Because of her, I am, I want, and I will be: An Exploratory Investigation of Black Mother-daughter Relationships across the Lifecourse

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Abstract

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The Black family remains a poorly studied and understudied entity within scientific research. Notably, the roles of Black mothers and processes of Black mother-daughter relationships have not been given adequate scholarly attention. This study aimed to investigate the role and function of Black Mother-Daughter relationships in gendered racial socialization. Namely, this study focused on gendered race-based message transmission surrounding notions of Black womanhood, mental well-being, and hope and healing. This research study included three research questions: 1) How do Black mothers and daughters describe and understand their mother-daughter relationship?, 2) How does the Black Mother-Daughter relationship change over time?, and 3) How do Black daughters perceive their mother's influence on the development of their general mental health and self-esteem?

This study used a qualitative inquiry that employed the Rigorous and Accelerated Data Reduction Analytic (RAdaR) technique to uncover the significant aspects of Black women's gendered socialization in the family unit as well as the process by which messages of hope and healing are communicated. 18 Black mothers ($N = 18$) were interviewed regarding their experiences as Black mothers and daughters, including gendered racial socialization and mental health promotion within the family unit with a focus on transgenerational communication and gendered race-based messaging. True to qualitative inquiry, this study did not anticipate any specific findings. However, the goal of the study was to center Black women's familial

experiences as related to their identity in hopes of informing future research, clinical practice, and policy. An analysis of 18 semi-structured interviews with Black mothers of Black daughters illustrated the participants' experiences as Black women and girls within the family system particularly related to experiences of motherhood and daughterhood. The data analysis revealed eight prominent themes related to Black women and girls' gendered racial experiences related to the mother-daughter matrix: Yellow-Mothering, Gendered Racial Socialization, Grandmothering, Black matrescence, Family Environment, Gendered Racial Identity, Other Mothers and Auntie-ism, and Custody of the Inner Black Girl. Implications of the findings, study limitations, and future research recommendations are discussed.

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction…….....12

1.1 Unpacking Blackness……12

1.2 The Black Family……..….13

1.3 Black Mothers and Daughters……....14

1.4 Race Socialization……..14

1.5 Futurism: Hope and Healing…….……..15

1.6 The Present Study……...16

Chapter II: Review of the Literature……...…….18

2.1 Overview of the Literature ……18

2.2 Historical Context of the Black Family Structure……..18

2.3 The State of Black Girls and Women in the 21st Century…….…22

2.4 Race Socialization…….....24

2.5 Black Women's Gendered Racial Experiences……..25

2.6 Black Mothers and Daughters……....39

2.7 The Family Life Cycle Model……42

2.8 The Present Study……...43

Chapter III: Methodology……..……48

3.1 Overview…….48

3.2 Participants……..49

3.3 Procedures……...51

3.4 Instruments…….….51

3.4.1 Demographic Questionnaire…….…...…....50

3.6 Consent

Form…….……..…51

3.6.1 Interview Protocol……..……..……..…51

3.7 Safety Measures……..…….52

3.8 Data Analysis……..…….53

3.8.1 Research Team Positionality…….……...….53

3.8.2 Analytic Procedures…….....….54

3.8.2.1 RaDar Technique……...…56

Chapter IV Results: ……59

4.1 Participants and Interview Process…….…….59

4.2 Introduction of Themes……..……..61

4.3 Black Matrescence…….……..62

4.4 Grandmothering…….……..74

4.5 Custody of the Inner Black Girl…….……...…..…….……76

4.6 Yellow Mothering…….……..…78

4.7 Auntie-ism and Sister Mothers……...….80

4.8 Gendered Racial Socialization……..……...83

4.9 Gendered Racial Identity…….……93

4.10 Family Environment……..…...….95

Chapter V: Discussion ……103

5.1 Research Question 1:How do Black Mothers and Daughters Describe their Mother-Daughter Relationship? ……103

5.1.1 Distal Factors ……...…..…105

5.1.2 Proximal Factors ……..……..……109

5.2 Research Question 2: How does the Black Mother-Daughter Relationship change over time? ……..……..……....119

5.2.1 Dual Process of Relational Development for Black Mothers and Daughters…….……..……..……119

5.3 Research Question 3:How do Black daughters perceive their mothers' influence on the development of their general mental health and self-esteem…….....127

5.4 Implications for Clinical Practice…….……..…130

5.5 Implications for Policy……..….132

5.6 Limitations of the Study……134

5.7 Future Directions for Research…….136

5.8 Conclusions…….……..138

References……..141

Appendices……...……..181

Appendix I: Eligibility and Demographic Questionnaire……...…….183

Appendix II: Informed Consent……..……186

Appendix IV: Interview Protocol……..……..191

Appendix V: List of Resources for Black Women……...……...194

List of Tables ……...196

1 Summary of Participant Demographics……...……...196

2 Themes and Subthemes ……...……...199

List of Figures……...…….…...201

1 Proximal and Distal Factors…….……...201

2 Black Mother-Daughter Developmental Model……...……...202

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Chapter I: Introduction

"The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people"

- Yaa Gyasi, Ghanaian-American Author.

African Americans, including those who identify as a "Black", compose 12.4% of the United States population (United States Census Bureau, 2021). The Black American identity, and by proxy, the Black American family, remains a complex establishment at the crux of anti-Black racism, traditional Afrocentric values, and liberation and resilience. The institution of the Black family is one of the most misunderstood, misrepresented, and misstudied entities in scientific and social spheres alike (Sue et al., 2022). It is important to contextualize the Black familial experience within the world's anti-Black sociopolitical context. While this positioning of Black families includes an acknowledgment of generational and intergenerational trauma transmission, one must also recognize the possibility for the transmission of hope, agency, and efficacy that must be present to persist and resist despite critical awareness and marked experiences of oppression.

Unpacking Blackness

Historical explorations of Black identity and culture have inextricably linked the existence of this population to experiences of racism and oppression (Sue et al., 2022; Suslovic & Lett, 2023). That is, without trauma, pain, and suffering, Black American people would cease to exist (Suslovic & Lett, 2023). While partially true– racism has undoubtedly shaped the experiences, attitudes, and psychological plight of Black folks both within and outside of the United States, the scientific query has barely scratched the surface of the Black physical, psychological, or spiritual existence. *Who are Black people? What is the meaning of Blackness and the impact of occupying this identity within an explicitly anti-Black sociopolitical context?*

Where and how can liberation be achieved for a historically and presently oppressed and marginalized group of people?

Despite attempts to understand Blackness as a monolithic identity, the complexity of the African diaspora makes for a fragmented and multi-faceted cultural heritage and corresponding experience. To navigate the world as a Black being is dependent upon numerous identity-related and contextual factors, including gender and gender expression, socioeconomic status, sexuality, religiosity, phenotypic presentation, and geography, among other things. Dr. Jemimi Pierre explores the intricacies of Blackness in her seminal work, *The Predicament of Blackness* (2012), which investigates the global hatred and fear of all things Black.

The Black Family

Research regarding the Black family structure, including composition, relational dynamics, and communication (i.e., socialization), has come a long way since the controversial 1965 Moynihan report, which degraded the Black family and reduced the entity to "poor negroes" and "ghetto culture." In 1990, Taylor and colleagues compiled a review of scientific literature focused on Black families. These findings resulted in frequent topical areas of exploration, including Black children and adolescents, Black men, female-headed households, and marital concerns. Black women's well-being, mother-daughter relationships, and personal and cultural strengths, however, were left unexplored in this review.

The Black family structure has been significantly marked by slavery, anti-Black political efforts, and mass incarceration. Black family households are more likely to resemble a matriarchal structure, meaning, they are more likely to be headed by women (Glynn, 2019). Additionally, Black women are more likely to make more money than their partners when cohabitating and raising children (Glynn, 2019; Hunter, 2001). Thus, the experiences of Black

women are markedly different compared to that of other racial ethnic groups. As such, the Black family structure is markedly different from that of their White counterparts and deserves critical attention and exploration.

Black Mothers and Daughters and Trauma Transmission

Intergenerational trauma describes the phenomenon of collective trauma transmission within the family system (Gump, 2010). This phenomenon has been explored specifically within the context of Black families whose histories often include both collective (e.g., chattel slavery) and idiosyncratic traumas (e.g., familial sexual abuse) (Graff, 2014; Gump, 2010).

Limited research exists surrounding the Black mother-daughter relationship. Given the complexity of the Black familial experience in the United States, special attention must be given to highlighting the nuanced psychological and psychosocial plights of Black mothers and daughters. Additionally, given the history of Black women and families in the United States, we must acknowledge the role of intergenerational trauma in the nature and functioning of Black mother-daughter relationships. Research suggests that Black mothers are crucial in the development of their daughter's gendered racial identity (Leath et al., 2021) and self-esteem (Everet alt et al., 2016).

Race Socialization

Race-based messaging, or race socialization, has been documented extensively within the Black family. Race socialization within Black families may include messages transmitted from parent to child about how to interact with others within their racial-ethnic group, how to interact with those outside of their racial-ethnic group, and how to cope with the positionality of their oppressed racial-ethnic group (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Race socialization may be an implicit or explicit process; while some parents choose to have dedicated talks and lessons surrounding race

relations and racial identity, others communicate race-based messages to their children through modeling, correctional behavior, and even silence (Hughes et al., 2006).

Gendered Racial Socialization

Less documented is how these messages vary by gender of the parent and child. However, a handful of studies exist regarding the role of *gendered racial socialization,* or messages at the intersection of racial and gender identities, for Black girls and women. Notably, Thomas and King (2007) found that Black mothers and daughters do engage in gender-specific messaging that may be correlated to the self-esteem of Black daughters. In this study, messages which embraced mainstream or Eurocentric standards were correlated with lower self-esteem, whereas prideful, Afrocentric racial messages were associated with higher levels of self-esteem. Still, comprehensive analyses of how and when these messages are transmitted, as well as the content of these messages, largely remain unexplored.

Wholly understanding the Black family, and Black women and girls' experiences within those families is a continuous effort. However, this study attempted to thoroughly examine a small fragment of these experiences by investigating gendered race socialization processes between mothers and daughters across the lifespan. More specifically, this study analyzes the notion of intergenerational gendered race based messaging between Black mothers and daughters within the United States.

Futurism: Radical Hope and Healing

Afrofuturism describes the collective envisioning of possibilities beyond an oppressive social environment, particularly pertaining to Black people (Holbert et al., 2020). Historically, afrofuturism has been used to project aesthetics of Black freedom and exercise radical imagination through visual arts and literature (Winchester, 2018). Facets of afrofuturism have

also been conceptualized and studied through contemporary psychological science; in 2020, Mosley and colleagues introduced the Radical Hope Framework. According to the framework, *Radical Hope* is defined as "the commitment and courage to achieve a vision involving new forms of collective flourishing." This definition includes cognitive, behavioral, and emotional responses. Cognitively, radical hope is a belief that one can work in harmony with others to achieve a shared goal. Behaviorally, radical hope functions as a compulsion or an urge; those with radical hope feel compelled to act upon injustice and achieve on behalf of their communities. Lastly, hope is an emotion-- a desire or aspiration to experience something different (Mosley et al., 2020).

Relevant to Black mothers and daughters, radical hope may be one of the many messages used to heal and buffer against trauma and gendered racism. Consistent with Black feminist theory and Afrofuturism, Black women have historically used their collective imaginations to envision better futures for themselves and generations to come (Upton & Joseph, 2021). Leath and colleagues (2024) found that Black mothers do engage in radical healing and radical hope when mothering their children. Specifically, Black mothers view the hopes for their children as an act of social justice (Leath et al., 2024). The current study provides the first of many inquiries into the role of hope and futurism in Black women's gendered racial socialization as it relates to the Black mother-daughter dyad specifically.

The Present Study

Currently, there are few studies in the literature surrounding the nature of Black mother-daughter relationships and their influence on psychological outcomes (Everet et al., 2016; Leath et al., 2021). However, little research has looked at the role of the mother-daughter relationship in gendered racial socialization throughout the life course and across generations (Everet et al.,

2016). Staggering mental health inequities persist among Black women, including increases in mental illness, shortened lifespans (De Ramos et al., 2022), and variability in help-seeking behavior (Kirby, 2019; Walton et al., 2021). Attachment theory and related research point to the significance of the mother-child matrix in the psychosocial development of children, including their mental, physical, and emotional health (Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Laible & Thompson, 2000). Thus, it is imperative that Black women's mental health be holistically studied at the intersection of gendered racial relational dynamics and family systems.

Given the pervasive nature of health inequities, the state of Black women's mental health rests in the hands of equity-facing research breeding structural change. The intention of this investigation was to continue digging into the nuances of Black humanity by exploring the family unit, with a particular focus on Black mother-daughter dyadic relationships. Using qualitative methods, the research reveals stories, narratives, and truths, unique to the individuals in this study with the potential to generalize aspects of their idiosyncratic experiences to others occupying similar identities. 18 Black mothers ($N = 18$) were interviewed regarding their experiences as Black mothers and daughters, including gendered racial socialization and mental health promotion within the family unit with a focus on transgenerational communication and gendered race-based messaging. Finally, and most importantly, this research sought to restore agency and provide a voice to Black women in a world characterized by the physical, cognitive, emotional, and political brutalization of the Black woman's psyche. May this study serve as a vehicle for liberation and mobility in the fight for psychological justice and equity for Black women and girls worldwide.

Chapter II: Literature Review

I. Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to review the Black family structure and the defining dynamics within it, specifically mother-daughter relationships and the external sociopolitical, interpersonal, and interpersonal forces that have historically and presently influenced them. A large focus of this literature review is examining Black women and girls as gendered racial beings as they develop and exist within and outside of the Black family.

II. Contextualizing The Black Family Structure

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote the infamous *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action,* a publication on poverty in the Black American family that quickly garnered national attention from scholars, politicians, and the public alike (Greenbaum, 2015; Patterson, 2010). At the time, the report, also known as the "Moynihan Report," became one of the most well-known comprehensive artifacts from the latter 20th century detailing the Black family and Black society's social, moral, cultural, and economic state (Greenbaum, 2015). Essentially, this report claimed that single motherhood and "ghetto culture" were the biggest detriments to the Black family and economic growth within Black American populations.

The Moynihan report was well-received by conservative policy-makers but criticized within traditionally leftist academic and social circles. First, the report's infrequent and insufficient understanding of the influence of sociohistorical and political contexts on the state of Black families drew disdain and strong condemnation. Second, the report's lack of acknowledgment of structural oppression, sexism, and racism in the continued plight of Black families also infuriated scholars, feminists, and civil rights activists. Moynihan's report was regarded as hyper-masculine and heavily influenced by patriarchal thinking. His attempts to

position Black single mothers as the scapegoat for racial, political, and economic inequality contributed to existing stereotypes surrounding Black women, such as the "Welfare Queen" or "Jezebel" (discussed in later sections of this literature review) by suggesting that this population was morally corrupt and held values unaligned with Americanism and social progress (Monahan et al., 2005). While the total impact of the report remains unknown, scholars and activists often acknowledge the report as both inciting the subsequent War on Poverty program that attempted to end social support programs for low-income families (Massey & Sampson, 2009) as well as reigniting the dehumanization and demonization of the Black woman in the larger U.S. society (Almond et al., 2011).

More important than the Moynihan report itself, one can learn a lot from the backlash it received. Scholars in history and sociology began to look critically at the Black household and family to better understand how and why it may differ from other ethnoracial groups within the United States. Most foremost, it became evident that the Black family was forever shaped by the institution of chattel Slavery, which tore apart the fabric of the traditional two-parent family system for Black people living in the United States. Before the abolition of slavery, enslaved African people were unable to marry (Goring, 2005) and children of all ages were often separated from their parents. Thus, the family structure of enslaved African families within the United States has virtually always differed from the nuclear family idealized by Western and American culture.

America's Political History and the Question of Black Humanity

It is important to note that chattel slavery was not so long ago. Slavery in the United States legally ended in 1865 with the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment (Carter, 2006). However, this change in law did not translate into liberating attitudinal changes. Not long after

the abolishment of slavery, the United States entered the Reconstruction Era. Reconstruction lasted from 1865-1877 and can be characterized as a period of drastic national restructuring regarding citizenship, political involvement, education, and land ownership (Gates, 2013). More specifically, the United States Government devised a plan to integrate thousands of newly freed Black Americans into the various American social, political, and economic systems (U.S. Department of the Interior). In addition to the thirteenth amendment, the reconstruction era also saw the introduction of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, which granted citizenship to all U.S.-born individuals and voting rights to all men regardless of race or color.

At the outset, Reconstruction appeared to be a progressive step in the direction towards the complete liberation of formerly enslaved Black Americans. However, the government promised that legal changes would not be properly implemented to allow for equitable integration. For example, U.S. General William T. Sherman's Special Field Order 15, also infamously known as “40 Acres and a Mule,” promised Black families at least forty acres of tillable land alongside an accessible water channel (Gates, 2013). Later on, it was ordered that the government also provide Black households with a mule as well. Unfortunately, this order was immediately overturned following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the inauguration of President Andrew Johnson (Gates, 2013), leaving Black American families without a social or economic foundation for adequate integration as full American citizens. Additionally, Black Codes, policies that limited the economic and social mobility of Black Americans, were passed immediately after the Civil War. Specifically, these policies served to limit formerly enslaved peoples by prohibiting their rights to carry firearms, testify in court, or be unemployed without fines (Edis, 2019).

In 1873, the great "Panic" ensued, leading to economic depression and political unrest. For Black American families just recently gaining freedom, this period was especially devastating. Following the Reconstruction Era, segregation laws were implemented to restrict Black Americans from educational, political, economic, and social opportunities (Barreyre, 2011). During this time, many Black families gained economic benefits through the practice of sharecropping, which indebted Black people to farm owners and physically trapped them to plots of land (Royce, 2010). Due to the insufficient economic opportunities for Black Americans during this time, Black families experienced the need for both partners and even children, at times, to enter the labor force. With both parents working laborious jobs, the Black family typically did not mirror the Westernized model of the family system of the time in which the dominant male figure is tasked with bringing financial income and the woman occupies the home as a homemaker and caretaker (Franklin & James; 2015; Mann, 1989).

Jim Crow Laws were enacted in 1877, which prohibited Black people from accessing equitable resources and receiving fair treatment compared to their White counterparts (Graves, 1989). These laws made it politically acceptable to have "separate but equal" facilities for Black (or people of color) and White Americans; these laws were later upheld by the Supreme Court in 1896 as part of the infamous Plessy v Ferguson case. Additionally, Jim Crow laws saw the continued legalization and entertainment of crimes committed against Black people, such as public lynchings (Louise Wood, 2018).

Despite the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision that eventually led to the end of Jim Crow Laws by 1965, scholars argue that the mental and physical enslavement of Black people continues, particularly through selective law enforcement strategies and mass incarceration (Alexander, 2020). Mass incarceration refers to the disproportionate

criminalization and incarceration of Black people (particularly Black men) compared to other racial-ethnic groups within the United States (Wildeman & Wang, 2017). Statistically, Black men are arrested more often and sentenced more harshly (Traum, 2011) than members of any other racial-ethnic group.

These disparities in incarceration perpetuate dangerous and inaccurate stereotypes while also working to fragment Black families further. Wildeman and Wang (2017) highlight how approximately 1 out of every 3 Black men in America will be incarcerated at some point in their life. The implications for this include nearly half of Black American women having a relative involved in the carceral system (Wildeman & Wang, 2017). The increased incarceration of Black men further means a significant loss in economic, emotional, and parental support for Black women and children. With Black men away from the home and unable to provide economically, Black women are tasked with additional labor and stress, which often leads to significant psychological trauma and other negative mental health outcomes (Elliot & Reid, 2016; Western & Wildeman, 2009). Furthermore, Black children who grow up without their fathers may experience emotional disturbance, such as feelings of rejection and worthlessness due to this loss of attachment (Western & Wildeman, 2009).

Anti-Black social policies and historical events have shaped the Black American family structure. Aside from Black women often being the primary breadwinners (Hunter, 2001), Black families often utilize a multigenerational approach to dwelling and child-rearing (Hunter, 1997).

III. The State of Black Girls and Women in the 21st Century United States

Chattel slavery, Jim Crow Laws, and Black Codes were prominent social policies and institutions in the United States that brutalized, disenfranchised, and marginalized Black Americans (Fremon, 2014). The social structural inequities stemming from these Anti-Black,

racist policies still persist today. For example, in 2016, the median wealth for non-retired Black households 25 years old and older was less than one-tenth that of similarly situated White households (Hanks et al., 2018). Additionally, data trends show that over thirty percent of Black families have zero or below zero accrued wealth (Institute for Policy Studies, 2021). Roughly nine percent of White households are headed by women compared to nearly thirty percent of Black and African American households (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). In 2020, Black women in particular, made only $0.64 for every dollar earned by a non-Hispanic White man due to the gendered racial pay gap (Bleiweis et al., 2021).

Furthermore, physical and mental health disparities persist in Black and Black American populations as well due to systemic oppression and structural racism (Sue et al., 2022). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2018 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), African American and Black adults reported more feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness than White adults. As of 2017, the suicide rate for Black youth has risen faster than that of any other racial-ethnic population (Sheftall et al., 2022).

Black women and girls in America experience unique psychosocial stressors due to their sociodemographic position and the experience of simultaneous gender and race-based oppression (Day, 2002). In recent years, the suicide rate for African American high school girls has increased by 60% (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Studies have also shown that Black women experience higher rates of depression compared to Black men. Black women have also been reported to be 25% more likely to experience PTSD compared to White women (Erving et al., 2021). Despite statistics that show equal and higher rates of mental illness and mental health challenges for Black women, Black women have also been reported to be less likely to seek mental health care due to lack of access to quality care (White et al., 2023) and

medical mistrust (Nelson et al., 2020; Watson & Hunter, 2015). Notably, societally exacerbated cultural factors also play a large role in Black women's mental health. As previously mentioned, Black women are often their homes' financial and child-rearing leaders (Hunter, 2001). The mental fortitude needed to manage these important roles successfully may lead to the need to emotionally compartmentalize for the sake of survival in a society where it is a privilege to bear emotions (Geyton et al., 2022). Thus, Black women's mental health suffers as a result of social and cultural expectations. The following sections will unpack Black women's social and emotional health using socialization and developmental theories of gendered racial identity.

III. Race Socialization

The effects of racism and other forms of oppression on the Black American human mind and body have been well documented in the scientific literature (Pieterse et al., 2012; Rollack & Gordon, 2000; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). We know that exposure to racism, in particular, is correlated with increased stress levels (Harrell, 2006; Peters, 2006), accelerated aging (Carter et al., 2019; Gee et al., 2019), and a variety of other mental health disparities in Black Americans (Jackson et al., 2010; Miranda et al., 2008).

Race socialization describes the process by which children begin to learn about race through messages received by the media, peers, caregivers, and other institutions. Race socialization also encompasses the values, attitudes, and behaviors transmitted to a child concerning their racial group (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Previously, African American and Black race socialization has been studied in the context of identifying and unpacking race-based messages, or communications from parent to child regarding one's racial-ethnic group (Brown & Lesane-Brown, 2006; Neblett et al., 2009).

One of the most significant findings related to race socialization is that the family unit, particularly parental figures, is critical in a Black child's socialization. Hughes and colleagues (2006) found that Black parents engage their children in racial socialization via four primary mechanisms: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism. Essentially, parents teach their children about cultural heritage, raise their awareness surrounding racial discrimination, warn them about harm stemming from other racial groups, and encourage them to develop other facets of their identity (Hughes et al., 2006). Of note, the last mechanism of socialization, egalitarianism, often results in silence about race or the absence of conversations surrounding race and racism. This form of race socialization occurs most frequently in Black families (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Hughes et al., 2006). Additionally, it has been found that mothers play a key role in the socialization of Black girls through socialization processes at the crux of race and gender (Leath et al., 2021). These gendered socialization techniques and processes will be explored further in subsequent sections.

Notably, race socialization may continue into adulthood because humans never end their socialization process. With this in mind, socialization is an ongoing process initiated in childhood that has the ability to shift and change throughout the life course (Hope et al., 2015). While the vast majority of race socialization research focuses on childhood experiences, this dissertation study takes a lifespan perspective on the development of gendered racial identity and gendered racial socialization for Black women and girls.

IV. Gendered Racism, Gendered Racial Identity, and other Gendered Racial Experiences

Despite extant research on racial identity development and formation, scant research exists concerning gendered racial identity and its development among Black girls. The following sections will provide a historical overview of identity-related challenges for Black women and

girls, followed by relevant research concerning gendered racial identity, gendered racism, and other unique gendered racial experiences for this population.

Gendered Racial Identity: Unpacking Slavery's Scars on Black Women's Psyche

The 1851 Women's Rights Convention was unprecedented. It was there, in Akron, Ohio, that the formerly enslaved abolitionist Sojourner Truth would deliver her riveting "*Ain't I a Woman?*" speech. She spoke eloquently, growing more impassioned with every line as she repeatedly asked the audience to confirm her gender (Truth, 2020). A seemingly rhetorical question, Truth was one of the earliest examiners of the intersections of race, class, and gender in American culture; her activism would later serve as support for contemporary intersectionality and standpoint theories (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Mullings, 2005; Smiet, 2020; Wallaschek, 2017). This speech was exceptionally noteworthy as a woman born in slavery spoke in front of hundreds, declaring her humanity. She demanded her presence be known long before the ratification of the thirteenth amendment, which abolished slavery, and certainly before the 19th amendment, which granted voting rights to only some women.

