MORE THAN WORDS: A PHOTO-ELICITATION STUDY EXPLORING BLACK MOTHERHOOD IN ACADEMIA

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ABSTRACT

MORE THAN WORDS: A PHOTO-ELICITATION STUDY EXPLORING BLACK MOTHERHOOD IN ACADEMIA

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This study aims to conceptualize how tenure-track Black faculty women at Tier 1 research universities understand the experience of being an academic mother and if race shapes academic motherhood experiences. Seminal research on academic motherhood, like Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004, 2016), continues to shape and influence academic motherhood discourse, however, it does not address the particularities of motherhood experiences for Black women. Other research on Black women's experiences in the academy addresses the compounded effects of racism, bias, and discrimination that results in feelings of isolation, alienation, and limited career mobility (Constantine, et al., 2008; Wilder, et al., 2013; West, 2019). Motherhood adds another layer of complexity that further complicates an environment that is already problematic, yet little research has closely examined academic motherhood experiences for Black women in the academy. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened the challenges of caregiving for academic mothers (Gordon & Presseau, 2022; Skinner, Betancourt &Wolff-Eisenberg, 2021; Staniscuaski et al., 2021)., in addition to having a devasting effect on the Black community (Kirksey et al., 2021; Rusoja & Thomas, 2021; Laurencin & Walker, 2020). In the same way that this study examines the confluence of race and academic motherhood, it was essential to consider that issues that affected the Black community and issues that affected academic mothers might have a compounded impact on Black Academic mothers.

The current is rooted in a womanist methodological approach and a participant-generated method called photo-elicitation. The womanist methodological approach centers the wholeness

of Black women, and specifically, the complexities of their everyday lives as academics and mothers. Photo-elicitation is a participatory research method that involves incorporating participant-generated photographs throughout the research process based on the idea that photographs can capture elements of the human experience that can be lost, overlooked, or unmentioned (Harper, 2002). The photo-elicitation method is complementary to the womanist praxis of 'wholeness,' by providing an opportunity for Black women to share more of their lives than can be captured in words. Participants for this study took photographs that captured their understanding of academic motherhood, Black motherhood, and Black academic motherhood, and then discussed the photographs in photo-elicitation interviews and a focus group with other study participants.

Findings from four participants in this study revealed distinctive characteristics of Black academic motherhood for tenure-track Black faculty women. Over the course of the study, five major themes emerged. The five major themes were: (a) Flexibility, (b) Access, (c) Intersectionality, (d) Critical Consciousness, and (e) The Village.

This study has implications for practice for institutions—particularly, research-intensive institutions—that seek to retain and recruit Black faculty women with or without children. Findings from this provide support for the use of photo-elicitation to create deeper meaning, to raise awareness, and to better understand lived the experiences of participants. Finally, findings from this study reinforce the need for more research on Black academic motherhood and an exploration of motherhood experiences for academic mothers from other races and ethnicities.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At times when I knew the least about myself, I always knew I wanted to be a mother. From childhood through adolescence, I spent considerable time wondering how exactly it would happen for me. Unlike my friends, the future I envisioned for myself did not include men or marriage, only children I would be responsible for raising just as my mother had raised me. This is not to say that my father was insignificant; he just played a supporting role in a powerhouse matrilineal ensemble whose principal actors were my mother, grandmother, and six aunts. My cousins and I spent nearly every weekend in each other's homes, at my grandmother's house, kitchens, backyards and front yards, Sunday church pews, and everywhere in between. We were living our best lives in the shadows of our mothers. It was hard not to develop a deep love and admiration for mothering with so much divine, woman-mother-energy spilling out in every direction. Our mothers made mothering look good, and, somehow, despite the challenges of the outside world, we existed in their microcosm of pride, joy, and love as children. I became curious about who they were outside of us and how they appeared to others.

Since then, I have learned through motherhood about the struggle, pain, and overwhelmedness nested behind the sanguine expressions that mothers extend to their children. Likewise, I have learned the weight of two disguises worn by mothers: one worn to shield their children from the ills of society and another worn to survive them. Many mothers wear these disguises because how they appear to others matters in ways that have significant implications for navigating day-to-day realities. In particular, the workplace can necessitate a clear delineation of roles between mother and employee as though it were impossible to be both. It turns out that the resolve to my amateur musings about how mothers appear to others is that they do not appear at all in many cases. Until recently, the identities of mothers and academics could occupy

distinctly different spaces. Every day, mothers leave their children at school or with caregivers and head off to the academy, where they shed their mother-skin and transform into outward appearances upon entry. To all whom they encounter, they look no different than anyone else. They are expected to perform their job duties just like anyone else and blend into the milieu. For the most part, this is an easy task because motherhood is invisible, and no one can tell just from looking that there is more to an academic woman than her scholarship. However, motherhood is deeply embedded in the minds and hearts of academic mothers. Though they may appear just like everyone else, the invisible load is heavy to bear.

On March 11th, 2020, the world changed to reveal what mothers looked like to others. The Novel Coronavirus Disease, COVID-19, was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, and the following day, the United States announced a national emergency. In less than 24 hours, all that was routine and familiar was suddenly washed away. In no particular order, K–12 schools closed across the nation, it became impossible to find disinfectants and other household necessities like toilet paper and paper towels, store hours changed, some people wore masks, some people did not wear masks, and gas prices dropped as we spun wildly into COVID chaos. Higher education institutions (HEIs) scrambled to physically evacuate college campuses across the country, initiating an abrupt transition for its personnel from occupying physical spaces to becoming full-time occupants of a newly forming virtual world.

Before COVID-19, I had just begun exploring my interest in academic mothers' lived experiences. I was curious to know more about the complexities of academic motherhood and how mothers experience it. I was familiar with existing literature on academic motherhood but struggled to visualize it. However, scholars discuss mothers' lived experiences in the academy, and it is left to the imagination to determine how it looks. I completed a project for an advanced

qualitative methods course that involved collecting photographs taken and submitted by faculty women to capture their understanding of academic motherhood. The photographs provided a look beyond what is seen and expected of academic women in the spaces they occupy within the academy. In the photographs, women would inhabit the same spaces (e.g., lecture halls, offices, conference rooms, laboratories) they always do, but with their children on their hips as they lectured, in pop-up play pens, or occupying themselves on tablets. The conversations resulting from the photographs spanned from challenges with promotion and tenure to pumping (breast milk) in bathrooms, sick babies at dissertation defenses, and everything in between. Imagery is a powerful conduit for understanding, and the photographs deliver a stream of comfort, relatability, strength, and support. The project was unlike anything I had ever experienced from any text on academic mothers.

More recently, I created a digital photobook for the Michigan State University WorkLife Office that expressed employees' experiences working from home using a combination of photographs and participant-written photograph captions. As I organized and coded the photographs into different themes, I saw connections with academic motherhood research. I also noticed a disconnect between the photographs and the literature; the photographs reflected racial and ethnic diversity in academic motherhood, and most of the literature did not. The benefit of visualizing academic motherhood is two-fold: an opportunity to add context and wholeness to academic motherhood discourse, and it brings necessary light to what is missing by showing what exists and has been overlooked. The absence of race and culture in academic motherhood literature felt empty, shifting my focus from what was unseen to who was unseen.

My personal and professional experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic affirmed my decision to focus my research on Black academic motherhood. Many issues I encountered

throughout the pandemic were amplified because of my Blackness. I watched as my community was disproportionately affected by the coronavirus disease due to stark racial health disparities in a broken system that could not withstand a pandemic. I watched Black families distance themselves from older relatives to protect a generation from illness and sudden deaths. The Civil Rights generation had already lost so many lives creating a better world for the rest of us, and now, staying apart was all we could do to return the favor. I watched much relied-on community recreation centers and after-school programs in the inner city close to the Black children and families who needed them most. I watched the desecration of the Black spirit in the wake of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade at the hands of the United States Criminal Justice System. I watched Black people marching in streets across America—protesting for Black lives, for Civil Rights, for fundamental human rights—in the middle of a pandemic. I talked with Black students, staff, and faculty in healing spaces to make sense of moving forward. We were overwhelmed by white guilt and white people seeking us out with a new interest in fixing what many of us have spent our careers trying to help them see—racism, injustice, and oppression.

In addition to a growing interest in the lives of Black folx, emerging scholarship around COVID-19's impact on society began to take up space in higher education discourse. Central to that conversation was academic motherhood. Mother scholars began speaking out about the effect of the pandemic on their academic careers; however, the role of race remained largely unaddressed by the white academic mothers leading the charge. Yes, all academic mothers are struggling, but what does the pandemic mean for Black mothers and other mothers of color who are already entangled in the academy's confines of racism and sexism? Do we know anything about their motherhood experiences at all?

While the pandemic is a painful reminder that we know very little about Black academic motherhood, it demonstrates that the reality of being Black in any space is worthy of special attention. As a Black mother and soon-to-be Ph.D., I may one day join the professoriate, understanding how Black women experience academic motherhood matters. Beyond my predilections, I was compelled to do this study because I regularly engage with Black faculty women. Among the most discussed topics are being a Black woman in the academy and raising our children. The conversations often fill in the gaps for me—rich with knowledge-sharing and comfort for a reality few understand. Through this research, I hope to fill in the gaps for others searching, like me, to find perspective, hope, and possibilities.

This study is guided by womanist notions of Black motherhood, which are profoundly cultural and rooted in African mothering traditions. Womanism emphasizes the importance of understanding the wholeness of Black women's lives. In service to womanist ideas—which call for embracing unconventional ways of knowing—I use photographs to contribute to the wholeness of their lived experiences. It is critical to understand what Black women must overcome to exist and succeed in chilly, predominantly white academic spaces and if there can be any practical efforts to retain and sustain them. I enter this dissertation space with a great sense of pride and respect for all Black women, specifically, Black mothers, have endured, so I have the privilege to write about it. I am honored to have the opportunity to study and foreground the lived experiences of Black mothers in the academy and to raise awareness and understanding that results in action and change.

Statement of Problem

This study aims to address three distinct yet related problems. The first problem is the need for more research on the particularities of academic motherhood for Black women and other women

of color. Research on academic motherhood suggests that having a child or children results in challenging situations at work and home. Still, there is less research focused explicitly on Black academic motherhood. The second problem is that while there is literature dedicated to discussing Black motherhood, which includes working mothers' experiences, little research explores the experiences of Black motherhood in an academic setting. Black mothers navigate these distinct experiences that affect faculty women. The third problem is limited research on the pandemic's significant burden on Black mothers and families and the need for continued research in this area. Given the distinct challenges Black women face in the academy, the research on the differential experience of Black motherhood, and the current social context, it is likely that Black women are experiencing academic motherhood in ways that have yet to be discussed. The following section addresses each of these problems in greater detail.

Academic Motherhood for Black Women

To date, no research has closely looked at academic motherhood experiences for Black women in the academy—scholars present academic motherhood as a universal experience that resonates with all women regardless of background. While there are some universal experiences in being a mother, motherhood is complex and can be shaped by countless variables such as race, class, and culture, to name a few. Seminal research that shaped and continues to influence academic motherhood discourse from scholars like Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004, 2016) did not address the particularities of motherhood experiences for Black women or other women of color. Their accounts reflect their experiences as white women in the academy and feature white or race-neutral expressions of academic motherhood. Although academic motherhood literature acknowledges the compounded effect of sexism and attitudes toward motherhood, it does not discuss how race intensifies that effect, which is observed in Black motherhood research.

Black Motherhood

A significant body of literature discusses Black motherhood as an institution (Barnes, 2015; Roberts, 1997; Collins, 1990). In the Black community, mothers occupy a critical space, where they are both held in high esteem if they meet cultural expectations in the "superstrong Black mother" façade (Roberts, 1997) and quickly degraded if they fall short. The cultural conditions that inform Black motherhood experiences are nuanced and complex and profoundly affect how Black women approach their careers. While some research discusses working Black mothers and other research focuses on middle-class Black mothers' experiences (Barnes, 2015; Roberts, 1997; Collins, 1990)., less research is specifically concerned with how Black faculty women experience motherhood in the academy.

Racial and Social Context

More research is necessary to understand how Black mothers adapt to constantly changing racial and social contexts. Collins (1990) discusses how social context has been a primary source of how Black women experience motherhood. Black mothers' relationship with each other, their families, and the larger Black community is often a result of varying social conditions resulting from "slavery, Southern rural life, and class-stratified, racially segregated neighborhoods of earlier periods of urban Black migration" (p.177). To that end, the way Black women make sense of motherhood today differs from the period of enslavement or the Civil Rights era. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the effect and impact of the current social context, which includes a global pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement's resurgence after the killing of George Floyd Jr., and the most racially polarizing Presidential election in recent history. Each occurrence has put a significant burden on the Black community. Research suggests Black mothers suffer a considerable disadvantage in times of crisis, often holding Black

communities and families together. Understanding the state of Black motherhood in the current social context helps create a complete picture of how Black women experience academic motherhood in the academy.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to conceptualize how Black women understand the experience of being an academic mother and if race shapes academic motherhood experiences. Moreover, the current pandemic living and working conditions continue to deepen the challenges faced by tenure-track Black faculty mothers. Little is known about how they grapple with this new reality. Photo-elicitation guides strategies and methodological techniques for this study. The womanist perspective and strategic mothering theoretically frame the methodological approach to explore how Black women understand the experience of being an academic mother.

Research Question

To gain insight into how Black women understand academic motherhood, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Black women understand the experience of being an academic mother?
    1. In what ways does race shape academic motherhood experiences for Black women?
    2. What if any particular issues have come up because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Significance of the Study

Research over the past 30 years on academic motherhood has raised awareness of the obstacles faced by faculty mothers in the academy. However, the bulk of the literature is race-neutral and

centered on white faculty women's accounts of motherhood experiences. Many academic motherhood scholars included in this review acknowledged their privilege as middle-class White women. Some noted the potential for differing viewpoints from women of color but did not attend to them in their work. Scholars have expanded our thinking and understanding of the experiences of faculty mothers by examining the role of motherhood in career advancement, research productivity, and professional identity development, as well as coping strategies and ways to achieve a balance between work and family (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Cohehmiller, 2013; Cuddy & Wolf, 2013; Mason & Goulden, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004;). Evans (2008) suggests that "women pay the ultimate social tax: their childbearing, child-rearing, and caretaking roles put them at a clear and often significant disadvantage on the job" (p.133). This sentiment is amplified for Black mothers, who contend with racism and the gender-based conflicts arising from motherhood. New research concerning academic motherhood experiences suggests that Black women and academic mothers' careers will suffer the most significant pandemic impact (Staniscuaski et al., 2020). Staniscuaski et al. (2020) suggest,

> These women risk suffering yet another motherhood penalty. Instead of writing papers, they are likely to devote time to homeschooling children and doing household chores. In other words, for those who have not yet leaked from the pipeline and are struggling to keep their careers on track, these months of heavier duties may increase the distance between them and their male and childless peers. (p.724)

Although new research on the pandemic is emerging daily, existing research addresses the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on caregivers and the Black community. For that reason—as this study takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic and involves participants who

are caregivers and members of the Black community—it is crucial to examine if they experienced any issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the reasons above, the current study aims to explore how Black women understand academic motherhood and to consider how the pandemic has influenced Black academic motherhood experiences. This study does not seek to make up what has been overlooked by over three decades of academic motherhood literature. This study aims to foreground Black mothers' unique experiences in the academy and foster meaningful connections to sustain them.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this study, I seek to explore how Black women understand their experiences of being academic mothers, specifically how race makes a difference. I am also interested in learning if they have experienced related issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the limited scholarship on Black academic motherhood, I conducted a comprehensive literature review of academic motherhood broadly, Black women in the academy, and literature that discusses Black motherhood experiences. This chapter begins with my literature review and concludes with my proposed conceptual framework.

I organized my literature review into three sections: academic motherhood, Black women in the academy, and Black motherhood. In the first section, I identify key themes in academic motherhood literature centered on structural and systemic disadvantages. In the second section, I introduce research regarding Black women's experiences and the social, structural, and systemic challenges they experience in the academy due to race and the intersection of race with gender. Finally, I provide an overview of Black motherhood literature as a distinctive experience for Black women. To begin to understand the differential experiences of Black academic mothers, it is necessary first to explore the breadth of challenges faced by academic mothers. Therefore, a brief introduction to academic motherhood follows, followed by a more in-depth exploration of the structural and familial challenges that shape motherhood experiences in the academy.

Academic Motherhood

Women and mothers have long borne the brunt of carrying a disproportionate load of family and household responsibilities. Throughout history, we have watched advances in women's rights and access to opportunity. However, these advancements come at a cost—the ability to maintain the roles of partner and homemaker simultaneously effectively. Although

women have risen above challenging circumstances, it is not without significant challenge and sacrifice. Many of the challenges academic mothers face are deeply embedded in outdated institutional structures and systems that were not created with women or mothers in mind. Although some conditions have improved, the rate of change remains problematic as academic mothers are often left to struggle through their careers' most defining moments.

Structural and Familial Barriers

Scholars have expanded our understanding of mothers' experiences working in higher education by examining the role of motherhood in career advancement, research productivity, and professional identity development. According to the most recent Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data, 42.5 percent of full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members are women (2018). Due to the rigor and pressures of academic life, academia as a professional work environment, specifically its impact on mothers, has become the site of considerable scholarship. Research has shown that faculty women who are mothers experience exacerbated gender discrimination, fewer tenure and promotion opportunities, and difficulty balancing responsibilities between work and home (Castañeda & Isgro, 2015; Mason & Goulden, 2008; Schoening, 2009; Ward &Wolf-Wendel, 2004). The following sections highlight academic mothers' structural and familial barriers, including institutional setting, tenure and promotion processes, family planning, and the struggle to balance it all.

Institutional Setting

Faculty women’s departure is most prevalent at research institutions where the rigor of academic commitments, high research expectations, and a heavy teaching load is not compatible with family life (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016). The prevalence of faculty women’s decisions to pursue alternate paths demonstrates how oppressive power structures work. Wolfinger (2008)

finds that while some women make career decisions based on marriage and family formation, they do not affect their likelihood of earning tenure. Instead, while family planning can make it more challenging to meet the demands associated with earning tenure, Wolfinger (2008) suggests that women are "disadvantaged for reasons unrelated to family formation," citing "negative aspects of the academic workplace" are to blame (p.396). Due to pervasive systemic inequities at research institutions, women scholars may pursue careers at "less competitive" institutions such as small liberal arts schools and community colleges (Schoening, 2009). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) note,

> While many women faculty opt not to face the challenge by deciding not to have children (Armenti, 2000; Finkel & Olswang, 1996), by securing non-tenure-track positions, or by working at less research-intensive institutions (Perna, 2001), those who do attempt to balance parenthood with faculty life at research universities find that academic work, although intrinsically satisfying, is also consuming and can have negative effects on personal life (Finkel & Olswang, 1996; Finkel, Olswang, & She, 1994; Sorcinelli & Near, 1989). (p.236)

There can be many reasons that women choose not to pursue tenure appointments, however, the substandard conditions and disadvantages faced by women academics often interfere with tenure and promotion processes, particularly for those who are mothers (Acker & Armenti, 2004).

Tenure and Promotion Processes

Earning tenure at a higher education institution is among the most significant milestones of a professor's academic career. Tenure provides long-term job security, protection of academic freedom, and increased earning potential. It is the difference between being on a constant grind to stay afloat and competitive and achieving a degree of comfort and autonomy in one's career.

Whether or not tenure is the self-professed goal of aspiring academics, it remains an implicit and explicit measure of success in higher education. Unfortunately, even though achieving tenure is a structural barrier for all faculty, women are at a critical disadvantage. Schoening (2009) attributes this phenomenon to two factors: "career choices based on marriage and family responsibilities and the inherent inequity of the tenure system itself" (p.78). Despite the consequences, more women choose family even if it could cost them tenure (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Only one in three women who choose a tenure-track position before having a child ever becomes a mother, leading researchers to the conclusion that "women, it seems, cannot have it all—tenure and a family—while men can" (Mason & Goulden, 2002, p. 2).

Family Planning

Armenti (2004) discusses the tendency for faculty women to postpone family planning or attempt to schedule pregnancy to fit academic calendars and tenure processes. Armenti's research is consistent with other research that suggests that women who have children later in their careers achieve at the same rate as women without babies (Schoening, 2009). To understand the bigger implications, consider the average age for a Ph.D. recipient is 33 years of age; a woman who waits to conceive until after completing doctoral studies, followed by up to six years for tenure, will be subject to the potential biological repercussions of high-risk childbearing years (Patterson, 2008). To that end, "rather than blatant discrimination against women, it is the long work hours and the required travel, precisely at a time when most women with advanced degrees have children and begin families, that force women to leave the fast-track professions" (p.90).

Women faculty are twice as likely to be single and childless compared to their male peers, which Mason and Goulden (2002) attribute to the perceived consequences of childbearing on their academic careers. By comparison, men who have babies early in their academic careers

are 38% more likely to get tenure than their female counterparts. At the same time, faculty women who choose motherhood often feel like they have to choose family or career and find themselves taking less desirable second-tier positions as part-time or adjunct faculty (Curtis & Thornton, 2014; Patterson, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004).

Struggle to Balance It All

According to Crosby (2004), women encounter a phenomenon known as the 'maternal wall,' which represents the stigma and discrimination they endure from colleagues when they return to work. Women have felt that the rigor of family life compromises their efforts to move up in the academic system; in other words, "women pay the ultimate social tax: their childbearing, child-rearing, and caretaking roles put them at a clear and often significant disadvantage on the job" (Evans, 2007, p.133). Pribbenow and colleagues (2010) claimed that universities needed to attend to their needs by extending the tenure clock and supporting work-family policies to retain women in academic positions.

Work-Family Policies

Research over the past 30 years on academic motherhood has raised awareness of the obstacles faced by faculty mothers in the academy, including unfair tenure policies and practices, unreasonable productivity expectations, ineffective leave policies, and a climate that does not support family life (Gold, 2017; Hunt, et al., 2012; Hill, et al., 2011; Solomon, 2011). While strides have been made to improve work-family policies in the academy, many are created without attending to the lasting effects of hundred-year-old systemic racism, sexism, and classism that permeates every corner of U.S. HEIs. For example, in 2001, the National Science Foundation (NSF) launched the NSF ADVANCE program with the goal of "addressing women's underrepresentation and slow advancement in STEM disciplines by focusing on the academic

institutions" (Hunt et al., 2012, p.275.). ADVANCE is arguably one of the most significant efforts toward improving the academy's conditions for women, specifically regarding work-family policies. However, Hunt et al. (2012) contend that while ADVANCE resulted in major improvements to work and leave policies, it continues to privilege the experiences and conditions of white women without regard for race or class. Thus, it is not enough to make better policies if unresolved issues underlie them. Laursen & DeWelde (2019) examine how NSF solicitations for ADVANCE grants have changed over time, noting that despite recruiting and supporting women in their careers,

> Women faced barriers intrinsic to institutional structures, such as biased selection and promotion systems, inadequate structures to support those with family and personal responsibilities … These barriers are enlarged and entangled when multiple marginalized identities intersect for women who are also in non-dominant groups due to their race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, citizenship, or physical abilities. (p.2)

The National Science Foundation has addressed this issue around race in its solicitations in recent years, which are explicit in requiring attention to the intersectionality of race with gender and to the implications of that intersectionality in the lives of women in the academy.

