

#BlackMamasMatter: The Significance of Motherhood and Mothering for Low-Income
Black Single Mothers

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ABSTRACT

In the present neoliberal era, low-income Black single mothers receiving public assistance must grapple with heightened state surveillance, the devaluation of their mothering, trying to raise Black children in a racist society, and navigating the neoliberal economic system. This dissertation examines how, in light of all this, such women perceive themselves as mothers and what they identify as the greatest influences on their ability to carry out their mothering activities. It specifically investigates how they perceive their race as influencing their motherhood and how they perceive employment in relation to motherhood. Based on in-depth interviews with 21 low-income single Black mothers in Virginia, findings illustrate that the mothers in this study recognize and resist controlling images of low-income Black single motherhood, such as the “welfare queen” and the “baby mama,” and that a key aspect of their mothering activities is socializing their children around race and class. Findings also demonstrate that motherhood is a central identity for the women in this study and that they prioritize their motherhood identities over their work identities. In addition, in a departure from previous research on Black motherhood/mothering, findings show that the women in this study do not mother within dense networks of kin and community support.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Low-income Black single mothers receiving public assistance must grapple with heightened state surveillance, the devaluation of their mothering, trying to raise Black children in a racist society, and declining social welfare support. This dissertation examines how, in light of all this, such women perceive themselves as mothers and what they identify as the greatest influences on their ability to carry out their mothering activities. It specifically investigates how they perceive their race as influencing their motherhood and how they perceive employment in relation to motherhood. Based on in-depth interviews with 21 low-income Black single mothers in Virginia, findings illustrate that the mothers in this study recognize and resist stereotypes of low-income Black single motherhood, such as the “welfare queen” and the “baby mama,” and that a key aspect of their mothering activities is socializing their children around race and class. Findings also demonstrate that motherhood is a central identity for the women in this study and that they prioritize their motherhood identities over their work identities. In addition, in a departure from previous research on Black motherhood/mothering, findings show that the women in this study do not mother within dense networks of kin and community support.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the #BlackMamas across the globe. I see you. *We* see you. In the words of Tupac Shakur, “You are appreciated.”

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	1
Significance of Research	3
Overview of Chapters	4
II. Literature Review	6
Introduction	6
Black Women’s Work and Family Configurations: Historical Perspectives	6
Mothering While Black	9
Racial Socialization	12
Racial Socialization Practices of African American Mothers	14
Defining Motherhood and Mothering	15
Neoliberalism and Welfare Policies	23
Welfare Reform	25
Literature on Low-Income Women on Welfare	28
III. Methodology	32
Research Design	32
Table 1	33
Table 2	38
Data Analysis	41
Reflexivity/Reflexive Statement	42
IV. Mapping the Contours of Low-Income Black Single Mothers’ Identities and Experiences	48
Introduction	48
Mothering Activities	52
Neighborhoods/Communities	53
Daily Lives	63
Primary Obstacles	64
Experiences Receiving Social Services Benefits	65
Work and Mothering	66
Financial Barriers	69
Absent Fathers	70
Motherhood Identities	73
Conclusion	80
V. Navigating Racism and White Supremacy	84
Introduction	84
Origins of Controlling Images	84
Racial Survival/Racial Socialization	93
Controlling Images of Low-Income Black Single Mothers	94
Stereotypes in Action	96
Not Wanting to Be a “Statistic”	99
Strong Black Woman Schema as Resistance	102
Black Mothering in Action: Racial Survival/Racial Socialization	107
Racial Socialization as Gendered	114
Conclusion	119

VI. Conclusion	121
Contributions of the Present Study	121
Reflections on Findings	126
Limitations and Future Research	128
Policy Implications	129
References	130
Appendix A	140
Appendix B	146

I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout U.S. history, Black women have had to fight for their right to bear and mother their children in the face of social and institutional barriers (Collins 2000; Roberts 1997). Since slavery, Black women's mothering experiences have been shaped by the intersections of racism, sexism, and economic exploitation, which make their experiences markedly different from those of white women (Collins 1994). While contemporary white women may experience tension between their work and mothering responsibilities, Black women's employment has long been constitutive of their mothering (Arendell 2000). Black women's employment, for instance, has traditionally been essential to the survival of their families and communities, and thus Black women have often defined their employment as part of their mothering responsibilities (Arendell 2000; Collins 2000). When sociologists study low-income women's experiences managing employment and mothering, however, they often pay little attention (if any) to the distinctiveness of Black women's experiences (see, for instance, Hays 2003; Hennessy 2015).

Unlike white women, Black women have also often experienced a disconnection between their motherhood identity and their capacity to mother their children. For example, during slavery, Black women's children were often sold off to other plantations. Incarcerated Black women may also experience this disconnect, as their children are often taken from them immediately after birth (Yager 2015). Poor Black women, in general, are more subject to state surveillance and to having their children taken by the state, as they are often deemed unfit to be mothers (Roberts 2002). Because of this

disconnection, I draw a distinction between motherhood as an identity and mothering as a set of activities. I explain this distinction in more detail later in this dissertation.

Welfare reform, i.e., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), provides a framework in which to examine how low-income Black single mothers perceive their motherhood and mothering. In the contemporary era of neoliberalism, the state has significantly declined its support for social reproduction, while simultaneously emphasizing individual self-sufficiency and ramping up its surveillance and disciplining of poor communities (Peck and Tickell 2002). An upsurge in anti-racist activism (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter) also marks the contemporary moment, as Black people are fighting for the recognition of their personhood in the face of widespread state-sanctioned violence against Black bodies. Thus, low-income Black single mothers receiving public assistance face several challenges—the devaluation of their mothering, trying to raise Black children in a racist society, navigating the neoliberal economic system, and experiencing the heightened state surveillance that accompanies receiving public assistance. I am interested in how, in the face of these challenges, these mothers perceive themselves as mothers and workers. My research questions are as follows:

1. How do low-income Black single mothers interpret motherhood?
 - a. How, if at all, do they perceive their race as influencing their motherhood?
 - b. How do they perceive employment in relation to motherhood?
2. What do low-income Black single mothers identify as the greatest influences on their ability to carry out their mothering activities?
 - a. How, if at all, do they perceive their race as influencing their mothering?

- b. How, if at all, do they perceive employment as influencing their mothering?
- c. How, if at all, have their experiences with receiving public assistance affected their ability to carry out their mothering activities?

Significance of Research

This study offers several potential contributions to the scholarly literature on motherhood, Black feminism, low-income women on welfare, and work-family dynamics. First, this study disentangles motherhood and mothering, as for Black women, these concepts are historically and contemporarily distinct. Second, this study considers the significance of race, as it may impact the ways in which low-income Black single mothers interpret motherhood and mothering and the relationship between employment and motherhood/mothering, rather than treating all low-income single mothers as a unitary group. Third, this study challenges the dominant assumption in work-family literature that work and family exist in separate spheres (i.e., the public/private dichotomy), as for Black women, employment and mothering have historically been mutually constitutive (Arendell 2000; Collins 2000). Finally, this study attempts to empirically examine the aforementioned long-held claim that employment and mothering have been mutually constitutive for Black women by examining how low-income Black single mothers receiving public assistance perceive the relationship between employment and mothering and how, if at all, they perceive employment as influencing their mothering.

Overview of Chapters

In the next chapter, I provide an overview of the relevant literature to this study, summarizing key texts and arguments regarding Black women's work and family configurations throughout history; Black women's mothering experiences within the context of U.S. racism; racial socialization; motherhood and mothering; neoliberal welfare reform policies; TANF, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Medicaid requirements in Virginia; and low-income women on welfare. In chapter three, I detail the methodology, focused on semi-structured in-depth interviews with low-income Black single mothers, that I employed in this study (this includes a reflection on how my role as a Black woman may have shaped the research process). In chapter four, I describe and analyze my findings regarding the significance of motherhood as an identity for low-income Black single mothers and the key influences that they identify regarding their ability to carry out their mothering activities. This chapter also describes the context in which my participants mothered, specifically their neighborhoods, communities, and social ties, as some previous literature has pointed to dense networks that support Black women's mothering activities. Additionally, I discuss the obstacles they face to being able to mother their children in the way they want to and how they perceive paid work in relation to their motherhood identities and mothering activities. In chapter five, I discuss how these low-income Black single mothers perceive race as influencing their mothering, as this emerged as a central theme across my interviews. This includes how low-income Black single mothers recognize and resist controlling images of low-income Black single motherhood and how they socialize their children around race. In the conclusion chapter, I emphasize how this study both reinforces and diverges from the findings of previous

studies, ponder the conceptual distinction between motherhood as an identity and mothering as a set of activities, reflect on findings I had not anticipated, and discuss implications for future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, I contextualize my study by briefly summarizing relevant bodies of literature. I begin by providing the historical context of Black women's work and family configurations in the U.S. Next, I situate Black women's mothering experiences in the U.S. within the context of racism. Both of these discussions provide some insight into how race, class, and gender uniquely shape the experiences of low-income Black single mothers. Then, I provide an overview of literature on racial socialization, which further illustrates the significance of race in Black mothers' mothering practices and sets the context for chapter five's discussion of the ways in which low-income Black single mothers socialize their children around race. Following the discussion of racial socialization, I review literature on motherhood and mothering and provide my own definitions for these two terms. Subsequently, I place welfare reform policies within the context of neoliberalism, after which I provide an overview of TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid requirements in Virginia. Finally, I provide an overview of literature on low-income women on welfare and discuss how the present study diverges from previous similar studies.

Black Women's Work and Family Configurations: Historical Perspectives

Historically, Black women's major role in the political economy has been as workers, rather than mothers (Davis 1981). As Angela Davis (1981) writes in her book, *Women, Race, and Class*, "...In the eyes of the slaveholders, slave women were not mothers at all; they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor

force” (p. 7). During slavery, Black women’s reproductive bodies were only seen as valuable to the extent that they produced more slaves, and Black women’s caretaking was only seen as valuable in the context of caring for the slave master’s children (Davis 1981; Roberts 1997). Even when Black slave women became mothers, they were often denied the right to mother their own children, as their children were likely sold off to other plantations. Unlike elite white women, Black slave women also worked out in the fields alongside their men (Davis 1971). Indeed, even when they were pregnant, Black slave women were expected to do the same amount of labor in the fields as their male counterparts, (Davis 1971; Roberts 1997; Jones 1985). Sojourner Truth alluded to these realities in a renowned speech at the Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as any man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman? (Truth 1851, cited in Guy-Sheftall, ed. 1995: 36)

In this speech, Truth poignantly illustrated Davis’ (1971) assertion that “the ideology of femininity did not apply to Black women” during slavery (cited in Guy-Sheftall, ed. 1995:205). In many ways, this speech was one of the earliest formulations of Black Feminist theory, as Truth clearly articulated the outcomes of the intersection of racism and sexism (and class exploitation, implicitly) in Black women’s lives.

For Black mothers, the legacy of slavery continues in that their mothering experiences are largely shaped by racism, sexism, and economic exploitation (Collins 1994). Black women have historically played a large public role within their families and

communities. In their families, Black women often had to take on the role of primary breadwinner as Black men were unable to do so due to employment discrimination (Collins 2000; Goldin 1977). Hence, traditional definitions of family that presume a split between the “private” (women’s) sphere of unpaid household labor and the “public” (men’s) sphere of paid work outside the home did not necessarily apply to Black women (Collins 2000; see also Dill 1988). Black women’s experiences with motherhood, mothering, and employment in the U.S. are unique in the sense that for Black women, employment and mothering have in many ways traditionally been intertwined (Collins 2000). As Black women have always had to work, employment has been central to the performance of their role as mothers (Collins 2000; Glenn 1994). Additionally, for Black women, the role of mother often extends beyond that of mothering one’s own biological children, to serving as a mother in their communities at-large (Collins 1994; Gilkes 1980; Stack 1974).

Despite Black women’s extensive labors—for their families, communities, and employers—their mothering and care work have been pathologized. For instance, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, author of the 1965 report, “The Negro Family: A Case for National Action,” essentially accused Black women of emasculating Black men, and blamed them for the alleged downfall of the Black family, as well as for many of the social ills facing Black Americans at the time (Moynihan 1965; Traylor 2014). The pathologization of Black women’s mothering and care work is indicative of the longstanding assumption that “care labor is only properly carried out when it occurs within a self-sufficient male-headed household and that poor women’s and women of color’s unpaid caring for their families has little social value...” (Glenn 2010:162). This assumption has contributed to

the fact that, historically, poor women and women of color have been less likely to receive social support from the state (Glenn 2010). The devaluation of Black women's labor is evident in the fact that Black women have historically been (and still are) overrepresented in the lowest-paid, lowest status positions in the labor market, often in the service industry (Jones 1985; Collins 2000; Glenn 1992; Kessler Harris 1982).

Mothering While Black

State-sanctioned violence against Black bodies and surveillance of Black people are deeply embedded in the fabric of the U.S. As Hattery and Smith (2018) note, "Policing Black bodies is as deeply rooted in American history, culture, and ideology as democracy and 'The Star-Spangled Banner'" (p. 2). While recent cases of police and vigilante violence against Black bodies have garnered a lot of media attention (and rightfully so), it is important to recognize that policing Black bodies is not a recent phenomenon. In fact, the policing of Black bodies in the U.S. began when African slaves were brought to the U.S. as "chattel" to be sold like livestock (Hattery and Smith 2018; Jones 1985). The definitions of enslaved Africans as three-fifths of a person, according to the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787, coupled with their designation as chattel, "provided the ideological justification for the ultimate in policing Black bodies, both literally and symbolically" (Hattery and Smith 2018:5).

Since slavery, legislators have introduced laws such as Black codes, which were designed to control the movement and labor supply of newly freed slaves, and Jim Crow segregation to police and criminalize Black bodies (Hattery and Smith 2018; Oshinsky 1996). The legacy of such laws remains, for instance, in the form of residential

segregation, mass incarceration, and police violence against Black and brown people. For instance, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, in 2016, roughly 1,506,800 people were incarcerated in state or federal prisons in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Justice 2016). As of December 31, 2016, approximately 2.5% of the U.S. Black male population was incarcerated in state or federal prison (2,417 per 100,000). 18 to 19-year-old Black males were 11.8 times more likely to be incarcerated than their white male counterparts. In addition, although there were more white females in state and federal prison in 2016, the rate of incarceration for Black females (97 per 100,000) was nearly twice that for white females (49 per 100,000). 18-to-19-year-old Black females were 3.1 times more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts and 2.2 times more likely to be incarcerated than their Hispanic counterparts in 2016 (U.S. Department of Justice 2016).

Data on police killings of Black people demonstrate that Blacks are disproportionately killed by the police. For instance, although Blacks comprise only 13% of the U.S. population, in 2017, they comprised 23% of those who were killed by the police (Beer 2018). The proliferation of social media and recent social movements, such as the Movement for Black Lives, or #BlackLivesMatter, have been key in raising awareness about the ongoing nature of state-sanctioned violence against Black bodies. Three queer Black women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, founded the Movement for Black Lives after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a white vigilante who murdered Trayvon Martin, whom Zimmerman perceived to be a criminal who was out-of-place in his neighborhood in Sanford, Florida. Martin was an unarmed seventeen-year-old boy walking home from the store wearing a hoodie and carrying a bag of

Skittles and a bottle of Arizona tea. His death and Zimmerman's acquittal incited protests across the country and the world (Botelho 2012; Simon 2017).

A couple of years after Trayvon Martin's death, Tamir Rice, a twelve-year-old boy carrying a BB gun, was shot and killed by a white police officer in Cleveland, Ohio (Izadi and Holley 2014). While police and vigilante violence against Black boys and men tends to dominate headlines, Black women (cis and trans) also face high rates of racist and gendered violence at the hands of police, vigilantes, and intimate partners. A recent case that dominated headlines is that of a 14-year-old girl at a pool party in a suburb of Dallas, Texas who was restrained with her face on the ground by a police officer who also had his knee on her back. The incident occurred after police were called to respond to a disturbance in the neighborhood. Video footage of the incident also shows the officer waving his handgun at other partygoers who approached him as he was restraining the young girl (Cole-Frowe and Fausset 2015). The police officer's treatment of the young girl in this case illustrates that Black girls are criminalized in ways similar to Black boys; however, in addition to the threat of racist violence, Black girls also disproportionately face the threat of sexual violence.

Cases such as these illustrate that Black children are not seen as children in the same way that white children are. Unlike white children who are presumed innocent, Black children are presumed to be "bad" or to be criminals at a very young age. Even when white children (white male children, in particular) commit heinous crimes, such as mass shootings or other violent hate crimes, their personhood remains legible in journalistic accounts and legal proceedings. As Cacho (2012) explains:

...The youthification of the white male as victim trope encourages reading 'the dominating and prohibitive behaviors that boys/men often enact on others' as

‘further proof of their own vulnerability, suffering, and need for compassion from our culture’ (citing Kusz 2001). In other words, even unsympathetic or neutral portrayals can be interpreted as more evidence of white male youths’ innocence (p. 54).

Black male children on the other hand are presumed to inherently be criminals and thus unworthy of sympathy and incapable of redemption (Cacho 2012).

Preparing their children to navigate living in a racist, white supremacist society has historically been a key aspect of Black mothering (Collins 1994; Barnes 2016a, 2016b). As Smith (2016) argues:

Black mothers bear a unique burden under the weight of anti-Black state violence not because they are the idyllic symbols of maternal purity, loss or innocence, but because they are the enemies of the state—subjects that challenge the ideology of anti-Blackness, which undergirds the state’s structure...Global anti-Black genocide has a *gendered* impact on Black mothers because of the explicit relationship between Black mothering and the production and proliferation of Black life (p. 32; emphasis hers).

In this sense, Black mothers stand in direct opposition to the state, as they create Black life, while the state (in the form of anti-Black state violence) seeks to destroy it (Smith 2016). In the face of horrific anti-Black state violence, Black mothers are unfortunately unable to ensure their children’s survival, which presents a unique dilemma for them. As they struggle to navigate this dilemma, they must figure out ways to prepare their children to cope with racism and discrimination.

Racial Socialization

Psychologists developed the concept of racial socialization (also referred to as *ethnic socialization*) to describe “the mechanisms through which parents transmit information, values, and perspectives about ethnicity and race to their children” (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, and Spicer 2006:747). The study of racial

socialization stems from scholars' interest in examining how African-American parents preserve a high sense of self-esteem in their children and help them understand systemic racism in the U.S. (Hughes et al. 2006). Often, racial socialization occurs in the form of African-American parents' conversations with their children (Hughes et al. 2006). Conversations with children around race and racism are often gendered, meaning African-American parents socialize their male and female children differently around race. When socializing their female children, conversations tend to focus on racial pride, heterosexual relationships, independence, and physical beauty, while conversations with male children tend to focus on racial barriers and self-protection (Hughes et al. 2006; Thomas and King 2007).

Hughes and colleagues (2006) emphasize four major themes that arise out of empirical research on racial/ethnic socialization: *cultural socialization*, or the practices parents engage in to educate their children about their racial/ethnic heritage and promote pride in their children's race/ethnicity and culture; *preparation for bias*, or the ways in which parents teach their children about and prepare them to navigate racial discrimination; *promotion of mistrust*, or parents' attempts to warn their children about the need to be suspicious of other racial groups and their cautions to their children about racial barriers to success; and *egalitarianism* and *silence about race*, or parents encouraging their children to focus on their individual qualities rather than their membership in a particular racial group and/or avoiding the topic of race with their children entirely.

Racial Socialization Practices of African American Mothers

In their study examining the relationships between mothers' and adolescents' accounts of racial/ethnic socialization and adolescents' racial/ethnic identity based on a sample of Black, Puerto Rican, Dominican, or Chinese sixth graders and their mothers, Hughes, Hagelskamp, Way, and Foust (2009) found that both adolescents and their mothers were more likely to report cultural socialization than preparation for bias, indicating that mothers tend to focus more on positive aspects of their racial/ethnic background and cultural heritage than racial discrimination and stratification, which parallels the findings of previous studies (e.g., Hughes and Chen 1997; McHale, Crouter, Burton, Davis, Dotterer, et al. 2006; Phinney and Chavira 1995). They found that Black mothers, however, discussed racial discrimination more often than mothers from other racial/ethnic backgrounds in the sample, which may be because Black mothers experience and/or perceive racial discrimination more often or at a deeper level than mothers from other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Edwards and Few-Demo (2016) found that African American mothers' racial socialization practices with their preschool children center around two themes: *Motherwork as Conscientization* and *Doing African American Mothering*. The first theme, *Motherwork as Conscientization*, focuses on the conscious choices that African American mothers make regarding how they will intercede when their children encountered racial messaging that countered the positive racialized and gendered messages that they wanted to instill in them. Paralleling Hughes et al.'s (2009) findings, this study also found that African American mothers engaged most often in cultural and egalitarian socialization than preparation for bias. For instance, they often used colorblind

language with their children, such as “we’re all the same” and “be nice to everyone” (p. 64). They also read their children books about prominent African American figures, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. With their daughters, they engaged in gendered cultural socialization, as they gave them African American dolls and attempted to bolster their self-esteem by telling them they are pretty and “providing alternate beauty scripts” (p. 64). Nevertheless, mothers also engaged in preparation for bias, as they described teaching their sons how to deal with racism and how to present themselves in a certain way in order to avoid being stereotyped as a “thug” or a criminal (p. 64). The second theme, *Doing African American Mothering*, focuses on African American mothers’ thoughts about how raising African American children impacted their perceptions of motherhood. Mothers often referenced stereotypes about African American mothers, such as the “angry mother,” “welfare mother,” and “promiscuous mother” in their responses.

Defining Motherhood and Mothering

One of the first second-wave feminist scholars to theorize extensively about motherhood was Adrienne Rich in her seminal book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (originally published in 1976; reprinted in 1986). In this book, Rich distinguishes between two meanings of motherhood: “(1) the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and (2) the *institution* which aims at ensuring that that potential—and all women—shall remain under patriarchal control” (Rich 1986:13, emphasis in text). While Rich does not draw a clear distinction between *motherhood* and *mothering*, other scholars have built on her definition to distinguish between *motherhood* as an oppressive social institution rooted in patriarchy

and *mothering* as “women’s experiences of mothering that are female-defined and centered and potentially empowering to women” (O’Reilly, ed. 2004:2). The latter definition of mothering gives women agency to define mothering for themselves outside of patriarchal norms and provides room for variability in how women experience mothering. For instance, mothering for African-American women has historically been a site of resistance and empowerment (Dill 1988; O’Reilly, ed. 2004; Rodriguez 2016). As Black children have been deemed inherently unlovable and inferior to white children, the simple act of a Black mother (who is also denigrated in her own right) loving a Black child is an act of resistance (O’Reilly, ed. 2004). While mothering may serve as a site of agency for women in certain contexts, women nevertheless mother against the backdrop of a patriarchal social structure that is also racialized and classed.

Rich’s (1986) work has served as a foundation for subsequent scholars to theorize about motherhood as an institution embedded in patriarchal norms. Nevertheless, she did not attend very much to race and class differences among women. Though O’Reilly (2004) expands Rich’s (1986) definition of motherhood to include a separate definition for mothering, her definitions of motherhood and mothering do not specify the significance of race or class. In her study of formerly incarcerated Black mothers, Traylor (2014) draws on Rich (1986) as she defines motherhood as a “social identity and role for women...that is embedded within patriarchal social arrangements in US society, which privileges men over women in the social hierarchy” (p. 16) and mothering as “the actuated processes linked to women’s gender role, lived experiences, and actuated tasks performed as a mother” (p. 16). While Traylor’s (2014) work centers the experiences of

formerly incarcerated Black mothers, the definitions of motherhood and mothering that she provides unfortunately do not allude to race or class.

Since Rich originally published *Of Woman Born* in 1976, however, many scholars have theorized about the mothering experiences of women of color (see for instance, Barnes 2016a, 2016b; Collins 1994, 2000; Dill 1988; Gonzalez 2004; Reynolds 2001). While there has been a great deal of scholarship on Black women and motherhood and mothering, to date, scholars have not reconceptualized motherhood and mothering in the way that I seek to do. Black feminist scholarship on Black women and motherhood and mothering has been foundational in challenging the pathologization of Black motherhood and mothering, as well as in challenging the public/private dichotomy that predominates in literatures on work and family (see, for instance, Collins 1994; Dill 1988). For instance, Black feminist scholars have long argued that Black women's motherhood/mothering experiences are tied to the overarching concerns of their communities (Collins 1994; Barnes 2016b). Patricia Hill Collins (1994) used the term "motherwork" to "soften the existing dichotomies in feminist theorizing about motherhood that posit rigid distinctions between private and public, family and work, the individual and collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing from the collective self-determination of one's group" (p. 48). Preparing their children and their racial-ethnic communities to navigate racism and thrive in a racist society is central to Black women's mothering (Collins 1994; Barnes 2016a, 2016b).