Despite its initial delivery occurring in the mid-19th century, "*Ain't I a woman?*" is a question many Black women pose today (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). The psychological plight of Black Women in the United States is unlike that of any other racial-gender group. Composing roughly 13% of all women in the United States (Catalyst, 2021), Black women have a complex and intricate history in America (Berry & Gross, 2020; Hine & Thompson, 1999). Often lost in the majority-male narratives of Anti-Black racism, oppression, and disenfranchisement, examinations of Black womanhood have been overwhelmingly contained to contemporary compositions and disregarded from much of the scientific literature (Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Harris, 2015; Spates, 2012). Though literature exists concerning the psychological experiences of

Black women, these studies are largely based on Black women's encounters with and abilities to navigate racism, perpetuating the idea that Black women's experiences are inextricably linked to resilience and oppression.

It is important to note that Black women's history in the United States did not begin with British colonialism and slavery. Black women have a long and significant legacy in the Americas dating back to at least the early sixteenth century (Berry & Gross, 2020). There are historical records of Black woman healers and explorers who traveled with the Spanish to the Americas. These women were not enslaved; they were free and contributed largely to political proceedings and economic development (Berry & Gross, 2020). The overemphasis on imperialism and colonization in contemporary American history education is one of the many forms of curriculum violence and narrative erasure present in the American chronicle (Berry & Gross, 2020; Collins, 1998). Trivializing Black womanhood, including both its triumphs and struggles, is an act of social injustice referred to as *Intersectional Invisibility* and has further perpetuated damaging tropes such as the "Strong Black Woman" and exaggerated notions of resilience. (Coles & Pasek, 2020; Nelson et al., 2016).

While Black women's stories in the United States did not begin with slavery, it would be remiss to continue this narrative without mention of this horrible institution. As one of history's most infamously damaging demonstrations of dehumanization and brutality, the mental health effects of chattel slavery can be witnessed today in the Black American community. In 2005, Dr. Joy DeGruy conceptualized the influence of slavery on Black Americans as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), a theory that describes the condition of the Black American psyche, including the development of mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression, as a result of centuries of enslavement (DeGruy, 2005; Strachan, 2019; Sule et al., 2017; Womack, 2016).

Enslaved Blacks endured frequent physical, mental, emotional, and social degradation and torture. DeGruy explains the etiology of various Black American survival strategies are adaptive behaviors that stemmed from the horrors of slavery; she posits that post-traumatic slave syndrome is a condition that manifests as a result of torment both during slavery and subsequent efforts to oppress and marginalize Black people such as Black Codes and Jim Crow laws (DeGruy, 2005; Sule et al., 2017; Womack, 2016).

Additionally, contemporary forms of colonization, such as segregation, Anti-Black government policies, biased media portrayals, and lack of positive and accurate representations of Black women, are theorized contributors to PTSS (Hammond & Davis, 2007; Wallaschek, 2017; Degruy-Leary, 2017; Sule et al., 2017). DeGruy (2005) provides examples of how this trauma may manifest itself in Black lives, including low self-esteem, anger, propensity for violence, and internalized racism or negative racial regard. Similar to the DSM-V diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), PTSS may include similar mood and cognitive symptoms such as hopelessness and depressed mood. These mood and cognitive symptoms are referred to as *vacant self-esteem,* which is posed as a response to society's dehumanization of the Black existence (Womack, 2016; Sule et al., 2017). PTSS is also characterized by perpetual, ubiquitous anger and frustration. Because the Black experience is minimized, marginalized, and overregulated by the larger society, Black people may carry with them emotional unrest in the form of rage (DeGruy, 2005; Sule et al., 2017). Finally, PTSS may be experienced in the form of negative self-concepts due to racist socialization (DeGruy, 2005; Sule et al., 2017; Womack, 2016). Sule and colleagues (2017) explain that many Black Americans internalize the trivialization of their narratives and, in response, minimize their distress, thus mirroring avoidance-like tendencies associated with PTSD. DeGruy highlights white supremacist policies

and practices as contributors to PTSS as well as inaccurate portrayals of Blacks in media (DeGruy, 2005; Womack, 2016).

As demonstrated in the aforementioned paragraph, Black people continue to be clinically and chronically affected by the indecencies of chattel slavery and subsequent anti-Black racism woven into the rudimentary composition of American societal functioning. For Black women, however, slavery brought with it the additional barbarity of sexual violence performed against the female Black body (Feinstein, 2018). According to Fredrickson and Roberts' objectification theory (1997), a woman's existence is often reduced to physicality and sexual functioning; women internalize the beliefs and messages concerning self-image and self-concept using the dominant beliefs of society (Watson et al., 2019). In the case of Black women, specifically, this means the internalized belief that they are to be symbols of impurity (Roberts, 1999) and that their bodies are not theirs to own (Watson et al., 2012).

Furthermore, Black women's body image dissatisfaction has been researched to include the pressure of conforming to White European beauty standards while maintaining cultural authenticity and pride (Watson et al., 2019). According to Awad and colleagues (2015), Black women evaluate their body image using society's preference for lighter skin and straighter hair, the same metrics used to assess a) Black women's slave's utility to reproduce and contribute to the enslaved workforce and b) serve as pleasurable entities for White men (Feinstein, 2018; Neal and Wilson, 1989; Roberts 1999). This research suggests that even 400 years removed from the institution of slavery, Black women are still largely affected by systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal gendered racism and oppression.

Modern Gendered Racial Identity Development: What We Know about Black Girls

As previously mentioned, research on Black women's identity development continues to be underrepresented in scientific literature. Furthermore, while some research exists, the ever-changing sociopolitical and digital landscapes of the 21st century present new challenges to both Black girls' development and research methods for studying it.

Jones and colleagues (2007) found positive racial identity attitudes to protect against race-related stress and negative mental health outcomes. In their study of 118 African American and 144 self-identified Caribbean women, lower depression and self esteem scores were found in women with more positive racial identity attributes (Jones et al., 2007).

Racial identity attitudes also can be studied using the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (Sellers et al., 1997; Sellers et al., 1998; Sellers et al., 2006). This model includes four aspects surrounding a person of color's racial identity: racial salience, racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology. Racial salience is a contextual component of a person's racial identity (Sellers et al., 1998), and refers to the extent to which a person's race is pertinent to their self-concept at a discrete point in time (Sellers et al., 1998; Scottham et al., 2008). Literature suggests that an individual's racial salience may be higher when surrounded by people who do not share their racial or ethnic identity (Douglass et al., 2016; Hurtado et al., 2015). Racial centrality refers to the extent to which a person underscores their racial group membership as a component of their comprehensive self-concept. Racial centrality contrasts with racial salience in that the former is a more fixed factor of one's racial identity (Scottham et al., 2008). Racial regard refers to how a person feels about their racial group membership. These feelings can be either positive or negative and are divided into two subcategories: private regard and public regard (Sellers et al., 1998). Private regard refers to how the individual feels about their racial group membership and how they feel towards members of their racial group overall. Oppositely,

public regard refers to how positively or negatively an individual believes others view their racial group (Sellers et al., 1998; Scottham et al., 2008). Finally, racial ideology comprises the most extensive dimension of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity. Racial ideology refers to a person's guiding philosophy or principle beliefs regarding how members of their racial group should act and comprises four subcategories. The nationalist ideology is characterized by a desire to highlight the uniqueness and specialness of one's racial group; those who endorse this ideology believe that their racial group's experiences are unlike those of any other group. This may be demonstrated through support for race-based organizations (Scottham et al., 2008; Sellers et al., 1998). Parham (1989) also found that ascribing to this ideology may serve as a mechanism of resistance to racial oppression.

As with nationalist ideology, those who endorse the oppressed minority ideology are also critically aware of their racial group's marginalization. However, the oppressed minority ideology emphasizes the sameness between one's experiences in their racial group and those of other oppressed racial minority groups (Sellers et al., 1998). Assimilationist ideology emphasizes the similarities between Black American and mainstream American society (Scottham et al., 2008; Sellers et al., 1998). While Sellers and colleagues (1998) maintain that this ideology does not imply a lack of critical consciousness or awareness, they do suggest that those who adopt the assimilationist ideology may be more likely to support interactions and relationships with the dominant racial group. Lastly, the humanist ideology highlights the similarities among all people regardless of their racial group membership. People who endorse humanist ideology as their primary philosophy are less likely to define themselves and others by group memberships and more likely to emphasize individualistic qualities (Sellers et al., 1998).

Each domain relates to how a person relates to their race or ethnicity, corresponding to their psychological functioning, including their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors within a socially unjust and oppressive society (Sellers et al., 2006). A 2010 study found that both higher public and private racial regard were associated with lower depression in a sample of 379 African American women (Settles et al., 2010), meaning the more positively a Black woman believed her racial group to be perceived personally and publically, the less likely she was to develop clinical depression (Settles et al., 2010). This research supports the above notion that ancestral pride functions as a buffer against adverse health conditions (Jones et al., 2007; Sellers et al., 2006; Settles et al., 2010).

To date, little research has been conducted on the gendered racial identity development of Black girls in particular. While findings may emerge at the intersection of race and gender, "Black Girl Studies" has recently taken off as a separate research agenda (Owens et al., 2017). Williams and Lewis (2021) developed a conceptual framework surrounding Black girls' identity development that consisted of six gendered racial ideologies: assimilation, humanism, defiance, strength, pride, and empowerment. These identified ideologies are somewhat consistent with the aforementioned research on racial identity development but are articulated through a nuanced gendered racial lens concerning Black American girls and women. For example, the gendered racial assimilation ideology, similar to the assimilation ideology conceptualized by Sellers and colleagues (1998) refers to Black girls' desire to conform to Eurocentric views, perspectives, and behaviors (Williams and Lewis, 2021). However, this phase contains gendered racial behaviors such as straightened hair on Black women as a response to internalized racism.

Even more relevant to examining the process of gendered racial socialization within the family unit were the four processes or phases of gendered racial identity for Black girls. These

phases included the Hyperawareness phase, the Reflection phase, the Rejection phase, and the Navigation phase. Similar to other identity development models (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1995), Williams and Lewis (2021) suggest that the process of Black women's identity development begins with a "gendered racial encounter" in which a Black girl observes differential treatment based on her gendered racial identity. From there, a girl becomes hyper-aware of her identity due to her knowledge of how others may perceive her. The reflection and rejection phases of their proposed identity development model consist of unpacking the messages received about their gendered racial identity and deciding what to believe versus what to discard. Finally, in the navigation phase, girls begin to learn how to occupy various spaces while balancing both authenticity and self-protection. At this stage, Black girls realize that they may encounter gendered racism and have built tools to navigate the world in a way to mitigate harm (Williams and Lewis, 2021).

Williams and Lewis' (2021) conceptual model of Black girls' identity development is relevant to this study because it suggests that the tools for navigating Black womanhood are a) learned and b) built over time. As a result, it is possible that facets of identity formulation and integration can be learned from parental figures through the process of gendered racial socialization.

Gendered Racial Socialization

When examining the psychological experiences of Black women, in particular, it is imperative to do so through the critical lenses of Black feminist thought, intersectionality, and womanism. Gendered racial socialization describes how children are socialized on the basis of their intersecting racial and gender identities (Lesane-Brown, 2006). Essentially, the race

socialization messages described above often interact with more traditional gender role messages (McRae & Noumair, 1997).

Mims and Williams (2020) found that Black girls tend to be socialized into their ethnic-racial identities within four settings: families, classrooms, peer groups, and schools. In their study, socialization within the family unit was particularly significant for Black girls' identity development. The authors found that Black girls tended to discuss encounters with racism with their families following the discriminatory event. Additionally, conversations surrounding racial pride were more likely to happen within the family context than the other socialization settings highlighted in the study, suggesting that the family unit is critical for Black girls' gendered racial socialization (Mims and Williams, 2020).

Black girls' gendered racialization is often characterized by the indoctrination into tropes or schemas surrounding Black womanhood, most notably, the *Strong Black Woman*. The Strong Black Woman schema refers to a means to navigate through and resist oppression that frequently means putting others or a greater cause before oneself (Carter & Rossi, 2019). This schema, or way of being, has been linked to various negative mental health outcomes, including low self-compassion (Liao et al., 2020), rates of depression (Nelson et al., 2020), and diminished self-care behaviors for Black women (Jerald et al., 2017). Contrastingly, the Strong Black Woman schema has been lauded for decades and has historically been found to play an imperative and key role in how Black women navigate existing pressures (Allen et al., 2019). For example, past studies have shown that Black women reported that subscription to the *Superwoman schema*, a component of the Strong Black Woman Schema, yielded benefits such as preservation and stress-related health behaviors (Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Additionally, Jones et al. (2021)

suggest that Black collegiate women are aware that the *Strong Black Woman* schema may be perceived negatively yet persists in perceiving strength as a necessity in Black womanhood.

Expansions of what is now recognized as the *Strong Black Woman* are found in examples of *Mammy* and *Jezebel* stereotypes. Described as a maternal figure, the mammy stereotype adheres to implicit biases that Black women are to be nurturing– placing others' needs before their own (Givens & Monahan, 2005 & Carter & Rossi, 2019). Additionally, and in contrast, the Jezebel stereotype builds an expectation of Black women as hypersexual beings with an uncontrollable appetite for sex (Givens & Monahan, 2005; Carter & Rossi, 2019; Warren-Gordon & McMillan, 2022). Regardless of the name, these schema iterations all have two things in common: strength and caregiving (Donovan & West, 2015), which have yet to be fully explored in scientific literature. At the same time, each component of the Strong Black Woman schema produces powerful negative images and false caricatures of the Black American woman, which may contribute to low self-esteem and other markers of negative self-evaluation.

Gendered Racism and Mental Health Outcomes

As discussed above, racism can have detrimental effects on Black mental and physical health. Gendered racism, in particular, describes the intertwined nature of racism and sexism (Thomas et al., 2008). Sociologist Philomena Essed's *Understanding everyday racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* (1991), coined the term gendered racism to highlight the inseparable accounts of racism and sexism in Black women by examining sociohistorical and sociopolitical context. Through this work, Essed explains how complexities of human identity through systems such as race, class, and gender contribute to the unique experiences of oppression and discrimination. In 2003, Jones and Shorter-Gooden conducted a qualitative study to understand the simultaneous nature of racism and sexism for Black women. The study reported that in most

cases, it was difficult for the women to separate experiences of racism from those of sexism, noting that the stereotypes and expectations of Blackness and womanhood together made for nuanced experiences of discrimination (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Thomas et al., 2008). In addition to interpersonal gendered racism, this specific form of oppression has structural and institutional implications as well (Spates et al., 2020). Economic disparities, including poverty and wage gaps are an example of systems-level gendered racial oppression. In a 2015 qualitative study, Elliot and colleagues reported that the intersecting marginalized identities that comprise Black womanhood produce daily challenges in motherhood and maintenance of mental well-being (Elliot et al., 2015). This report is of great concern considering the fact that approximately 80% of Black mothers are the primary income providers for their households (Spates et al., 2020).

Gendered racism is also linked to health outcomes (Thomas et al., 2008; Szymanski & Lewis, 2016; Lewis et al., 2017). A 2017 study found that receiving gendered racial microaggressions predicted poor mental and physical health effects in a sample of 231 Black women. Similarly, Thomas and colleagues found a significant, positive relationship between global psychological distress and experienced gendered racism (Thomas et al., 2008). This research supports the multiple jeopardy theoretical framework, which posits discrimination has multiplicative effects at the intersections of different identity facets (King, 1988). Gendered racism and its effects can also be linked to modern intersectionality theory, which addresses the interlocked nature of multiple systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1990).

After recognizing major differences in Black versus White feminism, Dr. Janet Helms developed the Womanist Identity Development Model, which proposed statuses regarding how Black women respond to gender oppression (Helms, 1990). These statuses are similar to Cross's

Nigrescence model in that they are characterized by four egos: Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, and Internalization. Pre-encounter is the first ego status a woman may develop. In this status, a woman ascribes to the conventional, patriarchal views of society; women who occupy this stage endorse anti-woman and female-oppressive ideologies.

Similarly, Boisnier (2003) studied differentiation in feminist identification between Black and White women. Unsurprisingly, she found partial support for the notion that Black women identified more strongly with womanist principles than with traditional feminism. Most interestingly, her research supported the idea that race would moderate the relationships between the womanist and feminist identity models and self-esteem.

In 1990, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins published her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment,* where she provided an interpretive, integrative framework built upon decades of Black Feminist scholarship (Collins, 1990). Inspired by the works of renowned Black feminists, including Alice Walker, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, Collins explains the negotiation of identity unique to Black womanhood. She refers to the negotiation as the "Outsider-within" complex wherein society acknowledges Blackness and Whiteness and Maleness and Femaleness but not the intersections of race and gender, leaving Black women's experiences out of identity-related discourse in politics, media, and everyday society. Because of this, Black women often feel like outsiders in mounting challenges against oppression despite experiencing it from multiple perspectives. The Outsider-within complex led Collins to develop the *Matrix of Domination,* which provides a framework for intersecting oppressions through four domains: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal.

Around the same time, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined *Intersectionality,* a term first used to describe the invisibilization of Black women in American policy and legal systems (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is an approach or perspective that focuses on how multiple systems of privilege and oppression shape people's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; 1990). In her first writings on intersectionality, Crenshaw describes the perspective using the following analogy:

> *"Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them"* (Crenshaw, 1989).

This metaphor conveys the complexity of interlocking structural oppressions and the identities at which they converge. The use of a car accident as the representation of social identity is, in itself, quite jarring. Crenshaw demonstrates that the more intricate a person's identity is, the more complicated it is to unpack or identify the sources of discrimination.

Although first used to understand power and oppression in legal capacities, especially the lack of existing laws or policies that clearly apply to individuals with two or more identity groups, as in the case of Black women, intersectionality studies have become increasingly more common in understanding the psychological experiences of those with multiple marginalized identities. Cole (2009) describes the importance of intersectionality in psychological science by highlighting the significance of political history and environments in how a person experiences and navigates the world. Therefore, it is critical to utilize an intersectional approach when

exploring the vast psychological experiences of Black women in their families, communities, and sociopolitical landscapes.

VI. Centering Black Mothers and Daughters

Graff explains that slavery resulted in a "complete disruption from their [Africans] land, people, and customs ....Attachments from one's place in the world, continuity with the past, an expectable future were all destroyed" (Graff, 2014, pp. 184-185). Given what we know about attachment and post-traumatic slave syndrome, it can be theorized that trauma transmission between Black mothers and daughters is inevitable. Graff goes on to explore how intergenerational trauma may present in Black American families. She concludes that Black mothers may transmit excessive fear, a lack of empathy, and shame to their children due to the transmission of master-slave relational archetypes and expectations learned during slavery (Graff, 2014; Gump, 2010).

Little research has focused on the nature of Black mother-daughter relationships. Patricia Hill Collins led many of the initial scientific inquiries related to the Black mother-daughter dyad in the late 1980s, investigating the meaning and significance of Black mother-daughter relationships (Collins, 1987). In her scholarship, Collins identified several ideologies related to Afrocentric motherhood. First, Collins identified "*Other-Mothering*" and "*Blood-Mothering*," concepts that refer to the flexibility of boundaries regarding motherhood. In Western Eurocentric cultures, motherhood is often viewed as the responsibility and role held by the biological mother or legally appointed female guardian. "Other-Mothering" describes the tendency for women of African descent to parent collectively (Collins, 1987; Collins, 1995). Collins then identifies *providing as a part of mothering*– due to the social and economic impact of slavery, Black mothers are often both financial and emotional providers for their families. Given this, Black

mothers also may view motherhood as a *symbol of power,* according to Collins (Collins, 1987). She explains that the concept of other-mothering extends from individual children to the community at large, as Black women often provide care for the entirety of the social network. Similarly, Black mothers often model agency, progress, and efficacy for social change. For this reason, being a mother is a powerful position filled with equal pride and responsibility (Collins, 1987).

Collins' inquiry into Afrocentric motherhood suggests multiple implications for the Black mother-daughter relationship. Black mothers may serve as role models for their Black daughters through their efforts as providers, activists, and caretakers. Collins suggests that as their daughters aspire to become mothers one day themselves, Black girls pay special attention to the behaviors, roles, and values of their mothers (Collins, 1987). Knowing this, Black mothers value the image their daughters hold of them and strive to provide an example of how to navigate the world as a Black woman. In their efforts, Black mothers may seek to provide protection to their daughters through tough love in the form of strict parenting, boundary setting, and disciplinary action (Collins, 1987; Collins. 1995; Kelley, et al., 1992; Kitawna, 2019). Collins (1987) goes on to say that this balance of protection and provision may result in high emotionality between mothers and daughters. Similarly, because Black mothers' values and goals of mothering are different from Westernized European ideals of motherhood, Black American mothers may be perceived as "less affectionate" than their White counterparts (Collins, 1987, p. 6). For Black daughters, this means learning and unlearning the ideals of what a mother should do and be by striking a balance between societal norms and Afrocentrism within an oppressive sociopolitical context (Collins, 1987).

Building from Collins' research, a 2016 qualitative study investigated the role Black American mothers play in developing their daughter's self-esteem, resilience, and coping strategies (Everet alt et al., 2016). Findings underscored the importance of Black mothers supporting their daughters in building a basis for self-esteem and coping. However, the research could not pinpoint *how* these messages were communicated through the mother-daughter relationship. Similarly, the research study did not contextualize Black women's experiences within the context of gendered racism or intergenerational trauma.

Leath and colleagues (2021) found that Black mothers play a critical role in the gendered racial socialization process of Black girls and women. Their qualitative study, which consisted of in-depth interviews (n = 47) of college-aged Black women, explored multiple themes surrounding Black mothers' race and gender-based communication. Special attention was given to how Black mothers prepared their daughters to respond to racial discrimination. These preparation strategies included self-advocacy, "taking the high road," code-switching, and "getting home safe." Furthermore, the researchers found that Black women received particular gendered racial messages from their mothers surrounding Black racial ideologies. These ideologies included messages of anti-Black racism (from immigrant mothers), and a focus on Black sons. The findings suggest that Black mothers can serve as a conduit for both gendered racial pride and internalized gendered racism (Leath et al., 2021).

The Family Life Cycle Model

The Family Life Cycle Model or Family Life Cycle Theory may provide a foundation for understanding both the role and process of Black mother-daughter relationships. Conceptualized in the 1960s, the Family Life Cycle Model offers a theoretical framework for understanding transitions and evolving family dynamics throughout the life course (Carter & McGoldrick,

1988). While the model has received criticism for its lack of applicability to non-White families (Candib, 1989), the idea of a familial process related to parent and child development still remains incredibly useful to understanding nuances in Black American families.

In 1992, McGoldrick acknowledged the importance of race, class, religion, and other cultural variables in understanding family life cycles (McGoldrick, 1992). In her work, *Ethnicity and the Family Life Cycle*, McGoldrick identified several key ways Black family units and their life cycles may differ from their White counterparts. Those ways include flexibility of the family composition, the importance of funerals and grief, grandparents as primary child rearers, authoritarian parenting, expansive gender roles for Black women, an emphasis on religion and prayer as methods of coping, and finally, the acknowledgment of "friends as kin" or the idea that Black friendship networks are often conceptualized as an extension of family (McGoldrick, 1992, p. 448).

Summary

Prior research provides evidence for continued study of the Black family concerning historical and generational trauma, socialization, and identity development. With limited research on the nature of the Black mother-daughter relationship, it is impossible to know this dyad's full complexity and meaning. Some previous scholarship surrounding intergenerational communication between Black mothers and daughters has focused on the survival of Black girls through protective gendered racial socialization (Cameron, 2022; Lucas & Wade, 2023). This study examined Black mother-daughter relationships by adding empirical evidence of various facets related to this unique dyad. Essentially, the researcher set out to understand the complexities and intricacies of Black mothers and daughters, given their gendered racial identities and the American sociopolitical context. Additionally, this study sought to understand

the role and process of the Black mother-daughter relationship in communicating hope and healing against the backdrop of gendered racism, intergenerational trauma, and sociopolitical oppression.

VII. The Present Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, the research sought to investigate the nuances of Black women within the family system through a comprehensive examination of the mother-daughter dyad. This investigation explored the complexities and subtleties present within the Black mother-daughter matrix related to gendered race based messaging, gendered racial socialization, and identity development. Thus, research questions 1 and 2 focus mainly on characterizing the Black mother-daughter dyad and understanding the evolution of the matrix overtime. Secondly, this research aimed to contribute to literature surrounding intergenerational trauma through an exploration of intergenerational healing. That is, previous research suggests that stress and trauma may be transgenerational and intergenerational, but what about healing, hoping, and coping? Traditionally, a deficit approach has been applied to studying health disparities in the Black community; it is further known that Black women and girls experience intersectional oppression (Coles & Pasek, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). However, this project aimed to uncover the intersectional strengths of this demographic population by focusing on the strengths-based cultural messaging that may act as a buffer to racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination.

