logics, especially those shaped by race, gender, and culture. Taken together, these approaches reinforce the importance of listening as a feminist and ethical practice. They

insist that researchers resist assumptions, remain attentive to complexity, and recognize the multiple identities and roles that both they and their community partners bring to the research encounter.

While Royster and Ratcliffe helped us think critically about our own positions and the ethics of cross-cultural engagement, our work with HYPE also required us to turn our attention more fully toward the community itself, particularly the Black girls at the heart of the project. To do this, we drew on Black feminist contributions within writing studies that confront dominant, white-centered models of literacy and affirm Black feminist–womanist storytelling as a method of liberation, self-definition, and collective transformation (Kynard; Baker-Bell). Framed as "the practice of a Black Feminist imaginative," Black feminist pedagogy pushes beyond traditional classroom hierarchies, demanding that pedagogy itself be rewritten through the lived experiences, histories, and epistemologies of Black women (Kynard). This reimagining extends to language as well, where the false neutrality of "Standard English" is unmasked as a tool of white linguistic hegemony. An antiracist Black language pedagogy affirms Black English as both legitimate and powerful, positioning language as a central site of resistance and radical possibility (Baker-Bell). In this view, literacy is not a means of assimilation but a pathway toward justice, freedom, and collective transformation.

Listening in Practice

This work is further shaped by Black feminist approaches to community engagement and abolitionist pedagogy, which move beyond reformist impulses that frame communities or students as problems to be solved. Rather than focusing on correction or control, these approaches center practices grounded in local knowledge, collective joy, and self-determination (Caisey; Graham; Love). In this framing, communities are not seen as lacking but as already holding the tools, insights, and histories necessary for their own flourishing. Supporting this kind of community knowledge requires more than presence; it requires listening that is both intentional and critically informed. This is especially important when engaging with Black girls, whose daily lives are shaped by the overlapping forces of racism and sexism. Moya Bailey's concept of misogynoir helps name this specific form of oppression and invites a deeper understanding of the stakes involved. When Black girls offer critiques of school, society, or even our well-intentioned efforts, those critiques must not be treated as peripheral. Instead, they must be understood as essential to any ethical and transformative approach to research and program design (Bailey, 2021).

The ideological and structural forces of whiteness continue to shape the daily realities of Black girls, often rendering them invisible while simultaneously subjecting them to heightened surveillance and scrutiny. This paradox of hypervisibility has been theorized as a mechanism through which Black girls are seen only through stereotype, threat, or deviance, yet rarely recognized in their full humanity, complexity, or agency (Newton; Mowatt, French, & Malebranche; Wade). What emerges is a pattern of being constantly watched but rarely witnessed, constantly disciplined but seldom understood. These conditions echo longstanding critiques of controlling im-

ages, which function to distort and limit the ways Black girls are perceived and engaged (Collins).

In schools, this paradox is not abstract. It shows up in the disproportionate punishment of Black girls, the erasure of their histories and contributions from curricula, and the absence of environments that nurture their brilliance and creativity. Within this context, community listening, when rooted in Black feminist theory and writing-based practice, offers a deliberate challenge to these dynamics. It is a method of refusal that resists imposed narratives, a mode of reconstruction that centers lived experience, and a form of relational presence that values connection over control. By holding space for the truths Black girls carry, this listening reclaims the right to be heard on their own terms.

Examples from community literacy work further underscore the urgency and possibility of this approach. Storytelling has been shown to cultivate empathy and relational understanding across lines of difference (Stone). Practices such as "preparatory community listening" make visible the wealth of knowledge that communities hold, often before researchers or institutions are ready to recognize it (Rowan & Cavarallo). Acts of self-disclosure and vulnerability, when ethically engaged, can serve as bridges between participants and facilitators, opening space for deeper connection and insight (Lohr & Lindenman). In each case, the work of reclaiming voice—particularly for those historically excluded—emerges as central to ethical community engagement. While our approach builds on these foundations, the integration of Black feminist writing methods shifts the focus toward intimacy, collaborative theory-making, and shared meaning-making as core components of community listening.

Listening, in this sense, is not a neutral act. It is grounded in the understanding that none of us exists outside the influence or responsibilities of our communities. As Fishman and Rosenberg (2019) argue, we are always teaching, researching, and living in relation to the communities we belong to. Black feminist listening extends this insight by insisting that such relationality demands accountability. It asks not only what we hear, but how we hear, and with what consequence. This orientation transforms listening from a tool of information-gathering into a practice of mutual recognition and transformation.