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) has come a long way since its inception in 1993; however, it only offers the bare minimum—paid leave. Patterson (2008) finds that while FMLA acknowledges the necessity of paid leave for specified family and medical reasons, it assumes a regulated amount of time and compensation is enough. FMLA does not account for access to affordable childcare to return to work, the flexibility necessary to raise a child while working full time, or support to balance work and family life (Patterson, 2008). Even though parental leave policies strive to level the playing field for parents in the academy, they can also

advance inequity issues that make for an even steeper climb (Hill et al., 2011). For example, fathers receive less leave time, if any, and women often must combine multiple policies to secure adequate leave time after childbirth. Institutional leave policies and practices demonstrate how academic mothers are systematically set up to struggle more than men. Unfortunately, the inequities outside the home are often intensified when the burdens of motherhood responsibilities and expectations are not lessened at home.

The Second Shift

Hochschild (1989) began a decades-long conversation about what she called the 'second shift,' referring to the time women spend working to support their households long after the workday has ended. More specifically, research shows that women in heterosexual relationships are responsible for arranging childcare, cooking, cleaning, and the majority of domestic work in their personal lives, as well as being flexible to the professional needs of their spouse (Dickson, 2018; Hochschild & Manchung, 2012; Misra et al., 2012). Although some women report that they only feel exploited at work, the second shift is a form of gender exploitation in their own homes (Young, 2013). Dickson (2018) writes, "female faculty undertake considerably more housework and caring tasks than male faculty, and the hours they put into caring for their children are long...as a result, some women report thinking of their family as hindering their academic productivity, due to its time-consuming nature" (p.77).

Alternately, Dickson (2018) suggests that some faculty women have successfully found harmony between mothering and academia. Dickson notes that while mothers experience overwhelm, stress, and guilt, they do not regret their choices. Institutions must acknowledge the considerable time and effort required for women to survive and thrive in the academic milieu. Specifically, Phillipsen (2008) advises "embracing female ways of doing, knowing and being—

in other words, providing equal opportunities for women without the expectation that they become like men" (p.3).

Summary

Scholars have expanded our understanding of mothers' experiences working in higher education by examining the role of motherhood in career advancement, research productivity, and professional identity development. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) focused on exploring mid-career tenured women faculty. In particular, they aimed to address working norms for women who manage multiple roles in their personal and professional lives. Throughout academic motherhood literature, it is evident that mothers face structural and familial barriers that shift, alter, and ultimately define their academic careers.

Unfortunately, the bulk of academic motherhood literature is race-neutral or centered on white faculty women's accounts of motherhood experiences, which makes it difficult to determine if those mentioned above structural and familial barriers are further complicated by race. Castañeda and Isgro's (2015) Motherhood in Academia is an exception to race-neutral academic motherhood scholarship that calls attention to the additional burden women of color carry to survive racism, tokenism, and lack of support and flexibility. The authors note,

> Despite some gains in position in the ivory tower for female students and faculty as a whole, many women of color who are both scholars and mothers find they continue to be blocked in their progress by sex and racial prejudice and biases. (p.6)

Castañeda and Isgro (2015) emphasized the necessity of understanding the academy's conditions for mothers, specifically women of color; however, further research is needed about the particularities of different groups. One such group is Black women, who, in addition to social, gender, and political inequalities, are also racially oppressed.

Black Women in Higher Education

To understand Black academic motherhood as divergent from white or race-neutral academic motherhood, researchers must consider the historical origins of Black women in the academy. Black women's entry into formalized education was not a gesture towards equal opportunity; instead, they were being groomed by white missionaries to be "uplifters" of their race. The very instance of Black women in the academy is born in the burden of carrying an entire people on her shoulders, to sacrifice herself for the good of all. The Black woman's sole responsibility for pursuing education was to succeed in resolving the oppression of Black people; thus, "historically black women have been one of the most isolated, underused, and consequently demoralized segments of the academic community" (Carter et al., 1998, p.98).

Black women have a long history of working in education. Gregory (2001) noted that Black women often choose careers in education because of the "potential for challenging current paradigms and providing leadership for young, developing scholars," and as a result, "have a profound impact on the lives and perceptions of Black students" (p.125, 129). Many scholars emphasize the impact of Black women in the academy, which can be observed through the recruitment and retention of Black students, faculty, and staff, availability of diverse courses and curriculum, and mentoring relationships with students (Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017; Perry et al., 2009).

Unfortunately, the compounded experience of racism, bias, and discrimination makes the academy an uncomfortable place for Black women to exist. Motherhood adds another layer of complexity that further complicates an already problematic environment. Therefore, before exploring motherhood for Black women, it is essential to examine what it is like to be a Black woman in academe. The following sections address the realities of Black women's critical

challenges in the contemporary academy: double discrimination, tokenism, isolation and alienation, and lack of mobility and support.

Double Discrimination

Black women are in a constant state of what Carter, Pearson, and Shavlik (1988) term 'Double Jeopardy;' they are the minority among their male counterparts and underrepresented among females. Although over 150 years since the first Black woman earned a Bachelor's degree, the vestiges of Black women's distorted path into the academy undergird manifestations of racism and sexism that remain. Turner (2002) calls attention to the experience of women of color in the academy, who have to negotiate multiple marginalities, that is, stereotyping of race and/or gender in various contexts. Black women contend with what critical race scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) termed intersectionality or the cumulative effects of discrimination due to multiple marginalized identities. The implications of intersectionality affect Black women in the workplace and in their communities, where the assumptions and expectations of Black women are deeply rooted in racist and/or sexist ideologies. Crenshaw (1989) suggests,

> Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. (p.140)

Black women have no choice but to endure the converging oppressions of racism, sexism, and classism if they pursue a career in the academy, where they make up just 10 percent of tenured and tenure-track faculty (NCES, 2018). Nzinga (2020) suggests that while Black women are limited in terms of their ascent into the professoriate and high-level administrative roles, they are still a great benefit to the success of white men and women and Black men.

The exclusion of Black women in tenure appointments and upper-level administration results in the suppression of Black women's thoughts and ideas while simultaneously reinforcing the value and importance of others (Nzinga, 2020). Consequently, Black women are left to sort through the harsh realities of an academic life that includes tokenism, isolation, and alienation from their peers.

Tokenism, Isolation and Alienation

Among the top reasons for the departure of Black women from the academy are feelings of isolation and alienation from colleagues. Black women report feeling intentionally excluded from opportunities to build collegial bonds with their peers or required to compartmentalize their identity to navigate tense working relationships (Bell et al., 2003). When included, they often participate in committees or initiatives centered on diversity, equity and inclusion regardless of their interest or research orientation (Gregory, 2001; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Research on workplace discrimination (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Hughes & Dodge, 1997;) finds that Black women and women of color are often discredited based on their perceived pathway into the academy. They are labeled 'diversity hires' or 'affirmative action candidates and diminished professionally because of these monikers. As if existing in the margins is not enough, Black women constantly experience assaults on either race or gender that make it uncomfortable to work in their own office spaces (Constantine et al., 2008; Wilder et al., 2013; West, 2019). Thomas and Hollenshead (2001) observe,

> Marginalization is further evidenced when Black faculty women are forced, either covertly or overtly, to compromise their gender and/or racial/ethnic identities and when their White colleagues hold unrealistic expectations, insisting that they be shining

> examples of their group and somehow different from other Blacks and other women. (p.165)

Whether blatant or subtle microaggressions, Black women are left to navigate feelings of confusion and self-doubt that make them question how and if they fit within the environment. Kelly and Winkle-Wagner (2017) find that this is particularly true for Black women at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), where Black women are more noticeably underrepresented in all white departments, campuses, and classes with primarily white students. These experiences are especially salient at research institutions, where a heavy focus on research productivity only exacerbates feelings of isolation for Black women (Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017).

Lack of Mobility and Support

Regardless of an institution's professed commitment to diversifying the academy, many drop the ball when doing what is necessary to recruit, support, and/or sustain Black women (Kelly et al., 2017). This experience is evidenced by low representation in the professoriate, lowest tenure appointments, and disciplines dominated by white male scholarship (West, 2019; Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017; Griffin et al., 2013; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Nzinga (2020) discusses the condition of Black women in the academy:

> Black women academics face positions of sustained precarity that are demarcated by their disproportionate overrepresentation as underpaid lecturers, adjuncts, skills course instructors and assistant professors. Despite higher education institutions' professed commitment to diversifying faculty, the disparity in the numbers between assistant and full professors has been attributed to the disproportionate number of Black female

> professors who have been denied tenure by their institutions or not offered tenure-track appointments at all. (Jaschik, 2020, para. 5)

Nzinga (2020) emphasizes that institutional culture and climate make it nearly impossible for Black women to advance in their careers or just stick around. Black women are often called upon to serve as the voice of their racial group, "treated as representatives of their group or as symbols rather than individuals" (Moses, 1989, p.15). Thomas and Hollenshead (2001) discuss the tendency for Black women to be assigned to teaching and service roles. They are often asked to sit on diversity committees, are asked to mentor Black students, and presumed to have an interest in community outreach and engagement. Thomas and Hollenshead (2001) contend that while Some of this work may compel black women, it backfires when they receive little acknowledgment for it in tenure and promotion processes that prioritize research productivity (Brown-Glaude, 2010; Gregory, 1998).

Similarly, few Black women hold executive leadership positions within HEIs, leaving limited opportunities to interrupt structural forms of oppression that Black faculty women face. Notably, it has been less than 30 years since a Black woman, Condoleezza Rice was the first Black female to occupy the highest academic appointment (provost) at a major institution. While this is a significant sign of progress for Black women, it reflects a broken system that puts apparent limits on what is possible for Black women.

Support in the form of mentoring is a critical component of success for tenure-stream faculty; particularly for Black women, mentorship has been shown to increase chances of career advancement (Holmes, 2007). Unfortunately, it is difficult to find a Black woman mentor because those in the position to mentor are often buried in the struggles of trying to survive the academy on their own (Henderson et al., 2010; Holmes, 2007; Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017).

Fries-Britt and Turner Kelly (2005) emphasize the importance of being able to connect with other African American women scholar-friends to "sustain each other, inspire each other and rejuvenate each other when the cumulative effect of racial microaggressions become too much to bear alone" (p. 235). In the absence of support from the academy, Black women rely on family and community for support.

Career and Family

Family is a significant source of support for Black faculty women who experience isolation and lack of support in the workplace. In addition to their immediate family, Black faculty women often rely on help from relatives, parents, friends, and cultural affinity groups (Chambers, 2011; Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017; Mabokela & Green, 2001; West, 2019). This reliance upon community support means Black women are often more involved and engaged with their families and communities (Collins,1990). Carter, Pearson, and Shavlik (1998) noted, "In their professional roles, women of color are expected to meet performance standards set for the most part by white males. Yet, their personal lives extract a loyalty to their culture that is central to acceptance by family and friends" (p.98). Black women are stretched thin between their careers and family, and there is rarely enough support to alleviate challenges at work and home. As a result—for fear of being unable to manage work expectations without jeopardizing family life—many Black women opt out of the tenure process, choosing instead to pursue adjunct and non-tenure track positions.

According to Nitsche and Brueckner (2009), Black women with advanced degrees are 50 percent less likely to be married by the age of 45 when compared to their white counterparts. Unlike white women, Black women confront what the authors describe as 'declining marriage chances,' based on research that suggests women are more likely to wed individuals with

comparable education (Nitsche & Brueckner, 2009). For that reason, cis-gender Black women (seeking to marry Black men), who significantly outnumber Black men in the advanced degree population, have fewer options to build a family if they choose to do so. As a result, Black women faculty may choose not to have children due to the lack of options and time (Haskins et al., 2006).

Summary

While there is evidence of the struggle to balance work and family, little research dives into the complexities of being a Black mother in the academy and Blackness and academic motherhood. It is evident throughout the literature that Black women encounter far more significant professional and personal complications than their white counterparts when trying to succeed in the academy. Black women are still expected to do more at work, support and uplift their communities, make whites feel comfortable, nurture, mentor, and mother (Collins, 1990). Given the considerable challenges Black women face in the academy and specific responsibilities/expectations related to race and culture, it is likely that Black women also have distinct academic motherhood experiences.

Black Motherhood

According to Collins (1990), "Black motherhood consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African American Women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African American community, and with self" (Collins, 1990, p.176). Black motherhood is a particular way of experiencing motherhood in ways known only to Black women, their families, their children, and their communities. Before the Black feminist movement, Black mothers were primarily discussed in the context of others; specifically, Collins

writes, "analyses of Black motherhood were largely the province of men, both white and Black, and male perspectives on Black mothers prevailed" (p.179). Similarly, until recently, white women's perspectives on motherhood have prevailed in academic motherhood discourse.

In the Black community, Black mothers are revered for their strength, influence, and commitment to family and community; however, they are also held to unrealistic standards if they fall short of expectations (Chambers, 2011; Collins, 2000; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008;). These standards are deeply rooted in historical archetypes of Black motherhood that demand selflessness, sacrifice, and putting the needs of the family and community before herself. Despite their strength and perseverance against all odds, Black mothers face harsh judgment both within and outside their communities. Rousseau writes,

> As mothers and wives in a patriarchal structure, Black women have often been held liable for the professed decay within Black communities. Antithetical to the American ethos, Black women are routinely accused of being lazy; hyperfertile; and lacking a strong work ethic, moral foundation, and family values. (p.194)

For Black women, motherhood is more than the condition of having a child or children; it is the pressure to restore and ensure good favor in the eyes of society. It is the responsibility to be strong and powerful protectors, providers, and culture bearers. It is the fortitude to raise Black children who can understand, recognize, and survive racism, while at the same time instilling a sense of pride and prioritizing joy.

The history, complexities, and specificities that inform Black motherhood are unmistakably missing from academic motherhood literature, even though it is clear they exist. Dillard (2008) discusses 'racial, cultural' memories as "memories that change our ways of being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology) in what we call the present" (p.90). These memories

allow us to be vulnerable in ways "that feeds our ability to engage in new metaphors and practices in our work" (p.91). Black motherhood is full of racial and cultural memories that cannot be addressed or defined under the guise of academic motherhood. Understanding how Black women experience academic motherhood has implications for approaching their work that needs to be explored independently. Thus, it is not enough to have literature if it does not speak to differential academic motherhood experiences across race and ethnicity.

The Conceptual Framework:

Womanism

Womanism is a social theory that emerged out of a necessity to explore, understand and center the everyday experiences of Black women. Often scholars use womanism and womanist interchangeably as both reflect the same perspective and 'semantic efficiency' (Maparayan, 2012, p.15). Alice Walker (1983/2011) popularized the term 'womanist' in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* and is widely revered as the founding mother of womanist thought. Walker acknowledges the wholeness of African American women's daily lives, reinforces that their experiences are significantly divergent from those of white women, and emphasizes the need to devote special attention and care; these women are worthy of special attention.

Although the origins of womanism are often tied to Walker, womanist scholars have continued to build upon and further develop womanist theory over time. My study is guided by Walker's (1983) initial notions of womanism and subsequent iterations of womanist theory and praxis that acknowledge the influence of African-centered beliefs and values and motherhood. Mainly, I draw on the work of early contributors to womanist thought like Ogunyemi (1985) and Hudson-Weems (1989), who emphasized Black women's responsibilities to family, community,

and activism, and more contemporary womanist scholars like Layli Maparayan and Melina Abdullah who expand on the womanist worldview, shifting social conditions, and mothering.

In conducting this research, my epistemological choices are informed by the following major themes that appear across womanist literature: (1) centering Black women, (2) the womanist worldview, and (3) responsibility to family, culture, and community.

Centering Black Women

For this study, broadly distinguishing Black women from white women and Women of Color is necessary to understand precisely how Black women experience academic motherhood. Williams (2006) writes, "womanist scholars have the freedom to explore the particularities of black women's history and culture without being guided by what white feminists have already identified as women's issues" (p.120). Writ large, the literature addresses what white women have identified as academic motherhood issues, with little regard for race. However, even when white women discuss or include the experiences of Black women, it can seem disconnected and exploitative (Taylor, 1998). hooks (1994) speaks to this phenomenon,

> Often the white women who are busy publishing papers and books … make us the 'objects' of their privileged discourse on race. As 'objects' we remain unequal inferiors. Even though they may be sincerely concerned … their methodology suggests that they are not yet free of the type of paternalism endemic to white supremacist ideology. (p.12)

Womanism, however, is not bound by the preferences of outsiders; instead—through Black women's voices and perspectives—it allows for uncompromised exploration of Black academic motherhood experiences. Further, as womanism centers on Black women's lives, experiences and culture, it emphasizes that understanding is critical to recognizing how systems and institutions are positioned to cause them harm (Maparayan, 2012). Therefore, any framework that does not

confront racism or relies on feminist ideas and theory is insufficient to address Black women's experiences. Academic motherhood without acknowledgment of race and cultural differences is not enough. Accordingly, for the current study, womanism gives permission to embrace Black women's wholeness, specifically, the complexities of their everyday lives as academics and mothers.

The Womanist Worldview

Black faculty women continue to survive at U.S. HEIs whose white male founders never imagined women would occupy them, at least not Black men, especially not Black women. HEI's structure manifests the long history of racism and oppression in the United States. Yet, somehow, Black women seemingly outwit and outlast the very conditions meant to hold them back. Maparayan (2012) suggests to exist within structures and systems of oppression, Black women find a 'way to be in the world and create the conditions they need to thrive. They adopt a womanist worldview that "contributes to an ongoing sense of inner well-being and power that defies, and in turn, transmutes external conditions" (p.33). However, these conditions often require constant shifting and flexibility from Black women to meet unexpected challenges in addition to everyday racism and oppression. Taylor (1998) writes,

> The simultaneous influence of class, race, and gender is not constant but changes according to varying life events. Thus, the significance and meaning of race, class or gender greatly depends on the context because at any given time, social conditions shape which factor has the greatest influence on or in African American women's lives. (p.55)

For this reason, in the current study, it is impossible to ignore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black academic mothers whose careers and communities were among the hardest hit (Staniscuaski et al., 2020).

Although the pandemic has upended the lives of many, it has borne an uneven burden on Black lives. Womanism is a useful lens to examine the effect of the pandemic on Black women, whose ways of knowing and being have been thrown wildly out of balance. Maparayan (2012) discusses the womanist 'triad of concern,' which focuses on the interconnectedness of Black women's relationships with others, spirituality, and nature. Maparayan includes a visual of the "triad of concern" to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the womanist worldview (Figure 1).

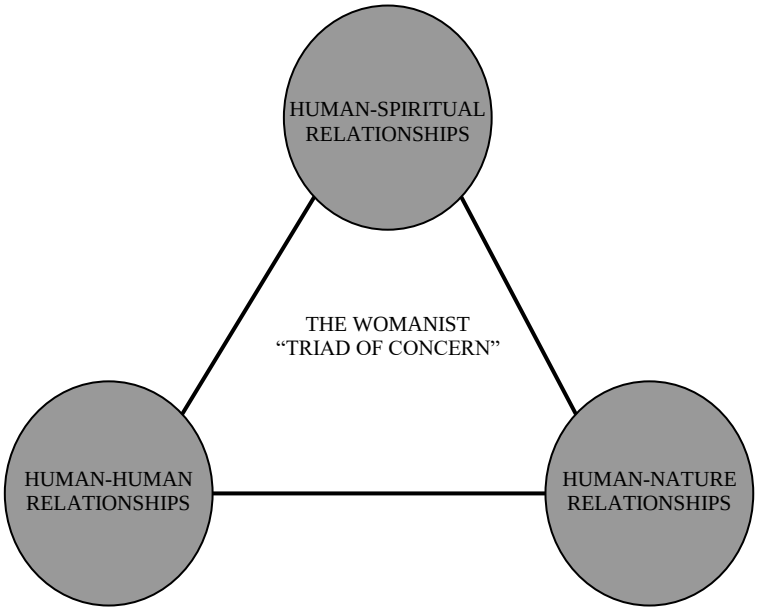

Figure 1. The Womanist "Triad of Concern."

Finding harmony and balance among these relationships is severely compromised by the pandemic that has resulted in a crisis of health, humanity, and spirit. For Black women, this means confronting devastating racial health disparities and unprecedented loss of Black lives. It means maintaining self and family without support from extended family and the networks of kin

that uphold the Black community. It means grappling with a loss of faith that the universe or some forces beyond their control will see them through just as they consider giving up. There is no choice but to remain steadfast even amidst a global pandemic for Black mothers. As evidenced in the literature and throughout history, Black women's ability to weather the storm determines and ensures the future of generations.

Responsibility to Family, Culture, and Community

The weight of responsibility to family, culture, and community is a heavier load for Black women, who are forced to contend with professional, societal, and cultural pressures and expectations daily (Barnes, 2016)--particularly unspoken expectations that call for Black women to be leaders at work, home, and the community. For Black women, responsibility has "been historically centered as care-givers, culture bearers, and community builders," and that responsibility comes with profound social, political, and cultural implications (Barnes, 2016, p.219).

Hudson-Weems (1987) stressed that Black women are 'political beings' responsible for fighting racism and oppression and driving political action in their communities. Black women are often at the center of major political movements and drivers of change in their communities. Walker (1983/2011) notes that womanists are "committed to the survival and wholeness of all people," and one of the ways their commitment manifests is through political engagement and advocacy (p.xi). However, these commitments are anything but voluntary; from the womanist perspective, a call to action is a part of cultural norms ingrained in Black women over generations.

Barnes' (2016) book *Raising the Race* is the first publication to examine how Black women navigate careers, family and the expectations of the Black Community. Barnes notes that

Black women's struggle to balance seemingly competing interests is deeply rooted in historical struggles that transcend generations. Womanism raises these struggles to a more palpable level of consciousness by providing a complete picture of Black Women's realities. Ogunyemi (as cited by Maparayan, 2012) reifies Walker's lighter treatment of womanism suggesting Black women are "leaders in organizing, mediating, reconciling, and healing a world overrun with conflict, violence, and dehumanization" (p.25). In short, Black women must constantly contend with substantial internal and external pressures to keep moving forward. Further, womanist mothering plays a significant role in how they envision the path ahead.

