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“Before the World Gets Them”: The Impact of Racialized Parenting on Black Mothers

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“Before the World Gets Them”: The Impact of Racialized Parenting on
Black Mothers

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to every Black girl who is striving in spite of adversity.
Adversity produces perseverance, character, and hope...all of which has brought me this
far.

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Throughout this dissertation process – configuring my topic, settling on methodology, the creation of my interview guide, recruiting participants, preliminary data collection, editing my interview guide, cleaning transcripts, analyzing data, and writing (just to name a few things) – I have had a great deal of support and assistance that helped me get to this point.

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a light in times of darkness. This journey takes a village, and I am incredibly grateful for mine.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the distinct practices Black women implement to protect their children from both actualized and anticipatory experiences of racism, as well as its effects on their mothering experiences, health and well-being, as well as how they manage the emotional and mental toll of their children's experiences. Race plays an integral role in shaping mothering practices. More specifically, motherwork examines how Black mothers ensure the physical, mental, and emotional survival of their children in the face of micro- and macro-level structures that perpetuate racism and inequality. However, much is left to explore regarding the interconnectedness between Black women's motherwork, linked lives, and Black maternal health. Following a three-article format, analyzing qualitative semi-structured interviews with thirty-two Black mothers around their children's experiences of racism, my dissertation explores three overarching questions: (1) How do Black women engage in motherwork around their children's experiences of racism? (2) How do children's experiences of racism impact Black maternal health and well-being? (3) What coping strategies are Black women utilizing in the wake of their children's experiences? In these articles, I build on existing sociological research surrounding racial socialization of Black children, gender, race and racism, health, and family to highlight the insidiousness and multifaceted nature of racism and its impact on Black families, specifically Black maternal health and well-being. Additionally, I expound on the impact that racism has on parent-child relationships, which highlights the impact of multiple forms

of racism on Black women, expanding sociological understandings of the negative implications of racism beyond direct interpersonal experiences.

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GLOSSARY

This glossary is intended to provide an overview of terms and concepts as I utilized them within the context and purposes of this project.

Race: a socially constructed form of categorization based on phenotypic characteristics used to categorize groups of people.

Racism: a structure of social relations at social, political, economic, and ideological levels that impacts the life chances of the various racial groups.

Black: a cultural group, in addition to a racial category, of African descent who have a shared experience of both cohesion and discrimination.

Anti-Blackness: a framework that highlights society's inability to recognize the humanity of, as well as holding disdain, disregard, and/or disgust for, those who are racialized as Black (Ross, 2020).

Motherwork: a concept used to describe the physical, mental, and emotional efforts of Black women to protect children from racism at various levels within society (Collins, 1996).

Children: One's offspring, within the context of this project all are biological, which includes those in the life stage of adolescence and emerging/young adulthood.

Health: a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and is not merely the presence or absence of disease or illness (WHO, 2020).

Actualized: experiences of racism that are realized, whether overt or covert in nature.

Anticipatory: experiences of racism that are anticipated but have not yet occurred.

Vicarious: experiences of racism that are not directly encountered.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“I think that’s why a lot of Black moms... are so strict. We [are] trying to hold onto them as long as we can before the world gets them.” - Harriet, 50

Historically, discussions of motherhood within the broader scholarship often discussed Black¹ women as “defective,” or ignored them altogether. However, the work of Black feminist scholars has sought to center the experiences of Black women within family scholarship in an effort to remove racist boundaries on “good” mothering (Collins, 1986; Few, 2007; James, 1993; Rodriguez, 2016). These efforts have resulted in a growing body of literature focusing on the way Black women’s mothering is not only unique but is strategic in taking hold of their own lives and their families in the face of efforts to largely erase their experiences (Dow, 2019; Powell & Coles, 2020; Rodriguez, 2016; Smith, 2016).

Conflicting with prevalent ideas surrounding mothering, Black women utilize the social institution of family as a site of empowerment (Collins, 1996). Privately, within the home, Black mothers fight to protect their children against systems of inequality, such as race/racism, in their everyday lives. Black women are actively protecting their children from racism, which feels indivisible from her mothering and is deeply embedded into the fibers of Black families in the United States.

¹ In line with Black scholars, such as Du Bois (1899) and Crenshaw (1988), I assign “Black” as a proper noun to recognize Black people as a cultural group, in addition to a racial category, of African descent who have a shared experience of both cohesion and discrimination.

These efforts that Black mothers utilize to protect their children in the face of racism are defined by Black feminist scholars as *motherwork*. Patricia Hill Collins' (1996) theory of "motherwork" suggests that Black mothers utilize motherhood as a site of both individual and collective empowerment that allows them to engage in racial liberation resulting in both cultural and physical survival.

Motherwork and Racial Socialization

Dominant definitions and research on mothering have limited our understandings of the unique experiences of Black women. As a result, Black feminist scholarship became increasingly committed to elucidating the specific effects and mechanisms that race has on mothering practices (Collins, 1986, 1996; A. E. Edwards, 2000; James, 1993). Much of this commitment was rooted in the scholar's desire to provide necessary visibility to the extensive labor of Black mothers, centering their experiences (Collins, 1996; Davis, 1983; Few, 2007; Johnston & Swanson, 2003; Jones, 1985; Roberts, 2014; White, 1999).

While the idealized images of motherhood and mothering within the United States hold race- and class-specific images, being a mother has historically looked vastly different for Black women. Rooted in the legacy of anti-Blackness and enslavement within the United States, Black women were not afforded the privilege of having a sense of control over their motherhood. Those who profited from the enslavement of Black people viewed Black women as property, which resulted in the controlling of their families and bodies (White, 1999). This lack of autonomy over their bodies, and more specifically their childbearing, manifested itself in various ways, such as being forced to bear children, or the threat of having their children being ripped away. In addition to the lack of autonomy, enslaved Black mothers were tasked with a number of responsibilities outside of mothering

their own children that speaks to the consequences of race and gender on Black women's motherhood. For example, the work of Black feminist scholars, like Deborah Gray White (1999) and Angela Y. Davis (1983), has provided insight into the historical role of enslaved mothers which feeds our current understandings of Black motherhood. White (1999) documents the substantial labor, both inside and outside the home, of enslaved women, including full responsibility for domestic work within the homes of slave owners, as well as domestic work to take care of their own children. Additionally, more contemporary scholarship has highlighted how Black women's fight for control over their families and autonomy has shifted from the history of enslavement to state-run institutions that continue to perpetuate racialized violence against Black mothers. For instance, the work of Dorothy Roberts (2002), emphasizes how the child welfare system in the United States disproportionately separates Black children from their families, which inflicts emotional trauma and stress on Black children and their parents. Moreover, it is suggested that these institutions are designed in a manner that disadvantages Black families due to the foundation of anti-Blackness within U.S. society (Roberts, 2002). This historical creation and contemporary perpetuation of state-sanctioned racialized violence against Black families has led to Black women's efforts to protect their children and their own bodies from society's attempts at (literally and figuratively) removing them. This exhaustive, both historical and contemporary, labor of Black women continues to focus on the collective survival of the Black community by ensuring the well-being of Black children.

To add a nuanced understanding to the role race plays in shaping mothering, Collins (1996) developed the concept of "motherwork," which illustrates how race defines and transforms mothering practices for Black women. Specifically, motherwork centers the

battle for collective power and ensuring survival in the face of racism (Collins, 1996). Current research surrounding racial socialization is nearly synonymous with the concept of motherwork by focusing on the efforts of Black women to protect and empower their children in the face of racism (A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016). Both motherwork and racial socialization broadly consists of three spheres: (1) physical survival, (2) collective power, and (3) identity.

The role that Black women take to racially socialize their children in efforts to protect them is well-established in the literature (Caldwell et al., 2002; A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Hall, 2018) and closely tied to motherwork. Racial socialization consists of the messages that mothers provide to their children surrounding attitudes, values, and beliefs around race (Hughes et al., 2006). This may consist of teaching children to be proud of their race and culture (A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016), informing them of certain protective practices – e.g., “the talk” (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019), and/or providing tools to stand-up for oneself in the midst of a racist experience (JoAnne Banks-Wallace, 2001). For example, mothers may instill racial pride as well as effective coping methods to counteract the potential negative experiences their children will face at school (Stevenson & Arrington, 2011). However, these vital efforts of Black women may also produce a unique form racism-related parenting stress that has consequences for Black women. More specifically, because prior research has recognized how racism produces stress for Black Americans (Brown et al., 2000), this may be an additional pathway in which racism impacts the well-being of Black women and families. However, the health costs of motherwork on Black women remain largely unexplored. Understanding the

potential health costs of motherwork may provide additional insight into the negative effects of racism on Black women's health.

Racism, Health, and Coping

Racism is acknowledged as a key determinant of health inequality (Paradies et al., 2015; Phelan & Link, 2015). Several studies find an association between racism and poor health, including higher rates and earlier onset of physical illness among Blacks, including higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, heart disease, and diabetes (Gee & Ford, 2011; Jackson et al., 2001; Krieger, 2014; Paradies et al., 2015; Phelan & Link, 2015). Additionally, navigating their children's experiences of racism may produce a unique form of racism-related stress for Black women. More specifically, applying the stress perspective distinguishes racism as a unique form of stress that damages health both directly and indirectly (Gee & Ford, 2011; Krieger, 2014; Paradies, 2006; Paradies et al., 2015). According to the Stress Process Model, or stress perspective, the relationship between stress and health is linked via complex processes of appraisal, coping, and resources (Pearlin et al., 1981; Thoits, 1995). Specifically, under this model, racism is a unique form of stress that has negative consequences for mental and physical health (Alang et al., 2017; Anderson, 2013; Brown et al., 2000; Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Geronimus et al., 2006; Hall, 2018; Lu & Chen, 2004; Pearlin et al., 2005; Woods-Giscombé & Lobel, 2008). The established racial hierarchy in the U.S. influences power and access to resources that produces these unequal outcomes in health. Additionally, while racism generally is thought of as a primary stressor, secondary stressors are also produced that impact and influence health outcomes (Brody et al., 2008; Gee et al., 2012); this is widely known as stress proliferation (Gee et al., 2012). Stress proliferation focuses on the

notion that a single stressor can cause the production of secondary stressors (Pearlin et al., 2005). The insidiousness of racism suggests that health implications may extend beyond direct interpersonal experiences. Specifically, the theory of linked lives suggests that racism experienced by an individual will also impact close others, particularly within familial relationships (Gee et al., 2012). For instance, the work of Thornberry and colleagues (2003) found that stressors impacting parents, such as financial insecurity, also had a significant impact on the social and emotional behavior of their children. This previous work lends itself to our understanding of how the lives of individuals are interconnected and have an impact beyond the individual. Recently, there has been an expansion of linked lives scholarship to examine its relationship with racialized stress.

Research on the impact of racism on the health and well-being of Black families has often focused on parent-child interactions when examining the effects of racism on the lived experiences of Black Americans. Specifically, when applying a linked lives perspective, researchers often examine how mothers' experiences of racism impact child health and well-being (for examples see: Caughy et al., 2004; Jackson et al., 2001; JoAnne Banks-Wallace, 2001; Kelly et al., 2013; Pachter & Coll, 2009). However, the toll that children's experiences of racism have on mothers has lacked this same exploration. Black mothers are expected to tend to the basic needs of their children, while simultaneously ensuring their mental, emotional, and physical survival in the face of racism. Although research has independently examined Black women's roles in racially socializing their children (Collins, 1996; Gurusami, 2018; Gonzalez, 2019; Harris and Amutah-Onukagha, 2019; Hill, 2001) and racism's impact on the health of Black Americans (Gee et al., 2012;

Pearlin et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2017), the interplay between these two concepts has long been ignored.

Additionally, research has provided insight into the various efforts deployed by Black Americans to cope with experiences of racism (Brondolo et al., 2009; Butler-Barnes et al., 2017, 2018; Hall, 2018; Lowe et al., 2012; Mehra et al., 2020; Spates et al., 2020). These efforts are documented across multiple domains, such as religion and social support (Brondolo et al., 2009). More specifically, Black women utilize a variety of coping strategies within the context of family to mitigate the effects of racism-related stress (Hall, 2018).

The Impact on Black Mothers

The association between Black women's motherwork and well-being is highlighted by Collins (1996) when she states, "women's motherwork for individuals and the community has been essential for their survival...this work often extracts at a high cost. The question of whether women are doing more than their fair share of such work...merits consideration" (62). Despite Collins' clear assertion about the need for further research, relatively little work has been produced to examine the cost of motherwork on the well-being of Black women. Taking into consideration the recent advances in our knowledge surrounding racism and health, particularly the recent application of linked lives (Colen et al., 2012; Gee et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2013), and the unique processes and practices of motherwork, this dissertation furthers our understanding of the complex consequences of racism on Black mothers.

This Dissertation

Following a three-article format, based on in-depth qualitative interviews with thirty-two Black women with at least one child between the ages of 10-24, my dissertation examines the following research questions: (1) How do Black women engage in motherwork around their children's experiences of racism? (2) How do children's experiences of racism impact Black maternal health? (3) What coping strategies are Black women utilizing in the wake of their children's experiences of racism? In these articles, I build on existing sociological research surrounding the racial socialization of Black children; gender, race, and racism; health; and family to highlight the insidiousness and multifaceted nature of racism and its impacts on Black families, especially Black maternal health. Additionally, I expound on the impact that racism has on parent-child relationships, which highlights the impact of multiple forms of racism on Black women, expanding sociological understandings of the negative implications of racism beyond direct interpersonal experiences.

In the first empirical chapter, I discuss how family scholarship has often discussed Black women's motherhood as defective, but the efforts of Black feminist scholars sought to change this narrative by centering Black women within the literature. I also discuss how Black feminist scholars, such as Patricia Hill Collins, aimed to reveal the realities of racism in the lives of Black women and how this transformed their mothering practices. More specifically, I utilize Patricia Hill Collins' theory of *motherwork* to explore how Black women's mothering encompasses unique practices that look to protect their children from racism and empower them in the face of racist experiences. I present evidence that is supported in the larger literature illustrating how Black women play a salient role in racially

socializing their children to protect them (and prepare them for) experiences of racism. This chapter also explores the impact of motherwork on Black women's overall well-being.

Situating my work within the larger Black feminist scholarship focusing on Black mothers, I reveal potential areas for future research. First, I speak to the importance of Black women's motherwork in the lives of Black children by revealing their efforts to protect their children from racism. Second, I explore the unique ways Black women are engaging in motherwork based on certain factors, such as their child's gender identity. Third, I discuss how motherwork comes at a cost to Black women's overall well-being. Fourth, I consider a connection between the concepts of motherwork and intensive mothering, which may introduce a new potential framing when discussing Black women's motherhood and mothering experiences.

In the second empirical chapter, I examine the following question: How do children's experiences of racism impact Black maternal health? In this article, I explore how Black women understand and navigate their children's experiences of racism, while also inquiring about how they perceive their children's experiences impacting their own health. In this article, I illustrate how Black women's health is, in many ways, also closely tied to the well-being of their children. More specifically, I reveal how the impacts of racism extend well beyond direct and/or initial experiences. Not only do the mothers in this study consistently hold concerns surrounding their children's experiences of racism, but they are able to readily identify the ways that these experiences – whether actualized or anticipated – are impacting their health. Lastly, I consider how the domains of health being identified – i.e., mental, emotional, and physical, are not mutually exclusive from one another. Rather, I pose that these differing domains of health are interconnected and have

the ability to negatively influence physical health outcomes and contribute to health inequalities experienced by Black women.

In the third empirical chapter, I explore the question: What coping strategies are Black women utilizing in the wake of their children's experiences of racism? Here, I examine how Black women cope with and manage the perceived health consequences they feel in the wake of their children's experiences of racism. This article builds on existing literature highlighting the various coping strategies Black women deploy to mitigate the effects of racism on their lives and overall well-being. Exploring these coping strategies through the narratives of the women who participated in this study revealed: (1) the necessity of these strategies for maintaining the ability to function and complete the tasks expected of them, and (2) the complexity of these strategies, as they do not always offer the reprieve intended when utilizing them. I contend that, through the examination of these coping strategies, although racism clearly impacts the lives of Black women and their families in various ways, Black women remain vigilant and persistent in combatting the negative effects of racism while also finding ways to resist.

In chapter five, I conclude by drawing a connection between motherwork, health, and coping in the lives of Black women. In this article, I highlight how racism permeates multiple facets of the lives of Black women and families. More specifically, this chapter underlines how Black women recognize the necessity of their motherwork, while simultaneously viewing it as a source of parenting stress. This parenting stress, which I argue is another form of racism-related stress, shapes the health of Black women, which pushes them into deploying various coping strategies to survive these health effects. This work draws connection to a more complete understanding of the ways racism impacts the

lives of Black families. More specifically, in addition to direct interpersonal experiences, the looming threat of racism within day-to-day activities – e.g., going to work, shapes the lives of Black Americans.

Lastly, each empirical chapter contains a theoretical or conceptual framing that extensively outlines the theories and concepts driving this work. It is my aim that the women’s narratives shared within this study allow for a deeper understanding of the impacts of racism by highlighting its persistent and consistent looming over the lives of Black families. This study looks to affirm the experiences of Black mothers by affirming that, although they are not always measurable by a survey, these experiences are not “one offs,” or delusions, but they are representative of the realities of many Black families in the United States. Additionally, I hope that this work can be a reminder that in order to understand the experiences of Black women, we must listen to their stories.

CHAPTER 2

CAN'T JUST SEND OUR CHILDREN OUT: THE IMPACT OF MOTHERWORK ON BLACK WOMEN²

“That’s the difference in parenting, that we always have to be on the defense.... We don’t have that luxury of just sending our [children] out into the world.” – Anna

INTRODUCTION

Popular rhetoric surrounding Black motherhood has often labeled them as dysfunctional and/or “bad” mothers who reproduce children that perpetuate cycles of disadvantage (Giddings, 2009; Kelley, 2001; Moynihan, 1965). Black women’s desire to take hold of and protect the lives of their children is a radical push against white supremacist notions of mothering that largely erase the reality of their experiences (Dow, 2019; Powell & Coles, 2020; Smith, 2016). Contrary to popular (feminist) discourse, Black feminist theorists have articulated how motherhood could be a site of empowerment for Black women. Patricia Hill Collins’ (1996) theory of “motherwork” suggests that Black mothers utilize motherhood as a site of both individual and collective empowerment, allowing Black mothers to engage in racial liberation that results in both cultural and physical survival.