Studies have also examined Black mothers' relationship with paid work. In her study of 23 upper-middle-class Black women in Atlanta, Riché J. Daniel Barnes (2016) found that Black women often engage in "race-work," or racial uplifting, as a means of

ensuring the survival and thriving of their own children and the Black community. She also found that Black women employ a strategy she terms “strategic mothering,” in which they “continuously navigate and redefine their relationship with work to best fit the needs of their families and their communities” (Barnes 2016a; Barnes 2016b, p. 50). While her work focuses on upper-middle-class Black mothers, Black mothers of all class backgrounds experience racism and must negotiate the effects of racism on their own lives as well as those of their children, families, and communities. In addition, low-income Black mothers may live in impoverished, racially segregated neighborhoods, public housing projects, and other contexts where community needs are extensive.

As I noted earlier, the public/private dichotomy that predominates in sociological literatures on work and family does not necessarily sufficiently capture Black women’s experiences, as Black women have always had to work in the U.S., and thus their paid work and mothering have in many ways been intertwined (Arendell 2000; Collins 2000; Reynolds 2001). In her study of 20 Black mothers in Britain, Reynolds (2001) found that Black women occupy a “mother/worker” status in which Black women’s status as workers predominates. As she notes, Black women’s decision to work full-time is often shaped by economic and structural constraints, as well as racial and gender discrimination in the labor market (Reynolds 2001). Black women’s decision to work full-time may also stem from high rates of Black male unemployment (largely a result of racial discrimination) (Reynolds 2001). Reynolds’ study illustrates that for Black women, the decision to work full-time or stay at home with their children is often a complex, multifaceted one shaped by a variety of structural and cultural factors (Reynolds 2001). Similarly, Gonzalez (2004) found that Black mothers on welfare who stayed at home

with their children did so out of necessity, for lack of childcare, having a large family, or living in an unsafe neighborhood. However, rather than understanding paid employment and stay-at-home mothering as existing in separate spheres, the women in her study understood both as part of their duties as mothers (Gonzalez 2004).

Like the mothers in Gonzalez's (2004) study, most of the mothers in Dean, Marsh, and Landry's (2013) study did not experience work and family as in conflict with one another, but rather, they saw their roles as worker and mother as complementary. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 31 Black middle-class mothers and their spouses and building on Blair-Loy's (2003) schemas of work and family devotion, the authors develop the concept of "work-family integration" to describe the way in which most of the mothers in their study were able to incorporate the dual roles of worker and mother "into a meaningful, multidimensional view of Black womanhood" (p. 137). These studies illustrate that while Black mothers (of all social classes) may experience a certain amount of work-family conflict, their experienced are uniquely shaped by race, class, and gender.

I employ a Black Feminist perspective when conceptualizing motherhood and mothering, as Black Feminism specifies the necessity of considering race and class differences when examining women's experiences, rather than treating women as a unitary group (Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989) Building on the distinction Traylor draws between motherhood and mothering, as well as the work of Chodorow (1978), Rich (1986), Hays (1996), O'Reilly (2004), and others, I define motherhood as a gendered social identity that is also race- and class- specific and mothering as a set of gendered, racialized, and classed social activities expected of mothers in specific social and historical contexts.

Mothering is a gendered set of activities in that it rests on a gendered division of labor (Chodorow 1978; Glenn 1994). As Glenn (1994) explains, “Mothering and gender are closely intertwined: each is a constitutive element of the other” (p. 4). While it is not only women who nurture and perform care work, women primarily do this work, thus mothering is associated with women (Arendell 2000). I use the term “work” when describing mothering, as it involves “a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people” (Forcey 1994:357). Motherhood, by contrast, encompasses a gendered social identity (Chodorow 1978; Hays 1996; Traylor 2014). Furthermore, motherhood and mothering practices are variable. It is important to note that motherhood as a social identity and mothering activities are not tied exclusively to those who give birth to their own biological children; they also include being a mother to adopted children and the role of “other mothers,” i.e., African-American women who often take on the social and/or political role of mother in their communities (Gilkes 1980; Naples 1996).

Thus, I aim to disentangle motherhood from mothering conceptually, as for Black women, there may be a disconnection between motherhood as a social identity and mothering as a set of activities. As noted above, Black women who identify as mothers have often been denied the right to enact that identity by mothering their own children. Dating back to slavery, Black women’s children were often sold away to other plantations, while they may have been forced to care for their slavemaster’s children. In that instance, they performed mothering activities, albeit for someone else’s children, and in the context of slavery. In the Post-Bellum period, Black women often worked as domestic workers in white homes, caring for their white employer’s children, often

working long hours, which took them away from their own children (Collins 1994; Rollins 1985; Dill 1988). Black women are also disproportionately subject to state violence and surveillance and to having their children taken away from them by the state (Roberts 2002; 2012). In addition, Black children are disproportionately taken from their mothers by the child welfare system, often because their mothers live in poverty and conditions in which the state deems inadequate to raise children (Roberts 2002; 2012). Rather than addressing the structural issues that create poverty, however, Child Protective Services will remove children from their homes and place them in foster care (Roberts 2002; 2012). Incarcerated Black women may be denied the right to see their children at all, and in many cases, are even shackled to the hospital bed while giving birth, after which their children are immediately taken from them and they are returned to prison (Flavin 2009; Yager 2015). These examples illustrate that when examining the experiences and perceptions of Black mothers, it is important to disentangle motherhood and mothering, as for Black women, they are historically and contemporarily distinct.

Despite such race-specific variability, motherhood and mothering have often been conceptualized in essentialist terms. Glenn (1994) argues that the gendered distribution of mothering may account for why it “has been subject to essentialist interpretation: seen as natural, universal, and unchanging” (p. 3). She continues,

Indeed, for most of the twentieth century an idealized model of motherhood, derived from the situation of the white, American, middle class, has been projected as universal. In this model, responsibility for mothering rests almost exclusively on one woman (the biological mother), for whom it constitutes the primary if not sole mission during the child’s formative years. The corollary view of children is that they require constant care and attention from one caretaker (the biological mother) (p. 3).

This “idealized model of mothering” to which Glenn (1994) refers is that of intensive mothering (Arendell 2000; Hays 1996). Intensive mothering is a child-centered, emotionally demanding and labor-intensive ideology that emphasizes that child-rearing is the (biological) mother’s primary responsibility (Arendell 2000; Hays 1996). The mothering of women of color, however, has often diverged from the dominant model (Glenn 1994). For instance, as African-American women were brought to the United States to serve as a source of exploitable labor, they were seen primarily as workers, rather than as mothers (Glenn 1994; Dill 1988; Jones 1985; Gemelli 2008). As such, scholars examining the mothering practices of women of color have argued for the importance of moving beyond essentialist understandings of mothering (e.g., Glenn 1994; Dill 1998; Collins 1994). The assumption underlying the traditional gendered division of labor is that all women have experienced the division between the public and private sphere in the same way. Women of color, however, often employed as domestic workers or in low-level service positions in institutions, “were not expected or allowed to be full-time mothers; nor did their circumstances allow them even to harbor the illusion of a protected private haven” (Glenn 1994:5-6). Furthermore, Black women, regardless of marital status and class, have historically worked at higher rates than white women in both the public and private spheres (Glenn 1994, Kessler Harris 1982). While Black women often performed care work outside of their own homes, their own mothering and care work responsibilities have been devalued.

In the U.S., dominant ideologies of mothering are also interwoven with dominant ideals of the family (Arendell 2000). Dorothy Smith (1993) argues that the ideological code of the Standard North American Family (SNAF), which idealizes the white, middle-

class, heteropatriarchal nuclear family, frames the way we conceive of the institution of family in the U.S. Historically, this type of family has received the majority of support and protection from policymakers and legislators as it is considered the lifeblood of American society (Dill 1988). Conversely, low-income women of color are often deemed unsuitable for mothering, and their children undesirable members of society; on both counts, they are therefore penalized. For instance, through legislation and policies, such as sterilization abuse, coercive birth control, and welfare reform, policymakers have, in effect, deemed Black women's mothering (particularly that of poor Black women) a social ill to be curtailed (Roberts 1997). In these ways, Black women's experiences of mothering and motherhood vary from dominant ideals, and thus require a Black Feminist perspective to illuminate.

Neoliberalism and Welfare Policies

Neoliberal policies and practices, including the “roll-back” or dismantlement of social welfare programs and the deregulation of labor markets, have exacerbated the precarious conditions facing the most marginalized members of society (i.e., poor people, women, and people of color) (Peck and Tickell 2002). Nevertheless, there is an expectation that individuals should “fend for themselves” and not rely on the state for social support (Harvey 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002). At the same time, neoliberalization involves increased regulation, disciplining, and surveillance of marginalized groups, a phenomenon that Peck and Tickell (2002) refer to as “roll-out” neoliberalism. In many ways, welfare reform policies are an example of roll-out neoliberalism, as these policies are essentially a mode of disciplining the poor (Peck and Tickell 2002; Piven and

Cloward 1993). Under neoliberalism, receiving welfare benefits has become part of a market relationship in which welfare recipients must exchange their labor to receive benefits (Schram, Soss, Houser, and Fording 2010; Weigt 2006). Some scholars argue that the most recent “welfare restructuring” process mirrors previous restructuring processes in that one of the major purposes of this restructuring is to serve capitalism’s interests, namely “insuring an insecure, available workforce” (Weigt 2006:337; see also Piven and Cloward 1993). For instance, a major emphasis of welfare-to-work programs is providing low-wage workers for the global economy through disciplinary mechanisms that enforce proper behavior (Schram et al. 2010).

As an example of roll-out neoliberalism, welfare reform policies are also indicative of neoliberal governmentality in that they require welfare recipients to discipline themselves into being good “neoliberal subjects” (Brown 2005; Schram, Soss, Fording, and Houser 2009; Schram et al. 2010). The concept of governmentality, stemming from the work of Michel Foucault, refers to methods of governing that surpass traditional modes of rule by the state, and influence the way individuals behave and view themselves (Brown 2005; Foucault 1978; cited in Gordon 1991). Neoliberalism functions as a form of governmentality in that its aim is to produce rational subjects who are responsible for their own self-preservation (Brown 2005; Foucault 1978, cited in Gordon 1991). Good neoliberal subjects are essentially rational actors who weigh the costs and benefits of their actions, and who take responsibility for those actions, no matter the consequences (Brown 2005). Under TANF, for instance, benefits are temporary, and recipients of TANF must illustrate that they are employed or currently searching for employment to remain eligible to receive benefits (Monnat 2010; Schram, et al. 2009). If

the state determines that a TANF recipient is not complying with these requirements, the recipient may be sanctioned (Monnat 2010). In this way, TANF requirements operate as a disciplinary mechanism of policing the poor (Schram, et al. 2009).

While welfare programs have always functioned as a means of disciplining the poor, this practice now reflects a neoliberal paternalism that is different from the past (Schram, Soss, Houser, and Fording 2010). According to Schram et al. (2010), “Under the ‘new paternalism,’ welfare provision has adopted a more overt and muscular approach to using direction, surveillance, instruction and penalty as therapeutic tools for transforming the subjectivities of the poor” (p. 740). Another key shift in the disciplinary project of welfare systems is that they have become more intermingled with carceral systems, with an emphasis on punishment and control, which is indicative of the contemporary era of mass incarceration (Schram et al. 2010).

Welfare Reform

Welfare reform elucidates the complicated relationship between motherhood, mothering, and employment for Black women. With the emphasis on paid work, welfare reform foregrounds employment for all low-income women receiving TANF benefits in a way that the mandate to work has been historically foregrounded for Black women. As such, all low-income women receiving TANF benefits must comply with the work requirements. In Virginia, for instance, for a recipient to remain eligible under TANF, recipients must participate in the Virginia Independence Program (VIP) (Becoat, Federspiel, and Young N.d.). One of the components of VIP is the Virginia Initiative for Employment Not Welfare (VIEW), which maintains that participants must “be employed

or engaged in a work activity” (Virginia Department of Social Services 2009: iv). TANF participants are required to participate in VIEW unless they meet an exemption. To remain eligible for benefits, recipients must enter a work activity within 90 days of receiving TANF (Virginia Department of Social Services 2009). VIEW participants are required to partake in a work activity for at least 30 hours a week. The following activities qualify as work activities: “employment, job readiness classes (classes to help with resumes and interview skills), training for a specific job (e.g. medical tech, car repair, computer tech), On the Job training, and high school education or GED” (Jones N.d.:9).

In addition to enforcing the ideal of being an independent wage earner, VIP requirements also enforce dominant ideals of mothering and the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. As such, primary goals of TANF include promoting marriage and preventing “nonmarital births” (Becoat et al. N.d.:3). To reach this goal, Virginia funds several initiatives that work to discourage out-of-wedlock pregnancy and promote abstinence education (Becoat et al. N.d.). Other parenting-related requirements include verifying paternity, ensuring that children attend school regularly, immunizing children, and prohibiting cash payments for children born 10 months after the onset of a mother receiving TANF cash benefits (Becoat et al. n.d.). The latter requirements, including the “family cap” on childrearing ten months after TANF begins, are indicative of the policing of poor women’s reproduction and mothering.

In her book, *Welfare Reform and Sexual Regulation*, Anne Marie Smith (2007) argues that requiring low-income women on welfare to establish paternity, a practice she refers to as “paternafare,” is a form of biopolitics. She explains,

Compulsory paternity identification and child support enforcement systems register the poor in a governmental database such that they can be easily tracked, definitively identified with state-of-the-art biometrics, pinpointed in the seamlessly connected public and private networks, and physically hauled into court. In a sense, paternafare creates an opportunity for the State to attach radio frequency identification tags to poor women, men, and children alike (p. 9).

Essentially, Smith is arguing that TANF's mandatory paternity identification requirement and system of enforcing child support serve as means of state surveillance of the poor. In Virginia, TANF participants who do not meet the requirements of VIP will be sanctioned, meaning their benefits will be cut. Sanctions are the official form of punishment for those who do not comply with TANF's requirements. VIP's emphasis on "personal responsibility" and self-sufficiency (i.e., not relying on state support) is indicative of the proliferation of neoliberal policies and practices, including the decline of social welfare supports and the disciplining of the poor and other marginalized groups (Harvey 2005; Peck and Tickell 2002; Piven and Cloward 1993).

While the requirements for remaining eligible for TANF are quite rigid, requirements for remaining eligible for other Social Services benefits programs, such as SNAP and Medicaid, are less strict. For instance, to be eligible to receive SNAP benefits, an applicant's gross monthly income must be at or below 130 percent of the poverty line, which, for a household of four, equals \$2,720. Similar to TANF, there are also work requirements that participants must meet in order to remain eligible to receive SNAP, which include "Registering for work; Not voluntarily quitting a job or reducing hours; Taking a job if offered; and Participating in employment and training programs, if assigned by the State" (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2018). If applicants and/or participants do not meet these requirements, they may lose their eligibility to receive SNAP benefits. In Virginia, the SNAP Employment and Training Program (SNAPET)

accompanies SNAP (Virginia Department of Social Services 2017). According to the Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) website, participation in SNAPET is voluntary, however:

...Those individuals who are not exempt from work registration and who have their benefits time-limited have an opportunity to extend SNAP by choosing to participate in the SNAPET program, where offered. Not participating can prevent SNAP recipients from receiving services that could help them find and keep employment” (Virginia Department of Social Services 2017:n.p.).

Prior to the 2018 expansion of Medicaid in Virginia, to be eligible to receive Medicaid benefits, parents’ income could not exceed 33% of the poverty line, or \$6,900. After the expansion of Medicaid, parents’ income must be at or below 138% of the poverty line or \$28,700 (Department of Medical Assistance Services 2019). While the above requirements for SNAP and Medicaid may seem strict, there are no parenting-related regulations (e.g., to verify paternity, immunize children, ensure that children attend school regularly, etc.) as there are with TANF.

Literature on Low-Income Women on Welfare

The literature on low-income women on welfare centers largely around how they balance work and family while attempting to comply with TANF’s policies and how they respond to welfare reform’s cultural prescriptions (Gemelli 2008; Hays 2003; Morgen, Acker, and Weigt 2010; Weigt 2006; for a review of much of this literature, see Hennessy 2015). While many mothers struggle to balance paid work with mothering responsibilities, low-income single mothers on welfare face a unique set of constraints (Hennessy 2015; Morgen, Acker, and Weigt 2010). In Hays’ (2003) landmark study of the experiences of low-income women post-welfare reform, she examines the responses

of welfare recipients and caseworkers to the competing visions of work and family under welfare reform, which she refers to as the “Work Plan” and the “Family Plan.” The Work Plan consists of work requirements that are intended to encourage welfare recipients to become “self-sufficient, independent, productive members of society” (p. 19). Hays argues that the Work Plan essentially punishes mothers for failing to fulfill traditional ideals of family (i.e., the heteropatriarchal nuclear family model). She writes:

In the Work Plan we offer women lots of temporary subsidies for childcare, transportation, and training, to make it possible for them to climb a career ladder that will allow them to support themselves and, presumably, their children. No longer dependent on men or the state, these women will make their own choices about marriage and children. According to the Family Plan, work requirements will teach women a lesson; they’ll come to know better than to get divorced or to have children out of wedlock. They will learn that their duty is to control their fertility, to get married, to stay married, and to dedicate themselves to the care of others (p. 19).

Interestingly, she found that low-income mothers on welfare often supported welfare reform, as they emphasized the importance of being “self-sufficient” and not relying on the state for social support. Similarly, Weigt (2006) found that low-income single mothers leaving welfare often internalize dominant discourses around what it means to be a good worker and a good mother, rather than understanding their experiences as they are situated within larger structural inequalities.

While the studies discussed above have illuminated the struggles that low-income women on welfare face to balance paid work and family commitments and how they respond to the requirements of welfare reform, they unfortunately tend to pay scant attention to the role that race plays in the ways these women experience the relationship between work and family responsibilities and how they respond to welfare reform’s requirements. One example of a study that attends to race in relation to how low-income

single mothers on welfare balance work and family and how they perceive some of the requirements of welfare reform is Gemelli's (2008) study of twelve low-income single mothers in Portland, Oregon. She examined their perceptions of certain aspects of welfare reform, specifically, the Marriage Promotion Act, which as she points out, seems to undermine welfare reform's emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence (which is similar to Hays' discussion of the contradictions between the Work and Family Plans of welfare reform). Unlike other similar studies, she briefly acknowledged the role that race played in the way in which the women she interviewed understood their ability to manage paid work and mothering. Some of the African American women in her study identified race "as a barrier to finding decent employment and as a way to have the role of mother be devalued" (p. 106). Nevertheless, her sample was mostly white, with only four African American participants and one Hispanic participant. While she mentioned the structural constraints faced by women due to race, she did not center race in her analysis.

Building on the work of Gemelli (2008), Hays (2003), and others (e.g., Fraser and Gordon 1994; Hancock 2004; Monnat 2010; Piven and Cloward 1993; Weigt 2006), this study elucidates the ways in which the intersection of race, class, and gender shapes the attitudes and experiences of low-income Black single mothers who are receiving or (who have received) Social Services benefits. As mentioned earlier, most of the literature on low-income women on welfare centers on their individual, intra-household tensions between paid work and family responsibilities and their experiences adapting to the constraints of welfare reform (e.g., Hays 2003; Hennessy 2015). The present study departs from these previous studies by focusing less on the experiences of low-income women with the social welfare system and more on how they perceives themselves as

mothers and how the racialized, classed, and gendered experience of being a low-income Black single mother on public assistance shapes their motherhood identities and mothering activities.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for my study is informed by the general goal of my research, which is to understand how low-income Black single mothers interpret motherhood and mothering. In that sense, my project is interpretive in that I am seeking to understand motherhood and mothering from the perspective of low-income Black single mothers (Bailey 2007). As such, a Black Feminist epistemology lies at the core of my project, as I aim to center the voices, experiences, and ways of knowing of low-income Black single mothers (Collins 2000). The intersection of the race, gender, and class of my participants shapes their experiences and identities as mothers in unique ways. Using an intersectional, Black Feminist lens to examine their experiences and their perceptions of their identities as mothers illuminates the distinctiveness of low-income Black single motherhood and why it is important to center race in our analyses of motherhood. This study also contributes to Black feminist literature on motherhood/mothering that aims to de-pathologize Black single motherhood and mothering. Finally, I aim to challenge dominant work/family literatures in sociology which tend to treat low-income women as a unitary group.

Research Design

As my goal is to understand how low-income Black single mothers receiving public assistance interpret motherhood and mothering, my primary method of data collection was semi-structured in-depth interviews with 21 low-income Black single mothers who participate in or who have participated in Social Services benefits programs, such as TANF, SNAP, or Medicaid, in Southwest and Central Virginia. I conducted all

but one of my interviews in person, either at the participant’s home or at another location of their choosing, such as a library, book store, or fast food restaurant; one interview was conducted via Skype. Interviews lasted an average of one hour, and centered around my research questions (see Appendix A for interview guide). See table 1(below) for an illustration of how I operationalized my research questions into interview questions.

Table 1. Research Questions Operationalized into Interview Questions.

<p>Demographic and Contextual Questions</p>	<p>Just to confirm, you identify as a Black/African American woman. Is that correct?</p> <p>When were you born?</p> <p>Have you ever been married?</p> <p>I would like to ask some questions that will help me get to know you a little better. Tell me about yourself.</p> <p>Where did you grow up? [if they say multiple places] Do you feel like any one place is home? [If they say one place] Does that place still feel like home? What makes that place feel like home?</p> <p>Tell me about the community in which you grew up.</p> <p>Who were the main people who took care of you when you were growing up?</p> <p>Where do you currently live? Tell me about your neighborhood.</p> <p>Probes: How long have you lived there? Do you feel safe there? Are there grocery stores in your neighborhood? If so, what types? Do you have family and friends in the area? [If yes] who?</p>
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	<p>How many children do you have?</p> <p>How old are they?</p> <p>Probes: Are they living with you?</p> <p>Are they currently in school (pre-school or K-12)?</p> <p>Are there places for your child(ren) to play in your neighborhood?</p> <p>How far is your child(ren)'s school from where you live?</p> <p>Are you currently working? [If so] Where do you work?</p> <p>[If so] How far is your job from where you live? Do you have reliable transportation there?</p> <p>What days and hours do you work?</p> <p>Is your schedule set or does it vary from week-to-week? [If the schedule varies] When do you know what your schedule will be for the coming week?</p> <p>I'm trying to get a sense of how you manage all the things you have to do in a day. Can you describe what you did yesterday, starting with when you first got up?</p> <p>Probes (examples): What time did you wake up?</p> <p>How long did it take to get your child(ren) ready for school/daycare?</p> <p>[If they talk about going somewhere] How long did it take to get there? How did you get there? How long did you spend there?</p>
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	<p>Who took care of your child(ren) while you were there?</p> <p>What time did you get home? What did you do when you got home? [May follow-up with other probes and/or detour (or return to some points) to get more information]</p> <p>Is this what a typical day is like or was this unusual? [if the latter] What made it unusual?</p> <p>What is a typical day like?</p> <p>What types of Social Services benefits do you (or have you) receive(d)/participate(d) in (e.g., TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, Head Start)?</p> <p>Depending on what types of benefits they receive (or have received)/programs they participate in (or have participated in)]</p> <p>When did you first start receiving/participating in [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head Start]? How long have you been [or were you] receiving/participating in [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head Start]? Have you been on/participating in [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head Start] more than once? Tell me about that.</p> <p>I'm going to give you some annual/yearly income ranges. Which of the following ranges includes your annual/yearly income:</p> <p>Under \$10,000; \$10,000 - \$15,000; \$15,000 - \$20,000; \$20,000 - \$25,000; \$25,000 - \$30,000; \$30,000 - \$35,000; \$35,000 - \$45,000; \$45,000 - \$50,000; over \$50,000?</p>
<p>How do low-income Black single mothers interpret motherhood?</p>	<p>What does being a mother mean to you?</p> <p>How do you think your life would be different if you were not a mother?</p>
<p>How, if at all, do they perceive their race as influencing their motherhood?</p>	<p>What does it mean to you to be a Black mother?</p>

	<p>What does it mean to you to be a mother to a Black child?</p> <p>Do you think your responsibilities as a mother to a Black child are any different from the responsibilities of mothers of White children? Tell me about that.</p> <p>Do you think your responsibilities as a mother to a Black child are any different from the responsibilities of <i>fathers</i> of Black children? Tell me about that.</p> <p>Overall, how, if at all, do you think your race impacts how you think of yourself as a mother?</p>
<p>How do they perceive employment in relation to motherhood?</p>	<p>Do you think that having a job is part of your responsibilities as a mother? Why or why not?</p>
<p>What do low-income Black single mothers identify as the greatest influences on their ability to carry out their mothering activities?</p>	<p>What, if any, obstacles/barriers have you faced to being able to mother your children in the ways you wanted to?</p> <p>Have you ever been separated from your children for an extended period of time? [If so] Tell me about that experience. [If so] how did you handle that?</p>
<p>How, if at all, do they perceive their race as influencing their mothering?</p>	<p>[If race is not mentioned] How, if at all, do you think your race impacts your ability to mother your children in the ways you want to?</p>
<p>How, if at all, do they perceive employment as influencing their mothering?</p>	<p>How do you [or how have you, if they do not currently have a job] manage(d) the demands of your job(s) with the demands of your child(ren)?</p> <p>Has there ever been a time when your work schedule conflicted with something you wanted to do with your child(ren)? How did you handle that?</p>
<p>How, if at all, have their experiences with receiving public assistance affected their ability to carry out their mothering activities?</p>	<p>What types of rules do you have to follow being on/participating in [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head Start]? How do you feel about them?</p>

	<p>Probe: Has following these rules ever caused any problems for you?</p> <p>Have you ever been denied [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid] or had it taken away because of the rules? [If so] Tell me about that. How did you feel?</p>
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First, I asked basic demographic questions to set the tone and to get to know my participants, including establishing the community context in which they carry out their mothering. Next, I asked questions focusing on their motherhood identity, such as “What does being a mother mean to you?” and “How do you think your life would be different if you were not a mother?” I followed these questions by questions about race and motherhood, such as, “What does it mean to you to be a Black mother?” Finally, I asked questions focusing on their mothering experiences and every day activities, such as “I’m trying to get a sense of how you manage all the things you have to do in a day. Can you describe what you did yesterday, starting with when you first got up?” and “What, if any, obstacles/barriers have you faced to being able to mother your children in the ways you wanted to?” As the interview was semi-structured, I often had to alter the wording of some of my questions to ensure that participants understood what I was asking. I also often followed up questions with probes to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses.