According to Abdullah (2012), womanist mothering is "forward-thinking, proactive, and visionary," it moves beyond the victories of resistance and onto "the imaginings of alternative realities" (p.58). Not only can Black mothers create worlds of possibility for their children, but they also pass down a tradition of resistance that may prevent trauma and oppression for future generations. Abdullah (2012) writes,

> Womanist mothers challenge the confines of the nuclear family, embracing extended familial and communal bonds, drawing from traditional African gender roles, kinship ties and definitions of community to build a "village" that shares in child-rearing responsibilities and enables mothers to develop as full and complete human beings who are guided by spirit as they engage in motherhood and their own development as a part of the larger human struggle for greater peace, beauty, freedom and justice. (p.57)

Thus, even though motherhood further complicates issues of race, class and gender, it is also a major source of empowerment, pride and hope for the future.

Chapter Summary

Motherhood comes with challenges for all women in the academy; however, Black women's experiences navigating multiple marginalities, racism, sexism, and motherhood deserve their own space to benefit Black women and all. It is necessary to examine Black academic motherhood through a lens that allows for a more holistic understanding of Black women's unique ways of knowing and being and to honor the breadth of lived experiences.

Taylor (1998) reminds us that research involving Black women necessitates epistemological choices that embody Black culture, values, and ideals. Black women's understanding of motherhood exists outside the traditional forms of knowledge (Barnes, 2016); therefore, to explore how Black women understand academic motherhood, it is necessary to utilize a lens that leans into their nuance and complexity. This study aims to examine how race shapes academic motherhood for Black faculty women, how they understand the experience of academic motherhood, and how they navigate changing social contexts, especially crises that have a significant impact on their worlds. Womanism is most relevant to the aims of this study, given the emphasis it places on "the unparalleled experience that black women have in the particular institutions, cultures, and societies of which they are a part" (Thomas, 2009, p.307). Through womanism, Black academic mothers' experiences can be recognized, affirmed, and centered.

Consistent with the 'way' described by Maparayan (2012), womanist ways inform womanist research of knowing, which involves gathering together with Black women for communing, sharing, and co-creating knowledge made more robust by the collective energy of Black women. Similarly, a womanist conceptual framework requires a methodological approach that transcends traditional forms of knowledge production. Visual methods are a powerful tool that can help capture Black academic mothers' lived experiences and complicate universal

definitions of academic motherhood that do not account for race, culture, or social context. For this study, I will use photo-elicitation to broaden understanding of Black motherhood experiences in academia.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview and Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative research paradigm in order to develop an understanding of how participants make meaning of their experiences (Sipe & Constable, 1996). Preissle (2006) described qualitative inquiry as a "rich fabric or tapestry of practice" through which we often blend varied practices and designs with one another, "across boundaries of methods, disciplines, and fields to develop new approaches" (p. 688). Preissle points out that qualitative inquiry has become a diverse and inclusive method for deepening our understanding of human and societal behavior for both scholars and a wider audience outside the academy. Similarly, Kelly and Kortegast (2018) note that the goal of qualitative research is to "unpack and come to understand social and cultural complexity" (p. 14). For these reasons, a qualitative design will be the most effective approach to learn how race makes a difference in motherhood experiences for Black faculty mothers, and how their experiences have been affected by the pandemic.

Photo-Elicitation Methodology

To conduct this research in a way that captures the spirit of Black academic motherhood and creates a space for storytelling and building community, I knew I would have to explore participatory research methods. Participatory research allows participants to have agency in the knowledge-production process, which is helpful for building and establishing trust and a level of comfort between me and participant (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). The participatory approach is often used in health, community-based, and political action research focused on marginalized communities to center the voice and experiences of the people as a means to effect change. It is collaborative, flexible, and responsive, and relies heavily on the relationship and partnership

between the researchers to derive meaning from everyday life and experiences (Bergold &Thomas, 2012).

Scholars have used participatory research to study the experiences of Black women in a variety of different settings; however, the inclusion of visual methods presents a compelling approach to study the intersection of Black women and academic motherhood. Visual participatory research is driven by the belief that images are far more powerful than words. In particular, photography has been used to create deeper meaning for the purposes of solving problems, raising awareness, or simply developing a better understanding of participants' lived experiences (Harper, 2002).

The research design for this study is photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation is a participatory research method that involves incorporating participant-generated photographs throughout the research process based on the idea that photographs can capture elements of the human experience that can be lost, overlooked, or unmentioned (Harper, 2002). Keats (2009) suggests,

> Offering participants multiple means of expressing stories around their observations, ideas, emotions, and activities can also expand a researcher's opportunity to better understand the complex narrative participants construct about how they are living through experiences. (p.182)

In an effort to honor womanist ideas that call for embracing unconventional ways of knowing, I believe photography may be an effective medium to examine the complexities of Black academic motherhood that might otherwise remain unspoken. According to Saldaña and Omasta (2017), "a photograph, as an extension of the human body, is a cognitive memory of what was visually experienced" (p.81). In this way, the photographs may trigger memories that have shaped participants' understanding of Black academic motherhood and provide opportunities for

reflection that words alone cannot (Clark-IbaNez, 2007). Harper (2002) suggests that photo-elicitation may "overcome the difficulties posted by in-depth interviewing because it is anchored in an image that is understood" (p.20). Thus, the researcher and the participant are better able to find common understanding and co-create knowledge based on shared perspectives.

The methodological choice of photo-elicitation in the current study is complementary to the womanist praxis of 'wholeness,' by providing an opportunity for Black women to share more of their lives than can be captured in words. In the advent of social media, images consume our every waking moment. Whether on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or in a text exchange between friends, images are the most widely used mediums for expressing everyday lives, feelings, thoughts, and aspirations (Gunthert, 2014) that often require more than words. Ndione and Remy (2018) refer to the use of images in research as the "mixing and matching the discursive with the iconic," where photographs allow for creative dialogue between the researcher and the participant that results in co-construction of meaning and understanding (p.62). The current study seeks to understand how Black women experience academic motherhood in a way that honors the everyday experiences of Black mothers and honors womanist ways of knowing and being. For that reason, it was necessary to utilize visual methodological strategies and techniques that can "uncover, unpack, and come to understand social and cultural complexity" (Kelly & Koretegast, 2018, p.14).

Harper (2002) suggests that the insertion of visual images in research can "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words" (p.13). The brain's cognitive response to processing images elicits thoughts and feelings that may otherwise lay beneath the surface (Glaw, et al., 2017). Photo elicitation can also give participants agency in the interview process when they are able to choose which photographs, they would like to discuss, and the order they

are discussed in. This approach can increase the level of comfort with the researcher and allow the researcher and participant 'common understandings' that add validity and richness. In this study, photographs provided by the participants were used throughout the photo-elicitation interviews, and in the focus group, to add depth and context to the interview process, and layers of meaning to the qualitative data.

The use of visual images in research enables people to share in the creation of knowledge and meaning by telling their own stories in more than words. Although scholars discuss the lived experiences of mothers in the academy, it is left to the imagination to determine what it looks like, or if there is anything to be seen at all. This is particularly true for Black women, who often do not see themselves represented in the literature on academic motherhood. Visual methodologies allow researchers to probe for deeper meanings and more abstract ideas than what can be expressed in words. Harvey, Johnson, and Heath (2013) suggest the womanist paradigm is rooted in an 'ethic of caring,' based on the idea that "one's well-being is connected with the well-being of others" (Banks-Wallace, 2000, p.41). The use of images to guide conversation embodies the spirit of participatory research, as participants will tell their own stories while discussing the ways in which they are connected with others. This approach is conducive with Maparyan's (2012) 'womanist idea' for an "ontological and fundamentally spiritual move away from taxonomic logic and towards integrative logic" (p.22).

Strengths of Photo-Elicitation

While visual methods are not without their share of complexities, photo-elicitation "enlarges the possibilities of conventional empirical research" by creating space for meaning making to occur beyond text alone (Harper, 2002, p. 13). When conducting research that seeks to foreground the perspectives and experiences of African American women, it is critical to use

methodologic frameworks that help us advance the understanding of their lives (Taylor, 1998). A strength of photo-elicitation supports that aim by using images to "enhance what can be known from multiple perspectives," and interpretations of reality (Kelly & Kortegast, 2018, p.14). Additionally, the use of participant-generated photographs allowed participants to become partners in the knowledge creation process (Reese, 2013). Accordingly, Chapman, Wu, and Zhu (2017) note, "images provide a powerful means for quickly giving voice to complex experiences by allowing individuals to tell their stories in their own way" (p. 811).

Challenges of Photo-Elicitation

Photo-elicitation provides compelling and engaging data that is capable of escaping words and convention; however, it is not without criticism. Using participant-generated photographs relied heavily on my ability to communicate the photograph prompts clearly. Even with prompts, taking photographs is a subjective process based on participants' understanding and interpretation which leaves room for disconnect or misunderstandings. According to Kelly and Kortegast (2018) *connotation*, "imbuing an image with social and cultural significance, is a dual process occurring both during the creation of the image and during the consumption of images" (p.17) Thus, images can be understood in many different ways and ways that may be in conflict with the purpose and intention of the study (Pink, 2007). Because photographs can have many different meanings—from the meaning constructed by the photographer to the meaning constructed by different viewers—there is the potential for the me as the researcher, or the viewer to focus on what is in the photograph to derive meaning, rather than how meaning is defined by the participant. Conversely, my sharing a cultural lens with the participants sometimes resulted in meaning that was only understood by ingroup members or Black women.

Ethical Considerations of Photo-Elicitation

In addition to the challenges of photo-elicitation, I had to be mindful of ethical concerns around photo-elicitation research design. For the current study, three primary ethical considerations include (a) consent, (b) confidentiality, and (c) content sensitivity. Studies that involve participants appearing in or generating photographs require additional measures to ensure informed consent (Bates, et al., 2017). In addition to participants' consent for the use of their images, photo-elicitation may include images that include other individuals and possibly minors (ClarkIbáñez, 2004). Therefore, consent presents a significant ethical issue. Consent was obtained by all individuals that appeared in the photographs in order to include them in the study (Bates et al., 2017). Similarly, I made it clear to the participants that the use of their photographs could interfere with my ability to guarantee their confidentiality. Even when participants did not appear in their photos, like Chapman, Wu, and Zhu (2017) suggest, "small elements in the photographs may compromise privacy in unexpected ways" (p. 811). For example, a photograph may include distinguishing elements of the participant's home or office or feature other identifying attributes that compromise their confidentiality. Ultimately, all participants declined to choose pseudonyms or conceal their identity in any way, which resulted in fewer ethical considerations related to confidentiality.

Finally, while there is a potential for the photo-elicitation interview to be a positive experience, it can also trigger deep emotional responses that alter the course of the interview in unexpected ways (Chapman, et al., 2017). It was important to exercise care and concern when engaging participants in dialogue over potentially sensitive topics (Bates et al., 2017).

Even though existing research touches on a broad range of topics related to academic motherhood, it often feels disconnected and devoid of emotionality and compassion. The current study sought to capture the stories, feelings, and emotions of Black faculty mothers—which are

often lost and overlooked in research on academic motherhood—by engaging participants in dialogue on the images and embodied experiences of Black motherhood in the academy. The following section provides an overview of the photo-elicitation methods I used.

Methods

The purpose of the study was achieved using womanism as a theoretical framework and a participant-generated method called photo-elicitation. This study used photo-elicitation to generate participants' visual images and reflections on their understanding of Black academic motherhood. Photo-elicitation data generation and analysis processes were used to answer the research question: How do Black women understand the experience of being an academic mother? Secondary research questions include: (1) In what ways does race shape academic motherhood experiences for Black women, and (2) What if any particular issues have come up because of the COVID-19 pandemic? This section is organized into five parts: (a) site selection, (b) participant recruitment, (c) instruments for data generation, (d) data analysis, and (e) limitations and delimitations of the study.

I used multiple means of data collection to generate data, including participants' information (photographs, captions, individual and group interviews), field notes, member checks, and conversations with a critical friend. The study took place over three months, and participants met with me for three interviews in total: two individual photo-elicitation interviews and one photo-elicitation focus group interview with other study participants. Each interview focused on a different topic for which participants were asked to generate five photographs and captions representative of their experience with three topics: (1) academic motherhood, (2) Black motherhood, and (3) Black academic motherhood. The objectives of the photo-elicitation interviews were: (a) to gain insights into participants' understanding of academic motherhood

and, more specifically, as Black women, and (b) to elicit deeper reflection on the role of race in their understanding of academic motherhood. Throughout the study, after each interview, I used a journal as a field instrument to generate notes based on my reactions, experiences, and subjectivities as they emerged in interviews with the participants.

Site Selection

For this study, I recruited faculty members at institutions defined by the Carnegie Commission as R1 Doctoral Universities or institutions with very high research activity. This study's site selection was guided partly by research that suggests that institutions with high research activity present more structural and systemic challenges for academic mothers (Armenti, 2004; CohenMiller, 2013; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016). Additionally, the primacy of white male-dominated disciplines at R1 institutions and the heightened publishing and productivity expectations create challenges to work and family life that may have a compounded effect on Black women faculty who are also mothers.

Participant Recruitment

Following IRB approval (see Appendix A), I recruited participants by enlisting the support of campus entities or university-affiliated networking groups at my home institution, Michigan State University. I selected groups, offices, and programs that provide targeted support and resources for historically marginalized groups, including the Diversity Research Network (DRN), Women of Color Community (WOCC), the Women of Color Initiative (WOCI), the MSU Family Listserv, the WorkLife Office, and the Black Faculty Staff and Administrators Association. At the same time, I shared the study with colleagues and promoted the study on social media via Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Participants had to meet three conditions for selection. First, participants must self-identify as Black and/or African American. Second, participants must self-identify as mothers to at least one dependent aged 0–18. Third, participants must have a tenure-track designation at an R1 institution. Eight participants completed a short questionnaire via Qualtrics to determine their eligibility to participate in the study. Five of the 14 completed questionnaires met the criteria and were selected to participate in the study. One participant dropped out before the study began citing timing conflicts with prior commitments. The four remaining participants received a solicitation letter that provided an overview of the study (see Appendix B). In keeping with photo-elicitation processes, it was essential to ensure that participants were made aware of the commitments and expectations of the study before moving forward. In addition to the solicitation letter, the participants received two consent forms: (1) an informed consent form and (2) a photo consent form (Appendices C and D, respectively). The photo consent form indicated that photographs submitted for this study would be shared with other study participants during the focus group interview and might be shared via presentation or publication of the results. Following submitting the consent forms, the participants received an email with instructions for collecting photographs, the prompt for the first photo-elicitation interview, and a request to schedule an interview via Zoom (see Appendix E). The following section reviews the instruments used for data generation throughout the study.

Instruments for Data Generation

Data generation refers to collecting, producing, and analyzing data—each part of the photo-elicitation process allowed for collaboration between the participant and me. The following sections outline the data generation process. Data generation recognizes and acknowledges the participant's role in co-creating knowledge and meaning (Jenkings et al.,

2008; Reese, 2013). Based on the data generation processes outlined by Reese (2013), four sources of data were generated in this study: (a) participant-generated photographs and captions, (b) information elicited in two individual photo-elicitation interviews and one focus group, (c) researcher's reflexivity exercises and field notes, and (d) the researcher's subjectivity journal. Figure 2 illustrates the photo-elicitation interview process.

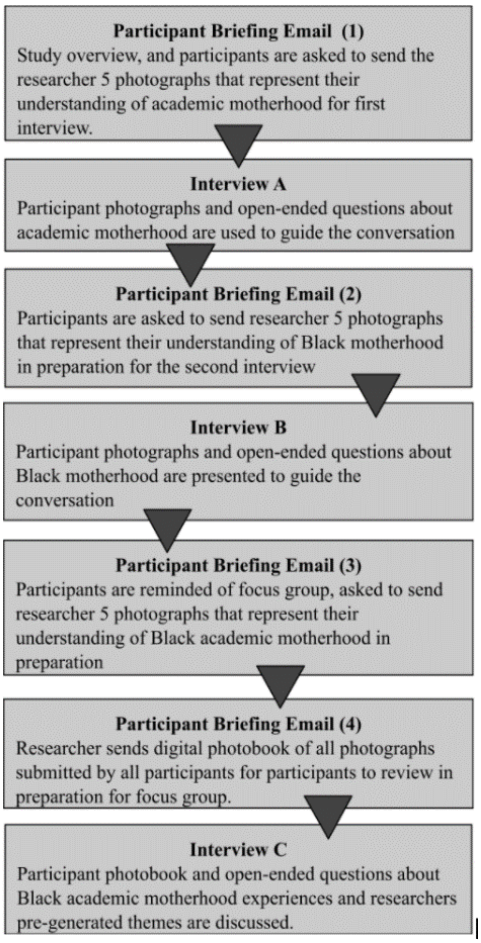

Figure 2. Photo-elicitation interview processes

Photographs and Captions

Throughout the study, participants were asked to provide three unique sets of photographs and captions - one set for each photo-elicitation interview. Additionally, participants were instructed to provide a caption or brief description of each photograph they offered. I

emailed participants with photograph prompts before each interview and requested that they submit their photographs before our scheduled interview time.

For the first photo elicitation interview, participants were asked to provide five photographs representing their understanding of academic motherhood. For the second photo-elicitation interview, participants were asked to provide five photographs that depict their understanding of Black motherhood. For the photo-elicitation focus group, participants were asked to provide five photographs representing their understanding of Black academic motherhood. Participants submitted new and existing pictures, screenshots, and stock images. By the study's conclusion, participants had submitted a total of 60 photographs; 32 were included. All 60 photographs were organized by theme, and 32 final photographs were selected based on how closely they embodied themes. Even though participants were asked to keep their captions to a minimum of 40 words, some captions exceeded the word limit. More extended captions have been shortened in the text so they do not distract from the content of the findings.

Each participant engaged in a total of two hour-long interviews, during which time they were able to reflect on their photographs and captions. Participants engaged in a 90-minute focus group with other study participants for the focus group, where they shared and discussed their photographs with the other participants. The following steps provide an overview of the photo-elicitation interviews and focus group.

Photo-Elicitation Interviews

The photo-elicitation interview is a qualitative research method where participants discuss the meaning of their photographs and captions with the researcher (Harper, 2002). To do this, I used a semi-structured interview protocol and probing questions to establish a conversational and informal tone that allowed participants to share their thoughts and feelings

with minimal interference (Longhurst, 2003). In adherence to COVID-19 guidelines concerning conducting in-person research, all interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom to ensure the safety and comfort of all participants. Interviews were video and audio recorded. The protocols for both photo-elicitation interviews can be found in Appendix E and Appendix F.

For each photo-elicitation interview, I created a PowerPoint slideshow that included individual participants' photographs combined with their captions. I began each interview by reviewing the photograph prompt before sharing my screen with the participant's photographs. I showed each photograph separately and asked the participant to describe the photograph on its own and then with the prompt.

Photo-elicitation Focus Group

A focus group is a qualitative data collection strategy whereby participants gather in a small group for an informal discussion of a topic determined by the researcher. For this study, I conducted an audio/video recorded focus group interview with study participants via Zoom and guided a discussion on Black academic motherhood and their photographs. Before the focus group, I created a digital photobook of the 32 selected photographs and captions collected from all participants over the study. Participants were asked to review the digital photobook and to be prepared to reflect on thoughts and feelings that emerged when they viewed the photobook.

Similar to the photo-elicitation interviews, I created a slide of the photographs submitted by each participant, and they took turns sharing their captions and discussing their photographs. I used the participants' photos to elicit responses to questions about their experience and understanding of each topic and how they situated their experience within the research context.

The focus group photo-elicitation interview protocol can be found in Appendix G.

Field Notes

While collecting data for this study, I created field notes (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) to account for the "settings, people, activities, dialogue, and emotions" that were not included in transcriptions but were necessary to analyze and interpret the interviews (p.187). Field notes created a space where I was able to bear 'witness' to participant experiences and are 'less observer than a teller [...] who translates what s/he sees and hears for an audience" (Gordon, 1995, p. 383). I completed post-interview field notes to ensure the immediate memory of the interviews was not lost and could be recalled later during the data analysis process. An additional data source included a slideshow of final themes and photographs shared with the participants as a part of the member-checking process.

Researcher's Reflexivity Exercise

Reflexivity examines one's beliefs, values, judgment, and assumptions throughout the research process and how these can influence the research (Finlay, 2002). While reflexivity should be a necessary exercise for any researcher, it is imperative in this research when the topic of study involves multiple identities that I shared with the participants. I entered this research with an understanding of Black motherhood based on my experiences, my friends and family's experiences, and my observations of Black motherhood in the outside world. I am intrinsically connected to Black motherhood. While that was a tremendous benefit for this study, it also necessitated the continuous practice of reflexivity to ensure the data's validity and trustworthiness. Practicing reflexivity also helped me clear my mind of preoccupations that may be distracting, thus, creating space for meaningful interactions and open communication. Throughout the study, I practiced reflectivity using an exercise called 'brain dump,' where I

wrote freely about the study and research questions. Brain Dump is "intended to both enact and produce cognitive processing from the self, to make it visible for inspection or introspection" (Markham, 2017, Technique 1: The 'Brain Dump,' para. 3). This process allowed me to 'dump' my thoughts, feelings, and musings out of my head and onto paper in a more natural and less contrived way than traditional journaling.

Researcher as an Instrument

When I decided to research Black women in the academy, my interests were fueled by my predilections about what awaits me on the backend of my doctoral education. After having my first child, I was thrust into the world of parenting. I found myself communing with other Black women about how my reality was not exactly what I read about in academic motherhood literature. So much was missing, but I was unsure if my experiences were shaped by race. At some point, I joined a Facebook group for Black women in the academy. I observed and engaged in conversations about the very particularities that made me question academic motherhood discourse. Discussions among Black academic mothers emphasized the weight of responsibility within and outside of the family, the centrality of women in Black culture, and distinct challenges to navigating race and academic motherhood in the academy.

Like many Black parents, who often rely on grandmothers for parenting support (Hunter, 1997), I would not be able to work and attend school full-time without the support of my partner’s parents and mine. For the first two years of my doctoral program, my mother-in-law drove over an hour, sometimes twice a week, to care for our son so I could attend classes at night after work, and my mother kept our son for more extended overnight periods. Neither would accept gratitude and often remarked that it was their job to ensure our success. Gregory (2000) discusses the role of support systems, including extended family, as critical to Black women’s

professional success. I was not aware of how deeply my experiences were situated in what Collins (1994) describes as "a continuation of African-derived cultural sensibilities and functional adaptations to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, and nation" (p.178).