Unfortunately, there are significant gaps in the literature surrounding the nature of Black mother-daughter relationships.. Research has yet to look at the role of the mother-daughter relationship in gendered racial socialization throughout the life course. Given the dearth of

strengths-based and intersectionality-informed psychological research, it was important to investigate the role and function of Black Mother-Daughter relationships through the process of gendered racial socialization, including gendered race-based messages such as notions of womanhood, mental well-being, and hope and healing through rich qualitative inquiry.

Rationale

Black women remain largely invisibilized in American society (Coles & Pasek, 2020). This invisibility disregards how the experiences of gendered racism triangulate women through antiBlackness, sexism, and patriarchy. As of 2020, the suicide rate for Black girls and women has skyrocketed; Black women are the largest growing suicidal population in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Lack of hope has been suggested as the number one cause of suicide ideation (Davidson et al., 2009). Previous research has found that collectivistic emotional support is especially beneficial for the mental well-being of Black women (Watson-Singleton, 2017). Given the insurgence of police brutality and anti-Black racism, coupled with increasing rates of suicide, depression, and anxiety in Black women and girls, it is crucial to understand interactions among women within the Black family structure. Therefore, this project advances mental health equity and fills in gendered racial gaps in the scientific literature by emphasizing *hope* as a key mechanism already present within Black families.

Structural racism and sexism are social determinants of health (World Health Organization, 2014). Thus, this project seeks to understand the impact of *gendered racism* and race socialization in determining mental health outcomes among Black women and girls. By conducting interviews with Black mothers, insight was gained into how these parent-child

relationships increase autonomy and agency by instilling hope as a core value in Black girls and women.

Research Goals, Questions, and Measures

Guided by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1991) and Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989–see beginning of Ch 3 Overview), this dissertation research project included three research questions detailed below to be answered using the rigorous and accelerated data reduction (RADaR) technique, which is explained in more depth within the methods section. The research questions were developed to qualitatively assess the gaps in literature concerning intergenerational dynamics between Black mothers and daughters. The research questions are as follows:

1. **How do Black mothers and daughters describe and understand their mother-daughter relationship?** The goal here was to explore how Black women think about their relationship with their mothers and daughters. This question sought to provide a baseline understanding of the Black mother-daughter dynamic through the narratives of the participants. Participants were encouraged to share anecdotes and emotions related to their experiences as both mothers and daughters.
2. **How does this relationship change over time?** Participants were asked to reflect on their relationship with their mothers growing up as well as currently. Similarly, the participants spoke about how their relationship with their daughters had changed over time. The purpose of this research question was to explore the complex nature of the Black mother-daughter relationship throughout the life course.

3. **How do Black daughters perceive their mothers' influence on the development of their general mental health and self-esteem?** Information concerning the impact of the Black mother-daughter relationship on self-esteem and mental health is crucial in understanding the function of this dyad in the psychological development and experiences of Black women and girls.

Potential Study Implications

Ultimately, this research aimed to empower and support Black women and girls' mental well-being and Black familial health. I hope that this research serves as both inspiration and encouragement for continued efforts of actualization, liberation, and justice-seeking through family and collectivism.

Chapter III: Methodology

Overview

A qualitative design was chosen for this study due to the exploratory aim of this study with regard to understanding Black mother-daughter relationships and communications. This is because, compared to quantitative methods, a phenomenological qualitative approach allows the research team to collect richer, more nuanced data derived from women's narratives, allowing for new and unanticipated concepts and ideas. Moreover, qualitative methods are a good fit with the culturally-relevant, context-specific nature of the research questions, as discussed below. Specifically, this study will employ multiple qualitative analytic methods, each informed by Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1988) to address the research questions at hand.

Recruitment

Study recruitment took place both online and in person. Participants were recruited using social media (Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook) and through snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Online, potential participants were recruited via social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), emails to professional and community listservs, and word-of-mouth. Social media posts and emails were sent to groups that cater to Black women broadly and mothers specifically (e.g. Jack and Jill of America, Inc., Black Women's Health Imperative, etc.). Research assistants used recruitment messages prepared by the principal investigator (see attached recruitment materials). Research assistants were also trained and supervised by the principal investigator in proper methods regarding ethical and effective study outreach and participant communication.

In addition, the principal investigator contacted via email professional colleagues with ties to the Black community to ask them to share the flier (see attached recruitment materials) for the study with organizations or individuals that may qualify to participate.

Community-based recruitment efforts included posting physical flyers in public spaces in New York City and North Carolina. These spaces included churches, community centers, hair salons, and health centers.

Participants

This study concerned communication between Black mothers and their daughters. As such, participants for this study consisted of 18 ($N = 18$) Black women aged 18+ years who were based in the United States. Participants were screened via a Qualtrics survey to indicate that they identify as of Black or African American descent to be included in this study. Additionally, given the intergenerational focus of this study, participants must have indicated their mother is of Black or African American descent. Inclusion criteria for this study also specified that each participant must have had consistent communication with their mother for at least five years from ages 5-18 in order to provide a foundation of communication efforts between mother and child. For this reason, study inclusion criteria included participants who have lived in the same household as their mother for at least five consecutive years between the ages of 5-18. Finally, participants also indicated that they are the mother or primary maternal figure of a female-identifying child and that they have regular communication with their child in order to best evaluate transgenerational messaging and relationships. The age of the participant's daughter must be at least five years old. This age was chosen because developmental psychology asserts that by this age, verbal communication is a child's primary mode of communication (Scharf et al., 2016). Additionally, five years of mothering experience set a solid foundation to inquire

about gendered race based messages and identity development (Swanson et al., 2009) according to race socialization and racial identity development literature (Root, 1998; Swanson et al., 2009). By interviewing Black mothers of Black daughters, I hoped to uncover transgenerational and intergenerational phenomena related to relationship quality, communication patterns, and messaging contents within the family unit.

Consistent with other empirical qualitative research designs (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), this study recruited 18 participants ($N = 18$) to capture a wide range of narratives without reaching saturation. While this study sought to include a homogenous sample on the basis of gendered racial identity (participants who identified as "Black women" and "Black mothers"), I hoped to encapsulate diverse experiences, voices, and perspectives. As such, the sample varied in geographic location, income and education levels, and other factors related to one's worldview.

The average age of participants (mothers) for the study was 42.6 years old with the majority of participants being in their 30s. Geographically, participants ranged from across the United States, however, the sample lacked any west coast representation. Educationally, the majority of participants had obtained a postgraduate degree, and all but one participant graduated with at least a bachelor's degree. The average age of the participants' daughters was 14.2 years old with a range of 5-29. Participants also reported their socioeconomic status growing up as well as their current household incomes. 11 participants reported growing up working class, 3 poverty/impoverished, 2 low income, and 2 middle class. Most participants indicated current household income levels of either \$50,000-\$89,999 ($n = 5$) or \$90,000-\$129,999 ($n = 5$). Six participants reported a household income of at least \$130,000 and two made less than \$49,000. A comprehensive breakdown of the research participants' demographics for this study can be found in Table 1.

Procedure

Study approval was obtained in August 2023 from the Institutional Review Board of the author's home institution, Teachers College, Columbia University prior to data collection. The research procedure was as follows: After viewing recruitment flyers via social media or word of mouth, interested participants were instructed to complete a screening form via Qualtrics, which included study eligibility and demographic data. Data was via a semi-structured interview lasting no longer than 90 minutes. The average interview for this study lasted 79 minutes. Following the successful completion of the interview, participants received a $50 Visa e-gift card which was delivered to their email address. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Interviews were completed virtually using Zoom software. Only individuals who completed the interview in its entirety were included in the data analysis.

Instruments

Demographic Questionnaire

A brief demographic and eligibility questionnaire was distributed to all interested participants. This questionnaire included questions regarding the participant's race, gender, income, education level, and geographic location. The questionnaire included items surrounding the participant's personal and family background, including the education level and living status of the participant's mother. The survey was programmed in qualtrics to assess eligibility before continuing to other demographic variables.

Consent Form

Once a participant's eligibility had been determined, they were contacted by the principal investigator or a research assistant via email to schedule an interview. The scheduling email

included the link to a doodle poll where each participant was instructed to select a time that worked well for them. The email also included another link to an informed consent document that was to be signed prior to the interview.

Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview questionnaire was developed to best capture and understand each participant's lived experiences. Moreover, the semi-structured interview format allowed participants to authentically share their personal experiences surrounding mothering and Black womanhood while also allowing for methodologically sound analysis.

The interview questionnaire included four parts:

1) Gendered Racial Experience: Participants reflected on their lived experience occupying a Black woman's body throughout their life course.
2) Daughter Experience: Participants recounted their childhood, familial background, and relationship with their mother.
3) Mother Experience: Participants described their relationship with their own daughter(s) and approach to mothering
4) Hope and Healing: Participants answered questions related to mental wellbeing, trauma experiences, and their hopes for their daughters.

The interview questions are contained in Appendix IV. Several theories also helped guide the questions chosen for this questionnaire, including The Sociohistorical Integrative Model for the Study of Stress in Black Families (Murry et al., 2018), Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989), Standpoint Theory (Hekman, 1997), and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1991).

Safety Measures

Participants were reminded of the study purpose and time commitment before beginning the interview. Additionally, participants will be informed of their right to discontinue participation at any time. Because difficult subject matter can arise throughout the interview, a list of resources will be provided to participants surrounding racial trauma and Black womanhood at the conclusion of the interview.

Data Analysis

Research Team and Positionality

Consistent with prior scholarship on ethical qualitative research, I believe it is imperative to include the positionality of the research team and to engage in ongoing reflexivity throughout this project. For the analysis, this process included consistently acknowledging and reflecting upon the various identities of the research team in relation to the study participants so as to balance power and perspective (Bourke, 2014; Holmes, 2020).

As the principal investigator for this project, I led the qualitative coding process. I identify as a Black feminist and Afrofuturist scholar who utilizes both public health and psychology frameworks as a means for Black psychological liberation. Originating from the Southern United States, I am the proud great-granddaughter of sharecroppers and the descendant of enslaved African people. I identify as a Black, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian woman. I also identify as a doctoral candidate at an Ivy League institution. I acknowledge that my identities hold both power and oppression. Relevant to the research at hand, I am a daughter, but not a mother.

The research team consisted of myself and three research team members. For this study, while each member held different roles, we did not ascribe to a traditional hierarchy. Thus, we referred to each other as teammates, noting that each teammate held a specific set of skills and

knowledge that would be useful to the team. Black Feminist Thought asserts that humanity is not hierarchical (Collins, 2022). Thus, I encouraged the team to speak up, ask questions, and engage with one another with respect, curiosity, and openness. Two of the team members identified as Black women; one of whom identified as a 21 years old undergraduate student, and the other who identified as a 61 year old mother and grandmother. The other team members identified as Black man in his 30s, and father of a Black five year old Black daughter. Each research team member had either obtained or was in the process of obtaining their undergraduate degree.

Analytic Procedures

As previously mentioned, this study used the rigorous and accelerated data reduction (RADaR) technique, a method developed to streamline qualitative data analysis in a structured, efficient, and systematic way. Notably, the RADaR technique was developed by a Black woman and is used to structure thematic data analysis without compromising the depth or authenticity of the data (Watkins, 2017). The research questions and subsequent analysis were informed by Intersectionality Theory and Black Feminist Thought.

Intersectionality is a term created by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the invisibilization of Black women in American policy and legal systems (Crenshaw, 1989). For this analysis, Intersectionality is an approach and theory that focuses on ways that multiple systems of privilege and oppression shape women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1990).

Black Feminist Thought informed the method of inquiry and subsequent analysis as well. In 1990, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins published her seminal work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment,* where she provided an interpretive, integrative framework that built upon decades of Black feminist scholarship to

capture the unique psychosocial experiences of Black women (Collins, 1990). This study applied Black Feminist Thought by implementing holistic and sociopolitically aware evaluations of participants' narratives; Black Feminist Thought encourages researchers to recognize and address power structures that affect Black women's lives. In our analysis, the team critically examined social and systemic factors that contributed to participants' experiences. Black feminist thought also emphasizes the interconnectedness of race, gender, class, and other identity markers. Our team examined how these intersections influenced the participants' experiences and outcomes, rather than analyzing each identity factor separately. Thus, our code development and analytic process highlighted how these factors shape lived experiences uniquely for Black women. Finally, Black Feminist Thought emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and positionality (Collins, 1991; Clemons, 2019; Patterson et al., 2016). In addition, the gendered racial identities and familial experiences held by the coding team will be considered when identifying patterns and forming interpretations of the data.

To best employ Intersectionality Theory and Black Feminist Thought, research suggests an analytical method that incorporates and emphasizes continuous reflexivity and critical thinking (Clemons, 2019; Patterson et al., 2016). Thus, the analytical method that has been developed specifically for this project exercised three steps underscoring the importance of conscious exploration and inquiry. First, the analysis team read through the participant's transcripts without the goal of identifying patterns or themes. The principal investigator guided the team in engaging in a series of inquiries during this stage of the analysis in order to identify and process potential biases. This exercise was also implemented in an attempt to facilitate self-understanding, worldview exploration, and social positioning in relation to the data narratives. This stage involved answering the following questions: "Who do you imagine is behind those

words?" "What images are elicited?" "What comes to mind as the woman is talking?" "How does she relate to who you are?" "How is she similar, and how is she different?". The team's responses to these questions were shared during weekly coding meetings and used to facilitate discussion surrounding the subsequently generated codes.

Utilization of the RADaR Technique

The primary analysis involved coding the data using the rigorous and accelerated data reduction (RADaR) technique (Watkins, 2017). This technique consists of five steps and three phases of organizing and categorizing the women's narratives into general classifications and checking for consensus among other narratives using a charting tool designed to map onto each research question. First, each transcript was formatted to be exactly the same. This was done for ease of the coding process.The principal investigator then created a data reduction table for phase 1 of the coding process. The RADaR technique relies on these data reduction tables as the foundation of the coding process. Essentially, this step of the coding process consisted of reformatting the participant's transcripts so that they fit within the constructed reduction table; for this reason, this step of the coding process included many large quotes directly from the participant's transcripts. The third step of the process involved further data reduction; this step significantly reduced the amount of direct participant quotes and distilled the data into more refined themes, thus signifying phase 2 of the analysis. Phase 2 of our data analysis consisted of a "process of elimination" (Watkins, 2017 p. 6) outlined by the RADaR technique. Themes were developed by reaching consensus within the research team. We did not use specific quantities of endorsement in order to compromise a theme. We felt that Black Feminist Thought underscores the importance of amplifying each Black woman's experience and the integration of these narratives as opposed to quantification of experiences. Instead, we relied on team consensus; in

order to constitute a theme, the coding team must have all agreed that they saw a similar pattern within the data. First, each team member independently coded the data. After independent coding, we held a series of consensus meetings to discuss and resolve any coding conflicts. During these meetings, coders reviewed the specific sections of text where discrepancies arose, articulating their rationale and interpretations. Through open dialogue, coders negotiated interpretations, aligning their perspectives on how to apply each code. This process was iterative, with coders independently reapplying codes after each meeting to ensure consistent application across the data. We looked both within and across tables to see which information fit with our research questions and with identified themes. Similarly, we continued to check a) the emergence of new themes, as well as b) the possibility to condense previously identified themes. Each coder reviewed the data and contributed to the development of a codebook, defining each code based on preliminary themes identified from the data and relevant literature.

Phase 3 was marked by further data reduction using our created data tables. After independently applying the initial codes to a subset of data, the coders revisited the codebook to refine code definitions and resolve any ambiguities. This refinement ensured a shared understanding of code meanings, reducing the likelihood of conflicting interpretations in subsequent coding rounds. Our team met to continue the discussion around what data fit with our finalized themes and if those themes best answered our research questions. We continued to use the data tables to reach consensus and streamline our results for optimized accuracy and data reporting.

Finally, phase 4 of our process transferred the latest data reduction table to a word document whereby each research question had relevant themes and quotes listed below it. This helped us best organize the results for the reporting process. Additionally, this process helped us

streamline the results to make it easier for external research communication as we hoped for our work to reach a large audience and to contribute to sustainable health promotion and prevention efforts for Black women and families at large.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter will discuss the results of the qualitative inquiry conducted for the present study. The results of this study are presented based on the eight most supported themes and subthemes in the RADaR coding process. Watkins (2017) outlined a unique coding process wherein various concepts revealed through the data are distilled into unified themes which then allow for easier communication of results. This section will begin with an analysis of participant characteristics and the overall interview process both those observed by the research team and interpreted from the transcripts. The results of this study highlight the eight themes and their accompanying sub-themes as they relate to the purpose of this study which was to broadly investigate various facets of mother-daughter relationships. Following the results, the discussion section will analyze the eight identified themes in terms of answering the three primary research questions that have guided this study. Some participant quotations have been lightly edited for readability by removing filler words (i.e. like, so, etc.).

Participants and Interview Process

True to intersectional qualitative methods (Christensen & Jensen, 2012), the analysis was grounded in the complex, dynamic identities of our participants. While table 1 displays some basic information regarding socioeconomic status, gender identity, and racial-ethnic identity, it is important to discuss other aspects of identity or experience that may have been missed in our demographic survey. The participants consisted of doctors, wives, single mothers, businesswomen, trauma survivors, and grievers of their own mothers. Participants came from all over the United States, with backgrounds from a variety of historical times, making for an interesting intersection of place, time, and childhood sociopolitical landscape, thus shaping the values, opportunities, and desires of each mother.

Equally as important to understanding the data, was a reflection on the interview process. To this end, special attention was paid to the synergic energy between the principal investigator and the participants. Interviews began with a script read by myself as the principal investigator. This interview script introduced the participants to myself and to the interview process. I described my identity as a cisgender, African American woman who is a daughter, but not a mother. I then invited each participant to share their reactions to any of the identities I listed to give them space to voice their opinions or questions about my experiences and identity. The interview then proceeded.

Many of the participants expressed gratitude and excitement at the opportunity to share their experiences of both motherhood and daughterhood. A shared sentiment amongst the participants was a sense of sadness surrounding how infrequently they are offered a space to reflect on their upbringing with a specific regard to their family dynamics. As a Counseling Psychology trainee, I responded to these sentiments with my own reactions of shared sadness and gratitude for the space. Similarly, throughout the interviews, I responded to the women's anecdotes and narratives with empathy, compassion, and curiosity. My responses were grounded in both the tenets of counseling psychology and Black feminist thought which each emphasize shared connectedness and power-sharing (Byrne, 2020) in order to lead from a social justice praxis (Collins, 2022).

Simultaneously, some participants also expressed feelings of frustration, hurt, or sadness during the interview, particularly when speaking of adverse childhood experiences such as maternal neglect, poverty, or other traumatic experiences. These feelings were also shared particularly when participants acknowledged the juxtaposition of their own upbringing and how they have chosen to parent their daughters.

Throughout data collection, it appeared that the interviews themselves were cathartic and potentially therapeutic for both parties involved; that is, the interviewees, in addition to myself, garnered insights that were relevant to our lives and our understandings of the world and ourselves. Importantly, while I have psychotherapy training and aspects of the interview experience did mimic the therapy experience, the essence or process of these interviews is not best understood using the frame of Western talk therapy. The participants were paid an amount believed to be commensurate with participation ($50), they were encouraged to take the time they needed to participate, and as the interviewer, I offered a wealth of self-disclosure to facilitate connection, authenticity, and vulnerability. Instead, I offer the tenets of Black feminist thought which support the notions of everyday knowledge and standpoint epistemology (Collins, 2015; Collins, 2022). Each of these tenets emphasizes the importance of meaning making and interpretation of phenomena by those who experience it. United by a shared gendered racial identity, I was able to engage in an analysis of gendered racial phenomena with participants that felt mutual and raw in nature, rather than hierarchical and clinical as psychological science data collection can historically be (D'silva et al., 2016; Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019; Reich, 2021).

Themes

Using the RADaR method, themes were identified using a comprehensive analysis of each transcript using a charting method to find commonalities and differences between each woman's narrative. This analysis of all 18 transcripts yielded eight overall themes and various sub-themes related to the participant's experiences of Black motherhood and daughterhood. Each of these themes will be introduced and described in depth using quotes from the data to supplement. Because the interviews asked about each woman's experiences both mothering and

being mothered, distinctions will be made related to when in the life course each theme applies. A list of the themes and sub-themes can be found in Table 2.

Black Matrescence. The term *Matrescence* describes the complex psychosocial process of becoming a mother. More specifically, the term was coined to describe the process of taking on the identity and role of a *new* mother (Athan, 2024; Maxwell & Leat, 2023). For this study, *Black Matrescence* describes the unique process of becoming a mother when holding a Black racial identity; in other words, for Black mothers, the identity of mother is influenced by various other cultural, historical, and social factors surrounding Blackness. For example, in this sample, Black matrescence included a heightened awareness of negative stereotypes reserved for Black mothers. One participant described feeling judged while at the airport for not having a man with her.

> Participant 218: When we were at security, I had to take my shoes off and I brought the girls and I feel like I'm being judged because people see me struggling with one toddler that can walk and one that can't and me trying to pack up a stroller. I have to beg for help….I'm internalizing the looks on other people's faces and actually interpreting, I think accurately, because one person actually did say, “Oh, my goodness, you have so much stuff and so many kids. I don't know how you do it.” So well, I mean, “same way, your mom or dad, or whoever took care of you did it.” And I feel like I'm defending myself to say, Oh, I have a husband, he's just not, he's just not here with me. You know, like that, that whole story. We're Black women, you know, we reproduce, but we don't have men around or they're incarcerated, or their, you know, any of the other things. So I think that's what they say about us.

This quote highlights the impact of holding multiple marginalized identities in addition to being a mother. Black womanhood as a gendered racial identity is wrought with many negative stereotypes that have been documented in the media and scientific literature alike (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). Arguably, many of these stereotypes are exacerbated in conjunction with Black motherhood. This participant prefaced her airport security story with the idea that she felt Black mothers were viewed as "Loud, sexually, promiscuous, provocative and uneducated". These adjectives align with many identified gendered racial stereotypes for Black women including the Sapphire (Loud matriarch), Jezebel (sexually lustful and provocative), and the Welfare Queen (uneducated and lazy) (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016).

In understanding matrescence through the Black women's experiences, it is imperative to acknowledge that for Black women, motherhood means accumulating additional social stressors and pressures. The stressors can partially be attributed to historical events in which Black women were regarded as "breeders" in order to sustain the population of enslaved people (Smithers, 2012). Early understandings of matrescence did not incorporate such contextualized understandings of entering motherhood and thus failed to conceptualize matrescence for Black mothers in totality by not acknowledging the nexus of gendered anti-Black racism and Black motherhood. The intersection of motherhood and Black womanhood is perhaps more pronounced concerning mothering a Black daughter.

Additionally, two sub-themes emerged from the concept of Black Matrescence: *Single Motherhood* and *Family Systems Contractions and Expansions*. *Single Motherhood* emerged as a sub-theme of matrescence as the participants described the process of becoming a single mother and specific characteristics associated with being a single mother and how that impacts the mother-daughter dyad. A portion of the sample identified as single mothers or as being raised by

a single mother (or both). In either case, the identity of a single mother had significant impacts on the family system. Importantly, the effect of single motherhood on the family system was not a generalizable facet of the Black mother-daughter system. In fact, the impacts of single motherhood on Black matrescence were incredibly complex; while single motherhood brought some women closer to their daughters and their own mothers, for others, being raised by a single mother brought unique challenges related to the mother-daughter relationship. Participant 202 offered a nuanced understanding to Black single motherhood in particular. Growing up, she reported observing a plethora of single mothers in her neighborhood. In this way, single motherhood was a normal aspect of the Black familial structure. With this perspective, many negative characteristics associated with single motherhood ceased to exist for the participant and her community:

> Participant 202: So growing up that obviously there were a lot of single mothers on our block, there were a handful of homes, especially like generations prior just above my mom, where that generation seemed to have like the husband and the wife still in a household. But I think my mom's generation, that's where I really started seeing like a lot of single mothers and I really didn't know any different.

This participant grew up in the inner city of a large urban area. She explains that while her neighborhood environment was disadvantageous in terms of disorganization, crime, and drug presence, the sense of maternal nurturing of the community was strong throughout her upbringing. Regarding the relationship between this participant and her mother related to single motherhood, she explained that her bond with her mother was "interesting:"

Participant 202: So my mom is interesting. My mom was a single parent. I think she was super liberal in our child-rearing. I think a part of it was because they were young parents themselves. And so a part of being young and watching my mom was understanding that she is a single mother. I was always a homebody. My older siblings would go and stay the night, especially on weekends with my cousins, you know, but I always wanted to be home. My mother being young, she wanted to hang out with her friends. So I remember Friday evening, for example, you know, I come home from school, my siblings are packing up ready to go to our cousin's house and I'm ready to just kind of hang out with my mom. She would probably order pizza or make hotdogs or you know, something really simple and lay in the bed and you know, watch TV and eat whatever she made or ordered. You know, usually around about nine o'clock, you know, her phone rang, and it would be her girlfriends. And they're like, "Hey, we're hanging out at this bar" And so then she would start getting dressed to go. At six years old, I essentially shouldn't be home by myself on a Friday night. So she would leave, and I would be home by myself, often scared of being in a house. And inevitably, she would come home after, you know, a night of drinking. So she would come home drunk, and I would help her get in and get her clothes off or whatever, a lot of times, I had a really clear memory of her always having to go to the bathroom. Like, when she gets home, it's just like, I had to go to the bathroom, you know. So she would be like walking, trying, I'm like, trying to help her, like, grab whatever she had in her hand, help her, you know, get to the bathroom, of course, she's moving a little slower because she's been drinking, sometimes she would make it

> to the bathroom. Sometimes she wouldn't. You know, and I would be there just to kind of help and clean up. Morning, you know, inevitably she would be hungover. So I would be there with a bucket, you know, for her to, you know, food or whatever. So that was my weekend with my mom. But I didn't want to be anywhere else.