Initially, I only planned on interviewing low-income Black single mothers who were receiving (or who had received) TANF. However, I decided to expand my study to also include those who were receiving (or who had received) SNAP or Medicaid, as I had a difficult time locating participants who were receiving (or who had received) TANF at

the outset. In the end, however, 12 out of 21 participants had received TANF at some point. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 57. I determined low-income status by asking each of my participants if they were receiving or had previously received Social Services benefits programs, such as the ones listed above (each of them confirmed that they had) and by confirming their current income (see table 2 for participants' demographic information). Incomes ranged from under \$10,000 to \$35-\$45,000. The modal income was under \$10,000, and only one participant earned in the \$35-\$45,000 range. Most of my participants had never been married (only seven stated that they had been married before). The number of children each participant had ranged from one to five. 57% of participants were employed at the time of the interview.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Sample.

Participant ^a	Age	Marital History	Number of Children	Employed	Income	Social Services Benefits
Tamara	26	Y	1	Y	under \$10,000	^b T, ^b S
Kara	32	N	5	Y	under \$10,000	^b T, ^b S, ^b M
Sasha	20	N	2	N	under \$10,000	^b T, ^b S, ^b M
Kenya	29	N	3	Y	\$10-15,000	^c T, ^c S, ^b M
Pamela	38	N	2	Y	\$25-30,000	^c S, ^b M
Jenise	28	N	3	N	\$10-15,000	^c T, ^b S, ^b M
Kayla	29	N	3	Y	\$20-25,000	^c T, ^b S, ^b M, ^b C
Katrina	36	N	1	Y	under \$10,000	^b S, ^b M
Lexi	24	N	1	Y	under \$10,000	^b S, ^b M
Ashley	26	Y	1	N	under \$10,000	^c T, ^b S, ^b M
Leslie	27	Y	4	N	\$35-45,000	^c T, ^b S, ^b M, ^b C
Shay	38	N	3	N	under \$10,000	^c T, ^b S, ^b M
Sonya	41	N	1	N	under \$10,000	^b S
Briana	36	N	2	N	under \$10,000	^c T, ^b S, ^b M
Asia	29	N	2	Ye	\$25-30,000	^c S
Erin	47	Y	1	Y	\$15-20,000	^c T, ^c S
Paula	49	N	5	Y	\$20-25,000	^c S, ^b M
Jackie	56	Y	2	Y	under \$10,000	^c S, ^c A, ^c M
Tonya	43	Y	4	N	\$10-15,000	^b S, ^c M
Michelle	38	N	3	N	under \$10,000	^b T, ^b S, ^b M
Christie	57	Y	1	Y	under \$10,000	^c S, ^b M

Note: T = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); S = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);

C = Childcare Assistance; A = Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (now TANF); M = Medicaid

Y = Yes; N = No

^a Participants' names are pseudonyms.

^b Participant was receiving this benefit during the study.

^c Participant received this benefit in the past.

I recruited participants primarily through hanging flyers (see Appendix B for my recruitment flyer) in Social Services agencies in Southwest and Central Virginia. I also contacted Directors of Social Service agencies and organizations that work with low-income African American single mothers to ask if they would be willing to share my recruitment flyer with their clients. This recruitment method turned out to be hugely successful, as most of my participants were women who saw my flyer in Social Services, at a public housing agency, or an organization in which they were involved. Several participants called me to inquire about participating in the study, while others e-mailed. In this sense, most my participants were self-selected, as they reached out to me to participate in my study on their own. I recruited two participants through personal networks. Since I was aware that they qualified to participate in my study and we shared mutual contacts, I asked our mutual contacts to reach out to them and ask if they would be willing to participate in my study. My initial goal for recruitment was to use snowball sampling, especially since I anticipated having more difficulty recruiting participants than I did, so I asked each of my participants if they knew someone who may be interested in participating. A few of them said they did and that they would share (or had already shared) my flyer and/or contact information with that person. However, only one of my interviews resulted from a participant reaching out to that person about my study. Interestingly, two of my participants were mother and daughter, but I did not realize this until the day of my interview with the mother.

I spoke at two churches about my study (one in Southwest Virginia and one in Central Virginia). Through speaking at churches, I met several people who worked with Social Service agencies or organizations that serve low-income single mothers, and

several of them shared my recruitment flyer with their clients. I also recruited several participants through the food pantry at a church in Southwest Virginia, as the director allowed me to talk to his eligible clients about my project and ask them if they were interested in participating. Offering a \$25 gift card to a local grocery store proved to be a useful incentive for recruiting participants as well. The entire recruitment and interviewing process took place during September through December of 2017.

My research was approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). Before beginning each interview, I reviewed the IRB approved consent form with each participant and asked them to sign it, emphasizing that their participation was voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. I also encouraged them to ask questions as they arose during and at the end of the interview. Additionally, I emphasized that the interview is for research purposes and that their responses would remain confidential. I asked participants' permission to record each interview (all of them gave me permission to do so) and I recorded each interview using a small digital recorder. Interviews were transcribed by transcription service, rev.com, which uses TLS 1.2 encryption to ensure that data remains secure and confidential. In addition, according to their website, their transcriptionists are required to sign strict confidentiality agreements, and files are kept private and deleted upon request. I requested that rev.com delete the interviews after they were all transcribed. I stored recordings and transcriptions in a secure location that only I am able to access. To protect confidentiality, I assigned each participant a pseudonym in the final transcript.

Data Analysis

During the first iteration of my coding process, I read through each interview transcript, highlighted excerpts that struck me, and wrote analytic memos about why that excerpt struck me, some of which included tentative codes. Saldaña (2016) refers to this process as “pre-coding.” I then developed a set of codes based on my research questions, which is known as structural coding (Saldaña 2016). Next, I entered those codes into Dedoose, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software program (CAQDAS). During the second iteration of my coding process, I read through my transcripts again and applied these codes where they were applicable. Upon completion of the second iteration of my coding process, I examined the frequency of each of my codes to determine which ones I could collapse or delete, collapsing codes that were similar and/or redundant and deleting codes that were not significant (i.e., I only used them a couple of times and they were not relevant to my research questions). During the third and final iteration of my coding process, I read through each transcript again to double-check that the codes I had applied previously matched the excerpts to which I had applied them and to determine if I needed to add or delete any codes. This process enabled me to identify recurring themes and categories. Throughout the coding process, I kept my research questions in mind, as I was careful not to add codes that were irrelevant to my research questions or to delete codes that were relevant to my research questions.

When analyzing the coded interviews, I sought to identify the story lines that seemed to predominate across most participants’ statements. That is, I identified what each participant offered as a primary explanation or narrative in response to each question, and which of those dominant responses recurred across most interviews. When

selecting participants' excerpts to include in the discussion of my findings, I focused on those that most clearly represented the dominant responses I had identified. For instance, when discussing how low-income Black single mothers perceive their race as influencing their motherhood, I focus on excerpts that represent the most common perspective of my participants. However, I was also careful to note outliers and present them, too, in an effort to illustrate that perspectives often varied. Noting outliers also enabled me to clarify the patterns that existed and understand what made them different.

It is important to note that this project does not employ a grounded approach. It was driven by existing literature and research questions that sought to illuminate Black women's experiences in specific areas. However, I was careful not to ignore findings that emerged during the coding process that did not necessarily align with my research questions. This includes, for example, the recurrent theme of fathers' participation (or lack thereof) in my participants' children's lives and the lack of dense kin and community ties for participants. It was important to include these findings as they are part of my participants' stories and they help to paint a more complete picture of the lives of low-income Black single mothers.

Reflexivity/Reflexive Statement

As a highly educated and somewhat class-privileged single Black woman who is not a mother, I was hyper-aware of the ways in which my social position may have affected my ability to build rapport with my participants. I did not want to presume that because my participants and I shared the same race and gender that I would automatically be granted insider status (Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett 2003). As Few et al. (2003)

note, “Idiosyncrasies are embedded in our identities that inevitably create moments of intimacy and distance between the informant and the researcher” (p. 207). I was acutely aware that while I, like my participants, am a Black woman, other aspects of my identity, such as my social class, may have created some distance between my participants and myself. Since I was not completely an “outsider” among the women I interviewed, nor was I completely an “insider,” I struggled to negotiate how I would navigate “the space between” being an insider and being an outsider (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle (2009) posit that rather than dichotomizing insider role status vs. outsider role status, researchers should understand that one often moves between these statuses, as being a member of a group does not necessarily mean one shares every characteristic of that group. Similarly, not being a member of a group does not necessarily mean one is completely different from members of that group.

My struggle to navigate my “insider-outsider” status manifested itself in several ways. For instance, I thought a lot about what clothing I would wear to my interviews, as I did not want to exacerbate already existing power differentials between myself and my participants by dressing too formally. To my first interview, I wore a t-shirt, jeans, and no makeup, but as I did more interviews and began to realize that what I wore made little difference, I focused less on my outer appearance. One of my interviews, for instance, took place after church and I had little time to change beforehand, so I wore a dress. Most of the time, however, I wore casual clothing because I felt most comfortable in casual clothes. I also thought quite a bit about my accent. Growing up, my Black classmates and friends would often tease me for “talking white” or “talking proper.” I can also recall being perceived as “stuck up” because in the eyes of some of my classmates, I did not fit

ideals of how a Black person should speak or act. Consequently, I was concerned that my participants may perceive me in ways similar to the ways in which my classmates perceived me growing up. Despite these concerns, I felt that it was important for me to be myself, so I did not alter my accent in any of my interviews, as doing so would have been disingenuous and may have also altered my interactions with participants.

In addition to thinking about the possible role that my social identity would play in my experience interviewing participants, I was also conscious of power differentials in the researcher-participant relationship (Few et al. 2003; Berger 2015). As the researcher/interviewer and as a doctoral student, there was inevitably a power differential between my participants and myself, although it was rarely noticeable to me during any of my interviews. I recall one instance in which I became aware of the power differential when interviewing Kara, as she asked me what I was studying and toward what type of degree I was working. After explaining that I was working on my Ph.D. in Sociology, she said, "...see...you not being a statistic." The notion of being a "statistic" or trying to avoid being one came up quite a bit during interviews. I quickly realized that being a statistic was something that participants tried hard to avoid not only for themselves, but for their children, as they associated it with stereotypes about low-income Black single mothers receiving public assistance (I will discuss this in more detail in chapter five).

Self-disclosure was one way in which I was able to achieve insider status with my participants and thus build rapport with them (Few et al. 2003). For instance, I began my first interview by explaining to my participant, Tamara, that I was raised in part by a Black single mother and witnessing her struggle in many ways compelled me to learn more about the issues facing Black single mothers and to raise awareness about their

struggles, as well as their resilience. Disclosing this seemed to help Tamara speak candidly about her own mother, who raised her (and took in two of her cousins, whom she refers to as her brother and sister) while facing many obstacles, including the incarceration of her father (her mother's then husband) for thirteen years. Although disclosing personal information about myself at the beginning of my first interview helped me break down some of the relational barriers that often exist between researchers and participants, I did not do this at the beginning of every interview. I felt it necessary to disclose information about my own mother before my first interview because I was very nervous and I did not know what to expect from the interview experience. However, as I interviewed more participants and became more comfortable with the interview process, I decided it was not necessary to disclose that information. Thus, I mostly discussed the nature of my project and my general interest in understanding and illuminating the lives and experiences of low-income Black single mothers. The amount of information I disclosed about myself during each interview ultimately depended on the flow of the conversation and in some cases, the participant's interest in my personal and/or professional background.

Most of my participants seemed to open up to me quite easily, and, as I expected, our shared racialized and gendered identities and experiences seemed to help them connect with me on a deeper level than they would have if I had not been a Black woman. There were several times when participants would begin a sentence by saying, "Girl..." or respond to something I said by saying, "Yes, girl," which are common ways that Black women communicate with each other. They would also commonly use terms like "us" and "we" when referring to Black people, which was indicative of our shared

racialized identities. Participants and I would also often commiserate about dating and relationships. While there were differences between us, we were able to find many common interests, which helped us to relate to each other (Few et al. 2003). Few et al. (2003) refer to this phenomenon as “Sister to Sister” talk, which they define as “Afrocentric slang to describe congenial conversation or positive relating in which life lessons might be shared between Black women” (p. 205). When I was interviewing participants who were much older than me, it often reminded me of talking to my mother, an auntie, or my grandmother, as they would comment on their perceived differences between mothers, motherhood, and parenting in contemporary society and when they were raising their children.

While I had little difficulty building rapport with my participants, a couple of them seemed concerned that my study had the potential of reinforcing controlling images of low-income Black single mothers, such as the “welfare queen.” At one point during the recruitment process, I received an e-mail from a woman who would later become one of my participants. She had seen my recruitment flyer and wondered why my study focused solely on African American single mothers. When I replied to her e-mail, I explained the scope of my project in more detail and that my own mother was an African American single mother who at one point received SNAP, Medicaid, and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits. I also explained that my topic is close to my heart because through my mother’s experiences, I saw firsthand the types of struggles that single mothers endure. After seeing my profile picture in my e-mail and realizing that I was Black, she replied that she was interested in participating. During our interview, I asked her about her initial e-mail. Laughing, she explained, “I was like, why is it just

single Black moms, like we're not...Black moms are not the only ones that's single, you know. All races are, but...once I saw your picture, I said, 'Oh, well, she's Black [laughs].'" Another participant began our interview by making a statement about how there is a misconception that Black people who receive public assistance are lazy or uneducated, but that she is very hardworking and that it hurts her to be defined by a stereotype. It was unclear whether she was telling me this because she thought that my project was going to perpetuate those stereotypes or if she simply needed to get that off her chest. I explained to her that I was drawn to this project in part because those stereotypes and misconceptions around Black single mothers bother me and that I hope to shatter some of those stereotypes through my research.

For the most part, my conversations with participants felt as if I was talking to a friend. Sometimes, it felt a bit like I was a counselor or therapist, as I sat and listened while participants cried as they recalled painful details of their lives or as they talked about raising Black children in a racist society. A few of them told me at the end of the interview that it felt good for them to be able to sit down and talk to someone about their experiences. In this way, it seemed as if talking about their lives and experiences as low-income Black single mothers was cathartic for them.

IV. MAPPING THE CONTOURS OF LOW-INCOME BLACK SINGLE MOTHERS' IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES

Introduction

Scholars of Black women's motherhood/mothering have long documented that Black women tend to mother within dense networks of kin and community support and that Black women have a history of serving as "other-mothers" or community mothers (Dill 1994; Dow 2016; Gibson 2005; Gilkes 1980; Naples 1996; Stack 1974). For instance, in her landmark study of a low-income urban Black community in the Midwest, Carol Stack (1974) found that low-income urban Blacks develop kin-based exchange networks to share in childrearing and other household responsibilities. She argues that these kin-based support networks, which include "fictive" kin, provide a means for them to cope with the lack of access to resources associated with being in poverty. Later studies, however, deviated from the long held belief that African American mothers rely heavily on kin-based networks of support (e.g., Brewster and Padavic 2002; Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clog 1993—see below). Literature on Black motherhood/mothering also notes that as Black women have always had to work, employment has been a key aspect of the performance of their role as mothers (Arendell 2000; Collins 2000; Glenn 1994). For Black women, then, having a job is part of being a responsible mother, which was certainly the case for the women in the present study.

Brewster and Padavic (2002) argue that changes in the political, social, and economic landscape of the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s meant that African American mothers did not necessarily need to (or were not necessarily able to) rely as heavily on kin-based support networks as in the 1960s and 1970s, when several ethnographic studies

depicting strong kin-based support networks among African American families were conducted. In their study of changes in working Black mothers' use of kin-based childcare, they found that although family members continue to provide a significant source of childcare for Black mothers, the use of kin-based childcare has declined significantly. One reason for this decline is an increasing reliance on child care centers, particularly for married Black mothers. Single Black mothers continue to rely heavily on kin for childcare, although much less so than in previous years. In addition, as earlier literature has reported, lower-income, less educated single Black mothers with less access to social and economic resources also tend to rely more heavily on kin for childcare (Brewster and Padavic 2002). Similarly, Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg (1993) found that when accounting for "structure, needs, and resources," Black families provide less intergenerational assistance than white families, as intergenerational Black families often have fewer "financial and human capital resources to meet the needs of all generations adequately" (p. 1454). Like Brewster and Padavic (2012), they point to changes in the social landscape that have led to weakened Black communities and diminished life chances for Black people as a reason why there may be a greater demand for intergenerational support, but limited resources with which to provide such support.

Raudenbush (2016) points out that research on social support among low-income urban Blacks tends to fall within two categories: (1) the pervasive social solidarity perspective, which suggests that support networks within low-income urban Black communities are extensive, and (2) the distrust-individualism perspective, which suggests that widespread distrust creates a situation in which low-income urban Blacks lack social ties and develop individualistic approaches to solve problems. Using ethnographic

fieldwork conducted in a Black public housing complex called “Jackson Homes” from 2010-2013, Raudenbush (2016) found that despite the dominance of the above two perspectives, social life in low-income urban Black communities is more complicated. She develops the term “selective solidarity” to describe that, although residents in Jackson Homes are generally suspicious of others in the community, and their exchange networks are not as extensive as those reported in earlier studies (e.g., Billingsley 1968; Stack 1974), they are also not socially isolated as other studies have reported (e.g., Tigges, Browne, and Green 1998; Wacquant and Wilson 1989). Rather, they are selective about their exchange networks.

This chapter discusses how my findings both diverge from and reinforce these other literatures. The present study diverges from previous literature on Black mothering, as the participants in my study noted that while they often draw on the support of their parents and a few close friends, the dense kin and community support networks described by previous studies were largely non-existent. They also received little to no support from their child(ren)’s father(s). The present study also complements literature on Black motherhood/mothering that suggests that for Black women, employment is constitutive of mothering. Most of my participants seemed to take for granted the responsibility to earn money to support their children.

A unique contribution of the present study is the distinction that I draw between motherhood as an identity and mothering as a set of activities. As I discussed in chapter two, I aim to disentangle motherhood as an identity from mothering as a set of activities, as Black mothers throughout U.S. history have often been denied the right to mother their own children (e.g., in chattel slavery when their children were sold to other plantations,

working as domestic workers and caring for white children while not being able to care for their own, and having their children taken by the state and/or lost to state violence). Thus, Black mothers' unique experiences in the U.S. mean that it is conceptually useful to disentangle motherhood from mothering, as they are historically and contemporarily distinct. While scholars of motherhood have established that motherhood is a patriarchal social institution and that gender norms and roles shape women's mothering experiences, (e.g., O'Reilly 2004; Rich 1986; Traylor 2014), only Traylor's (2014) definitions of motherhood and mothering distinguish between motherhood as a social identity and mothering as the tasks women perform as part of their role as mothers. In addition, previous definitions of motherhood and mothering allude to gender, but not race or class. Another unique contribution of the present study, then, is that I have expressly added the dimensions of race and class to my definitions of motherhood and mothering.

As a reminder, I define motherhood as a gendered social identity that is also race- and class- specific and mothering as a set of gendered, racialized, and classed social activities expected of mothers in specific social and historical contexts. This intersectional framework was salient in my interviews with participants, as it was clear that the way they think of themselves as mothers and the activities they engage in to mother their children were shaped largely by their gender, race, and class. For instance, when discussing what it meant to them to be Black mothers, participants often alluded to sexist, racist, and classist controlling images such as the "welfare queen" and the "baby mama." In addition, a major aspect of their mothering activities involves socializing their children around race and class (see chapter five).

While the distinction I draw between motherhood as an identity and mothering as a set of activities was not always clear in interviews with participants, in general, motherhood emerged as a central identity for my participants, as several mentioned that they could not imagine their lives if they were not mothers and/or that becoming a mother saved their life. It was also clear that their day-to-day activities center largely around being a mother and that their race, class, and gender play a significant role in the obstacles and barriers they face as mothers.

I begin this chapter by setting the context in which low-income Black single mothers are mothering by describing what their daily lives are like, including a discussion of their neighborhoods, communities, and social ties, as it relates to previous literature on Black motherhood/mothering. Next, I discuss having a lack of financial resources as a major obstacle/barrier facing the participants in my study. Finally, I discuss motherhood as a central identity for low-income Black single mothers, as it emerged as such during interviews.

Mothering Activities

Historically, the social context in which Black women mother, including the extent of any meaningful social support, has proven to be a significant factor in their ability to carry out their mothering activities (Dill 1994; Dow 2016; Gibson 2005; Gilkes 1980; Naples 1996; Stack 1974). Overall, the participants in my study did not enjoy the extensive kin and community support networks that previous literature on Black motherhood/mothering has documented. While nearly all of them mentioned receiving some form of support from family and/or friends, the dense kin and community support

networks that Stack (1974) and others wrote about were virtually non-existent. Most participants also had not lived in their present neighborhoods for very long, which may have hindered their ability to establish strong connections within their communities.

Neighborhoods/Communities

Eight (out of 21) of the mothers in my study lived in suburban neighborhoods. Six lived in urban neighborhoods. Three lived in rural neighborhoods. For four of the participants, I am not certain whether they live in rural, suburban, or urban neighborhoods, as I interviewed them outside their homes and I did not ask them to classify their neighborhoods as rural, suburban, or urban. I distinguished their neighborhoods as rural, suburban, or urban based on whether they lived in a relatively remote area or a more densely populated one, and whether their neighborhood was located in the city proper or outside of the city (i.e., in the county and/or in areas commonly known as suburbs of a specific city). Five of the participants had lived in their present neighborhoods for less than one year. Eight had lived in their present neighborhoods for one to five years. Three had lived in their present neighborhoods for five to ten years. Four had lived in their present neighborhoods for more than 10 years. I am not sure how long one participant had lived in her present neighborhood.

Those who lived in more rural and suburban areas described their neighborhoods as peaceful and quiet, while those who lived in urban neighborhoods noted that they often witnessed incidents of violence in their neighborhoods. Regardless of the type of area they lived in, most participants were reluctant to let their children play outside, due to dilapidated playground areas or general fear of their children's safety. While most participants (14/21) reported having friends and/or family in the area in which they lived,

participants often noted that they preferred to stay to themselves, rather than attempt to make friends in their neighborhood. In addition, although most participants mentioned receiving some form of support (e.g., childcare, financial assistance, and/or emotional support) from family and/or friends, for the most part, they were not able to draw on extensive kin (including “fictive kin”) and community support networks. This illustrates that there is more nuance to social support among low-income African Americans than previous research has suggested. As Raudenbush (2016) points out, researchers have tended to portray low-income African Americans as either enjoying pervasive social support systems or being socially isolated. However, the women in the present study mostly described receiving intergenerational support (e.g., from their parents) or from one or two close friends, thus, they are neither completely socially isolated nor embedded in dense kin and community support networks. Rather, they are careful about whom they exchange support with, much like the participants in Raudenbush’s (2016) study.