² Brantley, Mia. Submitted to *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 7/15/2021.

Black mothers continue to play a salient role in the protection of Black children in the face of many forms of racism, particularly through racial socialization. This is illustrated in the quote above from Anna, a mother of a daughter (17) and two sons (12 and 1), who discussed how Black mothers restrict activities for their children due to a fear of racism or unfair treatment. In alignment with Collins' theory of motherwork, Black mothers have unique negotiations and teachings they engage in to protect and empower their children.

Dominant definitions and research on mothering have limited our understandings of motherhood to a universal and exhaustive practice that places confines on the lives of women – i.e., intensive mothering (Hays, 1996; O'Reilly, 2004). While intensive mothering has shed light on particular aspects of motherhood, such as the efforts and practices mothers engage to ensure the success of their children, little empirical work has been done to gain an intersectional understanding of the ways race influences mothering practices and experiences. More specifically, the absence of scholarship surrounding the emotional, mental, and physical practices that Black mothers employ to ensure the individual and collective well-being of Black children ignores the unique experiences of Black women's motherhood. As a result, Black feminist scholarship provides necessary visibility for the specific effects and mechanisms that race has on mothering practices (Collins, 1986, 1996; A. E. Edwards, 2000; James, 1993). This reconceptualization of Black motherhood led to Collins' theory of "motherwork," where she highlights how race plays an integral role in defining and transforming mothering practices for women of color (Collins, 1996). Specifically, motherwork focuses on the ways Black mothers ensure the success and survival of their children in the face of the micro- and macro-level structures

that perpetuate racism and inequality. Contemporary research on racial socialization is almost synonymous with concepts from Collins' theory of motherwork (A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016), which consists of three spheres: (1) physical survival, (2) collective power, and (3) identity. However, several gaps remain in our understanding of the overlay between intensive mothering and motherwork for Black women.

While most mothers look to ensure the well-being of their children in various domains, motherwork asserts that race and racism are key determinants in the overall well-being of Black families. Additionally, the three spheres of motherwork provide a framework for the unique aspects of mothering that Black women engage. For example, all mothers may look to ensure the physical survival of their children; however, motherwork asserts that for Black children, physical survival is not guaranteed due to the constant threat of racism and racial inequality (Collins, 1996; Gurusami, 2019; Roschelle, 2017; Smith, 2016). Additionally, dominant (white) feminist discourse around intensive mothering practices has often argued that motherhood conflicts with women's individual empowerment (Ennis, 2014; Ladd-Taylor, 1994). However, motherwork centers Black women's efforts to resist the oppression of various social institutions – e.g., combating destructive narratives Black children receive (Powell & Coles, 2020) and teaching self-empowerment (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2017) instead of centering individual power or autonomy. Furthermore, Black women's motherwork in the home is a form of resistance to external systems of oppression (Collins, 1996), rather than prior scholarship's claims that mothering in the home may be a site of loss or exploitation (Ennis, 2014). Black women's motherwork often consists of efforts to foster their children's racial and cultural identity in the midst of a society that tends to devalue them – e.g., teaching their children

survival techniques, while ensuring such lessons do not come at the cost of confidence and dignity (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2017; Dow, 2019). In addition to general mothering practices, Black mothers' fears about racism impacting their children requires additional mothering practices to safeguard their children's survival (Lorde, 1984).

This work looks to further our understanding of the practices and labor Black mothers employ to protect and empower their children in the face of racism. To examine these practices, I analyzed 32 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black mothers of adolescent children. In this study, whenever "children" is referenced, it is always referring to adolescence and emerging/young adulthood, since all mothers interviewed have at least one child in within the age range of 10-24 years. In this study, I explore Black women's motherwork around their children's experiences of racism, as well as assert that contemporary motherwork adds an additional aspect of intensive mothering for Black women that has yet to be fully explored. This paper addresses the following research question: *How do Black mothers engage in motherwork around their adolescent's experiences of racism?* Understanding the answer to this question is necessary to: (a) gain a more thorough understanding of the mothering practices of Black women, (b) provide a nuanced look into the effects of race and racism on Black families, and (c) highlight the impacts that both actualized and anticipatory experiences of racism have on Black women's mothering experience.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Motherwork and Racial Socialization

The dominant ideology in sociology used to define mothering stems from Hays' (1996) work on intensive mothering as the defining guidelines of motherhood. Intensive mothering is a child-centered, labor intensive, emotionally engrossing, and financially costly ideology where mothers are primarily responsible for nurturing and cultivating their child (Ennis, 2014; Hays, 1996). These practices primarily involve preparing children for particular academic and social futures and include mothers being particular about the social activities in which their children engage (Ennis, 2014).

Similarly, another common ideology used to define parenting is the work of Annette Lareau (2011) examining what she refers to as *unequal childhoods*, where she explores how parents, with a primary focus on mothers, raise their children in two particular ways: (1) concerted cultivation, which is similar to Hays' idea of intensive mothering where parents invest time into their children to ensure the development of their talents and skills by putting them into extracurricular activities and other efforts to allot them additional opportunities and resources; and (2) natural growth, which contends with the previous notion of concerted cultivation because it focuses more on the placement of boundaries between parent and child. This work suggests that instead of fostering skills through extracurriculars, parents who engage in natural growth tend to be less involved in children's schooling and activities and allot more leisure time for their children (e.g., playing outside with friends) (Lareau, 2011). Most pointedly, Lareau argues that a defining factor in who engages in these parenting styles is largely class-based, where middle- and

upper middle-class parents are more likely to engage in the concerted cultivation versus working-class parents being more likely to engage in natural growth (2011). While this work does explore how race is also a factor in shaping parenting experiences, class is discussed as being most persistent.

These dominant definitions and research on “good” mothering has long focused on primarily middle- and upper-middle class white women and have minimized the impact of race on mothering ideologies, which has limited our understandings of the unique experiences of Black women. More specifically, scholarship around intensive mothering focuses primarily on the social success of children, while Black women’s practices look to ensure survival in the face of inequality. In response to this gap, Black feminist scholarship committed to elucidating the effects of race on mothering, which was rooted in the desire to provide a necessary visibility to the extensive labor of Black mothers and centering their experiences (Collins, 1996; Davis, 1983; Few, 2007; Johnston & Swanson, 2003; Jones, 1985; Roberts, 2014; White, 1999). For example, the work of Nash (2018) asserts that Black feminist theorists, in centering Black women, reimagined Black motherhood as a powerful force that resisted society’s attempt to relegate them to a place of despair due to the multiple forms of oppression they faced. This reconceptualization of Black motherhood led to Collins’ (1996) theory of “motherwork.” According to Collins (1996), motherwork focuses on how race and racism plays an integral role in defining and transforming mothering practices for women of color. Additionally, motherwork centers Black women and their battle for collective power, by focusing on the practices Black mothers engage to ensure the success and survival of their children in the face of racism – i.e., racial socialization (A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016). Motherwork, and by extension racial

socialization, consists of three spheres: (1) physical survival, (2) collective power, and (3) identity. As previously noted, when describing intensive mothering, scholarship often focuses on the privileges being utilized to promote the “success” of one’s child, while mothers simultaneously lose their identities in the process. However, Patricia Hill Collins’ theory of motherwork suggests that Black women’s mothering ideologies look substantially different.

Physical Survival

All mothers look to ensure the physical survival of their children. However, because of the threat of racism on the lives of Black families, motherwork asserts that for Black children, physical survival is not assumed to be attainable (Collins, 1996; Gurusami, 2019; Roschelle, 2017; Smith, 2016). Due to this persistent threat of racism across multiple domains, Black mothers’ fears of racism and racialized violence, concluding in the possible and actual deaths of their children, requires additional mothering practices to better ensure their survival (Lorde, 1984). Additionally, although scholarship examining motherwork has provided insight into some practices that focus on physical survival of Black children, there may be other forms of labor and survival – i.e., emotional and mental – that Black mothers implement to protect their children. These forms of labor have not yet been fully explored. Not understanding the multiple forms of labor Black women practice to ensure the overall well-being of their children not only limits our understanding of mothering practices within Black families, but this scholarship also lacks a complete understanding of the impact of multiple forms of racism.

In light of the multiple avenues across which motherwork is carried out to better ensure the physical survival of Black children, scholars have become increasingly interested in the racial socialization process of Black children. Several studies have focused on the multiple unique practices of Black mothers in relationship to their children's physical survival (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Berkel et al., 2009; Berrey, 2009; Dow, 2019; Gurusami, 2019; Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019; Roschelle, 2017; Russell-Brown, 1998). For example, Gurusami (2019) found that many Black mothers engage in practices, such as "hovering" and other emotionally-intensive methods, that involve being around their children as much as possible in order to protect them. Additionally, Harris and Amutah (2019) discuss the various strategies Black mothers use to ensure the physical survival of their sons during encounters with police, such as promoting mistrust and skepticism. A review of Black parenting strategies by Schiele (2013) describes how the passing down of adages promoting non-violence in response to racism, e.g., "you can't fight fire with fire," is utilized to mitigate exposure to threats that put Black children's physical survival at risk. Across these studies, there is evidence that Black mothers have and continue to use unique tools and practices to ensure the physical survival of their children, but little empirical work has explored how Black women are utilizing additional practices that are protecting their children's emotional and mental survival in the face of racism as well.

Collective Empowerment

The collective empowerment of Black children and community has often been a focus of Black women (Berkel et al., 2009; Collins, 1996; Davis, 1983; Jones, 1985; Lorde, 1984; White, 1999). One area where dominant (white) feminist and Black feminist

discourse around motherhood disagree is that motherwork centers Black women's motherhood as an area to resist oppression, instead of focusing on motherhood removing individual power. For example, Collins (1996) asserts that the struggle to ensure the survival of their children, as well as thwarting the stereotyping and narratives told to their children, are persistent themes of maternal empowerment for Black women. Current research suggests that Black mothers engage in numerous efforts to combat the negative stories told to their children about the social location of Black people in the U.S. (Berkel et al., 2009; A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Elliott & Reid, 2016; Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019; Powell & Coles, 2020; Stevenson & Arrington, 2011). For example, Powell and Coles (2020) found that Black mothers were hyper-aware and skeptical of the role of educators in instilling confidence in their children, which led to vigilance in the form of empowering counternarratives to ensure their children did not internalize racism. Additionally, Berkel and colleagues (2009) found that Black boys expressed the importance of their mothers believing in them and "sustain[ing] their innocence" in the face of racism within institutions. Combating the destructive narratives Black children receive from social institutions not only provides maternal empowerment, but it also empowers the Black community by resisting and (re)building their own stories. These examples represent the common practices of Black mothers to empower Black children in the face of threatening social forces. While this work is important, what is missing is how Black women's necessary hyperawareness impacts their mothering experience and their perceived health and well-being. Understanding how the need to protect and empower their children in the face of racism impacts them as well as their children provides a necessary

insight into the multiple pathways through which racism impacts Black women and families.

Identity

Black mothers often teach their children about their racial and cultural identity in order to preserve it. Black mothers often teach their children survival techniques, like the ones previously mentioned, while safeguarding their children's confidence (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2017). The work of Collins (1996) highlights this motherwork practice by drawing attention to the efforts of mothers of color in fostering their children's racial identity in the midst of a society that tends to devalue them. The work of other scholars has found similar examples of utilizing identity as a protective mechanism among Black mothers (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2017; Berrey, 2009; Caldwell et al., 2002; A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Powell & Coles, 2020). For example, the use of oral histories often provides positive images of Blackness to children, such as stories of Black history and racial pride rooted in their African ancestry (Berrey, 2009). Utilizing positive images within the home rooted in Blackness further supports Collins' claim that Black women's motherwork in the home serves as a form of resistance to external oppression rather than additional exploitation. Contemporary scholarship has found that Black women continue to instill confidence in their children, as it remains vital to the protection and empowerment of Black children, mothers, and families (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2017; Berkel et al., 2009; A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Elliott & Aseltine, 2013; Elliott & Reid, 2016; Gurusami, 2019; Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019; JoAnne Banks-Wallace, 2001; Roschelle, 2017). For example, Bailey-Fakhourey (2017) found that Black mothers consistently teach their daughters the value in embracing their phenotypic features (e.g., skin tone and hair texture)

through various images and role-modeling to promote positive psychological and emotional well-being. Additionally, Edwards and Few-Demo (2016) found that Black mothers would often provide their children with books and dolls that reflected their racial identity to teach racial pride, as well as assist in developing a sense of belonging and high self-esteem. Acknowledging the work of Black mothers in building a positive racial identity among their children is necessary, but with much of this scholarship focusing on how this work protects and empowers children, there is still much to examine on the ways Black mothers are also utilizing motherwork in an effort to protect and empower themselves through motherhood, which is important in understanding the unique experience of mothering for Black women.

Overall, there is evidence to suggest that Black women's mothering is unique due to the tools and practices they deploy in efforts of protecting from, and combatting, their children's experiences of racism (Collins, 1996). While the examples and scholarship previously presented are imperative in highlighting the mothering efforts of Black women, what is missing is how practices for safeguarding the survival of Black children in the face of racism – such as hyperawareness of racism and racialized violence outside of their home– may also come at a cost for Black mothers. Additionally, scholarship centering Black families and the effects of racism would benefit from exploration of how multiple forms of racism, and not only direct or even actualized experiences, are impacting Black mothers and mothering practices.

The Present Study

While intensive mothering provided insight into particular practices mothers utilize to secure the well-being and social futures of their children, Black women's motherwork

provides an understanding of the unique mothering experiences and practices at the nexus of race and motherhood. Additionally, while there has been a growing body of scholarship examining the efforts put in place by Black women to protect their children from experiences of racism (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2017; Berkel et al., 2009; Dow, 2019; A. Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Elliott & Aseltine, 2013; Elliott & Reid, 2016; Gonzalez, 2019; Gurusami, 2019; Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019; JoAnne Banks-Wallace, 2001), there is still much to be explored about the nuances of these practices, such as the effects on mothers. Building on this scholarship, I examine how contemporary Black women engage in specific forms of motherwork around their children's experiences of racism and the effects of these practices on both themselves and their children, how the overlap between intensive mothering and motherwork creates a unique aspect of intensive mothering, and how this motherwork introduces a distinct form of parenting stress that has yet to be fully explored.

METHOD

This study explored how 32 Black mothers with children in adolescence or emerging/young adulthood (ages 10-24) implement motherwork around their children's experiences of racism. I focused on mothers with at least one child in this age range because: (1) younger children may not be able to understand or articulate instances of racism, so their mothers may not be as aware of particular experiences of racism, or they may not express as much concern over these experiences at younger ages and (2) children within this age range are desiring more independence and meeting more developmental milestones – such as driving, going out with friends, living outside of the household for the first time, etc., which may also increase the likelihood of experiencing racism and needing

additional protection and guidance from their mothers, which is centered within the concept of “motherwork” (Collins, 1996). Given this previous scholarship, I utilized both inductive and deductive methods closely tied to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to analyze the narratives of the mothers. Through their stories, I explored how participants view and engage in particular practices around their children’s experiences of both actualized and anticipated racism. Analyzing the narratives of Black women in understanding Black motherhood is important because it highlights the complexity of the lives of Black mothers. Additionally, the narratives of Black women also validate the necessity of their stories being centered within the larger conversation of mothering without the addition of a comparative group (Evans-Winters, 2019). The experiences and practices of Black mothers are necessary to explore and understand because they shed light on the multiple ways racism impacts parenting and well-being, centers Black women’s experiences of motherhood as important, and exposes the vicarious impacts racism has on Black families in the U.S.

Recruitment and Sample

I conducted 32 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Black mothers between 2019 and 2021. I recruited participants from around the continental United States using a variety of strategies, including social media postings on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram utilizing the hashtags: #BlackMoms, #BlackWomen, #BlackFamilies. I also recruited participants through email outreach and modified snowball sampling, where only participants who identified as working class, or had a household income at \$60,000 or less, were given flyers to pass along to other mothers who may be interested at an attempt to gain class diversity among participants. All participants self-identified as Black or African

American, a woman, and had at least one biological or adoptive child aged 10-24 years old at the time of the interview that self-identified as Black or African American. The sampling frame aimed to include a diverse sample of perspectives of mothers with adolescent children. I emailed and direct messaged, via social media sites, the project recruitment flyer and announcement to organizations focusing on Black women and Black motherhood, e.g., *Black Mamas Matter* and *National Coalition of 100 Black Women*. After I sent the initial email, the project announcement and flyer were then forwarded by either administrators or leaders with the organization to members via a Listserv. I had previous interactions with four out of the 32 participants, while the remaining participants were unknown to me. I recruited a total of 35 participants, where three were excluded because their children were under the age of ten years old.

I conducted three interviews in person in the participants' home, 24 interviews via Zoom video call, and five interviews over the phone. Upon meeting the participants and greeting them, many expressed their excitement with "assisting a Black woman with her research." This displays the importance of my racial identity to participants, and it highlights the relatability felt between participants and myself as an "insider" (Collins, 1986; Evans-Winters, 2019). All interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 2 hours. I used an interview guide to maintain consistency across the questions and topics discussed within each interview, while also allowing the semi-structured format of interviews to permit flexibility. Each participant discussed what motherhood means to them and who influenced those ideas, how motherhood differs based on race, how race shapes their child(ren)'s life, and how their child(ren)'s experiences of racism impact the mothers.