Participant 202's experiences reveal the complexities of single motherhood and its impact on the Black mother-daughter relationship. She explains how she looked forward to the weekends because she would get to experience a closeness to her mother. In this sense, her mother expressed traditional nurturing and care by providing food, entertainment, and quality time together. The latter portion of her anecdote describes a role reversal where the participant has distinct, yet fondly nostalgic memories of caring for her mother in her drunken state. She details waiting until the early morning hours for her mother's return and caring for her with a bucket and food handy at the age of six. However, she also describes not wanting to be anywhere else. This participant was able to offer insight related to her own mother's matrescence journey as a younger single mother. She alludes to her mother's intentional balance of personal freedom and social life with the responsibility of providing as a parent. The participant was able to acknowledge not only her closeness to her mother but also her reverence for her mother despite atypical circumstances. Caring for her mother was not viewed with disdain or as a chore. Instead, it was an opportunity to continue facilitating a warm and close relationship with her mother.

Other participants conceptualized single motherhood as a trauma. When asked about challenging events or experiences in her life, Participant 103 offered the idea of being a single mother of Black daughters as a trauma.

> Participant 103: Yeah. So honestly, I think what comes to mind immediately is the idea of being a single mom raising a girl in the sense of, like, working, working hard and feeling like, you know, like, I got to do so much, and there's so much pressure on me to make as much money as I can, you know, by any means. I feel like that's clearly a memory that I have, but also, like, when I recognize it in myself, that is a trigger for me, you know, like even my daughter called me a workaholic. And I was like, I really felt like….I don't know how I feel about that.

In this short quote, Participant 103 described the weight of single motherhood and how pressured she felt when raising her daughter to provide financially. During the interview, the woman began to tear up as she talked about her daughter referring to her as a "workaholic". On one hand, she felt compelled to continue working to provide for her family. On the other hand, she was aware of the lack of time she could spend with her daughter. Participant 103's reference to her mother as a workaholic demonstrates a potential outcome of single motherhood, which is the difficult decision to prioritize work over quality time to provide necessities and opportunities for the daughter. Similarly, the impact of this decision on the mother-daughter relationship can vary; mothers may feel both proud and saddened by providing at the expense of quality time with their daughters, and daughters may experience both gratitude and disappointment.

Participant 115 offered a similar connection to single motherhood and trauma when discussing her daughter.

> Participant 115: She has a single mom. I think about the fact that because I am a single mom, I do have two jobs, sometimes three, depending on what I do extra at work so that eliminates or that decreases the amount of time that we could spend

> together. And so, you know, it's like, 'is her father involved?' Well, I mean, he, he's *around*….he's not as involved as I would like for him to be.

Here, Participant 115 mentions the lack of her daughter's father's presence as a part of single motherhood. While not all single mothers lack father involvement, the level of the father's involvement and the relationship between the mother and father can contribute to the impact, stress, and perception of single motherhood.

Some partnered (either married or in a romantic relationship) participants discussed how being raised by a single mother allowed them to acknowledge and appreciate differences in parenting styles. For example, participant 114 explains how having a partner, higher education, and a mom who was available to help with caregiving (re: grandmothering theme) all contributed to having a "different ease of life" compared to her mother's experience as a single parent.

> Participant 114: So I think that I have a different ease of life. Compared to my mom, I only have one child versus her four children. I had my daughter when I was almost 30 years old. So I was already like through school and I finished my PhD. So I finished my PhD like right when she was an infant. And I had a partner, you know, who are married to now and things like that. So I think and I also had my mom as a resource when I was, you know, becoming a mother. She retired in April. My daughter was born in November, and so just able to be our primary caregiver when I went back to work and things like that. So I had her she didn't have her mom growing up. She didn't have her mom until she was about 30 years old, almost. So I think resources wise, knowledge wise, maturity, partnership, all of those elements definitely made a difference in our parenting approaches.

This sentiment appears to be similarly related to the burdens and difficulties of single motherhood shared by Participant 115. This participant's narrative was marked by references to her growing up being raised by her mother and father in the household. While her relationship with her mother was distant and lacking in affection, the participant explained that her mother's temperament is much more affectionate and warm when it comes to interacting with her own daughter. She attributes this maternal behavioral change to the fact that she is a single mother and that her own mother feels the need to provide her daughter with extra attention in her father's absence.

> Participant 115: I don't know if it could be our circumstances, meaning that I am a single mom. So I don't know if she feels like she needs to help give an extra ounce of love and attention and, you know, help my daughter feel loved. And, you know, I don't know if that has anything to do with it. Judging that her father is not really around like we would want him to. So maybe that is but I don't know, maybe it's just because she you know, she's gotten older. And so, you know, maybe that that tough exterior, or, as she says all the time, you know, she successfully raised me. So I think maybe like the pressures of being a mom, she kind of can sit back and maybe breathe a little bit.

The subtheme *Family Systems Contractions and Expansions* was revealed throughout the analysis process as many women discussed matrescence as a lifelong process and not simply just becoming a new mother. The terms contractions and expansions speak specifically to the highs and lows of the matrescence process across the lifespan and the course of the mother-daughter relationship from perinatal to parenting an adult daughter. This theme consisted of revelations within the mother-daughter dyad across the lifespan. Participants were asked to describe their

relationships with their mothers in four stages: birth to young childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and as mother's themselves. Some of the sample became mothers in young adulthood or adolescence, which was also accounted for in the semi-structured interview format. Participants were also asked about their own experiences as mothers and their journey through matrescence as their daughters grow older. One participant described the experience of mothering her daughter as "a deep stretch".

> Participant 106: It's just watching them grow. Imagine…you're growing alongside with them. It is a deep stretch. Like they're stretching you, and you're growing as you have to respond to their different needs and those of different people. And so there's also a beauty in that kind of journey as well.

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that motherhood denoted a concrete life stage for many of the participants. One participant described having frequent "revelations" about motherhood as her daughter grows and matures. The participant described forming a relationship with her daughter beginning in utero and changing over the years following her birth.

> Participant 107: I remember being pregnant and having a relationship with her when she (Participant's daughter) was in utero. Like I feel like [redacted name] has always been herself, even when she was in utero. But now you know, she's eight, I still have days where I'm like, Oh, my God, I'm someone's mom. You know, like, when she says, "Mommy", I was like, in my head…. I'm like..."Wait, I'm a mom". Being a mom, and it's unreal. I feel so responsible, I think of I feel responsible for her mental and emotional health. I feel responsible for teaching her about what it means to be Black in America, and all the ugly sides of that, and all the amazing sides of that that I feel.

When the women recounted their own relationships with their mothers, distinct changes in the mother-daughter relationship were noted in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Participants described differing levels of closeness with their mothers in childhood. For example, Participant 202 described having a close but sometimes difficult relationship with her mother, where she would be responsible for helping her mother clean herself after coming home intoxicated. Despite this, Participant 202 expressed profound admiration for her mother in childhood.

> Participant 202: Even in the bathroom…if she was sitting on the toilet to use the toilet. I was sitting on the side of the tub. Just like everywhere she was I wanted to be always really close. Yeah, you know, the baby girl, the baby of the family. And I just I love being with my mom. I love being around her. I love watching her. Yeah, so just really close. If she was in a tub, I was sitting on the toilet talking to like, wherever she was. I wanted to be.

Later in her life, however, participant 202 realized at the age of 17 that her childhood and her experiences with her mother may not have been "normal." These reflections caused her to feel anger and spite toward her mother as she questioned her mother's decision-making. After becoming a mother herself, Participant 202's perspective of her mother changed from anger and questioning to grace and acceptance.

> Participant 202: So 17 in the military have this realization that Oh, this isn't normal. And I remember feeling angry with my mom. Like, why did I have to grow up and witness all this stuff? If that wasn't the norm? Like, why did you choose, like, this existence over being a mom, that's just normal? So I did kind of go through that. But then as I got older,

> especially as I became a mother, I recognized like, wow, I have so much more respect and grace for her. Because it's like, like, the conditions could have been worse.

The above quotes demonstrate a common evolution of perspective and emotional expression captured throughout the interviews. In almost every interview, participants' descriptions of and feelings towards their mothers changed throughout the life course. The direction or intensity of these changes varied from person to person depending on various factors influencing the family system and the mother-daughter dyad specifically.

The theme *Family Systems Contractions and Expansions* was largely characterized by different events and developments within the family. For instance, Participant 106 described having a relationship with her dad despite him no longer being in a relationship with her mother. This resulted in friction between her and her mother when her father eventually remarried, and the participant attended his wedding.

> Participant 106: My dad got married a couple of years back in 2009. But that like disturbed my mother, like so bad. So when he got married, she called me was she called me a traitor for like being in my dad's wedding. She was like, upset at all of us (grandmother and aunt) for being a part of the wedding. She does not like my stepmom, for whatever reason does not like her.

While the participant described having a sometimes challenging relationship with her mother, this relationship changed significantly when the participant became engaged. Participant 106 described her mother as having a "bitterness" towards the idea of her getting married and starting a family of her own.

> Participant 106: And so when my husband was planning my engagement, he asked my mom like, "do you want to be a part of theengagement?" And she's like, "No, I don't need to be a part of that."
>
> Participant 106: Like when I called her like the day, the day I got engaged. I called her like, "I got *engaged*!!" And she was like, "*congratulations*"... like, not the response you would want from your mother, when you tell her that you got engaged. I do I wish….because I really wanted like that mother-daughter, like bonding time, like as I'm preparing for a wedding. So that was hard. So there are times where I'm like, I wish I could share things with her. Like, if me and my husband are having an argument, like I want to talk to my mom about it, but I can't because I don't know how she's gonna respond. I don't know what she's gonna do with that information. She could use it against him. Bitterness is the right word. It's her only child and only daughter getting married but she was like "*when is it going to be my turn to get married?*". So we keep her at arm's length now.

For Participant 106, her relationship with her mother changed drastically due to her increasing closeness with other family members. During her interview, she described wanting more "closeness" to her mother throughout her life. However, her mother's inability to honor her experiences and have "emotionally mature" conversations hindered their ability to repair and grow their relationship over time. While Participant 106 described craving a closer emotional bond with her mother in childhood and adolescence, she eventually decided to keep her mother "at arm's length" as an adult. Participant 106's narrative mirrors that of several other women in

this study; *family systems contractions and expansions* significantly affected the level of closeness, presence of conflict, and the nature of the relationship between mothers and daughters over time.

Grandmothering. As discussed in the *Family Systems Contractions and Expansions* theme analysis, becoming a mother significantly affected the relationship between the women in our sample and their mothers. Thus, it makes sense that *Grandmothering* was a common, yet not surprising, theme revealed from the data. Historically, African American households tend to be multigenerational, often including the influence of grandparents, specifically grandmothers, in child rearing and support (Hunter, 1997). To this end, most participants mentioned the interaction between their mothers and their children. Notably, not all of the participant's mothers were still alive during data collection. Still, all of these participants described their mother's relationship with their children in generally positive terms regardless of their own relationship with their mothers. For example, Participant 110, who described a tumultuous relationship with her mother during childhood and early adulthood, explained that their relationship became more "solidified" once she became pregnant and her mother became a grandmother.

Participant 110: My relationship with my mother especially solidified when I was pregnant with my son. She had been clean for a while, at least eight years at that point. She was really excited. And she came to me, and she was like, '*Hey, I know that we are not especially close. But I really want an opportunity to be a grandmother.*' And then I told her I said, '*Okay, that's fine. You can grandparent to the fullest, but there are boundaries. And if you, you know, violate these boundaries or behave in such a way that is unhealthy for this, this baby that's, you know, cooking in my belly, then I'll cut you off*'. But she did not….she's been an amazing

grandmother. But we do not have a mother-daughter relationship because she's never been a mother.

Participant 110's experience with navigating her mother's transition to grandmother provides a unique perspective on the flexibility and scope of grandmothering. She described how her mother can be "amazing" at the role of grandmother yet still not fulfill the role of "mother." Her account also provides an understanding of what it means to be a grandmother and what it means to be "grandmothered." As supported by the narratives of other women in our study, the role of a grandmother differs from that of a mother. In this study, we define *grandmothering* as a role in which a woman provides emotional, physical, or financial support to her grandchildren regardless of the relationship to or history with the mother.

Regarding childhood experiences and upbringings, some women in the study described their grandmothers as their primary maternal figure which is consistent with prior research (Hunter, 1997).

> Participant 106: I think it was more my grandmother. Like she was the one who I knew. I remember when I'm walking to school in the morning, my grandma was it was the one that made sure I got on the bus. Or if I missed the bus, my grandma was the one to call my dad and be like, 'Hey, let's take her to school'. So my grandmother was probably during that time period, the primary caregiver because my mom was there and I have recollection of her being there. But I know from important things, like we're getting up and we're going to church and my grandma was the one that's getting me up and we're going to church, then go on with her to church, and go on to the grocery store… those things were with my grandma.

This quote supports the idea that Black grandmothers may provide child-rearing support to their grandchildren. In cases like Participant 106, her grandmother was her primary maternal figure rather than a secondary or tertiary caregiver. Being parented by a grandparent is not uncommon in the Black community. However, it is an interesting facet of life to explore when investigating maternal outcomes and dynamics between Black mothers and daughters. This participant described her grandmother as especially important to her in childhood and adulthood; she even chose her grandmother to be her "flower girl" at her wedding. This selection of the flower girl and her strong connection to her grandmother in the context of marriage is especially notable given the fact that her own mother expressed "bitterness" at the idea of the participant getting engaged. This suggests that in the absence of a strong and healthy mother-daughter relationship, grandmothers can help fill the roles traditionally held by the mother. Additionally, grandmothers are unique in that they are embedded within the family context and hold some sort of relationship with both the mother and granddaughter; the strength and characteristics of both of these relationships can affect the scope of grandmothering within the family system.

Additionally, two of the participants mentioned stepping into the role of grandmother themselves. While there was not enough consensus present in the data to justify this as a theme, *grandmatrescence,* the process of becoming a grandmother and characteristics associated with this position is an area that should be explored further in the context of Black mother-daughter relationships and the Black American family system at large.

Custody of the Inner Black Girl. In Kanye West's hit song POWER, he writes, "Taking my inner child, I'm fighting for custody with these responsibilities that they entrusted me." His song details the profound feeling of gaining power as an adult to not only shape your own destiny, but the destinies of others and the world itself. Interestingly, these lyrics accurately

describe a phenomenon captured through the women's stories in this study. The "inner child" is a Jungian archetype that can describe parts of the self that continue to need nurturing; each of us is thought to have an inner child that may be dissatisfied due to inadequate social, emotional, or physical care (Bradshaw, 2013). Regardless of their upbringing and closeness with their mothers, each woman described mothering their Black daughters as an opportunity for personal growth, reflection, and healing that aligns with inner child theories. That is, the women could link experiences or thoughts from girlhood to behaviors and mindsets present in their adulthood. For example, Participant 114 depicts herself as a mother who sees her own self-care and self-awareness as essential to mothering.

> Participant 114: And so, as a Black mother, I think I'm trying to redefine what it means to be a Black woman with her and have her focus more on herself and on her own self-care. And emulating that by being selfish myself, you know, sometimes and talking to her about selfish napping, a "dirty word", and being okay to focus on you and what you need. And prioritizing yourself so that you can be of service to other people in ways that you want to be. I think that's a very long-winded answer. But for me, being a Black mother really means taking ownership of how I want to live as a person and not letting that always be in relation to somebody else or caretaking for someone else.

Participant 114's reference to the term selfish as a "dirty word" gives insight into her recognition of Black women's, and especially Black mothers' choice of self-care as antithetical to socially acceptable maternal behavior. Here, this mother not only thinks of self-care as something vital to mothering but as an essential part of Black womanhood and sustained mental health that she hopes to teach her daughter. Thus, *Custody of the Inner Black Girl* can be thought

of as a dedication to healing through modeling acts of self-love and demonstrating the importance of mental healthcare maintenance.

Participant 100 described mothering a Black daughter in a similar way. She explained that for her, mothering is about accountability and intention and getting to "challenge" herself to "be a better person."

> Participant 100: It's just the best part is, is just knowing that you're, you're softly accountable, someone is holding you accountable, in a way because my behaviors are the seeds and the model. Whatever I do, whatever I say… that makes me intentional. So the best part is just really having to be a better person. Like challenging myself. And really evaluating my decisions, the way I see things, the things I do, really making me to see things differently. So I think that's the best part about being a mom to these girls. Because my daughter would tell me, 'I don't like it when you yell at me.' And I'm like, 'I know. I'm sorry.'

Participant 100 had previously described feeling criticized by her mother. Therefore, she used her role as a mother to exercise traits such as "listening" and "forgiveness" to parent her daughter differently.

Yellow Mothering. The term *Yellow Mothering* comes directly from a participant in this study who described her mother as a "yellow mother" due to her selfless attitude and approach related to parenting.

> Participant 116: I give her this I get from her. And then I'm trying to tell her like Mom, I am like this because of you. Like, you know, and I see…I see now, I realized my mom always said her favorite colors were purple and yellow. And I thought "you know what? Nobody's favorite color is yellow." And now as I take care of my kids, I know why her

> color is yellow because it's what's left over when everyone else has chosen their favorite color. And if you say that yellow is your favorite, you always get your favorite because no one else wants that. My favorite color is yellow two now. Is it yellow? No, it's purple. I love purple. It's beautiful! But it is also yellow because it needs to be I'm a, I'm a yellow mother.

The participant's description of her mother as a yellow mother presents the idea of selfless mothering as intentional and honorable; she describes her mother and herself as purposefully sacrificing her own preferences and desires for the sake of her children. This participant went on to say:

> Participant 116: It means I'm a mother who makes sure that my family is taken care of at all times. And I will take the most joy in knowing that they are taken care of. That's when you're a yellow mother. That's what you do.

Yellow Mothering was a recurring theme throughout the interviews, as multiple women described parenting as a selfless and intentional act. However, the women differed in why they chose to be self-sacrificing in their parenting efforts. For some women, like Participant 116, yellow mothering resulted from learning through modeling. In this way, yellow mothering, or maternal sacrifice, was observed in childhood and reenacted once the woman became a mother herself. In other instances, yellow mothering was a deliberate choice because it was the opposite of how they were raised. In this way, Yellow Mothering is closely associated with the previous theme, *Custody of the Inner Black Girl*, as these mothers sought to care for their families due to not feeling adequately supported in childhood.

Auntie-ism and Sister Mothers. In Black American culture, an "Auntie" describes a woman who is not a child's legal or biological maternal figure but someone who provides similar support, supervision, and mentorship. This theme emerged from multiple participants' descriptions of prominent maternal-like figures in their lives who positively influenced their development either alongside or in the absence of their primary caretaker. An Auntie or Sister Mother differs from a grandmother in our sample due to their less disciplinarian and structure-providing role in child-rearing.

Aunties and Sister Mothers may be related to the individual however, this is not always the case. Participant 114's description of her track coach provides an example of auntie-ism and other mothering.

> Participant 114: My sister and I, my second oldest sister, we ran track together on a track team since I was about seven years old, through college. So that was like a big part of my childhood. Because I was with my teammates and my track coach a lot. We traveled to run track races, we practiced almost every day. It was a very intense but fun environment very competitive. I learned a lot like a lot of who I am is because of being on that track team and have my coach raised that she was a black woman from the south. And she was very old school and old fashioned. But she raised us like with a lot of love discipline. We're also friends now 30 years later, like we're very close friends like sisters almost. She was like a really, really big maternal figure for sure. She is the short, kind of heavyset black woman from South Carolina, I think. And she was just, she's really she's really funny, but very, very, very hard on us, you know, but like in a loving and like, good way. We were all really great athletes are all really great academically, too. And she she just

> embraced all of us, my mom and her like were would be at at odds sometimes, but never in like a detrimental or serious way. She was an amazing track coach.

Participant 114 described her track coach as a woman who raised her in childhood. For this participant, her relationship with her track coach was characterized by spending extended time together and using "love discipline." The participant described eventually becoming close friends with her track coach as she grew older. This relationship between the participant and her track coach captures the essence of "Auntie-ism" and "Other-Mothering" by describing a relationship of emotional closeness, mentorship, and trust.

Participant 111 described a fraught relationship with her mother that was characterized by consistent conflict and a lack of emotional closeness. Though she was raised primarily in a single-mother household, she described experiencing the most happiness at her aunt's home. In the quote below, she credits her aunt with allowing her to experience being "the baby" and thanks her for providing her with "an outlet" for the turmoil experienced at home.

> Participant 111: I grew up in a single-parent home half the time, and then I also grew up raised by my aunt and my uncle, which is my mom's sister and her husband. You know, I always had my mom's back; I was always fighting for her until I realized a lot of the things she caused on herself. And that's when I stepped away. But, you know, yeah, I had that. But I also was, you know, I had an outlet, you know, when I would go to my aunt's to be the kid, I got to be the baby. And treated as such, I didn't have to carry that weight when I was at my aunt's house, like I did when I was at my mom's. So it is unfortunate. It's an unfortunate thing. And it's definitely a cycle that has been broken through me. With my own daughter, I try to be more like my Aunt.

Participant 111 helped us understand the importance of Aunties and Other-mother (Collins,1987) relationships in the context of mental health and emotional development. Because her aunt's home and presence were such a contrast from her mother's, she was able to receive the emotional support and attention she needed to develop as a Black girl in her care. Her Aunt also provided a space for the participant to develop an understanding of what she valued or desired for her own daughter years later.

Participant 202 had similar sentiments about her aunt and emphasized the importance her aunt played in mentoring her and showing her a different example of what it meant to be a Black woman. Here, she defines her aunt as a "funky" and "weird" woman who is much different from her mother. Earlier in the interview, Participant expressed feeling confined in her career options as a young girl; she felt that her mother and other relatives had decided what career she should pursue. The trusting and accepting relationship between the Participant and her aunt made her feel safe enough to open up about her true desires. Her Aunt provided a safe space for the participant to express herself and her dreams.

> Participant 202: . But my aunt, I have an aunt, my aunt [redacted name], who was kind of like a mentor to me. She was the first person she was the only adult actually, that I said, like, with all the other adults, I was like, I'm going to be a lawyer, you know, but she was the only adult that I'd said, I want to be a writer. And I remember just, you know, getting to spend time with her and she had like a little apartment. And I remember she was weird. Like her bell bottoms, her claws, like she was just so funky to me. And I would spend a night with her, she, you know, never married, never had children. To this day, she's kind of a mentor to my daughter. But she was the aunt that like, really nurtured my my desire to write.

> And she was the one that were going, Oh, you can write, you know, even as I got older, she I remember, she sent me like a list of agents. And she was like, you know, you know, here's a list of agents that you can reach out to. And so, but she was the only literally the only adult that I would ever say I want to be a writer, and she kind of encouraged that. But with all the other adults around me, I just kind of kept up this, you know, I want to be a lawyer, you know.

Notably, Participant 202 explained that her aunt continues to be a mentor figure to her and her daughter as well. All three quotes are used to demonstrate how auntie relationships continue throughout the life course. These relationships continue either directly through sustained contact or indirectly through lessons learned and passed down to their own children. While we are not able to conclude the exact criteria that distinguish a mentor from an Auntie, our analysis revealed that common characteristics of these Aunties were that they *a) positively contributed to the gendered racial identity development and gendered racial socialization process of a Black girl, b) sustained a relationship over an extended period of time, and c) provided valued and critical mentorship and guidance that resulted in positive mental health and life outcomes for a Black girl.*

Gendered Racial Socialization. The literature review for this study included gendered racial socialization as a potential framework for understanding the Black mother-daughter matrix. While gendered racial socialization research has gained headway in recent literature (Brown et al., 2017; Davis Tribble et al., 2029; Stokes et al., 2020), the role of the family environment– namely, the mother in this complex process continues to be an area of needed attention (Thomas & King, 2007). In this analysis, gendered racial socialization is defined as: communicated messages, either direct or indirect, related to Black womanhood or girlhood from

mother to daughter. Essentially, the team identified narratives of gendered racial socialization as those that contributed to the development and conceptualization of Black girlhood or womanhood by their mothers.

For this study, it was imperative to understand the context and perspective from which the gendered racial socialization process was taking place. Thus, to begin, participants were asked about the challenges, surprises, and joys of mothering a Black girl. Participant 106 described parenting as especially hard in the current sociopolitical environment of the United States.