Yet institutional contexts often fail to make these shifts. School districts and universities, particularly when engaging historically disenfranchised communities, continue to struggle with building authentic relationships and trust (Stanley & Gilzene). In response, listening must be more than strategic or performative. It must be restorative, grounded in humility, and oriented toward relationship-building rather than outcomes or optics. Only then can it contribute to the conditions necessary for justice-oriented collaboration and sustained change.

Intellectual Humility and Community Listening: A Perspective from Elise Silva

I was a member of the first cohort of graduate students who worked with HYPE Media as part of Dr. Khirsten L. Scott's graduate seminar Critical Literacies and Peda-

gogies Across Urban Education and Higher Education in 2019. The first half of the semester we engaged in readings about critical literacies and began to imagine what critical literacy community work might entail at large. The second half of the semester we moved to the university's Community Engagement Center (CEC); a university-operated building located in Homewood built for the purpose of community-engaged work. There, we co-created a community literacy program with participant involvement and input. We conceptualized it as both a program and a research project. My involvement was as a graduate student facilitator who was responsible for planning activities and executing them with my peers. I later acted as a facilitator and wrote on this program as part of my dissertation project.

As a white woman, and a PhD student, I felt the pull of various identities and power dynamics almost instantly when our in-person programming started. I felt the uncertainty of my student status, wondering where my "expertise" fit in such a space as a "researcher in training," especially in relation to Dr. Scott and other community leaders. Further, as someone who grew up in white suburbs and who had attended majority white institutions, I was acutely aware of the privilege of my embodiment. I was also a single mother, having returned later in life to complete a PhD affording me more life experience than some of my peers. Even so, I often felt a sense of uncertainty regarding my racial privilege and even my age while interacting with the Westinghouse High School 6-12 students and found myself over-analyzing each interaction for fear of doing something "wrong."

Most often this looked like me hanging back, not knowing when or how to interact. I told myself I was "listening" or "making space," but in time I came to realize I was being avoidant. That avoidance wasn't an act of listening; it was a way to shield myself from discomfort and it eventually cost me connection. This was an important period of growth for me and self-realization. While my intentions were well-meaning, they did not ultimately serve the group. Instead, they served to protect me so I would not have to feel discomfort in my whiteness.

Such a posture, I quickly learned, was more of a hinderance than a productive, collaborative stance. For collaboration requires working *with* people, not avoiding them. It also assumed that there was a "right" and "wrong" way to proceed, ultimately arising from fear of failure. Eventually I came to understand through working alongside the community members, my peers, and the participants, that growth and learning cannot happen without failure and the humility that comes from such a disposition.

This change in perspective I learned to name; it was an exercise in *intellectual humility*. As a former academic librarian I was well-versed in information literacy pedagogy, having taught university students research skills for many years. I already understood intellectual humility as a posture assumed by a researcher that reframes the research path as messy, complex, and iterative, with multiple voices and perspectives, creating space for multiplicity, open-mindedness, curiosity, and critical questioning. What happened throughout my involvement in HYPE Media was that I realized that kind of frame could be applied to moments of community-driven programming and research as well. It could be an embodied reality—not just a cognitive one.

My understanding of this orientation was borrowed from "The Framework for Information Literacy" adopted in 2016 by the Association for College and Research Libraries. A central frame of research practice is fostering an understanding that *research is a form of inquiry*. As researchers mature, they realize their end goal is not to definitively answer a question, but rather, that research is a mode of iterative questioning, a method of engagement that embraces the unknown ("Framework"). Embracing the unknown and starting from an open attitude of thoughtful questioning became key as a program and curriculum builder, and later facilitator who engaged with HYPE media as part of my dissertation project.

Ultimately, the practice of intellectual humility became central to my growth and understanding of community listening practice in action. It provided a method and conceptual basis for what listening could look like in these kinds of spaces. It is also central to how I engaged with HYPE Media in my dissertation (Silva). As I worked to establish thoughtful research practices, I soon realized that I would need to be self-reflective in not only how I asked research questions and how I engaged with program participants, but also in how I would eventually disseminate research findings.