For instance, Kara, who, at the time of the interview, had lived in her quiet rural neighborhood outside of Richmond with her five daughters (ages two, five, six, ten, and twelve) for almost one year, mentioned that she does not associate with anyone in her neighborhood and that although she had a fairly large yard, she was too scared to allow her children to play outside a lot, so they mostly played in the house. In addition to not associating with anyone in her neighborhood, Kara only described receiving minimal support from her family when she needed it. She mentioned that her parents sometimes helped her out, but “they don’t take care of my kids,” she said. “They might help me with a bill or something...but I take care of [my children] on my own.” Her sentiments about raising her children “on [her] own” may be indicative of how she was raised. She

explained, “My mom...raised us [with] a strong backbone, so if we’re slacking at any point...she ain’t having that...” Essentially, Kara was raised to be independent, which seems to make her reluctant to ask (particularly, her parents) for help caring for her children.

Kenya, who lived in an apartment with two of her sons (ages ten and five; she also has a six-year-old son who lives with his father) in Roanoke, Virginia, described the area in which she lived as “good,” but also noted that it had become increasingly violent. When asked if she feels safe in her neighborhood, she explained:

Yeah, it's okay, being that the violence and stuff has increased...a friend of mine got killed this weekend...that's why I say I don't know, the violence is kind of crazy. It's like, all of my high school friends and stuff is dying, but...and it's kind of scary 'cause you know, I have boys, so...but um, this area here is good. It's quiet...it's a lot of kids my kids can play with...but like I said, we stay in the house, so...

She later mentioned that the shooting of her friend that had happened the weekend prior was the third shooting in her neighborhood within a three-day timeframe, and that there had been another shooting the week before, and another a few months before, in which another one of her high school friends was killed. When I drove through Kenya’s neighborhood to meet her for our interview, it seemed relatively quiet, so I was somewhat surprised to learn about the recent incidents of gun violence that had occurred there. It was not surprising, however, that she and her children mostly stayed in the house (especially considering the recent incidents of gun violence), as this seemed to be a common practice for my participants. Although she was somewhat isolated within her neighborhood (in part, by choice, it seems), she mentioned being able to draw on her mother and her best friend, who is also a single mother, for support. She explained that her mother babysits her children sometimes, takes her to work and picks her up from

work, and helps ensure that her children are up and ready for school in the mornings. She and her best friend exchange support in the form of watching each other's children periodically, especially when her mother is unable to, as she works a night job.

Like Kenya, Kayla, who lived with her five-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter (she also has a six-year-old daughter who lives with her father) in Roanoke, expressed concerns about the violence in her neighborhood. She explained, "The neighborhood I live in now, I like the actual apartment, but the neighborhood itself, I don't like as much. It's a lot of crazy stuff going on over there. Not all the time, but every now and then, I would hear shooting, and fighting and stuff." Although she stated that she likes her actual apartment, she only felt somewhat safe in her neighborhood due to incidents of violence that occurred every so often. Like most other participants, Kayla's children play inside more than they play outside. While Kayla did not necessarily have an established support system in her neighborhood, she described her church community as "like [her] family." Kayla lost her mother at 16, but she mentioned being very close to her aunt, her mother's twin, before she passed away shortly before our interview. Unlike most participants, Kayla had established a network of "fictive kin" with women at her church who help her care for her children, pray for her, and offer her advice. "They're just there," she said.

Similar to Kenya and Kayla, Katrina, who lived in an apartment in Richmond with her two-year-old son, mentioned that she does not feel safe in her neighborhood:

I don't feel safe here. I don't go outside. I try to stay away, I don't make friends because a lot of people here, they just seem to like trouble. They like to fight, they like to argue. A lot of people are on drugs, whether it's mental illness, or just trying to deal or cope with everyday life. And I don't knock it, but this is the only place that I can afford, myself, and be able to be a mom by myself without trying to be in someone else's house...cops come all the time, or you'll hear screaming

and yelling all the time. It's not what I'm used to, like in [town where she used to live], I can come home at 10:00 at night and I don't have to worry about anybody trying to come up to me, ask me for any money, ask me can I feed them, ask me for anything. You just go in your own house. You can leave your doors open, to me. But here, I always make sure I hear my alarm, and I always make sure I don't go back outside after dark...

This passage from Katrina alludes to two major issues that arose repeatedly during interviews with participants, namely, (1) not feeling safe in one's own neighborhood and (2) living in relative isolation (i.e., most were reluctant to pursue friendships/relationships with people in their neighborhoods and often chose to stay in their own homes rather than venture outside). Like other participants, Katrina does not allow her son to play at the park closest to her house because she feels it is not safe for children; however, she allows him to play at another park close by, which is designed for children with disabilities, as her son has autism. While Katrina does not engage much with people in her neighborhood, she has established a support network which includes her son's doctors and four of her girlfriends. Since none of her family lives in the area in which she lives, she is not able to draw on them for immediate support. When asked if it would be helpful for her to have more support, she explained that support in the form of a group for single mothers would be particularly helpful. A couple of other participants also expressed interest in finding a single mother's support group.

Shay, who had recently moved to Richmond from New York with her two daughters (ages one and 13) and 18-year-old son, described her current neighborhood as violent, explaining:

I noticed when I came down here, it's so much violence here. More than I was seeing up there...Oh, yeah. This apartment complex, it sucks. It's so much violence in here alone. We're just getting lights and we haven't had lights for like six, seven months...There's two different stories. We don't know which one is the truth and which one is a lie, but we know that a girl got sexually assaulted out

here and then a couple days later, that's when we got lights. It took all of that, but before that, it was a shooting, and more shooting, and yeah. For her to get sexually assaulted because the lights weren't working. Then they just got off they butts and we got lights... The whole complex was completely dark. So, if you're walking outside, you can't see your hand in front of your face, you've got to use a flashlight from your phone to take out the trash. Once the sun sets, it's a wrap. Yeah, so now the lights are... People are complaining because the lights are too bright, but my thing is, listen, get black curtains, get thick curtains, you'll be okay... I'd rather have lights and safety than nothing... But then again, who says we're safe just because we have lights?

Around the time of my interview with Shay, some apartment complexes near where she lived had been on the local news for not taking care of issues residents were having in their households. When asked if her apartment complex was one of those complexes, she replied: "No, that was the one down the block... where the pregnant lady fell off the balcony... This one, they're about to be on the news too because they don't do a lot. It sucks. That's why I was like, 'Wait a minute. Hold on. Time to go.'" Like a lot of public and subsidized housing communities, unfortunately, Shay's neighborhood is not properly maintained. She mentioned that she had put in work orders months ago for issues that have yet to be fixed:

My thing is, I have Section 8. This is not forever. I'm not going to waste my voucher on this. They don't fix anything. They don't paint. You've got to do everything. I've had work orders in for this apartment for months. They still haven't come and fixed anything. But when you ready to move out, they don't want to let you out your lease... Their thing is, 'Oh, you got to give them 60 days,' but then on top of that, it's some other BS that they be talking about. 'You're going to pay this month's or this.' Too much with the shucking and jiving with them. My thing is, what's good is I've got Section 8, so Section 8 is not hearing it. They're like, "You ready to go? All right. Time to go." I wanted to move last year. I couldn't find a place, so then I stayed. My daughter's still in school. She's about to graduate next year, so I said, 'Let me just stay.' I really don't want to be here. My thing is if the conditions were better, maybe. I said, 'You know what? I'm going to just get my own paint and paint it and do what I want to do. If they have a problem with it. Oh, well.' I'd rather be comfortable than keep relying on them.

Unfortunately, Shay has already moved around a lot during her lifetime. She explained that she was emancipated from her mother at 15 because they were not getting along at the time. She described her neighbors as being more involved in raising her than her mother was. After staying with her neighbors for a while, she left to go to Job Corps, graduated, and then moved in with her son's father and his family, which she described as the "worst decision ever because they didn't like me because I was Black" (her son's father is Puerto Rican). Around the time she had her son, she was living with her mother again. After leaving her mother's house, she and her son's father went to stay in a shelter, which she described as "overcrowded" and "dirty." Once she received a voucher to move into Section 8 housing, she moved closer to her mother again until she finally decided to leave New York for good. Then, she moved into Section 8 housing in New Jersey, where she had similar issues with property maintenance as she has in her current apartment. She explained,

I was doing fine in Jersey except for the fact that every time I got an apartment, the conditions were just the worst. The landlords don't want to fix nothing, so then Section 8 is like, 'All right, they don't want to fix it. You got to move. You got to move. You got to move. You got to move.' In five years, we had probably about five apartments in New Jersey...Moving, moving, moving, moving. Then... I met her father, and then I was still trying to get the apartment I had into good working order. The landlord didn't want to do it. I lost my Section 8. Went to a fair hearing to get it back. Got it back and was like, "All right. I'm done." Gave the apartment up. Started staying with her father for a while and then noticed that wasn't...He was just a piece of crap. He thought I was looking for an apartment in New Jersey, and then I just moved down here. Got up one morning, got on the bus, and came down here. He didn't even know.

When asked if there was anything that section 8 could do to make them fix things, she explained,

Yeah, Section 8 can do that, but my thing is, I have to go through Section 8. Sometimes going through Section 8 can be worse than just doing it on your own. Because if Section 8 gives them a time limit and they don't meet the time limit,

then I have to move... Yeah, they're like, "All right. They're not fixing it." Especially if it's a hazardous situation. Right now, under my kitchen sink, the floor is coming up because there was a leak and now it's black [mold]. I'm telling them they need to come fix it. They haven't come yet, so I'm dealing with an agency, and she said email them again, CC her in the email, and then if they don't come out, she'll take it from there. That way, I don't have to go through Section 8. I'll go through [a local housing safety initiative] and they'll fix it or they'll put me in a situation where... I can come back if I want to or I can just find another place.

Shay mentioned that she felt safer in her neighborhood in New York than she does in her current neighborhood. She also mentioned that her son was physically attacked in her current neighborhood and that nothing like that had ever happened when she lived in New York or New Jersey. In addition, she described her neighborhood in New York as more welcoming and as having a greater sense of community. When asked what the community was like that she grew up in, she described a community similar to those portrayed in previous literature on support in urban Black communities (e.g., Stack 1974):

It was different. It seemed like a village. Nothing like that out here. Nothing at all... Everybody looked after each other's kids. If one person didn't have something, someone else had it, but out here, it's like everybody just fends for they self, except for me. Most of the kids come to my house because they deal with my kids, but it's like, uh-uh (negative). Out here is just these kids, I think they're lost. When I first came down here, I used to take the kids to the library. They never had library cards and they've been out here for years... It was like... their parents didn't care. They would let them go with me, don't call and ask when the kids is coming home. It got to the point where it was like I'm doing too much, putting myself out there all the time, but no one does anything for my kids or for me when I don't have.

It seems that Shay was trying to re-create the "village" that she had in New York in her current neighborhood, but with little success. She also mentioned that there is a community center in her current neighborhood where she volunteers, but she felt like it was under-utilized. When asked what kinds of events the center organizes, she explained:

Different events. We just had October, the breast cancer month, so we had a bake sale and fundraised so that we can do the walk, the breast cancer walk. Nobody out here showed up...It was supposed to be the community coming together. Nobody showed up...Then we had a dinner after the walk and the same outcome. Only time people shows up for stuff around here is if they're getting free food, and that's sad. We did the thing for the kids to get book bags for right before school. People that never showed up a day in their life to the center showed up for the book bags. It was like, "Are you serious?"...Halloween, I baked cupcakes and brought them to the center, so the kids had cupcakes. We're doing a World AIDS Day event December 1st. We're going to see how that's going to turn out. Later on this month, we're having an appreciation dinner for the people that do come to the center, so, you know, it's going to be like ten people there. That's it. It's sad because the community is so big, but no one shows up for nothing.

Like several participants, Shay mothers largely in isolation. When asked if she had family and friends in the area, she explained:

No...all my family...supposed family, if you want to say that, live in New York...No. I don't have friends. I speak to people, but that's it. I won't consider no one out here a friend or anything. The kids have friends, but no. Uh-uh (negative)...Because, I think, coming from New York, I'm more skeptical about people, and once you do me wrong, it's hard to get back in my good graces. Then when I let you back, if you do me wrong again, then I'm sitting there looking at myself like, 'You idiot,' because I just had that experience, so now I'm like, 'Yeah, I'm an idiot because I shouldn't have let her back in.' But, her karma is going to be so good when it happens to her, but it's like uh-uh (negative). If I couldn't trust my own family, you can't just trust any old body out on the street.

Paula was also reluctant to develop relationships with people in her neighborhood/community. She explained:

I don't really know my neighbors...I speak to certain ones, and then the rest you just leave alone, you might wave in passing, but you don't engage in conversation or have them over for dinner and things like that. And a lot of that is because of the way of the world now. You know, people are not always what they seem, so it's best to just keep them at arm's length...

Michelle, who lived with her two sons (ages 12 and 16) in the suburbs of Richmond, explained that she has relatives close by, but that she stays mostly to herself. "I don't deal with people," she said. "No, I don't deal with nobody at all...Like, I done had bad

experiences with my own family, so I just stay to myself.” When asked if she wishes she had friends, she replied:

Yeah, I do sometimes. Somebody to talk to, you know, share my woes with. Then, sometimes, if you talk to people, they'll let you know...I guess 'cause the experiences I have, I think everybody the same way...Like, people will stab me in the back, or share your business with other people, so I just stay to myself.

There were some participants, such as Jenise, who lived in a rural area in central Virginia, that felt that their neighborhoods were relatively safe. Jenise explained that there was lots of room for her children to be able to play outside freely and she did not seem to share the same concerns as other participants about not allowing her children to play outside a lot due to fear for their safety. She also, unlike many other participants, described having several friends and family members that lived near her. Other participants, such as Lexi and Ashley, also described their neighborhoods as relatively safe and quiet. Leslie, who made the most money out of all my participants (her self-reported annual income was in the \$35-45,000 range) and lived in an apartment in the suburbs of Richmond with her four children (ages 10 months, three, four, and six years) described her neighborhood as “friendly” without a lot of “drama” or “violence.” When asked what her neighborhood is like, she explained:

Working families up to upper-class, just depends on the area. I think there's a mix in the school. My kids have a lot of friends, their families are pretty well off. Not a lot of drama, not a lot of violence. Family values, the neighbors, everybody's really friendly, speaking and willing to help anybody out. It's really family-oriented.

Her current neighborhood stood in stark contrast to her former one, which she described as crime-ridden and violent.

In sum, my participants did not enjoy the extensive kin and community support that Stack (1974) and others have documented as existing within low-income African

American communities. They also tended to isolate themselves in their houses and were reluctant to venture outside due to violence in their neighborhoods, dilapidated neighborhood conditions, and/or general fear of their children's safety. Participants also often expressed a reluctance to make friends with people in their neighborhood, which may be indicative of a general skepticism of people in their communities, but could also be indicative of their experience with larger structural issues, such as violence and crime.

Daily Lives

The daily lives of the mothers in my study centered largely on their mothering activities. Most of them had an established routine that consisted mostly of the daily activities associated with being a mother and caring for children. For instance, when asked to describe what a typical day was like for her, Sonya, who at the time of the interview lived in an apartment with her two-year-old daughter in the suburbs of Richmond, Virginia, explained:

As far as a typical day, like today, usually I'm up at 5:30, getting ready, then I get her up, get her ready, fix my lunch, and then we are out of here by 9:00 and she's on to grandma's, I'm on to my work site. I do a work site three days a week. So, I'm there from 9:30 to 2:30, and then I pick her back up on my van service, we get home and get ready for the next day all over again, finding clothes, dinner, dishes and a little TV, and then it's off to bed again to do it all over again.

Similarly, Erin, who at the time of the interview lived in a townhouse in Roanoke, Virginia, with her eleven-year-old son, explained:

We're kind of on a time schedule. We get up. We get dressed. I get him to the bus stop by 6:40. I have to be at work at 7:00, doesn't take long. And then school, and then work for me. When I get off, if I have to go do stuff, I'll go do it before I pick him up. They don't close 'till 7:00. I pick him up. We go home. We do homework. We eat dinner. We go to bed, and we start all over the next day. Especially in the winter time.

Tonya, who was not working at the time of the interview, but looking for jobs, spent most of her time (when not with her four children) searching for a job. She explained:

After [getting her children off to school], my day varies. I spend a lot of time on the computer sending out resumes, going through my email, just looking at different job sites. I have done some work with a temp agency, so there have been times where I've been on assignment, so it'll be get the kids off to school, come back in, shower, get dressed, and head out. Then afterwards, straight from there, pick up my youngest, because her school gets out the earliest and she obviously can't stay home by herself because she's eight. She's in after care, so pick her up, and then it's thinking about dinner, if I have to stop by the grocery store to pick up something to cook... Then after that, I get home, it's pretty much just dropping my things, changing my clothes out, heading to the kitchen, fixing dinner. We all sit down at the table, eat dinner together, then it's everyone in the shower, brush your teeth, get ready for bed, pray before you go to bed. We pray before the smaller ones go to sleep. Then, once I've gotten the smaller ones off to sleep, which is the first three, the eight, 10, and my son. My oldest, she usually has a whole bunch of homework to do because she's in all these extracurricular activities, so I don't usually come back home from picking her up until like 7:00 or a little after 7:00. Once we've prayed and the little ones are in bed, then I can finally go in my room and either take a shower and relax, or just sit there and just watch TV or do whatever on my own time.

It is clear that the mothers in my study have very little down time or time to relax and focus on themselves. Most of their time is spent focusing on their children and managing their households.

Primary Obstacles

As current and former recipients of Social Services benefits, I anticipated that participants' would recount experiences of state surveillance as a result of receiving public assistance and that those experiences would have had a potential effect on their mothering activities (e.g., that their children may have been taken away by Child Protective Services at some point or that they would have lost benefits as a result of being sanctioned, which would affect their ability to provide for their children). However, none of my participants had ever had their children taken away by the state. Some of them had

been sanctioned before, but most of them said that following the rules associated with receiving Social Services benefits had not caused any problems for them. I also anticipated that work obligations would be a major obstacle to participants' ability to carry out their mothering activities, although this turned out not to be the case. Nevertheless, as I anticipated, participants described financial barriers as a major obstacle to being able to carry out their mothering activities. Finally, a major obstacle to carrying out their mothering activities that I had not anticipated was the prevalence of absent fathers (i.e., fathers that were not very involved in their children's lives and provided little to no assistance in childrearing).

Experiences Receiving Social Services Benefits

While experiences receiving Social Services benefits generally did not create major obstacles to participants' ability to carry out their mothering activities, some participants described negative encounters with workers in Social Service agencies. For instance, Leslie explained:

Sometimes they can be very nasty. Like sometimes...you pick up the phone and they're rude. I [have had] some very nice social workers, but here in [county in which she lives]...it was just like they felt like you didn't deserve to be treated with respect because you were given some type of help. You know, it's already embarrassing to come in there. Well, for me it was. Like, I'm not too happy about being on food stamps again. I was happy about paying cash. I mean, of course you miss getting the food stamps when they're gone, but it's a sense of pride to be able to go, 'I can do this myself,' you know? So, I wasn't happy about going back on that...it doesn't feel good to have to go ask for that help, then somebody treats you like that when you're asking for it, you know? And once again, they don't know your story... They may just automatically assume somebody just trying to milk the system... And that may not be your story.

In this passage, Leslie alludes to stereotypes of public assistance recipients "trying to milk the system," and suggests that some caseworkers may not treat public assistance recipients with respect because they are asking the state for help.

Briana described having to prove who her children's fathers were at 17 so that the state could go after them for child support when she was applying for TANF benefits:

...They gotta get the swab and if it come back that it's the daddy, then they'll take out child support for the daddy. If it come back not the daddy, I think you go to court or don't go to court, but you gotta tell them or get them a list of who could be the daddy. I said, 'Lordy be. I only got two. One and the one. I know the daddy.' Yeah, but it was a lot 'cause I had her in '99, so they wasn't doing everything on the phones and on the computers and stuff. Everything was on paper, and you had to give everybody's name, information and just, like I said, once they find its father, the father goes, you and your child go, you all go...do the swab, then it takes some time. If it come back it is the child, the paperwork continues to go on for TANF. If it's not the father, the paperwork gonna go on, but you gotta tell them, you gotta give them something. If you don't get them something, they stop it...Yeah, 'cause they gotta find out who the father 'cause they want their money back.

When asked how she felt having to go through all of that, she explained:

I felt bad, I felt belittled, I felt like ... I don't even want to say worse than an animal 'cause they treat animals real good and you supposed to treat animals good. You're supposed to treat people good too. I felt like shit. I really did 'cause like I said, I was 17 having to do all of this stuff. Like really go through...something big on my own, not knowing what to expect, not knowing what to do and then, like I said, you already a statistic for being Black, you understand? So it was that, uh, another statistic.

In this passage, Briana suggests that the process of having to prove who her children's fathers were in order to receive TANF benefits was dehumanizing. Her statement that she was "already a statistic for being Black" implies that all that she endured during the process of applying for TANF benefits reinforced stereotypes/controlling images about Black single mother welfare recipients, such as the "welfare queen."

Work and Mothering

For participants who had jobs, their work schedules sometimes conflicted with their mothering activities. Participants often described having to miss their children's field trips or other activities due to having to work. However, in cases in which their

children were sick, they did not hesitate to take off work, emphasizing that their children came first. Some participants described having flexible jobs in which their supervisors were understanding if they had to miss work because their child was sick or they had a school activity. Others described walking away from jobs if their supervisors were not understanding when they needed to take off work to care for their sick children. If they were forced to choose between work responsibilities and mothering responsibilities, however, in many situations, participants put their children before their jobs.

Katrina, who at the time of the interview, worked in a daycare, and has a two-year-old chronically ill son, explained that “he’s more important than my job”:

So, my son, he's more important than my job. He will always be. You really don't manage, you just kind of...just do it. My boss, she's understanding, but I'm prepared for her to tell me I'm fired...I'm fine with that, because my son matters the most. She said I understand that, so she's like, I'm going to work with you. But if she says that she can't work with me, I'm not mad at her because technically until my son is healed, I'm supposed to be with him, point blank, period. You just go with the flow. I've had jobs that was like, 'Yeah, you can't stay here. Your son keeps getting sick.' Okay, I'm not going to cry over spilled milk. My son matters way more than you.

Although Katrina describes her current boss as understanding, she makes it clear that if she were ever forced to choose between her son or her job, she would choose her son.

Kenya, who works at a security company, also described her job as flexible.

When asked how she manages the demands of her job with the demands of her children, she explained:

They have to work with me. I mean, you know, and they understand. It's a lot of single moms in there, too, you know. I have to--that's why I go to work early, to get it done early, so I can get off in a decent time so I can spend time with my kids. It's important to be at home with my kids. I don't want to be coming at six, seven o'clock and it's...You know, I can barely get anything done, you know?

Asia, a customer service representative at a bank call center, described her job as much less flexible than Katrina's. She also unfortunately worked from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. on most weekdays and on Saturdays, which meant she often had to miss out on her children's school activities and was not able to take them to many events on the weekends. Fortunately, her mother was sometimes able to fill in for her.

Tonya, a former project manager, was having a difficult time finding a permanent job at the time of the interview, but understood very well what it meant to have to manage the demands of a job with the demands of being a mother. She explained, "I'm pretty much used to that. I don't know. To me it just seems automatic. I just know it needs to be done and I do it and I worry about being tired after. That's pretty much how I deal with it. Just do what needs to be done." When asked if there has ever been a time when her work schedule conflicted with something she wanted to do with her children, she replied:

Yes, there's been several times. Depending on what it is, I put my kids first with everything. If one of my kids are sick, there's no job that's going to stop me from taking care of my kids. I learned a long time ago that everyone's replaceable on a job. I won't risk the health of my children or even my health for a job. I just won't do it, because if I drop down dead, all the job's going to do is just replace me because they need to continue on with their business. I need to be able to take care of myself, so I need to do whatever it is. If I'm sick, I need to take that time off to take care of myself, or if one of my children are sick, I won't be any good to you anyway because I'll be too worried about my child to be concentrated on the job.