> Participant 106: Being a Black woman in America is hard, but now you've got kids. And so I think she did the best that she could. Like parenting in general, is hard, but parenting black girls in a world where the world does not love us. This America does not love us, we're in this place where we are a challenge and we are not valued. So it's hard. Like it's just it's hard.

Similarly, Participant 111 described prioritizing her daughter's safety, which consists of teaching her about the importance and challenges of being a Black girl and woman in America.

> Participant 111: The most challenging part about mothering a Black daughter is making sure that she's safe. Even when she's not in my presence, making sure she's aware of the things, you know that she needs to be safe when she's not. In my presence, one of the things you know, when I talk to her about certain things, I tell her, I need you to know XYZ because I'm not always going to be present. And that doesn't mean from this or just not in a close vicinity, you may try to reach out to me, I may not be reachable, you know, I may not be you know, able to answer

> the phone. So I need you to under understand and know how to navigate these things.

These quotes suggest that for Black mothers, intentional gendered racial socialization may be a means for preparing and thus protecting their daughters from racism and other challenges. For some women, this intentional gendered racial socialization differed from their childhood experiences of understanding the world as a Black girl. For example, Participant 114 described teaching her child the reason for certain practices among Black women (such as wearing a swim cap) as a stark contrast to how she came to understand the difference between her and her White peers during childhood.

> Participant 115: For myself, I think at times, you know, I kind of had that White standard of beauty, like, I couldn't wait to straighten my hair and no longer have pigtails. And, you know, my hair wasn't flowing like everyone else's, or I didn't understand like, Okay, I went swimming, so I had to wear the swim cap, you know, things like that. But now, having a daughter who's into swimming, and I mean, she's only five. *But we just had to have that conversation.* Like, this is why you wear a swimming cap every time you go. Swimming, and this is, you know, your hair texture is different. And these are things we have to do that are different than others. It's important for her to know.

To understand the gendered racial socialization process, participants were also asked about facets of communication between the mother-daughter dyad. Participants were encouraged to share as much as they wanted regarding areas or processes of communication, including discipline, verbal communication, modeling and observation, and written communication. Two

sub-themes were identified that fall under the larger umbrella of Gendered Racial Socialization: *Pretty Privilege and Color Capital* and *Gendered Racial Values*.

The term "Pretty Privilege" is certainly not new to this study. In popular culture, pretty privilege describes the societal benefits that a person receives due to their physical appearance (Ellis, 2023). Similarly, those who lack pretty privilege often experience a negative bias or discrimination due to being deemed culturally less valuable (Meier, 2022; Rowe, 2021). The subtheme *Pretty Privilege and Color Capital* as a whole describes socialization surrounding proximity to Whiteness (i.e., lighter skin, slimmer noses, thinner body frames, straighter hair, etc.). This theme pays particular attention to Black women's experiences in the mother-daughter relationship that have been marked by messages of pretty privilege or colorism.

Participant 142 grew up in Alabama and attended high school in the mid-2000s. She gives a glimpse into what it was like to grow up in a state known for its racial tensions.

> Participant 142: Yeah, when I went to high school, we transferred from a majority of Black schools to all White schools. And literally, the first day that we got off the bus. We went towards the restrooms, and there was a sign that said coloreds and Whites. It was scary. I was really scared.

This participant described throughout her interview being acutely aware of her skin color as a darker-skinned Black girl during childhood. She described herself as the "darkest sibling" and was made fun of both within and outside of the family unit for her skin color.

Participant 142's experiences in childhood affected how she parents her daughter in terms of gendered race-based messages related to skin color. Here, the participant's negative experiences of being judged for having darker skin allowed her to develop tools to help her daughter embrace her skin color.

> Participant 142: I think she [her daughter] likes her skin. But when she looks at her skin compared to other classmates that are lighter complected, she feels that she's too dark. And you know I tell her all the time there's no such thing as too dark. Your skin is beautiful. So she's already noticing even at you know this was in daycare when she might well she was pre K - so this was in pre K when she made this, you know, like this lighter skin tone girl is prettier than so just having to reel her back in.

Participant 102 provides more commentary about her daughter's skin tone. When asked to describe raising a Black daughter, Participant 102 listed her daughter's neurodivergence and dark skin tone as factors that affect her parenting. This mom's understanding of what it means to be a darker-skinned Black girl catalyzed her to parent in a way that mitigates risk to her daughter's self-esteem.

> Participant 102: One, she's on the autism spectrum, and two, she is dark-skinned. Right now in our house, she's the darkest person in our house. You might say, what does that mean? Why does that matter? More than anything, I want her to love herself and know her worth. And so it's, it's tricky because she has a twin. And for my son, everything is easy. Like, he's a social butterfly, he gets all A's… He's already in a top swim class, like it, like everything is easy to handle for him and he's lighter. And everything, like everything is hard to her. And I want her to understand that, you know, there is nothing wrong with her. She is a gift. And just because she moves through the world differently, you know, she's still got all the God given magic that everybody else has.

Participant 142 also shared her experiences related to her weight and body image and how that impacted her relationship with her mother. Her mother placed her on a diet at 9 years old, which meant she ate differently from the rest of the family. She describes developing an eating disorder due to experiencing bullying from her mother and others in the household. For this participant, expectations surrounding bodily appearance and conventional femininity were direct examples of how her mother's values and parenting impacted her self-esteem and self-concept. Not only did the participant's experiences of being bullied affect her relationship with her body and self-image, it also "negatively affected" her relationship with her mother.

> Participant 142: My weight is another negative factor that negatively affected my relationship with my mother. Growing up, there were not many positive reflections of plus-size Black women, and despite a huge majority of the women in my family being plus-sized I was picked on a lot by those same family members regarding my weight. Early on, my mom started me on dieting at a young age, starting at 9 years old. I hated it and felt so bad about myself because I was not as skinny as my sisters. This channeled bouts of binging and I hated the act of throwing up so I would simply start skipping meals. I am now at a place in my life where I am still working on developing a better relationship with my body and building it on strength versus just being skinny. This is another characteristic I refuse to place on my daughter, and working with her on remaining body-positive and to not bully any others due to size.

Participant 142's experiences with bullying from her mother motivated this mother to not engage in the same discriminatory behavior when parenting her own daughter. In light of her

experiences, the participant "refuses" to bully her daughter for her size and to practice body positivity.

Participant 111 described having active and intentional conversations to increase her daughter's awareness of racial disparities in beauty standards and social privilege, which is different than the lack of messages she received from her own mother. She explained, " I actually talk to my daughter. I have conversations with her. Even though she may not want it, I gave it to her. That's not something I can say that I've gotten from my mom."

Participant 111 further described why she believes it is important that she discusses colorism and gendered racism purposefully with her daughter.

> Participant 111: One thing for sure is being aware of her surroundings, being aware that we live in suburbia, you know. I'm raising my Black daughter in suburbia, where it's predominantly White. She needs to understand and know that the privilege, the privileges that are afforded to our White counterparts aren't afforded to you [her daughter]. So when you may respond in a way it may be acceptable on the poor, a white child, or a lighter-skinned girl….My daughter is darker than I am, you know, so I just try to make sure I teach her how to respond. And not necessarily respond in a demeaning way but more in a professional way.

Not only did Participant 111 describe teaching her daughter about discrimination, but she also made it a point to teach her daughter how to respond to and combat gendered racism. Each participant described wanting to equip their daughters with tools they were not given in childhood. In this way, gendered racial socialization may mimic the themes of *Yellow-Mothering* and *Custody of the Inner Black Girl* as these mothers describe protecting and nurturing their daughters as a response to their own childhood traumas and experiences.

Gendered Racial Values is a sub-theme that describes a set of beliefs or traits passed on from mother to daughter, either directly or indirectly, that are particularly related to Black girlhood or Black womanhood. These traits were identified through the participant's narratives because they each hold utility in surviving and thriving mentally, physically, and emotionally in an anti-Black patriarchal society. Additionally, these values each held importance to the culture of Black womanhood. Participants were asked to identify what values their mothers passed on to them. Later in the interview protocol, the women were asked what values they had passed on to their own daughters. Examples of these values include independence and idiosyncrasy. Both independence and idiosyncrasy speak to our participant's understanding of gendered racism and the negative public perceptions that exist surrounding Black women. Thus, both are coded as examples or subthemes of gendered racial values.

Independence was a common topic throughout the women's narratives in this study. Participants described how self-sufficiency and self-reliance were valuable and necessary traits for Black women and girls. Below, Participant 114 describes how both her mother and track coach (later described as an "other-mother" in the coding process) raised her to be "self-sufficient", often requiring her to be responsible for her desires, belongings, and actions.

> Participant 114: Getting ready for school was definitely on me. I remember getting myself dressed for school when I was eight years old or so. My… I think both my mom and my track coach, were very big on like self-sufficiency and independence. So even I remember like just traveling my track coach, and we would be at the restaurant ordering dinner, to make all of us that we wanted like to the waitress, we had to like speak up for ourselves and say, like, I want to order this thing. She wouldn't talk for us. She wouldn't like, you know, do all those

> things for us. So we had to be responsible for like having our uniforms together, having all the things that we needed. When we packed to travel, we had to have all of our stuff like it wasn't our parents …it was on us to get those things together. And our mom was kind of the same way. I think for her it was out of necessity of having four or five kids in the household. Like, "I can't do all this for all of you".

Participant 100 described a more indirect socialization process concerning independent characteristics. She learned to value independence by observing her mother and learning from her experiences as a Black woman.

> Participant 100: I made some commitments in my life. Some life goals I had was mainly because of her. Because of what I saw her go through and I was like, "there's no way….if I'm going to get married, I'm going to have my own car, I'm going to have my own job, I'm going to control my own finances. So those things that I set for myself, they were mainly because I saw her go through what she did. So it was more like, I'm not going to allow someone to treat me this way. Like, if you're going to treat me that way and walk out because I can take care of myself. So I think in a way, it made me really independent. So you see people telling me things like, "Oh, you don't act like the last child, you act like a firstborn in the house." I'm like, "I know, I don't act anywhere close to the last child!" Like, I don't depend on anybody. And it made me to be a go-getter, and just really wanting to pursue what I want to do, because I always have that at the back of my mind like "okay, you know what, I want to have my life and I want to be able to provide for my children, even if I'm in the hospital, I want to get to a point where

> my kids would be enough to provide for them. I think, in all it just instilled the whole idea of independence and hard work for me.

Idiosyncrasy was another gendered-racial value transmitted from mother to daughter in our study. Idiosyncrasy describes the value of celebrated individualism and the ability to be your own person without shame. Throughout the interviews, participants detailed how their mother's appreciation of their unique characteristics contributed to positive mental health outcomes such as improved self-esteem and self-efficacy. Participant 107 described how her mother's encouragement and embracement of her natural proclivities made her feel treasured and accepted. In the quotes below, Participant 107 explains why this gendered-racial value is especially important for young Black girls as "silly," "goofy," and "funny" is the opposite of what society allows for Black women and girls to be.

> Participant 107: My mother specifically made room allow, and made room for us to be silly, and Goofy, and funny. We could be that. And that was very, and I know now that that is a that is a treasure. That is a treasure in black womanhood

> Participant 107: And then I will say also, again another treasure along with this was to be silly. Another value that she had was gentleness. She really instilled that everything don't have to be so hard. Black girls are not really afforded gentleness and softness.

When asked about the gendered racial messages she would like to instill in her own daughters, participant 107 shared similar values that her mother gave to her.

> Participant 107: We allow our girls to be funny and silly and have their own interests and express how they want. They pick out their own clothes, are they we

> see that we look at them, but they pick out their own clothes every day. Be who you are, even when it looks different than what you're seeing around you.

Participant 107 went on to explain that she believes " *that authenticity is our power because we have been socialized to are encouraged to be like a norm….be like a category… be like a box.*" Having her children know who they are and embrace that person was important for her because it gives them *power* in this world.

Participant 114 described parenting similarly, " *I feel like I've learned so much from my kid. I'm giving her the space to be who she is. And for her to just, like, teach us [participant's husband] what she needs and wants and what she likes, rather than like imposing things on her. So I feel like, I have to be like, very responsive to her.*"

When asked further why it is important for her daughter to be able to express her authentic self, Participant 114 described, " *I just… I always want her to know that like, it's okay to like to be happy on your own terms. And to be yourself. Unapologetically, like, you know, not having to stifle or quiet parts of yourself, because what other people's feelings or other people's comfort about who you organically are. I think I've had to learn that myself as a Black woman. And I want her to just know that intuitively.*" This participant's own difficulties embracing herself and her emotional well-being resulted in her wanting to teach idiosyncrasy as a value to her daughter.

Gendered Racial Identity. The interview protocol began with participants detailing their experiences as a Black woman and a Black girl. Each participant was asked, "What does your identity as a Black woman mean to you?". This open-ended question was followed by "Describe what was it? like growing up as a Black girl." The purpose of these questions was to engage in scene setting– the participant was given the agency and opportunity to frame their narrative as a

Black woman and girl through their own words and experiences. The objective of this dissertation was to understand and uncover various factors related to Black mother-daughter relationships. *Gendered Racial Identity*, or the combination and interaction between Blackness and womanhood, became a salient theme throughout the course of data collection and analysis related to both motherhood and daughterhood. Scientific literature and pop culture alike present Black womanhood as a complex and distinct concept, much like the women in this study. The importance of this theme is the intersection of gendered racial identity and the Black mother-daughter relationship.

Gendered Racial Identity remains a broad theme. This is mainly because the data sample never reached saturation on information related to identity formation of Black womanhood and Black girlhood. However, the data identified that a) gendered racial identity is an important aspect of the self-concept for Black women and girls and b) the mother-daughter relationship helps shape this identity through several mechanisms, including modeled behavior, direct messaging (and lack of messaging), and discipline.

When Participant 116 shared the difficulties in mothering her daughter, she referenced helping her daughter understand her gendered racial identity and positionality in America while also teaching her to embrace her individuality as one of the most difficult facets to balance.

> Participant 116: Helping her remember that she is a Black girl and that that is going to shape the way people see her without unintentionally placing a chip on her shoulder. I don't want her to move through the world with a chip that I have had because of my experiences. Because I don't want that to stop her from creating her own experiences and developing her own opinions based on how she moves to the world. But I need her to know history enough to understand why

> certain things are happening. I don't want her to let history stop her or mute herself. But I do need her to know that things happened. It's a delicate balance.

Participant 106 reflected on her gendered racial identity development as a Black girl. In her reflection, she noted that she did not remember having direct conversations about Black girlhood or womanhood with her mother.

> Participant 106: I don't think we talked about it. I don't think we talked about being Black. I've never had those conversations with my mom; we just never talked about it. Not that I remember. But I did feel things.

Participant 106's experience of not having direct conversations about gender or race was not uncommon in the women's narratives in this study. However, several women in this study, regardless of how they were parented, wanted to have formal or explicit ongoing conversations about gendered racial identity with their own daughters. This suggests that there may be a shift in the desire to talk openly about gendered racial identity or that these conversations may be becoming more commonplace between Black mothers and daughters specifically. In this way, this theme relates to gendered racial socialization as gendered racial identity is formed due to a person's socialization.

Family Environment. Exploring contextual family factors related to the Black mother-daughter relationship was essential to understanding the nuances of this matrix. For example, this study would be remiss not to mention the influence of siblings, spouses or fathers, birth order, geographic location, and other factors relevant to the Black family. The theme, *Family Environment*, refers to family-related factors, both positive and negative, that influence the mother-daughter relationship throughout the life course. By ascribing to family systems theory

and the extensive research on collectivism in Black families (Logan & Freeman, 2012), the family environment was vital for framing our Black mother-daughter relationships. Our team identified *domestic and gender-based violence, drug and substance use,* and *religiosity* as subthemes. Other noteworthy factors that may influence the Black mother-daughter relationship include family composition and time and place of childhood. However, these components of the family environment were not prevalent enough in our study to be identified as solid themes or subthemes. Family composition includes the presence of domestic partners, siblings, and others who may cycle within the family system as a whole. For instance, some participants described family members such as cousins or non-blood-related but close relationships as influential in their upbringings. Sometimes, these relationships could also impact the mother-daughter relationship by providing additional stress or support to the dyad. Additionally, some participants possessed less consistent or cohesive family compositions. By this, we refer to the women who described upbringings that were marked by significant separations, adoptions, or loss of custody.

Drug and Substance Use was identified as a subtheme for Family Environment. A handful of participants recalled how drug use within their family system impacted the mother-daughter relationship. For example, participant 106 described growing up in the late 1980s and early 1990s and watching her mother fall victim to "The War on Drugs." While the participant was not aware that her mother was using drugs, her mother's substance use still impacted the family system and the mother-daughter dyad by leading to family separation and relocation.

> Participant 106: So, I mean, I remember her being there. But I do know her telling me that, you know, she was on drugs during that time. So she was in and out doing her own thing. So from zero to seven to 10, she was on drugs, and then she

> got off drugs. This is 1995-ish, okay, when she got off drugs then she got saved, started going to church.
>
> Brianna Baker: Were you aware that your mom was using drugs?
>
> Participant 106: No, not a clue. I mean, I didn't know. And I think it's just not knowing, like, I probably stole it. And I probably didn't even realize what I was seeing. But no, I didn't. I didn't know. Okay, like I knew she smoked. I understand that. She smoked cigarettes. Like that was a thing. Like I've seen you smoke a cigarette that no cigarettes are bad for you. But, like the drugs, I didn't know that she was on drugs

Our team included drug use as a theme because of the significance this factor had on several mother-daughter relationships in our sample and the Black American population at large. Participant 106 goes on to describe how the drug use of her immediate and extended family members and the neighborhood influenced her worldview growing up.

> Participant 106: But I'm talking about my two uncles that were kind of in and out the house. them and kind of like they all use drugs. Like everybody just mentioned that we grew up in the hood. So poor, really poor area. A lot of people use drugs. I had cousins that live down the street that sold drugs. So like it was in the area.

Participant 110 described how drug use impacted her mother's ability to take accountability for the neglect she experienced in childhood.

> Participant 110: My mom is my mother and that she birthed me, but she never really parented me. My mom was a blue collar professional working in oil and gas until I was about in kindergarten. And in unfortunately, in being in that that world, there was a whole lot of cocaine.

> Participant 110: She would say, "Oh, it was the drugs that made me blah blah blah". And never, in never any real apologies for just the abuse and trauma and things that I suffered while living while she was addicted. Because it was never her fault. It was the drugs. And so I just never…the relationship never got close, because taking responsibility for your actions matters to me

Before this excerpt, participant 110 had described a childhood where she felt emotionally isolated and neglected. When the participant reached adulthood, she decided to confront her mother about her emotional absence and drug use. In response, she recalled her mother excusing her behavior as a result of her drug use, not her parenting. The participant went on to conclude, "She was consumed by cocaine. I'm like, my mom is my mother and that she birthed me, but she never really parented me."

The subtheme *Domestic and Gender-based Violence* captures the unfortunately common theme of sexual violence and intimate partner violence present within the family histories of the participants. Participant 102 described how her grandmother's experiences of sexual abuse and domestic violence led both her and her mother to prioritize bodily autonomy and independence from male romantic partners.

> Participant 102: Um there's a Also my grandmother was a survivor of, of bad domestic violence. My mother's father was abusive. And I wonder, so I'm only

> like….. my mother and I are both single. And like my goal in life, as from early on was, I will never be a single parent. And bam, here I am. Um I think my mother I think part of her relationships with men or her lack of trying to sustain them was in part due to watching that violence of a child um, you know, she's because she will say things like, Oh, you're not gonna hit me, you know? Like, she said, she remembers her mother, like running down the street, screaming for her life.

Participant 102's memories of gendered racial messages within the context of her family environment complement findings from the *Gendered Racial Socialization* theme. This participant's narratives support the messages of independence and strength that other participants received around Black girlhood and womanhood. However, the subtheme *Domestic and Gender-based Violence* captures a nuance that suggests these messages may be in relation to intergenerational issues within the family system as well as the broader sociopolitical environment. Here, Participant 102's understanding of the importance of independence comes from experiences women in her own family had concerning domestic and gender-based violence. This theme, in particular, captures a generational pattern of single motherhood as a choice rather than an unintended consequence.

Participant 112 described how one of her mother's primary goals in caring for her and her sister was to protect them from sexual assault.

> Participant 112: I have five sisters, and we would share undergarments, but we're happy. Previously, the participant had described growing up "in poverty". We're happy, we would have one meal a day, which would come from my mom's garden. But we're happy. So for me, it changed. It changed the way I define

> happiness. It's not about money, but it's about mental stability. Being she made sure that we're mentally fine. And I don't know how she's afforded money to take me to a boarding school when I reached high school. But her initial step was to make sure her daughters go to high school to protect us from maybe sexual assault.

Her mother worked hard to provide them access to a better primary and secondary education via boarding school. With access to quality education and a better social environment, the participant hypothesized that her mother believed this would protect her from sexual assault at a young age. Participant 112's experiences provide a socioeconomic context to the experiences of Black women and girls. While sexual violence can affect all people, 40-60% of Black girls will experience unwanted or coercive sexual contact before the age of 18 (Blueprint, 2012). Participant 112 also described her mother protecting her and her sisters from sexual assault as a means to maintain "mental stability," further speaking to the toll gender-based sexual violence can have on Black women and girls.

Interestingly, this participant described "protecting Black girls" as a "family effort." For her, being protected from sexual assault was a priority not just for her mother but for the entire family, including her father. This idea suggests that the family environment can serve as a buffer and protective unit for Black women and girls in the face of domestic and gender-based violence.

Religiosity was the final subtheme of *Family Environment* in this study. Participants referenced religion, particularly Christianity, several times. For the participants in this study, being raised in a religious or Christian household defined a large part of their upbringing. For example, Participant 106 described how one of the "biggest takeaways" from her mother was to "put God first:"

> Participant 106: I think the biggest thing, that my biggest takeaway when my mom was like, a love for God, and that really God first and that the Christian, the Christianity, I think that was what it was…that whole, like, 'Train up a child thing'. So that was one of the things that she would always say, she was like, 'you know, you grow up, you may not want to go to church, but at least I'm gonna give you this, I'm gonna instill this in you'. So it's not forced upon me. But anything that I want to learn as it relates to, like Christianity or religion, I now have that I can do that on my own without being forced to do it. So that is something like the power of prayer. Like those are things that she gave me that I will always take with me. And I'll pass that on to my children.

This participant previously described religious practices such as attending church on Sunday mornings as a "staple" in her household, suggesting that religiosity provided some routine and structure during childhood. In addition, this participant described wanting to pass on this aspect of her upbringing to her own children, further suggesting that there were positive benefits from being raised in a religious family environment.

Being raised in a religious home informed many of the participants' coping strategies as well. For example, Participant 115 explained how her mother taught her to handle hard times, *"And I remember her saying to me, like, she would literally be like, 'Hey, did you pray about it?' And I'd be like, 'No, not yet'. She was like, 'Okay, well, pray about it, find out what God said.'"* For this participant, her mother taught her to use prayer to cope with stressful situations. This participant also credited her mother's religious teachings with helping her build her self-concept. For example, she stated:

> Participant 115: It [Christianity] definitely helped me to build into the woman that I am and to be, and you know, that she would say it to she's like, 'I'm not gonna be here forever, so you got to figure out how are you going to make these decisions without me.'

These quotes suggest that for some Black women, religion was used in childhood to supplement parenting by providing a structure for dealing with stress and building resilience.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study represents an effort to capture the relational aspects specific to the Black-mother-daughter relationship. As evidenced by the vastness of the results, the data encapsulates several facets unique to this dynamic in the American sociopolitical environment. This chapter offers a discussion of the aforementioned results presented in correspondence to the following research questions.

1. How do Black mothers and daughters describe and qualify their mother-daughter relationship?
2. How does the Black Mother-Daughter Relationship Change over Time?
3. How do Black daughters perceive their mothers' influence on the development of their general mental health and self-esteem?

Following the discussion of research questions, implications of these findings regarding psychological theory, professional practice, and policy will be addressed. Lastly, the chapter will explore the limitations of the study and present future directions for research.

Research Question 1: How do Black mothers and daughters describe and understand their mother-daughter relationship?

This primary research question captured the core purpose of this study which was to understand the complexities and nuances that constitute and differentiate Black American mother-daughter relationships from other sociodemographic groups. Our key takeaway from interviewing mothers about their experiences in motherhood and daughterhood was that Black mothers and daughters have complex relationships that are not monolithic. However, there are some key factors of influence that appear consistent across narratives to be significant in the development and strength of the mother-daughter bond throughout the lifecourse. It is critically

important to note that the age of the daughter in relation to these factors may moderate the impact of each on the dyadic relationship and on the mental health of both parties. To holistically capture the personal, social, and systemic influences on the Black mother-daughter matrix, our team developed a list of proximal and distal factors using the identified themes. These factors were generated by dissecting the identified themes and applying them to answer research question 1. Broadly, these factors include:

Proximal Factors:

- Internalized gendered racism
- Attachment to mother
- Family trauma
- Family closeness
- Presence of siblings
- Family death
- Family separation
- Major conflicts
- Religious Beliefs

Distal Factors:

- Gendered racism
- Socioeconomic status
- Neighborhood and Social Environment

To further demonstrate this, I developed a concentric graphic (Figure 1) to model the proximal and distal factors that impact the mother-daughter relationship in Black families. Distal factors describe life variables external to the mother-daughter relationship that can influence the Black mother-daughter bond. Proximal factors are used to describe direct relational variables between Black mothers and daughters. Proximal factors may also exist as a subjective response to distal factors affecting the dyad.

