BLACK MOTHERING IN THE BAY AREA WHILE UNSEEN AND UNHEARD: NAVIGATING BLACK MOTHERING IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC & SOCIAL UNREST

Kassie Michelle Phillips

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.usfca.edu/diss

Part of the Africana Studies Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons
University of San Francisco

BLACK MOTHERING IN THE BAY AREA WHILE UNSEEN AND UNHEARD:
NAVIGATING BLACK MOTHERING IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC & SOCIAL UNREST

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

Kassie Michelle Phillips

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Kassie Phillips, MSW

San Francisco, CA

Fall Semester 2022
Dissertation Abstract

Black Mothering In The Bay Area While Unseen And Unheard:
Navigating Black Mothering In The Midst Of A Pandemic & Social Unrest

This narrative research study was conducted in Northern California while attending the School of Education at the University of San Francisco. Introducing a new theoretical framework called Black-Crit Mothering, this study examined the relationships of single and married Black Mothers living in the Bay Area and how Black Mothering has been directly impacted by the various pandemics that continue to take over the Black communities. These stories provided counter-narratives to the traditional views of our women in history which leave out the voices of our Black Mothers. Research data included narratives of seven African-American identified women in the form of individual interviews and a focus group.

The key findings of this research demonstrate a profound need for Black Women to increase their visibility in their community, the media, healthcare, and even within their own homes. This study highlighted the voices, resilience, and dedication of the participants and their willingness to do anything to be the best Black Mother to their Black children.

*Keywords:* Black Mother, Black Woman, Black-Crit Mothering, pandemic, spirituality, COVID-19
This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate’s dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Kassie Michelle Phillips                                           December 8, 2022

Kassie Michelle Phillips, MSW, Candidate                     Date

Dissertation Committee

Susan Roberta Katz, Ph.D.                                      December 8, 2022

Chairperson, Susan Roberta Katz, Ph.D.                       Date

Colette Cann, Ph.D                                             December 8, 2022

Colette Cann, Ph.D.                                           Date

Cheryl Jone-Walker, Ph.D.                                      December 8, 2022

Cheryl Jones-Walker, Ph.D.                                    Date
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At this moment all I can do is say thank you to everyone! I am so grateful and humbled by the process of writing something that has proven to be so monumental and personal to my own journey and story of being a Black Mother, a Black Woman, a Woman who has fit into every category of not expected to beat the odds.

First and foremost, I have to thank God.

To my dissertation committee and chair, Dr. Cheryl Jones-Walker, Dr. Colette Cann, and Dr. Susan Katz, thank you for being a part of my committee and helping me work through bringing this subject to life. This experience at the University of San Francisco has been one of the best educational experiences I’ve ever had. I’ve heard so many times from my colleagues horror stories of the lack of support from start to finish in their process but I do not share in those sentiments. Thank you, if it wasn't for your support I may have given up a long time ago.

To my participants, if it wasn't for you this whole dissertation would not be possible. Thank you for trusting me with your stories and trusting me to share a small glimpse into the world of the Black Mother. Thank you for your participation and thank you for your encouragement.

To the best mentor in the world Dr. Jeanne Wilson. You are so many reasons why for me. During the time you were my counselor while I was at Chabot College, you were the reason why I stayed in school. When I finished my Masters degree you were the reason why I made the life changing decision to switch to work in education. When I struggled with self worth and trying to find my purpose in life and trying to keep the faith through my struggles with interviews, you kept praying for me, you taught me patience and helped me see what is made for me will be.
When I finally got the job of my dreams you shouted for me in praise and gratitude. I am forever indebted to you, I thank you.

To my closest friends, Chavon, Julie, Lamont, Natalie, Philena, and Willeeda, I thank you for supporting me through this process, checking in on me and always encouraging me to keep going. I am beyond grateful for each and every one of you.

To my family including my aunts and uncles, and my father who prayed over me during this process. Thank you for believing in me.

To my mom, THANK YOU! These past few years have been such a struggle for you but your strength and resilience has continued to shine through. Know that this is in part because of you, without your support, your mothers love, your belief that I could do this, this wouldn't be possible. You continued to always put your faith and I appreciate you for always being there.

To my Granny Rosa, even though you are no longer in this world, I have to tell you how much I love you and how I wish you could see what I was able to accomplish. You were my biggest fan, you always believed in me, never questioned my choices and always gave me the space to feel accepted no matter what. You and my mom are two of the strongest women I know and I can only hope to be half as great of mother as you were to your children.

To my children, you are what has kept me going through this whole process. You are my biggest reason why and I love you all through eternity.

To my husband, my best friend, my life partner, soon-to-be Dr. Robert Alexander III. Thank you for doing this with me. Through life’s ups and downs we have found a way to make it through together. Thank you for being a voice of encouragement, my sound board, and the person I can always count on. To anyone I may have missed, your support during my process is deeply appreciated. Thank You All!
# Table of Contents

**DISserTATION ABSTRACT** ii  
**SIGNATURE PAGE** iii  
**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** iv  
**PROLOGUE** 1  
A Letter to My Sons 1  
   Psychological 1  
   Safety and Security 3  
   Love and Belonging 5  
   Esteem 7  
   Self-Actualization 8  
   Black Consciousness 9  
**CHAPTER I: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM** 14  
   Introduction 14  
   Statement of the Problem 16  
   Background and Need 18  
   Purpose Statement 19  
   Research Questions 19  
   Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks 20  
      Black Feminist Thought 21  
      Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome 21  
      #BLACKLIVESMATTER 22  
      BlackCrit Mothering 23  
      Limitations/Delimitations 27  
      Educational Significance 28  
      Definition of Terms 29  
**CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE** 31  
   Black Mothering through Spirituality 31  
   Evolution of Black Mothering 36  
   Black Mothering in the 21st Century 44  
   Black Mothers’ Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic 48  
   New Consciousness: What Are We Still Missing? 51  
**CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY** 61
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Overview 68
Participant Profiles: Demographics 69
Introduction of Themes 71

Amauri 72
  Background 73
  Maternal Figures 74
  Opportunities for Our Babies 76
  Navigating Pandemics 77
  The Unseen Superhero 78

Cameryn 78
  Background 78
  Maternal Figures 80
  Opportunities for Our Babies 81
  Navigating Pandemics 81
  The Unseen Superhero 82

Kamiyah 83
  Background 83
  Opportunities for Our Babies 86
  Navigating Pandemics 87
  The Unseen Superhero 87

Kassie (Me) 88
  Background 88
  Opportunities for Our Babies 90
  Navigating Pandemics 92
  The Unseen Superhero 93

Lashonda 93
  Background 93
  Maternal Figures 94
  Opportunities for Our Babies 96
APPENDIX D: Voices of Our Black Mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radical Gratitude Spell</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amauri’s Letter</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameryn’s Letter</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamiyah’s Letter</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lashonda’s Letter</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikita’s Letters</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone’s Letter</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn’s Letter</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kassie’s (My) Letter</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter from My Mother</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie’s Art and Poems</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURES

Figure 1..........................................................................................................................................16
TABLES

Table 1 .......................................................................................................................................... 69
PROLOGUE

To begin this dissertation, I’ve chosen to write a letter to my sons addressing the layers of need required to raise Black children as well as focusing on how the Black Mother often navigates systems of oppression speaking but rarely being heard. In doing this, I introduce you to my thoughts on the need to educate our Black children about the trials and tribulations of what it means to be their mother while Black. As an African American mother to all Black sons, it is essential to educate, uplift, and continuously make them aware of who they are, what they mean to me, and what they mean to society. Unfortunately, the two do not often intersect.

A Letter to My Sons

Psychological

To My Sons,

I am writing this letter to you to express my love and concern for you. I gave birth to all three of you under three separate circumstances but all times, surrounded by love. Of all three of you, my first childbirth experience was the most difficult and posed the most challenges. To my oldest son, you and I almost did not make it. I remember the day as if it was yesterday. On Friday, October 13, 2006, I went into the doctor’s office to do my routine check-up and make sure you were shifting from the breech position. My regular Ob-Gyn had been out sick for the last few months, and I was made to see this White male doctor who would almost be the death of you and me. I never had a good feeling about him.
I went into the doctor’s office one week from your birthdate and weighed in at about 163 lbs. The doctor was in a rush. I tried asking him questions, but he felt on my stomach, said you were still moving from your breech position and thought things were okay. I returned to work the following Monday, and throughout the week, I started having bad headaches and stomach cramps. I called the doctor again, and he said, “it was likely only Braxton Hicks, and I shouldn't be worried”.

I called Granny and told her what was going on. She said “that didn't sound like Braxton Hicks” and since she had given birth to seven children and was a nurse, I was inclined to believe her. I ended up calling the advice nurse line and putting it on extra that I was in pain, since my Granny told me that that was the best way to be seen. At this time, it was the following Friday, October 20, 2006, and when I entered into my appointment with this fill-in doctor, I stepped on the scale again and my weight had increased to 193 lbs. Yes, you read that right, I gained 30 lbs. in one week. One would think that a doctor would show some type of care and concern; not this one. This doctor saw this young Black Mother who was experiencing her appointments alone, who didn't know what she didn't know, and he just sent me home.

I went home and in the middle of the night I started feeling bad all over again, I called Granny and Mimi and they both told me to go to the emergency room. At that moment the doctor on duty asked me why I was allowed to go home earlier that day, and then I was admitted. The doctor discovered that the amniotic fluid that was surrounding you was slowly leaking, and you were in shock because you were struggling to breathe while in my womb.