It is not unusual for faculty from all different backgrounds to take positions where they are displaced from close family and relatives. Academic motherhood literature attends to this phenomenon in the context of childcare dilemmas, access, resources, and the associated expense. While this is not unusual or unexpected, the strain is significantly different due to Black women's identity and orientation to family and community. I remember trying to find a caregiver for my son when some of the stay-at-home restrictions were lifted in 2021. Due to obvious health risks and distance, our parents were not an option. My white friends were in the same boat but quickly found and hired childcare via Care.com and suggested I do the same. I was reluctant because I had rarely let anyone outside our family watch my son; this is not uncommon for Black families. Although I had the means to do it, I lacked familiarity with how to do it. Additionally, my most pressing concern was that most caregivers on Care.com were white. What if they were racist? What did they know about being in a Black household, caring for my Black son? What if they say something cruel to my son about his skin color or hair? These instances are central to my experiences as a Black mother and inform every part of my life and every decision I make.

Although I am familiar with the challenges of Black motherhood for an administrator in the academy, I know less about the experiences of Black faculty women, and Black motherhood is not monolithic. For this reason, I engaged in 'participatory witnessing,' described as an act of bearing witness or "an active engagement of the self to create the space in which to share the experiences of others" (Taylor, 1998, p.59). I took extra steps to ensure that my thoughts and feelings did not influence the study or my interpretation of the data. The following section details

the steps I took to ensure the credibility of the results.

Data Management

The study occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, and health and safety protocols regarding mask-wearing and social distancing remained intact. For this reason, I conducted and recorded the interviews on the Zoom video conferencing platform. Due to the nature of photo-elicitation interviews, which require photographs to elicit participants' responses and guide the interview process, the interviews and focus group were video recorded. The photo-elicitation interview process was facilitated using the 'screen share' function on the Zoom platform. Audio recordings were provided to a transcription service to be transcribed. Although I did not transcribe the interviews and focus group on my own, I reviewed the recordings alongside the transcripts to ensure accuracy and to become more familiar with the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). In the following section, I provide an overview of data analysis, trustworthiness and validity, and the study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Data Analysis

In analysis, the researcher can become more deeply connected with participants as they bear witness, again, to participants' images, words, and feelings. Taylor (1998) emphasizes that the significance of the researcher's position, "how we locate ourselves and perform research in ways that affirm African American women" (p.59), is critical to how African American women's stories are shared and interpreted. Therefore, it is my responsibility as the researcher to analyze the data in ways that 'affirm and validate' African American women's 'experience as real' (p. 59)

The data analysis process involved visual content analysis and coding to better understand the interviews' photographs, captions, and content. I began to analyze the data upon

receiving the photographs from each participant before their scheduled interviews. I completed a visual content analysis for each photograph that addressed: (1) the setting, (2) a description of the photograph (e.g., who, what, where), (3) my assumptions about the photographs relevant to the prompts, and (4) questions I had about the photographs to be included in the interview. I then reviewed the captions with the photographs as a form of triangulation to build justification for significant themes.

Data Organization

Rossman and Rallis (2016) suggest data organization as a necessary first step to create a 'complete record' of data that 'stimulates analytic thinking' (p. 238). Because this study involved multiple data types, data organization was a critical part of the data analysis process that helped me make sense of the data. Photographs, photograph captions, field notes, interview transcripts, and researcher reflexivity exercises were sorted into different categories. Additionally, it was important to analyze the photographs separate from the captions and interview text to make sense of the photographs without the meaning provided by the participants (Chapman, Wu, & Zhu, 2017). All interviews were transcribed promptly to ensure that participants had adequate time to review their transcripts, submit edits or provide additional information (Creswell, 2014).

Coding and Theming

Coding organizes data into categories or segments to make meaning from the information (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). For this study, a code refers to a "short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 3). My primary research question, "How do Black women understand the experience of being an academic mother?" was informed by research about academic motherhood, Black women faculty, and Black motherhood. The coding

process began once the first photo-elicitation interview was completed and transcribed. Photographs were coded independently and with text-based data as a form of triangulation that helped build justification for major themes (Keats, 2009). By completing an initial coding early on, I could evaluate and make adjustments to guide data analysis as I moved through each subsequent interview (Saldaña, 2015).

The coding portion of the data analysis process included two cycles of coding. For the first coding cycle, I coded the data using In Vivo coding, which uses the direct language of the participants to ground the data analysis process in the participants' voices and perspectives (Manning, 2017; Saldaña, 2005). I condensed these codes into clusters of descriptive codes and then organized them into categories. I began the first coding cycle upon receiving the first transcript to ensure that I could present preliminary themes to the participants in the focus group and solicit their feedback. In the second coding cycle, I used focused coding to identify recurrent patterns and multiple layers of meaning. I utilized the same clustering exercise and sorted the clusters into the existing categories, creating additional categories when necessary. Five major themes emerged from the data analysis process, which were then shared with and validated by the participants to honor the intention of the womanist framework, which involves gathering with Black women for communing, sharing, and co-creating knowledge (Maparyan, 2012). These themes laid the groundwork to conceptualize how Black women understand academic motherhood.

Trustworthiness

As a Black woman who works in academia, I may have had experiences similar to the experiences of other Black women in academia, particularly regarding race. Knowing how my beliefs, values, and biases influence my research processes and outcome is critical. Reflexivity

required that I engage in "continual internal dialogues and self-evaluation" of my positionality and take responsibility for my own "situatedness" within the research. While it was necessary to 'bear witness to the participants' experiences, I approached the knowledge-creation process with great care and accountability (Taylor, 1998, p.59). I triangulated the data by practicing member-checking to ensure trustworthiness throughout the study. In addition to their photograph captions, participants were asked to provide clarification of the meaning of their photograph during the interview and again in the focus group. After the study, I emailed participants their transcripts, a slide show that included an overview of my framework, and their photographs which were categorized into major themes and subthemes. In the spirit of co-creating knowledge, I asked that participants add comments or notes directly to the slides. I received a reply from each participant indicating they did not have anything to add. Thus, participants had three opportunities to provide feedback: (a) photograph submissions, (b) participants' professionally prepared transcription, and (c) the titles and descriptions of the themes and subthemes in the final paper (Reese, 2013, p. 64).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This research is anchored in the assumption that Black women have distinct academic motherhood experiences based on their race, which is supported by research about Black women, Black motherhood, and the experiences of Black faculty women. I assumed photo-elicitation was a suitable methodology for analyzing how Black women understand academic motherhood. Due to the breadth of terms used in this study, and specific terminology related to my research methodology, Black women and motherhood, I dedicated space to defining terms.

Delimitations of this study include site selection, participant recruitment, and my secondary research question. The site selection criterion of RI research institutions may have

differing conditions for Black women faculty. Second, the pool of Black women from RI institutions is limited; there are fewer Black women, and they make up a smaller percentage of tenure-stream appointments. Despite my best efforts to recruit participants, casting a wide net across multiple resources, I had to rely on access to potential participants based on personal connections and membership in race and/or parental status-based academic affinity groups.

Finally, my secondary research question situates how Black women understand academic motherhood within the context of a pandemic. While this question necessarily attends to the role and toll of the current social context on the lives of Black academic mothers, there may be additional implications for future research.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

You have these inhumane systems and structures that don't give a damn about people's humanity. Or what it means, like, I have to jump through all these hoops to get through a system that wasn't designed with me in mind. Or was designed to maintain a certain form and structure to scholarship and what matters. If it doesn't fit into this box, it's not good enough or it's not quality. Who gets to determine that? It's the people who keep perpetuating the system, which is white men. We know there's so much brilliance, and you can't get to that brilliance if you are constantly trying to fit yourself in a box, which means that you are not being authentic. That you are not being true to yourself. You don't get to discover your magic until you have a space where you can be authentic. That's not all gonna look the same, and it shouldn't. It shouldn't look the same.

Joy Gaston Gayles

This study explored academic motherhood from the perspective of tenure-track, Black women faculty at R1 institutions using photo-elicitation. This study used photo-elicitation to generate participants' visual images and reflections on their understanding of Black academic motherhood. Photo-elicitation data generation and analysis processes were used to answer the research question: How do Black women understand the experience of being an academic mother? Secondary research questions include: (1) In what ways does race shape academic motherhood experiences for Black women, and (2) What if any particular issues have come up because of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Introduction to Study Participants

The study included four Black women in tenure-track positions at R1 Universities. As indicated in Table 1, the four participants occupied different points along the tenure and promotion process, from a newly appointed assistant professor to a full professor in post-tenure review. Each participant identified as a mother to at least one dependent child aged 0-18. Marital status varied; two participants were married, one single, and one divorced. The participants' ages

ranged from 36-49, which provides context for observing family planning in tandem with their career trajectory.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Academic Rank	Number of Children	Age of Children	Age Range	Marital Status
LaShonda	Assistant Professor	2	9,12	36-40	Married
Melody	Associate Professor	1	15	41-45	Single
Bridget	Associate Professor	2	10,14	45-49	Married
Joy	Full Professor	2	12, 16	45-49	Divorced

All participants were asked if they wished to use a pseudonym. Each declined in favor of using their actual names to amplify their experiences as Black mothers in the academy.

LaShonda

Mother to two daughters aged 9 and 12, LaShonda recently transitioned into an Assistant Professor role at an R1 Institution. Before her current appointment, LaShonda spent close to four years as an Assistant Professor at an R2 institution. She shared that she could not bring any years with her to count towards tenure in her new position due to limited publications but indicated that her new role was a better fit for her career and family. As one part of a dual-career-couple, she and her partner have spent the better half of their relationship pursuing higher education and balancing work and family life. Their efforts are ongoing and have spanned many years, states, and institutions.

Despite her experiences with structural and systemic disadvantages including lack of understanding of childcare responsibilities, and untenable expectations for productivity, LaShonda was unwavering about her commitment to motherhood. She elaborated, "I think being a mother, a parent, I think, forces you to kinda stay grounded and not get in the weeds, and not get stressed and burned out on things because you don't have a choice," she explained. Additionally, her past career experience navigating motherhood while working in corporate America resulted in a greater appreciation for the flexibility the academy allows. LaShonda emphasized the importance of flexibility, particularly regarding raising Black children. She remarked, "that [flexibility] helps me be a more effective advocate for my children…I think that Black mothers and probably Brown [mothers] really need to do that more. Probably would love to do it and just can't."

Melody

Mother to one son (15) and an Associate Professor in her second year of tenure at an R1 institution. Melody identified as a “single parent” and discussed the added responsibility of raising a child with limited support. Melody took on a coordinator role for a new graduate program in the past year—a position she agreed to in exchange for a course release. Admittedly, this role requires more work without financial compensation; however, it allows Melody to spend more time with her son.

With her son newly in high school, Melody often reflected on how she hoped her son would be more prepared for college than some of her students. She remarked, “I see students who have been pretty much indoctrinated to believe that they only need to be tunnel vision or uber focused on just academics…so I wanted to make sure that he was well rounded in school.” For Melody, that means making sure her son has access and exposure to opportunities and

experiences outside of school. Melody added that she is always mindful of how the world will receive her son as a young Black male, making sure he knows that even though people may have preconceived ideas about who he is, she assures him that he is "not limited to one model." In Melody's words, "I want to let him know that one thing that I tell him is that my job is to make sure that he is productive, and he's a productive citizen. He can be self-sufficient, self-disciplined, all those great things."

Bridget

Mother of two children, a daughter (10) and a son (14). She is currently an Associate Professor with an extensive list of awards and publications and is looking forward to being promoted to Full Professor in 2022. Being a mother is a significant part of Bridget's identity; she described being an academic mother as "joyful," adding, "it's complicated…but overwhelmingly, I feel like I've been able to be very successful as an academic Black mother." Being an academic mother allowed Bridget the flexibility of paid leave after the birth of each of her children and to be home now to attend their events and extracurricular activities. Bridget reflected on experiences across her career, highlighting moments that defined her identity as a Black woman, a mother, and an academic. In her terms, being successful means having a relationship with her children and "being seen as a leader in our field and being seen as somebody who people respect and admire and would consider somewhat prolific."

Bridget and her partner are a dual-career-couple currently employed at the same institution, albeit in two distinctly different roles. Bridget has become particularly attuned to how gender influences perceptions and acceptance of parental status in the academy throughout their parenthood and careers. Unlike other study participants, Bridget is the primary caretaker for her children; her partner's position in executive leadership does not allow him the flexibility to

contribute to the same degree. She compared her experiences in the academy with her partner's. She noted that being a parent is viewed more favorably for men, and at the same time, it can be crippling to a woman's career trajectory. Even though it hasn't been easy, for Bridget, the triumphs of academic motherhood have been worth every struggle.

Joy

Mother of two children, one daughter (16) and a son (12). Joy was recently promoted to Full Professor and is currently completing a post-tenure review. As the leader of the top professional organization in her field, Joy is all too familiar with juggling the many roles and responsibilities of an academic mother. For Joy, being an academic mother is more than balancing work and family; it is a call to action. She stated, "it can't be just writing a bunch of papers. That ain't doing nothing, especially if we just all run around here, reading each other's stuff. What are you doing in practice that's gonna make a difference or bring some joy to people who are part of what you're talking about in your research?"

To that end, Joy expressed that her children must have a critical consciousness, or the ability to recognize and respond to systemic oppression. To Joy, this meant making sure her children understood their history and privilege and were raised with a desire to advocate for others. Joy reflected on experiences growing up that had a significant impact on who she is today and how she and her partner raised their children. Her parents, she said, "were just trying to survive, they tried to shield us, or it was too painful for them to talk about some of the things that they experienced around race, discrimination." Even without an intentional effort to instill critical consciousness, Joy had an idea of the outcomes that befell people that looked like her, and she was determined to “get out.” She explained, "I was very aware that people who don't have a lotta money and who grew up in the neighborhood that I grew up in, there was a high

chance that you would succumb to teen pregnancy or drugs or some other setup, right, that we have in society to keep you downtrodden and beaten, right?" It was clear that Joy could never forget where she came from and would ensure that her children continued to build on her legacy. Joy co-parents with her ex-husband, who shares her views on raising their children to be socially and culturally aware.

On choosing a pseudonym, Joy—like the other participants—declined, adding, "I'm okay with people knowing the full story… It's my academic freedom and my first amendment rights to tell people what's really going on around here."

Presentation of Findings

Photo-elicitation as a method allowed participants to explore their understanding of academic motherhood, Black motherhood, and Black academic motherhood through pictures. By asking participants to provide pictures for each topic separately, they were better able to recognize the distinct differences between Black academic motherhood experiences and those that could be characterized more broadly as academic motherhood. Using photos to elicit specific characteristics of each identity and then exploring the confluence of these identities resulted in deep and meaningful reflection. Bringing the participants together for a focus group at the conclusion of the study provided a space for communing, meaning making, and affirmation. Ultimately, participants reached a consensus that—on its own—academic motherhood does not fully capture the realities of Black academic mothers. Over the course of the study, five major themes and eight subthemes emerged. The four major themes were: (a) Flexibility, (b) Access, (c) Intersectionality, and (d) Critical Consciousness.

Flexibility

Flexibility, the first theme, described how participants benefited from a certain degree of freedom—as faculty—to create schedules that allowed them to be more present in their children's lives. Flexibility includes attending children's school events, bringing children to class and conferences, the ability to set boundaries for family time, and the freedom to work from home during the covid-19 pandemic.

LaShonda, an Assistant Professor, shared a photo of her daughters at a school presentation; her caption reads, "My older daughter Jillian is doing a school presentation with my other daughter, Jordyn, watching. This reminds me of the flexibility being an academic mother provides that most other careers don't." LaShonda presented this photo of her daughters at a school event that she and her partner were able to attend (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The freedom I have to do what I need to for my family.

LaShonda shared that she and her husband are able to attend events at her daughter's school, a benefit she doesn't take for granted as an academic mother. She opined, "I think the pay is not always great, but the freedom I have to do what I need to for my family, for my husband who has a really, really busy and time-consuming and demanding job, I'm able to kind of navigate that

and have a lot more flexibility than I think I would have in a normal 9 to 5." She reflected on her ability to show up for her children in ways her mother was not able to. "I was raised by a single mom who was active at my school when she could be. Had a little flexibility where occasionally, she could drop in during the day, but I'm sure she would've loved to have been able to be there more. I feel like I'm their wildest dream because I'm able to do all of that."

Flexibility was a significant theme in LaShonda's pictures related to academic motherhood. In addition to attending her children's school events, LaShonda brought her daughters to class with her on more than one occasion for different reasons (Figure 4). At times they were on break from school, and on rare occasions, they were under the weather. Regardless of the circumstance, she was relieved that she was able to be with them or have them with her.

Figure 4. I had to take my girls with me to give a final exam on a Saturday.

Joy discussed how her children had grown to love college campuses because—whenever possible—she brings them with her to class, presentations, and workshops. In addition to being able to spend time with them while she was working, it is important to Joy that her children be

exposed to college. She emphasized the importance of Black children being exposed to College, which for her meant spending time on campus and becoming familiar with college life as soon as they could understand it. She also believed that students benefit from seeing her in a different light. She remarked,

> Faculty work takes you outside of 9 to 5 hours…Well, guess what? They gotta come with me. I think students or prospective students, current students, whoever, they often reflect it back to me. "Oh, it's so nice to see another side of you." Then that just made me double down. They like it, you're really gonna love it, cuz that's what you're gonna see—because this is my world. I don't wanna leave them home.

Although flexibility was a significant theme in this study it is not as prevalent in academic motherhood literature, which tends to focus on the challenges of managing work and family. While there can be many reasons for this, Joy was clear about the reason she would not let the academy out-prioritize motherhood. She resolved, "I'm so moving away from compartmentalizing my life such that they can't be a part of whatever I'm doing."

Summary

Across all interviews, flexibility remained a constant theme. Participants indicated a strong appreciation for the ability to make their schedules, which allows them a more significant amount of flexibility to be present in their children's schools, attend extracurricular activities for their children, and bring their children to class and other work-related events. The emphasized the importance of flexibility specifically as it relates to being a Black mother. Several participants noted that despite the challenges of academic motherhood, the flexibility to be present in their children's lives was worth the inherent sacrifices of being a mother and an academic.

Access

Access, the second theme, described how participants benefited from access to resources and opportunities as a result of their position at a higher education institution. Access was characterized as proximity to college campuses, financial security, health and safety, and an environment where their children could explore educational options. Access is supported by two subthemes: Resources and Exposure.

Resources

The subtheme of Resources emerged as participants discussed their children's access to higher education while accompanying their mothers in the classrooms, at workshops and conferences, and engaging with other campus resources.

Growing up with what she described as “humble beginnings,” Joy was proud to provide her children with access to resources and opportunities that she did not have. Joy asserted, “I’ve tried to—as a parent who has access to more resources than my parents did—to really pay attention to my kids and feed their interests and not, and try not to steer them into the things that I want them to do.” Joy shared a picture of her daughter using the Makerspace at her institution (Figure 5). The Makerspace allows students, faculty, and staff to experiment with innovative technology. While Makerspaces are a fairly new concept, access to any similar resources was not available to Joy as a child. She reflected:

> To me, that represents me as a kid in terms of always had an inquisitive mind. I was always curious about how things worked. Because I’m a faculty member, she gets to go and hang out in the maker lab and do some of that fun stuff.

Figure 5. Black academic motherhood means my kids spend a lot of time on campus.

Moreover, Joy's children enjoy traveling with her to workshops and conferences, especially where they could observe her and other Black academic who had achieved a level of success in their fields. She has always insisted that they are included in every part of her world. Joy reflected on her decision to bring them along when she traveled, saying, "At first, I used to be like, oh, gosh, what am I gonna do with the kids? I'm just like, I'm a mom, and they're part of me." She shared a picture of herself, her children (Figure 6), and a colleague having dinner at a workshop. She beamed, reading part of the caption aloud, "They have so much fun being in college environments. To them, I'm nothing but their mom regardless of any accolades I receive for academic productivity."

Figure 6. They have so much fun being in college environments.

Exposure

The subtheme Exposure described how —by virtue of the participant's professional status—their access allowed their children more exposure to arts, travel, culture, and athletic events.

LaShonda discussed the many transitions she and her partner encountered while supporting each other's pursuits of doctoral degrees while trying to balance work and family. Being an academic mother made it possible for her family to do things they may not otherwise have been able to afford. For LaShonda access meant being able to expose her daughters to new things without financial strain. She shared a picture of her daughters visiting with a pilot in a plane that would take them on a house-hunting trip for a position at a new university (Figure 7). LaShonda notes, "I just thought this was a good example also of what kind of opportunities they can be afforded because otherwise, I doubt I would've been flying with them probably, especially not on our dime."

Figure 7. My girls sitting in the cockpit before their flight.

Melody shared a picture of herself and her son at a sporting event for which they received highly sought-after tickets from a friend (Figure 8).

Figure 8. providing access

They were seated next to a section of season ticket holders who treated them as though they were not supposed to be there. Melody reassured her son, "we deserve to be there as much as anyone else. To me, that is showing him we have access to things that others do. Now, it doesn't go without saying that we may have to work a little harder for it." More than benefiting from access, Melody expects her son to use his access to create opportunities for those who are not as fortunate as he is. She explained, "What I tell him, sometimes it doesn't matter as long as you have the access. Now, how do you use it? You need to use it to help others so that we are not the only ones to have access, right?" In addition to recognizing the access that their professional position provides, Melody is steadfast in ensuring that her son understands that he is expected to pay it forward. She adds, "I let him know that he is a privileged young man in the sense of some things that his classmates experience, he doesn't have to…Yes, you do have access but make sure you aren't the only one who has access to these things."

Joy often compared her upbringing to that of her children, particularly in reference to differences in access and opportunity. Like Melody, Joy wanted to make sure her children didn't

take their access for granted and emphasized the importance of exposure to all things, including community service. She remarked:

> I tell them stories about my life growing up often because I need them to know not everybody who looks like you has access to all the things that you have access to…it is your responsibility because you have so much privilege, to share it with others and to do your part to try to make the world a better place.

Summary

Despite adversity, all participants constantly reinforced the impact of access and flexibility in their children's lives. Even though as Black faculty women in the academy who feel they have experienced racism, bias, and discrimination in every way imaginable, they are reluctant to highlight adversity. Instead, they are focused on what their sacrifices afford them in flexibility, and access for their children.