The above passages illustrate that while some participants expressed difficulties managing work and mothering activities, their mothering activities trumped their work activities for the most part, especially in cases where they had to choose between keeping their job and caring for sick children.

Financial Barriers

A major obstacle that the women in my study faced was not having sufficient financial resources to mother their children in the way they wanted to. Most participants simply did not have enough money to make ends meet on a daily basis. For those that worked, most did not earn enough money to adequately support their children, which caused them to search for other jobs and/or aspire to go back to school to get more education in hopes of getting a better job. For example, Kenya, had a full-time job working for a security company, but was in the process of searching for a higher-paying job. She explained:

One income, it just don't get it...I'm in the process now of looking ...for a better paying job or stable career...I want to move up in companies and, you know, be a supervisor or anything, anything that's going to get the bills paid. Like, it's just...so important, especially if I want to move out of town...

Like Kenya, Kara was also searching for a stable career, but was hindered by her criminal background. When I asked if there was anything Social Services could do to help her find a job, she explained:

Well...I called my social worker today, and she told me to go through some type of entry program...to see if...it's something they can do about my record...so, basically, that's where I'm...stuck at...because I've been doing housekeeping all my life, so I just got tired of doing stuff that's very physical...It's just, it's, it's a financial thing...I want to be financially stable...And like, sometimes I call on my...parents for stuff to help me, and...I'm 32 years old, shouldn't have...to do that, and that's just the only thing that really keeps me down is because I think about bills...and stuff like that, and that is the issue, because I haven't been, like, with TANF and all that, it's, it's been a very long time since...I had to get myself back to this point, and that's what bothers me.

Kara currently works part-time driving children back and forth to school in her SUV, but her goal is to get an administrative job in the health care industry doing medical billing

and coding or dealing with health records. Unfortunately, she is having difficulty finding a job in that field because of her criminal record.

Tonya had been having a difficult time finding a job in her field since she moved from Florida to Virginia. She explained that she was facing “financial obstacles all the way around”:

I've had a hard time finding a job in the field that I was used to working, which was project management... Since I moved here, I've had a really hard time finding a job as a project manager. The requirements are much different here than they are in Florida. Here the PMP certification is more required than it was back in Florida. I've been doing project management for almost six years, and back in Florida I didn't need that, but here it's like I almost have to have that. This year, I'm hoping that I can gather the money together to get that certification to give myself a fighting chance. In between there, I registered with temp agencies, so I've been doing some accounting work for them, because I have a diverse career background. I've worked in HR, accounting, and anything business administration and things like that, a few years back, so I kind of had to go to that. It doesn't pay nearly as well as project management, but it's kind of just been just taking jobs just to have money coming in pretty much...

While Tonya had a good career in Florida as a project manager, she had been having trouble finding those jobs in Virginia, due to different state requirements for project managers. For her, this meant temporarily taking a major pay cut until she can obtain the necessary certifications to become a project manager in Virginia. In addition, since she is new to Virginia, another major obstacle she had been facing was not having friends or family in the area to call on to help her with her children in case of an emergency.

Absent Fathers

In general, fathers were largely absent from the lives of the children of the mothers I interviewed. Some fathers were more involved than others, but for the most part, the bulk of childrearing fell on the mothers. When asked what, if any, obstacles or barriers she has faced to being able to take care of her children the way she wants to,

Leslie alluded to the stresses of being the primary caretaker for her children and having little help from their fathers. She explained:

Childcare [is a major barrier]. I'd really like to further my education but I don't have time right now. Like getting bills paid is more important, but I feel like if I had a better job, then financially, I'd be better. I feel like I'm doing pretty good financially, because for the most part, they have everything they want. One of the big things is just get a break... You know, sometimes I just want a break. Sometimes, I feel like I'd be a better parent if I just had time to enjoy myself, and that's my biggest thing. Their fathers, they just, you know, they come and go as they please and they just make time when they feel like it. It's always a visit and not taking them with them. I'm always responsible for another human being, and that is mentally [draining]... There's times that I just break down because I'm like, "Why?" You know, I don't understand. Sometimes I feel like they think I'm such a good single mom that they're just perfectly fine with me doing on my own because they know their kids got everything they need. Because I see these moms out here, they're bad single moms, then the dad want to be fighting to get their kids. So I'm like, "Are you guys not fighting because I'm just doing a great job without you? Really?"... I don't get it.

Although Leslie is doing alright financially, she admits that she would be doing better if she had a better job. For her, a major obstacle to being able to take care of her children the way she wants to is a lack of support from her children's fathers. In this passage, she alludes to the gendered expectation that mothers (as opposed to fathers) are supposed to be primarily responsible for taking care of children.

Jenise, who lived in a rural neighborhood with her two sons (ages six and eight) and ten-month-old daughter, had similar experiences with her children's fathers, and even had to go to court to get them to pay child support. She explained:

...I used to have to go through that whole court process...and that's something that I never thought I would have to do... and I guess you can say, like now, it doesn't really bother me, like whether they pay or not, because for me, I'm just like, if you're not there physically...and you're not stable and that kind of thing, like you're not really showing my children what they need...Being there or being a pop-up father...that doesn't work for me, so I'd rather you just stay distant because I'm not going allow you to just, you know, pop up when you want to pop up or when it's convenient for you... You're not father of the year when you've been absent...for months, years at a time.

Although Jenise went through a formal court process to try to get child support from her children's fathers, she suggests in this passage that the most meaningful form of support from them would be them consistently spending time with their children and not simply "popping up" whenever they feel like it.

Asia, who lived in a house in inner city Roanoke with her one-year-old son and four-year-old daughter, mentioned being more responsible for raising her children than their father. She explained:

... I have the bulk of the income to be able to support the kids. My kids' father is a felon. He'll work, but if he works, it's something that doesn't pay very much, and he has other kids also along with mine. It pretty much just falls out that way. Not that it was established or anything like that, like I'm going to take care of this, you take care of this, it's just pretty much the way it turned out. The cards fell...It frustrates me a lot because, like I said, it's a lot to the house, the kids, to wake up, make sure you have groceries, make sure you have gas to get there. They get sick, you need to take off work, and this and that. It's hard. It's [frustrating]...you want the help, but I mean what can you do?

Although Asia is frustrated that her children's father does not share equally in the responsibility of taking care of them, she feels there is not much that can be done to change the situation because he is a felon, which limits his employment prospects, and he has other children to care for. Like Asia, Sasha's daughter's father was recently released from prison and her son's father was incarcerated at the time of the interview. At the time of the interview, she reported that her daughter's father had not seen her since he had been out of prison. Nevertheless, she mentioned that she gets support from her children's stepfather and her mother and grandmother.

Motherhood Identities

Motherhood was as a central identity for the women in my study. To understand the significance of motherhood as an identity, I asked them, “What does being a mother mean to you?” and “How do you think your life would be different if you were not a mother?” Several of them mentioned that they could not imagine their lives if they were not mothers or they do not know where they would be if they were not mothers. For instance, when asked what being a mother means to her, Kara explained, “it means everything to me because my kids is...what keeps me going...without them, I don’t know where I would be in life and...they’re my motivation to be better at life.” Leslie explained that her identity centered on being a mother:

I don't know what I would be without being a mom. I say that all the time jokingly to my friend, because there are some weekends once in a blue moon, my oldest three I had with my ex-husband, that his family will be like, ‘hey, can we see the kids?’ Might be once a year, but I'll let them go and I'll have the whole weekend to myself, and I'm like, ‘I don't know what to do with the free time.’... I do feel like that's something I need to work on better is finding myself, though, because I have wrapped so much of my identity around being a mom.

Similarly, Tonya explained:

I don't know how to imagine my life without not being a mother, because for as long as I can remember, I've always wanted to be a mom and my children are my life, so I can't imagine my life without them. I honestly can't. I don't even know what I would be doing if I wasn't a mom.

Like Leslie and Tonya, Erin had a difficult time imagining what her life would be like if she were not a mother. When asked how she thought her life would be different if she were not a mother, she explained, “I don’t know. I have no idea. Kind of scary because that’s what I live for, is my son. I think I would be...I don’t know. I couldn’t tell you.”

In addition to not being able to imagine their lives if they were not mothers, participants often provided redemption narratives when discussing what their lives would

be like if they were not mothers. For instance, when asked how she thought her life would be different if she were not a mother, Kara added, “Partying, who knows? She continued, “Because when you have kids, your whole outlook on life, it changes. And now that it's so much stuff happening in the world, you just want to bring your kids even closer to you, because...they're a part of you.” Shay explained that if she were not a mother, she would “probably be dead”:

I had a bad alcohol problem when the first two were growing up. I drank a lot. Before I found out I was pregnant with the baby, I was still drinking. Had I not found out that I was pregnant, I'd have probably been drinking, getting into trouble. Yeah. Probably dead. Cirrhosis....I'd probably have been...Yeah, because I've been hospitalized for alcohol poisoning before. Before the second one was born. I've been hospitalized for kidney infections. My health wasn't great then. I wasn't eating right. I was drinking more than I was eating, so yeah. Smoking cigarettes. Yeah. I'd have probably been dead.

In Shay's case, it seems that motherhood literally saved her life. Similarly, Leslie explained that her children “saved [her] life”:

The path that I was headed on before I had kids, I was smoking weed, partying, hanging out with killers and robbers. When I got out of foster care, I was really drawn to the street life, and that was something I never grew up around, but it just was really, really exciting for me. So, I was just the type to play with fire, and I just wanted everything that was dangerous or exciting, and when I had my daughter, that really just woke me up like, ‘Hey, there's this person that you're responsible for.’ Just the urgency of not wanting to make the same mistakes my mom did. I never want my daughter to feel the way I feel about my mother...So, that changed my life. And it made me more responsible, made me look at things differently, made me take life more seriously, take my life more seriously.

Like Kara and Shay, it seems that motherhood provided a sense of redemption from a past life for Leslie, as well as a sense of responsibility. Her statement that having her daughter “changed [her] life” as it made her reflect more carefully on her life choices and made her “take [her] life more seriously” shows that the meaning that motherhood takes on for someone may be shaped by their particular life circumstances. Having grown up in

the foster care system and not having a good relationship with her own mother seems to have made her want to be a better mother.

In Leslie's case, motherhood saved her from the dangers associated with "street life"—a life that she was drawn to as a young woman growing up in the foster care system. Until the age of four, she lived with her mother, but went to live with her grandmother until the age of eight. At eight, she entered the foster system, and was adopted at age 10. However, after experiencing sexual and physical abuse in her adopted family, she was put back into the foster care system at age 14 and aged out at 19. The sexual and physical abuse she endured, as well as being moved into and out of different foster homes, unfortunately seemed to shape her relationships with people from then on, and also shaped her motherhood identity and how she mothered her children. She explained:

I think I try not to be overly protective over my kids, but I feel like I'm more aware of what's really out here in this world, I'm not oblivious, there are some really bad people out here. And I took a lot of things from me and what type of parent I didn't want to be. I try my best not to let my past be a crutch, you know what I'm saying? But be something that I...I don't want to be a statistic, and I feel like I have kind of ended up being one, like being a single mom, but I think I've overcome a lot of the average statistics for people that had a background the way that I did...I mean growing up in foster care, I think a lot of times...Well, I guess I can only go in my mind on what the average is. Most of the girls I was in foster care with ended up on drugs or never got married, they didn't finish school, and it's not that they're not capable, it's just their background messed them up so much that they didn't get past it. And I only had one friend...that I can say she grew up, she made it, she did something...You don't hear a lot of success stories of people lived through stuff like that, or they have to go down a really, really, really bad path before they end up deciding to come back. You know, so...to me being a statistic was I didn't want to be like my mother, but I did in a way because my first marriage was abusive, and my mother, she lost us because of abuse and drugs. So, I didn't go down the path of doing drugs, that was really rampant in my family, but I did find myself in [an] abusive relationship, which I felt like I would never. I judged my mother a lot about that, and I'd never thought I would be a single mom. When I got married, I had my children with the intent on staying with that person, and I mean I just didn't want to repeat the cycle of my kids being

raised in a broken home. So, a lot of things I feel like I have repeated, but not to the extent or as bad, you know. I don't want to make it sound like I think I'm better than my mom, but I feel like I did make some better choices. Even though I am a single parent, I have my kids, that's one big thing. I'm here. I haven't lost them, I haven't done anything to jeopardize losing them. Even though I didn't have a mom to teach me how to be a mom...there is information I can educate myself on how to be the best that I can be, and I still fall short, I think we all do, even people that have parents. But I really try to make up, I guess for the things that I didn't have to contribute to me and becoming a young woman.

It is clear that Leslie's motherhood identity is shaped by her having grown up in the foster care system. The reference to not wanting to be a statistic comes up in this passage as she recalls the predicament that many of her friends who also grew up in foster care found themselves in. For her, being a single mom means being a statistic, and although she tried to avoid becoming one, she still became one because she ended up in an abusive marriage (like her mother) and finally became a single mother. Her statement that she did not want to "repeat the cycle of [her kids] being raised in a broken home" is striking, as it seems she has a standard in her mind of what a good home should look like and hers does not fit that standard. This is one example of how dominant notions of family may shape how low-income Black single mothers perceive their own family formations and thus, their motherhood identities. If, for Leslie, a "broken" home is one that looks like hers, what might that mean for how she perceives herself as a mother? The implication behind the notion that a home led by a single mother is a "broken" one is that being a single mother is bad and mothers should aim to raise their children in homes in which a father is also present (i.e., a heteropatriarchal nuclear family). It also seems for Leslie that her relationship with her own mother has shaped her motherhood identity. Earlier in our interview, she described her relationship with her mother as fraught. Not wanting to repeat the same mistakes that her mother made has caused Leslie to reflect on her own

choices, even to the point of participating in therapy and co-dependency meetings, which help her maintain healthy relationships, particularly with men.

Participants provided a range of reasons for why motherhood as an identity was so significant for them. For instance, when I asked her what made her always want to be a mom, Tonya explained:

Because of the way that I grew up. My dad took me from my mom when I was very, very young, and I was kind of kept from her, separated from her, and then she eventually passed away when I was at the age of 18, so I never got to build on that relationship with my mom. My father wasn't exactly the father figure type of role. He was more of a provider type of parent. He would give me all of my necessities in terms of financial, the best schools and things like that, but none of the guidance and support and teachings and stuff like that. I grew up watching...families on t.v. and I just remember being very young and always wanting to be part of whatever family that was I was watching on t.v. For me, growing up just like, I want a family. I want to be like those people on t.v., kind of thing. That's where it kind of stems from for me.

Tonya's separation from her mother at an early age, her strained relationship with her father, and the family models she saw on television made her aware of dominant family ideals and caused her to want her own family to fit into that ideal. This passage illustrates the power of cultural mediums (in this case, popular culture) in shaping desired family formations.

Katrina explained that she was really excited when she learned she was going to be a mother because she previously thought it was not a possibility. When asked what being a mother means to her, she explained:

It's my life. That's my everything. I take on that responsibility better than I've taken any. It makes me feel like superwoman...I really was like excited that I was going to actually be a mom, because I didn't think it could ever happen. Like from my own birth of a child. So when it--I was like, oh yeah, I'm about to make this look easy...yeah, I didn't [laughs]. I didn't make it look easy.

Long before Katrina became a mother, she served as an “other-mother” to her younger brothers and sisters. She explained:

I took care of everyone's children and didn't think I was going to have children. I was told that I couldn't have children from doctors. I tried to have a child five years ago. It didn't work, and then I got my miracle baby...The reason I got taken from my mother is because my mother was working and she needed...childcare, and my grandmother on my dad's side found out that I wasn't going to school because I was taking care of my mom's three-month baby. The three-month baby ended up being 14 when my mom died. When she died, I ended up getting custody of her, putting her through college, and then she went [and] had two babies. My sister, another sister, of my mom's children...she had a child when we were 20, and she didn't know what to do. My mom was already gone, so she ended up giving her children to me. When one of my other sisters, she got postpartum, she...had to go into a mental place. So someone had to take care of her child or her child would end up in foster care, so I took care of her child. So I took care of everybody's babies.

Like many Black women, Katrina played the role of other-mother to her sisters and one of her sister's children. Nevertheless, it seems that having her own child was a defining moment in her life, especially since doctors had previously told her she would not be able to have children.

Like Katrina, Jenise had also been told she may never be a mother. When asked what being a mother means to her, she replied:

...It's definitely my greatest blessing...I was told...early on that I may not be able to have children...it would be hard...and even with having my daughter...I had some issues...so...it's...joyful, it's fun...I enjoy...seeing them grow and their personalities showing, you know, every child is different, so it's interesting...but it's, it's very important to me. You know, I love my children to death...

I followed up by asking her how it made her feel when she was told that she may never be able to have children and she explained that she was “devastated” because “...as a woman, we feel like that's something we all should be able to do.” She added:

...So before I even had my daughter, I actually suffered a miscarriage...and I went through that whole blaming myself kind of phase...Like, you know, should I have listened to the doctor when she said...don't have any more or...try not to

have anymore, you know, so I kind of blamed myself like...it was my fault that [inaudible] you know...that kind of phase...and then, maybe, I'd say about six months later...I ended up pregnant with my daughter.

Jenise's description of being a mother as "[her] greatest blessing" shows that motherhood plays a central role in her life; however, she was able to imagine her life outside of motherhood. When asked how she thinks her life would be different if she were not a mother, she explained:

I think I would be, I would definitely be able to travel more...I would only be responsible for myself financially...so it, it would be different...but I would be able to travel more and...see the world...that's one of my biggest...things that I want, even if it means...eventually taking them.

Similarly, Kenya explained that if she were not a mother, she probably would have finished college and be living in another state:

I'd probably be in California somewhere, or Florida...I did two years of school. I did criminal justice. I didn't graduate 'cause I got pregnant with my second son. But I did finish my two years, just didn't graduate. I got a couple more...classes I need to finish. I just would be finished with school and living life.

The passages from Jenise and Kenya illustrate the sacrifices that mothers often make for their children. In Kenya's case, she was not able to finish school because she got pregnant with her second son. The ability to focus more on a career and travel more if they did not have children came up often with participants. For instance, Katrina explained that if she did not have children, she "would be in a great big career, probably in marketing" and "probably be able to travel the world, and still have no children."

Michelle explained that she would probably be a "professional dancer" if she were not a mother:

...When I was younger, I [was] in dance. Elementary school, we had a dance class, we performed dance. I used to love to get on stage and dance. At that time, I did used to think I was going to be a professional dancer. But then, everything...so, that went out my mind.

In this sense, it seems that several of the women in my study sacrificed their career goals to become mothers and/or were never able to fully realize those goals because they had children and taking care of their children became a priority.

Although some participants put their career goals on the backburner when they became mothers, none of them described their motherhood identities as in tension with their work identities. It was clear that their motherhood identities were more powerful than their work identities. For them, having a job was part of their responsibilities as a mother. Although this was not a significant emphasis in my interviews, when asked if they felt that having a job was part of their responsibilities as a mother, it was clear that my participants took for granted that having a job was part of being a responsible Black mother. This was in part for the obvious reason of having to provide for their children and not necessarily being able to depend on their children's fathers to help them do so. In addition, historically, Black women have always had to work due to race discrimination, so they have not necessarily been able to choose between staying at home with their children or joining the paid work force.

Conclusion

Although mothering and motherhood were significant aspects of my participants' lives, for the most part, they mothered somewhat in isolation. While some previous literature on Black motherhood/mothering has documented that Black women tend to mother within dense kin and community networks, most of the mothers in my study mentioned that they do not receive much support from their kin networks and/or communities (although the extent to which this was the case varied) or their children's

fathers. They also often mentioned opting to stay inside and not let their children play outside a lot, which may be evidence of a lack of community solidarity and support (although staying inside obviously reinforces this). Isolation within their homes may also reinforce their focus on motherhood (rather than, for example, community activities and friendships).

As studies following Stack (1974) and others paint a more complicated picture of social support within low-income African American communities (e.g., Brewster and Padavic 2012; Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clog 1993; Raudenbush 2016), I am reluctant to argue that the mothers in my study are completely socially isolated. As I did not do an ethnographic study and thus could not observe their daily interactions with family and/or community members, I am not aware of the full extent of their engagement with kin and community members or their reliance on kin-based exchange networks. Nevertheless, it was clear that they were somewhat selective about whom they exchanged support with, as most of the support they received was intergenerational (i.e., from their parents) or from a few close friends. The stories presented in this chapter illustrate that there may be several reasons why my participants do not enjoy dense and kin and community support networks in their current neighborhoods. For instance, not having lived in their present neighborhoods for a very long time may mean that they have not had sufficient time to establish dense community ties, and lack of safety in their present neighborhoods, which may make them reluctant to pursue relationships with others in the community.

The daily lives of the women in my study centered largely around being a mother, and there were very few expressions of ambivalence about having children. In addition, motherhood was a central identity for these women. As their daily activities centered so

much on their mothering activities and responsibilities, perhaps many of them had not necessarily had the time to think about their identities outside of being mothers. They saw having a job as part of their responsibilities as a Black mother, and the identity of worker did not emerge as a major alternative identity to motherhood. Even though several of the mothers in my study worked, none of them mentioned working in jobs that they were particularly passionate about and none of them had partners with whom they could share the responsibilities of childrearing, which may contribute to the fact that their identities centered largely around being mothers and their daily activities centered largely around mothering. In cases where participants had to choose between work and mothering responsibilities, they chose mothering responsibilities.

The major obstacles participants faced to being able to carry out their mothering activities in the way they wanted to included financial barriers (i.e., class obstacles) and a lack of involvement from their children's fathers. In contrast to studies that focus on the belittling rules and invasive surveillance that accompanied welfare reform (e.g., Schram et al., 2009; Schram et al. 2010;), my participants largely did not report feeling belittled by having to follow rules associated with receiving public assistance (with the exception of Leslie and Briana). The lack of emphasis on experiences with public assistance as an obstacle was unexpected. This may be due to fact that while some of my participants were receiving TANF at the time of the study, most were not (although many had received it in the past), and rules accompanying other forms of public assistance (i.e., SNAP and Medicaid) are not as invasive as rules accompanying TANF.

I had anticipated that at least some of my participants would have experienced having their children taken away by the state (and consequently, may have had some

interactions with the criminal justice system). Although this turned out not to be the case, it was clear that the criminal justice system played a role in the life outcomes of Kara, Asia, and Sasha. For instance, Kara explained that her job prospects were limited by her criminal record. Similarly, Asia explained that her child's father had limited job prospects due to his criminal record (he had also fathered other children besides hers), which meant that his ability to provide financially for their children was minimal. Sasha's daughter's father had been recently released from prison at the time of the interview and her son's father was incarcerated at the time of the interview. Research has shown that incarceration may impact African American fathers' involvement in their children's lives and their ability to provide for them (Perry and Bright 2012; Swisher and Waller 2008).

In addition to being a central identity for the mothers in my study, it is also clear that for some participants, motherhood provided a sense of redemption from a past life and hope for a better future. Some of them discussed having experienced difficult life circumstances before becoming mothers, such as struggling with alcoholism or participating in criminal activity. This illustrates that the meaning that motherhood takes on for an individual may vary based on their life experiences, which are, of course, shaped by race and class. Specifically, low income Black single mothers must grapple with racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes when making meaning of their motherhood identities (see chapter five).

V. NAVIGATING RACISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY

Introduction

A major part of being a low-income Black single mother is navigating racism and white supremacy. While my participants may not go about their daily lives thinking about the impact of racism and white supremacy on their motherhood identities or mothering activities, my findings clearly illustrate that racism and white supremacy shape not only how they think of themselves as mothers, but also how they mother their children. This chapter is organized in two parts: the first part of the chapter focuses on the ways in which controlling images or stereotypes of low-income Black single mothers shape the motherhood identity of my participants and how they attempt to resist those controlling images or stereotypes. The second part of the chapter focuses on the ways in which, through their mothering activities, my participants attempt to protect their children from racism and white supremacy. In the introduction to this chapter, I discuss the origins of controlling images of Black women and how these images continue to shape the perceptions of low-income Black single mothers. In addition, I provide some historical context on the significance of racial socialization and/or preparing one's children to navigate living in a racist society.

Origins of Controlling Images

How my participants think of themselves as mothers was largely shaped by *controlling images*, that is, racist and sexist stereotypes about Black women that are used to justify their oppression (Collins 2000). As controlling Black women's sexuality and reproduction has historically been essential to the preservation of race, class, and gender inequality in the U.S., controlling images emerged as a way to maintain Black women's

subordination and the economic system of chattel slavery (Collins 2000). Patricia Hill Collins provides a detailed historical account of the emergence of controlling images of Black women in the U.S. in her seminal text, *Black Feminist Thought*.