Granny finally made it to the hospital and noticed that I was shaking uncontrollably, which I guess with all the poking and prodding and drugs they had me on, I hadn't noticed. She was concerned for you and me. She was concerned that this would possibly be the last breath of
her first great-grandson and even her granddaughter. As a grandmother, she knew she had to fight for me; as a nurse, she knew the doctors weren't doing all they could, and as a Black Woman, she knew we were not being treated the same.

I was young, Black, woman, poor, and my life meant nothing. I wasn’t being seen or heard.

She asked them if they were going to do anything. Her mind was racing a thousand times a minute trying to think of what was happening to me, why I wouldn't stop shaking. And then she finally had an ‘aha’ moment where she demanded that a doctor come in and evaluate me, and she suggested a drug. The doctor ordered it and within minutes, I stopped shaking. She had saved us. Granny is the reason for your first breath and the reason it wasn't my last.

**Safety and Security**

Being you guys’ mother has always been exciting and fulfilling, but I have had so many times where I feared being able to meet your needs of food and shelter. I was a single Black Mother who had three African American boys by the time I turned 25. I was not stable and was currently living in low-income housing and a welfare recipient.

Back in 2010, I made a decision that you guys all deserved more. You deserved to have a home and live in a house where you could enjoy a backyard or a park that wasn’t riddled with vagrants. You deserved to have a mother who could afford to take you on nice trips and buy you the things you did and sometimes didn’t deserve, you boys deserved to have the Safety and Security that I had all my life but somehow lost sight of.

I was, at this time, in one of the worst relationships of my life and was experiencing continued domestic violence in our home. I can recall a time I thought I was going to die.
I was pregnant sitting at home in my room after having just put the oldest one of you to bed. I was falling asleep while folding clothes on my bed when I heard an abrupt thump on my door, and it was the abuser trying to get in. He was intoxicated and angry and he was ready to unleash on me. I thought he had left, so I opened the door to the room and he found me.

After what seemed like forever of him attacking me, he left to retrieve an object from the kitchen but before he could return, I ran out the front door.

I remember running outside in my underwear to the payphone at the store that was right outside my apartment complex. I called the police and I stood frantically with my adrenaline running high. The dispatcher told me to stay on the line with her but I was not free of my abuser; He came running.

I screamed, “Help me!” It was the dead of the night and no cars were driving by. There was no one around. He picked me up and tried to carry me back inside. I was mid-air in his arms, and then all I saw was lights flashing; there had to be at least eight police cars that pulled up. I just knew I was free, I knew the police would see me, they would hear me, they would see the cuts, somehow feel my pain. They would recognize that no one in their right mind would run outside in the dead of the night, screaming, if they didn’t need to be seen … if they needed to be saved.

I called the police thinking they would rescue me. I called the police thinking they would provide me with the safety and security that I thought the boys in blue stood for. That never happened. Instead … They called me a liar. They said I couldn’t possibly have been telling the truth and that no one would ever allow themselves to endure that amount of abuse and pain. They asked me if I had been drinking; they asked me if I was doing drugs.
After everything that I had been through, I finally had the courage to run. I laid it all on the line thinking, “FINALLY, I’m free!” They locked him up for the weekend and by Monday they had dropped him back off at my home saying he had rights and I needed to file a “No HARM” restraining order, which just said, “Don’t touch her again for 14 days.”

I was young, Black, woman, poor, and my life meant nothing. I wasn’t being seen or heard.

I tried my hardest to make sure that you never saw or heard me being abused, I tried my hardest to make sure that the abuse never made its way to you. I tried my hardest to make sure that even when I was hurting and feeling like I was at my wit’s end and that I couldn’t take the pain any longer, I made sure you knew you were loved.

In the greatest depression of my life, I knew nothing more than to overcompensate for the abuse and hate I was receiving not just from the bad relationship, but also from the lack of security and the constant rejection I received from my dad. I filled you guys’ life with so much stuff, from too many shoes and clothes that you never wore, to not just too much of things that in the end just didn’t really matter.

I did these things. Just so you wouldn't see my pain. Just so you didn't see me cry. Just so you knew love was real and your mother would do everything in her power to give it to you. So I fought; I got back in school, I excelled, and I mustered up the courage to leave the abuser. We were safe.

**Love and Belonging**

One thing I pride myself on is how close you boys are all growing to be. This current pandemic has definitely bonded you in ways that I am sure none of you imagined. Middle and Youngest son, you both have grown so much from your constant fights and battles of who was
playing with what first but you also have grown an understanding and appreciation for one
another and each other's interest. I remember my middle son when you started Kindergarten and
I know you've heard this story a million times but you cried EVERY DAY for eight of the ten
months of the school year. You wouldn't walk into the classroom unless your dad or I came in and
sat with you for close to 10 minutes so that you could settle in. The cutest thing that happened
one day was your little brother began to hold your hand as you walked into the classroom and it
was as if that was all you needed. He looked at you, hugged you, and said in his little voice:
“Brother, it is going to be okay.”

Then your classmate came and said the same thing, and the teacher allowed him to sit
next to you throughout the remaining transition. He became your elementary school best friend,
and from that point forward you didn't cry anymore. You felt loved and you finally felt like you
belonged in the class.

Love and Belonging are so important as you all shape into young men and I want you to
know that you always have a place. I've always taught you boys that this world is definitely a
cruel place and if you aren’t careful, it can chew you up in whole. But always remember you guys
have a sense of love and belonging with one another and you can continue to build on your love
and interest and be who and what you want to be in life.

Oldest son, you’ve been telling me for years that you want to be a computer engineer or
work for NASA. Middle son, you’ve told me time and time again you are going to be a basketball
player and that your side hustle will be having your own restaurant. My youngest son, you’ve
told me that you aren’t sure of what you want to be, but you know you want to make a lot of
money and live close to your mom. I am going to hold you all to these three. You belong, you are
great, and you have a place in this world; just don’t stop fighting to hold your place.
Being a single mom, I’ve struggled to find a place for you. I’ve played the role of supermom which can hold the title of mom and dad to all of you for most of your life. I’m sorry I didn’t choose better. I’m sorry that the men you call dad have not been significant in your upbringing, I’m sorry that they chose themselves and their security over yours. I’m sorry I fell into the statistics of what a “normal household” was supposed to look like. I always wanted you to have both parents in the home, but that came at a cost that I wasn’t willing to pay. I never wanted to see you cry when our home was no longer safe. My job as your mother was to ensure your safety, but everywhere I turned people made me feel at fault or as if my problems weren’t that bad.

I was young, Black, woman, poor, and my life meant nothing. I wasn’t being seen or heard. All I had to give you was my love. I hope it was enough.

Esteem

Remember how I always had you repeat after me and say, “I am confident, I am smart, I can do it”? Remember when I told you to never talk down on yourself? Remember when I said to always be kind and to stay humble? Well, that was my way of making sure that you knew that when you hit the “real world” and started hearing all the bad things that people think of you as a Black male that your self-esteem would be so high that their words wouldn’t affect you. I remember a time, my youngest son, when you came home from school one day sad. You were sad because a group of kids at your school said your skin looked like feces and dirt. You were sad because I had always told you how handsome and smart you were, but the words somehow lost meaning because these kids made you feel less than. They tried to tear down your self-esteem and make you feel like you were less than the smart, intelligent, handsome young man you knew yourself to be.
At the moment you asked me why you couldn't go to a school with more kids that looked like you. You wanted to know why you had to be around a bunch of kids who didn’t understand you but what you didn’t know was that I had made a decision years ago to take you out of the predominantly Black schools because they were the most underperforming schools. The schools where we have seen the most [Black kids] were the schools that needed the most amount of help. I wanted more for you.

Then there was another time when I was with all of you and a woman asked if you were all my boys. I told her “Yes,” and she proceeded to tell me she was sorry because statistics said one of you wouldn’t likely see it to adulthood. She was sorry that statistics had already predetermined your fate.

The scary part was that she didn’t see me as a woman intelligent enough to know the odds were against you. She didn’t see me as someone smart enough to know our road was full of obstacles. She knew what I already knew and that was that.

I was young, Black, woman, poor, and my life meant nothing. I wasn’t being seen or heard. No matter what I did, my intersectionality poses more challenges than rewards. I feel hopeless.

**Self-Actualization**

My dream isn’t much different from that of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who in his “I Have a Dream” speech said: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character” (King Jr, 1963).

These words are almost 60 years old, and yet today I still struggle with knowing what your tomorrow will bring. I still struggle with this dream that Martin Luther King shared with
our nation. He had a dream, a vision, and hoped that our Black men and women would be treated with equality. Yet here I am writing this letter expressing all my fears and concerns of what it means to be your Black Mother. Somehow our world got so lost that we can no longer just fight for equality, but we have to fight for equity.

I want everything for you guys. I want you to know that you have the choice to do anything that you want to do. I want you to know that sky is truly the limit. I want you guys to always know that your mom fought for you. I am not perfect by any means, and I've definitely made my share of mistakes, but I write this to you to just share a little bit of the how and the why I've done the things I have for you and knowing that I continue to fight for you every day. One of your goals as a Young Man should be to achieve self-actualization.