Intersectionality

The third theme, Intersectionality captures the challenges the participants experienced as they struggled to manage multiple intersecting identities such as race, gender, and parental status. All participants were disadvantaged in some way as a result of their parental status in addition to enduring bias and discrimination based on race and gender. Participants used the term intersectionality to describe the overlap of multiple intersecting identities and the resulting systemic oppression and discrimination. Subthemes that emerged are the primary identities discussed by the participants including, (a) race, (b) gender, and (c) parental status. Because these identities are intersecting, participants necessarily reflected on a combination of the identities as opposed to each identity on its own.

Race and Gender

The subtheme of Race and Gender captures how participants described experiences in the academy that were influenced by the intersection of their race and gender.

Melody has been the only Black tenure-track professor in her department for the past eight years. Her white colleagues often call on her to provide guidance and leadership on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). She referenced her inability to separate being Black and a woman and the necessity of an intersectional lens when thinking about DEI. Specifically, Melody believed that her contributions could make a difference in helping her department understand what it takes to retain a Black woman in the academy; she stressed the importance of creating a way for others,

> People interview me. I'm the first Black woman tenured in my department. They always say how do you feel about that? I was like, yeah, I am the first, but it's my responsibility to make sure I'm not the last. Cuz it's not just about me getting the attention. It's about opening the doors for others and changing the culture.

While she didn't mind contributing her perspective, it was exhausting, especially when her white colleagues decided to take up causes on her behalf without consulting her. She said, "they often tell me what should happen for other people as a means of allyship, and it's just, they get it so wrong." Melody expressed frustration over misguided, unreliable, and sometimes harmful acts of allyship, adding, "Everything shouldn't have to be a teachable moment."

Fortunately, Melody was able to find community in a group of friends who are all Black professors, who has made her feel less isolated at her institution. She expressed a desire to increase diversity and representation at her institution but struggled with the inherent challenges of recruiting racially diverse students to a predominantly white institution (PWI). She cites several factors that influence Black student enrollment, including the size of the campus and the

perceived rigor of attending a research institution. However, Melody believes representation is the most critical component of recruiting and retaining Black students. She explains, “They’re gonna see they’re the only ones in their classrooms, which is going to make them very uncomfortable because it makes me uncomfortable.”

Melody connects with Black students through mentoring, and even though it’s time-consuming, she understands the pivotal role Black faculty play in retaining Black students. She admits, “a lot of the invisible work…I brought that on myself because when I had Black students in my class, if they had questions or needed extra help, I was always there for them.” Even though there are limited, if any, benefits to invisible and unpaid labor, Melody remains motivated by any opportunity to recruit Black students to the graduate program she oversees, recognizing the value of meeting a recruiter who shares the same identity. She shared a picture of herself at a recruiting event (Figure 9) saying,

> There’s not a single Black faculty in communication. When there are opportunities to recruit students, they’re not gonna be able to do the same thing that any person of color could do as far as even showing, putting a good face forward for what they could experience here. It’s like, what Black student wants to come to the Midwest, with all white faculty?

Figure 9. Recruit- Being an academic mother means taking on extra duties in exchange for compensation.

The weight of building meaningful connections with Black students is one she carries entirely on her own and does so with pride; she commented, "I kinda know why I was chosen. That's okay. If that means that my representation will get more of us into graduate study, that's fine with me."

Parental Status, Race and Gender

The subthemes Parental Status and Gender refer to how the participants' status of being a parent, and a Black woman affected their tenure and promotion processes, their professional identity, and their interactions with colleagues.

One significant stressor participants experienced was the pressure to conceive in a timeframe that did not interrupt or negatively impact their tenure and promotion processes. Joy discussed the urgency for her daughter to be born in the summertime so that she could spend time with her, she stressed,

> I was like, we gotta get pregnant now so that Angel will come in the summer. Because it wasn't ridiculous, because I understood enough about the tenure process where I wanted to be able to spend time with my child. I knew that I didn't work in the summers, and that will be the time when I can do it. Whereas if I had her during the academic year, I wasn't sure what was gonna happen because we didn't have any policies in place for taking leave. Well, you could take leave, but you weren't gonna get paid. Who's gonna do that?

Joy had to be intentional about the time of her daughter's birth because there weren't many policies in place that allowed paid leave outside of the academic year. Fortunately, her daughter was born in June, and she had more time than she would have during the academic year, but still not enough. Joy began teaching again in August, only two months after the birth of her daughter. Two years later, there were policies in place, but Joy was not as lucky timing the birth of her son. Even though she conceived within the same timeline as her daughter, she became pre-eclamptic and delivered one month earlier than expected. While she was relieved to have six months of leave instead of two, Joy's son was born the day before her mother's funeral. She described what was a challenging time in her life and career,

> The notion that you have to time your kids so you can have them in the summer so it wouldn't interfere with the academic calendar. I did it but thinking back, it was just absurd, and the fact that I had to do that just makes me angry on so many levels. Then the second kid just didn't come, but having the support, I think that we've been sources of support for each other for so many years. That is super important because a lotta times, we talk about the challenges of navigating the academy as a Black mom and trying to hold it all together. I don't think I was, well, I wasn't as successful as holding it together. I think the academy cost me my marriage in a lotta ways because I just didn't do a good

> job, air quote—attending to all the things—and didn't have the kinda support that I needed to do that.

Looking back, Joy says, "I needed that six months because for five of them, I was out. Trying to figure out what the heck just happened, and why did it have to happen like that, and what did I do to deserve that?"

With two young children, Joy had to figure out how to continue moving forward with her career while meeting the needs of her family. She was not willing to give up time with her children and was committed to "making it work" in every way possible. Joy shared a stock image of a woman holding her child while she appears to be working at a computer (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Having kids in the tenure track pre-tenure — there was a lot of this.

She recalls having many nights where she would wear her babies while working; it wasn't easy, but she didn't feel like she had a choice. She remarked,

> Babywearing was my thing. That's how I would get work done and still feel close to the baby or make sure the baby felt close to me. I did a lot of work that way, pre-tenure. I had to make the decision, just like I could wait till after I got tenure to have kids. I'm like, well, who wants to do that? I don't want to be an old ass mom.

Like Joy, LaShonda was mindful of the time frame that was best suited to have children so as not to interfere with an academic career. Also similar to Joy, LaShonda was unable to prepare for the birth of her second daughter, which occurred just as she began an adjunct position at a community college. LaShonda describes a harrowing time early in her career and in her motherhood,

> They hired me and the dean had no children so she didn't know any idea what is involved in having a baby. Even though I had already had one, I told her that I only needed one week off, so she would hire me still. I had my second child and I told her and a week later, I was back in the classroom because I had no paid time off. My family couldn't afford me to be at home. I was fortunate that my mom came down and stayed with the baby and would bring her there so I could nurse her. I made sure I was off all my pain meds from the C-section before I went back to class so I could drive myself. In hindsight, that was a horrible idea and could've turned out really bad. Thank God, it didn't. I just pulled my girdle up and went and did what I had to do.

LaShonda spent most of her career in and outside of the academy as primary caregiver for her children making sacrifices to support her and her partner's ambitions to pursue doctoral studies and ended up doing it simultaneously in two different states with two small children. The children remained with LaShonda, and she recalls bringing them to class many times while she taught (Figure 11).

Figure 11. a school holiday for them, but I still had class

She recalled that even though she had to "make it work as an academic mom," her students did not seem to care. She mused,

> I remember in my student evaluations, somebody actually mentioned me having my children there. They were like, I know she had no choice but to bring her children, but it was kind of distracting. That's just the kind of student that was, most of the students were like that—entitled, not used to seeing or having a Brown person, especially not a Black female in a position of power, and so I dealt with a lot of adversity. They wouldn't do it to my face. They would smile and laugh and be nice, but then in evaluations, they would really hit below the belt.

Currently, LaShonda commutes to an institution in a different state from where she lives to advance her career and support her husband, who landed a "chance of a lifetime" in their home state. For some, a long commute on the road is enough to reconsider a job opportunity, let alone flying several states away. However, LaShonda takes it in stride, and after years of working, learning, and parenting across states, she is not quick to settle when she can figure out how to "make it work." LaShonda noted that for men, having children is perceived more favorably than it is for women. LaShonda discussed concealing her parental status until after receiving a job offer based on the possibility that people may judge her negatively for having children. She suggested this is especially true for tenure-track positions. For this reason, even though she firmly believes parental status should not matter, LaShonda decides to "play it safe" and keep her family life separate from her professional persona. She lamented, "depending on who the audience is, that [parental status] can be seen negatively, and I don't want people to have preconceived notions about my ability to do anything or lack thereof." She continued, "It can be positive and give you credit for what you're doing, but it also can go the other way, where they're like, 'Oh, you have children? How are you gonna get tenure? How are you gonna get your publications?'" On the other hand, LaShonda's husband enjoys the freedom of sharing his family status without fear of retribution. She describes a picture of her husband's website (Figure 12), observably in awe of his candor:

> He does it all the time, so even in his academic presentations, this is his personal website, where he promotes himself and some of the other things that he does. I think every single one, no matter where it is, there's a family picture.

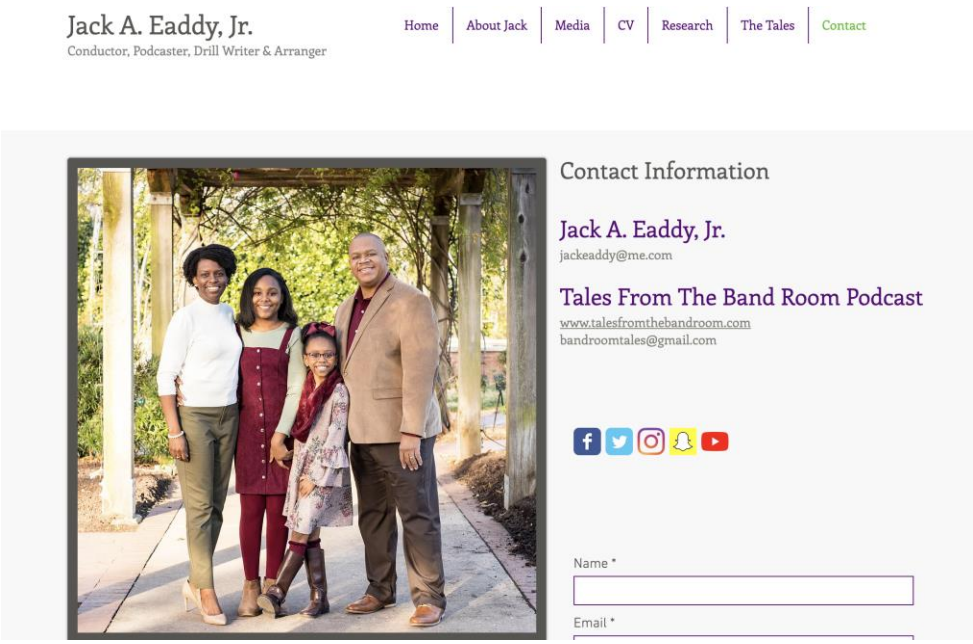

Figure 12. This is a screenshot of my husband's website.

LaShonda further emphasized, "Even by him saying it, no one would ever think it's an issue…because they likely are thinking that he has a spouse or a significant other that is likely handling all that female stuff," which to LaShonda was not uncommon in the Black households.

All that "female stuff" translated into stark realities for participants who took on a disproportionate amount of responsibilities at home, managing their households, being the primary caretaker for their children, and attending to the complexities of Black motherhood.

Bridget discussed her experiences at a previous institution where her parental status was not as well-received as it is at her current institution. She and her partner had gotten into the habit of taking their children with them when they traveled, and on one occasion, she was presenting at a national conference. Bridget shared a picture (Figure 13) from this presentation in which her expression is decidedly uncertain.

Figure 13. Presenting- Bringing our son to a conference and having him cry

Her son began to have a tantrum while she was presenting, and she recalled that this moment made her question her ability to balance being a parent with her professional responsibilities. She says,

> I didn't feel comfortable having him up there with me. I felt like, kind of as I said here, it would be seen, especially for that dean like, as unprofessional, as not being able to see me as fully credible and intelligent and capable of taking care of my academic self. Then really feeling like, also judged because he was kind of having a fit. I also felt like people are looking at me like, not only do I not look professional, but I also look like now not a good mother. Like I don't know how to raise my child to be respectful and polite in meetings. Just a vivid picture in my head of that was the time that we no longer brought them to conferences.

Before we moved on, Bridget backtracked for a moment to add, "Or, I no longer brought them to my conferences." As it turns out, her husband continued bringing their children to work events and conferences without fear of how it would be perceived by his colleagues. Both Bridget and

her partner work in the academy but have distinctly different experiences which she attributed to "good old-fashioned patriarchy." For her partner, having children makes him more relatable and better able to identify with colleagues who have children. She reflected,

> He brings the kids everywhere, to different professional things, and always has, even when they were really little. People would just ooh and ahh and just say what a good—and he is a good father—but what a good father he is. He didn't feel … like, any kinda way about what people would say or how he was gonna be perceived. He still felt very professional.

Bridget's experience was not uncommon among other participants, who agreed with the sentiment that parental status had a less significant impact on men compared to women. To that end, Bridget mentioned that she had been writing about "racialized genderism," which she described as "a hierarchy, even within communities of color, where women, trans people, LGBT women are still at the bottom." In other words, despite the challenges faced by Black men in the academy, they can still benefit from gender bias toward women. Bridget shared a picture with her partner to represent different experiences in the same field (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Same degree- Partner and I have Phds and he brings kids to work events often.

Bridget and her partner decided that they would find positions in the same geographic location after having children. As an administrator, Bridget's partner's salary— at times—has more than doubled hers; for that reason, his career opportunities determined where they moved. Bridget described her experience being a Black academic mother in a dual career couple,

> It's hard to start all over, and it's different. I feel like, as an academic mother starting over, it's like dentists for the kids and eye doctors for the kids, medical doctors for the kids, and then figuring out what activities the kids can get into and I can support. Meeting other parents so I can understand the network or what I need to get them into…and then on my side, it's like figuring out what institutions I can work in and what colleagues I can work with. I'm meeting them all over, meeting new people all over again, and trying to establish myself. Not just as a new professor, but as a professor who is there in this job because of my spouse. Having to kind of almost prove myself in a different way. We're used to the proving process as Black people, having to prove myself as an academic spouse, as a dual career person.

Some expectations have changed across time, ranks, and institutions, while others remain familiar. As Bridget mentioned the stressors of have to prove herself as a woman and across multiple marginalized identities is a significant load to bear. Bridget is more comfortable sharing her family life at her current institution while recognizing that her last promotion process— to full professor—will still interfere with the time she can spend with her children, "I feel like I am having to push back a little bit from the time I spend with them [the kids] in order to do the things that my chair tells me I need to do to get tenure, get grants, keep writing, so that feels not great."

Summary

Intersectionality explored how participants navigated multiple intersecting identities in the academy and at home. For all participants, intersectionality was commonplace in the academy and at home, and they found it difficult to separate one identity from another. For example, Melody was constantly reminded of her race and gender in her interactions with colleagues, and in both assigned and unassigned roles and responsibilities. At the intersections of parental status and gender, Joy struggled to time the birth of her children around her tenure clock in the absence of leave policies that allowed for adequate leave. Similarly, LaShonda and Bridget dealt with the challenges of being in a dual-career couple while maneuvering gendered perceptions of their efficacy in the academy. Finally, LaShonda accounted for the ways in which parental status, gender, and race affect her motherhood experiences outside of the academy. An important note is that as each of the participants described conditions of the academy that had As described by each of the participants, they felt the need to go above and beyond The theme of intersectionality provides context for the ways in which the participants' identities shaped their experiences.

Critical Consciousness

The fourth theme, “Critical Consciousness” was a term Joy used to describe her desire to ensure that her children understood Black history and could make sense of a world that required them to always be on guard and only afford cautious optimism. Even though Joy used this term specifically, Critical Consciousness best describes the various approaches all participants used to achieve the same ends, which include the need for constant advocacy in schools to ensure fair treatment, overwhelming concern for their children’s safety, and helping their children navigate

racialized spaces. Five subthemes emerged: (a) Education, (b) Self-Esteem, (c) Preparing, (d) Parental Involvement, and (d) The Village.

Education

The first subtheme of Critical Consciousness, Education, refers to participants' efforts to support positive racial identity development by exposing their children to Black history and culture through community engagement and activism.

It was important to Bridget to ensure her children had a supportive environment to learn about and develop pride in their culture. One way she set out to do this was through membership in Jack and Jill of America, Inc., a national organization defined on their website as *a membership organization of mothers with children ages 2-19, dedicated to nurturing future African-American leaders by strengthening children through leadership development, volunteer service, philanthropic giving, and civic duty.* Bridget shared a picture of her daughter at a Jack and Jill event (Figure 15). Organizations like Jack and Jill can create a sense of community for Black families in places where a naturally occurring Black community does not exist.

Figure 15. Jack and Jill- Being in an overwhelmingly white space prompted me to join a national Black mother's organization

Being a member of the organization helped connect Bridget's family to a network of Black families in and around her community. She said the organization "encourages us to focus on different aspects of their racial identity development that may not have…. Every month, the kids have to do an activity in their grade group that's focused on some kind of aspect of them being Black." When her family first joined Jack and Jill, they were living in Chicago; they later moved to upstate New York. She mentioned that her son is more interested in participating in Jack and Jill than her daughter, who is still getting "in touch" with her racial identity. She attributes their difference in reception to her son's early exposure to Black people in their community and in his school when they lived in Chicago. Regardless of where they lived, Bridget was intentional about nurturing her children's developing understanding of Black Culture.

Similar to Bridget who sought to surround her children with Black community and culture, Joy was also actively involved in Jack and Jill. She explained why she joined: "My sole purpose for doing that is so that they can see other kids who look like them and also be around other critical moms, teaching their kids the truth about American history." Being involved in the organization lessened the pressure of teaching racial literacy on her own by providing structured activities and programs focused on Black history. Joy described her experience on a recent Jack and Jill trip she'd taken with her children,

> We went to Birmingham...That trip was so powerful because it kinda adds to what they don't learn in school. They know what really happened at the 16th Street Baptist Church. They recreated the march that really turned the corner in terms of desegregation or ending Jim Crow laws…Some of the original foot soldiers were there. It was just a really powerful learning experience for them.

Learning about the many sacrifices that afforded her and her children the reality they know today fueled Joy's passion for service. She felt responsible for her family doing their part, emphasizing, "You just can't exist in this world. You really have to participate and try and use your platform, use your influence, use whatever, your purpose to try to make the world a little bit better." The service component of Jack and Jill made it easy to participate in community service often; Joy shared a picture of her and her children at a service project (Figure 16).

Figure 16. To whom much is given much is required.

She discussed the ways her upbringing shaped her commitment to service and how she hoped to cultivate the same commitments in her children,

> I try to overcompensate for my childhood by pouring into them so much, but at some point I was just like, hm, what are they missing that I got from my childhood by not having. I developed a very strong work ethic because that was my survival mode. I wanted to make sure that they still had values that I think are important for them to have. If it wasn't for other people pouring into us, I may not have made it out of my working-class environment. The only way that I can really repay all the people who stepped into

> my life, for whatever rhyme or reason—because somebody was praying for me—the only way that I can really repay them is to pay it forward and do it for somebody else.

Joy mentioned that her children's ability to do service and other activities shifted drastically as a result of the pandemic, which prevented her and her family from being able to engage in the same ways as they did pre-pandemic. However, she noted that her socioeconomic status "buffered" her family from the devastating outcomes that befell some of the communities they served. Moreover, in addition to adjusting to the new realities of a global pandemic, Black communities across the country found themselves at the center of a "racial reckoning" triggered by a series of high-profile police-killings. While millions gathered in protest, the inherent dangers of racial violence combined with a pandemic created barriers for participants who felt it necessary for their children to be aware of what was happening while doing their best to keep their families safe.

Despite the devastating effects of the pandemic, Bridget was overwhelmingly relieved to know that she could keep her family safe from everything else. She remarked,

> I haven't talked to too many people about this, but I've talked to Black mothers about it. How I just felt safer during the pandemic, when all of that was going, when all the racial unrest was going on because I knew every day where my kids were. We were all home for a good year. It just made me feel safe. It made me feel like they couldn't go out, even if they wanted to. I didn't know, especially my son, I didn't know, I wouldn't be able to be with him all the time if he was out, even at school. It really felt like a time where we could just, I could catch my breath because every time, and my partner, every time my partner leaves the house, there's a part of me, that if I think about it, I'm like, I hope he gets home okay.

> We know that racism is systemic and pervasive, and it's been here for centuries, but this particular time, it felt very charged…I was getting emails and calls from friends saying don't go out on this day. People are looking for Black kids, Black guys or kids to take or shoot. I was just like so thankful that I didn't have to take them to one soccer practice or piano lesson or anything. That I could just wake up and see them every day.

Even though Bridget did not want to take her children to protest, she wanted them to understand what was happening. She shared a picture that was included in her family's holiday card from 2020 (Figure 17); the caption read, "I requested we wear these shirts for one of our family photos that we send out to hundreds of friends and family every winter holiday season. When racial reckoning and protests went global, I wanted the kids to be aware."

Figure 17. Black Lives Matter

Like Bridget, Melody wanted her son to be aware of what happened to George Floyd and the implications of his death on Black communities, particularly Black men in America. Her university sponsored a rally in protest of racial violence in the criminal justice system. She shared a picture of her and her son at the rally (Figure 18) and explained,

> This was after the murder of George Floyd…I made sure that we participated in that rally because, yes, he's privileged. Yes, he has a state of privilege, but he's still a Black guy. He's still a young, Black man. He needs to be aware and exposed to things that are

happening to others just because they are Black. I don't even want to just say Black man—but in this case—it was because he was a Black man. I want him to be socially responsible and understand who he is and what that means and the implications of that. I've never been one to hide social ills from him. He's very much aware of what's going on in the world.

Figure 18. Awareness and exposure

Melody takes every opportunity to teach her son about Black history if for no other reason than to make up for what is not taught in schools. He doesn't learn it in school. She and other participants felt a responsibility to make up for what is not taught about Black history in Schools. Melody shared a picture of her son at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Figure 19). According to the museum's website, "the memorial uses sculpture, art, and design to contextualize racial terror." Melody suggested that Black mothers had been teaching critical race theory "long before it trended" adding,

…My son doesn't have to worry about learning that in his school district because he's gonna learn it from me…I make sure that everything is a teachable moment. We're not just looking at this and reading, but I'm sharing with him that he's not that far removed.