Embracing Intellectual Humility in Research: A Practice of Community Listening

Intellectual humility has a long history, with roots in philosophy, psychology, and education (Krumrei-Mancuso). Intellectual humility, a sister-concept to cultural humility (Hurley et al.)—is the awareness of one's personal knowledge limitations. Intellectual humility is a philosophical virtue for which psychologists eventually created robust framework and measurement tools (Porter et al.). This has heavily influenced the field of education in recent years in terms of pedagogy and practice, particularly in creating learning situations in which participants are comfortable making mistakes to learn (Brower). The concept has been less applied to community listening and learning practices than it has to measurable, formalized school environments, and remains a gap worth exploring.

When considering how intellectual humility, as a concept, overlaps with community listening practices, one must return to the researchers' orientation. A mindful researcher who is practicing intellectual humility, realizes that many problems and questions are open-ended. They understand that part of the ethical engagement with the research process is approaching and acknowledging the boundaries of their not-knowing. Such a stance requires a researcher thinker who is "open to being wrong and slow to be dismissive of information that challenges preconceptions" (Becker 191). This positionality leaves open the door to multiple directions for questions, and various interpretations of "findings."

Practicing Humility as a Commitment to Ethical Engagement

Given the work HYPE was doing at the intersections of race, class, gender, and education, cultivating sensitivity in the research process was not optional; it was foundational. The project demanded a participatory space where both researchers and participants could be present as full people. Graduate students found themselves

reflecting on their own embodiments and lived experiences, choosing to "research" themselves in tandem with their fieldwork alongside youth. This self-reflexivity became a mode of accountability. Intellectual humility functioned as a key practice of community listening in this context, creating conditions where the voices, perspectives, and uncertainties of all involved could be honored. It invited researchers to acknowledge the limits of their own knowledge, to remain open to being challenged, and to shift in response to what the community surfaced. In an environment like HYPE Media, where transformation was part of the process, this kind of humility was both necessary and generative.

This orientation toward intellectual humility shares deep resonance with Black feminist research frameworks that position inquiry as a relational, dialogic, and iterative practice (Rankin). Within these frameworks, lived experience is not supplemental to theory but central to the knowledge-making process. Relationships are not instrumental to research outcomes; they are part of the epistemological structure itself. This perspective challenges extractive or linear models of research by insisting that knowledge emerges through sustained engagement, care, and co-authorship. Intellectual humility, in this light, is not simply an individual trait. It is a collective practice that holds researchers accountable to the communities. They engage with and affirm the value of shared meaning-making over authoritative claims.

Through this framework, the research practices at HYPE were not only guided by Black feminist theory but were also transformed by it. The project evolved through acts of listening, reflection, and response, where researchers remained attuned to their own position while actively co-constructing knowledge with youth. Intellectual humility was not a concession of authority, but a commitment to presence, learning, and the belief that knowledge is most powerful when it is created together.

This grounding is especially vital in contexts like HYPE Media, where intellectual humility operates not only as a personal disposition but as a structural and relational ethic. Within a Black feminist epistemological framework, humility is understood as a practice that embraces complexity, resists domination, and insists on shared authority (Rankin). It is shaped by an awareness of how power circulates through research relationships and institutional spaces. Drawing on intersectional analysis as framed by Collins and Bilge (2016), this perspective recognizes that ethical research requires a decentering of the researcher's voice and a willingness to listen with care, attentiveness, and accountability. Intellectual humility in this sense is not abstract. It is a concrete practice of acting in ways that affirm relationality, honor difference, and prioritize care over control.

Within HYPE Media, this translated into practices of co-creation, sustained critique, and shared reflection. We resisted quick fixes or one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, we asked: What does it mean to honor the lived knowledge of Black girls? How do we build structures that allow their insights—not just their participation—to shape the work? In this way, intellectual humility was not ancillary to the program's design. It was central to its ethical foundation.

By acknowledging and valuing one's own embodiment in research, this practice aligns with pedagogies that emphasize the interconnectedness of personal and com-

munal experience. Through this lens, humility is not a soft skill or personality trait but an ethical imperative, a daily practice of listening, adjusting, and staying accountable to the communities with whom we engage. Black feminist thought provided the framework for that practice and the language to describe what we already felt to be true: that justice-oriented research must be slow, relational, dialogic, and led by those most affected.