You should be able to live amongst everyone knowing that if you wanted to get a job you wouldn't have to worry who will be concerned about your name appearing too ‘ghetto,’ or are they concerned about your skin being too Black. Are they concerned that the hair that you have chosen to wear is too natural, or if the dreads worn by our ancestors match their ideal of being well-kempt? I want you to be able to go outside and actually realize that you are the heir to greatness and you have so much greatness in you.

I want you to be able to think about your success as being whatever career or degree, whatever partner you choose to love, and whatever supports YOUR happiness, are choices and not things I have been predetermined for you based on who you are or who you are not. I say all this with so much love in my heart. I’m so happy God chose me to be your mother. I’m so happy to have all of you in my life. A mother’s love can never be matched and there is nothing I wouldn’t do for you.

Black Consciousness
There is something I must leave you with. Through everything I’ve written, you must know that you must at all times know how to defend yourself and your family. Being able to take care of you financially and emotionally is just not enough. I can send you to all the best schools in the world and move you to the best neighborhoods but it doesn’t change the most important thing, and that is that you are a Black man living in a White man’s world. This world that we live in wasn’t created with your greatness in mind. This nation we live in wasn’t built to see a Black man or woman be successful.

I have always been scared when you leave my side. I constantly tell your step-father and your Mimi that the best place for you to be is with me. My love will protect you. I want you boys to be able to live your life carefree but I am afraid that isn’t possible. When you tell me that you want to go to the park, my whole body tenses up, not because we live in a bad neighborhood, not because there are vagrants walking around, but because you are Black. I worked so hard to give you the best that I didn’t realize that you needed so much more than kids who weren’t Black. I needed to teach you how to defend yourself.

In 2012 when Trayvon Martin was murdered by an overzealous rent-a-cop, I remember holding on to you all and crying. Crying because I knew one day it could be you, crying because someone’s baby had been taken from them and all Trayvon wanted to do was get a snack from the store. What would I tell you when you grew old enough to walk to the corner store and all you wanted to do is get a snack but my distrust of the world makes me tell you no? I would tell you, “You can’t go alone. I have to go with you.” I would tell you that snacks may cost you your life.

You boys always asked me for toy guns but I told you no. I told you no because I remember the day just two years after Trayvon’s murder that Tamir Rice, age of 12, was gunned
down for playing outside with a toy gun. I made sure you never owned a toy gun. That’s the only way I knew how to help you defend yourself.

These were just some of the many boys whose parents I’m sure told them the morning when they woke up to be careful, to go be a kid, and just be careful. But being careful doesn’t hold the same meaning with you. In order for you to be careful, you must be cautious, you must be informed, you must learn to avoid. We live in a very diverse community but you must always keep in mind that you can’t do what your friends can.

Oldest son, remember the weekend after President 45 failed to be reelected? Remember when you asked me if you could go hang out but I showed you a text message warning for Black boys and men that read: “Don’t know how true this is but this is something to be mindful of.

Family,

The following information is being shared out of concern for the safety of you and your family. The NAACP has received credible information that some of the White nationalist groups, neo-Nazis, and White supremacist groups have initiations happening this weekend. As a part of the initiation, it is said that they will be looking to snatch Black men and boys and hang them, shoot them, torture them, and kill them. So please spread the word. Do not let your sons go out alone. Pay attention to your surroundings. If you have made friends with someone recently, do not be gullible and naïve; they may have another motive. Be cautious, STAY PRAYED UP! Only travel in pairs and even then, pay attention. If your car is hit by a truck or van don’t be quick to jump out. Pay attention. Women also be alert. The rumor is that they will seek men. But we know that at some point anyone will do. Be careful! Passes on, share, share, share!” (source unknown)
After reading this, I knew I couldn’t let you go anywhere, and you told me you didn’t want to go. You told me you were scared and the only defense I had was to keep you in our home, where they would have to get through me first. In order to survive, you must know that you have to live by our Black survival guide, and if you don’t you have a strong possibility of not seeing your 30th birthday or the inside of a prison cell. Please ALWAYS remember the following:

Always know your rights. Our ancestors have fought long, hard, and died so that we can have the rights we have today. KNOW THEM.

When you go to any store, keep your hands out of your pocket. Someone will likely be following you or looking to see if you will take something. Be respectful and keep a smile on your face even when you don’t think there is anything to smile about.

Your beautiful dark skin is not seen as beautiful to all. Because you are dark-skinned you will be discriminated against even more, even among other Blacks. People will try to pay you less, assume you are a naturally great athlete, assume you aren’t good in school (especially not at math), and make many assumptions based on pre-existing stereotypes.

Never forget your skin intimidates many. So when you are at school and begin to work, you will notice a lot of people will treat you differently and assume you can do things because of your stature. Again, know your rights, but know that what’s acceptable to many in the school and workplace isn’t acceptable for us.

Middle son, do you remember the time when you were in middle school and the principal wouldn’t erase your referral even when the other non-Black kid admitted to harassing the little girl and blaming it on you?
Well, that’s just a small dose of what your reality can really look like. At the young age of 10 your school was ready to label you and I had to fight for you so that they wouldn’t do it. If and when you start a family: Be present. Protect your partner at all costs. Know that the doctors don’t always have the back of a Black Woman. One almost let me and my firstborn die. They treat us with sub-human abilities, don’t believe us when we tell them something isn’t right. If she says something isn’t right, help her advocate.

Last but not least:

When you get your licenses, make sure you know the rules of Driving While Black. Our rules are different from the rest of the world. If a cop pulls you over; keep calm, listen, and follow instructions. Keep a copy of your driver’s license, insurance, and registration in your front window as we discussed so that you never have to reach for anything. Don’t talk back, the less you say the better, and never reach for anything. If you are alone and you remember, press “record” on your phone to ensure you are protected. It is your right.

My boys, I never want you to forget how much I love you. I leave you with these words by Radhika Maira Tabrez: “May you continue to be, what you want to be; And the courage to resist becoming what the world wants you to become.”

Love, Mom
CHAPTER I: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

The most disrespected person in America is the Black Woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black Woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black Woman. (Malcolm X, Speech to women, 1962)

Malcolm X spoke these words almost 60 years ago, and they are still relevant in today's society. Black Women in America and across the world are still seen as the most unprotected and disrespected women ever. Our lives are seen as valueless and meaningless; just refer to the massacres of women like Breonna Taylor and Sandra Bland, who have been slain by cops that continue to walk away without any accountability for their actions. The only penalty for the killer of Breonna Taylor being that his bullet missed her body.

Black Women have been made a mockery of for centuries. Sara Saartjie Baartman (b.1789-d.1819) is a prime example of this. At the age of 21, Sara was sold into slavery and later used for entertainment purposes due to her larger derriere. When she died at the age of 26 in 1819, her body was put on exhibit at the Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Man) in Paris to support racist theories about people of African ancestry (Howard, 2019). According to Leger’s (2013) article in Essence magazine, Black Women are represented negatively in the media at twice the rate that they are portrayed positively (Leger, 2013). This negative imagery has not only impacted how Black Women are portrayed in a physical sense but also with the continued depictions of the Black Mother.

Black mothering comes with its own set of issues. As an African American woman, every part of me has to be dissected when thinking of my approach to how I raise my children. What do I focus on first: the fact that I am Black, a woman, a Black Woman, a mother, a single mother,
a mother of only sons? And if I add these with other characteristics, such as me living in the overpriced Bay Area, or raising my children in what has been a historically never-ending race war, then this leaves me with a lot to think about and discuss. As W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) stated

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (p. 5)

The Black Woman has never been protected and has gone unseen and unheard within our communities and around the world for centuries. Starting from slavery to now, many ongoing issues have led to movements, such as the #BLACKLIVESMATTER #SAYTHEIRNAME, and #BLACKMINDSMATTER. Currently, we are living in extremely unprecedented times where not only are we, Black Mothers, trying to figure out how to navigate the historical issues of racism, but now we have to add them during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, a monumental election, and continued social unrest where pre-existing inequities have been exposed, and people are temporarily listening.

Black mothering is deeply connected with my ability to be educated so that I can teach my children what it means to be Black in the Bay Area and Black in America. There is a long and important-to-understand global history around race relations, and we cannot digest events effectively if we do not see color (Burrage, 2016). I wanted to be able to answer certain critical questions in my dissertation to help shed light on how parenting during a pandemic and in the midst of a social movement can help to improve the social consciousness of Black children who otherwise lack political education as pertaining to their culture and background.
Statement of the Problem

The problem that I addressed in this study is: How do Black Mothers parent while living in the Bay Area, in the midst of multiple pandemics? The Black community has been plagued with issues around health, safety, and being a parent that alone are difficult but when intersected with being Black, a woman, and a mother, the experiences are intensified even more. When I think of Black Mothering, I think of “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs” (1943). Within his chart, I believe that all of these layers are necessary, but an added layer is needed to address how a Black Mother can meet her needs for good health, safety, and security as well as social belonging and self-esteem in order to reach self-actualization while being Black. Maslow created the Hierarchy of Needs chart to identify the needs of Whites while ignoring the different needs of other ethnic groups. The charts in Figure 1 show Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (on the left) and an adapted needs chart (on the right) that I created to include the needs of the Black community.

Figure 1
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Phillips’ Black Community Needs charts
Mothering is no longer just about thinking about safety, such as teaching your child how to cross the street or having a happy healthy child, or providing basic needs such as food and clothing, or thinking about what K-12 schools your child may attend. Being a Black Mother now means to think about basic needs while thinking about when your child is walking, will they make it to their destination safely? Will the school that you choose provide an adequate education? Will you make it back to the school to pick up your children? If you are a mother of sons, will your son be the police's target practice of the day? Will they remember to “follow directions,” and even if they do, will they be shot dead anyway?