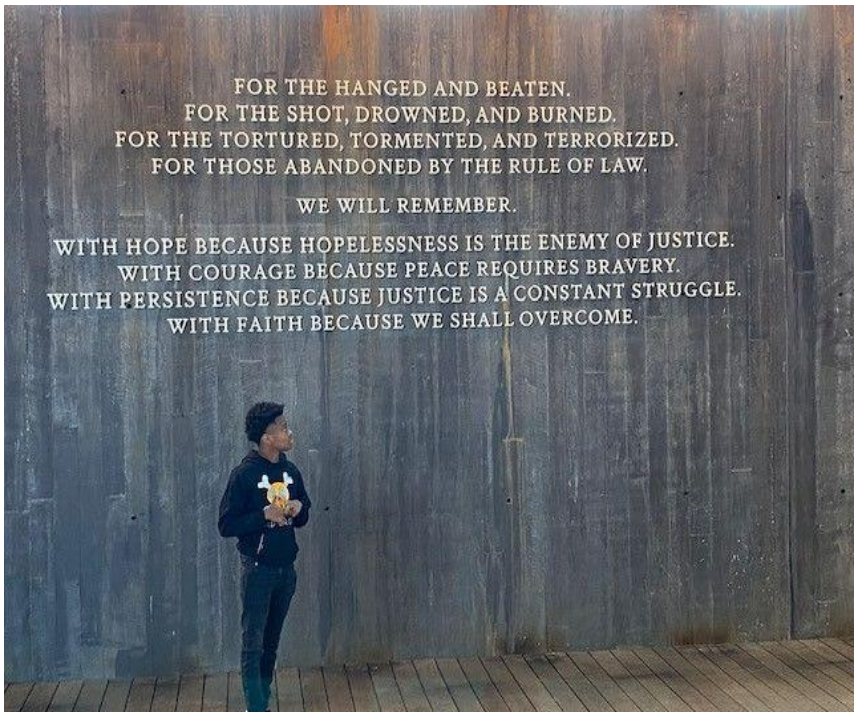

Figure 19. Teaching CRT before it trended

Self-Esteem

The second subtheme of Critical Consciousness, Self-Esteem, accounts for how participants guide the development of positive racial identity by bolstering their children's self-esteem. They accomplished this by positively affirming their identity, instilling pride in Black family traditions, and surrounding them with positive Black role models.

LaShonda had two daughters, both with a "head fulla hair," so in addition to managing her household and academic career, she spent a significant amount of time doing their hair. The haircare process was often met with dismay from both her and her girls, who constantly sought a middle ground between style, feasibility, and function. She explained,

> So, Black hair. Love it and hate it. I think a Black mother, especially of girls…either you're having to deal with it or you're having to go pay a good bit of money for somebody to deal with it for you—which we've never been able to do it regularly—like take them to the salon. It's much better than it used to be when they were little because I've learned more and they've grown more, but both of my children were tender-headed …it was just never pleasant.

LaShonda shared a before and after picture of her daughter's hair (Figure 20). In one picture, she is sectioning her daughter's hair into clips for straightening, and the second picture shows the completed style.

Figure 20. Before and after hair pic.

From wash to style, she could spend hours completing the style in the picture on a designated day of the week which many Black mothers refer to as "hair day." Some hairstyles last longer than a day, but others require upkeep throughout the week. LaShonda emphasizes that managing Black hair is more than just styling; she says,

> … it's just this constant challenge. I don't think any other cultures really have to go through … I try to help my daughters understand—even though we tried our best to make

> them comfortable in their skin and everything else—the images that are around them—even if we try to put some in front of them that are more reflective of them and us— they still somehow—and I think it's just because it's more prevalent in what they see on TV and other places—they still think that Black hair's not good, and that it's somehow inferior.

For that reason, time is spent building her daughters' self-esteem by showing them all of the different styles they can do with their hair that others can't. She also found joy in being able to style their hair, as her grandmother had styled hers. LaShonda's late grandmother was a beautician, and she knew the struggles and the time spent would have made her proud. Thinking about how far she'd come with her daughters' hair reminded her of the professional challenges she faced on her own hair journey. LaShonda reflected on her time working in "corporate America," a time when she had to be strategic about her hair choices, specifically avoiding "natural" styles. She said,

> Not that I think we should conform, but my, I guess, my strategy has always been to play the game. Not do anything against my values or that ethically I think is wrong but play the game. Not necessarily lay down, roll over for anyone, but I was, I just knew that kind of in that corporate, traditional corporate climate, it wouldn't really be looked upon well. Even in academe, I kinda was that way, too, when I first went to X University. I wanted braids, but I'm like, I'm not gonna come with braids. I gotta be there a year first.

Over time and through her hair journey, LaShonda says her "priorities are different," and she no longer cares. She was proud of her persistence with her and her daughters' hair. Recently, her oldest daughter has taken an interest in doing her hair independently. She's given her daughter permission to "experiment" with her hair so she can learn and become more confident in her

appearance. She noted that she has given her daughter this freedom much earlier than she was allowed to do her hair, adding,

> I really try to help my girls feel comfortable in their own skin because they should. Hair, that kinda thing, just like other cultures can wear their natural hair, so should we and so can we. We should feel empowered and okay doing that.

The process of doing hair is a customary part of a Black upbringing; it goes hand and hand with customs and traditions that contribute to Black identity and belonging. For example, LaShonda discussed the importance of cooking meals with her daughters and shared a picture of the first time she made a big Thanksgiving dinner with her daughters help (Figure 21).

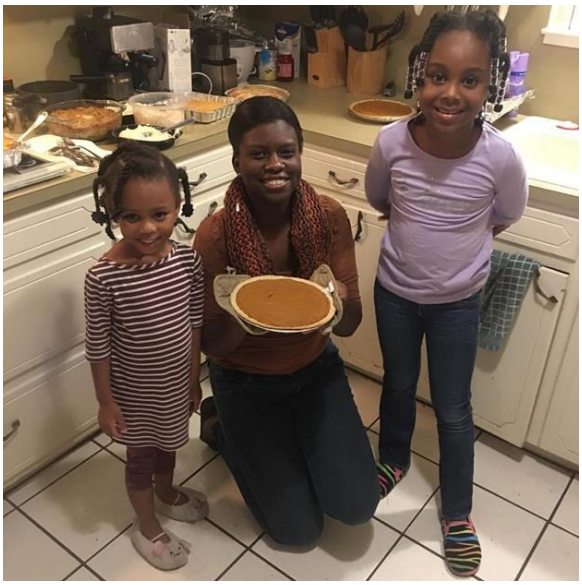

Figure 21. We made sweet potato pie together at Thanksgiving

LaShonda's efforts to build her daughter's self-esteem happened in different ways, including setting an example. She knew the potential she had to make an impact every time she witnessed her daughters following her lead. She shared a picture of her daughter on a day she was "sick" and had to come to campus with her. LaShonda was surprised to see her daughter's swift recovery upon entering the classroom, at which time she picked up a marker and began to write on the board (Figure 20). She explained,

I think it also shows they're watching, even when they think we aren't, and I think they really can rise to the occasion, you know, and even if we aren't explicitly challenging them to do things, like they're watching us work, what we're doing and watching us tackle challenging things.

Figure 22. Jordyn was "sick" this day

More than anything, Lashonda stressed that the time she spent with her daughters across different experiences deepened their bond. She wanted to have a strong relationship with them, so they felt comfortable talking to her about anything, the kind of relationship she wished she'd had with her mother. She described a photo (Figure 23) of her and her daughters,

I think it just kinda represents the relationship. I think with my daughters and kind of making sure that they're all or that they're both okay. Even now, my other daughter is my height, but we still walk in places side by side. I think that maybe not all Black mothers, but I think a lot really work hard to try to have good relationships. Not saying that others don't, but I think in our culture, perhaps maybe when we were children or maybe when our mothers were children, it was a bit different, how relationships worked with Black

moms. No slight to them. I think you don't know what you don't know, but I think as we evolve and as we grow and as we're more educated, we can work more towards that.

Figure 23. Walmart trip

Bridget shared a picture of her son as a toddler in a barbershop chair getting his haircut (Figure 24). The photo caption read: "Hair is a part of Black motherhood, giving them ways to express themselves and love their curly hair." Like LaShonda, Bridget spent a significant amount of time styling her children's hair or taking them to get it done professionally.

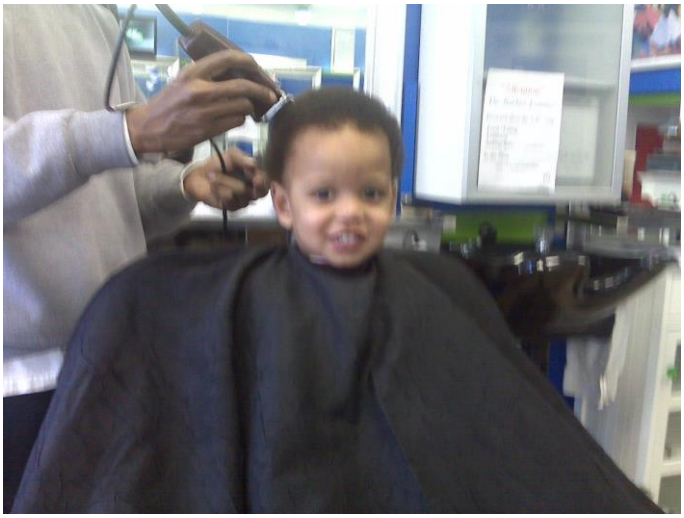

Figure 24. Barber- Hair is a part of Black motherhood

Bridget said she spends more time helping her daughter navigate haircare than her son. Recently her daughter has decided that she wants to wear her hair "pressed" (or straightened); however, it has been challenging to maintain. Bridget recalls her daughter's frustration with her gym teacher's lack of regard for her hair,

> She was like, "Mom, they had us out [outside] there in gym." It seemed like the other girls didn't care. Maybe some of the other Black girls, they have braids or whatever, and so she was like, "Mom, I was out there with my sweatshirt, holding my sweatshirt on my head. Tied it around while I was trying to run in gym."

Bridget was happy that her daughter's primary concern was what was wrong with the school, not with her hair. On the other hand, her son has started seeing other Black boys at school with hairstyles that he likes, making him more comfortable. She said his school recently changed rules that governed how students could wear their hair, and her son was happy about the changes. She explained, "I think COVID helped cuz you used to not be able to have maybe dreads or something, but if kids were spending time doing dreads for like 18 months, and then to tell them to cut those off to come back…" Post-pandemic, some rules have changed and now students at her son's school can wear their hair in different ways. Bridget is unsure if the rules changed due to the Crown Act being passed into law, but she hopes that someone at the school is advocating for kids to have "many different expressions of their hair." She reflected on the last time she styled her son's hair,

> He asked me to do something different to his hair, and we were all, like the four of us, watching this YouTube thing so I could figure out how to do the style that he wanted. I told him about your study, and I said we've just spent two hours together, with me doing the style that you wanted on your hair. A lot of white kids, they don't get to spend that

kind of time with their parents. He was literally in my arms, like that physical touch, but also just talking.

The extra time with her children outweighed the inherent challenges of navigating Black haircare, and it made Bridget proud to know that her children felt good about how they looked.

In addition to ensuring that her children were confident in their appearance, Bridget was also intentional about making sure they were surrounded by images of successful people who looked like them. She shared a picture of her daughter looking through an *Oprah* magazine (Figure 25) and said,

> This isn't really about Addison but about the things that we have in our house. It's really important to me to have, kind of important to us to have positive role models around the house and that the kids know certain people and who they are and what they've contributed to society, so they can kind of see themselves as a norming.

Figure 25. Oprah

Setting an example was important to Bridget; she and her partner strived to model success in hopes that they might one day I aspire to follow in their footsteps. Bridget said, “I think it also helps that they see me working, and they see that, as a Black woman, that I am able to kind of be really successful professionally and be a successful mom.” The idea that her children chose different careers did not bother her, as long as she gave them the best example of what was possible in their own home.

For Melody, part of guiding her son’s understanding of how to interact with the world around him is helping him understand that while people may have preconceived ideas about who he is—as a Black make—he does not have to “fit into a box.” Melody shared a picture of her son standing after trying on his first full suit (Figure 26). She remarked, “To me, this represents, it gives him representation outside of what others may think of a young Black male as.” The picture is the moment he saw himself in the suit for the first time, and he was surprised and delighted with how he looked, which made Melody proud. She suggested that in addition to boosting his confidence, the suit allowed her son to see himself in a different light. She told him, “you can be your person and still, and the world is still going to see you as a Black guy, but you’re showing them that you’re not limited to one model.”

Figure 26. Affording options

Preparing

The third subtheme of Critical Consciousness, Preparing attends to participants' efforts to prepare their children to understand and recognize racism.

Joy shared a stock image of a Black woman dressed in tactical gear in a guarded stance (Figure 27). At 16 and 12 years of age, Joy's children were developing a critical consciousness; however, they were still young and unassuming. To the extent that Joy could protect them, she considered herself their bodyguard. She explained,

> This one is hard because I'm trying to strike a balance between letting them fight their own battles, but also some battles, I can see the racism in there, and they can't see it because they're kids. Then I feel like I'm always, that look, that's the look. Every time I get an email, every time I see something that is off from what they normally do, that's my look. I'm looking at what's underneath this.

Figure 27. I feel like a bodyguard over my children.

Joy provided more context in the picture caption: "I feel like a bodyguard over my children. It's hard for me to let them fight battles that I know are a function of inherent racism or people's implicit biases. So, I go to battle often." Joy emphasized that while it is easier for her to recognize bias and racism directed at her children, teaching them how to see it was challenging. Further, she felt that how she protected them created a "false representation" of how the world is, and she had to remind them that "the world ain't nice and neat as I try to make it for you all." Joy recognized that as her children grew older, she needed to prepare them to protect themselves, especially her daughter, now 16. She continued with trepidation, "I'm trying to shift from protecting them and being a bodyguard to teaching her how to fight for herself and advocate for herself."

Preparing her children had become a daily exercise, and there was always something to address, whether it be an interaction with a teacher or classmate or what route they took to get home. Joy mused about what life could be like without the added weight of preparing her children, saying,

> I could just be a regular mom and define regular, right? Where I don't have to worry about the things that I have to worry about. To me, that's a regular mom. That my kids

> can live in this society and be free to be kids and live their best kid life, and me not have to do all the things that I do.

Joy elaborated on the realities faced by Black mothers that make it impossible for them to be "regular moms." She provided an example of how she has to prepare her son just for him to be able to play with his friends. She explained,

> My son, one of his [white] teammates for baseball lives in our neighborhood. There's a path that you go through, a shortcut, just walk up the street. Every time he goes, he has to come pick my son up. I always have to give the same instructions. I've seen Liam ride around this neighborhood on his bike. Ain't got a care in the world. Just on the path, just riding the bike. Jaden can't do that. Jaden can't do that. That's an example of my kids can't live freely because I'm afraid that something's gonna happen to him. Somebody's gonna do something to him on this path.

Joy describes how she cautions her son against potential dangers by providing explicit instructions on how to be as safe as possible, saying,

> If you want to go to your friend's house, your friend has to come pick you up. You all gotta walk together. It's a whole list of instructions. Don't talk to nobody. Text me as soon as you get there. Don't go anywhere other than Liam's house, and then be back before it gets dark.

As an added measure of safety, Joy asked Liam's mom to allow Liam to walk Jaden home; however, she was unsure if Liam's mom knew why she asked. Even though Jaden visits with Liam often, Joy's level of comfort with her son moving through the neighborhood remained unchanged. While she would continue to prepare her children to anticipate the "ails of the world," she did not expect to feel comfortable any time soon. She lamented, "I see too many

Trump signs to let my child run around here carefree. Too many people being murdered, just for being Black."

Around the 3rd or 4th grade, Bridget's son became more contemplative about his racial identity and what it meant to be someone who looked like he did. Although she knew her son's awareness was growing, she did not expect him to make sense of it in the way he did. Bridget shared a picture of her son sitting on the sidelines of a soccer field (Figure 28), and she recalled a conversation she had with him about his developing interest in athletics.

Figure 28. Dime a dozen

She asked him if he would be interested in playing basketball, to which he replied,

> oh, mom… I would be like a dime a dozen, playing basketball. You know how many Black boys play basketball? If I'm trying to get, I wanna get a scholarship or something to college, I'm gonna have to be really, really good in order to get looked at. But soccer? I can really shine in this area.

Bridget expressed that she was surprised to hear her son's perspective on his involvement in sports, saying,

> It just really occurred to me, one of his first understandings of race and how he's seen by others and how he views himself. I just never thought that would've been a consideration that he would make about a sport that he wanted to do. I always try to instill in them an understanding of racism, understanding who they are, both to be safe, but also to be proud. It was almost like a reflecting back to me some of the stuff that I've tried to instill in him as a Black mother.

At 15, Melody's son is close to completing driver's training. She shares a picture of him in the driver's seat with his hands firmly affixed to the steering wheel (Figure 29).

Figure 29. bittersweet- joyful & terrifying

For Melody, this recent "milestone" is bittersweet, and she is having trouble with what she first describes as a loss of control, which she later clarifies as losing her ability to keep him safe. She referenced the feeling of children growing up, noting, "they are now able to form their own opinions, and they're able to think logically about things, and critically think about situations." Still, as much as she wants to embrace her son's newfound autonomy, it comes with a caveat. She explains,

> Now, it’s a freedom of not only thought and reasoning, but now, we’re adding behavior because now, he can go places and do things. Then he’s another young Black man in a car, and we know how terrifying that is. For a Black mother, it is terrifying for me.

Melody reflected on a recent traffic stop that left her feeling even more unsettled about her son being on the road alone. The officer was unable to see that she was wearing her seatbelt. She did not receive a ticket, but she couldn't help but wonder how it might have happened if the same thing were to happen to her son.

For all participants, preparing their children to experience racism was not enough. There is an added layer of involvement for Black parents, who must be involved in their children’s schools and education in ways that other parents do not.

Parental Involvement

The fourth subtheme of Critical Consciousness, Parental Involvement, describes participants' consistent and intentional efforts to be involved in their children's schools to demonstrate support for their children and recognize and interrupt bias and discrimination directed at their children based on their race.

Melody discussed the added responsibility she has as a single parent for her to show up for her son in meaningful ways. She wanted to demonstrate to her son that she supports him, and will be present and advocate for him in every space he occupies, including his school. Melody shared a picture of her and her son eating lunch at his school (Figure 30). She reinforced that it was necessary to “make time to be with him in his space.”

Figure 30. Making time during my day to share his space

Like Melody, Joy believed that being involved in her children's schools was a significant part of raising Black children. Both women believed that having a presence in their children's school could offset maltreatment based on their race. According to Joy, bias, discrimination, and racism could take many different forms, and she would make sure that the school knew she was going to be present and watching. She described her intention to make her presence known,

> I'm the parent who always goes to the open house or the orientation, and I walk around to every teacher. I try to give them a warning, to say, hey, I'm a professor at NC State. I'm glad my son is in your class, but I say that intentionally. My son asked me the other day, he said, mom, why do you say that every time we got orientation? Cuz I'm letting them know, right? Don't start none, won't be none, just to say because I know how implicit bias works. You have preconceived assumptions about African American children that kinda dictate how you treat them in the classroom. I want you to know that I'm watching.

Joy's approach was warranted; her son's academic abilities were overlooked on more than one occasion, resulting in him being held behind based on an assumption about a standardized test score when the rest of his peers moved on without him. Even though Joy tries to prepare her children to recognize bias—at their age—it is nearly impossible for them to recognize implicit

bias, especially from teachers whom they are socialized to believe have their best interests at heart. Joy also wants her children to understand that she will make time to show up for them and why it matters. She shared a picture of a t-shirt with the phrase, "Don't Let These Degrees Fool You," (Figure 31) to which she said,

> They need to see their Black mama in school, and their teachers need to see me in school, too. That's the other part of don't let these degrees fool you. My son made a comment the other day. He said, mom, why every time we go to open house, you always tell them you're a faculty member at NC State? Cuz I need them to know, don't play. Don't play when it comes to my child.

Figure 31. I'm in the academy but not of the academy

As much as she tried to prepare her daughters for attending a predominantly white school in their small town, she could not prepare them for being the target of repeated racial slurs. LaShonda was shocked to learn her daughter had been called a "Nigger," not once but three different times. In addition to talking with her daughters, she and her partner had to address a broken system that could allow this to happen repeatedly without intervention. She explains,

> Unfortunately, we recently moved to Cullowhee, North Carolina, which is a really small town in western North Carolina. My older daughter, who's a 7th grader, has been called the N word three times by three different students. We've had to have some more conversations about that and have had to tell the school principal and the superintendent what they need to do and what they will do. The NAACP is getting involved recently, so we're having to deal with that a little bit more directly and in a way that we never would've imagined in 2021.

LaShonda, Joy, and Melody each expressed a need to be involved in their children's schools in a way that their children's experiences had affirmed. While involvement is voluntary for many parents, and there is no pressure to commit, participants indicated that being involved is not an option for Black parents.

The Village

The final subtheme of Critical Consciousness, The Village, denotes how participants discuss their efforts to surround their children with family and friends and immerse them in cultural traditions. Participants described The Village as a critical support system that contributed to raising their children with a sense of belonging that formed identity and affinity towards their culture.

Across several different topics, Melody discussed the differences in responsibilities for single parents who bear the brunt of raising children independently. She believed she faced an added layer of pressure to overcome stigmas associated with being a Black single mother from within and outside of the Black community. She shared that her colleagues often questioned what she had accomplished and that people were often surprised by her success. She guessed at what they might be thinking, "It's like, you're a single parent? You got a PhD? You moved, and

you're here by yourself? Your son is making the honor roll?" Melody proudly checked all of the boxes and attributed much of her success to her "village." She shared a picture of her father teaching her son to mow the lawn (Figure 32), explaining,

> This picture is my son, my father teaching my son how to mow the lawn. I think that is so important, and this may intersect with me being a single Black mother because it's showing that not only do I utilize my village, but I utilize male role models in my village because it's so important.

Figure 32. staying near my village

It was essential to Melody that her son had Black men in his life. "It's a different set of social pressures for boys than girls. I think having that village and making sure that village includes strong men and strong Black men is so important," she said. Melody received support from her parents and an "inner circle" of Black friends and colleagues. She emphasized that it was

important for children to see that their parents are not “islands.” “We are not here alone. We need, we need help. We need someone to assist us,” she concluded.

Bridget discussed how support from her parents had given her the time and space she needed to continue pushing forward in her career. She shared a picture of her and her daughter with the caption, “Addison came when my parents could watch her while I was teaching, allowing me to breastfeed her at my class break, reminded me of Black women having babies in villages with support and doing that as an academic was priceless” (Figure 33).