Humility and Iterative Research Design

Within academia at large, intellectual humility has become more salient as scholars have begun to question passed-down disciplinary knowledge, research practices, and scholarly traditions. Indeed, in the social sciences, "a large number of scientific findings have been disproven, or become more doubtful, in recent years. One high-profile effort to retest 100 psychological experiments found only 40 percent replicated with more rigorous methods" (Resnick). Such crises in disciplinary knowledge encourage researchers from all modes of scholarship to re-think their research methodologies and the assumptions that underline them. Impactful researchers ask questions repeatedly in the process of gaining understanding, and those engaging such an approach in the context of community listening must ask those questions and wait for answers from their community partners without pressuring them for an answer they think fits their research agenda. This method of research recognizes this process as never-ending, that questions always beget more questions. Unlike the rote and linear scientific method in which researchers hypothesize, experiment, analyze, and replicate, an active listening disposition in these research situations seek to break away from straightforward study to splitting off on unknown trajectories, being open to possibilities.

Such modes of inquiry are not meandering, but instead are mindful, present, and inquisitive. Like the play with which we engaged the youth of Homewood, the messiness of questioning also affords new avenues of meaning-making. This includes dialogue, community building, and increasingly complex question asking rendering deeper and more profound outcomes as a result. In other words, community listening, in tandem with intellectual humility, allows for alternate meanings and engagement. It allows for alternative data, findings, programs, and ultimately evolving answers to community concerns.

As a final note, we recognize design connects to Black feminist principles by emphasizing intellectual humility and community listening as central to rethinking research methods. These principles value iterative, non-linear approaches that prioritize community voices and experiences, aligning with the idea that impactful researchers must ask questions and patiently wait for community responses. This method respects the ongoing nature of inquiry, acknowledging that questions lead to more questions, and it values the multiplicity of perspectives and possibilities.

Playing with Questions and Playing with Uncertainty: A Perspective

with Ari Brazier

Grounded in Black feminist thought, the theoretical framework of community listening and intellectual humility shaped every aspect of our work in HYPE Media, from daily activities to long-term projects. We came to understand that how we approached the small and the large with equal care was essential to building trust and practicing listening as both method and relation. In this section, I reflect on two early activities, the *Question Game* and *Look Up, Look Down*, as examples of how Black feminist pedagogy and dialogic learning can live in simple, replicable acts of play. These games were not just openings; they were grounding practices that made room for vulnerability, reflection, and shared discovery.

Although I wasn't enrolled in the course that met weekly to design and facilitate the HYPE program, I was present each week as a co-facilitator and collaborator. I was also Dr. Scott's doctoral advisee, working under her guidance as I developed my dissertation on play, memory, and freedom in Thomasville, Georgia (Brazier, 2021). That research, along with my ongoing work with the Youth Undoing Institutional Racism (YUIR) initiative in Pittsburgh, had already shaped our years of dialogue around youth-led community transformation, the stakes of pedagogies of play, and the possibilities of Black feminist praxis in informal learning spaces.

So, when HYPE emerged, it felt like an extension of those conversations. I took the bus each week to the CEC and brought with me not only a willingness to help but also a sense of responsibility, creativity, and deep investment in what we were trying to build together.

I remember the first day clearly. Dr. Scott was in her office, overwhelmed by the logistics of pulling together a brand-new program. I offered to help, and together we created the first session's agenda. I polished it up and sent it out to the group, and that document became our template. We returned to this evolving tool, week after week, not as something rigid, but as something we could adapt and reshape. With each session, we set intentions, identified themes, and attached play as our primary pedagogical practice. I brought in games—ones I had used with youth in YUIR, ones I had observed or created through my own research—because I believed in their power to open space, to disrupt, and to connect (Brazier, 2025).

Looking back, I now understand that this work was shaped not only by theoretical alignment, but also by the relational proximity and feminist posture we shared. In another world, with more funding or more supportive infrastructure for community engaged scholarship, I might have been a graduate research assistant on the project. But in the often-underfunded landscape of humanities-based community work, and in the still-emerging understanding of what it means for faculty to structure radical research collaborations within institutions, our collaboration took shape through care, trust, and mutual regard.