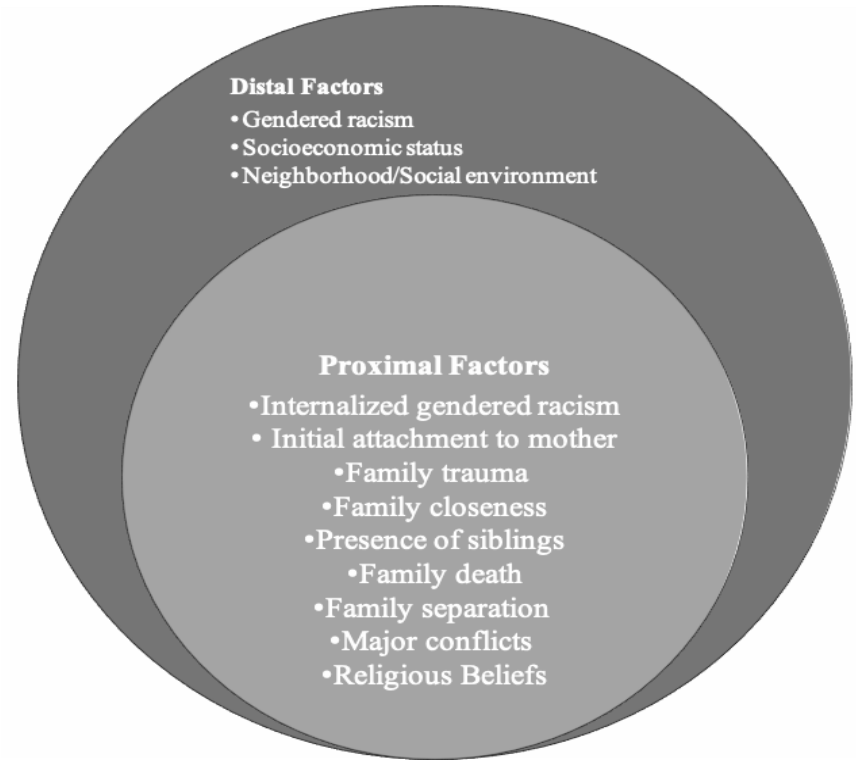

Figure 1: Distal and Proximal Factors found to influence the Black mother-daughter relationship throughout the lifecourse

Distal Factors. Three distal factors were identified as a result of this study: Gendered Racism, Socioeconomic Status, and Neighborhood and Social Environment.

Gendered Racism. Gendered racism describes a form of intersectional oppression and discrimination that Black women and other women of color face due to both their race and gender (Essed, 1991). Because gendered racism involves the intersection of both race and gender discrimination, Black mothers and daughters navigate unique forms of oppression that influence their identities, relational dynamics, and shared experiences (Spates, et al., 2020). The themes *Gendered Racial Socialization* and *Gendered Racial Identity* speak to these experiences of oppression and how it impacts the Black mother-daughter dyad. Like other identity development models (Cross, 1995; Helms, 1995), Williams and Lewis (2021) propose that Black women's

identity development starts with a "gendered racial encounter," where a Black girl notices distinct treatment related to her gendered racial identity. The findings from this study demonstrate how the mother-daughter bond can both facilitate and challenge the development of a Black girl's gendered racial identity in the context of gendered racism and oppression. Race-based messaging related gendered racial stereotypes may be disrupted or perpetuated via the mother as demonstrated in the *Colorism and Pretty Privilege Theme*; the women interviewed felt responsible for their daughter's identity development as a Black woman– often pointing to appearance and physical attributes as topic of discussion and concern. These findings are consistent with research from Williams and Lewis' (2021) conceptual model that propose that Black girls experience gendered racial encounters by "observing their mother's and family members' Black womanhood" (p. 218). Gendered racism influences parenting practices (Manning, 2021; Williams-Butler, 2023), access to resources (Spates et al., 2020), and the psychosocial health and development of Black women and girls (Lewis et al., 2017). While the observations of Black womanhood may be based on? the mother's behaviors and modeling, we assert that gendered racism as a structural phenomenon be constituted as a distal factor impacting the Black mother-daughter dyad due to its interwovenness in the fabric of American society.

Socioeconomic Status. According to the American Psychological Association (2023), socioeconomic status is defined as "educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class." In the demographic questionnaire, we collected income and educational attainment data. We also collected data surrounding social class (i.e. lower, middle, or upper class) both growing up and presently. The influences of socioeconomic status appeared throughout the data in multiple ways.

First, the data revealed that socioeconomic context significantly impacts Black mother-daughter relationships by shaping the stresses, opportunities, and dynamics within these relationships. For example, economic hardship sometimes created additional layers of stress for Black mothers, who faced financial instability, job insecurity, or limited access to resources such as quality education and housing. The theme *Family Environment* exposed these stresses as women described messages received from their mothers related to safety when growing up in disadvantaged neighborhoods. These challenges can strain the mother-daughter relationship, as mothers may experience heightened pressure to provide, while daughters may witness or feel the effects of these struggles firsthand. This dynamic can lead to tension or role reversals where daughters take on caretaking responsibilities earlier than expected, shifting more traditional boundaries between child and parent. On the other hand, the data revealed that more lenient boundaries between mother and daughter may aid in facilitating closeness between parent and child.

This study also found that in more stable or privileged socioeconomic contexts, Black mothers may have greater access to resources that facilitate positive mother-daughter interactions, such as extracurricular activities, mental health services, or educational support. The themes *Custody of the Inner Black Girl* and *Yellow Mothering* demonstrated that access to and use of these resources may be a priority for mothers in the current era. These resources can help nurture emotional bonds, allow for better conflict resolution, and provide opportunities for both mothers and daughters to focus on personal development such as gendered racial identity development. These resources can also shift the gendered racial values prioritized by mothers to be instilled in their daughters.

Socioeconomic context also influences the transmission of values and expectations. In the subtheme, *Gendered Racial Values*, Black mothers from lower income backgrounds strongly emphasized messages of resourcefulness and independence as central survival strategies. On the other hand, those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds shared a focus on navigating predominantly white spaces, differentiating oneself (idiosyncrasy) and educational achievement. In both cases, the socioeconomic context informed the relational dynamics and the coping mechanisms shared between mothers and daughters, ultimately affecting how they relate to one another and the world around them.

Neighborhood and Social Environment. Similar to socioeconomic status, the data revealed neighborhood context to play a critical role in shaping Black mother-daughter relationships. Neighborhood context was shown to influence the environment in which these relationships develop and the resources available to both mothers and daughters. For example, women who were raised in more under-resourced environments, their memories of their mothers included being taught survival skills such as protecting oneself from violence and prioritizing financial income. This finding underscores previous literature whereby Black children are socialized on the basis of intersectional oppression (Ecklund, 2012), gender identity (Stokes et al., 2020), and socioeconomic status (Edwards & Few-Demo, 2016; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Henry et al., 2019). This was evident throughout the themes *Family Environment, Gendered Racial Values,* and *Gendered Racial Socialization* where women reported learning from their mothers to be independent and to prioritize safety. Black mothers in these contexts reported working to shield their daughters from potential dangers while instilling a sense of strength and awareness of their surroundings. This protective approach, though rooted in care, sometimes leads to tension, as daughters may feel restricted or overprotected, especially in adolescence.

The social environment and neighborhood was also shown to impact the social networks available to both mothers and daughters. This finding is consistent with extant literature that establishes a link between neighborhoods, socioeconomic status, and social capital for Black families (Caughy & O'campo, 2006). The mothers in our study who reported higher income prioritized demonstrated better access to educational and social opportunities for their daughters, fostering open communication and creating opportunities for shared activities that strengthen the bond such as conjoint therapy, sport and recreational activities, and dedicated family time.

Finally, the racial makeup and cultural environment of the neighborhood can affect how Black mothers teach their daughters about identity and race. Prior research on gendered racial socialization also points to the sociocultural aspects of one's living environment in the development of gendered racial identity (Williams and Lewis, 2021). This was true for many mothers in the study as they explained the importance of helping their daughters navigate racism and maintain self-esteem. Additionally, fostering gendered racial pride and awareness was a common sentiment among women who had experienced pressure to assimilate in their own childhoods. Ultimately, neighborhood context was shown to influence not only the daily experiences and stresses faced by Black mothers and daughters, but also the coping mechanisms, values, and relational dynamics that are passed down generationally.

Proximal Factors. Proximal factors are defined as factors or aspects that have a direct influence on the Black mother-daughter relationship. Several proximal factors were identified in this study. These factors included internalized gendered racism, initial attachment to the mother, family trauma, family closeness, presence of siblings, family death, family separation, major conflicts, and religious beliefs.

Internalized Gendered Racism. While less research exists on the impact of internalized gendered racism on what?, a wealth of literature exists suggesting the link between internalized racism and low self-esteem (Roberson & Pieterse, 2021) and self efficacy (Rollins & Valdez, 2006) for Black populations (Cross & Frost, 2016). Internalized gendered racism is a form of racism that combines societal racial discrimination and bias and gender-based stereotypes (Lewis & Williams, 2023). This type of racism may result in self-critical beliefs that influence how Black women see themselves and interact with others.

Research suggests that internalized gendered racism can profoundly impact Black women and girls (Lackey, 2021; Lewis & Williams, 2023). Moreover, the data from this study suggest that internalized gendered racism may impact mother-daughter relationships by shaping dynamics around identity, self-worth, and cultural expectations. This is evidenced by the themes *Family Environment, Gendered Racial Identity*, and *Gendered Racial Socialzation* whereby in a mother-daughter context, these internalized beliefs can affect the ways mothers model identity and communicate expectations of resilience, strength, and success to their daughters. For example, some Black mothers in the study shared experiences of how they believed gendered racism shaped their upbringings and subsequent parenting. One potential way internalized gendered racism influences the Black mother-daughter dyad is that this internalization may subconsciously encourage their daughters to embody a "Strong Black woman" schema. While this can promote resilience and self assurance (Nelson et al., 2016), the Strong Black Woman archetype may also place undue pressure on daughters to suppress vulnerability, thus impacting their mental health. Additionally, internalized gendered racism might lead to high expectations around appearance, achievement, or behavior, with mothers aiming to shield daughters from discrimination by encouraging certain ways of presenting themselves. While the mothers in this

study most often promoted self confidence, idiosyncrasy, and independence, it is possible that these messages coincide with expectations of strength present in the historical narrative of Black women in America (Nelson et al., 2016).

Conclusively, the results of this study suggest that the internalization of these gendered racial biases can complicate mother-daughter bonding, as mothers may unintentionally transmit societal pressures and stereotypes, leading to tensions around autonomy, authenticity, and self-perception for daughters navigating their own identities. However, it is important to distinguish between awareness of gendered racial bias and internalization of these biases as both of these understandings can lead to similar parenting and developmental patterns.

Initial Attachment to the Mother. Although the study did not assess attachment or perinatal conditions explicitly, some mothers in the study discussed the conditions leading up to the births of their daughters. For example, one participant expressed having a "tumultuous" relationship with the father of her daughter during pregnancy, ultimately leading to his uninvolvement and her elevated stress levels throughout the first few years of life for her daughter. Another participant expressed having conflict within their own mother-daughter relationships before giving birth to their daughters indicating strain within the family system– a stressor known to impact the mental health of new mothers (Chauhan & Potdar, 2022).

Attachment theory refers to the connection between an infant and their caregiver beginning in the womb and continuing throughout the life course (Bowlby, 1979; Fletcher & Gallichan, 2016). Strong attachments are defined as close and secure connections to the parental figure by an infant; when an infant cries, they can be confident that the caregiver will respond appropriately and consistently (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979). Weak attachments point to disconnections between caregiver and infant whereby the infant cannot trust that the caregiver

will effectively or consistently attune to their needs (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1979). Although attachment can change throughout the life course, research has underscored the importance of attachment in infancy on the quality and development of adult relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

Many women in our study described how their relationships with their mothers influenced their self esteem and relational attitudes. For example, some women were unable to establish close bonds with their mothers, causing them to look elsewhere for attachment or to develop hyper-independency. In these cases, women often tried and failed to reestablish a connection with their mothers in adulthood after becoming mothers themselves. In other cases where a strong bond was established between mother and daughter in early childhood, these bonds typically lasted throughout adulthood and transferred generationally. These findings are relevant to existing research that proves the importance of one's bond to the mother in early childhood on self esteem, mental health, and the ability to initiate and maintain healthy, safe adult relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

While more research is needed to establish the critical link between initial attachment and Black mother-daughter relationships, the data in this study supports the idea of initial attachment as a key indicator of relational health, general mental health, and the quality of connection between mother and daughter throughout the life course.

Family Trauma. Trauma within the family system can significantly influence the mental health and development of a child (Collins et al., 2011; Cook et al., 2005; Lünnemann et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2012). This study used the American Psychological Association's definition of intergenerational trauma to ask mothers about their family trauma history. Participants were asked, "According to the American Psychological Association (2023), **Intergenerational**

Trauma is defined as a phenomenon in which the descendants of a person who has experienced a terrifying event show adverse emotional and behavioral reactions to the event that are similar to those of the person himself or herself. These reactions vary by generation but often include shame, increased anxiety and guilt, a heightened sense of vulnerability and helplessness, low self-esteem, depression, suicidality, substance abuse, and others. **Given this, can you think of any big traumas or challenges faced in your family?"** Responses to this question varied and ultimately led to the *Family Environment* theme which included references to religious trauma, substance use, and violence present within the family system. Ultimately, many of these named traumas were influenced by the previously identified distal factors which impact the Black mother-daughter relationship. Family trauma may impact the mother-daughter relationship by modeling adaptive behaviors or trauma responses related to coping, relationships, and communication. The theme, *Custody of the Inner Black Gir*l demonstrates ways in which maternal trauma responses can influence parenting practices. For example, one participant remembered her mother often retreating to her room during depressive episodes throughout her childhood. These incidents of isolation and disconnection from her mother made the participant desire to be an available mother to her daughter.

Family Closeness. Characterizing family closeness became an imperative part of dissecting and analyzing each mother's narrative. While initially coding for physical indicators of closeness within the Black mother-daughter dyad (e.g. living in the same home, growing up together), emotional closeness became much more challenging to define and evaluate. When analyzing the data, it became clear that understanding emotional warmth within the family unit as an influencer of mother-daughter relationships in the Black family system would be an integral domain of assessing these dyadic connections as a whole. Prior research has found that

higher levels of family closeness, defined as warm and supportive relationships between family members, is associated with greater perceived social support and decreased risk for depressive symptoms (Campos et al., 2014). This same influence was supported by the data in this study; Black women who reported closeness to their mothers generally described feeling supported throughout motherhood. The study revealed that "closeness" in the Black mother-daughter dyad can be observed or defined as the knowledge and feeling that the mother a) has their best interests in mind and b) knows and accepts them as a whole person. This differs from traditional conceptualizations of closeness as participants in this study reported needing less practical support from their mothers in order to feel close. For example, in one participant's recollection of caring for her drunken mother, the participant expressed sentiments of warmth and care despite receiving less traditional support from her mother in childhood. Similarly, one participant felt that her aunt resembled a mother in the *Aunties and Other Mothers* theme due to her support for her career goals to be a writer. These examples suggest that by understanding closeness as acceptance, Black mother-daughter dyads may transmit relational warmth through empathetic bonding and non-judgmental communication.

Presence of Siblings. Existing research notes the presence of siblings as an essential factor in understanding child development and parent-child interactions (Brody, 2004; Suitor et al., 2018). Throughout the interviews, mothers often referenced the presence of siblings in their upbringings and in the upbringing of their daughters. When reflecting on their childhoods, siblings were mentioned as sources of support, and at times, sources of comparison. Participants in this study reflected on differing gender roles between them and their brothers, often concluding that their mothers seemed more critical of their daughters than their sons. Additionally, for mothers with multiple daughters, underscoring the differences in personalities

and needs between siblings was an important factor in parenting approaches. The theme *Gendered Racial Values* underscores the importance of fostering idiosyncrasy in their daughters; mothers interviewed in this study felt that it was especially important to respond to the needs of their children individually. For Black families, research has suggested that Black parents take an active approach to gendered socialization (Hill, 2002). Gendered roles are often modeled through parental behavior and sibling dynamics in Black families (Hill, 2001; Hill, 2002). Thus, the role of the mother is especially important when modeling and communicating gendered racial roles to their daughters (Collins, 1987). When evaluating the impact of siblings on the Black mother-daughter relationship, this modeling may occur not only through the mother, but through the presence of older sisters as well. In this study, some Black women alluded to their older sisters as caretakers, confidants, and friends throughout adulthood and childhood. These strong relationships often reflected strength in the mother-daughter relationship. However, some participants' strong sibling relationships were due to the inability to emotionally access the mother. Finally, some women in the study felt that they were compared to their siblings in childhood. These sibling comparisons by the mother negatively impacted the women's self esteem and strength of the relationship with their mothers.

Family Death and Family Separation. Although not as explored in this study, the death of a mother or other significant member of the family was found to significantly impact the mother-daughter dyad and the family system as a whole. According to the family life cycle theory, family death and family separations are major sources of disruption in the family system (McGoldrick & Walsh, 2004). The loss of family members (via death or separation) can significantly shift the dynamics and functioning of a family system (Bowlby-West, 1983). Regarding family separation, single motherhood was a common theme surrounding *Black*

Matrescence. Single motherhood was often the product of unsustained relationships between parents. Some women reflected on how these separations from their father affected them. While some stated that it had no effect on their development, others expressed longing for a more "complete" family system. In many instances, parental separation underscored the importance of Aunties and Other-Mothers, as well as grandmothers, in child rearing and emotional support.

Sometimes, separation impacted the mother-daughter dyad by facilitating emotional closeness and bonding, even if the mother was frequently inundated with work and other responsibilities. In other cases, separations in the family resulted in disconnection from the mother. Some participants opted to live with grandparents or other family members due to the disrupted family dynamic. Ultimately, the conditions surrounding family separation and the existing familial relational strength may be the most important factor when evaluating the impact of family separation on the mother-daughter dyad. This notion is supported by prior research that suggests resilience is built through positive parenting, multigenerational living, and emotional support availability (Mackay, 2003).

Death of the mother was rarely discussed in this study as most women had mothers who were still living. However some (n =2) had experienced the deaths of their mothers. Research suggests that the death of a mother can be one of the most profound losses a girl may experience, impacting her emotional, social, and psychological development across her lifespan (Collins, 1987; Hershberg, 2006; Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). This loss disrupts the mother-daughter bond, which often serves as a foundation for identity, emotional security, and guidance, especially during formative years (Collins, 1987; Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986). For the women in this study, whether the participants held weak or strong bonds with their mothers, each expressed that they felt they did not have enough time with them. These losses prompted these

women to parent with increased intentionality as they recognized the transience of the mother-daughter relationship.

Major Conflicts. Similar to attachment, major conflicts within the Black mother-daughter dyad were shown to have a great impact on the future course of the relationship between mothers and their daughters. Some research points to the mother-child conflict as especially detrimental for Black children compared to White children on their mental health in adulthood (Suitor et al., 2018). While most participants described having some conflicts with their mothers in adolescence, the frequency and content of these conflicts varied greatly between participants. Common conflicts in adolescence centered around the desire for increased autonomy by daughters. This is consistent with previously identified familial developmental frameworks which point to the increased need for autonomy and independence in adolescence (Cohen-Sandler & Silver, 2000). Conflicts in adulthood varied and included themes of disappointment and judgment. Previous research supports these themes as common sources of conflict due to the adult daughter's ability to reflect on points of harm in childhood (Shrier et al., 2004). While research supports the idea of conflict as necessary for healthy parent-child and adult relationships, high conflict relationships can have negative impacts on mental health and self esteem (Laursen et al., 2017; Maccoby, 1992; Montemayor, 1983). Additionally, the content of conflicts can significantly influence the connection between mother and daughter. For example, one participant described her mother as saying "foul" things about her such as regretting giving birth to her. These harmful sentiments caused the participant to permanently sever ties with her mother. On the other hand, conflicts in adolescence were often resolved by adulthood as both mothers and daughters were able to reflect over time and gain insight into their relationship.

Ultimately, the presence of conflict between mothers and daughters did not always result in friction throughout the relationship; in some cases, friction earlier in the mother-daughter relationship led to understanding later on. This is supported by the previously discussed characteristics of close familial relationships built on non judgemental communication and empathy. However, conflict may lead to feelings of unsupportiveness and continued friction if closeness is not established or maintained.

Religious Beliefs. Historically, religion has played a large role in facilitating hope in the face of discrimination and racism for African American families (Hankerson et al., 2018; Holt et al., 2014; Millet et al., 2018). Regarding religion, Christianity was the only religion referenced in this study. Religion acted as both a facilitator and challenge in maintaining close relationships between mothers and daughters in this study. In the theme *Gendered Racial Values*, some women expressed gratitude to their mothers for instilling religious beliefs and practices in them, believing that religion provided positive coping methods for them and their daughters. Religion also provided structure in the home; many participants remembered the ritual of getting dressed and going to church every Sunday morning. This is consistent with prior literature that supports religious practices such as attending church as a coping strategy (Holt et al., 2014). Other women believed that their mothers used religion as a tactic for harm by hiding behind the pretenses of religious beliefs when exercising hurtful parenting practices. In these instances, participants alluded to strict or authoritarian parenting practices as supported by biblical teachings such as "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Proverbs 22:6). While most participants agreed that religion was not meant to cause harm in childhood, some participants did recall their mother's religious attitudes as impacting the strength and closeness of the mother-daughter relationship.

Research Question 2: How does the Black Mother-Daughter Relationship Change over Time?

The research team gauged this question by chronologically structuring the interview. Participants were asked to describe their relationships with their mothers from infancy to early childhood (11 years old), adolescence (12-17 years old), young adulthood (18-25 years old), and adulthood (25-now). Importantly, all of our participants were above the age of 25 although that was not a required study inclusion criteria. However, not all participants had a living mother throughout their lifetimes. Some of the participants' (n = 2) mothers had passed by the time they reached a critical developmental age point in the interview protocol and were not asked to further elaborate on their relationship after their mother's death.

Additionally, the participants were asked to describe their daughters (personality, attributes, etc.) and the evolution of their relationship with their daughters over time. These descriptions were limited by the participants' daughters' ages. The average age of the mothers in our sample was 42.6 years old and the average age of their daughters was 14.2 years old with a range of 5-29. While our sample was limited, our approach of asking participants about their experiences in both motherhood and daughterhood allowed us to design a developmental model to describe the Black-mother-daughter dyadic life cycle to describe how this relationship changes over time.

Using the themes identified in the results section, a developmental model was developed to capture the evolutionary process of the Black mother-daughter dyad (Figure 2). The following paragraphs outline the relational and developmental patterns created from the data.

Figure 2: Black Mother-Daughter Developmental Model

Matrescence and Prenatal Conditions

Matrescence: As discussed previously, Black matrescence describes the unique gendered racial process of becoming a mother as a Black woman beginning when a woman first learns she is pregnant. The conditions surrounding this period, such as whether the pregnancy was planned or unexpected, shape her immediate reaction and disposition. The mothers in this study demonstrated that a mother's mental state, physical health, and access to social support, including her romantic partner, family, and friends, also significantly impact her experience. These experiences are supported by literature that suggests prepartum conditions can serve as predictors of pregnancy related stress, attachment, and mental illnesses such as postpartum depression and psychosis (Guintivano et al., 2018). The findings from this study suggest that when a mother feels supported and is in good mental and physical health, she may experience a more positive adaptation to motherhood. Undersupported mothers, however, may experience barriers such as lack of access to resources which can complicate this transition to motherhood, heightening anxiety, and affecting early bonding with her daughter (Diener et al., 2003; Pressley & Smith, 2017).

Prenatal Conditions. Like the mother, the daughter's development in the womb can be affected by the mother's mental health and stress levels. While this data, which relied on reflection, could not directly make the connection between prenatal conditions and mother-daughter relationship quality, extant research has well-established this link (Misri & Kendrick, 2008). The findings surrounding Black Matrescence from this study support this connection by analyzing the womens' narratives related to connecting with their daughters during pregnancy. For example, one participant stated, "*I remember being pregnant and having a relationship with her when she (Participant's daughter) was in utero.*" This quote supports the idea that

attachment begins as a perinatal process and that the quality and trajectory of the mother-daughter matrix may begin before birth (Cataudella et al., 2016; Muller & Mercer, 1993).