Participant Characteristics

The mothers interviewed were located in states across the continental U.S., where eight were living in the Northeast, fifteen were living in the South, five were living in the Midwest, and four were living in the West. Twenty-two of the participants had a master's degree or higher: eight earned a PhD or professional degree and fourteen earned a master's. Additionally, six of the mothers earned bachelor's degrees, and four of the mothers earned an associate's degree or attended some college. Twenty-three of the mothers had a household income of \$65,000 or greater. The age of participants ranged from 36 to 57 years old. Fifteen participants were married, eleven were divorced or separated, one was widowed, and five were single or never married. Although marital status did come up for six participants in regard to their "workload" as mothers, marital status did not have an impact on mothers primarily being the ones to initiate and/or continually having conversations with their children around race and racism.

All participants were the biological mother of their child(ren). Fifteen mothers had both a daughter and a son, while eight had only daughters and nine had only sons. The sample size, like most qualitative samples, does not allow for empirical generalizability. However, this work allows for the development of theoretical themes around everyday experiences. The resulting sample size arose following thematic saturation (Goldberg & Allen, 2015).

Self-Reflexivity

As a Black woman engaging in this work, I both recognized and embraced the similarities to participants within the study. The similarities that existed between myself

and participants assisted me in recruiting and creating an environment where they could comfortably share their stories and experiences. Black feminist scholars have outlined the importance of engaging in a constant reflexive process that involves researchers questioning our participation in the research (Few, 2007). Although there is a perceived “insider” status as a Black woman researcher who is studying Black women’s experiences, I also recognized that this insider status should not be assumed (Collins, 1986; Few et al., 2003). Because of the potential preconceived notions I may have held in regard to Black women’s motherwork and its impact, I remained attentive to times in interviews where clarity was needed – e.g., when some mothers would say, “you know,” in place of completing a thought or explaining an event when sharing their account, I would respond by asking them to explain or discuss it further. These moments of clarification allowed for me to analyze the narratives surrounding how participants practice motherwork, while also limiting assumptions.

ANALYSIS

I completed data analysis through an iterative process that allowed for both inductive and deductive coding. In line with Charmaz (2006), after coding a number of interviews, I would engage in analytic memo writing to analyze emerging codes and concepts to gauge any necessary additions of questions or probes to my interview guide. Through this iterative process, I was able to be reflexive as I visited and revisited data to connect themes and insights while also refining my understanding. Through inductive analysis I was able to discover major themes within the data, while the deductive analysis allowed me to draw connections from existing scholarship. A major theme that emerged from the narratives of these mothers was that “being a mom is so many things,” which was an in-vivo code used

to capture the continual description of Black women's mothering as a highly intensive (both emotionally and physically) process. Concepts associated with this category included: delaying/restricting, teaching, and building. When participants discussed the definition of, and expectations surrounding, motherhood, they often used terms like "protector," "nurturer," and "advocate." These descriptions of motherhood were encapsulated by the words of Claire who asserted that "being a mom is so many things," which was utilized to frame Black women's motherwork. In addition to more generalized notions of motherhood, Black women expressed specific experiences of additional parental stressors outside of more general concerns – such as nurturing, love, etc., surrounding their children and racism. This race-related parenting stress manifested itself in what I term, *intensive motherwork* – the exhaustive efforts deployed by Black mothers to protect their children that is both an act of resistance to, and a form of racialized stress founded in, racism, which I will describe further, below. *Intensive motherwork* revealed itself through three dominant practices: (a) delaying or restricting certain milestones or activities, (b) empowering through teaching agency, and (c) building a positive self-image or identity. Mothers described these practices, whether explicitly or implicitly, as necessary efforts to protect their children from both actualized and anticipated experiences of racism. Most notably, while the majority of mothers engaged in building a positive self-image within their children, mothers of sons were more likely to employ delaying or restricting activities, while mothers of daughters were most likely to teach them to have agency in the face of experiences of racism.

Findings

Within the mothers' narratives there were three recurring themes surrounding Black women's engagement in motherwork to protect and empower their children in the face of racism. The distinctive, all-encompassing practices that Black women utilize display the interconnectedness between the concepts of intensive mothering – i.e., the consuming efforts to ensure the well-being of one's child, and motherwork – i.e., the unique racialized mothering practices to ensure the survival of one's child. Black women's mothering experiences produce an amalgamation of these two concepts, which I refer to as *intensive motherwork*. At the nexus of intensive mothering and Black women's motherwork, I posit that intensive motherwork exposes the ways that systems of inequality, such as race and gender, permeate the lived experiences of Black families. Furthermore, intensive motherwork highlighted, not only how race intersects with motherhood to reveal an aspect of mothering that is unique to Black women, but also how the gender of their children influenced mothering practices and behaviors, which continues to be a growing body of scholarship within sociological research. While the broader idea of these themes was reflective of the literature on racial socialization, these themes provided a nuanced look into Black women's motherwork and intensive mothering practices. Additionally, these themes also highlighted the ways racism impacts themselves and their mothering experience. Intensive motherwork reflected both emotional and physical practices, which included: (a) delaying or restricting milestones/activities, (b) teaching and encouraging agency, and (c) building a positive identity rooted in their race and culture. The practices of delaying/restricting, teaching, and building depict aspects of motherwork focused on ensuring physical survival and collective empowerment. More specifically, Black mothers

are utilizing these practices to protect their children from the physical threats of racism – i.e., ensuring physical survival, while simultaneously utilizing them as tools of empowerment by attempting to regain control of their motherhood and familial experience in the face of structural barriers. These mothering practices are illustrated in the next section by utilizing the participants’ narratives.

Delaying or Restricting

Intensive mothering is often discussed as an all-encompassing type of mothering, where mothers utilize privilege and sacrifice resources, such as time, to ensure the betterment and success of their children. These intensive mothering practices often find mothers being selective or controlling of social activities for their children in an effort to gain social capital and opportunities that can be used in the future – e.g., gaining certain academic opportunities. However, the risk of not being restrictive is vastly different for Black mothers than it is for mothers of other races. Black women are engaging in delaying or restricting activities to ensure the survival of their children. Mothers being fearful of their children engaging in certain activities or events revealed itself within a recurring practice of delaying or restricting certain milestones, activities, or behaviors for them.

Fifteen mothers expressed utilizing this practice in an effort to protect or shield their children from experiences of racism. Additionally, this practice was most common among mothers who were raising sons (nine out of fifteen) and was always associated with feelings of fear, anxiousness, or concern. For example, Claire, a mother of a son (17) and daughter (13), discussed how when it was time for her son to obtain his driver’s license, a rite of passage for many teenagers, she deliberately delayed this process:

So, when it came time for him to get a license, I procrastinated, like deliberately, because I was afraid of him driving. And he kept going, "well, I thought we were going?" I was like, I'm not ready. So, yeah, I deliberately held that off...I did do that on purpose because I was afraid, you know? I still am.

Claire chose to delay her son getting his license because she knew that would lessen her ability to control his environment. Her desire to delay her son's attempts at obtaining his driver's license was a manifestation of two concerns for Claire: (1) the fear of her son experiencing racism through some sort of police violence and (2) to offset the reality that she may not have the ability to fully protect him from experiences of racism.

Claire's fear encapsulates a reality that many Black mothers experience when it is time for their children, especially their sons, to begin driving. Although all of the mothers who discussed the desire to control their children's interactions while driving may not be delaying them in the same way as Claire, they still discuss how they look to restrict certain aspects via "the talk." "The talk" is known colloquially as a conversation between Black parents and their children to offer both informative and protective tools, regarding the potential threats of racism they may face when encountering law enforcement, teachers, or other institutions. Aria, a mother of two sons (23 and 15) and two daughters (19 and 17), explained the detailed talks she has with her sons: "You're Black in America.... Do all of your tasks during the day, don't make any rash turns, take your hoodie off." Similarly, to Claire, Aria recognized the lack of control she has once her sons were no longer around her, so she looked to restrict certain behaviors, clothing, etc., in hopes that these restrictions will ensure their well-being.

However, participants were not solely concerned with milestones, such as driving. For some mothers, the concerns lie in their children participating in *all* types of activities that may seem “typical” for those their age, which included: walking in their neighborhood, playing outside with friends, going to parties, attending sleepovers, and playing with toys in public spaces. These concerns led to some activities being restricted or off-limits altogether because of their recognition that, due to the white supremacist and anti-Black society they are occupying, Black children, and Black boys in particular, are under a constant threat of racialized violence that can produce emotional, mental, or physical death – e.g., imprisonment, police brutality, and homicide. Dominique, a mother of two sons (23 and 29), recalled no longer allowing her son to go out with his teammates after their games when he was in high school:

The kids used to go to the waffle house after the football games on Friday nights. We had to stop that because too many of them started showing up. Too many [Black boys] start showing up, it's going to be a problem. [I told him] “no, you may not go to Waffle House anymore because there's too many football players showing up and you're going to be deemed a threat. You have to come home.”

The concern that Dominique conveyed in her discussion of restricting her son from going out with his football team after their games was a specific example that encapsulates the efforts that Black mothers take to ensure the safety of their children.

Due to the perceptions and racial stereotypes that are placed on Black boys/men, mothers are required to be both active in anticipating and guarding their children. While

these efforts may be more readily seen in particular milestones or special events, even in the day-to-day activities and freedoms that most adolescents look to enjoy, Black mothers still recognized the potential limitations and restrictions that racism places on their children. Ton, a mother of two daughters (26 and 22) and one son (25), thought back to a particular conversation she had with her son when he was in his early teens regarding him playing outside with his friends:

When we moved [to our neighborhood] it was a predominantly white neighborhood. My son's friends, most of them ended up being white. Me and my husband were like, "okay, this is going to be challenging." When him and his friends would do things, we'd always have to tell him, you can't do the cut-through people's yards like they do. And he didn't understand it at first because these are his friends.... That was different. Again, my white neighbors didn't have to do that.

Ton highlighted that the worry and pressure she feels to protect her son is what led to her restricting his behavior and activities, such as playing with his friends. She continued to recall how these worries were heightened after the murder of Trayvon Martin because her son was close to his age during that time. Ton recalled her son preparing to walk to a friend's house: "I'm looking at my 17-year-old son in his navy-blue hoodie, and I was like, 'no, you can't.... I'll take you over there.'" In addition to illustrating how racial stereotyping and vicarious experiences of racism evoked a desire to protectively restrict her son, she also acknowledged the unique challenges this creates for Black mothers. Ton stressed that these are concerns and conversations her "white neighbors" were not having.

Ton's account mirrored many of the mothers' narratives regarding how their fears and concerns around perceptions of their sons led to them employing restrictive practices. For example, Shannon, a mother of two sons (24 and 17) and one daughter (10), discussed how her oldest son's height at a young age led her to be concerned with him being perceived as much older than his actual age: "My son...he was almost 5'9" in the 8th grade. He was always tall, [and] all his friends were tall, so...y'all can't go walking nowhere around here." She continued to discuss how the other Black mothers in her neighborhood stayed connected so that they were all able to be aware of where each child was going and were able to communicate and monitor their sons as they would travel to each other's homes. Shannon illustrated that, in an intentional effort to mitigate their sons' experiences of racism, Black women engaged in both individual and collective restrictive practices to safeguard their children. Similar to Ton and Shannon, Camille, a mother of a son (19), recalled how she had conversations with her son regarding him restricting his behavior and activities because of how others may perceive him:

He was fifteen and almost six feet tall. I'm looking at my child who I know is a child, but someone might see [him] as an adult.... The information I want him to take is to watch your environment. Be aware of your surroundings. Watch the behavior you're exhibiting in public. And he's sweet and kind, but he plays, because he's still a kid. You don't want to seem like a threat.... It's just a conversation I don't like because I don't feel like we should have to have them. But unfortunately, because of other people seeing Black people as a

threat, you have to almost defuse them. You can't behave like you normally would.

Camille expressed how she grappled with her desire to allow her son to enjoy the freedoms of adolescence, while also recognizing the need for her to teach her son how to restrict his behavior in order to protect him from the potential consequences of others' perceptions of him. Her discomfort with having these conversations with her son was consistent with the accounts of the other Black mothers who discussed utilizing these practices.

Overall, mothers who discussed delaying and restricting activities for Black children, whether these were considered milestones, rites of passage, or everyday events, were contending with having to institute caution or delays around these practices while also wanting their children to have freedom. However, although there was a desire to allow more freedom, they also did not see that as a safe option for their families. More specifically, Harriet, a mother of a son (15), summarized the viewpoint of the mothers who discussed this tension when engaging in this practice. While discussing why she believes Black mothers tend to be more protective, Harriet stated that Black children "can be targeted very easily." She described her mothering as "strict," and she believes other Black moms are as well, because they want to "hold onto them as long as we can."

Teaching

Another practice of intensive motherwork was teaching agency. Here, agency is the ability to advocate for oneself, feel empowered, and maintain control of one's own outcomes. Where, generally, mothers may want to instill the importance of a sense of agency in their children, Black mothers utilize this practice as a preparatory tool for combatting racism.

For example, when asked how she believes mothering differs by race, Wonder W., a mother of one son (23) and three daughters (19, 13, and 10), began to discuss the differential treatment experienced by Black children in schools. She stated:

I want to teach them how to be independent.... I don't want, as a black parent, [to have to say], "well you called my child dumb, so blah blah blah." I'm trying to teach my girls that you've got to stand up for yourself and speak, instead of having your parent do it for you, and I'll say, "I will support you on this."

Wonder's emphasis on teaching her daughters to speak up for themselves in the wake of experiences of racism reflected the efforts of several participants. Although all mothers discussed different ways they directly or indirectly advocated for their children in the face of racism, mothers found teaching most important for their daughters versus their sons. Of the twenty-three participants with daughters, ten expressed utilizing the practice of teaching. Although the number of mothers of sons is similar, these mothers were much less likely to describe engaging in this practice with their sons (two out of twenty-four).

An important aspect of teaching agency involved both empowerment as well as controlling one's outcomes despite external forces. This is exhibited through accounts by Veronica, a mother of a daughter (11), when she discussed that while attending a predominantly white school, her daughter would initiate conversations about noticing a lack of representation within the leadership positions at her school. Veronica continued that her daughter would often find discouragement and a lack of motivation due to feeling like these positions were not meant for her, so she encouraged her to take more control:

When she was in a predominantly white school, she would ask me, “why is so and so always doing this? They’re always student council or running for something.” I told her to run, and she said, “But, nobody else runs that looks like me.” And I said, so, why don’t you be the first?

While Veronica acknowledged the lack of representation her daughter experienced in school, she did not want her to feel like she was limited by these structures. Veronica was intentionally acknowledging her daughter’s concerns while simultaneously empowering her to take on these roles in which she had not seen other Black girls. Similarly, Susan, a mother of a daughter (16) and son (3), discussed teaching her daughter the importance of speaking up for herself, especially in a school environment. Susan stated, “the number one thing we teach her is about self-advocacy, especially in school. If you don’t feel like something is right, you are allowed to ask questions. And if the teacher is not responding in the way that will help you, then that’s when you come to us.” Both Veronica and Susan were intentionally teaching their daughters the importance of agency, whether through explicit directives or general conversations. Veronica and Susan wanted to ensure their daughters had the tools to speak up for themselves, especially when they were not around their parents.

Additionally, Claire discussed how she not only teaches her daughter (13) the importance of practicing agency, but she also exemplified it. When Claire’s daughter experienced racism from a teacher in one of her classes, Claire made sure to set an example for her daughter on how to interact with those who may treat her disparately. Specifically,

when attending an open house at her daughter's school, Claire took the opportunity to meet that teacher:

If [the teacher] is not gonna come over here and greet me, I'm going to go over there and introduce myself. That's how you handle yourself. [I told her], "come on, mama'll show you how it's done." So, I went over there, and she was in the midst of all the [white] parents, and I... put my hand out and shook her hand. And I said hello to all the other mothers. And [my daughter] was behind me...but I was trying to help [my daughter] know you don't just stand over there. You go over there and help her to see there's others of us coming in that you need to acknowledge.

As previously mentioned, Claire's efforts illustrated how Black mothers are looking to teach their daughters agency as both a protective tool and a tool of empowerment. By teaching their daughters the importance and power within their presence, they are ensuring that their daughters do not feel like they lack control within racially hostile environments. This is further revealed by Autumn's discussion of her fears and concerns surrounding her daughter's experiences in school. When asked about how she thinks race will shape her daughter's life, Autumn, a mother of a daughter (10), discussed the "false narratives" that her daughter will be told, which are steeped in gendered stereotypes that "weaponize" her Black girlhood. Autumn continued to discuss how she knows that, although her daughter has already faced racism, it will continue on as she gets older via the stereotypes placed on many Black girls and women, such as the image of the "jezebel," which is a trope stemming from the historical hyper-sexualization of Black girls and women (Collins,

1990). Part of Autumn's efforts "to protect her [daughter] as much as possible" is to ensure that she is presenting her daughter with the tools to deal with these instances of racism via instilling in her that she has the ability to control her own outcomes despite the structures of inequality that she will face. Autumn conveyed the concerns of many mothers who are teaching their daughters by highlighting why teaching may be particularly important for girls/women. Black mothers were acutely aware of gendered racism their daughters will face, so teaching becomes a necessary practice to sustain both the physical and mental well-being of their daughters. However, the decision to teach is also a complex process.

Similar to sentiments previously discussed around the tension between Black mothers delaying/restricting activities and also allowing their sons freedom, Black mothers who were looking to teach agency were also looking to find a middle ground between preparing their daughters to deal with experiences of racism, while also not diminishing their innocence in the process. Reign, the mother of a daughter (10), highlighted this tension as she discussed how being a Black woman affects her mothering:

I try to foster independence...but also making sure that I'm not being distant.... So, I try to find this balance.... [I am] just really making sure that she's aware of race and racism in the country.... This country is built on white supremacy and explaining what that means for her as far as it matters to her right now.

Reign's comments, similar to the mothers who are delaying or restricting activities for their sons, revealed how Black mothers who are teaching are also contending with wanting to

teach their daughters to be active agents in their own lives, while simultaneously wanting to maintain their innocence.