The problem that we have to address even lies with the continued talk of equity. How is equity being addressed in Black communities where, even with Black Women being considered the most educated people in America (National Center of Education Statistics, 2019), we are still the least advocated for and the least protected? I propose in my study the need for a more refined vision of what it means to mother while Black. This added layer of focus would include the need to be taught defense tactics in order to survive as a Black Woman. These layers include, but are not limited to:

1. Driving While Black
2. Shopping Etiquette
3. What to do when you are the only Black person at your school/job?
4. How to survive being Black and pregnant? (Black Women die at higher rates than White women when cared for by White doctors)
5. Code-Switching (the ability to switch from one type of language to another based on the environment).
Background and Need

The super-strong Black Mother image now dictates the terms of good mothering for Black Women: be strong and be solely responsible (Elliott & Reid, 2016). Parenting, in general, is hard, and it is noticeably harder while raising children with an increased risk of dealing with racial adversity - whether it be driving while Black (DWB) or being subjected to crueler punishment, if not death, based solely on the color of their skin. In a study tracking a nationally representative group of mothers of children from kindergarten to third grade, researchers Kei Nomaguchi and Amanda House (2013) found that only Black Mothers experienced heightened levels of parenting stress as their children grew older and mothers’ concerns about their safety and survival increased. (Elliott & Reid, 2016). Parenting while a single parent is arguably more complicated, but is also connected to an individual's ability to provide, manage their time, and have certain levels of competence to carry out tasks that may or may not follow gender norms. For example, a single mother living in the Bay Area without any type of assistance, whether it be from family, the other parent, or the government, will likely face more obstacles than a parent household where one parent/caregiver stays home to take care of the kids while the other works.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), “White children live at home with both parents at twice the rate of Black children under the age of 18. While 74.3 percent of all White children below the age of 18 live with both parents, only 38.7 percent of African-American minors can say the same. More than one-third of all Black children in the United States under the age of 18 live with unmarried mothers as compared to 6.5 percent of White children” (Prince, 2016, p. 4). The super-strong Black Mother dictated how one perceived good mothering, which ultimately meant to be strong and solely responsible for our children.
Furthermore, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has had a negative impact on the lives of millions of people in the world. For all families, there were big changes in their everyday routines. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, about 1.38 billion children were out of school in 2020 (Johnson, 2020). The pandemic has reshaped how Black Mothers as well as many other parents have had to learn how to parent while staying on top of our own mental health, maintain employment, be “good parents” and adapt to the new roles that the pandemic forced many of us into.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this narrative research study is to explore what it means to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area while dealing with multiple pandemics. This was done through individual interviews with seven Black Mothers, including me, across the Bay Area. This study researched how Black Mothers have been directly impacted by the various pandemics that have continued to take over the Black communities. The objective of this is to create transparency about how Black Women lack safe and adequate platforms to have their parenting struggles seen and heard.

**Research Questions**

Black Mothers have a unique challenge when it comes to parenting their youth. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do Black Mothers negotiate parenthood while being unseen and unheard?
2. What does it mean to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area?
   a. How have Black Mothers created opportunities for their children?
b. What are Black Mothers’ experiences of educating their children (i.e., what type of school do their child participate in)?
   i. Do their experiences create inequities or new learning opportunities for Black Mothers and/or their children?
   ii. How do Black moms use this time to educate their children on social issues?

3. What does it mean to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area during multiple pandemics?
   a. COVID-19
   b. Racial injustices
   c. Police brutalities

4. What are Black Mothers’ experiences of being a super-strong Black Mother?
   a. What are the dynamics in their Black family?

**Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks**

This research was framed using the theoretical/conceptual frameworks: Black Feminist Thought (BFT), Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), #BLACKLIVESMATTER, and a new framework that I developed which I call, “BlackCrit Mothering.” After presenting these frameworks below, I argue how Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs needs to be redeveloped by including matters such as ongoing social, personal, and professional pressures that extend beyond the five needs that Maslow addresses. Rather we have to explore what be(com)ing a mother while Black means and what that means for the youth that we are raising.
Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) describes Black Women as a unique group that exists in a “place” in U.S. social relations where intersectional processes of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation shape Black Women's individual and collective consciousness, self-definitions, and actions (Collins 1991, 1998). Scholar Patricia Hill Collins (2002) analyzes several stereotypes of Black Women, which include the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother and the Jezebel. In doing this, she also relates these stereotypes to modern day stereotypes of Black Women that still exist today. Collins’ (2002) concept speaks to the need to continue looking for remedies within the Black community to transcend these preexisting stereotypes paired with other historically oppressive issues into a dynamic statement about resistance and overcoming negative socio-environmental conditions.

Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome

The conceptual framework, Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome, was created by Dr. Joy DeGruy in 2005. Dr. Joy DeGruy speaks to “appropriate adaptation,” which talks about living in a hostile environment and is a behavior that has yet to be unlearned. This is in reference to how Black Mothers are predisposed to a certain type of behavior due to the effects of slavery. Due to this adaptation, the mothering practices of Black Mothers differ from the stereotypical norm.

Optimism is an emotion that has a different meaning when you are mothering while Black. It is important to recognize and understand the many layers of what it takes to raise a Black child. We must review what the culture and social norms are in the community and how we are forced to adjust based on what the current climate is and how the world views Black people. We cannot merely go outside with the expectation that we will be treated fairly; we can’t send our children outside even though we have forewarned them not to talk
to strangers or to make sure to use their turn signal when switching lanes. We as Black Mothers are forced to pray for the best but be prepared for the worse.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened this awareness and created opportunity and space for the Black community to be heard and seen in a way that has never been done because people have no choice but to pay attention. We are essentially being forced to sit in our homes and stay current on issues as they negatively or positively impact our well-being. In the Bay Area we as Black Mothers now are being forced to confront every insecurity that has been an ongoing issue in our community for years.

#BLACKLIVESMATTER

#BLACKLIVESMATTER arose out of obligation and need for the Black community - the need to be seen and heard and to feel validated about all the racial injustices that have continuously taken place within our community. #BLACKLIVESMATTER is a conceptual framework that I will refer to throughout my dissertation to name the challenges of being Black and the continued need to create additional moments, such as #SAYHERNAME, to bring light to the Black Women who are constantly losing their lives, but no one is saying their names.

When we say “Black Lives Matter,” we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an acknowledgment of how Black poverty and genocide represent state violence. It is an acknowledgment that one million Black people (one-half of all people in prisons or jails) being locked in cages in this country is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgment that Black Women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families, and that assault is an act of state violence (Garza, 2015). As a Black Mother to Black children, it is important to always be able to
communicate to our children that their being Black holds a different meaning in society and, while it should not, it does.

**BlackCrit Mothering**

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men. (Douglass, 1855, p. 375)

BlackCrit Mothering recognizes the power dynamics and oppressive structures in the society along with the existence of ideologies that are more dominant than others (Marchand, 2019). BlackCrit Mothering has emerged from the paradigm of critical theory that identifies the political, social, economic, cultural, and legal institutions influencing different groups' beliefs, attitudes, values, and experiences (DePouw & Matias, 2016). In particular, BlackCrit Mothering is drawn from two critical theories - Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Critical Race (BlackCrit) Theory. While Critical Race Theory considers race as central in the struggles of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), BlackCrit Theory focuses only on the experiences of Black people (Roberts, 1998). BlackCrit acknowledges the existence of a racially biased system, urges understanding of what constitutes Blackness, and challenges conversations beyond racism by emphasizing what *being Black* and *knowing what it means to be Black* (Dumas & ross, 2016).

Drawing on the tenets of Critical Race Theory, Depouw and Matias (2016) developed the concept of Critical Race Parenting (hereafter ParentCrit), focusing on the counter-narratives of parents in understanding the correlation between race, racism, and predominantly White-dominated systems. ParentCrit promotes the mutual learning between parents and children on debunking the stereotypes and prejudice on race and superiority to work towards institutional change (Depouw & Matias, 2016).
As an extension of ParentCrit, BlackCrit Mothering emphasizes the importance of critically conscious Black parents and children in continually learning social justice in systems dominated by intergenerational Whiteness (Williams, 2017). BlackCrit Mothering acknowledges parenting as key in establishing racial realism and establishing Black consciousness among their children in efforts to promote social justice. BlackCrit parenting builds awareness of institutionalized racism, White supremacy, systematic disparities, Black affirmation and knowledge, along with the sense of being and knowing.

What I am calling “Black Parenting Consciousness” has been formed out of the demand to identify the needs of protecting Black people starting from the time of their conception. Black Parenting Consciousness comes from a place of concern as a parent and from a history of traumas that Blacks have had to endure dating back centuries. [Black] Mothers approach parenting informed not only by factors that are internal to their families, but also by the racial landscapes that exist within their immediate communities and the broader society (Dow, 2019). Black parents must be able to cultivate a level of consciousness that will teach them how to navigate the constant environmental and systematic oppressors that impact their lives.

As a Black Mother, I have experienced numerous hardships in raising my children. It was not until I began working as a college counselor for the Umoja Community that I realized that my experience as a Black Mother had a name. In 2016, I was introduced to a phenomenal woman by the name of Dr. Joy DeGruy at a conference in San Diego. DeGruy coined the term “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome” (PTSS) as a way to describe the trans-generational adaptations associated with the past traumas of slavery and ongoing oppressions [of being Black in America] (DeGruy, 2005). When I think about the experience of raising my children and how
I experienced being a Black child, I think about a time when I was a child when I went with my mother to her female friend’s house and her friend asked my mom how I was doing in school.