Black Feminist Foundations of Play

From the very beginning of HYPE, play was not treated as a break from instruction but as a method and mode of knowing. Drawing on Black feminist frameworks

that view embodiment, vulnerability, and relationality as essential to learning, we approached play as a practice of presence and connection. Rather than reinforcing hierarchy, it created opportunities to engage across difference. Showing up fully—emotionally, intellectually, and physically—became a central part of how we built community. That fullness did not require perfection or consistency; it made space for partiality, fluctuation, and the different ways each of us had the capacity to give. We understood ourselves as whole not because we were always complete, but because we were received in our many layers, and it was in our togetherness that this wholeness became possible.

This understanding was shaped by an engaged pedagogy grounded in care, mutual recognition, and freedom (hooks, 1994). In designing activities, we treated play as a relational practice that invited everyone in the room, including youth, graduate students, faculty, and community members, to enter a space where learning was co-created rather than delivered. Play became a structure for noticing, for building trust, and for moving beyond extractive educational routines toward something more reciprocal and affirming.

Our commitment to proximity and shared feeling was also informed by the concept of wake work, which urges us to remain present with the afterlives of slavery through care, relational witnessing, and refusal (Sharpe). In the HYPE classroom, this meant staying with the emotional truths that young people carried, including grief, frustration, longing, and joy, and honoring those realities not only through serious reflection but through practices that made space for lightness, laughter, and breath. Play became a form of presence work, a way of acknowledging pain while still making room for possibility.

Activities like the *Question Game* and *Look Up, Look Down* were intentionally designed to hold this complexity. These were not simply icebreakers or energizers. They were practices of what Gumbs (2020) describes as collaborative survival, where movement and laughter became tools for connection, resistance, and renewal. These games created space for Black girls to speak, to be witnessed, to lead, and to experience themselves outside the gaze of discipline or deficit. The space held by play affirmed that survival is not just about enduring but about breathing together, as Gumbs writes, and about creating new ways to care and be cared for.

This framework aligns with a healing-centered approach that views restoration as a collective process grounded in agency, cultural identity, and meaningful relationships (Ginwright). Within this context, play was not simply a strategy for engagement. It became a way of navigating reality without surveillance, a space where students and adults could imagine something freer. Healing, in this view, did not depend on correction or closure. It depended on return, on the practice of showing up, again and again, with curiosity, care, and openness to change.

Taken together, these frameworks challenge the idea that play is peripheral to learning. Instead, they reveal its pedagogical and methodological significance. The games we played opened portals into deeper relational work, inviting us to risk connection, to listen with our full selves, and to co-create meaning in the moment. These practices, grounded in Black feminist thought, were expressions of both survival and

freedom. What emerged at HYPE was not simply a curriculum. It was a living practice shaped in real time with the girls. It was built through presence, attunement, and a kind of listening that exceeded language. Play, care, and collaborative survival were not additions to the program. They formed its very foundation.

The Question Game

Our first session began with *The Question Game*, a simple but powerful activity that laid the foundation for how we would engage with one another. With the room buzzing with uncertainty, excitement, and energy, we invited everyone (youth, graduate students, faculty, and community partners) to stand in a circle. Each person asked the person to their left a question, any question: What time is it? Why are you wearing shoes? Is it raining outside? What did you eat for lunch? How tall are you? And so on. Without responding, laughing, or hesitating, that person then turned to their left and asked a different question. Questions could not be repeated, and anyone who did, or who laughed or hesitated, was "out."

We started with this game to ensure everyone felt comfortable asking potentially uncomfortable, ridiculous, or difficult questions. It wasn't simply an icebreaker; it was an invitation into a different kind of intellectual and relational space. It aligned with our theoretical engagement with community listening, beginning with a vulnerable question to initiate dialogue. This seemingly light-hearted exercise challenged us to move beyond our comfort zones and embrace the discomfort and vulnerability of asking. In doing so, we intentionally disrupted traditional power dynamics often present in educational settings. Rather than assuming the role of experts, faculty and graduate students embraced uncertainty, acknowledging our shared journey of co-learning.

The act of asking, rather than answering, became a cornerstone of our collective interaction.

This dynamic served as a constant reminder that we were not there to deliver solutions or impose knowledge. Instead, we were committed to understanding, listening, and learning together which foregrounded the kind of intellectual humility that values curiosity over certainty. The game required us to question our assumptions about one another, particularly those shaped by geography, education, roles, social identities, and lived experiences. It reflected principles that value multiplicity, relationality, and the disruption of hierarchy, fostering a space where all voices were welcomed and all questions were worthy.