Collins (2000) argues that the first controlling image that was attached to Black women was that of the “mammy,” or “the faithful, obedient domestic servant” (p. 80). The mammy figure is that of an asexualized Black woman domestic worker whose main role is to care for the children of her white slave master’s family. Importantly, as Collins (2000) points out, “Even though [the mammy] may be well loved and may wield considerable authority in her white “family,” the mammy still knows her “place” as obedient servant. She has accepted her subordination” (p. 80). The mammy controlling image has historically been used to signify Black women’s inferiority to white women (Collins 2000).

The second controlling image that Collins writes about is the “Black matriarch,” or the Black female head-of-household (Collins 2000). As Collins (2000) writes,

While the mammy typifies the Black mother figure in White homes, the matriarch symbolizes the mother figure in Black homes. Just as the mammy represents the “good” Black mother, the matriarch symbolizes the “bad” Black mother. Introduced and widely circulated via a government report titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, the Black matriarchy thesis argued that African-American women who failed to fulfill their traditional ‘womanly’ duties at home contributed to social problems in Black civil society (Moynihan 1965). Spending too much time away from home, these working mothers ostensibly could not properly supervise their children and thus were a major contributing factor to their children’s failure at school. As overly aggressive, unfeminine women, Black matriarchs allegedly emasculated their lovers and husbands. These men, understandably, either deserted their partners or refused to marry the mothers of their children. From the dominant group’s perspective, the matriarch represented a failed mammy, a negative stigma to be applied to African-American women who dared reject the image of the submissive, hardworking servant (p. 83).

The matriarchy thesis and the resulting controlling image of the Black matriarchy thus contributed to the vilification of Black single mothers in the U.S. During the time of Moynihan's report, women, in general, were expected to be "just dependent enough" (i.e., not too dependent, but certainly not too independent) (Fraser and Gordon 1994:325). White women, thus were characterized as too dependent, while Black women were characterized as too independent (Fraser and Gordon 1994). As welfare dependency became increasingly stigmatized in the latter half of the twentieth century and white women began transferring to "first-track" public assistance programs, such as unemployment and old age insurance, single Black mothers became the face of welfare dependency (Fraser and Gordon 1994). According to Fraser and Gordon (1994), "The ground [for Black single mothers becoming the face of welfare dependency] was laid by a long, somewhat contradictory stream of discourse about 'the black family,' in which African-American gender and kinship relations were measured against white middle-class norms and deemed pathological" (p. 327). Black mothers' leadership in their families, which was largely a result of Black men's unemployment and under-employment due to racist discrimination in the labor market, was seen as deviant.

The third and most salient controlling image that arose during my interviews was that of the "welfare queen." Collins (2000) argues that the "welfare queen" controlling image appears to be linked to Black women in the U.S. gaining access to social welfare benefits, as prior to this, there was no need for such a stereotype. As the social welfare state expanded in the U.S., African-Americans fought for and gained access to social welfare benefits that were previously denied to them (Collins 2000; Gordon 1995). In the wake of the major neoliberal economic shifts of the 1980s and 1990s, which exacerbated

poverty among African-Americans in the U.S., the “welfare queen” controlling image blamed Black mothers for their own poverty, as opposed to examining the political and economic structures that perpetuated poverty in Black communities (Collins 2000).

Popularized during the Reagan administration, the “welfare queen” controlling image denotes a “highly materialistic, domineering, and manless working-class Black woman” who was “content to take the hard-earned money of tax-paying Americans and remain married to the state” (Collins 2000:88) to justify cuts to social welfare programs, including eventually welfare reform. As Collins (2000) explains:

To mask the effects of cuts in government spending on social welfare programs that fed children, housed working families, assisted cities in maintaining roads, bridges and basic infrastructure, and supported other basic public services, media images increasingly identified and blamed Black women for the deterioration of U.S. interests. Thus, poor Black women simultaneously become symbols of what was deemed wrong with America and targets of social policies designed to shrink the government sector (p. 88).

In essence, the “welfare queen” stereotype signals, for white, middle-class Americans, a decline in the American way of life. As Lubiano (1992) writes,

‘Welfare queen’ is a phrase that describes economic dependency—the lack of a job and/or income (which equal degeneracy in the Calvinist United States); the presence of a child or children with no father and/or husband (moral deviance); and, finally, a charge on the collective U.S. treasury—a human debit. The cumulative totality, circulation, and effect of these meanings in a time of scarce resources among the working class and the lower middle class is devastatingly intense. The welfare queen represents moral aberration and an economic drain, but the figure’s problematic status becomes all the more threatening once responsibility for the destruction of the American way of life is attributed to it (p. 337-338).

Several of my participants recognized the “welfare queen” controlling image and attempted to distance themselves from it by describing themselves as hard-working and emphasizing that they were only relying on Social Services benefits temporarily.

Historically, welfare recipients have not been seen as citizens in the same way as those

who do not rely on the state for social support, so it makes sense that my participants would try to distance themselves from the idea that they are lazy, government moochers.

Judith Shklar (1998) argues that citizenship has always depended on two basic rights: the right to earn a wage and the right to vote. The U.S. has a long history of excluding certain groups (namely, non-property owning white men, women, and people of color) from the benefits of full citizenship. Although the right to vote is now extended to all citizens who are registered and over 18 years of age (with the exclusion of convicted felons), the civic and economic disenfranchisement of certain groups (i.e., people of color), prevents them from being recognized as full citizens. Additionally, as citizenship in American society is closely tied to being a wage earner (since being a wage earner denotes self-sufficiency and a lack of dependence), anyone who does not earn a wage (especially individuals who rely on state support) is not recognized as a full citizen (Shklar 1998). As Shklar (1998) explains, “To be on welfare is to lose one’s independence and to be treated as less than a full member of society. In effect, the people who belong to the under-class are not quite citizens” (p. 22). Simply put, people on welfare lack the social standing necessary to be recognized as full citizens (Shklar 1998). The rise of neoliberalism has amplified the significance of being an independent wage-earner, as being a good “neoliberal subject” is dependent upon one’s ability to be self-sufficient and thus to not rely on the state for social support (Brown 2005; Weigt 2006).

As Fraser and Gordon (1994) note, connotations associated with independence and dependence in the U.S. have changed over time. For instance, in the pre-industrial era, dependency was associated with subordination, thus it was a fairly common condition, and independence only applied to members of the upper-class, or the

bourgeoisie, who did not have to exchange their labor for a wage (Fraser and Gordon 1994). With the rise of industrial capitalism and the rise in the number of wage laborers, however, anyone who was excluded from wage labor (e.g., slaves, Native Americans, and paupers) was considered dependent. Dependency thus became stigmatized, racialized, and associated with moral and psychological inferiority (Fraser and Gordon 1994).

For Black people in the U.S., the effects of neoliberalism are also deeply entangled with racism and white supremacy. For instance, although Black people in the U.S. have always worked (first as slaves and then as wage laborers), they have not been able to reap the benefits of full citizenship. Lisa Marie Cacho (2012) argues that, in the U.S., racially marginalized groups are “ineligible for personhood,” as they are

“subjected to laws but refused the legal means to contest those laws as well as denied both the political legitimacy and moral credibility necessary to question them. These populations are excluded from the ostensibly democratic processes that legitimate U.S. law, yet they are expected to unambiguously accept and unequivocally uphold a legal and political system that depends on the unquestioned permanency of their rightlessness” (p. 6).

According to Cacho (2012), “To be ineligible for personhood is a form of social death; it not only defines who does not matter, it also makes mattering meaningful” (p. 6). In the context of the neoliberal U.S., only privileged groups (i.e., economic elites and white, middle-class, people who do not depend on the state for social support) matter; thus, extending public assistance benefits to non-working people of color is seen as a loss of power and privilege (with no promise of anything to gain) for dominant groups (Cacho 2012).

Another powerful controlling image that emerged during interviews was that of the “baby mama.” The baby mama controlling image denotes a Black mother of an “illegitimate child” “who purposely becomes pregnant so that she [can] maintain a

relationship while making the biological father financially indebted to her or keep her a part of him” (Stephens and Few 2007:52). The notion that single Black mothers must have multiple “baby daddies” stems from controlling images that portray Black women as sexually lascivious and immoral, namely, the “jezebel, whore, or ‘hoochie’” controlling images (Collins 2000:89). The jezebel controlling image is rooted in slavery and was used to portray Black women as sexually aggressive, “thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women,” as well as justifying the exploitation of Black women’s bodies to produce more slaves (Collins 2000:89). Stemming from the jezebel controlling image, the whore or hoochie controlling images also signify Black women with intense sexual appetites. Unlike the “good girl,” the hoochie is a “bad girl” that is good in bed and that men feel content with using only for sex (Collins 2000). Like the hoochie controlling image, Black women with intense sexual appetites are often labeled “freaks.” As Stephens and Few (2007) note, “The Freak is a ‘bad girl’ who gains male attention through an overt sexual persona. She appears sexually liberated, empowered, and seeks sex solely for physical satisfaction, not for a relationship” (p. 52). In many ways, the baby mama controlling image is a combination of the jezebel, whore, or hoochie controlling images and the “sapphire” or “angry Black woman” controlling image, as she is portrayed as a promiscuous, resentful, immoral Black single mother who gets pregnant to maintain a relationship with her child’s father and/or to get money from him (Tyree 2009). Stigma attached to being a baby mama is part of the reason why single mothers who take their children’s fathers to court seeking child support payments are often berated for doing so. As my participant, Tamara, put it, they are seen as “bitter baby mamas.” Part of the

reason that Black mothers may be discouraged from taking their children's fathers to court for child support is because of the Black community's historically fraught relationship with the state (Hattery and Smith 2018; Oshinsky 1996). A mother may not want her child's father to end up in prison if he does not pay his child support, so she may be reluctant to take him to court. In addition, as I mentioned in chapter two, to receive TANF benefits (which includes the state going after the child's father for child support), the state requires proof of paternity. Some mothers may not want to go through the ordeal of having to prove the paternity of their child, so they may choose to forego filing for TANF benefits. This dilemma is indicative of the fact that, for Black people in the U.S., the state has historically been a mechanism of repression. In this sense, a Black mother may view taking her child's father to court for child support as another opportunity for the state to incarcerate a Black man.

The baby mama stands in contrast to the "Black queen," who is "characterized by sexual purity, motherhood, spirituality, commitment to the uplifting of the race, and in particular the uplifting of black men" (Reid-Brinkley 2008: 247). As Reid-Brinkley (2008) notes, "The stereotypical representations of poor and working-class black women 'become texts of what not to be' for middle- and upper-class black women" (p. 246; citing Collins 2004). Thus, Black women may aspire to fit the ideal of the "Black lady" in an attempt to achieve ideals of femininity set forth by the "cult of true womanhood" and to achieve a certain level of respectability (Reid-Brinkley 2008). Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) coined the term "politics of respectability" to refer to the ways in which middle-class Black church women historically promoted "the value of religion, education, and hard work" among the Black lower-class in an effort to achieve "the dual

goals of racial self-help and respect from white America” (p. 14). For Black women, achieving the ideals of respectability politics has historically been a form of resistance to stereotypes about the sexual deviance of Black women and a means of protecting themselves against state-sanctioned sexual abuse, particularly at the hands of white men in the South (Gaines 1996; Reid-Brinkley 2008). As Reid-Brinkley (2008) argues, “Abuse was often justified by stereotyping black women as having loose sexual morals and the presumption that black women’s bodies were available to both white and black men without black women’s consent” (p. 245). Therefore, staking a claim to the virtues of femininity that traditionally were only reserved for white, middle-class women was Black women’s way of attempting to “gain patriarchal protection” (p. 245). To this day, ideals of white, middle-class femininity are the standards by which Black people judge Black women’s behavior (Reid-Brinkley 2008). The pervasiveness of “respectability politics” and its resonance with low-income Black single mothers became evident in my conversations with participants. I discuss this further later in this chapter.

The Black lady controlling image is thus a class-specific one, as it represents middle-class Black femininity, although lower-class Black women may still aspire to achieve this ideal (Reid-Brinkley 2008). The Black lady controlling image is indicative of the “uplift ideology” that middle- and upper-class Blacks began embracing post-Emancipation, which emphasized “self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth” (Gaines 1996:2). In many ways, embracing uplift ideology signified Blacks’ attempt to resist stereotypes of Black people as lazy, uneducated, and sexually immoral. It was also a response to the horrors of the racism of the time in the U.S., which included “peonage,

disenfranchisement, Jim Crow, the terrorism of lynching and rape, and the ubiquitous contempt for persons of African ancestry” (p. 4). In addition to reinforcing middle-class norms, uplift ideology also reinforced patriarchal gender norms with its male-dominated leadership and its emphasis on strengthening the heteropatriarchal Black family as the key to liberation and achieving respectability (Gaines 1996). It is important to note that not all Blacks embraced uplift ideology. More militant Blacks and many younger Black intellectuals, for example, were critical of uplift ideology’s tendency to perpetuate “the racial and economic status quo” (Gaines 1996:11).

Racial Survival/Racial Socialization

When analyzing and writing about Black women’s mothering practices and experiences, it is important to consider the context in which Black women mother their children, which illuminates the longstanding historical legacy of racism and contempt for Black bodies in the U.S. As I mentioned in chapter three, state-sanctioned violence against Black bodies and surveillance of Black people are deeply embedded in the fabric of the U.S (Hattery and Smith 2018; for additional discussion of this literature, see chapter three).

For my participants, preparing their children to navigate living in a racist, white supremacist society was as a key aspect of their mothering activities. It also became apparent during interviews that the propagation of recent incidents of racist police and vigilante violence on the news and on social media (such as those discussed in chapter three) has had a strong impact on how they mother their children. In this sense, my study parallels the findings of other literature on Black motherhood that indicates that ensuring

the survival of the race is a key feature of Black mothering (Collins 1994; Barnes 2016a, 2016b). One means by which Black mothers do this is through racial socialization (see chapter three for a discussion of this concept). For my participants, conversations with children around race and/or discussions about raising Black children were in many ways indicative of *respectability politics*, or mothers teaching their children how to behave respectably to avoid being perceived as a threat by white people and potentially avoid being a target of racism. I discuss this further later in this chapter.

Controlling Images of Low-Income Black Single Mothers

It became clear during interviews with participants that controlling images of low-income Black single mothers shape the ways in which my participants think of themselves as mothers, or their motherhood identity. Throughout my interviews, participants often referenced stereotypes about Black single mothers, especially those who receive public assistance. The “welfare queen” stereotype was especially prevalent. While my participants recognized racist and sexist stereotypes about Black single mothers, they also actively resisted them. When asked what it means to her to be a Black mother, Kenya replied:

Stereotype a little bit, ‘cause they think...I don't know...It's just some things you read, or you hear people say, they think Black moms just sit around and wait for the government to take care of them, and that is not the case...I mean, I've had my share of sitting down, but it's because I was always, you know...him and my middle son, they're behind each other, he's six and he's five. He was still crawling and I was pregnant with him, and then when he came, they were still both in diapers...I couldn't work, you know, so of course I've had to wait on food stamps and Medicaid and TANF, but once I was able, I got up...got out and worked, but...they just think that black people are just lazy and that's far from the case, I'm far from lazy. I work so much overtime and I will work.

When asked who “they” were, she added:

Government, the rich people, people like Donald Trump...I mean, white people. They're always saying, "we paying our taxes for them to just sit on their tail" while I work my tail off, and you know, just crazy stuff. And they don't know the people's situations. And in some cases, it is true, some people are lazy and don't want to work. But other people, they have kids with disabilities, or they're disabled, or it's different...50 million situations...why a person may not be able to work, you know. But I feel if you're able to work, get up and work.

It is interesting that when asked what it means to her to be a Black mother, Kenya immediately started talking about stereotypes about low-income Black single mothers receiving public assistance. It was as if those pejorative stereotypes were the first thing that came to her mind when she was asked to think about what it means to be a Black mother. The specific stereotype that she references here is that of the welfare queen, which, as she suggests, is a racialized one. She immediately pointed out why she personally had to rely on public assistance, especially when she was not employed. By explaining that her oldest son was still crawling and she was pregnant with her second-born son while she was receiving Medicaid, TANF, and SNAP (at the time of the interview, she was receiving Medicaid, but not TANF or SNAP), she is asserting the legitimacy of mothering young children and her need to "sit down" when she had two babies so close in age.

Kayla began our interview with a statement about stereotypes of low-income Black single mothers receiving public assistance:

There's a great misconception about people who receive benefits, especially us, in that a lot of us are just uneducated people who just lay around having babies and just sitting on our butt being lazy. And that's the furthest from the truth. That's why I wanted to sign up for this [interview], just to speak on that because I work so hard, and to be defined by a stereotype, it can be very, I guess you could say hurtful. Some people are not sensitive. They see a lot of what's on social media or the Internet, but not the real thing. Not everybody should be categorized in that way. As I said, I did graduate from college with honors. And it took a lot for me to just push through it and do that. I did have help with childcare through Social Services. My main goal in life is to not have to be dependent on government or

any programs. But we're using it as a stepping stone right now because it is needed. Not using the system, or taking advantage, or anything. I just wanted to clear that.

In this quote, Kayla attempts to dismantle the “welfare queen” stereotype. She immediately distances herself from the stereotype that low-income Black single mothers are lazy and uneducated by emphasizing that she works very hard and that she graduated from college with honors. Explaining that she is simply using Social Services benefits as a stepping stone reinforces the narrative that public assistance benefits should only serve as a temporary fix for recipients, rather than a source of long-term support. It is also indicative of the fact that, in the U.S., being a good citizen-subject is largely determined by one’s employment status. Working is a means by which individuals demonstrate their self-sufficiency; therefore, if one does not work, they are not independent, and are thus met with disdain.

Stereotypes in Action

The “welfare queen” controlling image is pervasive in U.S. culture. It is such a powerful stereotype that one can simply turn to social media to find memes about welfare recipients taking advantage of the system or social media users ranting about how many of their hard-earned taxpayer dollars are going to some lazy welfare recipient. As I mentioned earlier, politicians and policymakers also employ this controlling image to justify cuts to public assistance benefits and programs. Some of my participants discussed being blatantly stereotyped while they were out in public. Kayla describes an experience of micro-level racism and classism in which people in the grocery store were making disparaging remarks about her because she was using her Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card:

If I'm in the grocery store using my food stamp card, and it's happened before. I would hear people or see people looking, saying little comments about how they can't get it. But I don't say anything, because it's bigger than just me. People don't see the real picture, that you have to be humble to even go and ask for this type of help. And there was a time, that was me. I would judge and say, oh, they got money to get their hair and nails done, and stuff like that, but here I am working hard, and whatever's coming out my check for taxes, whatever, is paying for their stuff. I was very judgmental, until I had to end up doing it myself. And now I see, okay, not everybody is abusing the system like that...and it is hurtful. But like I said, I don't hold it in my heart. Because people, if they don't know, and they're just being ignorant based off of what's on the Internet or what they see...

The above passage from Kayla illustrates the power of the welfare queen stereotype. It is so powerful that even she believed it until she started receiving Social Services benefits herself. Part of the power of the welfare queen stereotype stems from the fact that it stands in stark contrast to the cultural and political mandate to be a hard-working, tax-paying American citizen. It also runs counter to the American myth of meritocracy or the bootstrap myth, which suggests that if one works hard, they will be able to succeed. These myths systematically mask structural racism and classism, blaming victims of racism and classism (e.g., low-income Black single mothers) for their own predicament.

Leslie, like Kayla, also alludes to the welfare queen stereotype, specifically, the idea that because she is a single Black mother with multiple children, she cannot possibly be making ends meet without receiving public assistance:

I feel like the way I'm viewed is the main thing that has to do with my race though, more than anything. I feel like a lot of times when I go somewhere, because all my kids are small, I get looked at. I've had people make comments like they wonder how many baby daddies I have. That's one thing. I hate that word...like, "Do they all have the same dad?" I mean people are just very blunt about things they may ask. They may assume that I have multiple, that each one of mine is a different father, or assume that I have section 8. I've had that comment made about me to my son's father, some of his friends would make comments to him like, "Oh," there was rumors going around that I was on Section 8 and all this stuff, and I make \$40,000 a year, you know, they just assume because I'm a young Black woman with a bunch of kids that that just must be how

I'm surviving...or I've had...when I go to the grocery store and I have a cart full of food, it's automatically assumed you have EBT. I've been asked that before.

The assumption that Leslie must be on public assistance is rooted in the notion that single Black mothers with multiple children are lazy and enjoy “mooching” off the government. Another stereotype that Leslie alludes to is that of the baby mama.”

Tamara’s discussion of how Black mothers are often portrayed as “bitter baby mamas” illustrates the pervasiveness of the baby mama controlling image. When asked what it means to her to be a Black mother, she responded:

That the world's already against us, like I- read posts where like black woman is this, black mothers is bitter baby mamas, and all those stuff, but honestly...you'd be bitter too, like not saying that all chicks is bitter, but it's like the perception they put out of us like we're bitter...You see it everywhere, like even when I was talking to my friend and he was like, ‘Oh, because you put your ex-husband on child support, you bitter.’ It was like, just because I put him on child support--and me and him broke up last year in May, and I had to put him on child support this May for him to actually give me money, that's not being bitter. I gave you a whole year to take care of your son and you didn't, so now I'm gonna make the government make you take care of your son...

Tamara’s discussion of the posts she has seen calling Black mothers “bitter baby mamas” and her friend’s comment accusing her of being bitter because she took her ex-husband to court to make him pay child support are indicative of the baby mama controlling image, as the idea behind such statements and accusations is that Black mothers take their children’s fathers to court to pay child support out of spite, rather than so that they will own up to their responsibility of taking care of their children. The notion that baby mamas get pregnant in part to get money from their children’s fathers suggests that they are “Gold Diggers,” or women who trade sex for economic and material gain (Stephens and Few 2007). It is also important to note the accusatory phrasing of “putting” one’s child’s father on child support, which effectively demonizes the mother and disregard’s

the father's responsibility to take care of his children. Obviously, if a father is already taking care of his children, a mother need not take him to court; however, in Tamara's case and that of most of my participants, their children's fathers are unfortunately not taking responsibility for helping to care for their children (see chapter four for further discussion of this).

Not Wanting to Be a "Statistic"

When it comes to Black women's single motherhood in the U.S., statistics have a lot to say. For instance, the U.S. Census Bureau's (2016) "America's Families and Living Arrangements" dataset shows that 34 percent of Black children live with their mother only, compared to only 6.5 percent of white children. In addition, while single mother families in the U.S. disproportionately live in poverty, African American single mother families experience higher rates of poverty (39.9 percent) than white (30.6 percent) and Asian (24.2 percent) single mother families. (Hispanic single mother families experience a slightly higher rate of poverty than Black families at 41.9 percent, and Native American single mother families experience the highest rates of poverty of all single mother families at 48.4 percent) (Tucker and Lowell 2016). Tonya alluded to some of these statistics when asked what it means to her to be a Black mother:

It means that you sometimes fall into the statistical group of eventually becoming a mom doing it on your own. I don't know what the numbers are, but I know that there's a lot of black women raising children on their own. I didn't start off that way, but either way, I still ended up that way.

Black single motherhood is so common in the U.S. that it has in many ways become a trope. Tonya describes a time when she saw a meme on Facebook that was poking fun at the absence of Black fathers in Black daughters' lives:

... There was a meme going around on Facebook and it was in the perspective of a white guy and he was saying he loves dating black girls and when asked why he loves dating black girls, he says because he never has to meet fathers. That broke my heart when I read that. It was awful. It was awful, but yet there was so much truth to it.

While research shows that Black fathers are more likely to live apart from their children than are white and Hispanic fathers (Taylor, Parker, Livingston, Wang, and Docterman 2011), this does not necessarily mean that they are not actively involved in their children's lives. Pew Research Center's (2011) report on the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) shows that Black fathers who live apart from their children are more likely (67 percent) than white (59 percent) and Hispanic fathers (32 percent) to see their children at least once a month. Despite these facts, most of my participants did report that the fathers of their children were largely absent. Obviously, notions of what comprises an absent father may vary, so it may be the case that many of my participants' children's fathers see their children at least once a month. Nevertheless, it appears that the bulk of the day-to-day childrearing is left to the mothers in my study (see chapter four).