Figure 33. Addison came when my parents could watch her while I was teaching

In addition to the direct support Bridget's parents provided, she also ensured that family surrounded her children during big holidays like Thanksgiving to bond over food and cultural traditions. She described how her children look forward to eating foods she doesn't usually cook and playing card games that her partner's family has played for years. Bridget places a high value on time with family, adding, “That is something that we really instill in them, I think. Make sure they are close to their, our parents, their grandparents, and my sisters. That is really important.”

Lashonda reiterated the value of creating a support system for her family. She and her partner also belonged to friend groups compromised of their black colleagues and who they relied on for sharing experiences, milestones, and guidance over everything from what to cook for dinner to advice for styling their children's hair. "We always make it a priority because we've always lived away from our families … It really helps you be able to survive," she explained. LaShonda noted that Black mothers have different parenting experiences compared to non-Black parents specific to Black culture. She shared a picture of her daughters participating in a church conference and noted the significance of spirituality in the Black community (Figure 34).

Figure 34. We attended a women's conference at church and the girls were on program

She and her partner prioritize finding a church in every place they have lived as a primary source for building community. When asked to expand the connection between finding a spiritual community and Black motherhood, LaShonda remarks,

> It's been really important for us. We always make it a priority because we've always lived away from our families. We felt like not, not, not, that's not the primary reason, but

having a support system especially when you live away from family and friends is so important. It really helps you be able to survive.

LaShonda implied that even though church is a family thing, the burden to engage children in meaningful ways falls on Black mothers, saying “there is sometimes a lot of pressure, especially in the Black religious culture and tradition.” Despite the added pressure, the church, more specifically the Black church, remained a significant influence in her family's life.

Not unlike the other participants, Joy described the village as a support system that existed within and outside of the academy. She was proud to surround her children with colleagues who provided familial support and guidance and also served as Black role models. Joy discusses her village and shared a picture of her son with one of her colleagues working on a project (Figure 35). The caption reads, “It takes a village! Being a black academic mom means that I sometimes share my kids with other black academics.”

Figure 35. It takes a village!

Joy provided more context for what the village means for her and her children. She explains,

> My village is all the moms and families that are, we're all kinda doing the same thing. Trying to get these kids off to a good start in life and exposing them to things. I definitely couldn't do it without my village. That includes church family. That includes sorority sisters. That includes Jack and Jill, sister moms, and other people who we have formed a tight knit group, a tight knit relationship with. Those relationships are invaluable … We definitely support each other in ways where it's not just my kids, but their kids are my kids. That's super meaningful. Then all the things I talked about are kind of like traditions, like what we do—the service projects, the things we do repeatedly. Those are our traditions.

Summary

The theme Critical Consciousness revealed that participants are forced to navigate many layers of complexity to arm their children with the necessary education, awareness, confidence, and support system to ensure that they can thrive in oppressive systems. Systems not created with Black children or Black families in mind may even exist to cause them harm. Participants were relentless in their pursuits to build a life for their children so that they might not experience the same struggles they did.

Participants' Collective Reflections on Major Themes

The final interview brought study participants together for a focus group. In the focus group, participants shared pictures that represented their understanding of Black academic motherhood and discussed major themes I identified based on participant interviews, photographs, and captions.

Flexibility and Access

Participants suggested that Flexibility and Access had shared components and discussed them together in the context of academic motherhood experiences broadly. However, participants resolved that even though many academic mothers benefit from these features of academic life, Flexibility and Access take on different and significant meanings for Black mothers in the Academy. They agreed that Flexibility and Access were especially beneficial to raising Black children. For example, while LaShonda attributed her ability to be present in her children's school to the flexibility of academic motherhood, she reinforced the necessity of parental involvement, particularly for Black and Brown children. Melody remarked that being an academic mother gave her access to a community of resources that exposed her son to new experiences, adding that access was essential to improving outcomes for Black males. Joy concluded by adding, "I think that they [our children] have another set of privilege that we may not necessarily have had. We should definitely capitalize on it. I know that the academy doesn't love us, but the resources. We have to use these resources just the same."

Intersectionality

Intersectionality played a significant part in how participants navigated the academy and multiple intersecting identities. Joy echoed the sentiments of what other participants shared regarding race, gender and parental status. She stated,

> I think race does make a difference … I think about intersectionality in terms of the ways in which my race and gender come together in ways that make me invisible in terms of systemic oppression and the ways in which policies, rules, regulations are set up to benefit and not benefit people based on the interlocking nature of their identities.

While participants had many shared experiences with regards to intersectionality, the most notable differences involved how parental status was perceived in the academy, specifically, when their children came to work with them. Joy mentioned her students' response to seeing her children in the classroom, "the students always say thank you for sharing your kids with us because it kinda humanizes you as a faculty member and makes you kinda, I guess, less intimidating." In stark contrast, LaShonda shared that her students gave negative feedback on her evaluations after she brought her children to class saying, "I've had students who put in their evaluations that they know life happens, and children get sick, but my children were a distraction, and I should not have them there." Unlike Joy, in most cases LaShonda was typically bringing her children with her out of necessity, not by choice. Melody was reminded of a comment Joy made earlier in their conversation and added, "what Joy mentioned about the academy not loving us and not loving our children is the reason why I don't bring my son to class or to my office because I don't want that type of evaluation that LaShonda received."

Critical Consciousness

Participants agreed emphatically on the necessity of providing their children with an historically accurate understanding of Black history compared to what they learned in school. They strived to achieve this in similar ways from having conversations about race and taking field trips to historic sites, to community engagement and activism. Similarly, they all spend countless hours building their children's self-esteem so that pride in their appearance, academic abilities, culture, and traditions, among other characteristics might shield them from—in Joy's words— "how mean and cruel the world really is." Lashonda confided in the group over the challenges of trying to find a balance between preparing her children to encounter "hateful people" in a way that did not overwhelm them or make them feel inferior. All participants

acknowledged what felt like a seemingly impossible feat with Joy adding, “You need to be aware and know what’s happening, but still be a kid.”

The Village

Throughout the focus group participants discussed the role of their family, friends, colleagues, and community in helping them to do the impossible. Beyond the discussion of their personal villages, the participants reinforced the need to expand The Village and build communities in order to thrive as Black women in the academy. Even though The Village was a subtheme of Critical Consciousness, it was the most discussed subtheme when participants came together for the focus group. Joy acknowledged the community that had been created through their participation in the study,

> I can just say you’ve made a difference in my life because part of it is when you are isolated in these communities, you start to think you’re crazy. You feel like you’re the only one. For me, just hearing Melody and LaShonda’s experiences, kinda say, hey, we’re all kinda doing the same kinda thing, to kinda survive and thrive even in these spaces that we find ourselves in. That was just good for me to hear and experience, just being in community with all you all.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a detailed account of findings which resulted in four emerging themes (Flexibility, Access, Intersectionality, and Critical Consciousness) and eight subthemes (Resources, Exposure, Race & Gender, Parental Status & Gender, Education, Preparing, Parental Involvement, and The Village). Major themes and subthemes were derived from the words and phrases used by participants over the course of the study.

The focus group gave participants the opportunity to discuss their pictures and how each represented their understanding of academic motherhood, Black motherhood, and Black academic. Being in conversation with one another resulted in a shared understanding and acknowledgement of the distinct experiences of Black academic motherhood as evidenced in their words and pictures.

Chapter Five provides an overview of the research findings in the context of theory and the research questions and concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study utilized a womanist framework and a participant-generated visual method called photo-elicitation to conceptualize how Black women understand the experience of being an academic mother and if race shapes academic motherhood experiences. Based on the time period during which this study occurred—approximately 18 months after the COVID-19 pandemic began—I was interested to learn if any issues had come up as a result of the pandemic. To accomplish this, I examined how Black women understood motherhood in three distinct ways: academic motherhood, Black motherhood, and Black academic motherhood. Chapter Five provides a discussion of (a) the research findings, (b) womanism from theory to reality, (c) implications for practice, and (d) recommendations for future research. This chapter concludes with an overall summary and conclusion of the research study, and my personal reflection.

Research Findings

The following research question guided this study: How do Black women understand the experience of being an academic mother? Secondary research questions include: (1) In what ways does race shape academic motherhood experiences for Black women, and (2) What if any particular issues have come up because of the COVID-19 pandemic? The photo-elicitation interviews, photographs, captions, and focus group supported the findings for this study. A digital photobook of participants' photographs in addition to my field notes and subjectivity journal supplemented the data findings used to answer the research question.

How Do Black Women Understand Academic Motherhood?

LaShonda, Melody, Bridget, and Joy each represent a marker on the tenure track timeline from start, Assistant Professor, to finish, Full Professor. Participants' real-life accounts of academic motherhood mirrored the structural and familial barriers as described in academic motherhood literature including the institutional setting, tenure and promotion processes, family planning, and the struggle to balance it all. The study's findings were consistent with research that women who are mothers experience exacerbated gender discrimination, fewer tenure and promotion opportunities, and difficulty balancing responsibilities between work and home (Castañeda & Isgro, 2015; Mason & Goulden, 2008; Schoening, 2009; Ward &Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Nuance occurs in the study's findings regarding how participants as Black women understand academic motherhood, more specifically, how the particularities of their experience stand out in contrast to what is discussed broadly in academic motherhood literature. The following sections situate how the participants understand academic motherhood in the context of the extant literature.

Tenure and Timing

At the time of the study, each participant was at a different point in the tenure and promotion process. All had successfully earned a highly coveted rank at their institution. None had been explicitly discriminated against based on their parental status but trying to "have it all" (Mason & Goulden, 2002, p. 2) was not without consequences. While participants were overwhelmed with the demands of pursuing tenure at their institutions, they were committed to their careers and caring for their families. Each participant noted some challenges they faced due to the culture of their institution and stigmas around parental status.

All participants in this study were resolved in their desire to have children despite potential professional consequences. Joy was not tenured at the time of the birth of her first child, and she tried to time her pregnancy so the baby would arrive in summer. She was successful in timing, but she had to propose changes to her institution's existing leave policies that did not account for the possibility that faculty on academic year contracts might have parental leave extended into summer. Data generated from this study were consistent with Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004), who found that seeking tenure did not influence women's decision to have children.

In many ways, Joy paid what Evans (2007) describes as the "ultimate social tax;" becoming a mother meant constantly trying to make up for the disadvantages of parental leave. While she succeeded in getting the university policy amended, she had to fight for it, she was only allowed two months' leave, and she took on some administrative duties because she wasn't teaching. Findings from this study are consistent with Armenti (2004), who found that faculty women attempt to plan their pregnancies to align with the academic calendar. Hill, Nash, and Citera (2011) made similar observations, although they focused more on outcomes, specifically, how FMLA policies intended to address and resolve inequities often advance inequities that further disadvantage academic mothers.

Joy's second child was born after she was tenured; however, he arrived early due to a difficult pregnancy that resulted in Preeclampsia. Unfortunately, Joy's ability to secure tenure did not change the preset—albeit extended—duration of parental leave; it was not nearly enough time for her to recover. Joy's experience represents one of many glaring oversights in work-family policies where recovery is measured by achievement rather than necessity. Joy's experience resonates with Patterson's (2008) criticism of FMLA policies for gaps in support that

might help families achieve a better balance between work and family life through access to extended time to return, affordable childcare, and flexibility upon return other things. Based on the structure of parental leave policies, one could infer that a tenured woman needs more time to recover from pregnancy than a non-tenured woman. It may sound absurd, but it is the painful reality of how parental policies play out for mothers in the academy.

For many academic mothers, tenure often coincides with the time they are trying to conceive for fertility reasons or being of "childbearing" age. Bridget became a mother to her first child when she got tenure. Like Joy's experience, tenured faculty were granted extended parental leave, and Bridget could spend more time at home with her son and her daughter, who arrived years later. She was grateful for the security tenure provided as she was all too aware of the struggles her friends and colleagues faced attempting to time their pregnancies. Alternately, Bridget felt defeated by her lack of productivity which she noted could be evidenced by the lack of publications on her vitae during the years her children were born. Her experience is consistent with major themes in academic motherhood literature that suggest some academic mothers find family life to be a hindrance to productivity (Dickson, 2018) and other research on the overwhelming pressure to perform at R1 institutions (Finkel & Olswang, 1996; Finkel et al., 1994; Sorcinelli & Near, 1989).

Balance

Another central theme in the literature involved endless pursuits for work-life balance while navigating the academy and the "second shift." The second shift refers to the time women spend working to support their households long after the workday has ended. In accordance with research writ large, Bridget and LaShonda were responsible for arranging childcare, cooking, cleaning, and most of the domestic work in their personal lives, as well as being flexible to the

professional needs of their spouses (Dickson, 2018; Hochschild & Manchung, 2012; Misra et al., 2012). LaShonda and Bridget were a part of dual-career couples, with their partners working in higher education; neither could say if it was to their benefit or detriment in raising their families. Although they are currently in tenure-track positions at R1 research institutions, both women had taken non-tenure track positions and worked at non-top-tier universities to support their families. Findings from this study were consistent with research that suggests academic mothers pursue careers at second-tier or teaching institutions that are more conducive to family life (Patterson, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Curtis & Thornton, 2014). In addition to her responsibilities at home, LaShonda was an adjunct faculty at a community college while her partner pursued his Ph.D. to support their family before pursuing her doctorate. In support of their partner's careers, both had endured several moves for job opportunities and re-acclimated their children to new environments time and again.

While participants were conscious of the excessive weight of carrying additional responsibilities at home compared to their partners, they accepted it as part of their realities and commitments to their families. Dickson (2018) had similar results to this study, finding that with added responsibilities, academic mothers that find harmony between mothering and academia do not regret their choices. Dickson (2018) did not specifically account for single parents or co-parenting arrangements. However, Melody and Joy assumed primary caretaker roles without a partner (Melody) or alongside a former partner (Joy).

Work-family policies represent one part of a giant puzzle that academic mothers are constantly trying to work out. Other pieces involve deeply rooted systemic inequities that influence the culture and climate of an institution amplifying the impact on Black academic mothers. Just as Castañeda and Isgro (2015) noted, "many women of color who are both scholars

and mothers find they continue to be blocked in their progress by sex and racial prejudice and biases" (p.6).

Intersectionality

In their understanding of academic motherhood, it was hard for participants to characterize their experiences without addressing how their identity as Black women contributed to their experience in the academy. Melody situated race in the context of her recent appointment as Director of a new graduate program, intending to recruit more students of color. Melody pointed out the importance of representation; while her race was not explicitly mentioned concerning her candidacy for this role, it was clear why she was chosen for the position to her. She accepted the added responsibility because it meant that she could spend more time with her son, and at the same time, she knew the power of her presence in the recruiting space. She considered this opportunity both the result of her being the only tenured black faculty in her department and a benefit to academic motherhood. These findings are consonant with other research that emphasizes the impact of Black women in the academy through the recruitment and retention of Black students, faculty and staff, and mentoring relationships with students (Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017; Perry et al., 2009).

For Joy and Bridget, their positions in the academy allowed them to model success to their children, which they felt was necessary as Black women who have succeeded despite adversity. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) discuss academic mothers' satisfaction with work in terms of their overall enjoyment in their careers and the potential for career advancement. Findings from the current study affirmed their research that suggests academic mothers find their work "intrinsically satisfying" (p. 236). In contrast, although participants took great pride in their work and accomplishments, they were most proud of the example they set for their children.

Notably, Bridget remarked, “it helps that they see me working, and they see that, as a Black woman, that I am able to kind of be really successful professionally and be a successful mom.”

The benefits of tenure, including long-term job security, protection of academic freedom, and increased earning potential, would arguably make it easier to thrive in an academic career. In slight contrast, study findings found that in spite of the comfort tenure provides, the grind from Assistant to Full Professor only lessens slightly with every milestone. Even when pressure is not directly applied, participants contended that the pressure to prove, perform and produce was ever-present. The extent to which they experienced anxiety and pressure could be attributed to the institutional setting, their position along the tenure track, work-family, gender, and race. Moreover, there are stark differences between ranks, contract terms, and other factors beyond the scope of this study. While there is evidence of the strides made towards improving work-family policies, the improvements are often in response to issues as they arise, instead of dismantling a broken system and building it anew.

Does Race Shape Academic Motherhood?

The simple answer is yes, race shapes academic motherhood experiences for Black academic mothers. The characteristics that make Black motherhood unique are evidenced by how Black academic mothers position themselves in the academy in ways that benefit their children and the community. The hard-earned prestige and esteem garnered by the academy and the resulting social capital have afforded the participants and their children possibilities they might not otherwise have. Gregory (2001) pointed out that Black women often choose careers in education for the potential to develop young minds and contribute to reshaping the trajectory of Black youth. For that reason, the minds of Black academic mothers are not free to focus on professional accomplishments; instead, they are accountable for teaching, role modeling, and

mentoring their children, extended family, students, and community members. Rather than finding contentment in job security, they are constantly concerned with providing a life that affords their children access to the people, places, and resources that might help them overcome systems of oppression designed to hold them back. Whereas many academics look forward to the highly sought-after academic freedoms that tenure provides, the Black academic mothers in this study were focused on the liberty the profession grants them outside of a standard 9 to 5 work. This freedom allowed them to keep a more watchful eye over their children both in and outside of school, a luxury they do not take for granted.

Across multiple interviews, participants' photographs demonstrated how race shaped academic motherhood. For the first interview—when participants were asked to submit photographs reflective of their understanding of academic motherhood—race came up consistently, even when I did not explicitly mention it. Several photographs contained scenarios that may resonate with any academic mother; however, the participants' accompanying narrative revealed the complexities of race that are often unacknowledged. For example, a picture of a participant attending a field trip with their child was discussed as an opportunity to show teachers that they are actively involved, but more importantly, in hopes that their involvement will mitigate potential bias and discrimination based on their race. Another photograph showed a participant's son with a colleague looking over his science project. The participant made it clear that more than being able to give her son access to academics in the area of his interest, she was able to expose him to successful Black engineers who have achieved what he dreams of doing. After the second interview, I asked participants if they believed race shaped academic motherhood experiences; all answered yes, resoundingly. More than their words, however, their

photographs throughout the study made the distinct differences and particularities of Black academic motherhood impossible to ignore.

Race is a significant factor that affects the way people live their lives. Likewise, motherhood, specifically academic motherhood, has its own obstacles. The intersection of racial and academic motherhood identities for Black academic mothers only adds to the looming fear and anxiety of what one participant described as "having your heart outside of your body."

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

This study occurred between October and December 2022, approximately 18 months after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although research on the effects of the pandemic continued to emerge at the time of the study, researchers focused on the experiences of women and caretakers that had just begun to surface in higher education publications.

Scholars pointed to the impact of the pandemic on women, specifically mothers and caretakers. Women faculty wrote about anticipated delays in tenure clocks, reduced productivity, and other career disadvantages resulting in caring for children while working from home (Gordon & Presseau, 2022; Skinner, Betancourt &Wolff-Eisenberg, 2021; Staniscuaski et al., 2021). Other research highlighted the devastating effects of the pandemic on communities of color, particularly the Black community (Kirksey et al., 2021; Rusoja & Thomas, 2021; Laurencin & Walker, 2020). In the same way that this study examines the confluence of race and academic motherhood, it was essential to consider that issues that affected the Black community and issues that affected academic mothers might have a compounded impact on Black Academic mothers.

This study's findings were inconsistent with research on the pandemic's impact on faculty women or the black community. On the contrary, participants agreed that their privilege and

socioeconomic status shielded them from the brunt of the pandemic. For the most part, participants were relieved to have their children at home where they could keep them safe, not just from the pandemic but from the daily challenges of racialized parenting. Ensuring their family's safety became the most pressing concern with ongoing protests in response to murders at the hands of police. The added time with their families due to the pandemic allowed more time to increase their children's understanding of ongoing race issues and racism in the U.S. and better prepare them to return to school.

Womanism from Theory to Reality

Utilizing Womanism as a framework, this study addresses gaps in academic motherhood literature about the distinct experiences of Black academic mothers while attending to the nuance of universal notions of academic motherhood. Womanism argues that Black women's experiences are worthy of special attention; as stated by Williams (2006), "womanist scholars have the freedom to explore the particularities of black women's history and culture without being guided by what white feminists have already identified as women's issues" (p.120). Womanism recognizes the experiences of Black women independently and in ways that center on the realities of Black women as they navigate oppressive systems while trying to make space for love and joy for themselves and their families. In the following sections, I discuss the findings of this study in the context of three major themes across womanist literature, including (1) centering Black women, (2) the womanist worldview, and (3) responsibility to family, culture, and community.

Centering Black Women

In any study it is important to center the perspective of the participant, however, it was especially important in this study to be able to amplify participants' perspectives in contrast to broad assumptions about motherhood. The extant literature primarily addresses issues that white women scholars have identified as motherhood issues without considering race. The participants in this study had a firm understanding of what it is like to be a Black woman in the academy. Photographs of the participants alone and with their children were used to articulate pride in their accomplishments, and to emphasize what they had accomplished as Black women. It was no small feat for any of the women to have reached their level of success in their careers in spite of adversity. In Womanism's aims to center Black women, special attention is paid to the intersection of race and gender and how that combination takes on a different meaning for Black women who can be discriminated against for their race and being a woman.

The Womanist Worldview

Findings from this study are congruous with Maparayan's (2012) belief that for Black women to exist in structures and systems of oppression, they adopt a womanist worldview. By adopting a womanist worldview, Black women necessarily take stock of the conditions in which they are meant to exist and create what is needed to survive and optimally thrive. Similar to how participants experienced intersectionality, it was difficult for them to know which identities would significantly impact their personal and professional lives. At multiple points in their careers, participants had to be malleable to changes in their environment while grappling with their ways of being, including taking on positions and responsibilities delegated to them as a result of their race, reconciling their own appearance while trying to teach their children to be

proud of their own, or working overtime to ensure that biased evaluations don't interfere with their success.

Maparayan (2012) introduced the "triad of concern" to make sense of how Black women can thrive amidst the constant shifting of their realities through their relationships with others, spirituality, and nature. Guided by the assumption that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a notable impact on the lives of Black academic mothers, the "triad of concern" was a useful tool to understand how participants sought to find harmony and balance during a global pandemic. Although the pandemic altered environmental conditions, which resulted in working/learning from home, participants found harmony in their ability to keep their children safe from catching COVID-19 and from traumatic race-related encounters they experienced due to being Black.

Responsibility to Family, Culture & Community

Study participants discussed their responsibility to family, culture, and community explicitly and their intention to ensure that their children are raised with the same sense of responsibility. Participant narratives and photographs conveyed deep meaning in how they'd come to involve family, culture, and community in their children's lives. More recent literature highlights the challenges faced by Black parents to acclimate their children to a society that is not prepared to embrace their children for who they are. At the same time, Black parents work diligently to ensure that the harsh realities of the world don't crush their children's spirits. Manning (2021) describes what this kind of "racialized parenting" looks like for Black families noting that "Black parents use various intentional racialized parenting approaches to instill a positive racial identity in their children, prepare them for a racist world, intervene in racist institutions on their behalf, and protect them against possible interpersonal racist harm" (p.2).