Building

Lastly, while mothers deployed differential practices of delaying, restricting, and/or teaching based on their children's gender, a majority of mothers (twenty out of thirty-two) discussed utilizing building their children's identity and positive self-esteem rooted in their race and culture, which is a third aspect of intensive motherwork. Many mothers found the practice of building to be essential in the protection of their children, while also finding it to be a fulfilling aspect of motherhood. Asia, a mother of a son (17) and daughter (13), illustrated the necessity of building to ensure her children thrive despite society's expectations. She states:

My children are very much aware as to the role that they play within...society, for themselves, as well as how they're viewed. That comes specifically from my mothering. I have always preached self-love, self-promotion, black excellence, things of that nature here within my home because I am aware of how they will be perceived in the public.

Similar to Asia, Vivian, a mother of two sons (25 and 17) also expressed being very intentional about instilling Black cultural pride into her children. Specifically, she discussed how she teaches her sons to have "a sense of pride" in their race and culture. She stated that she encourages this "as a means of preservation for them, not just because."

Both Asia and Vivian were representative of the many mothers who practice building.

Because Black children do not readily receive positive depictions of their culture and Blackness outside of their home, mothers are intentional about building a positive self-image and racial pride as a means of empowerment.

The importance of building becomes even more necessary in the face of experiences of racism. Peace, a mother of three daughters (25, 21, and 10), discussed the lessons and information she passes down to her daughters regarding experiences of racism. More specifically, after discussing with me a recent time when someone called her oldest daughter “the n-word” while she was driving, Peace expressed how she felt once she heard about the experience: “it was almost like, ‘we’ve talked about this before.’” Although this was a very serious incident that her daughter experienced, Peace believed that the conversations they have had prepared her daughter. Most importantly, Peace did not want this to define how her daughter saw herself. She wanted to remind her “that she cannot let others determine how she thinks of herself.” Like Peace, Denise, a mother of a daughter (19), found it necessary to build a positive self-image into her daughter, not only through conversations, but also through images within the home, which Denise shared was passed down through her mother:

My mom...was very intentional [in saying], “you’re Black, and you’re beautiful. You know, the world is going to tell you that you’re not, but I’m going to instill some lessons, so that you’re ready to confront that.” I carry those lessons with me.... So, I knew whether it was a daughter or a son, I was very intentional about toys, books, pictures, dolls, and creating spaces where she would look around and...there were beautiful Black faces, hair textures, whatever.

Denise looks to impart a positive self-image rooted in “the notion of Black is beautiful” because she wants to offer a counter-narrative within her home to the racialized stories being introduced to her daughter through different institutions, such as her schooling. Zoe, a mom of two sons (19 and 10), also shared how, as a Black mother, she is deeply aware of the importance of building a sense of racial pride through cultural expression, such as hair and art within the home. Like Denise, Zoe expressed instilling positive images of Blackness within her home in an effort to make these counter-narratives “normal.” These counter-narratives shared by Peace, Denise, and Zoe offer both a response to, and protection from, experiences of racism. Tabby, a mother of a daughter (20), shared this sentiment as well. When asked about how being a Black woman shapes her mothering, Tabby stated: “It's important for me that she is resilient.... Being a Black woman, those are things that I've tried to instill in her and try to speak into her. [For example], I want her to identify her beauty, because I think that the world often suggests to us that if you are dark skin, or brown skin, that you're not beautiful. It's really important for me to speak those things into her.” Tabby discussed instilling these ideals into her daughter because she understands the potentially damaging effects of inherent racial biases embedded within institutions.

Building a positive self- and cultural- identity is not only a protective tool for Black mothers, but it is also working as a site of empowerment that brings a sense of fulfillment to their motherhood. The impact of race and racism on Black women’s experience of motherhood was most explicit in Asia’s discussion of how the racism that Black children face impacts Black mothers. She stated that “it makes our mothering [and] our motherhood experience less fulfilling.... You automatically come into it stressed out.” Asia’s

declaration illustrated the necessity of Black women utilizing *building* in efforts to combat the negative effects of racism on their mothering. For example, Cynthia, a mother of two sons (14 and 12), suggested that, although “our larger public systems are in fact racist,” she does not look to center these systems or their violence within her home. Cynthia discussed how during her family times, the most fulfilling times with her sons are when they are able to be joyful and find laughter in the day-to-day, which Cynthia encouraged for other Black mothers. When asked what advice she would offer to other Black mothers she said, “find ways to celebrate Black joy. Constantly. Consistently. And center Black joy in your family as much as you can.” As Cynthia described the harms of racism and institutions that perpetuate it, she also recognizes that racism looks to remove control from her and her family. Encouraging and celebrating Black joy is another aspect of building a positive cultural identity that is a tool of resistance and empowerment for Black mothers in an effort to positively center and affirm Blackness within her household, which is an aspect of Black families and parenting that often goes unnoticed within family scholarship.

DISCUSSION

During the summer of 2020, protests demanding racial justice rang out over the United States. The state-sanctioned racialized violence plaguing the Black community, exemplified through the death of George Floyd, invoked demonstrations of Black mothers across the nation (O’Neal, 2020). Signs in the hands of Black women all over the United States read, “All Mommas Were Summoned When George Floyd Called Out for His,” (Spalding, 2020). The uniting of Black mothers in civil protest not only served as a powerful symbol in the fight for racial justice in the U.S., but also highlighted the centrality of Black women in the protection of Black children. Although George Floyd’s death

represents one of the most public and extreme acts of racism evoking the fears of Black mothers, there are also more private and subtle ways that racism impacts mothering. Privately, within the home, Black mothers fight to protect their children against racism in their everyday lives.

Previous research on American motherhood experiences has largely developed conceptual frameworks that identify mothering as a universal process that is all-encompassing and removes all autonomy for women – i.e., intensive mothering. While some scholars have examined the racialized nature of intensive mothering, the overlap between Black women’s motherwork and intensive mothering lends itself to a nuanced understanding of the impacts of systems of inequality, such as race and gender. Therefore, I merge the concepts of intensive mothering and motherwork to develop the concept of *intensive motherwork*. This intensive motherwork emphasizes the overwhelming nature of Black women’s mothering. Where intensive mothering and intensive motherwork diverge is that the concerns of Black mothers do not solely lie in their children’s academic and social achievements; rather, they also focusing on the physical, mental, and emotional survival of their children. This leads to a continual awareness of the ways race and racism impact their children’s lives, thus having to engage specific protective practices. Additionally, not only are they having to be aware of the threats of racism, but they are also engaging in practices – e.g., delaying, restricting, and/or teaching – based on the gender of their child. This reveals that, regardless of gender, Black mothers will always have to contend with the gendered racial stereotyping of their children, such as Black mothers teaching their daughters agency due to their awareness of racism within institutions. The gendered racial socialization practices are in alignment with prior work,

particularly the hyperawareness of racism within institutions (Stewart, 2020; Williams et al., 2017), as well as instilling confidence as a tool of resistance (Dow, 2019). Not only did the mothers' accounts highlight the behavioral impacts of intensive motherwork, but they also shed light on differing stressors Black mothers experience.

As previously mentioned, Collins (1996) has long suggested that Black women's mothering is vastly different from dominant ideologies of motherhood. While scholars suggest that mothers tend to hesitate in expressing the difficulties that they experience in mothering (DeGroot & Vik, 2021; Heneghan et al., 2004; Narciso et al., 2018), this was not the case for the mothers who participated in this study. Almost all participants (thirty-one out of thirty-two) identified there being vast differences in the impact of race on mothering and their motherhood experience, where these differences are rooted in particular parenting stressors due to race and racism. More specifically, Black mothers are having to contend with protecting their children from racism while trying to also maintain the innocence of their children, which is an exhaustive and seemingly never-ending process. This tension was exhibited when discussing the delaying and restricting practices for sons, as well as teaching agency for daughters. The tension between racially socializing Black children, while wanting to maintain their innocence or ensure they do not internalize these messages is consistent with the work of Dow (2019), who found that Black mothers battled having early conversations about race with their children because while mothers desired to offer protection, they also wanted to maintain the innocence of their children within that process.

Mothers who discussed delaying, restricting, and/or teaching indicated that, although it is not desired, it is a necessary tool for ensure their children's ability to survive

when encountering racism. In addition to delaying, restricting, and teaching, Black mothers also employed building a positive racial and cultural identity within their children. In line with Collins' theory of motherwork, as well as the existing literature on racial socialization, building fosters a positive self-image that offers a counternarrative to the harmful, racist anti-Black systems and structures that Black children encounter outside of the home (Harris & Amutah-Onukagha, 2019; Hughes et al., 2006; Powell & Coles, 2020; Stevenson & Arrington, 2011). These practices display the distinct and racialized nature of intensive motherwork, such as hyper-vigilance. The hypervigilant work that Black mothers engage when deciding to delay, restrict, teach, and/or build is "a part of regular parenting," as Zoe stated, for Black women. Intensive motherwork suggests that Black women must engage in constant awareness of their physical surroundings, as well as the perceptions of others, for the protection of their children. Although this labor is a common part of the intensive motherwork Black women described, its commonness does not remove the parenting stress that it causes. Participants highlighted the negative impacts of intensive motherwork when discussing how, as a Black mother, "structural dynamics...make mothering more of a protective or stress mode," which underscored a major component of intensive motherwork, which is the differing stakes for Black mothers, in comparison to mothers of other races, for not engaging in these practices. Where dominant ideologies of intensive mothering look to ensure children's social success (Hays, 1996), Black mothers utilize these laborious practices out of necessity to avoid individual and social danger. In line with Gurusami (2019), who identified this necessary engagement in hyper-vigilance for Black mothers, mothers are attempting to be around their children as much as possible to stave off anticipated racism or harmful experiences. However, Black women's intensive

motherwork, in addition to protecting their children, also reflects their efforts to empower themselves within motherhood.

The majority of mothers (eighteen out of thirty-two) discussed that, in addition to protecting their children from racism, they were also having to navigate and protect themselves from racist notions and stereotypes surrounding motherhood, such as being labeled as “ratchet” or “ghetto.” Intensive motherwork suggests that Black mothers are less concerned about their perceived autonomy or identity being sacrificed for the sake of their child, and instead reveals how Black mothers are working to combat or de-center racial stereotypes surrounding mothering that are placed on them. Therefore, the stressor that Black mothers articulated facing wasn’t motherhood itself but a gendered form of racism. Contrary to dominant intensive mothering ideology, intensive motherwork indicates that motherhood is not solely an area of loss, but also a site of liberation.

Mothers also expressed the impact of vicarious experiences of racism on their mothering practices, not simply the direct experiences of themselves or their children. Scholars have identified the connectedness and importance of communal mothering among Black families (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2017; A. E. Edwards, 2000). When discussing specific instances of racism that have influenced their mothering practices, many Black mothers pointed to broadly publicized instances of racialized violence that still held a great impact. In contrast to more individualized notions of mothering, intensive motherwork encompasses how, at the intersecting domains of race and mothering, Black mothers experience a connectedness that informs their mothering practices and experiences. Vicarious experiences of racism, which are not often explored, create additional barriers and stressors for Black mothers because the particular aspect of Black motherhood is

“having to navigate all of that with my children, but also feeling this deep connection with other Black mothers.” The idea of Black mothers feeling tied, particularly around the protection of Black children, is not novel, but there is room for expansion. The influence of vicarious experiences of racism on mothering experiences reveals the emotionally intensive aspect of mothering involved in intensive motherwork. This additional layer of navigating emotions while also assisting one’s children in navigating their own experiences of racism contributes to the impacts of intensive motherwork. These findings contrast with research suggesting that intensive mothering tends to focus solely on individual mothering experience (Ennis, 2014, Chapter Intensive Mothering: Revisiting the Issue Today; Hays, 1996). Instead, intensive motherwork conveys how, in addition to protecting one’s children and combatting racist notions of motherhood, Black mothers must also engage in emotion management surrounding the connectedness felt to other Black mothers whose children have been impacted by experiences of racism.

Overall, the necessity for Black women’s intensive motherwork to ensure the physical, mental, and emotional survival of their children creates a particular experience for Black mothers. Intensive motherwork not only adds additional parenting stress to Black mothers, but it also impacts their mothering experience, wherein Black mothers are having to contend with general stressors that come with parenting and the additional obstacle of racism. As previously mentioned, most participants explicitly stated that race influences their motherhood. Contrary to previous scholarship suggesting that motherhood is a site of oppression or confinement (Ennis, 2014, Chapter Intensive Mothering: Revisiting the Issue Today; O’Reilly, 2004), participants in this study revealed that it is not motherhood or the

push for social success that is limiting, but it is the constant need to combat racism across multiple domains of their lives.

The exploration of contemporary Black women's motherwork elucidates the overlap of specific racialized mothering practices and the intensive and laborious nature of Black women's motherhood. This research suggests that Black women's overall mothering practices and experiences are largely influenced by systems of inequality, such as race and gender. Participant's narratives provide insight into how both actualized and anticipatory experiences of racism shape their behavior and experiences, as well as illustrate their efforts to empower themselves and their children in the wake of these experiences. To further explore the deployment of these mothering practices, future research should examine at what point in time Black mothers begin engaging in intensive motherwork, as well as examine how long Black mothers practice intensive motherwork and to what personal and interpersonal effects and impacts. Participants extensively discussed their feelings of connectedness to other Black mothers and children, as well as the impact and influence of other Black women in their motherhood. Future research would benefit from examining how "other mothers" – i.e., grandmothers, aunts, sisters, etc. who assist in nurturing and teaching Black children, are also engaging in intensive motherwork practices to gain additional insight into these practices within larger familial networks. In conclusion, this study's introduction of *intensive motherwork* looks to provide an alternative discourse around Black women's mothering experience that examines both intensive aspect of motherhood, as well as the racialized practices they must engage to ensure the overall well-being of their families.

CHAPTER 3

“PARALYSIS OF THE WHAT-IF”: RACISM, LINKED LIVES, AND BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH³

INTRODUCTION

Racism has long been examined as a key determinant of racial health inequality (C. P. Jones, 2000; Phelan & Link, 2015). More specifically, studies have found that racism over the life course has detrimental effects on the health and well-being of Black Americans. However, much of this research has been limited to quantitative analyses or examinations of direct experiences (i.e., racism happening directly to the individual). This leaves much to be understood when looking into how individuals understand or operationalize their own experiences, as well as how anticipatory or indirect experiences may impact health outcomes. Additionally, the effect of racism on the health of Black women is gaining a necessary focus among health researchers, but in order to understand the significant impact that racism has on Black women’s health over the life course, it is important to examine health outcomes more holistically.

In this study, I utilize qualitative in-depth interviews with thirty-two Black mothers to explore how their children’s experiences of racism impact their own perceived health. In taking a holistic approach to the term “health” (*World Health Organization, 2020*), I am

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exploring the mental, emotional, and physical influences of experiences of racism, which contributes to more physical measures of health – e.g., blood pressure (Anderson, 2013; Gee et al., 2012; Hall, 2018; C. P. Jones, 2000). Utilizing qualitative interviews, I am able to explore whether anticipated and/or vicarious experiences of racism are impacting the perceived health of Black mothers. Additionally, this study also allows for participants to identify which experiences of racism they find most influential on their health and well-being. My findings highlight the multiple pathways through which racism may negatively impact perceived health among Black mothers. Experiences of racism that children face have impacts well beyond their individual direct experiences. In addition to actualized experiences, my findings emphasize the impact that both anticipated and vicarious experiences have on Black maternal perceived health as well, which provides a framework for understanding and discussing the insidious effects of racism on the health of Black women.

BACKGROUND

Given the body of literature focusing on racism and health, the goal of this study is to understand the effects of multiple forms of racism on Black maternal health, while also providing a space for participants to identify the experiences that they perceive as having significant impacts on their health. This work looks to provide an additional framework and understanding of the insidious effects that multiple forms of racism have on the health of Black women.

Racism and Health

Racism is a key determinant of racial health inequality (Phelan & Link, 2015). Several studies have found an association between racism and poor health, including higher rates and earlier onset of physical illness among Black Americans and higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, heart disease, and diabetes (Gee & Ford, 2011; Jackson et al., 2001; Krieger, 2014; Paradies et al., 2015; Phelan & Link, 2015). Additionally, Paradies and colleagues (2015) found that racism had a consistent and negative association with mental health and emotional well-being for Black Americans. The utilization of the stress perspective sheds light on the association between racism and health, specifically by highlighting its direct and indirect pathways. According to the Stress Process Model, or stress perspective, the relationship between stress and health is linked via complex processes of appraisal, coping, and resources (Pearlin et al., 1981; Thoits, 1995). Specifically, under this model, racism is a form of stress that has negative consequences for mental and physical health (Alang et al., 2017; Anderson, 2013; Brown et al., 2000; Franklin-Jackson & Carter, 2007; Geronimus et al., 2006; Hall, 2018; Lu & Chen, 2004; Pearlin et al., 2005; Woods-Giscombé & Lobel, 2008, p.).

The established racial hierarchy in the U.S. influences power and access to resources, resulting in unequal health outcomes. Experiences of racism and discrimination place individuals in a constant state of hyperawareness and vigilance that produces a number of negative health consequences (Pearlin et al., 2005). For example, Alang and colleagues (2017) found that racism-related stress, such as police brutality, has extensive emotional and psychological effects, even if it is not being experienced directly. This work suggests that racism has a deleterious impact on health, even if it is not directly

experienced. Furthermore, the concept of stress proliferation informs current understandings of the saliency of racism and racism-related stress. Stress proliferation focuses on the notion that a single stressor can cause the production of secondary stressors (Pearlin et al., 2005). For example, the stressor of marital divorce can lead to an additional stressor of economic strain, which in turn may lead to poor health. Racial discrimination may operate in a similar way as a stressor that produces other secondary stressors at different points in time (Anderson, 2013; Assari, 2017; Brody et al., 2008; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Brody et al. (2015) found that racial discrimination negatively impacts the mental health of a parent (primary stressor) and then affects their parenting style and parenting relationship (secondary stressor) with their child later in life. This example highlights the persistent nature of racism, where it not only leads to additional stressors, but it also impacts the lives of others as well. However, although this is a growing body of research, additional exploration into the influence of the experiences of close others on health is necessary to gain a complete picture of the impacts of racism on health.