Initial Attachment

Initial Attachment. Initial attachment begins to form shortly after birth as the mother first holds and interacts with her daughter. Research shows that strength of this bond can be influenced by the birth experience, the mother's mental and physical health, and early caregiving routines (Korja et al., 2012; Reisz et al., 2019). When the mother experiences a healthy prepartum and postpartum period and has adequate support, her attachment to her child may develop naturally and strongly (Crockenberg, 1981; Korja et al., 2012). On the other hand, postpartum depression or anxiety, complicated deliveries, or difficult early caregiving moments can strain this bond, making attachment feel more challenging (Cataudella et al., 2016). The findings from this study demonstrate these early challenges and facilitators of mother-daughter relationships in the Black *Matrescence* and *Family Environment* themes. The women in this study were able to link challenges in their upbringing to issues in attachment either due to proximal or distal factors previously identified. The women also expressed how family trauma and family separation also altered the strength of the relationship to their mothers in early childhood. Lastly, the themes *Grandmothering* and *Aunties and Other-Mothers* highlighted the importance of bonding to other maternal-like figures during this stage of development to support both the mental health of the daughter and the mother. These findings are consistent with attachment theory which states that infants and children will continue to seek positive and secure attachment with caregivers throughout early childhood (Strand, 2020).

For the daughter, a strong, secure attachment is fostered through consistent caregiving and responsiveness, giving the daughter a foundation of trust and safety (Rutter, 1995).

Attachment theory states that inconsistent caregiving or prolonged separations can impact attachment security, potentially influencing how the daughter interacts with others throughout her life (Bowlby, 1979). In this study, the findings highlighted the importance of accurately assessing and defining closeness for Black mother-daughter dyads which may or may not mimic traditional indicators of secure attachments. For example, although some participants experienced care from multiple family members or experienced role reversals in caregiving, these women were still able to form secure attachments with their mothers and others throughout the life course. This finding suggests that initial and protracted attachment for Black mothers and daughters may present differently compared to non-Black populations.

The findings also indicate that the perceived closeness within the mother-daughter matrix is shaped by daily interactions and shared experiences; activities, communication styles, and a child's personality contribute to this perceived bond (Burke et al., 2017; Crosnoe & Trinitapoli, 2008; Liable, 2004). A mother who feels a sense of closeness may enjoy more open communication and trust in the relationship, while feelings of distance can arise if the mother feels rejected or struggles to connect (Sroufe, 1985). Importantly, this bond can be impacted by the aforementioned proximal and distal factors. Findings suggest that factors such as exposure to family violence, financial stress, or periods of separation. These conditions can create environments of instability and fear, potentially disrupting attachment (Belsky et al., 1996; Moe et al., 1987).

Lastly, the findings suggest that mental health of both the mother and the daughter also shapes attachment. A mother experiencing mental health challenges, such as depression or anxiety, may struggle with emotional availability, affecting the daughter's sense of security. This is supported by the literature which identifies the mental health of the mother as a predictor of

the propensity for mental illness in the daughter (Karimi & Soltanizadeh, 2022; Nathaniel, 2007; Stein et al., 2014). Similarly, findings suggest that if a daughter has emotional or behavioral struggles, it can introduce tension and feelings of disconnect, creating challenges for both in maintaining a close and stable bond.

Separation and Detachment

Continued Matrescence. The findings suggest a *Separation and Detachment* phase of mother-daughter dyads characterized by the daughters heightened need for autonomy and independence, and the mothers struggle to allow this freedom for the daughter. Here, the mother enters a stage of continued matrescence, increasingly recognizing her daughter as a separate and independent individual. This can be a bittersweet experience, as the mother adjusts to her child's independence, interests, and beliefs that may differ from her own. For example, when describing their daughters, many mothers reflected on the evolution of their bonds with them by addressing the development of the daughter's personality and interests. Accepting and supporting the daughter's unique identity fosters mutual respect and trust but can be challenging, especially if the mother holds rigid expectations as demonstrated by the *Gendered Racial Socialization* and *Gendered Racial Identity* themes. Similarly, the sentiments shared in the *Yellow-Mothering* and *Custody of the Inner Black Girl* themes can aid in fostering the individuality and freedom of daughters by exercising selflessness, introspection, empathy, and confidence in the daughter's abilities. This theme is facilitated by Collins' (1987) assertions of Black motherhood which included moving from the role of protector to facilitator of personal development. Additionally, the Family Life Cycle Model points to a growing separation between parents and children as children enter adolescence and adulthood (Gerson, 1995; Olson & Lavee, 2013).

Adolescence and Less Reliance on Mother. The findings also suggest that during adolescence, the daughter typically begins to seek independence, often distancing herself from her mother. This period can involve conflicts around autonomy, identity, and boundaries as the daughter asserts herself. Again, research supports this stage of mother-daughter relationships as a secure foundation allows for healthy individuation and the development of self-confidence (Branje, 2018; Laursen et al., 2017; Trad, 1995).

Negotiation and Reattachment

Negotiating an Adult Mother-Daughter Relationship. As the daughter transitions into adulthood, the mother and daughter renegotiate their relationship, balancing autonomy and closeness. The women in this study detailed this process throughout the interviews, generally expressing that this stage came after some time apart in late adolescence and young adulthood. After the daughter gains independence, the mother and daughter move towards an adult-adult relationship, rather than an adult-child relationship. Although both parties will still be mother-daughter, the dynamic of this relationship is altered by the daughters' emerging adulthood and newfound independence. As the daughter gains life experience, she begins to see her mother not only as a caregiver but as a person with her own life history, flaws, and complexities. This stage often brings empathy and a new understanding, as the daughter recognizes the nuances of her mother’s journey. This realization can deepen the bond and provide healing opportunities, especially if the relationship has endured tension or misunderstanding (Rastogi h& Wampler, 1999; Shrier et al., 2004).

Both parties must navigate a new adult relationship, which may involve renegotiating boundaries and redefining roles. Findings indicated that this process is often ongoing throughout adulthood because it may involve addressing conflicts and circumstances present in the

daughter's childhood. As the daughter grows older, she may have questions or complex emotions about her childhood experiences and seek answers from the mother. Findings from this study suggest that both parties must be at a level of emotional readiness to have these delicate conversations and move towards negotiation and reattachment.

Grandmatrescence and Matrescence

Becoming a Grandmother (Grand-Matrescence). Finally, when the mother becomes a grandmother, she re-enters a process akin to matrescence. She may feel a renewed sense of purpose and joy in nurturing a new generation, along with challenges in finding her role as a grandmother. This transition can deepen her connection with her daughter, who now shares a maternal experience, fostering empathy and connection as they both explore motherhood (Miller-Day, 2004). However, this transition can also foster feelings of guilt, shame, and discomfort as the now grandmother reflects on her own matrescence and mothering experiences. The theme *Grandmothering* explored the importance of grandmothers in Black families and mother-daughter matrices. While grandmothers often provide support to the mother and granddaughter, there can also be complications in boundaries and conflicts related to parenting styles (Joo et al., 2018; Miller-Day, 2004).

Matrescence. Because this model has a maternal lens on mother-daughter relationships, matrescence marks an important life stage in the matrix. Should the daughter eventually become a mother herself, she undergoes matrescence, developing a new understanding of her mother's experience. This shared journey into motherhood can strengthen their bond, fostering mutual support and a sense of solidarity. However, it may also surface unresolved issues, leading to a re-examination of past dynamics as the daughter redefines herself in her own role as a mother. The theme *Custody of the Inner Black Gir*l speak to these re-examinations as the women in this study

expressed the complicated accountability to self and to their daughters in taking care of their needs.

Research Question 3: How do Black daughters perceive their mothers' influence on the development of their general mental health and self-esteem?

The themes uncovered in the study provided insightful answers to the research questions by directly addressing the key aspects of the mother-daughter dynamic and its impact on self-esteem. For example, themes such as *Gendered Racial Socialization* and *Gendered Racial Identity* offered concrete ways in which Black mothers influence the confidence and self-worth in their daughters. Additionally, the theme *Family Environment*, provided insight as to the context of how Black mothers may either instill confidence or contribute to mental health challenges experienced by their daughters. These themes aligned with this research question that centered on if and how mothers contribute to their daughters' ability to navigate racial and gender-based challenges, reject societal stereotypes, and develop a positive self-image. Additionally, these themes were consistent with previous literature which suggests that Black mothers play a key role in the identity formation, development of self-confidence, and racial identity of their children (Greene, 2014; Marshall, 1995; Peck et al., 2014). The research also underscores the importance of the mother or maternal figure in the development and navigation of mental health challenges for Black women and girls (Leath et al., 2023). For example, the women who expressed having warm and supportive relationships with their mothers throughout childhood expressed feeling equipped to navigate mental health challenges in adulthood. By uncovering how Black mothers affirm their daughters' identities and provide emotional validation, the study was able to illuminate the processes through which daughters cultivate self-

esteem, thereby providing comprehensive answers to the research inquiries regarding the maternal influence on overall mental wellbeing and self esteem.

More specifically, the data pointed to three key ways that Black mothers' influence the development of their daughters' general mental health and well-being: *Defining and Redefining the Strong Black Woman*, *Shaping Cultural and Personal Identity*, and *Directly Influencing mental health through perceived relational strength*.

Defining and Redefining the Strong Black Woman. The study findings suggest that Black mothers influence their daughter's perceptions of "strength" through modeling, trauma transmission, and transgenerational gendered racial values. Black mothers model strength to their daughters in various ways, deeply rooted in cultural resilience (Leath et al., 2023), historical mechanisms of survival (Duane & Mims, 2022), and communal care (Collins, 1987). One key way is through their ability to navigate and resist systemic racism and sexism while maintaining a sense of dignity and self-worth. By demonstrating perseverance in the face of discrimination, Black mothers show their daughters how to endure hardship with resilience and determination (Leath at al., 2023). This is consistent with literature that extends the radical hope and healing frameworks to Black mothers and families via racial socialization processes (Duane & Mims, 2022).

Black mothers also model strength by prioritizing family and community, often taking on roles as caregivers and nurturers (Collins, 1987), which reflects the value of collective well-being over individual success. The theme *Yellow-Mothering* demonstrates this phenomenon by describing mothers who are selfless and self-sacrificial. This sense of responsibility and leadership within the family unit teaches daughters the importance of supporting loved ones while managing personal challenges (Oshin & Milan, 2019).

Additionally, Black mothers often model strength through open communication about racial and gendered experiences as demonstrated through the *Gendered Racial Identity* and *Gendered Racial Socialization* themes, preparing their daughters to navigate a world that may not always be just. By teaching their daughters to advocate for themselves, assert their boundaries, and take pride in their Black identity, they pass on a legacy of empowerment, cultural pride, and survival in the face of adversity (Leath et al., 2023). This modeling is a source of strength not just for individuals but for the continuity of resilience within Black families and communities.

Shaping Cultural and Personal Identity. The study also found that Black Mothers shape their daughters' self-concept and identity development through direct (conversation, discipline) and indirect (modeling) pathways. Participants spoke about the various ways in which their mothers influenced their self-concept and how they believe they impacted their daughters' mental health. There was variation among the women in how their mother's influenced t\heir self-esteem. The theme, *gendered racial socialization* spoke to how some women experienced messages of healing and confidence, and self assurance, others felt that their mothers made them unsure of their worth and value. The subtheme *gendered racial values* explored common gendered race-based messages including themes of self-confidence and idiosyncrasy that Black mothers pass on to their daughters.

Directly Influencing Mental Health through Perceived Relational Strength: Finally, study findings suggest that the perceived strength of the mother-daughter relationship influences the daughter's self-esteem. Relational strength may change throughout the course of the relationship depending on various proximal and distal factors. More research is needed regarding potential critical periods of relational ruptures and repairs.

Implications For Clinical Practice

The current study offers several implications for clinical practice related to Black women, Black girls, and family systems. It is evident through the identified themes and discussion of these themes that the Black mother-daughter relationship is incredibly nuanced and complex. This relationship can and does influence the development of Black girls and women throughout the life course and can have profound implications for a woman's self esteem, self-concept, and emotional needs (Collins, 1987; Duane & Mims, 2022; Leath et al., 2023; Leath et al., 2024). Thus, the data suggests the need for improved measures and interventions that target the mother-daughter relationship at various stages of development from perinatal conditions, to initial attachment, childhood, adolescence, and well into adulthood. Given the role cultural incompetence plays in the historical underutilization of mental health services by Black women (Nelson et al., 2024), it is suggested that health service psychologists and other behavioral health professionals learn about the developmental processes of the Black mother-daughter dyad for improved competence and effectiveness when working with Black women and girls. Thus, five implications for clinical practice have been created to speak to the importance of effectively understanding, assessing, and treating Black women and girls.

1. **Behavioral Health Professional Training.** The findings from the current study suggest that the mother-daughter relationship is especially important in understanding behavioral health challenges and facilitators in Black women and girls. While developmental psychology is a part of foundational coursework for many behavioral and mental health care professionals, our findings suggest that a particular emphasis on applied family systems be included in the educational and clinical training of behavioral health providers. Standardized coursework and

practica on the mother-daughter relationship, in addition to continuing education (CE) opportunities for established professionals may prove beneficial in assessing and treating Black women and girls.

2. **Assessment Development.** Developing assessments and treatment plans that evaluate and target mother-daughter relational strength, rupture and repair, and gendered racial values may be a way to improve mental health outcomes among Black women and girls. While every mother-daughter relationship is different in their own right, it is evident through the current study that this relationship continues to influence a woman's self esteem throughout the lifecourse. The theme *Custody of the Inner Black Girl* suggests that healing from relational trauma including ruptures in attachment or grief can take place at any point in a woman's life. Additionally, while the mother-daughter relationship may not be a priority for treatment, it is imperative to still evaluate the strength of a Black woman or girl's relationship with their mother and how that relationship may have impacted the woman's current mental health challenges and concerns.
3. **Parenting Interventions.** Parenting interventions are essential in family systems and child psychology. The results presented in this study suggest that interventions which target mother-daughter relationships by addressing maternal mental health and parenting may be crucial in repairing and strengthening mother-daughter bonds.
4. **Normalizing Complex Relationships.** The Bidirectional Black Mother-Daughter Developmental Model and the Distal and Proximal factors can be useful tools for helping clients recognize and normalize the complexities within the mother-

daughter relationship.

5. **Grief Support.** This study underscores the importance of mothers and maternal figures in the psychosocial development of Black girls and women. Some women in this study touched on the grief process of mourning their late mothers, suggesting that assessing the Black mother-daughter relationship is important regardless of the life status of the mother. Understanding the stage of development in which the mother passed and the role the mother played in a woman or girl's life will likely aid the grief process in clinical intervention for Black women and girls who have lost their mothers.

Contibutions to Maternal and Family Health Psychosocial Interventions

The findings of this dissertation offer critical insights into the maternal influence on girls' psychosocial development, specifically their identity formation, self-esteem, and self-worth across the life course. The central research finding, that a mother's behaviors, communication patterns, and relational dynamics play a significant role in shaping her daughter's sense of self, provides an essential framework for future maternal and family health interventions. By emphasizing the maternal role in a girl's psychological and emotional development, this work advances understanding of the intergenerational processes that shape mental health outcomes in girls and women.

This research underscores the necessity of psychosocial interventions that explicitly target and enhance maternal influences to foster positive developmental outcomes for daughters. For example, family-based therapeutic models and intergenerational programs could integrate these findings to strengthen maternal relationships and improve relational dynamics. Interventions aimed at promoting maternal self-efficacy, effective communication, and

attunement to their daughters' emotional needs have the potential to support healthy identity development, build resilience, and mitigate the impact of negative external stressors on daughters.

Additionally, this dissertation highlights the importance of culturally responsive interventions, particularly within Black families. The findings demonstrate that systemic inequities, cultural history, and lived experiences uniquely shape mother-daughter relationships and influence developmental trajectories. These insights call for trauma-informed approaches that address the compounded effects of societal oppression and familial stressors on maternal functioning and relational quality. Programs designed to support Black mothers and daughters should incorporate strategies that acknowledge and counteract these contextual challenges, while fostering protective factors, such as cultural pride and intergenerational healing.

This research also has implications for scalable interventions at the community and policy levels. Prevention programs targeting maternal mental health could provide resources and support to mothers, empowering them with the skills to model healthy behaviors and nurture their daughters' psychological development. Additionally, initiatives aimed at addressing intergenerational trauma could integrate the findings of this dissertation to break cycles of psychosocial distress and improve family health outcomes over time.

By bridging the gap between maternal influence and daughters' psychosocial development, this dissertation contributes to the broader field of maternal and family health. It serves as a foundation for designing innovative interventions that prioritize maternal relationships as a key determinant of daughters' mental health and well-being. Through its focus on relational processes and cultural contexts, this research has the potential to inform equitable, effective, and sustainable approaches to family strengthening, ultimately promoting mental

health and resilience across generations.

Implications For Policy

While policy development was not a direct goal of this work, the findings pose multiple strategies for supporting Black women and girls from a structural lens. First, the current study points to how relational strength of the Black mother-dyad influences the mental health of Black women. Multiple women in the study attributed positive mental health practices and maintenance with strong bonds to their mothers. Thus, we suggest the development and strengthening of workplace and social policies surrounding maternal and family health equity. These policies may be related to increased compensation and leave for expecting and current mothers, and implementation of employee assistance programs (EAPs) to support maternal mental health. This implication is supported by several women in the study who detailed having work needs interfere with the time they would get to spend with their daughters.

For Black girls, school-based mental health prevention and intervention may be an appropriate source of mental health support surrounding the mother-daughter dyad and other challenges related to the family environment and system. While education was not an identified theme in the current study, research suggests that school contexts in conjunction with family contexts contribute to a Black girl's gendered racial identity and socialization (Duane & Mims, 2022). Similarly, school and community based programs aimed at strengthening the mother-daughter dyad such as parent-child lunches, sports activities, and other programs may be a way to encourage closeness in the mother-daughter relationship.

Secondly, the data revealed the relative absence of spaces to reflect on maternal mental health and the mother-daughter relationship in general. Throughout the interviews, women voiced their relief and gratitude for having a dedicated time and space to detail their experiences.

For many women, this interview represented one of the few times that they were able to reflect on not only their current mother-daughter relationships, but also on their hopes and dreams for the future. Similarly, the theme of *Black Matrescence* suggests that for Black women, motherhood encompasses an emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological journey incomparable to that of other racial-ethnic groups. We suggest an implementation of measures and questions surrounding maternal mental health and family health in primary care and gynecologic settings. Many women are likely to go to their primary (Kates et al., 2018) and gynecologic (Leddy et al., 2011) care teams for mental health support. Thus, being able to provide assessment and space for maternal concerns within the primary care setting may be a way for more women and girls to explore their mother-daughter relationship and the subsequent effects on their health. Additionally, these measures can inform healthcare providers when assessing protective factors and barriers to desired health outcomes in their Black women patients. Drawing from the Reproductive Identity formation literature (Athan, 2020), family planning and reproductive or maternal identity starts well before an individual creates a family. Therefore, implementing measures to understand, assess, and address a woman or girl's reproductive history and desires is imperative from a prevention perspective to contribute to positive mental and physical health outcomes in Black women and girls. This is especially important given the gendered racial health disparities in maternal and child health in the United States (Bediako et al, 2015; Burris & hacker, 2017).

Limitations

This study relied on an innovative qualitative design that sought to understand the unique bond between Black mothers and their daughters. Central to this innovation was a semi-structured interview designed to interview Black mother's about their experiences as both a

mother and daughter. This design provided rich data as the women were able to reflect on their experiences in childhood and in motherhood. The results yielded from this study highlighted nuanced and intergenerational aspects of Black motherhood and daughterhood that can inform research, practice, and policy. However, despite the innovative design, several limitations exist within the study design and participants. This section will explore those limitations followed by potential remedies.

Study Design. The study was created to gather insights from Black women who had both experiences mothering a Black daughter and growing up with a Black mother. This qualitative design was used due to both its simplicity for dissertation research and utility for further research and practice. However, this study design was limited in that it did not directly interview the daughters or mothers of these Black women and relied on reflective data to inform the research. While a dyadic or triadic design may have been more robust in gathering data on intergenerational relational experiences, this design allowed a simple execution for descriptive research. The reliance on a single narrator as opposed to a family system may have resulted in a lack of perspectives from daughters at varying developmental stages.

A qualitative design was chosen in order to obtain rich and original data surrounding Black mother-daughter relationships. However, quantitative data would have been useful in evaluating certain aspects of relationships that were difficult to operationally define such as “trauma transmission” and “perceived relational strength”.

Participants and Recruitment. Recruitment efforts were conducted by the research team primarily on social media. Namely, LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter) were heavily utilized to recruit potential participants. These platforms rely on the network of the user (the research team) to reach broader audiences. In this case, our research team consisted of college-

educated, Black people.Thus, our sample reflected a certain demographic of Black women who were likely to use these social media platforms and engage with content similar to the study flier. While our sample was able to maintain some socioeconomic and educational diversity, our recruitment may have limited data collection to a subset of women who were already engaging around topics of Black maternal and family health. Notably, the sample lacked women from the middle and western United States. Additionally, there was less economic diversity than we had hoped for. Finally, while our screening survey did collect demographic data such as income, education, and age, we did not collect information regarding the women's sexual orientation. While one participant mentioned having an ex-wife, the rest of our sample mentioned male partners. This focus on heteronormative relationships and the lack of representation from LGBTQ communities and identities in our study limits the generalizability of our study by failing to capture an extremely important identity domain.

Research Team. Recruitment of the research team was conducted by the principal investigator. The principal investigator sought a diverse team of Black individuals with a passion for family systems research. The recruited team resulted in three research assistants: a Black man and father to a five year old girl, a Black mother/ grandmother of two adult daughters, and a Black woman college student. While the team did its best to address and reflect on positionality throughout the research process, it is inherent that there would be bias and countertransference throughout data collection and analysis. Oftentimes, an awareness of these biases aided the research process by allowing for genuine reflection and authentic engagement with the team and data. However, as is human nature, bias may have affected the identified themes and interpretation of the data regardless of measures taken to address and minimize these effects.

Exclusion and Inclusion Criteria. Participants in this study all identified as Black

mothers who were raised by a Black woman. Additionally, each mother interviewed in our study had a Black daughter who was at least five years old. Our study included a sample of Black mothers from across the United States. However, our participant's vast geographic and cultural differences may have influenced the generalizability of this study. Similarly, our sample varied greatly in age of participants and their daughters. While this made for rich data and the development of our developmental model, our study remained more exploratory; more data collection is needed to understand critical points of development, cultural and geographical differences in Black mother-daughter relationships, and other factors that may influence this dyad.

Directions for Future Research

This research study employed qualitative methods to explore factors that may influence the Black mother-daughter dyad. This exploratory research uncovered many crucial aspects of Black mother-daughter relationships such as proximal and distal factors of influence and developmental stages. We recommend further longitudinal research, case studies, and cross-sectional designs to better understand these critical periods, proximal factors, and distal factors in the psychosocial development of Black girls and women. Recognizing the limitations of our study design, we strongly recommend and advocate for future research to include the intergenerational perspectives of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters.

Regarding identity, we also recommend more refined research that aims to understand Black women and girls through various cultural contexts. Meaning, our study broadly defined Blackness as having a Black mother and self-identifying as Black. However, we recognize that Black people, cultures, and family systems are not monolithic. Therefore, we advocate for continued mother-daughter dyadic research on subsets of Black women and girls such as Afro-

Latinx and other racial-ethnic categories within the global Black population.

Additionally, we recommend continued research on the perceived strength of mother-daughter relationships in the development and progression of serious mental illness (SMI), mood disorders, anxiety, and other psychological health challenges and illnesses. This is because of the suggested impact of the mother-daughter relationship on Black women and girls mental health broadly.

Finally, we suggest intervention development and use that targets Black mother-daughter relational strength, rupture and repair, and gendered racial values. Black mother-daughter relationships play a pivotal role in shaping the emotional and psychological development of both parties, particularly in the context of shared experiences of racism and gendered oppression. By focusing on relational strength, rupture, and repair, interventions can help preserve and enhance the resilience these relationships offer, while addressing potential sources of conflict that may arise from generational trauma and societal pressures. Additionally, targeting gendered racial values ensures that these interventions honor and incorporate the unique cultural, racial, and gendered experiences of Black women and girls, which are often overlooked in mainstream therapeutic practices. Such culturally specific approaches can foster more effective healing, promote positive identity formation, and strengthen familial bonds, leading to better overall mental health and relational outcomes within Black families.

Concluding Remarks

This exploratory dissertation study on Black mother-daughter relationships demonstrated the profound influence that these relationships have on the emotional, psychological, and cultural well-being of both mothers and daughters within Black families. The findings illuminated how the dynamics between Black mothers and daughters are shaped by historical and contemporary

experiences of gendered racism and gendered racial experiences unique to Black women and girls. Additionally, the study highlighted the critical role of communication patterns, cultural values, and intergenerational phenomena in fostering both connection and conflict within these relationships. These insights underscore the importance of culturally tailored interventions and programs that promote healing and strengthen familial bonds, particularly in addressing the effects of gendered racism and complex trauma on Black families. This work contributes to a deeper understanding of Black family systems and opens avenues for further research and practical application in counseling and prevention science.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Eligibility and Demographic Questionnaire

Pre-Screening Eligibility Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in the Mother's Message Study! In order to determine your eligibility, we ask that you please tell us a little about yourself. Please note that for each of the questions below, we have tried to provide a number of options. However, we recognize that these options will not capture everyone's identities or characteristics. Therefore, for some questions, we have also included a "Not Listed" option for you to describe in your own words your identity if the categories provided do not capture it. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact the Principal Investigator, Brianna Baker. This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Teachers College, Columbia University (IRB # XXXX).