The game also exemplified a deeply rooted Black feminist ethic. It mirrored and extended Black feminist commitments to honoring situated knowledge, embracing dialogue, and resisting systems that marginalize through control, surveillance, or expertise. Together, we witnessed that knowledge is never universal but always situated, that every voice carries a history, and that recognizing standpoint is crucial to a fuller understanding of the world (Collins, 1990). The iterative nature of the questioning echoed bell hooks' call to teach from a place of continuous learning and unlearning.

In this sense, we were not only playing a game, we were modeling a practice of collective inquiry and community accountability.

This approach to learning was a living, breathing practice shaped in real time with the girls, rooted in presence, attunement, and listening beyond words. It reflected a pedagogy of being with rather than doing to—a relational practice that made space for joy, experimentation, and mutual care. Play, care, and collective survival were not add-ons to the program; they formed its very foundation. In hindsight, the Question Game marked our first shared experience of intellectual humility. It flipped classroom expectations by privileging the question over the answer, uncertainty over expertise. We invited play into our pedagogy and practiced what it meant to listen deeply and learn relationally.

Look Up, Look Down

In another early session, we introduced a game called *Look Up, Look Down*. Everyone stood in a circle with their heads bowed. On the cue "Look up," each person searched for someone else's gaze. If two people locked eyes, they screamed and exited the circle. Then came the next cue: "Look down." The rhythm repeated, drawing participants into a cycle of anticipation, connection, and awareness.

The scream wasn't in the original game—or at least, we don't think it was—but Ari added it. It became essential, creating a moment of silliness, but also intimacy. In HYPE, silliness was never seen as frivolous. It was a mode of learning, a rehearsal of trust. We understood that students are often conditioned out of intimacy in formal education. Eye contact is seen as threatening; laughter is seen as disruptive; and play is either infantilized or dismissed altogether. But for us, play was a serious method. *Look Up, Look Down* was a way of practicing being seen, of noticing what happens when eyes meet, even briefly, and of asking what it means to be present with and for one another.

Many students avoided eye contact altogether, and we noticed that not as defiance or disobedience, but as a kind of signal. It told us something about how often Black girls are observed, surveilled, or corrected, but rarely witnessed. That distinction mattered and this game created space to disrupt those dynamics. Rather than reinforcing a culture of compliance or control, it invited the girls to move toward each other on their own terms. In doing so, they practiced forms of relational presence that extended beyond the moment of the game.

The act of locking eyes, screaming, and stepping out of the circle became more than play; it became symbolic. It surfaced shared tensions and gestures of exposure, collision, and recovery. The youth were navigating complex realities in a rapidly gentrifying, historically Black neighborhood. While our experiences differed, this activity offered a moment of togetherness, a collective acknowledgment of what it means to be seen, startled, and still held. In these seemingly small actions, we were rehearsing radical healing.

The structure of the game demanded responsiveness. There was no winner, no expert, no endpoint, only participation. It reminded us that curriculum can be lived

in the body, in breath, in the shared experience of movement and laughter. By leaning into the awkwardness and absurdity of the moment, we built a kind of lateral alignment. There was nothing to perform, no rubric to satisfy. Instead, we built a practice of collective presence and awareness, one that included ourselves, each other, and the possibilities we were creating together.

Look Up, Look Down reflected Black feminist commitments to embodiment, relationality, and care. It modeled what it means to learn through proximity and to recognize how deeply we are entangled in one another's lives. Each gesture—eye contact, scream, exit—held layers of meaning about protection, resistance, and tenderness. We were not just surviving these moments, we were shaping new ones, together.

This activity, like others in HYPE, demanded intellectual humility. It required our full presence and asked us to approach even a game with curiosity rather than control. We had to be willing to release our assumptions, lean into uncertainty, and let ourselves be changed by what emerged. These were not just moments of play; they were moments of pedagogy. And in HYPE, that pedagogy was always rooted in care, relationship, and the radical possibility of learning together.

Games like *The Question Game* and *Look Up, Look Down* were not diversions or add-ons. They were intentional, co-created practices that asked: What do students need? What can we build together? And how might we come to know, not through mastery, but through mutual presence? These games made our shared commitments to play, to listening, to witnessing, to humility visible. Together, they offered a model for learning that was as joyful as it was rigorous, as serious as it was liberating, and as rooted in Black feminist tradition as it was in the here and now.