I was a straight-A student. I even was doing well on the basketball team and a part of other extracurricular activities. In my mind, I knew that was what my mother would focus on. Yet instead, my mother mentioned I was doing okay, but went on to talk about the fact that I was hard-headed, talked too much in class, and didn’t always make a habit of following her directions. All I felt was embarrassment because there was so much more to tell about me.

DeGruy speaks to issues like this one as an effect of PTSS. My mother didn’t know that she was a victim of our ancestor’s trauma and that her views of me came from a defense tactic that was embedded in our history.

Historically, Black Mothers have always had to figure out how to navigate mothering while dealing with opposition. A “mother” in Webster's Dictionary (2022) is defined simply as being a female parent, but we know that it means so much more. Mothering has included tasks such as helping to guide our young achieve their greatest potential by ensuring all their needs are met while being able to maintain the self-efficacy of the parent. And with the historical experiences of Black Mothers, their task of reaching greatest potential has come with the added task of doing this while Black. Black Mothers have had to find a way to address the different levels of needs that they and their children bore but with minimal help and support. Black Mothers have worked tirelessly to try to achieve a form of completion or high security which psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943) referred to as “self-actualization” (p. 30).

Abraham Maslow spent his career as a psychologist focusing on how humans achieved happiness. In order to do this, Maslow created one of the most commonly known motivational
theories, known as “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.” The Hierarchy of Needs pays attention to the most urgent needs that we experience, beginning with the bottom of the hierarchy.

According to Maslow, in order to achieve “self-actualization” an individual must have all their needs met. However, in a deep review of the needs that Maslow explored, they are not inclusive of communities of color. While I am in agreement with the basic needs included in Maslow’s hierarchy, I believe that his model does not speak to the entirety of all ethnic groups. Black babies continue to die at more than twice the rate of those of Whites (Fullilove, 1993; Rowley, 1993; Singh & Yu 1995). So while it is definitely important to think about the initial physiological needs prior to even giving birth to a Black child, a mother must know defense strategies to ensure the safe delivery of her child(ren). As I mentioned in my letter to my son, if my grandmother did not make the decision to turn around from her trip to Las Vegas to be present for the birth of her first great-grandchild, neither he nor I may be here now to even speak to our negative experience. I had a doctor who didn’t work to ensure my well-being, therefore, neglecting the well-being of my unborn child.

BlackCrit Mothering allows for us to establish a deeper understanding of what it means to parent while being Black, which doesn't always fit into the one-size-fits-all mold that society often reads from individuals such as Maslow. As society continues to address what the Black community is talking about when we say #BLACKLIVESMATTER, we continue to ask questions about what else is needed

As Nelson Mandela (2002) famously stated:

Safety and security don’t just happen; they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear. (Mandela, 2002, p. xix)
BlackCrit Mothering comes from the need of Blacks to be able to achieve freedom that does not include limitations or boundaries created by other communities (Biko, 1981). It is important to be able to piece together how to properly provide for the needs of all societies to be conscious about BlackLivesMattering and to be able to have permanent partners and not temporary allies (Jackson, 2020). The goal of Black Parenting is to take away the ultimate power that has been given to our oppressors, which is the continued mindset of being oppressed (Biko, 1981).

**Limitations/Delimitations**

A limitation of my study was I only interviewed a small portion of cis-gendered mothers who are African American women within the Bay Area, which left out the voices of many, such as trans women and other members of the LGBTQ+ community, members of the disabled community, non-Black mothers of Black children, as well as Black fathers. Additionally, due to our world being within the first two years into the unknown impacts of COVID-19, we may not yet have seen the long-term effects that COVID will have played on Black Mothering.

Lastly, my position as being both the researcher and a close friend to a couple of the participants posed both ethical considerations as well as opportunities and advantages to the study. I was able to pull from my knowledge of social issues and to draw upon known experiences that my participants have undergone as well as from ongoing conversations we have had surrounding social, racial, and pandemic issues that have impacted our parenting. I was additionally able to come in with a rapport which allowed for the participants’ ability to share a more honest lived experience (Kriukow, 2017; Taylor, 2011).

As a researcher having studied some of my friends, I became an “intimate insider” which can be a challenge when interviewing friends. An “intimate insider” as defined by author Jodie
Taylor is how a researcher negotiates friendships and ethics while doing field research (Taylor, 2011). The issue no longer became trying to create a rapport or strong relationship with the participants but instead of not overstepping boundaries and using the opportunity as a means to intimately assist in narrating the lives of these participants.

**Educational Significance**

I attempted to adopt Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs by adding a layer called Black Parenting Consciousness, which is intended to explore the needs of the Black community. Black Parenting Consciousness offers the ability to bring voice and narratives to the group of people that have been historically marginalized and neglected (Levine, 2007). It lends insight into how there is a need to be transparent and how the needs of Black children differ drastically from that of other racial groups. Through my interpreted narration of my participants, I am offering an in-depth explanation of how Black Mothers’ immediate needs are often not addressed due to having to grapple with constant issues that plague our communities. Additionally, I will help to add a voice to the needs of our Black children since they are unable to advocate for themselves and share why they matter (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, 2021).

My goal was to have Black Mothers explore how the need for consciousness needed to begin by addressing Black societal issues as they were raised and documenting these issues in a manner that allows for our children to be able to continue to evolve from our past traumas (DeGruy, 2005). The study highlighted how Blacks Mothers have dominated fields of education, parented with and without the support of fathers, and worked towards finding ways to have their voices heard even while continuously being silenced.
**Definition of Terms**

1. **Black**: Refers to African American or African-identified people.

2. **Bay Area**: Refers to cities within the San Francisco metropolitan area, including but not limited to Oakland, Hayward, Berkeley, Union City, and San Leandro.

3. **Positive parenting**: A relationship between two or more people where at least one person is in the role of a parent and at least one individual is in the role of a child, regardless of age.

4. **Stalwart person**: A person marked by outstanding strength and vigor of body, mind, or spirit stalwart common

5. **Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)**: Defined by DeGruy (2005), PTSS is “a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today” (p. 13).

6. **Intersectionality**: Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) describes how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” with one another and overlap.

7. **Driving While Black (DWB)**: Refers to the criminalization of Black drivers. Driving While Black occurs when policemen use traffic offenses as an excuse for stopping African-Americans who have not committed any offense, questioning them, and searching them and their vehicles. In such cases, police stop Black drivers without the usual requirement of ‘probable cause’ or ‘reasonable suspicion.’

8. **Code switching**: Code switching is the way in which a member of an underrepresented group (consciously or unconsciously) adjusts their language, syntax, grammatical structure, behavior, and appearance to fit into the dominant culture (Cooks-Campbell,
2022). In addition to being able to switch back to traditional culture constructs when in
the presence of community.

9. Shopping Etiquette (While being Black): This term refers to Black people knowing how
to have acceptable behavior and follow protocol while shopping to avoid racial profiling
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Several common themes emerged when reviewing the scholarly literature on Black Mothering. Through the review of these studies, the following themes take the reader on a journey of Black Mothering from a historical perspective. First, we look at how spirituality has helped Black Mothers through the ebbs and flows of history. Secondly, we consider how mothers were viewed pre-Civil Rights. Then we address what Black Mothering is like in the 21st century, which leads to the final theme of moving away from viewing Black Mothers within a deficit framework. I explain the new consciousness needed to continue evolving African American men and women.

Black Mothering through Spirituality

_The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever._ (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Psalm 23:2-6)

Spirituality has vastly different meanings among people of different cultures. The intense spirit of the Black Mother has kept her alive through generations of hardship. Within the Black community, spirituality has spaced many aspects of our culture outside of our religion and church practices. Even during the times of legal segregation, the Black church served as a beacon
of hope for the Black community allowing for a safe space for solidarity. Hope was the primary source of inspiration for civil activities (Mohamed, et al., 2021). Traditions such as the sacred tree of protective dignity were brought over from the Africans across the Atlantic. The Blacks in North America attempted to mold their rituals and spiritual understandings to those of their African ancestors. Their belief stemmed from the biblical ideology that God’s children have "a right to the tree of life" (Harding, 2007, p. 267).

Often spirituality is questioned when traumatic events happen; trauma can make people construct questions about where God is during Black suffering and their innate pursuit to see how God intends for them to handle intuitive pursuit of God's mission for them to lead the way in redressing racial injustice (Booker, 2021). The constant traumas that riddle the Black community have historically been confronted through prayer, Negro spirituals (song), types of food cooked, and turning to matriarchal figures who have shared experiences with similar trauma.