Although I began this section discussing the extent of Black single motherhood in the U.S., my participants often did not seem to be referencing statistics in the quantitative sense, but rather statistics as stereotypes or dominant representations of low-income Black single mothers put forth by the media, politicians, and policymakers. For instance, the notion of being a statistic often came up in participants' discussions of not wanting to become any of the stereotypes of Black single mothers (e.g., the welfare queen). This reference was powerful, especially because none of my interview questions referenced statistics or being a statistic. It was clear during many of my interviews with participants

that they spent a great deal of time and energy trying to avoid becoming a statistic. For instance, Kara explained:

So, and that's the thing about it, I don't want to be part of a statistic no more--I want to show them that you do got some good, single, black mothers out there, because people think that because you're a single black mother, if you raising sons, that your sons will end up in jail...or your daughter's going to end up dating somebody just like you did and end up in the same situation like you did. But it might not be like that--they can grow up thinking, like, I don't want to be like that, you know what I'm saying? Just like...boys that grow up without a father, some of them grow up and be the best daddy--the best dad because their dad wasn't there...see it on Facebook all the time, oh, your daughter's going to be this, or your daughter's going to be that. You should have chosen who you had kids by, this and this...People say all types of stuff on Facebook that you--not necessarily to me...but I see it said to other people. And it makes me, it makes me feel a certain type of way...and then they think that people that's on, because they'll be like, blacks, they're lazy because they live off the government. Everybody needs help sometimes in life--even if it's something small--everybody needs help. And that's just the way I look at it...and I feel like I'm a stereotyped because I receive benefits from the government, and I don't like that.

In this passage, Kara is referencing stereotypes that Black single mothers are unworthy of being mothers, and when they become mothers, they are not good ones. She also alludes to the fact that Black single mothers are often blamed for many social ills, such as crime, poverty, and violence. Studies have demonstrated that children who are raised by single mothers do worse in school, are less likely to go to college, and have poorer life outcomes, in general, than those who are raised in houses with both their biological parents (for a review of much of this literature, see McLanahan and Percheski 2008; see also Amato 2005; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan 2004). Researchers and policymakers have used such bodies of literature to argue that Black single mothers are unfit for motherhood and to perpetuate the idea that “female-headed households” are deviant (e.g., Moynihan 1965). Kara also references stereotypes about Black single mothers who receive public assistance, such as the welfare queen stereotype.

Like other participants, she acknowledges this stereotype, while simultaneously resisting it. She later adds, “If I didn't receive the benefits...yeah, I did choose to have all my kids and I love my kids, but at the end of the day, I have to do what I have to do to get back...step back on my feet.” She emphasizes that at the moment, she needs public assistance to “get back on [her] feet” and that everyone needs help sometimes, while also suggesting that public assistance is (at least in her case) a temporary fix.

Strong Black Woman Schema as Resistance

The prevalence of the Strong Black Woman schema in interviews with participants may also be indicative of their attempts to resist controlling images of low-income Black single mothers, such as those discussed above. The Strong Black Woman Schema refers to “the culturally specific and multidimensional construct internalized by African American women to overcome oppression (e.g., racism, sexism). SBW schema encompasses both cognitive characteristics and stress-coping behaviors, like emotional suppression, self-reliance, and caregiving” (Watson-Singleton 2017:779). While this schema appears to have positive connotations, it may have negative consequences for Black women’s mental and physical health, as it perpetuates the idea that Black women are superhuman and thus it encourages them to suppress their emotions and to forego self-care practices (Belgrave and Abrams 2016).

When referencing what it meant to them to be a Black mother and/or how their race impacts the way they think of themselves as mothers, participants often referenced this schema by alluding to the notion that Black women (particularly Black mothers) have a special ability to overcome even the direst circumstances and to succeed despite facing many obstacles/barriers. Thus, for them, this schema may serve as a means for

them to affirm themselves as Black mothers. For instance, when asked what it means to her to be a Black mother, Jenise replied, “Strong...there's many times where you know, I struggled...I was stressed and...one thing I can say for sure, even with the women in my family, my mother...we know how to make a way out of no way...” The notion that Black women have the ability to “make a way out of no way” is a common sentiment in the Black community, stemming from dominant narratives of Black women’s “superhuman strength,” which emerged during slavery and were used to justify Black women’s enslavement (Watson-Singleton 2017).

Similar to Jenise, when asked how she feels her race impacts how she thinks of herself as a mother, Tamara replied:

They put us down, but somehow, we succeed every day...[America tells us], you're free, you have free speech, you have rights, you have...a right to bear yourself, but none of it is true. You say something they don't like, they arrest you, you say something [they] don't like, they kill you. You have a gun, you dead, but other people can walk around with guns and it don't faze them...So, me being a Black mother in America is very hard, but somehow, we make it...Our kids still succeed...we're still able to get the education, and still able to strive without [the] other parent in the house...Black mothers is very...like, through everything, Black mothers survive...They always make a way for their kids...most of them...

Tamara alludes to the structural inequalities that exist for Black single mothers in the U.S., which create barriers to getting an education and simply making ends meet, especially without a partner. She also alludes to the unfortunate realities of racism, which Black single mothers in the U.S. must navigate. Despite all of this, she explains, Black mothers “survive” and “always make a way for their kids.”

For Pamela, witnessing her own mother survive tough circumstances taught her how to do the same. When asked what it means to her to be a Black mother, she explained:

...Sometimes, it's a challenge. I don't let it get me discouraged because...like I said, I always keep pushing for it 'cause I gotta survive, and my mom was a single parent until she got married, so, me looking at that kind of gave me a better feel of how to survive...She had to work. She always had to work. And I was the oldest, so I always had to take care of my brothers.

Survival is key to the historical legacy of Black mothers in the U.S., as they have had to endure many hardships, including racism, sexism, and caregiving. Thus, embracing the Strong Black Woman schema may help Black women develop strategies to endure these hardships (Watson and Hunter 2016).

The strong Black woman trope perpetuates the notion that it is not okay for Black women to show any weakness. When asked what it means to her to be a mother to Black children, Pamela explained:

I guess it shows...strongness. You don't want to let them see too much weakness, but then sometimes you have to because they gotta understand everything is not going to be [inaudible]...when my son got older, I could explain that to him because he was mature enough to understand what I was talking about.

Pamela's statement that "you don't want to let them see too much weakness" is indicative of the potential harmful effects of the strong Black woman schema, as it creates a culture of silence around the emotional and mental health issues that Black women (particularly Black single mothers) may be facing (Belgrave and Abrams 2016).

Some participants mentioned being raised or largely influenced by the strong Black women in their lives. For instance, Briana was raised by her grandmother, who she identified as a "strong Black woman":

What I had was a strong Black woman and that she was a grandmother...I know my grandmother never...let us see her sweat and never let us see that she maybe didn't have for a bill. We never seen none of those problems...never seen her [say], 'Oh my goodness. How am I going to pay these light bills and still get food?' 'cause she raised five of us without my mother or my brothers' and sisters' father. Now, I know she had assistance, never knew that she had assistance, just knew that my grandmother got up every day, cook and clean, would see us off to

school, and if she's not in the house when we coming home from school, she's meeting us and always had food, like I said, always cleaned, always made a way. To me, that's a strong Black woman because you don't see them sweat... So, it's like she knew how to stand up. She knew how to hold her head up high, didn't know what this world had to offer, but she still did it and that's what, like I said, the type of person that I am now. So through all of it, that was a strong Black woman, you know, made it to, like I said, it was four or five of us in the house. My brother played basketball, I danced, my sister always stayed in trouble, but she was always at the basketball games, always at a dance recital, always there for when my sister got in trouble. It wasn't 'Oh, because you acting up, I'm not going to be there.' Or, 'I'm just too tired 'cause I just did a double and my back hurt and I didn't get my back brace 'cause Medicaid didn't send it or I didn't have the money.' She was there. You seen her. So, that's what I mean by a strong Black woman. That was like my superwoman.

Like Pamela, Briana's idea of a strong Black woman is one who never lets anyone see them "sweat," which most likely means being silent about the burdens they are carrying and the pain they may be experiencing. Briana may never have heard her grandmother complain about bills or medical issues, but that does not necessarily mean that her grandmother did not have trouble with those things. Black women, in particular, often feel pressured to fit the mold of "superwoman," or the woman who somehow has a superhuman ability to effortlessly juggle many responsibilities, including working, raising children, and in the case of Briana's grandmother, raising grandchildren (Belgrave and Abrams 2016; Watson-Singleton 2017; Watson and Hunter 2016). It is clear that for Briana, Pamela, and others, their ideas of what it means to be a good Black mother are shaped largely by the mothering experiences of their own mothers and grandmothers.

Although Briana suffers from a chronic illness, she still feels the pressure to be a "superhero" for her children:

I always told myself that I am my kids superhero 'cause they see me every day, so I have to... I'm not gonna be able to not no do that, but I have to be strong, I have to be that person that can do, like Superman or Spider-Man, that can do everything at once, even though I'm not built for it, but I have to do it.

Others, like Asia and Kayla, mentioned that being a Black mother requires a certain amount of strength to overcome institutional racism and other obstacles and barriers associated with Black motherhood. When asked what it means to her to be a Black mother, Asia explained that it means, “you have to have superpowers sometimes to try to get by”:

What's it to be a black mother? Just to show, basically, just strength. To try to...I don't even know how to put it into words. Just, it's already hard enough being a mother, period. Then it's just different aspects of it. Now what the world is now, you have to worry about not only just other people doing stuff to you, you or your kids. You got to worry about the police and the government, and it just seems that everything is working against you, like you have to have superpowers sometimes to try to get by.

For Kayla, being a Black mother means having to “try harder at everything”:

I think to be a black mother, I just have to try harder at everything. Just because. So much is going on in the world right now with race and everything, and I just feel like we have to...just to be a part, we just have to be better, just to prove that we can do the same things and that we are smart, we're intelligent. We're not just thighs and hips and what everybody shows on TV. I guess that's pretty much it.

When asked why she feels Black mothers have to try harder to prove themselves, she said, “...Because...we're not seen as equal. In some ways, things are changing for the better, but it's still that gap.” Later, she added:

I think because I do have it harder as a black mother, that I look at myself as a rock star because I am successful. And I'm not being cocky...but I...think highly of myself because of everything that I've been through, and that I'm still striving and still succeeding, and I'm not on a woe is me type of mentality. I just have a drive to push forward and go through. Might hit a bump here or there, but I'm still going to keep driving, keep going...

Asia and Kayla are well aware of the social and institutional barriers that they face as low-income Black single mothers. Kayla, in particular, is also well aware that she must work harder than more privileged mothers (especially white mothers) to prove that she is worthy as a woman and as a mother.

Black Mothering in Action: Racial Survival/Racial Socialization

In addition to the clear effect that living in a racist society has on my participants' motherhood identities, it also became clear during interviews that socializing their children around issues of race in an effort to prepare their children to navigate living in a racist society is a key aspect of their mothering activities. For instance, in addition to trying to avoid becoming statistics themselves, my participants also wanted to make sure that their children did not end up becoming statistics. Briana recognizes that her children's likelihood of becoming statistics is high, considering their background:

I tell my kids, 'You don't want to be a statistic,' or 'you don't...want them to label you as something 'cause you already labeled 'cause you raised in a single home, you in low-income, your school is not...you know, 'cause they rate schools...so, you already got that stamp on you, so you don't need to add nothing else to that, you feel me? Right now, all of these things is out of your control is because of your parent or parents, but you don't have to be labeled as that.

While she recognizes that her children will likely already be “labeled” or stereotyped because they were raised in a low-income area by a single mother, she also suggests that the likelihood of them not becoming statistics rests largely on their life choices. While Briana does not explicitly mention race in this quote, she alludes to stereotypes that are often applied to low-income Black people.

Participants' discussions of raising Black children in a racist society often focused on sons, which illuminates the ways in which racial socialization is gendered. Specifically, the association of Black masculinity with criminality means that Black mothers may experience a greater fear of their sons becoming targets of racist violence than their daughters, although, as I pointed out earlier, Black girls and women are also frequent targets of racist violence. Asia discusses some of the burdens that Black mothers experience when raising their children and not wanting her children, especially her

son(s), to become one of the many Black men in the U.S. who have fallen victim to state violence:

Being a mother, period, but a Black mother, I feel like it's a bit harder because you're raising young Black children, especially young Black men, and that's a struggle in itself because you don't want to see them on the news. You don't want to be one of the statistics that you see every day. You feel like you've got a whole bunch on your shoulders now to make sure they're raised right, but even if they do the right things, that they don't get hurt still.

While all mothers may fear for their children's safety, generally, Black mothers often experience a unique fear—that their children will become victims of racist state violence and may even die at the hands of agents of the state. As Asia suggests, one of the most troublesome aspects of this fear is that no matter how much Black mothers do to ensure that their children are “raised right,” they may still unfortunately become targets of state violence at some point in their lives.

Often, the fear that their children will become targets of racist violence at the hands of the state or white civilians manifests itself before the child is even born. Tamara discussed writing about some of her fears for her unborn son (who, at the time of the interview, was two-years-old) in a diary to him:

And I wrote in cursive, and it's like a diary, every day, and it's like, I'm scared for you, I love you, I'm gonna teach you how to be a gentleman, I'm gonna teach you how not to be a statistic, I'm gonna teach you the skills that I know to make you successful in this world. The world already has three fingers against you, you already supposed to be in jail, you supposed to be dead, and you supposed to be a deadbeat and not take care of your kids, and I don't want that for you. I want you to be able to go to college, I want you to succeed, I want you to have a family, I want you to love people, I want you to--be able to show love, I want you to be able to cry, I want you to enjoy this world, but the world would never enjoy you because they scared of you...

This quote from Tamara suggests that she believes, like several other participants, that she can help her son not become a statistic by teaching him “how to be a gentleman” and

other necessary skills for success. Participants also often discussed teaching their children about the importance of getting an education as one way in which to avoid becoming a statistic. While Tamara acknowledges that the odds are already stacked against her son as a Black boy growing up in the U.S., she hopes that through her mothering, her son will be able to overcome those odds. Nevertheless, she realizes that no matter how loving or caring her son is, the outside world may never fully acknowledge his humanity because he is a Black man.

When describing how her responsibilities as a mother to a Black child are different than the responsibilities of mothers of white children, Tamara explained:

We have to prep our kids before we go outside, we have to tell them what not to say, we have to tell them what not to do, even though we 'posed to be free, you gotta give them rules and regulations, especially being- I have a Black son, I tell him don't run from the cops, automatically put your hands up, get on the ground, they- I shouldn't have to tell him that because a white kid is not gonna go outside and be like, 'You know what, when a cop pull you over, get on the ground, listen to him... [mumbles].' They don't have that conversation 'cause...cops is not killing white kids. They not on the chopping block, they're not on the hunting, like, we deer to them and they just picking us off out here, no. And I don't like that, but I have to prep my son because, 'Listen, you Black.' I tell him that all the time...like when he do something like, 'No, you Black, you not white.'" Your name might be white, but you Black...act accordingly (Tamara).

In the above quote, Tamara describes one of the many burdens that Black mothers face—having to educate her two-year-old son about how to interact with the police so that he does not become a victim of racist state violence. Black mothers must have conversations with their children about how to interact with others in public spaces in hopes that their children will not be perceived as a threat and subsequently become the target of racist violence. Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, regardless of how many conversations Black mothers have with their children about how to behave appropriately when out in public, their children may still become targets of racist violence.

The conversation that Tamara discusses having with her son about how to interact with the police is a form of racial socialization. Leslie also discusses having to have different conversations with her children because they are Black:

I do think that I have to raise my kids a little different sometimes. Especially my sons, you know, the way that the world is right now, I think there's some different conversations we have to have with our kids, than maybe other races do. And it's unfortunate, but I feel like we do have to teach them to be a little different, because that's the way the world treats them...and unfortunately, there are gonna be some things that they encounter differently than other kids. There's gonna be some things—like, I was just having this debate with one of my friends. They have Black children, but well, you see [her friend's son], he's got blonde hair and blue eyes, but he's Black. And we were talking about how I felt like I was gonna have to teach my son some things differently than her son, because you know, [her friend's son] could walk through a white neighborhood and nobody would feel alarmed, because he looks--he could pass as Caucasian whereas my son, he might be seen as a threat. You know? So, I have to teach him some things that he may not be doing nothing wrong, but on how to live his life to be safe...and that's kind of irritating. That's very irritating that you have to teach your kid that they can't have basic rights as a person, but because of the way that they look, that there's potential their life could be in danger. And I think part of it has to do [with] where you live too, though, because I don't think every area is like that. I feel like this area I live in right now is a nice mix and you don't really get that too much, but there are some areas, even in [city that she lives in] that are...I mean I've gone to [my neighborhood] and walked past a mom and her child and she clutched her purse and I'm just like, 'It's nothing serious.'

Like Tamara, Leslie describes having to have different conversations with her son than a white mother would (and even perhaps different than her friend who has a Black son who can pass for white) because her son may be perceived as a threat because he is Black. She recognizes that her children, particularly her sons, will be treated differently because they are Black, even if they are not doing anything wrong. Her statement about having to teach her children that they “can’t have basic rights as a person...because of the way that they look” illustrates the ways in which Black children (and Black people, in general) are denied personhood and subjectivity. Black people do not have the luxury of going about their lives freely, without fear that their lives are in danger simply because they are

Black. As Leslie said, Black people must fear for their lives and safety, even if they are doing nothing wrong.

My participants' discussions of being a Black mother and raising Black children often invoked respectability politics. For instance, when asked what being a mother means to her, Kenya explained:

[Being a mother means] taking care of your kids, loving your kids, keeping them safe. You know, just being there for them. Helping them to grow up and be adults, responsible adults...It's so important, and... being that they're boys and they're targeted as Black men already, you know, I have to teach them that being respectable is important. Staying in school is important. You know, so. And working...I'm gonna make sure they know to work. They see me work all the time. They know, you know, mommy getting up to go to work, she gotta work, but they're gonna know that nothing is handed to you. Nothing.

Like several of my participants, Kenya implies that teaching her sons to be responsible and respectable may prevent them from being targets of racism. One of the ways that she believes she can do this is by emphasizing the importance of education and working, essentially, teaching them to be productive members of society. Her comment that “nothing is handed to you” is indicative of neoliberal rhetoric that emphasizes self-sufficiency and not depending on the state for social support.

Like Kenya, Lexi discusses having to raise her son differently because he is Black. When asked what it means to her to be a Black mother, Lexi explained:

You got a little bit more responsibility. You gotta pay attention to more things and you gotta make sure that you raise them a certain way because you don't want him to be out here because they got a target on their back, so you just gotta make sure that he knows certain things, especially since he's a boy.

Lexi's statement that Black mothers have “a little bit more responsibility” is indicative of the burden that Black mothers face raising Black children in a racist society. Later, I asked her what types of things she thought she could teach him that may affect whether

he becomes a target, and she replied, “Basically, to just learn that the streets are not your friend and you know you can't be in the streets. Stay in school--the basics, and about God...” Like Kenya, Lexi suggests that raising her son to be respectable by emphasizing the importance of staying in school and staying out of “the streets” may prevent him from becoming a target of racism.

Similarly, Kayla discusses having to be “harder” on her children because they are Black:

[Being a mother to Black children]...means I have to, again, try harder. Be harder on them, that they can succeed. Especially towards a Black son. I feel like, for one, him being a boy and Black, he's already got two strikes against him. And it's sad that society makes me feel that way, but it's just so much harder for Black males. Because they are smart and they can be smart. She's in third grade and she's reading on a fifth-grade level. So, it's like, you only get out what you put in.

When asked in what ways she feels she must be harder on her children, she explained

Just as far as being disciplined. Because if they don't respect me, they're not gonna learn to respect everybody else. And they have to learn to respect authority--their teachers or...adults that are in charge--they have to be able to listen and know rules and know that they can't just do what they want to do.

Kayla's quote suggests that Black children require more discipline *because* they are Black; the outside world is not going to go easy on them, so their parents should not either. As her son already has “two strikes against him” because he is a Black male, she explains that it is imperative that he learns to respect authority at an early age to avoid being stereotyped and being a target of racism. Some research suggests that Black parents may discipline their children more harshly than white parents do because they are aware of the harsh treatment that their children may encounter in the outside world, so they discipline them as a way of preparing them for that (Brody and Flor 1998). Studies also show that Black children, particularly Black boys, receive harsher punishments than

white children do in schools. Nevertheless, there is an important distinction between the over-policing and over-punishing of Black children and their mothers' disciplining them more harshly in hopes that they will avoid falling victim to the "streets" and/or ending up in jail. The over-policing and over-punishing of Black children in the U.S. is indicative of state surveillance and control of Black bodies. On the other hand, Black parents disciplining their children in hopes that their children will not make poor decisions may be viewed as a survival mechanism. After all, ensuring the survival and thriving of their children and communities has traditionally been a major aspect of Black motherhood (Collins 1994; Barnes 2016a, 2016b).

Katrina suggests that if she can convince her son not to dress in way that will make him a "target," perhaps he will avoid becoming one:

I was scared and terrified when they told me I had a son. That's when the Trayvon Martin stuff came out. I was just like, oh my goodness. I can't have no kid that could look like he's going to be a terror. I'm like, I want a preppy son. I want a preppy son. A jacket or a hoodie on your child can make them a target, and that's what blew me. I was scared and terrified. So, I was like, I gotta raise my child to be preppy. My son is so hood ... he's just like, he walks like a man, and he talks real deep. But he's just a baby, he's just trying to figure out his way, but...I'm like, I just want you to wear button up shirts and khakis. That's all you can wear, and that's it, and you just go home. And that's all you gotta do. Well, my son's going to be something else.

Like Kayla and Kenya, Katrina alludes to respectability politics in this passage, implying that the way her son dresses may have an impact on whether or not he becomes a target of racism. Namely, her statement about wanting a "preppy son" suggests that if her son dresses more like a white, middle-class boy, he may be able to avoid becoming a target of racism. As I mentioned earlier, Black boys are often criminalized, while white boys are presumed innocent. Michelle describes how white mothers often react to her when she tells them she has two sons:

...I have talked to white women and explained to them that I got boys. When they listen that you got boys, they be like, 'Oh. They not bad?' Like, they expect them to be bad. Well, is your boys bad? You know. Because they white, they ain't gonna be bad? It's just like, that culture thing. To me, it's still racism going on, it's just not talked loud about. But, it's still going on. White people, it's like their kids can never do no wrong, and they the ones with [inaudible] and shooting up places. You know?

Michelle's discussion of how white women often presume that her sons are bad just because they are Black is indicative of the criminalization of Black boys. Unlike white boys, who are presumed to be victims of bullying or in other respects given the benefit of the doubt even when they commit horrific crimes, like mass shootings, Black boys are seen as inherently bad and thus receive harsher punishments when they commit crimes and are sometimes even blamed for crimes they did not commit. As Rios (2011) argues, they are presumed to be guilty until they can prove their innocence.

Racial Socialization as Gendered

While discussions with my participants about raising Black children often focused on raising Black sons, several of my participants discussed specific concerns about raising Black daughters, revealing that conversations with Black daughters around race are often very different than conversations with Black sons. In addition, while Black mothers may have similar concerns about raising Black daughters and Black sons in a racist society, discussions about raising Black daughters revealed the ways in which the intersection of racism and sexism shapes Black mothers' concerns about raising Black daughters. Of course, the intersection of racism and sexism also affects Black boys, as they are hypersexualized and/or treated as violent predators (even as sexism also benefits them).

My findings parallel literature on racial socialization which suggests that racial socialization is also gendered. Leslie's discussion of instilling "self-love" in her children, particularly her daughter, illustrates this phenomenon:

Self-love is a big thing I feel like I have to instill in my kids, because my kids, like my daughter, she has a big thing about her hair not being the same as the other girls in her class. So, I really have been working on teaching her to love herself and that she is different, because there's a majority Caucasian kids in her class... so, she'll just wear her hair down, you know, these are some things that she can't do.

Note that when Leslie spoke about racial socialization as it related to her son, she focused on her fear that he may be perceived as a threat because he is a Black male, but one of her main concerns regarding her daughter is that she develops a strong sense of "self-love" in a society in which Eurocentric beauty standards are idealized.

Asia had similar concerns for her daughter. Like Leslie and others, she spoke at length about her concerns regarding raising a Black son in the U.S. However, when asked if she had any specific concerns raising a Black daughter, she explained:

...To make sure that she knows that she's as strong as anybody else, as good as anybody else, as beautiful as anybody else. That just because you're black or your hair may not be a certain way that you're not beautiful. You should never think lower of yourself because if you don't think the most of yourself, you'll take less from other people and I want her to be a strong woman to know what she deserves, to be able to strive and to want more.