Conclusion

We believe that HYPE Media offers a dynamic blueprint for fostering deep engagement, resisting systems of superficiality and whiteness in its approach. It demonstrates the power of dismantling systemic inequities and building futures rooted in dialogue, a commitment to unlearning, re-doing, failing, and embracing the messy, iterative nature of deep community collaboration. The program's impact is evident in the words of one participant, who years later, reflected on her memories of the Question Game as part of a program assessment interview: "And it's like, stuff [like that] that catches people off guard…That was my favorite [game] because of the unexpectedness; it made it funny. [Peoples' personalities] made it fun." This reflection encapsulates the core principles of HYPE Media—that community building thrives in the unexpected, that asking questions opens people to new ways of thinking, and that joy and vulnerability dialogically and interconnectedly evolve together.

Reflecting on our journey with HYPE Media, we realize how deeply it transformed our understanding of community engagement and the principles of Black feminist thought. The emphasis on listening deeply, valuing diverse voices, and embracing the iterative nature of learning has reshaped our approach to both research and personal interactions. Witnessing the growth and empowerment of the Home-

wood youth, we saw firsthand the power of creating spaces where their voices are not only heard but central to shaping, leading, and living the conversation.

As three researchers from different positionalities, informed by our interaction with other researchers, students, and community participants, we offer these reflections to highlight the relational and community-centered nature of HYPE Media. Our diverse perspectives have enriched the program and the program has enriched us, demonstrating the value of collaborative approaches in addressing systemic issues. HYPE Media's contributions are essential to the fields of community engagement, literacy studies, and writing studies. This work underscores the importance of integrating Black feminist thought, community listening, and intellectual humility into academic and practical frameworks. By prioritizing the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, we challenge conventional methodologies and highlight the value of co-constructed knowledge. These principles encourage a shift from top-down approaches to ones that foster shared agency and mutual respect.

Incorporating the insights from Black feminist thought into community literacy and writing studies provides a richer, more inclusive understanding of these fields. The iterative, non-linear approaches emphasized by HYPE Media align with the dynamic and evolving nature of community engagement. Scholars and practitioners alike can learn from this model, recognizing that meaningful programming is built through collaborative, dialogic processes for the purposes of the community. Intellectual humility, as practiced in HYPE Media, reminds us that embracing uncertainty and vulnerability is crucial for transformative learning and growth. Ultimately, this work exemplifies how integrating these principles can lead to more effective and impactful community-engaged scholarship and practice.

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Khirsten L. Scott, PhD is an Assistant Professor in the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education and Director of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project. Her scholarship and community work center Black feminist and womanist practice across rhetorical theory, writing studies, digital and Black studies, and critical pedagogy. She leads HYPE Media, a youth-powered storytelling initiative in Pittsburgh, and co-founded DBLAC, a national network supporting Black scholars. Her work has appeared in *Kairos*, Composition Studies, *Prose Studies*, *The Routledge Reader of African American Rhetoric*, and other venues. Dr. Scott is the 2024 recipient of the Ernest A. Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement from Campus Compact.

Elise Silva, PhD is the Director of Policy Research at Pitt Cyber, where she studies the intersections of technology, society, and public policy. Drawing on humanistic analysis, social science methods, and a community-engaged approach, her work has appeared in *Journal of Information Literacy*, *Tech Policy Press*, and other venues. She previously served as an academic librarian and visiting English faculty at Brigham Young University. Dr. Silva holds a PhD in Writing Studies from the University of Pittsburgh, an MLIS from the University of North Texas, and an MA in English from BYU. Her honors include an honorable mention for the 2024 *Computers and Composition* Hugh Burns Distinguished Dissertation Award, a 2022 Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship, a 2020 Sawyer Seminar Information Ecosystems Fellowship, and the 2017 ALA Library Instruction Round Table Innovation Award.

Ariana Brazier, PhD is a Black queer feminist and smiley sad mom-girl. She is a play-driven community organizer and educator who is motivated to raise a joyous, free Black child. Ari received her doctoral degree in English, Critical & Cultural Studies from the University of Pittsburgh in April 2021. She now resides in Atlanta, GA. Ari has been described by the people she loves as Southern, explosive, abstract, intricate, and awkward.