Theory of Linked Lives

In addition to the stress process, concepts found within life course theory, specifically linked lives, may provide insight into how children's experiences of racism may impact the health and well-being of Black mothers. Additionally, the concept of linked lives suggests that the lived experiences of individuals are intertwined with, and affect, the lives of close others (Elder et al., 2003). For example, Smith and Zick (1994) found that the risk of mortality for husbands and wives are closely linked via a number of indirect pathways shaped by their shared social environment. In the case of stressful events, an experience impacting an individual can also affect those within their social network. For

instance, the work of Thornberry and colleagues (2003) found that stressors that impacted parents, such as financial insecurity, had a significant impact on the social and emotional behavior of their children. This previous work lends itself to our understanding of how the lives and health of individuals are interconnected and have an impact beyond the individual.

Recently, there has been an expansion of linked lives scholarship to examine its relationship with racialized stress. Specifically, recent work suggests that experiences of racism could have indirect impacts not seen within the initial and direct relationship (DiAquoi, 2018; Gee et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2013). In other words, racially discriminatory events that affect one person also have the ability to impact others within their social network. For instance, Kelly and colleagues (2013) found that when mothers experience an increase in perceptions of racism in their neighborhood, their children experience an increase in socio-emotional difficulties. A life course perspective, including the concept of linked lives, has the ability to deepen our understanding of how racism affects the lives of Black families, particularly mother-child relationships. Although there is increased interest in life course approaches, this body of work still lacks a robust examination of the complex impacts of racism on health. For instance, when applying the concept of linked lives, the majority of this work examines impacts on children within parent-child relationships (Gilligan et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2013; Thornberry et al., 2003; Vogt Yuan, 2008). Although necessary, predominantly focusing on the effects of parent's experiences of racism on children's health limits our knowledge immensely. This study explores the linked lives of Black mothers and children and advances our understandings of health among Black women and families.

The Present Study

While prior research has provided insight into the impact that racism has on health and well-being, particularly for Black women, there is still room for expansion. Much of the work exploring the detrimental effects of racism on health centers direct and/or actualized experiences. Lack of attention to other forms of racism, such as indirect, anticipatory, or vicarious experiences leaves much unknown in regard to the insidiousness of racism on shaping health. Additionally, because the majority of this work is quantitative, it does not leave room for an individual's interpretation or understanding of events, which is necessary for gaining a fuller understanding of the consequences of race and racism. With existing gaps in prior scholarship in mind, I explore how contemporary Black mothers define and understand their children's experiences of racism, and how they perceive these experiences as impacting their own emotional, mental, and physical health. This project offers additional understandings and framing for Black maternal health by illustrating the multiple pathways through which racism influences Black women's health and well-being.

METHOD

This study explored how 32 Black mothers with children in adolescence or emerging/young adulthood (ages 10-24) understand their children's experiences of racism, and how their children's experiences of racism impact the mothers' perceived health and well-being. I focused on mothers with at least one child between the ages of 10-24 because: (1) younger children may not be able to understand or articulate instances of racism, so their mothers may not be as aware of particular experiences of racism, or they may not express as much concern over these experiences at younger ages and (2) children within

this age range are desiring more independence and meeting more developmental milestones – such as driving, going out with friends, living outside of the household for the first time, etc., which may also increase the likelihood of experiencing racism. I utilized both inductive and deductive methods closely tied to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to analyze the narratives of the mothers. Through their stories, I explored how participants defined racism, understood their children’s experiences of both actualized and anticipated racism, and perceived their children’s experiences as impacting their own health. Analyzing the narratives of Black women in understanding Black maternal health is imperative because it highlights the complex relationship between racism and maternal health, while also validating the necessity of their stories being centered within larger conversations on health inequality (Evans-Winters, 2019).

Recruitment and Sample

I conducted 32 in-depth, semi-structured interviews between 2019 and 2021. I recruited participants from around the continental United States using a variety of strategies, including social media postings on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram utilizing the hashtags: #BlackMoms, #BlackWomen, #BlackFamilies. Additionally, I also recruited participants through email outreach and modified snowball sampling, where only participants who identified as working class, or had a household income at \$60,000 or less, were given flyers to pass along to other mothers who may be interested at an attempt to gain class diversity among participants. All participants self-identified as Black or African American, a woman, and had at least one biological or adoptive child aged 10-24 years old at the time of the interview that self-identified as Black or African American. The sampling frame aimed to include a diverse sample of perspectives of mothers with adolescent children. I

emailed and direct messaged, via social media sites, the project recruitment flyer and announcement to organizations focusing on Black women and Black motherhood, e.g., *Black Mamas Matter* and *National Coalition of 100 Black Women*. After I sent the initial email, the project announcement and flyer were then forwarded by either administrators or leaders with the organization to members via a Listserv. I had previous interactions with four out of the 32 participants, while the remaining participants were unknown to me. I recruited a total of 35 participants, where three were excluded because their children were under the age of ten years old.

I conducted three interviews in-person in the participants' home, twenty-four interviews via Zoom video call, and five interviews over the phone. Upon meeting the participants and greeting them, many expressed their excitement with "assisting a Black woman with her research." This displayed the importance of my racial identity to participants, and it highlighted the relatability felt between participants and myself as an "insider" (Collins, 1986; Evans-Winters, 2019). All interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 2 hours. I used an interview guide to maintain consistency within the questions and topics discussed within each interview, while also allowing the semi-structured format of interviews to permit flexibility. Each participant discussed their expectations surrounding Black children experiencing racism, how often they think about their own child(ren) experiencing racism, as well as discussing their child(ren)'s experiences with racism, and how they perceive these experiences impacting their own health.

Participant Characteristics

The mothers interviewed were located in states across the continental U.S., where eight were living in the Northeast, fifteen were living in the South, five were living in the Midwest, and four were living in the West. Twenty-two of the participants had a master's degree or higher: eight earned a PhD or professional degree and fourteen earned a master's. Additionally, six of the mothers earned bachelor's degrees, and four of the mothers earned an associate's degree or attended some college. Twenty-three of the mothers had a household income of \$65,000 or greater. The age of participants ranged from 36 to 57 years old. Fifteen participants were married, eleven were divorced or separated, one was widowed, and five were single or never married. Although marital status did come up for six participants in regard to their "workload" as mothers, marital status did not have an impact on mothers primarily being the ones to initiate and/or continually having conversations with their children around race and racism.

All participants were the biological mother of their child(ren). Fifteen mothers had both a daughter and a son, while eight had only daughters and ten had only sons. The sample size, like most qualitative samples, does not allow for empirical generalizability. However, this work allows for the development of theoretical themes around everyday experiences. The sample size was chosen in line with thematic saturation (Goldberg & Allen, 2015).

ANALYSIS

Data analysis was done through an iterative process that allowed for both inductive and deductive coding. Each interview was transcribed using Otter.ai, and then read for

accuracy. Next, utilizing NVivo, I would code and identify themes within the transcribed interviews. In line with Charmaz (2006), after coding a number of interviews, I would engage in analytic memo writing to analyze emerging codes and concepts to gauge any necessary additions of questions or probes to my interview guide. Through this iterative process, I was able to be reflexive as I visited and revisited data to connect themes and insights while also refining my understanding. Through inductive analysis I was able to discover major themes from the data, while the deductive analysis allowed for me to draw connections from existing scholarship. This provided the ability to analyze and parse out Black women's perceptions of different domains of racism their children face, and how it is impacting their health and well-being.

Findings

Often within the family and health scholarship, the multiple pathways through which racism affects the health and well-being of Black families often focuses on its direct experiences of disparate treatment. However, within the narratives of the Black women who participated in this study, they highlighted the weight of racism in regard to their children, as well as the toll this takes on their health. Although the relationship between racism and health outcomes found in this study reflect much of the current literature, this study explored the particular pathways through which racism impacts the perceived health and well-being of Black women. Understanding the racialized parenting stress experienced by Black mothers illustrates the overlap between motherwork and life course perspectives, specifically linked lives, when examining the impacts of racism on health. The stress that Black mothers are experiencing founded in indirect experiences of racism impacted Black women's perceived: (a) mental, (b) emotional, and (c) physical health and well-being.

Although it was not always easily identifiable, twenty-seven out of the thirty-two (82%) mothers interviewed discussed the racism that their children face negatively impacting their well-being. Additionally, the impact was expressed, regardless of the type of racism mothers were concerned with in regard to their children – i.e., actualized, anticipatory, or vicarious. The health impacts are illustrated in the next section.

Contextualizing the Burden of Racism

Even though much of the work focusing on racism and health examines the impact of direct interpersonal experiences, the pervasiveness of racism within social institutions, individual ideologies, as well as the access to certain resources leaves much to be examined. Additionally, it is imperative to understand that the experiences of close others are just as impactful as those experienced directly. More specifically, Black mothers are acutely aware of the racism that their children will (have) faced, and they expressed how this reality consistently loomed over them. When asked if they expect Black children to experience racism, all thirty-two mothers stated that they expect their child(ren) to experience racism, even if the child has not yet experienced it. Additionally, when asked how often they think about their child(ren)'s experiences of racism, or how often they think about their child(ren) experiencing racism if they have not had any experiences, all thirty-two women interviewed stated that they think about it, with seventeen out of the thirty-two mothers (53%) interviewed expressing that they think about their children experiencing racism often, if not every day. For example, Vivian, mother of two sons (25 and 19) states:

There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about it, especially when something happens to an African American person in our community.

Every time my youngest goes to work.... I mean, there's never a moment I'm not thinking about it.

Vivian's thoughts of her sons experiencing racism are triggered by various situations, and not simply the direct (or actualized) experiences of her children. This illustrates how the concerns of racism towards her sons is not limited to specific forms or events, but rather it is a continual concern that is triggered by even the most "mundane" activities, such as her son driving to work. Vivian's declaration that she thinks about her children experiencing racism daily is a sentiment shared by many of the mothers interviewed. Although prior research suggests that this sort of worrying may be happening more consistently with mothers of sons, this was not the case among the mothers interviewed. Of the seventeen mothers who stated they think about their children experiencing racism often or daily, eleven had daughters – including those who had both daughters and sons. Mothers who expressed consistently thinking about their children experiencing racism would respond to this question, often without hesitation, while also revealing how these thoughts and "worrying" are burdens that they expect to carry. Ton, a mother of two daughters (26 and 22) and son (25), states: "The question is, when do I not think about it? Because that's the lens that I have to look through." Here, Ton is not only highlighting the weight she constantly carries around her children experiencing racism – a clear form of parenting stress, but she is also revealing how race/racism are embedded into her mothering in such a way that these thoughts and concerns become a part of their "normal" parenting, which is a notion expressed by several other mothers. Additionally, Asia, mother of a son (17) and daughter (13), discussed how these daily thoughts and concerns for her children became so consuming that she added it to her morning ritual:

[I think about it] every day. That's part of my daily prayer.... 'Please Lord, let my children's day be acceptable and not negatively hindering them emotionally because someone wants to put them in a box, a category, whatever. Please let them be able to be seen for **WHO** they are, and not what they look like.'

Ton's and Asia's sentiments were consistent with the majority of mothers who, although they may have not created rituals around these concerns – e.g., morning prayers, in the same way that Asia had, found themselves being consumed and affected by them. Additionally, even mothers who expressed not thinking about their children's experiences of racism often or only when a major event occurs, recognized how this was expected due to them raising Black children. However, the effects of their children's experiences extended beyond their expectations of motherhood.

Almost all mothers (twenty-seven out of thirty-two) expressed that they perceive their children's experiences of racism impacting their health in various ways. While some mothers did not readily see the impact on their health, others were able to clearly draw the connection. Moreover, although it was not always immediate, the twenty-seven mothers who articulated the impact of these indirect experiences – their children's experiences of racism – on their health highlighted its effects on predominantly two domains of perceived health: (1) mental and (2) emotional. Additionally, while mothers described distinct health consequences across these domains, they were also interwoven. Because of the holistic nature of health, it is difficult to disentangle these aspects from one another.

Mental Health Consequences

One domain of health that the majority of mothers identified as being impacted by their children's experiences of racism is their mental health. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven mothers (85%) who identified costs to their own health regarding their children's experiences of racism discussed implications on their mental health. More specifically, mothers who perceived these indirect experiences as a detriment to their mental health often discussed it in terms of "stress," "fear," and/or "anxiety." For example, when asked how she believes her children's experiences of racism impacts her own health, Shannon, mother of two sons (24 and 17) and a daughter (10), stated:

It's a stress level. It will stress you the hell out. Obviously, I think it's stress. I think it's the anxiety.... You're not relaxed, you know? My son, he works late, so he would come home later.... So, when it's past [time] you're like, okay, what's going on? You're getting antsy.... Now you are getting the flutters and the worry, and I think that's things that other people don't have to experience.

Shannon continued by reflecting on public instances of racism – e.g., the murder of George Floyd – and how these add to her concerns for her children. Worries that she believes non-Black parents are not having to contend with. Additionally, Shannon's concerns surrounding anticipatory experiences seemed to be just as impactful as actualized experiences, which mirrored the reports of others interviewed. Elise, mother of two sons (22 and 20) and a daughter (17), expressed the hurt she felt when her son was called "the n-word" in high school, and now that he is older, she finds herself worrying about future

experiences. She states that she is “always worrying,” about her children experiencing racism, and she is particularly triggered by the current social climate. She states, “Every time they are out the door [I tell them], ‘be aware of your surroundings.... It can happen to you. I can’t not believe that it can’t.’” Elise’s declaration to her children (and in some ways, a reminder to herself) revealed a common thread among the mothers interviewed. As Shannon expressed previously, even though they recognize the potential negative impacts of worry for their children’s well-being on their mental health, they do not have the ability or privilege to *not* be consumed by the threat of racism looming over their children.

While many mothers expressed anticipatory worries and concerns, Claire, a mother of son (17) and daughter (13), discussed how the experiences her children have had has impacted her mental health. She stated:

I think it causes stress.... I’m sitting here replaying in my mind him getting pulled over. Him probably going, ‘oh goodness.’ Lights on behind him. That’s what I’m saying. It causes me to replay what I’m thinking is happening. That’s what annoys, aggravates, and can stress me.

Claire continued to share how she perceived an experience her daughter faced in school impacting her mental health. Claire stated that, even though she was satisfied with the outcome, it left her being “concerned” about her daughter’s experiences in school. The stress Claire experienced illustrated a larger pattern of the stress, worries, and concerns expressed by the mothers who identified mental health implications. She often found herself ruminating on these experiences long after they have happened, as well as the possibility for future experiences. Ruminating on their children’s actualized and potential

future experiences of racism was a consistent theme for several of the mothers interviewed. Their concern regarding how their children would be treated outside of their homes, as well as within social institutions – such as school, perpetuates a continual stress pattern that manifested itself in several ways, including: the inability to focus on specific tasks, obsessive thoughts, and feelings of unrest. Anxiety and stress seemed to be key markers for the twenty-three women identifying effects on their mental health. However, it was not solely mental health that mothers identified as being impacted, but their emotional health as well.

Emotional Health Consequences

In addition to their children's experiences of racism shaping their mental health, mothers also identified how racism shapes their emotional health. A majority of mothers, seventeen out of the twenty-seven who identified health impacts (63%), described how these indirect experiences of racism had an emotional toll. Mothers described feelings of “anger,” “sadness,” “no peace,” “unsafe,” “hopeless,” and “hurt,” when discussing the impact of their children's experiences. However, these were not fleeting feelings, but consistent emotional reminders of their racialized realities. For example, when asked how she sees her children's experiences impacting her health, Dominique, mother of two sons (29 and 23), stated, “there were many times I feared a late phone call, or my child ain't getting in on time. For my health, it was probably emotionally.... Because there was no peace. I wasn't at ease until the child was in the house.” Additionally, when asking what typically would evoke these feelings for her, Dominique stated that her children were “Black males in a white man's society,” which emphasized not only her understanding and expectations surrounding her children's racialization, but also the emotional turmoil this reality stirs.

Similarly, to Dominique, Ton also discussed the impact the realities of racism have on her emotional health:

Definitely an emotional toll because I'm the kind of person that I have a plan, I execute the plan and I expect certain outcomes.... And I think the emotional toll is just feeling like you just don't have any control over it. And so that part, it's kind of hard. And I think to get through it, sometimes I know I numb myself to it or I do get angry, and I talk about, or I get sad, and I cry about it or it's the whole gambit of emotions.

Ton emphasized the lack of control she feels in regard to her children experiencing racism. The emotional toll Ton discussed reveals the complexities of the impact of racism. Here, Ton also illustrated her awareness and engagement in emotion work to suppress the lack of agency felt around her children's experiences. The "gambit of emotions," that Ton found herself experiencing, as well as the subsequent emotion work, is the reality of many mothers who expressed having cry spells, or intense feelings of anger, founded in their children's experiences of racism and their inability to prevent it. Cynthia, mother of two sons (14 and 12), shared Ton's feelings of emotional turmoil, but she also expressed that because of its common recurrence, she was engaging in emotion work to manage it. When discussing an instance when a non-Black friend witnessed her sons experiencing racism she stated: "She just cried and cried and cried. I thought, if I got fired up every single time...I don't have that much energy for every single person, every single moment.... And to see the level of pain that she was experiencing seeing how my boys were treated...it's something I manage on the day to day." Cynthia's engagement in emotion work is out of a necessity to suppress the pain that she feels over her sons' experiences of racism. She

discusses how this emotion work allows her to function in the day-to-day. Moreover, this emotional toll is not simply the result of mothers seeing or thinking of their children's experiences, but it is also founded in their children's responses to their experiences. For example, Mama Doc, mother of a son (19) and daughter (17), stated that she sees their experiences impacting her emotional health more than anything because she is "feeling the pain that they feel." Mama Doc continued by expressing how difficult it is to see how these experiences impact her children emotionally. Although she is not experiencing racism directly, the vicarious impact of these experiences of racism on her children are also influencing her own emotional well-being. Autumn, mother of a daughter (10), expressed a similar understanding of the emotional health implications. She stated:

[It impacts] emotional and spiritual.... Not the physical because if I'm not there, no harm has come to **ME**. But emotionally, you don't want any harm to come to your **children**. I mean, you want them to remain as innocent as possible for as long as possible. In the ideal world, she'd be like 65 when she experienced racism...or never at all.... So, again, I want her to not experience any sort of racism, but if she does...I want her to have what she needs to be able to cope.... So, for me it has to be emotional.