Older generations rely heavily on the church, and studies have shown that young Black adults today less frequently attend and are less involved in the church than older generations (Mohamed, 2022). Black Millennials and members of Generation Z are less likely to share the same religious beliefs as their parents and older generations. This was not the reality of our older generation, who used the power of prayer and faith to help offer a space of solace as they looked to find ways to escape the horrors of slavery and racism. As Mohamed et al. (2021) describes, our ancestors drew from a mix of different religious traditions:

Before enslaved people in America began converting to Protestantism in sizable numbers during the 1700s, they commonly followed traditional West African religions or
Islam. Catholicism, too, has long had a presence among Black Americans, including in Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana, during the slavery era. Furthermore, in the early 1900s, Islam began attracting thousands of Black Americans with the message that Christianity, like America writ large, had failed to offer them equality. Enslaved Blacks were usually either Christian or Muslim. However, historically, many followed the West African religious traditions, including the belief that a higher power and ancestral presence guided Blacks in their daily lives. (Mohamed, et al., 2021, p. 152)

This religious heritage also incorporated herbal remedies, a long-used tradition in African culture, which existed during enslavement and centuries afterward (Mohammed, 2021). The need for herbal remedies came about partially due to inadequate access to the healthcare system, so Black Women found ways to treat illness for themselves and their families. There has recently been a reawakening of many herbal remedies such as biosilver, turmeric, ginger, and Echinacea, among other natural supplements used to treat issues such as inflammation of the lungs or resistance to the disease. The Black community’s nourishments and herbal treatments are well-rooted within their spirituality.

They hold generations of trauma and transcendence in their tones. They are the religious form that has most faithfully nourished the link to ancestors and ancestral traditions among African Americans. They continue to provide great cultural and spiritual sustenance for all people who experience them. (Harding, 2007, p. 269)

Black Mothering is not only a biological project but also a project of Black Women, such as Eva R. Bird began social movements by opening her home to activists of Philadelphia's Black Liberation Movement (Grady-Hunt, 2021). When visualizing praying, singing, and teaching
mothers and other mothers who appear throughout slave narratives and autobiographies, we can see how Black Women have shown up and stayed in the center through Black religious history (Townsend Gilkes, 2011). For Black Mothers, the home has not been defined only by their geographic position but also “where the songs, teachings, and faith experiences have been lived out and sustained” (Bread for the World Staff, 2019). In her 2015 Chicago Sun-Times article, Maudlyne Ihejirika writes, “Church mothers are the foundation of the black church. They can be found in the front pews and the hierarchy of many churches. They are the glue that has nurtured generations of worshipers” (Ihejirika, 2015, p. 1).

Black Mothers have used religion in order to cope with the loss of their loved ones. The quotes below exemplify how these mothers' use of prayer carried them through the agony and peace of losing their loved ones. The first excerpt is from the book, Standing Our Ground (McBath, 2018), which comes from a mother named Congresswoman Lucia Kay McBath, who lost her son Jordan Davis to a “Loud Music Shooting” in 2012 (McBath, 2018).

My whole body slumped in my chair as the full reality of my son’s murder hit me squarely in the chest. God show me what to do now; I beseech my Lord. My child was dead. My whole purpose for waking up each morning had been torn away. How would I go on? Where would I find meaning? I had no clue. I begged God for an answer, my desolation at last absolute. I was too lost in grief and anguish to realize that I was already being guided to a purpose greater than any I could have dreamed through Jordan. It was a call to action that I would understand had been mine all along. God had begun planting the seeds right from the beginning. (McBath, 2018, pp. 25-26)
The next excerpt is a recap of a dream that the mother of slain unarmed teen Trayvon Martin, Sybrina Fulton, had. This illustrates the unique difficulties that Black Mothering faces versus the experience of any other American race. Hearing her story paints a vivid picture of what it is like to have children in danger, out of proportion to any other. Here she details how her life’s mission was unveiled to her.

In a dream, I saw myself in an endless field of purple. And I saw ladies crying in agony and sorrow. They were lost and alone, even while they were somehow together. Then, I saw them smiling and hugging one another in support. I somehow knew that these ladies were mothers. And I knew that, just like me, they were mothers who had lost their children to senseless gun violence. And while they once felt alone, they now had one another. I saw these mothers sitting together in a circle in an enormous room. Then I saw them sitting together before tables filled with flowers; everything was so pretty and purple. Different speakers were coming up to speak to them. I had no clue what all of this meant. But I knew that it was a vision that God had given to me. When I awoke, I grabbed a pen and paper and began writing down what I had seen in my dream. And when I was done writing about that purple dream in my purple bedroom, I had pages and pages of notes, all about that dream about mothers who found healing in one another. The next morning, I knew my purpose, my mission. (Fulton & Martin, 2017, pp. 327-328)

The Black Mother is a quintessential example of how despite years of discrimination, they have found ways to remain resilient and continue to show up for their communities. One way was definitely in the church. Historically predominantly Black churches played significant roles outside just the scope of religion in the Black Community. In a “period when discrimination
barred Black people from access to various public amenities, many Black churches offered job-training programs, insurance cooperatives, circulating libraries, and athletic clubs” (Mohamed et al., 2021, p. 155). At the head of these churches were the matriarchal figures who were front-line organizing and advocating for support.

**Evolution of Black Mothering**

Pretty women wonder where my secret lies.
I’m not cute or built to suit a fashion model’s size
But when I start to tell them,
They think I’m telling lies.
I say,
It’s in the reach of my arms,
The span of my hips,
The stride of my step,
The curl of my lips.
I’m a woman
Phenomenally.
Phenomenal woman,
That’s me.

(Excerpt from “Phenomenal Woman,” poem by Maya Angelou, 1978, p. 3)

Centuries of the history of Black Mothering document how we have a tremendous amount of experience building our communities and families in a historically inhospitable society. Beginning with slavery, Black Motherhood has been framed in a way that attempted to isolate and alienate Black Women from their children. We have been labeled breeders in relationship to our children and, therefore, were exploited and forced to be wet nurses to the children of the slaveholding class. In order to function as a slave, Black Women had to be annulled as a woman, that is, as the woman in her historical stance of wardship under the entire male hierarchy (Davis, 1981). Doing Black Mothering proudly claims the title of motherhood that we were once denied (Franklin, 2004). Historically and presently, community Mothering
practices represent a central experience in the lives of many Black Women, and participation in mothering is a form of emotional and spiritual expression in societies that marginalize Black Women (Collins, 2002).

There have been significant contributions by women like Sojourner Truth, a protagonist in the fight for Black Women’s rights throughout the nineteenth century (Mabee, 1993). Zackodnik (2011) notes that long before the enactment of the Nineteenth Amendment, women fought for their economic, political, and legal rights, which shaped the U.S. constitution centuries later. Sojourner Truth was a Black Woman activist from a small and humble background born into slavery in New York; she understood, supported, and advanced her activism for Black Women (Zackodnik, 2004). She publicly addressed the oppression and discrimination of Black Women and supported the abolition movement by being vocal about her disproval of the White-dominated system that was guiding America. Despite Truth being illiterate, she used logic and blatantly spoke for Black Women's rights in an era where only Black male interests were illuminated to emphasize the racist and sexist oppression Black Women faced (Inniss, 2020). In one of her speeches, she noted that

I feel that if I have to answer for the deeds done in my body just as much as a man, I have a right to have as much as a man. There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about colored women. (Inniss, 2020, p. 1642)

Like other female activists and mothers, such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Harriet Tubman, history has misrepresented the contributions of Sojourner Truth in White abolition movements (Minister, 2012). This is attributed to slave narratives being told from a White view while including fictional characters and the heroic stance of their counterparts, as seen in Uncle Tom’s
Cabin; A book written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, a White woman who included a fictional character when recounting slave experiences (Inniss, 2020).

Throughout history, the contribution of Black Women to current society's achievements has either gone unnoticed or overlooked (Lisher, 1997). Alberta Christine King, Martin Luther King Jr’s mother, contributed to the Civil Rights Movement by raising and shaping her son and as an activist who empowered women (Ntiriwah-Asare, 2021). In the 1950s, she organized National Baptist conventions for young Black Women to push the civil rights campaigns. Concerning her assassination in 1974, Alberta's journey as a mother and her suffering in her efforts to support her child in the civil rights campaign shows the contribution of Black Motherhood in contemporary American society.

Other Black Mothers like Louise Little, Malcolm X’s mother, contributed largely to Black national and Black freedom struggles throughout the 20th century (Ntiriwah-Asare, 2021). Her efforts in Pan-Africanist movements are often undermined despite her role in supporting Malcolm X in Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism, evident in his autobiography (Malcolm X & Haley, 2013). Roberts (1993) argues that people celebrate Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, and James Baldwin with little recognition of their mothers and their contribution to the Civil Rights Movement. The reality is that Black Women have made the most significant contributions to American society by fighting for their own life, the lives of their children, and the nation.

In 1967, Black Mothers stormed Capitol Hill to protest against the new legislation unfair to women on welfare and America's involvement in the Vietnam war that could use resources that would otherwise support American families (Denton, 2014). The Black Women protested against being put back into conditions that mimicked slavery in an era where Black freedom struggles were highly verbalized. According to the Washington Post (Honda, 1967), welfare
rights activists like Margaret McCarthy argued that the Welfare Bill was a means to separate children from their mothers. They would reject it even by force.

Mendoza (2016) refers to the appeal by mothers against social, political, and economic practices that do not promote social justice as “maternal activism.” Over the years, Black Women have shared the belief of motherhood as a motivation to air their concerns on practices that affect family values and the future of children in the U.S. Motherhood, just as Rima Apple (1995) argued, is not confined to the dominant ideals and societal norms meant to justify their oppression and behavior. Still, it is an ideal that emphasizes the critical role of women in understanding their obligation to protect the future of children (Swerdlow, 1993). The maternalist approach was present in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s protests for political, legal, and economic change in the welfare rights movements, the battle against busing, and the anti-abortion movement (Denton, 2014).