Barnes (2016) highlights the heavier burden carried by Black women who—in addition to professional, societally, and cultural pressures—face unspoken expectations to be leaders in their community and primary caretakers at home. LaShonda mentioned that despite their careers outside the home, she and her partner were "pretty traditional" regarding gender roles in their household. She noted that she observes similar partnerships in the Black community. By contrast, Bridget tried to balance the benefits of her and her children being involved in the Jack and Jill organization while actively trying to raise awareness of and address the gender binary culture and socioeconomic class culture that exists within the organization.

Joy and Melody were compelled to fight racism and be drivers of political action both in and outside the academy, just as Hudson-Weems (1987) described the responsibilities of Black women. They discussed their commitments as though they were anything but voluntary. All participants emphasized their power to influence their children and future generations through education and advocacy. However, their reflections were marred with an underlying sense of obligation linked more to necessity than choice. Additionally, there was an unspoken but implied concern over who would take up these mantles if they did not.

A considerable part of participants' responsibility to family, culture, and community was passed down in different ways from generations that preceded them. Participants were especially attuned to how positive, and traumatic experiences throughout their upbringing informed how they lived and raised their children. For example, Joy was hypervigilant about overcoming generational trauma to ensure that it ended with her. While she stressed the importance of her children understanding her roots, it was more important that they received her story as strength to carry them forward, as opposed to weaknesses that would hold them back. Similarly, LaShonda, raised by a single mother, desired to be more present in her daughters' lives, particularly in the

ways her mother wanted to but was unable to. This study amplifies Abudullah's (2012) findings that Black mothers are intentional about passing down a tradition of resistance to prevent the same trauma from affecting future generations.

Overall, participants emphasized the role of their "village" of family, friends, and community members in contributing to positive racial identity development. Building support systems for themselves within their institutions and outside for their families was a painstaking process, and participants relied on support from relatives, parents, friends, and cultural affinity groups (Chambers, 2011; Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017; Mabokela & Green, 2001; West, 2019). Participants contended that their villages delivered them to where they are today and continue to sustain them and their children, especially in the academy, where Black women are significantly underrepresented.

The Use of Photo-Elicitation

Photo-elicitation was utilized to explore how Black women understand the experience of Black academic motherhood. Even though participants could generate new photographs, all chose to submit existing photographs for the study except for two screenshots and two stock images. They found the process of selecting photographs to be a meditative, joyful, and healing exercise. Participants also reported that using existing photos resulted in deeper self-reflection on past experiences that shaped their careers and family life in ways they had not previously considered. Similarly, the interviews, combined with the photographs, captured the span of their children's lives, allowing participants to be contemplative of how far they had come despite the obstacles they faced over their careers.

The photographs in this study offer visualizations of academic motherhood, Black motherhood, and Black academic motherhood to make it easier to recognize each experience on

its own and begin to conceptualize a reality that includes all three. Moreover, participants' photographs further complicate race-neutral accounts of academic motherhood with visualizations that bring their thoughts and feelings to life, thereby making their words harder to ignore. For example, Bridget and LaShonda provided pictures and commentary on Black hair care. Even though helping children understand how to care for their hair seems like a common motherhood experience, Black hair care is complicated by its connection to racial identity development, pride, and self-esteem. In addition to locating and affording hair products, developing the skills to style their children's hair, or finding beauticians that can, Black mothers must also teach their children to love their hair in a society shaped by Eurocentric beauty standards. At first glance, their photos might resonate with everyday motherhood experiences, but more thoughtful meaning-making can occur when coupled with their words. Together with words, it becomes clear that despite the monetary and emotional investment in their children's hair, they still have to prepare their children to show up in white spaces and hope that they are proud of their hair and not targeted for it. In this and many other instances throughout the study, photo-elicitation was essential to "uncover, unpack, and come to understand social and cultural complexity" (Kelly & Koretegast, 2018, p.14).

Findings from this study were in harmony with literature on the benefit of visual participatory research methods, specifically, photo-elicitation, which offers multiple modes of meaning-making for participants and observers (Clark-IbaNez, 2007; Harper, 2002; Keats, 2009). Additionally, the photographs aided rapport-building between me and the participants, which resulted in higher levels of comfortability and increased opportunities for co-creating knowledge. To that end, allowing participants to view and discuss each other's photographs

honored womanist ways of knowing that call for bringing Black women together for communing, knowledge sharing, and creating.

Taylor (1998) recommends that research that intends to foreground the perspectives and experiences of Black women calls for methodologic frameworks that can advance understanding of their lives. More than words, participants' photographs evoke feelings that inspire curiosities about what motherhood looks like for academic mothers from other races and ethnicities.

Implications for Practice

This study has implications for practice for institutions that seek to retain and recruit Black faculty women with or without children. It is essential to evaluate what provisions are in place to sustain Black women beyond what they have to create and support, particularly at predominantly white institutions. Participants in this study expressed the challenges of building community at their institutions, and ultimately, they were able to connect with other Black faculty.

While professional organizations within an institution may be intended to serve and support Black faculty, they are often supported by member-generated resources. Suppose institutions are genuinely interested in retaining and recruiting Black faculty women. In that case, they should consider investing more resources into support systems so they are not left to manage "chilly" institutional climates independently. Institutional interest and designated resources for organizations developed by Black women to support Black women could make a significant impact. While institutions must take responsibility for their role in attracting and sustaining Black women, it is also vital that support existing and emerging initiatives.

Although there are often institution-wide efforts to build community among Black faculty and staff, these efforts often fall short at the department level when faculty, like Melody,

continue to be the only tenured Black faculty year after year. In contrast to initiatives like Black Faculty and Staff welcome receptions—which can feel empty and disingenuous—Melody's reality makes it difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Findings from the study also have implications for Black academic mothers pursuing tenure-track appointments at research-intensive institutions, especially at predominantly white institutions. While these women constantly adjust to the institutional climate, they raise Black children in America, which requires additional time, attention, and resources to ensure their children's mental health and safety. Participants had varied experiences across their professional careers depending on the institution, department chair, and even the region of their country. However, it was difficult for participants to know what they needed to succeed in their careers or raise their families, but through trial and error, they figured it out. This study offers insights into the experiences of Black mothers in the academy and how their experiences are shaped by race. With each experience, participants developed a better understanding of what they needed to survive and thrive.

Likewise, it is necessary to examine the nuance of mechanisms intended to support academic mothers, to develop an understanding of the needs of Black academic mothers and how they may be different than academic mothers broadly. For example, an institution might create opportunities for meaningful dialogue to build knowledge on Black family systems to help determine what supports could be critical to sustaining them.

In many cases, participants determined that the benefits of the academy to their children and families far outweigh the sacrifice. Furthermore, participants were comforted with asking for what they needed unapologetically. For Black mothers seeking to join the ranks at research-

intensive universities, this study provides insights into what it means to be someone who looks like them and gives credence to possibilities in both the written word and photographs.

To that end, for Black academic mothers in the academy, findings in this study may let them feel seen in the academy and know they are not alone despite how it feels. Participants remarked that being able to talk about their photographs and experiences with other Black academic mothers in the focus group was healing and restorative. They agreed that beyond the job security of tenure, a community of Black women who were friends and colleagues sustained them in their careers. In the same way, findings from this study may assuage some of the anxiety and second-guessing that Black women experience from questioning the validity of their experiences against the all-white backdrop of predominantly white institutions. They might find solace in the testimony of real women who represent a lived reality that is not often recognized or discussed by anyone other than those who live it.

For scholars who seek to advance academic motherhood literature, it is not enough to recommend research on motherhood experiences for women of color. While it can be challenging to develop a diverse pool, Black women and women of color should be more than a recommendation for future research. Scholars must consider the differential experiences of those whose identities differ from their own. It is necessary that academic motherhood literature not become a catch-all for non-distinct motherhood experiences in the academy resulting in missed opportunities for advocacy and change.

Finally, the findings from this study revealed that conventional ways of knowing do not always account for the range of experiences in academia in meaningful ways. This study used photo-elicitation to create deeper meaning to raise awareness and better understand participants' lived experiences. Visual research methods can be powerful and transformative, lending new

perspectives to complex issues and expanding the possibilities of words that might otherwise fall on deaf ears.

Recommendations for Further Research

Although this study contributes to a gap in academic motherhood literature that does not account for the distinct experiences of Black academic mothers, there are several limitations to consider. First, identifying participants who met the criteria for this study resulted in a small sample size, and the experiences of this small group of Black may not resonate with all Black mothers or even Black women. Based on the disproportionate number of Black women in non-tenure-track positions, future research could expand the sample size by including adjunct and other non-tenure-track appointments. Additionally, including different institution times might increase the number of eligible participants.

Second, future research might examine outcomes for the children of Black academic mothers raised with a heightened sense of purpose and responsibility to culture and community. All the participant's children were engaged in activism and/or philanthropy-oriented activities to raise their awareness of Black culture, history, and the associated struggles. While participants sought to strike a balance between critical consciousness and joy, they struggled to determine how much was too much and if their efforts would overwhelm their children.

In stark contrast, white children may be raised with an awareness of the history of race and racism in the US, but how they engage in related acts of activism or philanthropy remains optional. On the other hand, Black children are raised to navigate the complexities of their history and identity as whites have defined it. They must contend with frequent reminders of how far Blacks have come as people juxtaposed against how much more needs to be done to maintain advances for themselves and future generations.

Third, I gave participants broad parameters, giving them the flexibility to take new pictures or use existing photos. Due to the need for the research restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which required that interviews be conducted via Zoom, it was necessary to offer more means for submitting photos. While having several options benefited the study overall, existing photos resulted in more conversations about past experiences compared to new pictures and stock images. Future research might encourage participants to take new pictures to examine day-to-today realities.

Finally, over the past three years, more research has emerged about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic mothers; while participants in this study did not have specific challenges, research suggests that others have. Future studies might investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black academic mothers as a primary research inquiry.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

My study was guided by the scholarship of Black women and Black mothers like bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Alice Walker, whose life work was to uplift Black women and make way for their stories to be told when no way existed. There was depth and power in the photos that reflected victory despite the conditions of the text. Most importantly, these authors did it for Black women to see and connect with the experiences of other Black women and know that is possible when the prospects appear dim. The spirit and energy of Black women to keep moving forward with the weight of the world on their shoulders is a testament to their resilience, strength, and power.

Throughout the study, I felt an overwhelming sense of compassion from the women for me and my research and *for me as my research*. They were kind to take extra time to ask about my experiences as a Black mother in the academy. They cheered me on, invited me to join Black

women's professional groups, and encouraged me to submit proposals to conferences that would extend the reach of this research. I was overcome with emotion when reading through the transcripts, and there were several times that I had to take a break. I felt the enormous pressure on the participants to raise their Black children to effectively maneuver through the same obstacles many of them continued to face daily. Each of them had achieved notable success in their fields, and I thought how much more difficult it had been for them as Black women and primary caretakers of their children. Between the four women, they had endured countless encounters with racism, bias, and discrimination, yet they never betrayed a sense of defeat. They didn't make it look easy; instead, they offered honesty, encouragement, and hope in ways that will prepare, inspire, and sustain other Black women. The depth of their words and photographs gave light and life to what it means to be a Black academic mother, unapologetically. Their stories resonated with me as my primary lifelines in my profession and academic life have been Black women and mothers. Storytelling is a vital part of an ongoing conversation, as is the freedom it offers in return.

In conclusion, using photo-elicitation, I guided participants through conversations about their academic motherhood experiences that evoked more than words. Findings from this study provided insights into how Black women understand academic motherhood while contributing to gaps in academic motherhood literature. These findings demonstrated the need to move away from color-blind or race-neutral accounts of academic motherhood and toward a scholarship that honors the diversity of motherhood experiences that shape understanding. I hope this study's epistemological grounding and methodology provided an opportunity to center Black mothers' experiences in the academy and challenge dominant narratives of motherhood in academia.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Solicitation Letter to Survey Respondents

Dear Participant:

My name is Lauren Gaines McKenzie, a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University in the Department of Education Administration. I am seeking your assistance as a Black faculty mother in my dissertation study titled, *More Than Words:* A Photo-Elicitation Study Exploring Black Motherhood in Academia.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to better understand how Black women understand academic motherhood. Participation in this study will involve your commitment to participate in two audio-recorded interviews, and one audio-recorded group dialogue, and taking photographs on your own time.

Photo elicitation is a participatory photographic research method. It involves the participants of a study collating existing and/or taking mew photographs that represent their individual perspectives and lived experiences. These photographs will be discussed between the researcher and the participant, and later shared back with other study participants.

Participation will require you to meet three times with the researcher via Zoom, and include the following:

Individual and Group Interviews (two groups of five study participants)

- The first two interviews will run for () and will involve sharing back and discussion of the participants photographs with the researcher.

- The third and final interview will involve sharing back of photographs with other study participants, followed by a group discussion.

Reflection
After participants have completed all three interviews, they will receive a question to facilitate personal written reflection on their experience as Black academic mothers.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call (248) 842-0559 or send an email to gainesla@msu.edu. This study has received approval through the MSU IRB Process.

Lauren Gaines McKenzie
Primary Investigator

Marilyn Amey, Ph.D
Faculty Advisor

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to better understand how Black women understand academic motherhood. Participation in this study will involve your commitment to participate in two audio-recorded interviews, and one audio-recorded group dialogue, and taking photographs on your own time.

If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer questions in two thirty – ninety minute, audio-recorded interviews and one group interview, about my experiences with academic motherhood as a Black woman. Additionally, you will be asked to complete a written guided reflection after the researcher has finished interviewing participants. You understand that you must submit the reflection to Lauren Gaines McKenzie within her designated period as part of this study. You may end an interview at any point and may decline to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering. You may also feel free to take a break during any portion of the three interviews.

No major risks are anticipated. You acknowledge that if you do experience levels of discomfort emotionally or mentally, that you will be able to follow up with support resources provided by the researcher or those you have identified on my own.

No individually identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. You will self-select an identifying pseudonym that will be used on all written and verbal communication. All information obtained will be treated confidentially.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. You understand that you are agreeing by your signature on this form to take part in this research project, including video and audio-recorded interviews, and understand that you will receive a signed copy of this consent form for your records.

I,_____, agree to participate in a research study titled "*More Than Words: A Photo-Elicitation Study Exploring Black Motherhood in Academia"* conducted by Lauren Gaines McKenzie, Primary Investigator from the Department of Educational Administration at Michigan State University under the direction of Dr. Marilyn Amey, Advisor and Professor, Department of Educational Administration, Michigan State University. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time without any risk to myself. If this occurs, I am free to choose between destroying my contributions to the study or releasing them for use without my participation.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Telephone: _____
Email: _____

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

APPENDIX C

Photo Consent Form

This form refers to photographs that you supplied to Lauren Gaines McKenzie as a part of the study, *More Than Words:* A Photo-Elicitation Study Exploring Black Motherhood in Academia, in which you have participated. All photographs will be securely stored by the researcher. As discussed with you, photographs will be shared with other study participants in a group interview to guide discussion and analysis of themes. The researcher would also like to use some photographs (in electronic or print form), in reports, presentations, publications and exhibitions arising from the project. Please provide consent by signing below to indicate whether you give your permission to use your photographs in this project. The researcher will not use any photographs without your permission.

Participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time without any risk to yourself. If this occurs, you are free to choose between destroying your contributions to the study or releasing them for use without your participation. Your signature below indicates that you understand the above stated purpose of the project, the agenda and your right to withdraw from participation.

I _____ give my consent for these photographs to be reproduced for educational and/or noncommercial purposes, in reports, presentations, publications, websites and exhibitions connected to the Living Resemblances project. I understand that real names will NOT be used with the photographs.

Signed_____date_____

APPENDIX D

Email to Confirmed Participants

Dear Participant,
Thank you for returning your consent forms and agreeing to be involved in my study *More Than Words:* A Photo-Elicitation Study Exploring Black Motherhood in Academia. I am looking forward to meeting you on () at (). We will be meeting over Zoom and you can use the link below to join at your designated meeting time. As a reminder, the current study involves the participants collating existing and/or taking new photographs that represent their individual perspectives and lived experiences. These photographs will be discussed first, between you and I, and later shared back with other study participants.

For our first interview, I would like you to bring five photographs that are representative of your understanding and experiences as an **academic mother**. For each of the five photographs, please write a brief caption/description (no more than 40 words) making a connection between the photograph and the prompt.

Please see the instructions for collecting photographs for the study. The same instructions apply for all photographs collected throughout the study.

1. Upon completion of the consent form, participants will be prompted to capture between five photographs for the first two interviews, and one photograph for the final group interview. Photographs may be taken using mobile phones, digital cameras or disposable cameras. Participants may choose to use existing photographs as well.

2. Once the photographs have been taken participants will write brief descriptions for each of the five photographs, not to exceed 40 words. Participants will receive specific directions from the researcher prior to each interview.

3. Participants will participate in an interview for each set of photographs for a total of three interviews.

4. Participants are responsible for securing consent of anyone in their photographs. Additional consent forms will be provided by the researcher if they are needed by participants. Please do not take any photos of people without their explicit consent, do not take inappropriate photos for example nudity, and do not put yourself at risk to capture a photo.

Note: All photos must be in a format that can be shared digitally in order to be used in the project.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I look forward to meeting with you soon!

APPENDIX E

Photo-Elicitation Protocol 1

Interview 1

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I expect the interview to take about 60 minutes. Just to refresh your memory, the purpose of this study is to better understand how Black women understand academic motherhood. Are you good with that? OK, for our first interview, I asked you to bring a photograph that captures your experience as an academic mother. Today, we will have an open-ended discussion about your photograph and then discuss it within the context of some key themes in academic motherhood literature that I will share with you.

As a reminder I will be audio recording the session. The recording will be used by me alone to analyze the contents of our discussion. I will do my best to maintain confidentiality of all participants and to maintain security of the recording after today. Do you have any questions before we get started?

- First, tell me about the photograph you selected for today, specifically how does it represent your understanding and experience of academic motherhood?
- What are some of the critical features that characterize your experiences as an academic mother?
- Do you have any knowledge of academic motherhood literature?
- I would like to share some of the key themes and ideas from academic motherhood literature,
    - According to research on academic motherhood experiences, women who are mothers experience structural and systemic disadvantages including unfair and/or discriminator tenure and promotion processes, lack of flexibility with regard to child care responsibilities, untenable expectations for productivity, taking on more work in the academy and at home
        - Can you talk a little about your experiences with regard to these ideas (e.g., how you are experiencing the tenure and promotion process, managing home/family duties and work responsibility, etc.)?
        - Does it bring anything up for you?

For our next interview, I would like you to bring five photographs that are representative of your understanding and experiences as Black mother or your idea of **Black motherhood**.
For each of the five photographs, please write a brief caption/description (no more than 40 words) making a connection between the photograph and the prompt.

APPENDIX F

Photo-Elicitation Protocol 2

Interview 2
Thank you for taking the time to meet with me again. I expect the interview to take about 60 minutes. Just to refresh your memory, the purpose of this study is to explore how Black women understand academic motherhood. Are you good with that? OK, for our second interview, I asked you to bring a photograph that is representative of your understanding and experiences as Black mother or your idea of Black motherhood. Today, we will have a semi-structured discussion of your photograph and then discuss it within the context of some key themes in Black motherhood literature that I will share with you.

As a reminder I will be audio recording the session. The recording will be used by me alone to analyze the contents of our discussion. I will do my best to maintain confidentiality of all participants and to maintain security of the recording after today. Do you have any questions before we get started?

- First, tell me about your thought process for selecting this photograph, compared to the academic motherhood photograph from our first interview.
    - What if anything did you approach differently when taking this photograph compared to the first?
    - How would you characterize what the two photographs mean to you or convey about being an academic mother?
- Now, tell me about the photograph you've selected for today, specifically how does it capture your ideas about Black motherhood?
    - How do you think race shapes your motherhood experiences?
- Here's what some of the literature says are key themes in Black motherhood, responsibilities to family and community, strong Black mother myth, putting family ahead of self, challenges raising Black children in post-colonial US.
    - How do you respond?
    - Does any of that resonate with your experience as a Black mother?
    - Did anything come up for you that was not mentioned?

Our final interview will be a group discussion with other participants that I have been meeting with for the study. Before we meet again, I would like you to send me five final photographs that are representative of your understanding and experiences of **Black *academic* motherhood**. For each of the five photographs, please write a brief caption/description (no more than 40 words) making a connection between the photograph and the prompt.

I will consolidate all of the participants' photographs into a digital book that will share with you before we meet as a group. **Please review the digital photobook in advance of the focus group.**

APPENDIX G

Group Photo-Elicitation Interview Protocol

Thank you all for joining me for a group discussion. I expect the interview to take about 70 minutes. Just to refresh your memory, the purpose of this study is to better understand how Black women understand academic motherhood. Today we will be taking time to share your final photograph that represents your understanding and experiences of Black motherhood in the academy. We will also discuss your thoughts about the digital photobook I compiled. Finally, we will be discussing themes from the photographs and your collective experiences as Black academic mothers.

As a reminder, I will be audio recording the session. The recording will be used by me alone to analyze the contents of our discussion. I will do my best to maintain confidentiality of all participants and to maintain security of the recording after today. In addition to confidentiality from the researchers, everything that is discussed during our session today is to remain confidential among the participants as well. Before we get started, are there any questions?

- We will begin with introductions. Please share your name, position, institution, and tell us about your final photograph.
- When listening to the other women, did anything resonate with you based on what they shared?
- Now, we will spend some time discussing the photographs of others that you selected from the book. Please tell us about why you chose the photograph. We will give the photographer a chance to respond once you are done.
    - Photographer, how do you respond?
- Looking back, what are some distinguishing characteristics that make Black academic motherhood stand out when compared with academic motherhood? Black motherhood?
    - What themes stand out in the photographs? In our conversation?
- How do these photographs--yours or others--help you in shaping your understanding of academic motherhood as a Black woman?
    - What will you take away from this experience?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. The final a short reflection that will be guided by a question that you will receive via email in the next 24 hours. Please take a moment to complete it while our conversation is still fresh in your mind. I appreciate your support of my research and I look forward to reading your reflections.

APPENDIX H

Digital Photobook

The digital photobook of participant photographs that were selected to be included in the study, and shared with participants prior to the focus group can be viewed here via Canva.

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