Autumn's comments illustrated the significance and severity of her child's experiences of racism. Her emphasis on these experiences impacting her emotionally even though she is not experiencing them directly, similar to the other mothers within this study, reveals the significance of these experiences on the health and well-being of Black mothers.

Physical Health Consequences

Six mothers out of the twenty-seven (22%) who identified health impacts of their children's experiences identified physical health effects, such as: sleeplessness, headaches, muscle tensing, heart palpitations, and sweaty palms. Mothers discussed experiencing these effects whenever they would think about their child(ren)'s experiences of racism. However, unlike mental and emotional, physical health consequences of children's experiences of racism on the perceived health of the mothers interviewed was not always easily identified.

For example, mothers identified the inability to sleep until they knew their children were in a safe location – i.e., home, with a friend, etc. This was best exemplified by Camille, mother of a son (19), who stated, “oh, I don't sleep until he gets home. So, definitely [impacts] sleep. And he has a curfew. So, if he's not home by a certain time I'm [contacting him] But I typically don't sleep until he gets home.” Camille continued to discuss how her worrying and compulsive thoughts surrounding him experiencing racism were the foundation of those sleepless nights. In addition to Camille, there were three mothers out of the twenty-seven who identified health implications that explicitly stated their concerns about their children experiencing racism impacts their sleep. Prior scholarship has shown that sleeplessness can have negative physical health consequences (Williams et al., 2012).

In addition to sleeplessness, mothers also discussed having physical responses when thinking about their children's experiences. Although discussed separately, many of the mothers' narratives illustrated a connection between the mental, emotional, and

physical domains of health as they influence one another. Specifically, Tabby, mother of daughter (20), stated:

I think that it, I definitely can feel the physical effects of it.... I can feel like sweaty hands...and headaches...all related to the heightened anxiety. In terms of my mental health...I just know how connected I am with her. And that being my only daughter, that if something were to happen to her, that would really just dismantle me. I try to put positive things out in the atmosphere in regard to her, but I can feel my physical body being very anxious until she gets home.

Tabby was explicit about the physical effects that would present whenever she would think about her daughter's experiences of racism, with her recognizing that these effects are the result of their closeness. Several of the mothers shared Tabby's sentiments. While they worked to "not internalize" the worry they experienced surrounding their concerns of their children's experiences, they also were aware of the toll being taken on their physical health. For example, when asked how she feels when thinking about her children's experiences of racism, Asia, mother of a son (19) and daughter (13), stated: "[I feel] tight. Tense. Shoulders are raised. Eyebrows are raised." Additionally, both Sorrelle, mother of a son (17) and daughter (14), and Ivy, mother of a son (21) discussed experiencing sweaty palms and heart palpitations when thinking about their children's experiences of racism.

Similar to the mental and emotional health impacts, these physical manifestations of worry and stress were founded in indirect experiences of racism that are easily identifiable by the women who participated in the study. The impacts of racism on Black

women's perceived health and well-being that were discussed in this study provide a more detailed understanding of the pathways that produce unequal health outcomes for Black women and families by going beyond conventional measures of health and offering more descriptive understandings of the impacts of racism on health – e.g., emotional costs of indirect experiences.

DISCUSSION

Previous research has shown that racism shapes the health of Black families. However, this work has mostly focused on direct interpersonal experiences. Additionally, when the impact of the experiences of close others have been examined within families, it is often focusing on the impact of the mother's experiences on children (for exceptions see: Barr et al., 2018; Colen et al., 2019). I advance current scholarship on racism, health, and Black families by exploring how children's experiences of racism impact the perceived health of Black mothers in the United States. This study used in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore how children's experiences of racism impact Black maternal health. In line with recent studies (Berkel et al., 2009; Dow, 2019; Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016), I found that the mothers who participated in this study expressed clear concerns surrounding their children's experiences of racism. These concerns over their children's experiences of racism resulted in varying reported health issues and concerns. Participants regularly discussed how the threat of racism consistently loomed over them. More specifically, they discussed how these indirect experiences of racism – i.e., their child(ren)'s experiences, impacted their mental, emotional, and physical health. This study adds to existing scholarship by: (1) providing additional context for the mechanisms that influence negative health experienced by Black women due to racism and (2) highlighting the severity of

anticipatory and vicarious experiences, and not solely direct interpersonal experiences, on Black families.

In utilizing in-depth interviews, this study reveals the persistent negative health impacts of children's experiences of racism on Black women's health. Specifically, this study highlights the mental, emotional, and physical effects of indirect experiences of racism. The consuming nature of racism for Black mothers and its health consequences reveal the connections between multiple dimensions of health that may be interwoven with additional disparities surrounding Black maternal health. Because there is an increase in recognition that health consists of mental and emotional dimensions, and not exclusively physical, these findings support the need for a better understanding of measures and processes that may impact Black women's health, such as racism experienced by children. Additionally, this study is notable because it highlights the impacts of various types of experiences of racism, such as anticipatory, vicarious, and actualized. Essentially, this study elucidates the insidiousness of racism by revealing that its health consequences exist far beyond realized experiences. Instead, mothers in this study show how both anticipated experiences that their children face, as well as vicarious experiences, influence their perceived health and well-being in a variety of ways. This suggests that researchers may benefit from examining differing forms of racism experienced – i.e., actualized vs. anticipated and not solely focusing on direct interpersonal experiences when exploring the health consequences of racism on health.

When exploring the health consequences of children's experiences of racism, I found that mothers often identified their children's experiences as a consistent source of stress. This fits within the larger literature focusing on the impacts of racism on health.

Prior research has drawn the connection between racism-related stress and its consequences on health outcomes (Anderson, 2013; Colen et al., 2019; Gee & Ford, 2011; Jackson et al., 2001; C. P. Jones, 2000; Kelly et al., 2013; Paradies et al., 2015; Williams & Mohammed, 2013). Additionally, research by Gee et al. (2012) illustrates how the stress felt due to experiences of racism is transmissible to others. While recent scholarship has examined the impact that a mother's experiences of racism have on child health (Anderson, 2013; Jackson et al., 2001; Kelly et al., 2013), far fewer studies have explored the reverse. The work of Colen and colleagues (2019) found that mothers whose children have experienced racism have poorer health than those who did not have children who reported these experiences. More specifically, because of the closeness experienced in parent-child relationships, mothers' perceived health is linked to the experiences of her child (Barr et al., 2018). However, no qualitative studies have examined the process of the intergenerational transmission of racism-related stress from child to mother. The findings presented herein allow for a deeper understanding of these concepts by showing that, not only is the transmission of racism-related stress from child to parent significant for the mothers interviewed, but the types of health consequences reported – such as stress, anxiety, etc. – mirror much of what has been discussed in prior works.

Additionally, this study emphasizes the emotion work that Black mothers enact and its influence on their perceived health and well-being. I found that mothers who participated in this study would often discuss how they would experience a lack of control surrounding their children's experiences of racism, which led to them engaging in emotion work to (often) suppress the feelings being evoked by their children's experiences. The relationship between mothering and emotion work has been well-established (A.

Hochschild & Machung, 2012; A. R. Hochschild, 1979; John, 2009; J. Jones, 1985). However, this study provides insight into how this emotion work also has perceived health consequences for Black mothers. Additionally, mothers were highly aware of their engagement in emotion work in regard to their children's experiences of racism. The recognition of the necessity to engage in emotion work as a way to suppress the negative emotions experienced surrounding their children may have negative health consequences due to the heavy toll of these negative emotions. Because prior research has illustrated the negative health implications of emotional distress, such as unhappiness, on Black women (Blake et al., 2007; Hartnett & Brantley, 2020; Mehra et al., 2020), this work presents additional important health mechanisms that may be at play, such as suppressing emotions, in influencing Black maternal health.

Lastly, I found that there is a clear connection between the mothers' reported mental, emotional, and physical health and their children's experiences of racism. These findings illustrate the interconnectedness between multiple domains of health and provide some support for the necessity of looking at how racism impacts health holistically instead of within single domain. For example, although some mothers would not be able to readily identify physical health consequences, and in some cases deny them altogether, as we would continue to discuss their perceptions of the impact of their children's experiences on their health, they would often describe physical impacts – e.g., headaches, sleeplessness, heart palpitations, etc. These findings suggest that there may be a disconnect between the perceived health consequences of racism and its actual impacts. This work highlights the insidiousness and persistent nature of racism, which allows for it to permeate multiple aspects of Black women's lives, including being a part of their daily concerns for their

children. Because of the looming nature of these worries that mothers discussed, even when their children were engaging in mundane activities, the realities of racism became a fact of parenting associated with a number of perceived negative health impacts. These findings build on and extend prior scholarship that links these sorts of health consequences, such as sleeplessness (Williams, 2012), stress (Anderson, 2013; Hall, 2018), anxiousness (Assari et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2000), and emotional distress (Hartnett & Brantley, 2020) to a number of negative physical health outcomes. The findings in this study provide the framework for additional understandings and areas of exploration.

Building on this qualitative study exploring how children's experiences of racism impact Black maternal health, future research could explore how various forms of racism (e.g., anticipatory experiences) impact Black maternal health across multiple points throughout the life course, such as during pregnancy as well as during older life stages. Examining impacts across the life course will provide a clearer picture of the persistent (and consistent) presence that racism has in the lives of Black families. Additionally, future work would benefit from further exploration of the influence of emotion work on Black maternal health. While this study provides some insight into the processes occurring, additional insight into the types of emotion work being conducted around experiences of racism, and the specific influences they have on health, would move racism, health, and family scholarship forward.

In summary, this study provides a more in-depth understanding of the impact that racism has on the health and well-being of Black families. Specifically, this study's application of linked lives illustrates the influence of children's experiences of racism on Black maternal perceived health and well-being. Additionally, these findings provide

insight into the persistent and insidiousness nature of racism in the lives of Black families, as well as the interconnectedness between multiple domains of health, which allows for a more holistic understanding of the ways racism shapes health. Thus, this study adds to the growing body of research examining the multifaceted impacts of racism on health.

CHAPTER 4

“WHEN IT GETS TO BE TOO MUCH”: BLACK WOMEN’S COPING STRATEGIES AROUND RACIALIZED PARENTING STRESS

“It’s exhausting. It’s scary.... It makes me angry. I think other Black mothers feel [the same]. But...we got to keep it moving.” Cynthia, mother of sons (14 and 12)

INTRODUCTION

Racism is a stressor that significantly shapes the lives and health of Black Americans. In contemporary society, a number of examples reveal the various domains across which racism influences the lived experiences of Black Americans, such as: increasing the risk of death while giving birth (Taylor, 2020), school policies regulating hairstyles (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020), being threatened for walking around a neighborhood (Kinnard, 2021), and disproportionately experiencing police violence (Cooper & Fullilove, 2016). The consistently looming nature of racism over the lives of Black Americans not only impacts how they navigate society, but according to Jones and Neblett (2019), these experiences get “under the skin,” to significantly influence health outcomes as well. Because of the multiple dimensions of racism influencing Black Americans over the course of their lives, there is a growing need for examining these effects using a life course perspective.

The influence of racism across the life course for Black individuals is evident, particularly within the context of family. From in-utero to older life stages, racism impacts the health of Black families (Gee et al., 2012). For example, Black mothers may encounter a number of racism-related stressors during pregnancy, which impacts their emotional well-being and produces deleterious health effects for both mother and child (Hartnett & Brantley, 2020). The previous example illustrates how structures of racism may influence physical health outcomes, such as infant morbidity/mortality rates (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2011). However, embedded within recent scholarship examining the implications of racism on health, there is also a significant body of literature focusing on how Black Americans cope with this racism-related stress (Brondolo et al., 2009; S. C. T. Jones et al., 2020; Spates et al., 2020). Racism is a unique stressor in that it is persistent, insidious, and manifests in multiple forms, including through indirect pathways where the experiences of close others are also impacting health outcomes. However, the bulk of scholarship examining coping is focusing on coping with interpersonal experiences. This article applies a life course approach, specifically link lives, as well as the stress perspective, to answer the research question: How do Black mothers cope with the negative health effects they experience due to their children's experiences of racism?

BACKGROUND

Recent scholarship has provided insight into the multiple pathways through which racism influences health outcomes. More specifically, racism influences health far beyond the individual who directly experiences it (DiAquoi, 2018; Gee et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2013). In other words, racially discriminatory events that affect one person also have the ability to impact others within their social network. For instance, Kelly and colleagues (2013)

found that when mothers experience an increase in perceptions of racism in their neighborhood, their children experience various indicators of emotional distress as well. Utilizing a life course perspective, specifically linked lives, allows for a deeper understanding of the impact that racism has on the lives of Black families, especially mother-child relationships. However, while it is important to highlight the insidious nature of racism on health, it is also important to note protective practices individuals may draw upon in the face of discrimination.

Black people have engaged in a variety of coping methods (Brondolo et al., 2009; Butler-Barnes et al., 2017, 2018; Hall, 2018; Lowe et al., 2012; Mehra et al., 2020; Spates et al., 2020) to deal with racism, including racial identity, social support and religious involvement, and emotion management (Brondolo et al., 2009). However, much of the work on coping practices in the face of racism rely on quantitative measures that do not allow for an in-depth exploration of what is being utilized and how. Several qualitative studies support the overall consensus of many studies on coping, including the importance of emotional support from close others (Lowe et al., 2012) and the importance of faith and spirituality (Spates et al., 2020). Specifically, Black women expressed how prayer and their faith allowed them to remain optimistic in the face of racist experiences (Spates et al., 2020) and the importance of immersing themselves within a community that valued their personhood and experiences (Mehra et al., 2020). Across these studies, there is consistent evidence that Black women use coping mechanisms that further our understanding of the impact racism-related stress has on well-being. Although prior studies have advanced our knowledge of the health impacts of racism, as well as the processes taking place amid racism-related stress, there are still relatively few studies examining these processes within

the context of family life (for an exception, see: Hall, 2018). This study expands existing scholarship by exploring how Black mothers cope and/or manage their own negative health effects associated with their children's experiences of racism.

The Present Study

Recent scholarship has provided insight into the impact of racism-related stress on Black women. Additionally, previous literature has explored the ways that Black women aim to cope with racism-related stress and other health effects. However, because much of the work that examines the health consequences of racism are quantitative in nature, this leaves room for exploration surrounding the coping strategies Black women deploy, and why they find these strategies useful. Further insight into how Black women cope with racism-related stressors, particularly indirect experiences – i.e., experiences that are happening to their children, will provide a necessary understanding of the ways that racism permeates the lives of Black families. Moreover, this study will provide insight into how Black women attempt to fight against systems of inequality by making attempts at controlling their own outcomes. With this prior scholarship in mind, I explore how contemporary Black mothers cope with the negative implications of racism on their health – e.g., emotional, mental, and physical. This project offers additional context for understanding how Black women manage the impacts of racism on their families.

METHOD

This study explored how 32 Black mothers with children in adolescence or emerging/young adulthood (ages 10-24) understand their children's experiences of racism, and how their children's experiences of racism impact the mothers' perceived health and

well-being. I focused on mothers with at least one child between the ages of 10-24 because: (1) younger children may not be able to understand or articulate instances of racism, so their mothers may not be as aware of particular experiences of racism, or they may not express as much concern over these experiences at younger ages and (2) children within this age range are desiring more independence and meeting more developmental milestones – such as driving, going out with friends, living outside of the household for the first time, etc., which may also increase the likelihood of experiencing racism. I utilized both inductive and deductive methods closely tied to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to analyze the narratives of the mothers. Through their stories, I explored how participants respond to, and cope with, their children’s experiences of racism. Analyzing the narratives of Black women in understanding coping strategies surrounding racism-related stressors provides additional insight into Black women’s efforts to manage the negative impacts they experience due to their children’s experiences of racism, while also validating the necessity of their stories being centered within the larger body of research surrounding racism, families, and coping without the additions of a comparative group (Evans-Winters, 2019).

Recruitment and Sample

I conducted these 32 in-depth, semi-structured interviews between 2019 and 2021. I recruited participants from around the continental United States using a variety of strategies, including social media postings on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram utilizing the hashtags: #BlackMoms, #BlackWomen, #BlackFamilies. Additionally, I also recruited participants through email outreach and modified snowball sampling, where only participants who identified as working class, or had a household income at \$60,000 or less, were given flyers to pass along to other mothers who may be interested at an attempt to

gain class diversity among participants. All participants self-identified as Black or African American, a woman, and had at least one biological or adoptive child aged 10-24 years old at the time of the interview that self-identified as Black or African American. The sampling frame aimed to include a diverse sample of perspectives of mothers with adolescent children. I emailed and direct messaged, via social media sites, the project recruitment flyer and announcement to organizations focusing on Black women and Black motherhood, e.g., *Black Mamas Matter* and *National Coalition of 100 Black Women*. After I sent the initial email, the project announcement and flyer were then forwarded by either administrators or leaders with the organization to members via a Listserv. I had previous interactions with four out of the 32 participants, while the remaining participants were unknown to me. I recruited a total of 35 participants, where three were excluded because their children were under the age of ten years old.

I conducted three interviews in-person in the participants' home, twenty-four interviews via Zoom video call, and five interviews over the phone. Throughout the interview process, the importance of my racial identity to participants was often subtly expressed, and it highlighted the relatability felt between participants and myself as an "insider" (Collins, 1986; Evans-Winters, 2019). All interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 2 hours. I used an interview guide to maintain consistency within the questions and topics discussed within each interview, while also allowing the semi-structured format of interviews to permit flexibility. Each participant discussed the perceive implications of their children's experiences of racism on their own health, and who or what they engage with to manage – i.e., cope.