Throughout American history, Black Women's meager wages – or no wages in the case of slavery - stood in stark contrast to their strenuous labors in the workforce and at home (Jones, 2009). Both Jones (2009) and Collins (2002) examined how African American women’s oppression has encompassed three interdependent aspects that allow a deeper dive into what issues are still current. Collins (2002) explored the following key points:

1. The exploitation of Black Women’s labor is essential to U.S capitalism. The only way most African American women could survive was to do consuming work assignments which took away from other opportunities such as education.

2. African American women are denied the rights and privileges routinely given to White male citizens.

3. Controlling images of African American women that have been depicted since the slave era has contributed to Black Women's oppression. Images such as Black Women on
welfare, the portrayal of Black Women in contemporary pop culture, and other negative stereotypes contribute to the negative imagery (Collins, 2002).

Jones (2009) examined how Black Women's work occurred within three distinct spheres, simultaneously mutually reinforcing and antagonistic. One workplace consisted of their households - the locus of family feeling - and another consisted of their communities, which remained largely segregated, in political if not spatial terms, from White people. The family obligations of wives and mothers also overlapped in community welfare, as their desire to provide for their kin and neighbors expanded out of the private realm and into public activities that advanced the interests of Black people as a group. In contrast to this kind of work, which earned Black Women the respect of their people, participation in the paid labor force (or slave economy) reinforced their subordinate status as women and as Blacks within American society (Jones, 2009).

Both Collins’ (2002) and Jones’ (2009) arguments reveal how identity politics tends to overlook “intersectionality,” and in the process [has marginalized] women of color (Crenshaw, 1990). In slavery, Black Women were coerced into producing children to replenish the slave population, and each child produced added cash value to the owner's human stock. Presently, in societies that reduce the person to a unit of consumerism, Black Women and their children, especially poor ones, are disposable in the NED (National Endowment for Democracy) world economy. This reality contributes to the devaluation of mothering in the African Diaspora (Lawson, 2000). These assumptions are rooted in gender-blind intersectionality, ultimately affecting how Black Women's voices and bodies show up in greater social justice efforts (Jeffries, 2019).

Black Mothers’ experiences facing the dragon - living in the deadly fallout of the modern, hetero-patriarchal, neoliberal, White supremacist democratic American nation-state -
require us to rethink our traditional approaches to conceptualizing anti-Black state violence by accounting for its devastating and lethal impact on the living (Smith, 2016). The continued rise from the historical dismemberment of the Black community and the persistent attack on Black Mothers’ efforts to raise their children have heightened movements such as ##BLACKLIVESMATTER. Also, these conditions have forced Black Mothers to continue to dive into the needs of their children and community to help ensure survival.

While researching the history of Black Mothering, one of the common themes that arose was the mothers' fight for the safety of their children to help them achieve self-actualization, which is noted as one's ability to reach their full potential (Domínguez & Carton, 1997). At the same time, history would suggest that Blacks could not reach their fullest potential due to being subjected to slavery and forced into mass incarceration. Collins (2002) broke down the historically oppressive themes of Black Women into four sections:

1) *The mammy*: the often depicted unattractive, faithful, obedient domestic servant, created to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and sustained Black Women's long-standing restriction to domestic service. This ultimately promoted White inferiority and the continued expectation of Black subordination.

2) *The matriarch*: In the 1960s, the image of the matriarch became more prevalent. The matriarch was an adaptive image of the mammy but with continued issues behind racialization. In this context, portraying African-American women as matriarchs allows White men and women to blame Black Women for their children's failures in school (due to not being available) and with the law, as well as Black children's subsequent poverty. The matriarch was meant to have society view Black Women as aggressive, dominating, angry, and emasculating.
3) *The welfare mother:* This stereotype was tied to the working-class Black Mothers' access to government assistance. After a historical battle with Black Women being able to obtain not just equal rights but human rights, they began to gain political power and rights for the entitlement to government services. This led to another controlling image of the Black welfare recipient who lacked the support of a male in the house due to her own "dysfunction.” The image of the welfare mother provides ideological justifications for intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class. African-Americans can be racially stereotyped as lazy by blaming Black welfare mothers for failing to pass on the work ethic (Collins, 2002).

4) *The Jezebel:* This image is connected to the concept that Black Women were sexually promiscuous and deemed sexually aggressive, derived from the historical oppression of Black Women. The image of Jezebel was intended to downgrade Black Women to a category being individuals who attracted the attention of White males. Still, in reality, White men placed this title on Black Women as a means to violate and assault these women, which in turn increased fertility rates among Black Women and further set apart the household. This added to the increase in the number of single Black Mothers and fatherless children.

The focus of Black Motherhood, in both practice and thought, is how to preserve, protect, and more generally empower Black children so that they may resist racist practices that seek to harm them and grow into adulthood whole and complete (O'Reilly, 2004). Both Collins (2002) and Davis (1981) speak to the misleading assumption that Black Women have deemed themselves as the matriarch of their families as some form of power moves within their household. Davis (1981) discusses that the term "matriarch" is cruel because it ignores the
profound traumas the Black Woman must have experienced when she had to surrender her childbearing to an alien and predatory economic interest.

In many African-American communities, so much sanctification surrounds Black Motherhood that “the idea that mothers should live lives of sacrifice has come to be seen as the norm” (Christian, 1985). The controlling image of the “super-strong Black Mother” praises Black Women’s resiliency in a society that routinely paints us as bad mothers. However, to remain on their pedestal, these same super-strong Black Mothers must continue to place their needs behind those of everyone else, especially their sons (Collins, 2002). Many women of color, for example, are burdened by poverty, childcare responsibilities, and the lack of job skills, largely the consequence of gender and class oppression, which are then compounded by the racially discriminatory employment and housing practices women of color often face (Crenshaw, 1991). As a result, Black Women have contributed significantly to struggles against racism and the dehumanizing exploitation of a wrongly organized society (Davis, 1981).

Black Mothers are not just those Black Women responsible for the biological reproduction of children; black women also practice social responsibility for collaborative care (Smith, 2016). The Black community has always relied heavily on their elders, often the grandmothers, aunts, cousins, etc., to assist in rearing their children. Collins called these people and other community members "Othermothers," or women that assist blood mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities. Both Smith (2016) and Collins (2002) argue that the evolution of "Othermothers" was much needed in the Black community historically and resulted in a means to help uplift Black Mothers as they pursued jobs and education. Later this form of care translated into entrepreneurship opportunities in the form of Black Women starting childcare businesses.
Black Mothering in the 21st Century

We [Black people] need to know our ancestors' traumas to fully understand our people's strength to survive and, at times, even thrive in some of the harshest conditions…strength passed down to us. (DeGruy, 2005, Interview with black girl inc chronicles podcast)

Once a woman does become a mother, she must meet certain expectations. Society envisions a good mother as someone who is ever-present in her child's life and makes it a point to prioritize her family first. Even a married mother tends to bear ultimate responsibility for her child's actions because parenting is still seen as the mother's domain (Bethay, 2020). Black families, more often than not, are labeled as broken; Black fathers as absent. Black Mothers are loud and uneducated, and Black children are bad and deviant troublemakers (Powell & Coles, 2021). The horror that Black Mothers experience inside the dragon is both the fear of death and the dread of life without one’s children (Smith, 2016). The function of Critical Race Theory in education is a criticism of “white supremacy and the limits of hegemonic liberal multiculturalism“ (Dumas, 2016, p.415). As Sexton stated, “Refusal to admit to significant differences of structural position born of discrepant histories between blacks and their political allies, actual or potential” (Sexton, 2010, p. 48).

Black Women’s lack of being seen as fully human has stimulated resistance against that view. The struggle of Black activist women to evoke a sense of cross-class gender/ethnic solidarity in providing maternal support stems from a long tradition of maternal activism among middle-class Black Women (McDonald, 1997). Heroic figures such as Sojourner Truth made history by being the first Black Woman to win a case against a White man for obtaining custody of her son in 1828. Also, she is best known for her groundbreaking poem, “Ain’t I A Woman?” (1851), which spoke to the lack of being seen as a woman and the demand for African American
women's rights and suffrage. Along with other women's rights leaders, Sojourner helped pave the way for women's rights and freedom. These new freedoms have transformed the modern-day views of seeing Black Women as less than human toward being seen as leaders and providers.

Modern portrayals of Black Mothers come across in television sitcom characters such as Rainbow Johnson, "Black-ish," the "accomplished" mom juggling work as a doctor, wifehood, and motherhood, to real-life leaders such as Kamala Harris. The latter crossed several barriers in becoming the first Black female, the first Black (and South Asian) vice president, and the first woman to hold her title as Vice President of the United States. U.S. Black Women have long recognized the fundamental injustice of a system that routinely and from one generation to the next relegates Black Women to the bottom of the social hierarchy. When faced with this structural injustice targeted toward their group, many Black Women have insisted on using their First Amendment right of freedom of speech and exercising their right to fight back, resist and break barriers to seek the equitable treatment that we are all due.