1. What is your email address? You will only be contacted if you meet the eligibility requirements for this study. _____

2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your gender?

a. Man, not transgender
b. Woman, not transgender
c. Man of transgender experience (Trans man, Transsexual man, FtM)
d. Woman of transgender experience (Trans woman, Transsexual woman, MtF)
e. Gender Non-Binary
f. Gender identity not listed
g. Please indicate your gender here if not listed: _____

4. Do you identify as Latinx or Hispanic?
   a. Yes
   b. No

5. What is your race? (Please check all that apply)
   a. African/African American/Black
   b. American Indian/Native American
   c. Arab American/Middle Eastern
   d. Asian/Asian American
   e. Caucasian/European American/White
   f. Pacific Islander/Pacific Islander American
   g. None of the above
   h. Other_____

6. What is the race of your mother? (Please check all that apply)
   a. African/African American/Black
   b. American Indian/Native American
   c. Arab American/Middle Eastern
   d. Asian/Asian American
   e. Caucasian/European American/White
   f. Pacific Islander/Pacific Islander American
   g. None of the above
   h. Other_____

7. Did you live with your mother for at least 5 consecutive years between the ages of 5-18?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Other (please explain)_____

8. Do you identify as a mother or primary mother-figure?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Other

9. What gender(s) is your child or children? (Please check all that apply)
   a. Woman/Girl/Daughter
   b. Man/Boy/Son

c. Gender Non-Binary
d. Gender identity not listed
e. Other (Please Explain)_____

10. What is the race of your daughter?(Please check all that apply)
    a. African/African American/Black
    b. American Indian/Native American
    c. Arab American/Middle Eastern
    d. Asian/Asian American
    e. Caucasian/European American/White
    f. Pacific Islander/Pacific Islander American
    g. None of the above
    h. Other_____

11. What is your daughter's age? _____

12. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
    a) Some high school or less
    b) High school diploma
    c) Some college
    d) Two year college degree (e.g., AA)
    e) Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA)
    f) Some postgraduate work
    g) Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)

10. Is your Mother or primary mother figure presently living?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure/Do not know
    d. Other (Please Explain_____)

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire! We will be in contact with you shortly if you meet the eligibility criteria for this study.

Appendix II: Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Protocol Title: **A Mother's Message: A Family Systems Investigation of Black Women and Girls' Mental Well-Being, Hope, and Healing**

Interview Consent

Principal Researcher: Brianna A. Baker, BA Teachers College, Columbia University
bab2239@tc.columbia.edu

INTRODUCTION You are invited to participate in this research study called A Mother's Message: A Family Systems Investigation of Black Women and Girls' Mental Well-Being, Hope, and Healing

You may qualify to take part in this research study if you:

1. Are 18 years or older
2. Identify as a Black or African American Woman
3. Be the mother or primary female figure of a female-identifying child or adult.
4. Live in the United States

Implications for this study may include macro-level change, such as recommendations for institutional and governmental policy reform concerning the plight of Black women amidst intersecting forms of oppression.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief pre-screening survey to determine your eligibility and an informed consent form. This will take approximately 5 minutes.

If you qualify for the study and complete the consent form, you will be contacted to schedule an approximately 75-minute, one-on-one, audio-recorded interview that will be conducted by Zoom teleconferencing service. During the individual interview, you will be asked to discuss your experiences regarding motherhood, Black womanhood, and mental health.

You will not be required to disclose intimate details of racism or oppression and are free to stop the interview at any time. After completion of the interview, the video recording will be permanently deleted and the audio recording will be transcribed (i.e., written down) by a trained research assistant or using encrypted transcription software (Otter.ai). After transcription, the audio recording will be permanently deleted. Importantly, any identifying information that is shared during the interview will be masked in the transcript to ensure participant confidentiality. You will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep your identity confidential.
If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate.

All procedures of this study will take place over email, telephone, or Zoom teleconferencing technology. All interviews will be conducted in a quiet, private location.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel uncomfortable or emotional discussing details of your mental health, gendered racial identity, and/or experiences as a mother and daughter. You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE? This study is being done to investigate the role and function of Black Mother-Daughter relationships in gendered racial socialization, including gendered race-based messages such as notions of womanhood, mental well-being, and hope and healing You can also stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. If you become significantly emotionally distressed such that they cannot continue their participation, the principal investigator will end the interview and provide you with a list of mental health resources.

Your information will be kept confidential. You will be invited to ask questions and express any concerns you might have related to the interview process to the researchers before, during, and after the interview protocol.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. However, participation may benefit the field of psychology to better understand the psychosocial experiences of Black women and girls.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY? You will be compensated $25 for participating in this study in the form of a Visa Gift Card.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS? The study is over when you have completed the pre-screening questionnaire and the individual interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished. If you do not complete both the pre-screening questionnaire and the individual interview, you will not be compensated.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY In order to ensure your confidentiality, each research subject will be assigned a pseudonym (false name). The video recording of your interview will be destroyed immediately. Transcripts of the audio recordings will not include your name or other identifying information. All audio recordings and transcripts will be identified solely through the use of the pseudonym. All audio recordings will be stored on Yuja, a Teachers College Digital Media server. Yuja offers industry-leading security measures to ensure continuous availability and enterprise security. All sensitive user data is transmitted through an encrypted SSL channel that uses 256-bit encryption. Only members of the research team specifically involved in the data analysis will view the transcripts. Anonymous transcripts will be stored on the analysis team's password-protected personal computers. After data analysis is complete, all analysts, with the exception of the primary investigator, will permanently delete the transcripts from their computers. The primary investigator will keep the transcripts on their computer in a password-protected file.

For quality assurance, the study team, the study sponsor (grant agency), and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED? The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published.

CONSENT FOR AUDIO AND VIDEO RECORDING Audio and video recording is part of this research study. The video recording will be immediately destroyed while the audio recording will be saved under a pseudonym and stored on Yuja, a Teachers College Digital Media server. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will not be able to participate in this research study.

_____I give my consent to be recorded _____
Signature

_____I **do not** consent to be recorded _____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

It is possible that a professional transcriptionist may view your de-identified audio-recorded data for transcription purposes.

___I consent to allow written, video and/or audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University
_____Signature

___I **do not** consent to allow audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University
_____Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The primary researcher may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial below to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

The researcher may contact me in the future for other research opportunities:

Yes _____ Initial No_____ Initial

The researcher may contact me in the future for information relating to this current study:

Yes _____ Initial No_____ Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Brianna Baker at bab2239@columbia.edu or the Faculty Sponsor and Dissertation Advisor, Dr. Marie Miville at miville@exchange.tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at the researcher's professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Your data will not be used in further research studies.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date**: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix III: Interview Protocol

Interview Script

Hello, my name is Brianna Baker, and I'll be leading our interview today. Just to introduce myself, I am a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University. I have developed this study to investigate the role and function of Black Mother-Daughter relationships in gendered racial socialization, including gendered race-based messages such as notions of womanhood, mental well-being, and hope and healing. This study has been approved by the Teachers College IRB.

I'd like to start by thanking you for making the time to speak with me. Your time and voice is valuable and will be used to inform our team's analysis, and you will be compensated **$25** in the form of a Visa E-Gift Card pending the successful completion of this interview. Just to confirm, we'd like to keep this interview to approximately **75 minutes.** Does that still work for you?

During this interview, I'll ask you several questions regarding motherhood, Black womanhood, and mental health. I'd like to note at the outset that I'm **a cisgender, heterosexual Black woman from the rural South, specifically North Carolina.** I identify as the daughter of a Black woman, but I am not a mother myself. With that said, I am very aware that we may hold similar and different identities. This interview may bring up complex emotions related to your identity and experiences. Please answer each question with your personal level of comfort and please let me know if you need a break or to stop at any time.

Please be aware that there are no wrong answers – you're the expert here! We're doing interviews like these to hear things from your perspective. This research is intended to give voice and agency to Black women, so please express your honest thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

With your permission, I'd like to record this call. The recording will only be used to help us in our research, and it won't be shared with anyone except those within the research team. Recording this call also helps me, because I don't have to take as many notes! **Do I have your permission to record this interview?**

Press Record.

I also want to confirm that you've received and signed the informed consent, is that correct? Great!

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

Interview Protocol

So let's jump right in! To start, I'd like to hear about who you are and your experiences as a Black Woman. My first question is ***[Begin Section 1].***

1. **Gendered Racial Experiences**
    a. What does your identity as a Black woman mean to you?
    b. Describe what it was like growing up as a Black girl.

Thanks so much for sharing that information. I feel like I've learned so much about you and your identity! Now, I'd like to transition to asking you more about your relationship with your mother. ***[Begin Section 2].***

2. **Daughterhood**
    a. How would you describe your relationship with your mother in your early childhood? (Ages 0-11)
        i. In your teenage or adolescent years (ages 12-17)
        ii. In your adulthood? (18+)
    b. What values do you think your mom instilled in you?
        i. How were these values instilled? [***Prompts****:* Disciplinary actions, sit-down talks, activities or quality time, written messages, religious teachings]
        ii. Why were these values important?
        iii. Do you think these values or lessons would be different if you were of another gendered racial identity (ex: a Black boy)? Why?
    c. What is your favorite thing about your mother?*
    d. Did you and your mother have conflicts growing up? If so, what were they about?
    e. What are 3 words you would use to describe the relationship between you and your mother today?

I really appreciate you sharing such intimate details about your family and mother. I want to talk about a concept called intergenerational trauma ***[Begin Section 3].***

3. **III. Hope and Healing**
    a. According to the American Psychological Association, **Intergenerational Trauma** is defined as a phenomenon in which the descendants of a person who has experienced a terrifying event show adverse emotional and behavioral reactions to the event that are similar to those of the person himself or herself. These reactions vary by generation but often include shame, increased anxiety and guilt, a heightened sense of vulnerability and helplessness, low self-esteem, depression, suicidality, substance abuse, and others. **Given this, can you think of any big traumas or challenges faced in your family?**
    b. What role did your mother play in talking to you about these traumas or challenges?
    c. From your perspective what do you think it would take to heal from intergenerational trauma? What does healing look like?

As we near the end of this interview, I want to acknowledge your own experiences as a mother. I have a couple of questions for you related to you and your daughter. ***[Begin Section 4].***

4. **Motherhood**
    a. What values do you want to instill in your daughter?
    b. What is your biggest hope for your daughter?

It's been such a pleasure getting to know you. I sincerely want to thank you for your time & vulnerability with me today. And for increasing the diversity of Black women's experiences in scientific literature. Before I let you go, ***[Begin Section 5].***

5. **Wrap up**
    a. Is there anything about this topic that we have not discussed but you would like to tell me?

Appendix IV: List of Resources for Black Women

Mental Health Resources for Black Women

The ultimate goal of this research study is to facilitate the holistic well-being of Black mothers and daughters.
Talking about experiences concerning identity and oppression can be emotionally taxing. Because some of our questions were of a personal nature, below we provide referrals to resources that may be helpful if you experience distress.

If you have additional questions, you may contact Brianna A. Baker, Principal Investigator, at bab2239@tc.columbia.edu

Therapy For Black Girls
Therapy for Black Girls is an online space dedicated to encouraging the mental wellness of Black women and girls.

Ethel's Club
This vibrant virtual space serves as a hub for BIPOC to find community and resources to thrive mentally and creatively. Members have access to in-depth conversations, live-streamed classes, wellness sessions, and more with various young and diverse creatives.

HealHaus
This Brooklyn-based wellness space was established by its founders Darian Hall and Elisa Shankle to "create a safe space where healing is accessible, inclusive, and community oriented." It's currently offering online live-streamed classes and workshops that allow your mind to take a break and feel rejuvenated and restored. Some examples of these are *Meridian Cleansing Yoga*,

Mindfulness Grounding Meditation, *Breathwork for Trauma*, and *Circle of Care for Black Womxn*.

Racial Healing Conversation Guide
The National Day of Racial Healing (NDORH) offers people, organizations and communities across the United States,opportunities to recognize the need for racial healing, and brings people together to take collective action for a more just and equitable world

The Loveland Foundation
Loveland Foundation is committed to showing up for communities of color in unique and powerful ways, with a particular focus on Black women and girls. Our resources and initiatives are collaborative and they prioritize opportunity, access, validation, and healing. We are becoming the ones we've been waiting for.

Psychology Today
Provides national listings of mental health professionals and has listings to narrow down your search by the therapist's identity, modality, and experience.

NYC Well
NYC Well is your connection to free, confidential mental health support. Speak to a counselor via phone, text, or chat and get access to mental health and substance use services, in more than 200 languages, 24/7/365.
https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/
www.nyc.gov/nycwell
1-888-692-9355 (1-888-NYC-WELL)
Text "Well to 651-73

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
The Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support for people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24/7.
Call 1-800-273-8255
Text HELP to 741741
Chat on the website: https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/

Latinx Therapy
Latinx Therapy is a national directory and podcast with experienced, bilingual therapists and mental health resources. The mission is to help clients find a provider, in their preferred language, and within your budget.

Table 1: Table of Participants

Table 1

Summary of Participant Demographic Data

	ID	Age	Current Location	Racial Identities	Gender Identities	Education Level of Participant	Education Level of Participant's Mother	Socioeconomic Status in Childhood	Current Household Income	Age of Daughter(s)
1	106	37	Raleigh, North Carolina	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA)	Working Class	$130,000 - $149,000	13, 14.5
2	112	36	Philadelphia, PA	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Some high school or less	Poverty/Impoverished	$50,000-$89,999	13
3	114	38	Staten Island, New	African/African American/	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA,	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA,	Working Class	$150,000 +	8

			York	Black		MS, PhD, MD) degree	MS, PhD, MD)			
4	115	37	Dayton, Ohio	African/African American/ Black American Indian/Native American	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA)	Middle Class	$90,000-$129,999	5
5	142	32	Huntsville, Alabama	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA)	Some College	Low Income	$20,000-$49,999	5
6	116	42	Concord, North Carolina	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Some College	Working Class	$50,000-$89,999	5
7	100	37	College Station, Texas	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Some high school or less	Poverty/Impoverished	$90,000-$129,999	6
8	102	39	Greenville, South Carolina	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Working Class	$90,000-$129,999	11
9	103	38	Raleigh, North Carolina	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman/ Non-Binary	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Two year college degree (e.g., AA)	Working Class	$90,000-$129,999	11
10	107	35	Clayton, North	African/African	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree	Bachelor's degree (e.g.,	Middle Class	$130,000-	11, 8, 8 (twins)

			Carolina	American/ Black		(e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	BS, BA)		$149,000	
11	110	43	Houston, Texas	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA)	Some College	Poverty/Impoverished	$150,000+	17
12	111	41	Plano, Texas	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Some college	Working Class	$50,000-$89,999	17
13	143	50	Wilmer, Texas	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Some college	Some high school or less	Working Class	$50,000-$89,999	24, 22
14	147	47	Bingham ton, New York	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Some college	Working Class	$130,000 - $149,000	18
15	148	59	Dallas, Texas	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Some postgraduate work	Two year college degree (e.g., AA)	Working Class	$50,000-$89,999	29
16	202	51	Owings Mills, Maryland	African/African American/ Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	Some high school or less	Low Income	$150,000+	28
17	205	61	Hickory, North Carolina	African/African American/Black	Cisgender Woman	Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA, MS, PhD, MD)	High school diploma	Working Class	$90,000-$129,999	25

18	218	45	Queens, New York	African/African American/Black	Cisgender Woman	Bachelor's degree (e.g., BS, BA)	Some College	Working Class	$0 to $19,999	24, 5

Table 2: Table of Themes and Subthemes

Table 2 Study Themes and Subthemes

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Theme	Theme Definition	Subthemes	Sub-theme Definition
Black Matrescence	The unique process of becoming a mother when holding a Black racial identity; in other words, for Black mothers, the identity of the mother is influenced by various other cultural, historical, and social factors surrounding Blackness.	Single Motherhood	The experience of raising children without a romantic partner or father's involvement
		Family System Expansions and Contractions	Revelations and evolutions within the mother-daughter dyad across the lifespan
Grandmothering	We define grandmothering as a role in which a woman provides emotional, physical, or financial support to her grandchildren regardless of the relationship to or history with the mother.		
Custody of the Inner Black Girl	Conceptualizing the motherhood experience as a healing journey that may include help-seeking or personal development		
Yellow Mothering	Self-sacrificial motherhood defined by mothering that places the needs of the daughter over the needs of the mother.		
Aunties and Other-Mothers	Women- related or not related to another woman who provides mentorship, support, or supervision.		

Gendered Racial Socialization	Communicated messages, either direct or indirect, related to Black womanhood or girlhood from mother to daughter	Colorism and "Pretty Privilege"	Messages related to social or personal capital based on appearance specific to Black women and girls
		Gendered race-based messaging/ values	Messages related to cultural values passed from mother to daughter specific to Black women and girls
Gendered Racial Identity	The intersection of Blackness and Womanness as an identity		
Family Environment	The psychosocial and socioemotional influence of an individual's family system on their development as a mother or daughter	Drug and Substance Use	The presence of substance use by the mother or someone within the family system or social environment
		Religion	Engagement in religion or spiritual practices
		Domestic and Gender-BasedViolence	The presence of domestic and gender-based violence within the family system or social environment
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Figure 1: Distal and Proximal Factors

Figure 1: Distal and Proximal Factors found to influence the Black mother-daughter relationship throughout the lifecourse

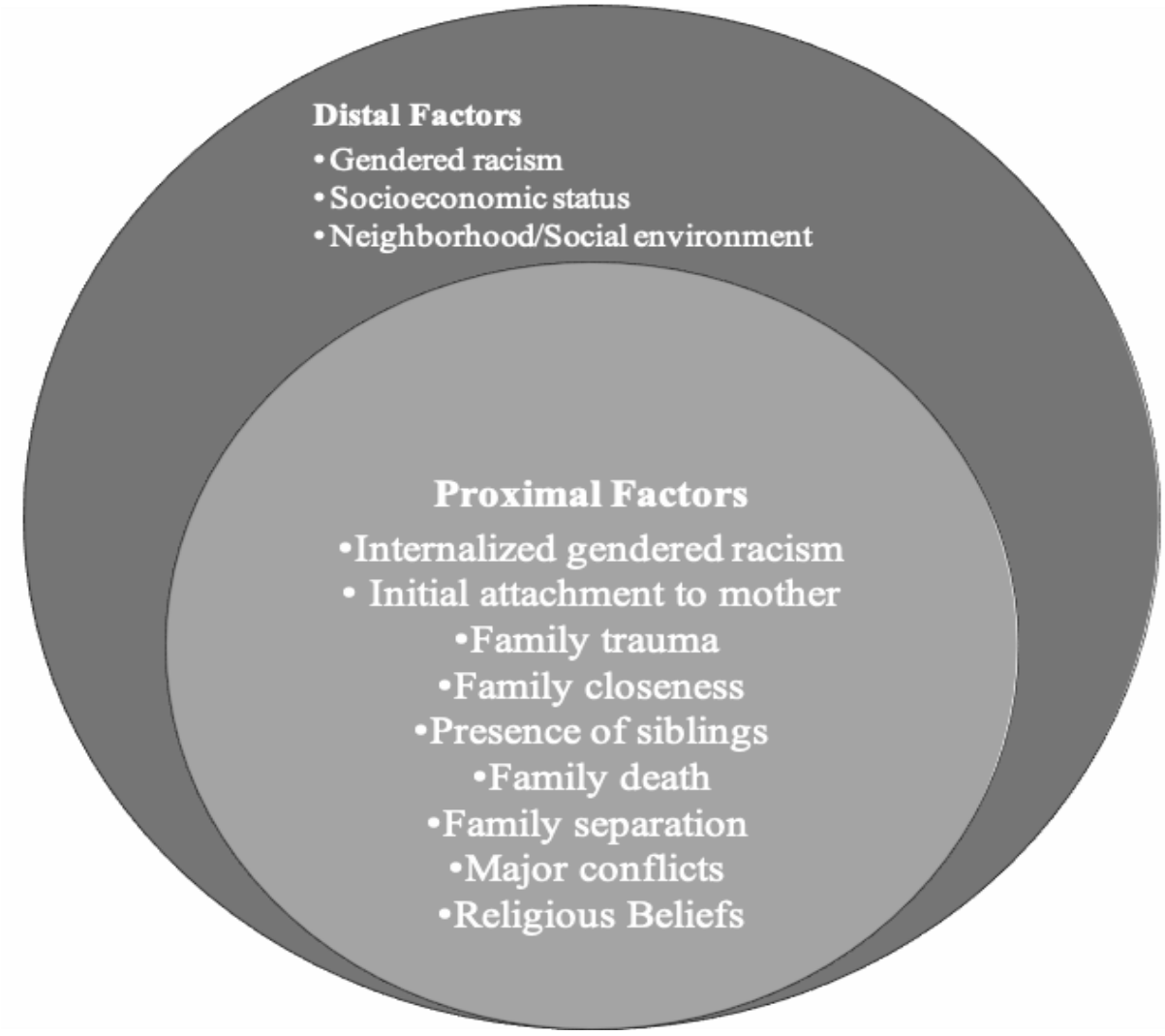
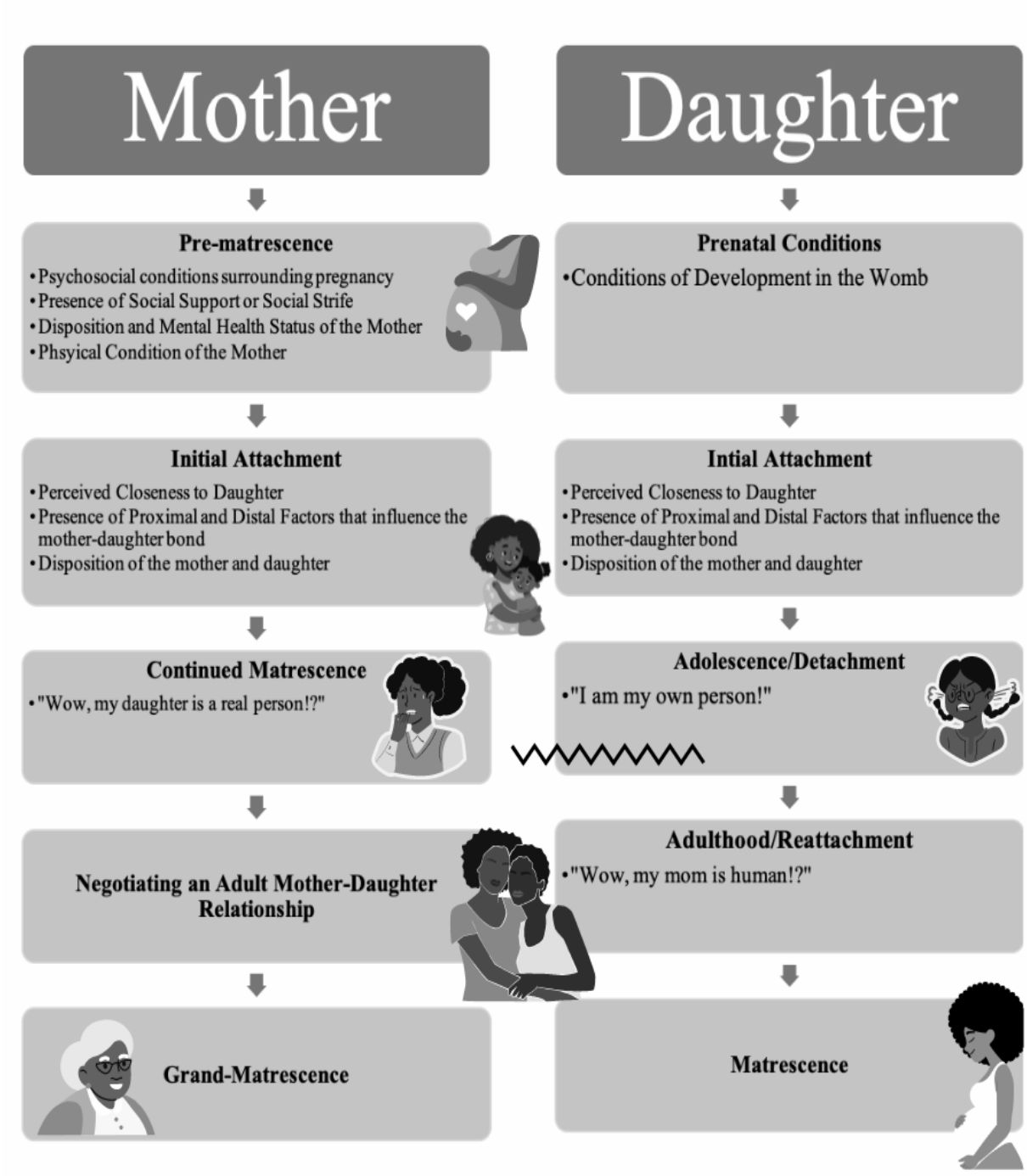


Figure 2: Black Mother-Daughter Developmental Model

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