Participant Characteristics

The mothers interviewed were located in states across the continental U.S., where eight were living in the Northeast, fifteen were living in the South, five were living in the Midwest, and four were living in the West. Twenty-two of the participants had a master's degree or higher: eight earned a PhD or professional degree and fourteen earned a master's. Additionally, six of the mothers earned bachelor's degrees, and four of the mothers earned an associate's degree or attended some college. Twenty-three of the mothers had a household income of \$65,000 or greater. The age of participants ranged from 36 to 57 years old. Fifteen participants were married, eleven were divorced or separated, one was widowed, and five were single or never married. Although marital status did come up for six participants in regard to their "workload" as mothers, marital status did not have an impact on mothers primarily being the ones to initiate and/or continually having conversations with their children around race and racism.

All participants were the biological mother of their child(ren). Fifteen mothers had both a daughter and a son, while eight had only daughters and nine had only sons. The sample size, like most qualitative samples, does not allow for empirical generalizability. However, this work allows for the development of theoretical themes, as well as additional insight surrounding how Black women cope with various forms of racism. The sample size was chosen in line with thematic saturation (Goldberg & Allen, 2015).

ANALYSIS

Data analysis was done through an iterative process that allowed for both inductive and deductive coding. Each interview was transcribed using Otter.ai, and then read for

accuracy. Next, utilizing NVivo, I would code and identify themes within the transcribed interviews. In line with Charmaz (2006), after coding a number of interviews, I would engage in analytic memo writing to analyze emerging codes and concepts to gauge any necessary additions of questions or probes to my interview guide. Through this iterative process, I was able to be reflexive as I visited and revisited data to connect themes and insights while also refining my understanding. Through inductive analysis I was able to discover major themes from the data, while the deductive analysis allowed for me to draw connections from existing scholarship. This provided the ability to analyze and understand Black women's coping strategies in the face of negative health implications due to their children's experiences of racism.

Findings

Often within race and family scholarship, understandings of coping strategies deployed by Black families are often limited to quantitative measures (Brondolo et al., 2009; Butler-Barnes et al., 2017), or when they are qualitative, they are focusing on direct and actualized experiences (Lowe et al., 2012; Spates et al., 2012). However, within the narrative of the Black women who participated in this study, they discussed the coping strategies they engaged when they felt the effects of their children's experiences of racism. Mothers looked to mitigate the negative health implications on their own health due to their children's experiences of racism by highlighting both the toll that these experiences take on them, as well as what they do in the wake of those experiences. Furthering our knowledge surrounding Black women's coping strategies is imperative to offer a complete picture of the effects of racism in the lives of Black families, as well as their resiliency. In response to their children's experiences of racism, Black women deployed three dominant

domains of coping: (1) social support, (2) religion or religiosity, and (3) self-reliance or more internal strategies. However, although these strategies differed in type, there was fluidity in the strategies that were used, where some mothers engaged in multiple coping strategies to manage the toll of their children's experiences on their perceived health and well-being. These coping strategies are illustrated in the next section.

Social Support

One realm of coping that a majority of mothers identified is the utilization of those within their social networks to offer support in the wake of their children's experiences. Twenty-two of the thirty-two mothers (69%) identified going to close others and relying on their "village" when they felt the effects of their children's experiences. More specifically, mothers often looked to systems of social support – such as other Black mothers, spouses, or religious community for advice, solidarity, or redirection. For example, after discussing the emotional toll her children's experiences had on her, Bunny, mother of daughters (18, 13, and 10) and son (15), discussed how she regularly goes to other Black mom for support. She stated:

It's just kind of like sharing information. Like, "oh, how did you handle that? What did you say?" Getting feedback from them.... So, it's a combination of [sharing] personal information, getting feedback, as well as receiving advice.

She continued discussing how the other mothers with whom she regularly speaks have offered her comfort and advice in the wake of her children's experiences. Additionally, this community of Black women have offered her support in times where she did not always

know how to handle a situation or began to be filled with worry. Bunny's statement reflected the sentiments of several mothers within the study. Ten of the twenty-three mothers (43%) who identified social support as a coping strategy discussed leaning on other Black mothers during these times. More specifically, Denise, mother of daughter (19), discussed how the support offered to her from her parenting group was able to affirm her at times when her daughter's experiences of racism began to take an emotional toll. She stated, "First of all, the group...we were kind of in solidarity with one another, so we were processing things through each other.... Because their kids were [having] similar experiences." She continued by discussing how these experiences would often lead her to question her reality, but the support from other's who had similar experiences provided a sense of community and comfort. The notion of social support being imperative in creating a sense of community has been well-established within the literature.

In addition to the support of other mothers, participants who were married also discussed the significance of being able to go to their spouse. Of the fifteen total participants who were married, eight mothers (53%) discussed going to their spouse whenever they were feeling the toll of their children's experiences of racism. Often, mothers discussed going to their husbands, not necessarily for affirmation like they received from other Black mothers, but to regain "perspective." For example, when asked who she finds most helpful when she is feeling stressed and emotionally overwhelmed, Anna, mother of a daughter (17) and sons (12 and 1) stated: "My husband. He puts things in perspective and keeps me from responding how I normally would respond. I'm reactive. I will react. He is the one that gets me to think about it from a more analytical and objective perspective." Anna illustrated how her spouse may not only perceive their children's

experiences differently, but he does not experience them in the same way that she does. All of the mothers who discussed going to their husbands in the wake of these experiences shared notions similar to Anna. Their spouses were viewed as a space to gain a new insight and think differently about covert, or even anticipated, experiences of racism.

Three mothers (13%) discussed their churches providing spaces and relationships where they could easily and readily discuss the impact of their children's experiences. For example, Claire, mother of son (17) and daughter (13), discussed how her church community had a team dedicated to diversity-inclusion efforts that would often provide opportunities for her to discuss her children's experiences and the emotional and mental impact they have had on her. She shared:

We had a diversity session at the church a few months back.... I was in a [discussion] group...and we all just talked about how we felt. The fears. And I was actually in tears because at that time, something had recently happened, and that's when I was open about taking my time with [my son] getting his license.... They don't think about that for their children like we do because it's not as much of a concern or a situation that's happening to white children.

Claire discussed how these spaces within her church community were helpful for her so that she would not internalize her feelings, but that she was also able to share these thoughts with other mothers who felt similarly. Claire also acknowledged how she believes white mothers do not hold these same concerns, so they will not experience the same mental and emotional toll that Black mothers experience. Similar to Claire, Ton, mother of daughters

(26 and 22), and Mama Doc, mother of son (19) and daughter (17), both discussed how the relationships within their church communities have been necessary for them to manage the toll their children's experiences take on their health.

Religion

Although a small number of mothers discussed utilizing physical relationships within their church communities to help them manage, many of the mothers specified turning to specific aspects of their religion. More specifically, 19 of the thirty-two mothers (59%) discussed turning to their religious faith in the wake of their children's experiences. Mothers expressed utilizing many faith-based tools, such as: praying, reading scriptures, and "trusting God." These tools provided comfort to many mothers, while others recognized that these tools were deployed due to the lack of control they felt with regard to their children's experiences. For example, Harriet, mother of a son (14), discussed how she utilizes prayer as a tool to prevent her from internalizing the fear and worry she holds as she anticipates her son experiencing racism. She said:

Once I pray, I have to just leave it in God's hands. Always. And [God] hears my prayers. Me and my son, we pray together, and I always ask God just to protect him and be a shield around him at all times, you know?

Harriet expressed how, although she did express worrying about her son experiencing racism often, she believes utilizing prayer as a tool to help her manage her emotions during those times mitigates the possibility of negative health effects. Harriet's thinking represented those of several mothers I interviewed. Aria, mother of sons (23 and 15) and daughters (19 and 17), when discussing how often she thinks of her children's experiences

of racism, stated that she tries “not to focus on it” because it is not something that she can change. Instead of focusing on the “injustices” her children have and/or will face due to their race, because she knows the emotional and mental toll this would take on her, she stated, “I just know what is required of me every day, so I try to start my days out with positive interactions with God. I talk to Him throughout the day and pray [for] protection over my children.” Aria illustrated here how Black mothers do not have the ability to remain in a place of anguish. Instead, Black women are expected to manage the stress faced surrounding their children’s experiences, and in order for Aria to do this, she utilized prayer as tool to provide some sort of reprieve from these worries.

In addition to prayer, these efforts were also engaged to offer mothers a sense of understanding surrounding their lack of control when it comes to the toll of their children’s experiences on them. Specifically, mothers discussed their trust in a “higher power.” For example, when discussing how she deals with the stress she feels surrounding her children’s previous experiences of racism, Claire, mother of son (17) and daughter (13), discussed how she is “on edge” every time they leave her home, so she just has to “trust God to protect [her] babies.” She continued to discuss how she believes “God puts [her] in different situations,” which has helped to limit some of her obsessive thoughts surrounding her children’s experiences. Claire’s experiences were echoed by many of the mothers who discussed that they, “give it to God,” to help limit their concerns. Additionally, Dr. Mandy, mother of sons (10 and 8), discussed how her faith allowed for her to limit her worries and concerns because “even if they’re experience a challenge, [I’m] going back to what [the Bible] says and praying about it.” Dr. Mandy continued that it is her hope that her faith would not only lessen the impact that her children’s experiences have on her, but it will

also enable to her to respond in ways that changes other's "perspectives and bias." Dr. Mandy's discussion illustrated the importance of faith and religion in the lives of the mothers interviewed, but it also revealed how some of these coping strategies are internal strategies, such as her managing responses to her children's experiences.

Self-reliance

Mothers who participated in this study identified several internal, or more self-reliant strategies that helped the mothers manage the emotional toll of their children's experiences of racism. Eighteen out of thirty-two mothers interviewed (56%) discussed depending on themselves in many ways to cope with the effects of their children's experiences. These aspects of self-reliance mostly involved: (a) having a strong sense of self, (b) engaging in "Black joy," and (c) suppressing emotions – i.e., emotion work. For example, when asked how her daughters experiences of racism impacts her health, Autumn, mother of daughter (10), discussed the emotional toll that it takes. However, although she recognized the implications on her health, Autumn discussed how her racial pride is what helps her manage during those times. Specifically, Autumn discussed that she knows her daughter will experience racism because of the racial structure of the United States, but her being "proud to be Black" is what assisted her in not internalizing those emotions, which she hoped will be a coping strategy for her daughter as well. Similar to Autumn, Reign, mother of daughter (10), also discussed this racial pride and sense of self being beneficial for her in times where she may think about her daughter experiencing racism. Reign shared how she had taken the time to curate spaces of "Blackness" for her daughter, such as having a Black teacher, physician, dentist, etc. When asked why she thinks that is important, she stated:

I think it's probably good for my mental health for the most part because I can minimize [exposure].... I want her experiences around race relations to be ones that I can control, so that we can have these experiences...and it be a learning experience, or in preparation of, or enlightening you to think about this.

While Reign's strategies do entail some external aspects of surrounding social networks to curate a Black space for her daughter, her efforts are rooted in racial pride. Additionally, she sees this pride (and subsequent actions) as benefiting her mental health because she believes she is able to control her daughter's exposure to racism. So, while she stated previously that she does expect her daughter to experience racism at older ages, regaining a sense of control enabled her to lessen the effects that these worries would have on her health. This was similar to several mothers who identified a strong sense of self as being necessary to lessen the impact of their children's experiences, such as Tabby, mother of daughter (20), who expressed that the confidence she has in how she raised her daughter – e.g., racial pride, high sense of self, observant, etc. – allowed for her to manage the anxiety she experienced whenever her daughter would leave the home. So, here, Tabby's sense of pride did not entail limiting exposures, but she held confidence in her preparatory efforts, which is what she identified as helping her manage during times of stress.

Additionally, a few mothers (three out of the eighteen) identified engaging in “Black joy” as a coping strategy in times of distress. When discussing Black joy specifically, mothers identified that choosing to experience joy in the wake of their children's experiences, provided an opportunity for them to (consciously) resist the hold that racism attempts to have on their lives. While Reign and Autumn both identified aspects

of this, it was most visible in Cynthia's narrative. When asked what helps her manage during times where she is overcome by the emotional and mental weight that her children's experiences have on her, Cynthia, mother of sons (14 and 12) stated:

I believe in...all of these women...who are fierce and radical about Black joy. You know, and how Black joy is resistance. It's saying, "you don't get to define who and how I love, I define that. I tell you." So, for me...I'm laughing a lot... I intentionally infuse joy in my life as much as I can. One, because it is important, but obviously, two, it is an act of resistance. [It's] saying, "no, this system is messed up. Ya'll get to do you, and my family is going to find joy."

Cynthia's focus on finding joy illustrated that her efforts were not solely to mitigate the health effects of racism, but rather to thwart the goal of racism: to negatively control her and her family's outcomes. While it is evident that racism influences the lives of Black women and families, mothers who discussed choosing joy to manage the impacts of racism argued that choosing joy in spite of these experiences of racism enabled them to take back control.

In addition to having a sense of self and choosing joy, Black women also discussed suppressing their emotions – i.e., emotion work, to assist them in managing or coping with racism-related stressors. Twelve out of the eighteen mothers who expressed self-reliance focused specifically on suppressing emotions by stating that their strategies involved "distracting" and/or "internalizing" their emotions. For example, when asked how she manages the worry and sleeplessness nights surrounding her sons' experiences,

Dominique, mother of sons (29 and 23), stated, “[I kept] myself busy.... I just had to get to a place of resolve.” Similar to Dominique, Di’Ann, mother of daughters (17 and 11), discussed how she also tries to keep herself busy whenever she is overcome by feelings of anxiety or stress. She stated:

I work all the time. Me working all the time keeps my mind off everything. Like I said, I do two jobs. Currently, I’m working thirteen plus hours a day just to keep my mind off a day that drives me to anxiety.... So, you know, being active and functional, finding things that put a smile on my face and warms up my heart is what helps me mentally.

Di’Ann’s sentiments here mirrored that of many of the mothers who mentioned staying busy as part of their emotion and mental management. Di’Ann expressed how she puts herself into her work because it helps to ease her mind when she becomes overwhelmed with thoughts surrounding her daughters experiencing racism. Additionally, mothers also discussed the need to internalize their emotions in regard to their children’s experiences because they do not see any other options. For example, when asked how she manages during times of worry or stress surrounding her children’s experiences, Sorrelle, mother of son (17) and daughter (14), stated:

Definitely just knowing that the older you get, you cannot, you know, you gotta start watching your health. Like, I can’t even go there. I just don’t have the liberty to go there.... And people don’t see it.

As Sorrelle continued, she discussed having to suppress her emotions, not only regarding her children’s experiences, but regarding the larger experiences of the Black community.

She discussed how she does not have the freedom to think about these realities or discuss them as much as she would like because of the anger, frustration, and pain that comes with those thoughts. Sorrelle's comment mirrored several mothers in this study, including Camille, mother of son (19), who discussed the importance of "keeping busy" to distract herself when she begins to worry whenever her son leaves home. The suppression of emotions that Black women expressed was founded in the desire to control the effects that these experiences have on their health, as well as the realization (even if not always explicit) that racism permeates their lives in many ways. They do not have the freedom to truly engage with their emotions because of the frequency in which they come up. When asked how she manages the stress and emotions, SupaVerne, mother of daughter (11) and son (6), stated:

I don't know. I don't know. I think you just...you just manage to just go because you have to. We can't...it's not realistic...that we can be with our children every moment of the day, or to say "no, that's not what my child did," or to say, "no, he's only fifteen, don't shoot my son." It's just...I don't know how you manage.... I don't know that I have some sort of healthy coping mechanism.... Yeah, I don't know.

SupaVerne's comments illustrated a notion that the majority of mothers shared. While they understood the impact of racism on their family life and their own health, as well as deployed a number of coping strategies at an attempt to mitigate the negative health implications of these experiences, the consensus remained that managing emotions and stress was not a privilege.

DISCUSSION

Prior research has shown that racism shapes the lives of Black families in various ways (Dow, 2019; Hall, 2018; Powell and Coles, 2020; Smith, 2016). However, in the wake of experiences of racism, Black families engage in several coping strategies that enable them to combat the effects of racism on their health and well-being. I advance current scholarship on racism, coping, and Black families by exploring which coping strategies mothers deploy in the wake of their children's experiences of racism. In line with recent studies (Brondolo et al., 2009; S. C. T. Jones et al., 2020; Spates et al., 2020), I found that mothers were regularly engaging in various coping strategies to mitigate the impacts of racism on their own health, as well as their family's well-being. These coping strategies existed within three broad domains: (1) social support, (2) religion, and (3) self-reliance.

Through utilizing in-depth interviews to analyze the narratives of Black mothers in the United States, this study reveals the necessity of these coping strategies for hindering the consuming (and persistent) nature of racism on families and health. Additionally, this study also illustrates the tension that mothers feel when having to deploy and navigate these strategies (Lowe et al., 2012). More specifically, for Black mothers, engaging with these strategies is not always a cathartic experience (although it can be) because it is a continual process. Therefore, when deploying strategies, such as turning to their faith or suppressing emotions, this is often due to lack of other tangible options when combatting racism and its impact (S. C. T. Jones et al., 2020). This suggests that researchers may benefit from a reframing around certain aspects of coping, where there is an acknowledgment of both resilience as well as necessity.

Additionally, these findings illustrate Black women's efforts to regain control of their families, as well as their own outcomes, such as Black women utilizing Black joy as a tool to resist attempts for racism to permeate every aspect of their lives. While recent scholarship has illustrated how Black women utilize the institution of family to practice agency and empower their families (Berrey, 2009; Hall, 2018; Spates et al., 2020), far fewer studies have explicated how Black women utilize tools of resistance, such as joy, in the face of racist experiences. Exploring aspects of coping, such as joy, in tandem with other dimensions, such as suppression, better describes the complex nature of racism-related stress and its impact on perceived health and well-being. Although coping strategies are deployed, I found that mothers often recognize the limitations in their abilities to prohibit experiences of racism altogether. Instead, this study reveals that these responses to racism-related stress are better thought of as a necessity for the overall (emotional) survival of themselves and their families.