Like Leslie, Asia wants to make sure that she teaches her daughter that she is beautiful, that her hair is beautiful, regardless of the messages to the contrary that she may receive from the outside world. Several of the participants in my study described receiving similar messages from their own mothers growing up, as their mothers emphasized the importance of being independent and not depending on a man for anything. Behind these messages is often the hope for Black mothers that their daughters will not make the same

mistakes they did when they were younger, particularly in their relationships with men. These messages are also indicative of the reality that Black women are often socialized to view economic security as separate from marriage because historically speaking, Black women have always had to seek paid employment, largely as a result of Black men's unemployment and underemployment (Narcisse 2013).

Emphasizing wanting to break the cycle of falling for men who are disrespectful and treat them badly, Tonya discusses having to teach her daughters to be "secure in themselves":

...The other task with my daughters is I have to teach them to be...secure in themselves. How to raise up their self-esteem and love themselves and believe in themselves and believe in their worth so that they don't fall for those same guys that is going to end up, so the cycle doesn't continue pretty much and build up their strength and know that you don't have to accept disrespect. You don't have to accept behavior that is not conducive to what you want for yourself. That is also extremely hard to do. I try to be really vocal with my daughters about things like that. She knows that I have those real conversations with her. I believe in God and I pray a lot. I pray with my children and I talk to them more about spirituality and not rushing into things and the importance of really getting to know someone and not making rash decisions. At any point, you don't trust a person's words, trust their actions.

Like Asia, Tonya wants to ensure that her daughter understands her value and does not accept mistreatment from others, particularly men. In a world where Black women are consistently devalued, it is crucial that mothers share those types of messages with their daughters.

Shay expressed concerns about protecting her daughter from sexual assault and other forms of gendered violence, especially considering the recent sexual assault of a young girl in her apartment complex:

I think it's worse for a Black daughter. Right now, my daughter just came home a couple weeks ago and told me that one of her friends are pregnant. The girl just got sexually assaulted out here...a girl was kidnapped. There's a lot, so I try to

make sure that, alright, you don't wear certain things. It's not that I'm punishing you. It's just I know better. Don't wear certain things. It attracts too much attention. The negative attention. You don't want. I don't want you outside thinking that you're going to be walking the streets at every hour because these guys don't care. They can snatch you up real quick. I think it's worse when they're little girls. At least the guys, they could probably handle they self a little better if it came to trying to fight someone off. She don't know. You can't always hit somebody with your book bag and think they going to...even grown folks. Even grown women can't fight predators off. I think it may be a little worse for women these day and ages because you hit...we just heard about the girls being kidnapped. There's a girl they still looking for a year later... Another girl that was kidnapped, they found her dead behind a church...in another state. Yeah, the trafficking. Sex trafficking. Everything. Yeah, I think it's harder being a black female than it is a black male sometimes.

Shay explains that, in some ways, she has greater concerns for her daughter's safety because she is a young woman, and there are dangers that young women face that young men do not (or are less likely to), such as the likelihood of being sexually assaulted or kidnapped and becoming a victim of sex trafficking. Like the above quotes from Kenya and Lexi, this passage also illustrates the role that respectability politics plays in Black parenting in that Shay explained that she discourages her daughter to wear clothing that attracts "negative attention." Shay hopes that discouraging her daughter from wearing inappropriate clothing may help prevent her from being sexually assaulted. However, just as the way a young Black boy dresses will not necessarily prevent him from becoming a target of racist violence, the way a young Black girl dresses will also not necessarily prevent her from becoming a target of gendered violence. In fact, as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) demonstrated in her seminal article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," sexism and racism intersect in the lives of Black women in a way that may heighten their vulnerability to violence, and also unfortunately the likelihood that the violence they face will fall under the radar. Historically, Black women in the U.S.

have faced racist sexual violence at the hands of white men and sexual violence at the hands of Black men. Shay's sentiment that "it's worse for a Black daughter" illuminates the unique threats of racist sexual violence that Black girls face that do not necessarily exist for Black boys.

The fear of her daughter becoming pregnant that Shay alludes to is one that many Black mothers may experience. While teen pregnancy rates in the U.S. have been declining, overall, rates of teen pregnancy for African American teens is still higher (39 births per 1,000) than that of white (19 per 1,000 births), Asian/Pacific Islander (9 per 1,000 births), and Native Americans (31 per 1,000 births) (Latina teen pregnancy rates are the highest at 42 per 1,000 births) (Wiltz 2015) Trying to prevent their daughters from becoming pregnant may cause mothers to police their daughter's behavior differently than their son's. As Erin explains, "You have to be stricter on girls than boys...easy to get pregnant. They sneaky 'cause I know how I used to be." Erin's claim that she was not worried about her son dating, but other things, such as "him getting his education...working, getting what he needs instead of being in the streets selling drugs, [being in] gangs" illustrates how gender norms often dictate different treatment for girl children and boy children. It is also important to note Erin's lack of attention to boys' responsibility for pregnancy, which is indicative of larger gender norms surrounding the policing of young girls' sexuality and the ways in which gender socialization, specifically, socialization around masculinity, frees boys from responsibility for getting girls pregnant.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates many of the difficulties facing low-income Black single mothers who must make sense of their own identities as mothers in the face of crippling controlling images about their motherhood and mothering. Not seen as worthy of having children at all, once they have children, their children are seen as a threat and/or as inherently criminal. They then must struggle to teach their children how to love themselves in a society that does not love them. In addition, they must teach their children how to be good citizens in a society in which they are denied state protection and personhood. While participants recognized controlling images of low-income Black single mothers, such as the “welfare queen” and the “baby mama,” they also actively resisted these controlling images by distancing themselves from them and discussing how they were different from these images. The Strong Black Woman schema emerged as a potential mechanism through which they resisted these controlling images and also affirmed their capabilities as low-income Black single mothers.

Preparing their children to navigate living in a racist society was as a key aspect of my participants’ mothering activities, as previous literature has documented. It also became apparent during interviews that the propagation of recent incidents of racist police and vigilante violence on the news and on social media (such as those discussed in chapter three) has had a strong impact on how they mother their children. In their discussions of teaching their children about race and how to navigate racism, participants often alluded to respectability politics, or the ways in which they teach their children how to behave in such a way as to avoid become targets of racism (e.g., emphasizing the importance of dressing a certain way and getting an education). This may serve as a

survival mechanism, especially considering that there is little that Black mothers can actually do to help their children avoid becoming targets of racism. Discussions of teaching their children about race and racism often focused on boy children, which illustrates the gendered nature of racial socialization, and that Black boys are often hyper-masculinized from a very young age and are not seen as children in the same way as white boys, which contributes to the association of Black masculinity with criminality. For Black girls, the threat of racist violence is coupled with that of sexist violence, which became clear in interviews with participants, as their concerns around their daughters often centered around helping them avoid becoming targets of sexist violence and/or encouraging them to love themselves despite society's racist and sexist beauty norms which reinforce the message that Black girls and women are not beautiful or worthy of love. In light of all that low-income Black single mothers must navigate, the actions they take to socialize their children around race, teach them to love themselves, and to ensure their survival are acts of resistance (O'Reilly, ed. 2004) and, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, are key aspects of their mothering activities.

VI. CONCLUSION

Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs upon the reasons they are dying. –Audre Lorde (1984:119)

Contributions of the Present Study

The above passage from Audre Lorde exemplifies the significance of using an intersectional lens when analyzing the experiences of Black mothers. Lorde eloquently articulates a key difference between white mothers' and Black mothers' realities. Namely, Black mothers, in addition to confronting sexism (and classism, in many cases), must also confront the horrors of racism and white supremacy. She alludes to the ever-present fear in Black mothers' lives that their children will become targets of racist state violence. This passage highlights a central theme of this dissertation, which is that scholars must center race in discussions and analyses of motherhood and mothering. This is especially important when thinking about the experiences of low-income Black single mothers in the context of the neoliberal white supremacist heteropatriarchal U.S.

As I have illustrated in this study, the intersection of race, class, and gender clearly shapes how low-income Black single mothers make meaning of their motherhood identities and engage in their mothering activities. For instance, in making meaning of their motherhood identities, participants often alluded to racist, classist, and sexist controlling images about low-income Black single mothers, such as the welfare queen and the baby mama. While there are certain stereotypes that low-income white mothers are subject to, such as being lazy, the controlling images mentioned above are distinctly employed to disparage low-income Black mothers. The welfare queen controlling image, specifically, stems from conservative, white supremacist, neoliberal ideologies that

denigrate Black motherhood and discourage individuals (especially low-income Black single mothers) from seeking social welfare support (Collins 2000; Lubiano 1992).

The low-income Black single mothers in this study also resisted controlling images by distinguishing themselves from them and by drawing on the Strong Black Woman schema as a potential way to affirm their identities as Black mothers. While this schema has a potential to be liberating, it is also problematic in several ways. For instance, it reinforces the myth that Black women can handle anything, thus they do not need emotional support (or any other type of support), which may contribute to Black women's reluctance to address their mental health needs. Additionally, the Strong Black Woman schema may bolster institutional racism, as policymakers may subscribe to the belief that Black women are resilient, and thus may not adequately support legislation that will assist these women.

The Strong Black Woman schema parallels the gendered pressure that mothers across races and classes experience to be selfless caregivers for their children. For example, white, middle-class mothers face pressure to adhere to the intensive mothering ideology, which demands that mothers be completely devoted to their children (Arendell 2000; Hays 1996). For white, middle-class mothers, this means (in part) making sure that their children have access to the best of everything (i.e., the best schools, lessons, sports, etc.). A major distinction for Black mothers, however, is not only that they cannot access such forms of privilege, but also that they have not historically received the same support for their mothering that white mothers have. Thus, while Black mothers are experiencing the pressure to be a Strong Black Woman, they are receiving little to no support to carry

out their mothering activities; indeed, the Strong Black Woman trope justifies that lack of support.

Similar to Hays' (2003) findings, I found that my participants embrace neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency and not depending on the state for social support, which may be indicative of the fact that Black women were never able to depend on the state for support and have always had to work. In a divergence from Hays', my participants tended to voice a feminist ethics of care (Sevenhuijsen 2003), which emphasizes human interdependence, care as a moral imperative, and the importance of social welfare systems, by stating that "everybody needs a little help sometimes" (Kara) and affirming their right to receive assistance from the state when attempting to provide for their children, much like the welfare rights activists of earlier eras (Nadasen 2005).

Additionally, participants clearly recognized the racialized tone of neoliberal messages regarding public assistance. For instance, several participants alluded to racist stereotypes about Black people receiving public assistance (i.e., that Black people receiving public assistance are lazy and uneducated) and emphasized the inaccuracy of such stereotypes.

In addition to grappling with racist, sexist, and classist stereotypes when making sense of their motherhood identities, the low-income Black single mothers in this study also contended with racism, sexism, and classism when engaging in their mothering activities. As such, a central aspect of their mothering activities involved socializing their children around race, class, and gender. In terms of race, participants discussed spending a great deal of time and energy thinking through ways to talk to their children (especially their sons) about how to avoid becoming targets of racist state violence. In doing so, they often drew on notions of respectability politics; namely, they discussed wanting their

sons to dress and behave in “respectable” ways in hopes that they would not be perceived as criminals in the way that Black boys so often are. When it came to their daughters, participants often emphasized encouraging them to feel beautiful, confident, and avoid making some of the mistakes they had made in their lives in relationships with men. These findings reinforce the argument that racial socialization processes are gendered (Hughes et al. 2006; Thomas and King 2007).

However, as literature on racial socialization tends to downplay class distinctions, these findings provide new insight into the ways in which parents’ class status (i.e., that of low-income Black single mothers) shapes how they socialize their children around race. Specifically, the mothers in this study tended to encourage their children to adopt more middle-class self-presentations in an attempt to promote respectability. While racial socialization transcends class lines for Black mothers (e.g., Barnes 2016a, 2016b), the low-income Black single mothers in this study have to grapple with the stigmas associated with not only Black motherhood but also being single and low-income, which was reflected in their discussions of talking to their children about race and how to avoid becoming targets of racialized violence. Specifically, the women in my study recognized that their children were multiply disadvantaged because they are Black and low-income. Middle-class Black mothers (especially those who are married), by contrast, have access to greater resources (i.e., social capital and financial resources), which may help them overcome some of the stigma associated with Black motherhood. Unfortunately, however, enjoying a middle-class status will not necessarily prevent the children of middle-class Black mothers from becoming targets of racialized violence.

Another unique contribution of this dissertation is my distinction between motherhood as a gendered, racialized, and classed social identity and mothering as a set of gendered, racialized, and classed social activities expected of mothers in specific social and historical contexts. This distinction has proven to be a useful way to make sense of low-income Black single mothers' experiences, particularly in terms of how their race and class shape how they see themselves as mothers and how they mother their children. My findings illustrate that low-income Black single mothers' motherhood identities shape their mothering activities and vice versa. For instance, their recognition of and resistance to controlling images of low-income Black single mothers influence how they socialize their children around race and class. Specifically, encouraging their children to behave and dress in respectable ways may be indicative of their attempt to distance themselves from such controlling images. In this sense, the distinction between motherhood as an identity and mothering as a set of activities may also be applicable to mothers of other social locations. For instance, low-income white Appalachian mothers may also experience heightened state surveillance, especially in the context of the opioid crisis, and have little access to economic resources, which may impact their motherhood identities and how they mother their children (Manoogian, Jurich, Sano, and Ko 2015). This distinction may also potentially apply to white, middle-class mothers who are subject to different constraints than their low-income counterparts (particularly those of color). Unlike low-income women of color, middle-class white women are encouraged to reproduce and pressured to adopt intensive mothering ideals, but are often also engaged in demanding careers and thus forced to juggle their career and mothering

responsibilities, which may affect how they make meaning of their motherhood identities and mothering activities.

Reflections on Findings

Based on previous literature on Black motherhood and mothering, I anticipated that I would find that my participants were embedded in dense kin and community support networks (Dill 1994; Dow 2016; Gibson 2005; Gilkes 1980; Naples 1996; Stack 1974). Instead, however, I found that while most mentioned receiving some form of support (e.g., financial assistance or help caring for children) from close relatives or friends, the sophisticated exchange networks that Stack (1974) and others found in their research on low-income Black communities largely did not exist for my participants. They also received little to no support from their children's fathers. Nevertheless, as I mentioned in chapter four, I hesitate to argue that they were completely socially isolated. Instead, I argue, similar to Raudenbush (2016), that they seemed to be more careful of their level and type of exchange with kin and community. My findings also suggest that participants' kin and community exchange may have been shaped by larger structural factors, such as living in violent, high crime areas. Additionally, participants' tendency to isolate themselves within their homes because of fear for their own or their children's safety may have reinforced their lack of kin and community exchange networks.

For Black women, work and mothering have historically been intertwined (Arendell 2000; Collins 2000). Indeed, my participants indicated that work was part of their responsibilities as mothers and they did not see work as an obstacle to carrying out their mothering activities. For them, their motherhood identities were more significant

than their work identities, which may have been indicative of the fact that those who were working were primarily employed in low-wage jobs, as opposed to jobs that they were particularly passionate about (which logically might have made those jobs more central to their identities). In this vein, financial obstacles (i.e., class obstacles, which are similar for low-income white women) (Hays 2003)) were prominent for my participants, as most were struggling to make ends meet whether they were employed or not.

While I expected that experiences receiving Social Services benefits would have emerged as a major obstacle for the women in my study, this turned out not to be the case. Only a couple of participants reported experiences of feeling belittled or surveilled by the state. This may be a function of the fact that most participants were not currently receiving TANF benefits (although most had at some point), which arguably include the most intrusive requirements of all Social Services benefits. Thus, their lack of mention of problems with social welfare agencies should not be taken as exoneration of welfare policy or practice. I had also expected that at least some of them would have had their children taken away by Child Protective Services. This also turned out not to be the case; however, three participants reported having experiences with the criminal justice system—two whose children’s fathers were currently or previously incarcerated, and one whose own criminal record was hindering her ability to find employment. Thus, racially discriminatory state action was evident in some mothers’ lives, albeit not in ways I anticipated.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the present study provides important insight into the experiences of 21 low-income Black single mothers in central and southwest Virginia, the findings presented here are not generalizable to all low-income Black single mothers. In addition, as this study is not an ethnography, I did not get a complete picture of my participants' everyday lives. Rather, my findings are based on participants' accounts of their experiences. While this is not necessarily a limitation in itself, it does not allow me to provide my own account of the context in which my participants were mothering. Finally, as my analysis does not compare the experiences of low-income Black single mothers with those of low-income white single mothers, I hesitate to make claims about differences and/or similarities between these two groups of mothers' experiences.

Future research should include interviews with low-income Black single mothers in a variety of geographic locations, as geographic factors may impact the socio-environmental context in which low-income Black single mothers carry out their mothering activities (e.g., neighborhood, kin and community support, employment opportunities, etc.). In addition, future research should include ethnographic studies of the experiences of low-income Black single mothers to explore the potential impact of socio-environmental factors on their motherhood identities and mothering activities. To gain a more complete picture of the distinct impact of race on low-income single mothers' motherhood identities and mothering activities, future research should also include similar, racially attentive studies on low-income white single mothers (as well as mothers of other races). Finally, future research should apply the distinction I draw

between motherhood as an identity and mothering as a set of activities to mothers of diverse backgrounds, including white mothers and middle-class mothers of various races.

Policy Implications

The low-income Black single mothers in my study could benefit from a variety of policy initiatives, particularly as they relate to housing, childcare, and employment. In general, a lack of affordable, safe housing adversely affected several of the women in this study, as they were either forced to move around a lot to find safe, affordable housing or they were forced to remain in unsafe, dilapidated neighborhoods due to the disinclination of local housing authorities to fix problems in their neighborhoods. These considerations seem to contribute to the diminished networks of support reported in earlier studies of low-income Black neighborhoods (e.g., Stack 1974). To remedy this, legislators should pass laws and agencies should implement policies to ensure that landlords provide adequate, safe housing for their tenants or suffer severe consequences (such as a hefty fine). A lack of available, affordable childcare was also a major problem for several participants, which could be remedied by legislation supporting affordable childcare centers in low-income communities and/or workplaces offering affordable (or free) on-site childcare for their employees. Finally, the women in this study would benefit greatly from a policy that raises the minimum wage at the federal level to a living wage. The fact that even those who were working full-time were struggling to make ends meet illustrates that current wage standards for full-time workers (particularly, in Virginia) are insufficient.

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APPENDIX A

Important Note: This tentative interview guide is for a semi-structured interview. As such, there may be times when the interviewer (Jennifer Turner) deviates from the script (e.g., in cases where the participants' responses elicit further probes that are not listed below).

Opening statement: I am interested in understanding the lives and experiences of Black single mothers who are participating in (or who have participated in) Social Services benefits programs, such as TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, or Head Start. To participate in my research study, you must: (1) Be a Black/African American single mother who is 18 years or older, (2) be participating in (or have participated in) Social Services benefits programs, such as TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, or Head Start, (3) have at least one child, and (4) identify as woman/female. Does this sound like you? If they say yes, continue. If they say no, say "Thank you for interest in participating, but unfortunately, I cannot include you in this study as it focuses on low-income Black single mothers who are 18 years or older, are participating in (or who have participated in) Social Services benefits programs, such as TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, or Head Start, have at least one child, and identify as woman/female."

1. Just to confirm, you identify as a Black/African American woman. Is that correct?
2. When were you born?
3. Have you ever been married?
4. I would like to ask some questions that will help me get to know you a little better. Tell me about yourself.
 - a. Where did you grow up? [if they say multiple places] Do you feel like any one place is home? [If they say one place] Does that place still feel like home? What makes that place feel like home?
 - i. Tell me about the community in which you grew up.
 1. Who were the main people who took care of you when you were growing up?
 - b. Where do you currently live? Tell me about your neighborhood.

Probes:

- i. How long have you lived there?
 - ii. Do you feel safe there?
 - iii. Are there grocery stores in your neighborhood? If so, what types?
 - iv. Do you have family and friends in the area? [If yes] who?
- c. How many children do you have?
- i. How old are they?

Probes:

- 1. Are they living with you?
 - 2. Are they currently in school (pre-school or K-12)?
 - 3. Are there places for your child(ren) to play in your neighborhood?
 - 4. How far is your child(ren)'s school from where you live?
- d. Are you currently working? [If so] Where do you work?
- i. [If so] How far is your job from where you live? Do you have reliable transportation there?
 - ii. What days and hours do you work?
 - 1. Is your schedule set or does it vary from week-to-week? [If the schedule varies] When do you know what your schedule will be for the coming week?
 - iii. Do you think that having a job is part of your responsibilities as a mother? Why or why not?

Motherhood Identity

- 5. What does being a mother mean to you?

6. How do you think your life would be different if you were not a mother?

Race and Motherhood

7. What does it mean to you to be a Black mother?
 - a. What does it mean to you to be a mother to a Black child?
 1. Do you think your responsibilities as a mother to a Black child are any different from the responsibilities of mothers of White children? Tell me about that.
 2. Do you think your responsibilities as a mother to a Black child are any different from the responsibilities of *fathers* of Black children? Tell me about that.
8. Overall, how, if at all, do you think your race impacts how you think of yourself as a mother?

Mothering Experiences/Activities

9. I'm trying to get a sense of how you manage all the things you have to do in a day. Can you describe what you did yesterday, starting with when you first got up?
 - a. Probes (examples):
 - i. What time did you wake up?
 - ii. How long did it take to get your child(ren) ready for school/daycare?
 - iii. [If they talk about going somewhere] How long did it take to get there? How did you get there? How long did you spend there? Who took care of your child(ren) while you were there?

- iv. What time did you get home? What did you do when you got home? [May follow-up with other probes and/or detour (or return to some points) to get more information]
 - v. Is this what a typical day is like or was this unusual? [if the latter] What made it unusual? What is a typical day like?
10. How do you [or how have you, if they do not currently have a job] manage(d) the demands of your job(s) with the demands of your child(ren)?
- a. Has there ever been a time when your work schedule conflicted with something you wanted to do with your child(ren)? How did you handle that?
11. What, if any, obstacles/barriers have you faced to being able to mother your children in the ways you wanted to?
- a. [If race is not mentioned] How, if at all, do you think your race impacts your ability to mother your children in the ways you want to?
12. Have you ever been separated from your children for an extended period of time? [If so] Tell me about that experience. [If so] how did you handle that?
13. What types of Social Services benefits do you (or have you) receive(d)/participate(d) in (e.g., TANF, SNAP, Medicaid, Head Start)?
14. [Depending on what types of benefits they receive (or have received)/programs they participate in (or have participated in)] When did you first start receiving/participating in [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head Start]? How long have you been [or were you] receiving/participating in [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head

Start]? Have you been on/participating in [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head Start] more than once? Tell me about that.

15. I'm going to give you some annual/yearly income ranges. Which of the following ranges includes your annual/yearly income?

- i. Under \$10,000; \$10,000 - \$15,000; \$15,000 - \$20,000; \$20,000 - \$25,000; \$25,000 - \$30,000; \$30,000 - \$35,000; \$35,000 - \$45,000; \$45,000 - \$50,000; over \$50,000

16. What types of rules do you have to follow being on/participating in [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head Start]? How do you feel about them?

a. Probe:

- i. Has following these rules ever caused any problems for you?

17. Have you ever been denied [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid] or had it taken away because of the rules? [If so] Tell me about that. How did you feel?

18. Where do you get support as a mother? Other women? Your own mother? Other mothers? Are there any men in your life who provide support? Tell me about them.

a. Would it be helpful to have more support? What other types of support would be helpful to you?

b. [If not previously discussed] Does anyone help you care for your children? Do you help care for other people's children? How so? [If so] Why do you do that?

c. Between your job, [TANF/SNAP/Medicaid/Head Start], and any other sources of support, do you have enough to support yourself and your children?

19. I'm really trying to learn about the experiences of Black single mothers and how they think about motherhood and mothering. Are there other things that I should know that we haven't gotten to that you think are important or other things that you think we should discuss?

APPENDIX B

- **Are you a Black/African American single mother who is 18 years or older?**
- **Do you participate or have you participated in a Social Services benefit program, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, or Head Start?**

If so, you're invited to learn more about participating in a 1-2 hour audio recorded interview in which you will be asked questions about your life, including questions about your family, community, and your experiences as a mother. Interviews will take place in a location of your choosing and children are welcome!

The purpose of this research study is to learn more about the experiences of low-income Black single mothers. **Participants will receive \$25 gift cards to a local grocery store as a thank you for their time.**

SEEKING STUDY PARTICIPANTS!



To participate, you must:

- ✓ Be a Black/African American single mother who is 18 years or older
- ✓ Be participating in or have participated in a Social Services benefit program, such as those listed above
- ✓ Have at least one child
- ✓ Identify as woman/female

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