Building on this qualitative study exploring how Black women cope with their own perceived health consequence related to their children's experiences of racism, future research could further this work by exploring emotion work as both a coping tool as well as an aspect of racism-related stress. More specifically, because mothers who engaged in emotion work as a coping strategy often perceived it as a strategy to be utilized in times of desperation – such as their need to keep going in spite of the emotional toll being taken. So, although this strategy helped them manage the emotional weight, current research discusses the potential physical health implications of suppressing emotions (Brockman et al., 2017; E. J. Jones et al., 2018; Lopez & Denny, 2019; Schultheis et al., 2019), which could potentially serve as a secondary stressor.

In summary, this study expands current understandings of the impact that children's experiences of racism have on maternal perceived health and well-being, as well as coping strategies deployed to mitigate potential health consequences. Specifically, these findings provide insight into the persistent nature of racism in the lives of Black families, while also highlighting their resiliency in the wake of these experiences. Additionally, this study underlines the complex coping processes taking place that influences the perceived health and overall well-being of Black women. Thus, this study adds to growing scholarship exploring how Black families cope with multiple forms of racism over the life course.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation was to center the voices of Black women when discussing the multiple implications of racism on the lives of Black mothers and families. More specifically, this dissertation expands and complicates sociological understandings at the intersection of race, gender, and family within the context of health. Using a three-article format, I explored the following questions by analyzing the narratives of thirty-two Black mothers: (1) How do Black women engage in motherwork around their children's experiences of racism? (2) How do children's experiences of racism impact Black maternal health? (3) What coping strategies are Black women utilizing in the wake of their children's experiences with racism? This dissertation provides additional insight into the multiple pathways in which racism influences the lives of Black women by: (a) introducing a framework – i.e., intensive motherwork, through which we better understand the influences of race/racism on mothering practices and its costs, (b) applying a life course – e.g., linked lives, perspective to highlight how multiple forms of racism impact Black maternal health across several domains, and (c) revealing the complex nature of Black women's coping strategies to mitigate the effects of these indirect experiences of racism on their own perceived health and well-being.

Overview of Results

In chapter two of this dissertation, I explored how Black women engage in motherwork around their children's experiences of racism and, subsequently, the effects of this work

on the mothers themselves. The results from this chapter illustrated several practices that Black mothers employ when looking to protect their children from racism, such as delaying/restricting, teaching, and/or building. More specifically, this work may differ depending on the gender of the child; whereby, mothers either delayed/restricted activities for their sons and taught agency to their daughters. This underlines the persistence of racism, while also combatting popular rhetoric that the concern lies solely with mothers who have sons. Regardless of their child's gender, mothers deployed practices to protect their children from multiple forms of racism. Additionally, mothers extensively discussed the necessity of building positive racial and cultural identity within their children to combat the negative images with which they are constantly bombarded. However, although I found that mothers viewed these practices as necessary, they also recognized that these practices come at a cost. This where I merge the concepts of intensive mothering – an all-encompassing mothering process that is exhaustive and impedes women's autonomy, and motherwork – the racialized practices Black women deploy to protect their children in the face of racism, to develop the concept of *intensive motherwork*. The concept of intensive motherwork emphasizes the overwhelming nature of Black women's mothering due to the constant threat of racism.

In chapter three, I examine how children's experiences of racism impact Black mothers' perceived health and well-being. Within this study, I find that Black women readily identify perceived health consequences in their own lives that are associated with their children's experiences of racism. Mothers within this study discussed how their perceived mental, emotional, and physical health are all impacted by their children's experiences of racism. Additionally, mothers revealed how it is not solely their children's

actualized experiences, but even the threat of racism – e.g., anticipatory or vicarious experiences—that impact their own perceived health and well-being. This study illustrated how racism moves beyond interpersonal experiences, or even those that are directly experienced, to impede on the perceived health and well-being of Black mothers. Moreover, this study also elucidated the interconnectedness between multiple domains of health. When mothers described the perceived health consequences they experienced, they would often describe additional effects that may overlap in multiple domains. For example, some mothers identified perceived mental health consequences stemming from their children’s experiences of racism, while also describing sleeplessness or headaches. This sheds light on the connection between mental, emotional, and physical health consequences.

Lastly, in chapter four, I explored which coping strategies Black women utilize in the wake of their children’s experiences of racism. My findings indicate that Black women deploy strategies that fall into three main areas: (1) social support, (2) religion, and (3) self-reliance. Specifically, to manage the perceived health consequences they suffer in the wake of their children’s experiences, the mothers I interviewed would often rely on close others – such as other Black mothers or their spouse, turn to aspects of their religion – e.g., prayer or reading scripture, and/or they would tap into more internal processes that involved them relying on themselves, such as suppressing emotion or finding joy. I also found that Black women did not always feel like these were “good” coping strategies, but they would specify that these strategies help them manage and remain functional. The coping strategies that Black women discussed, such as emotion suppression, revealed that these coping strategies may not always have positive effects on health outcomes and could possibly serve as

secondary stressors – e.g., through the suppression of emotions. However, even though mothers did not always identify these strategies as successfully mitigating negative perceived health and well-being consequences, I found that they recognized these strategies as necessary due to the numerous expectations placed on them as Black women and mothers.

The findings present within this dissertation contribute to sociological research and understandings in several ways: (1) introducing a new framework for understanding and highlighting the costs of Black women’s motherwork, (2) exploring the perceived maternal health consequences of children’s experiences of racism (in multiple forms), (3) complicating notions of coping with the effects of racism for Black women, and (4) elucidating the role of emotion work in the lives of Black women.

Within this dissertation, I introduce the concept of *intensive motherwork* as a potentially new way of framing the mothering experiences of Black women. Intensive motherwork underlines the emotionally, mentally, (and sometimes) physically overwhelming nature of Black women’s mothering. What is distinct about intensive motherwork is that it illustrates an overlap between Black women having to protect their children and protect themselves from the harsh realities of racism. Because prior research has highlighted health disparities experienced by Black women across a number of domains in relation to family (Taylor, 2020), intensive motherwork may provide a context that is often missing from this research. Intensive motherwork suggests that Black women’s motherwork is a unique form of racism-related parenting stress that often goes underestimated or unexamined when examining Black women’s perceived health and

wellbeing. Intensive motherwork highlights that racism is a key factor in parenting stress for Black women.

Second, this qualitative study on the perceived maternal health consequences of children's experiences of racism on Black mothers adds a richness to the racism, health, and family scholarship by bridging bodies of work together that are not readily placed into conversation with each other, such as life course theories, stress process, and motherwork. Additionally, this work utilizes perceived health and well-being, which has been suggested to be as important as traditional measures of health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018), which makes this study a necessary addition to racism and health scholarship. Through qualitative interviews, I was able to apply a life course perspective to explore the "linked lives" of Black mothers and children. More specifically, this study explored how children's experiences of racism influences Black maternal perceived health and well-being, whereas previous studies have focused on the reverse. Additionally, there is only one other study that has explored this relationship between mother and child, which was quantitative and examining self-reported health (Colen et al., 2019). Being able to take a qualitative approach to understanding the effects of racism on perceived health and well-being provides insight into pathways, as well as the operationalization of racism, that can add to our current understandings of racism's impact on perceived health and well-being, such as emotional and mental well-being, that can move race and health research forward in new directions. Moreover, this dissertation explores multiple forms of racism – i.e., actualized, anticipatory, and vicarious, which allows for a more thorough understanding of the effects of racism on perceived health and well-being. Because the majority of the racism and health literature focuses on direct interpersonal experiences, this project demonstrates

the importance of providing space for participants to define which experiences affected them. Understanding the impacts of anticipated experiences, or even experiences that have not happened directly within one's own family (vicarious), shed light on how racism influences perceived health and wellbeing. Additionally, this work amplifies understandings of how racism impacts perceived health and wellbeing over the life course, which reveals that experiences occurring at different points in time can have long-lasting impacts on perceived health and well-being.

Third, this dissertation complicates general notions of coping with racism that commonly views coping as a "positive" experience and looks to highlight individual's agency in the face of systems of inequality – e.g., racism. Mothers who participated in the study provided insight into how the coping strategies being deployed may not have the positive effects on perceived health and well-being that tend to be assumed. Rather, similar to motherwork, Black women engage in these strategies out of necessity. What is often focused on within racism and coping scholarship is its benefits, and understandably so, but discussions of the desperation through which mothers deploy these strategies often goes unnoticed. Additionally, because these coping strategies are not always beneficial – such as emotional suppression, this study highlights the possibility that some coping strategies having the potential to serve as secondary stressors that may also negatively influence perceived health and well-being.

Throughout this study, Black women's engagement in emotion work has been a consistent thread. Emotion work was evident across Black women's motherwork practices as they would contend with their children's need for protection over their desire to maintain their innocence. Emotion work also presented itself as mothers shared the perceived

emotional health consequences of their children's experiences. Moreover, emotion work presented itself as a coping mechanism for Black women in the wake of their children's experiences. This study sheds light on how emotion work is intrinsic to Black women's mothering.

This collection of articles exploring Black women's motherwork and its impacts on their perceived health and well-being, broadens our understandings of the insidious and complex realities of racism. However, even within these realities, the Black women who shared their stories also looked to complicate our understandings of racism's influence on mothering by providing insight into its costs, as well as how they work to resist, express, and cultivate Black joy and pride, and liberate themselves and their children from racism's grip.

Future Directions

The mothers who generously worked with me and shared their stories offered an abundance of data and knowledge that can be explored beyond the articles presented here. Future research would benefit from interviewing children, as well as the mother's partner and/or any additional parents, to gain further understandings of how racism impacts Black families. The following paragraphs discuss future interests that look to build off of this dissertation project.

First, there is a plethora of research that explores the collective mothering practices of Black women (Bailey-Fakhoury, 2017; A. E. Edwards, 2000; Story, 2014). To further explore the impact of motherwork on the lives of Black women, future research would benefit from examining these effects among "other mothers" – i.e., grandmothers, aunts, sisters, etc. who assist in the raising of Black children. Extending this work to "other

mothers” allows for further understanding of intensive motherwork by exploring if this framing is only applicable to biological mothers or if “other mothers” are also experiencing the same costs. The exploration of how intensive motherwork is engaged by other mothers will provide further insight into these practices within larger familial networks.

Second, this study focuses on Black women who had at least one child in the age range of 10-24 – i.e., adolescence and emerging/young adulthood. While exploring the impact of racist experiences among this age group provided great insight into the impact of children’s experiences of racism on Black mothers, expanding this age range could be beneficial. Future research should interview mothers who are also pregnant and/or are of older ages. As this work takes a life course approach, exploring how these processes work at different points in time, such as when a child is in utero, will illustrate a clearer picture of racism’s influence on perceived health and well-being.

Lastly, previous literature has established the potentially negative effects of aspects of emotion work, such as emotional suppression (Brockman et al., 2017; Lopez & Denny, 2019). While the mothers who participated in the study discussed engaging in emotional suppression, some also identified it being deployed out of desperation and necessity. Future research would benefit from exploring emotion work as both a coping tool and aspect of racism-related stress, more specifically a secondary stressor. Mothers illustrated that this emotion work was conducted so that they could remain functional; however, emotional suppression may have implications on perceived health and well-being during and after its deployment. Future analyses and research would gain from exploring the aforementioned concepts to enhance current understandings of race, gender, family, and health, while also

continuing to move scholarship forward in a way that ensures Black women's experiences of mothering and family life are no longer rendered invisible.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table A. 1 Participants' pseudonyms, demographics, and child(ren)'s age and gender; N=32 Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Geographical Region	Partnership Status	Highest Degree Attained	Household Income	Number of Children	Children's Gender and Age
Claire	48	South	Married	Bachelor's Degree	\$65K to under \$85K	2	Male (17) and Female (13)
Veronica	46	South	Married	Master's degree	\$35K to under \$50K	1	Female (11)
Harriet	50	South	Widowed	Master's Degree	\$50K to under \$65K	1	Male (14)
Dominique	48	South	Divorced/ Separated	Bachelor's Degree	\$35K to under \$50K	2	(Male 29) and Male (23)
Reign	37	South	Married	PhD	\$100K or more	1	Female (10)
Shannon	40	Northeast	Single/ Never married	Master's degree	\$85K to under \$100K	3	Male (24), Male (17), and Female (10)
Aria	45	South	Divorced/ Separated	Master's degree	\$65K to under \$85K	4	Male (23), Female (19), Female (17), and Male (15)
Camille	48	Midwest	Divorced/ Separated	Master's degree	\$65K to under \$85K	1	Male (19)
Peace	43	South	Single/ Never married	Some college	\$35K to under \$50K	3	Female (25), Female (21), and Female (10)
Elise	51	Northeast	Married	Bachelor's Degree	\$65K to under \$85K	3	Male (22), Male (20), and Female (17)
Anna	36	Northeast	Married	Master's degree	\$100K or more	3	Female (17), Male (12), and Male (1)
Ton	54	South	Married	Bachelor's degree	\$100K or more	3	Female (26), Male (25), and Female (22)
Vivian	44	Midwest	Married	Bachelor's degree	\$100K or more	2	Male (25) and Male (17)
Asia	37	West	Single/ Never married	Some college	\$35K to under \$50K	2	Male (17) and Female (13)
Di'Ann	36	Northeast	Single/ Never married	Associate's degree	\$50K to under \$65K	2	Female (17) and Female (11)
Zoe	50	Northeast	Married	Master's degree	\$100K or more	2	Male (19) and Male (10)
Tabby	46	Northeast	Married	PhD	\$100K or more	1	Female (20)

Sorrelle	47	West	Married	Master's degree	\$100K or more	2	Male (17) and Female (14)
Bunny	48	Northeast	Married	Bachelor's degree	\$100K or more	4	Female (18), Male (15), Female (13), and Female (10)
Ivy	53	West	Divorced/ Separated	Master's Degree	\$100K or more	1	Male (21)
SupaVerne	41	South	Married	PhD or Professional Degree	\$100K or more	2	Female (11) and Male (6)
Jane	50	South	Married	Masters	\$100K or more	5	Male (32), Male (31), Male (30), Male (23), and Female (13)
Mama Doc	51	South	Married	PhD or Professional Degree	\$100K or more	2	Female (19) and Male (17)
Cynthia	47	Midwest	Divorced	PhD or Professional Degree	\$100K or more	2	Male (14) and Male (12)
Denise	57	Midwest	Divorced/ Separated	PhD or Professional	\$65K to under \$85K	1	Female (19)
Susan	47	South	Married	Masters	\$100K or more	2	Female (16) and Male (3)
Dr.Mandy	37	South	Divorced/ Separated	PhD or Professional Degree	\$65K to under \$85K	2	Male (10) and Male (8)
Autumn	40	West	Single/ Never Married	Master's Degree	\$35K to under \$50K	1	Female (10)
Wonder Woman	45	South	Divorced/ Separated	Master's Degree	\$35K to under \$50K	4	Male (23), Female (19), Female (13), and Female (10)
Amanda	45	Midwest	Divorced/ Separated	Master's Degree	Under \$15K	2	Male (21) and Female (13)
Marlo	53	Northeast	Divorced/ Separated	PhD or Professional Degree	\$100K or more	1	Male (17)
Candace	46	South	Divorced/ Separated	Associates	\$85K to under \$100K	2	Female (23) and Female (16)

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Part I (motherhood & raising children):

1. How do you believe other people would define motherhood?
2. What does it mean for you to be a mother?
3. Could you describe how important being a mom is to you?
4. Could you talk about a time when being a mom was fulfilling/challenging for you?
5. Could you describe how close you and your child(ren) are?
6. So, we have talked a lot about what it means for you to be a mom. How do you believe being a mom differs based on race?

Part II (racism & socialization):

1. Lead in: So, we discussed how you believe being a mom differs based on race. How does being a Black woman shape the way you mother?
2. Do you expect Black children to experience _____ [insert racism, discrimination, or whatever similar term they use]? How common do you believe it is for Black adolescents to experience _____ [racism or discrimination]?
3. How do you talk to your child(ren) about these expectations of _____?
4. Could you describe what lessons or information you want your child(ren) to receive from these conversations?
5. Could you describe a time your child(ren) experienced _____ (racism or discrimination)? How did you learn of their experience?
 - a. If no, Probe: Although they haven't experienced racial discrimination, do you still hold an expectation that they will? Why?
6. How do these expectations of _____ against Black children impact Black moms?

Part III (well-being and coping):

Lead-in : After discussing some of these experiences of Black adolescents, such as [insert example from what they have shared], I would consider these experiences to be forms of racism – acts or behaviors that continue inequality among Black people.

Would you agree with that statement?

1. How often do you think about your own child(ren) experiencing racism?
 - a. Probe: Could you describe what feelings come up when you think about it?
 - b. Probe: Describe how your body reacts or feels when you think/talk about these experiences?
2. Tell me how you would describe the impact of your child(ren)'s experiences of racism on your own health. (Emotional. Mental. Physical.) Are there particular instances that come to mind?
 - a. Probe: what impact would you say this has on your sleep?
 - b. Probe, if necessary: How often do you find yourself worrying?
 - c. Probe, if necessary: How often do you find it difficult to concentrate?
 - d. Probe: How often do you have feelings of sadness?
 - e. Probe, if necessary: How often have you found it difficult to make decisions?
 - f. Probe, if necessary: How often have you experienced feelings of guilt?
3. What do you believe evokes these feelings? Could tell me about a day where these feelings [previously described] were evident?
4. What helps you manage [previously stated feelings]? When is it easiest to manage? When is it most difficult to manage?
5. Who do you find most helpful to you during these times? How have they been helpful?
6. Are there any organizations or groups that are helpful? How have they been helpful?
7. What advice would you give to other Black moms who have (an) adolescent(s)?
8. Is there anything that you came up during this interview that you had not thought about before?
9. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand how children's experiences of racism impact Black mothers' well-being?
10. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

END