Black Mothering in the 21st century has taken on other struggles while dealing with the trauma of our ancestors. Black Women have worked on the top of the educational tier while maintaining low net-worth stats and falling behind in asset retention. Black Women have been the nation’s top degree earners for over the past decade and counting. According to findings complied in study by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), information collected about higher education among African Americans between 2009 and 2010 shows that Black Women accounted for 68 percent of associates degrees, 66 percent of bachelor's degrees, 71 percent of master’s degrees and 65 percent of doctorate degrees awarded to Black students during that time frame(NCES,2019, ¶1). This suggests that Black Women are educated at almost two-three times the rate of Black Men and more so than any other race and gender.
Even though women today have a roughly equal presence in the workforce as men and represent the majority of college-educated women, the responsibilities of women as caretakers in the family over the centuries have remained pretty much unchanged (Bethay, 2020). As a result, redefining Black Motherhood has been key to opposing patriarchy and racism - two interrelated systems of domination (Roberts, 1993) that shape and influence the meaning of womanhood and motherhood, resulting in brutal social and policy implications for Black Women (Rodriguez, 2016).

However, the strength of the Black Mother has been perpetually tested by the fate that has already been prescribed to their children at birth, especially their sons. African American women have been neither passive victims nor willing accomplices to their domination (Collins, 1989). Scholar Brittany Cooper (2014) asked, "Does anyone care about Black Women?" The historical perspective of Black Women not being seen as actual or real women has promoted society's continued lack of valuing us. By excluding Black Women from social validation, the ideology of "true womanhood" also justified violence against and insufficient legal protection for us (Battle, 2016). As Smith discusses in her 2016 article, "Facing the Dragon: Black Mothering, Sequelae, and Gendered Necropolitics in the Americas," Black Mothers have been impacted by using their voice when advocating for their families due to widespread violence and continued social unrest.

In the United States, Black Mothers bear a unique burden under the weight of anti-Black state violence not because they are the idyllic symbols of maternal purity, loss, or innocence but because they are enemies of the state—subjects that challenge the ideology of anti-Blackness, which undergirds the state's structure. (Smith, 2016, p. 32)
DeGruy (2005) and McKinley (2020) both describe that the behaviors of Black parents are largely related to trans-generational adaptations associated with the past traumas of slavery and ongoing oppression. These ongoing narratives directly speak to the challenges of how regardless of the status of class and wealth of Blacks, Black Women are still likely to face more family challenges than their White counterparts. Black Women's inability to access equality even with their educational and financial resources has constantly been impeded because of the intersectionality of race and gender on their identity (Dow, 2019; McKinley, 2020). This, in turn, directly impacts Black Mothers' ability to provide equal opportunities to their children in areas such as education and housing.

Black Women have a long-standing tradition of identifying ways to transform society through socio-political thought and activism (Glass, 2005). Currently, hashtag political movements such as the #SAYHERNAME campaign and ##BLACKLIVESMATTER was created to bring awareness to the violence inflicted on Black communities by police and vigilantes, which has been true throughout U.S. history – abolition, civil rights movement, etc. Through the continued crisis of Black Mothers having to bury their sons in the hands of violence, these movements gave Black Mothers a sense of power through their voices and by telling their stories. The #SAYHERNAME campaign came from the need to emphasize Black Women who were being harmed and killed in the hands of violence and who were consistently unseen and unheard in society even while facing the same conditions as Black males. While this situation has been true for many Black Mothers, Black Fathers share a very similar experience and concern, as author Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) expressed in a letter to his son:

And you know now, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the
destruction results from an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates from a misunderstanding. It does not matter if the destruction springs from a foolish policy. Sell cigarettes without the proper authority, and your body can be destroyed. Resent the people trying to entrap your body, and it can be destroyed. Turn into a dark stairwell, and your body can be destroyed. The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions. (Coates, 2015, p. 9)

Black Mothering today means being free to seek joy and personal fulfillment while navigating the continued injustices that keep us from achieving the self-actualization referred to by Maslow. Black Mothering in the 21st century allows society to look at the pandemics that have continued to plague our community while maintaining the societal norms of maintaining our households, jobs, relationships, mental health, etc. The past and current needs of Black Mothers are connected. Black Mothers need to be seen and heard, and U.S. mainstream society must acknowledge “that African American middle-class families are navigating high achievement pressures in a social context that presents multiple obstacles to their intergenerational social mobility” (McKinley, 2020, p. 112). Furthermore, African American middle-class families are relocating and moving further away from their loved ones to pursue educational and professional opportunities, which sometimes results in being racially secluded and disrupting the family configurations “that have traditionally supported Black Women's labor force participation” (McKinley, 2020, p. 113).

**Black Mothers’ Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In 2020, the world experienced major shocks after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, leading to profound changes in the social and economic environments (Gur, 2020). The markets
and supply chains were disrupted, making people lose their sources of livelihood. Black Mothers’ were not spared from this disruption, and in fact, the racial disparities between the majority and minority groups in the United States became more evident. A study by Hamel (2020) noted that African Americans were more affected by the pandemic than their White counterparts due to lower health insurance coverage, lower quality of care, and continued discrimination in the health system to treat the infected. In addition, Black people showed a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19, which is attributed to the social and economic inequities of the BIPOC communities in the United States (Walton & Campbell, 2021). During the pandemic, the threat of violence against Black people has been on the rise, especially after the racially motivated deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, which were racially motivated.

According to Fulweiler (2021), Black Women in academia with children have experienced the challenge of navigating daily home activities, attending online classes, and homeschooling their children. With the BIPOC populations being underrepresented in academic facilities, a higher proportion of non-tenured faculty was at risk of losing their jobs (Gracia, 2020). With the systemic racism in American institutions, these higher proportions of nontenured faculty are BIPOC, specifically Black Mothers. Hamel (2020) notes that at least 42% of Black adults claimed someone lost a job in their family due to the pandemic's economic impacts. One-third of them claimed that this negatively impacted the household’s ability to obtain necessities. In addition to having financial difficulties, Black Women experience more difficulty obtaining health care than Black men, with a majority reporting that their healthcare providers assumed they were lying or were to blame for any illness (Tai, 2021).

COVID-19 affected the paid economy and the 'care economy' (Power, 2020). The care economy is the unpaid work mothers do in their households after leaving their workplaces, like
cooking, helping the kids with homework, and raising children (Alhas, 2020). In addition, with children switching to online classes during the pandemic, more support was needed to educate the children while meeting the required working hours. Black Mothers, especially those trying to balance more work hours with family life, were 40% more stressed than families without children (BBC, 2020).

**New Opportunities for Black Parenting during COVID-19**

The biggest challenge mothers have faced, especially working mothers, is balancing work life with child care. With the increasing financial uncertainty brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Women have faced the burden of the rigid and unchanging systems that have failed to consider the new challenges involved in taking care of their families (Gilbert, 2020). With the closure of most educational institutions, the rise of homeschooling has led parents to create their own learning experiences for their children. Petts (2021) asserts that even though this comes as an additional responsibility for the working Black Mother, homeschooling provides a new opportunity for mothers to educate their children on the realities of being Black in America.

Ray (2015) argues that Black children have displayed lower literacy skills than their White counterparts and have higher suspension rates. These statistics call for an academic movement that focuses solely on the Black child, which is Black homeschooling. Stereotypically, homeschooling is predominantly a White activity, with less than 9% of Black children being homeschooled (Stewart, 2020). Homeschooling allows Black parents to focus solely on their children's education while liberating them from the disparities, disadvantages, and systemic racism they face in education institutions (Apple, 2020).

Programs like the Abolitionist Teaching Network have created Black Women homeschoolers, especially those focused on changing existing pedagogical approaches to include
Brown and Black teaching (Abolitionist Teaching Network.org, 2021). Such programs encourage parents to become abolitionist teachers, focusing on their children's educational freedom and emphasizing the joy of Blackness. Kao (2019) noted that certain ideals and values within Black communities cannot be taught by White teachers but should be instilled by Black parents. This includes teaching children from a spiritual, political, economic, and social standpoint what it means to be Black in America and deconstructing the stereotypes and misidentification of Black people (Hoffman & Martin, 2020).

The pandemic has allowed Black parents to control their children's education fully. 16% of Black children were homeschooled by October 2020, which was five times lower in 2019 (Parks, 2021). Even though some parents have seen homeschooling as draining the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement to provide public education to Black children, other parents saw it as an opportunity to evade systemic racism and inequities in the schools (Feagin, 2020). Homeschooling allows Black Mothers to break stereotypes of who homeschools and why, the marginalization of Black Women in academia, and society's low expectations of Black Mothers concerning parental involvement (Wearne, 2020).

**New Consciousness: What Are We Still Missing?**

*(How Does a Black Mother Achieve Self-Actualization?)*

I had no idea history was being made, I was just tired of giving up. (Rosa Parks, 1992)

Change will not come if we wait for another person or another time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek. (Barack Obama, 2008)

In 2020, what could be known as a “dual pandemic” hit the Black community. Pandemics are nothing new in our world, especially not within the Black community. Historic
massacres of Black people have been documented in events such as the Red Summer of 1919, when a group of World War I veterans in 1918-1919 committed racist attacks against Blacks, including lynching and other violent crimes. The Black Wall Street Massacre in Tulsa is the most known massacre during the 1918 influenza outbreak pandemic. Moving ahead to 2020 with the COVID-19 Pandemic, the murder of George Floyd, the protest demonstrations attended by millions, and the uprisings against police violence all mirror a place that we have seen before in this country (Roberts, 2021).

Black people are still trying to fight for the right to live and to be treated fairly. This can be seen in the multitude of disproportionate issues that have come out due to the impact of COVID-19, where Black people have been already fighting for the right to adequate healthcare, the right for our children to be educated, especially during times like during the pandemic where online was the only way and families struggled with to get access to Wi-Fi and hotspots. Black Mothers (as well as Kamiyah’s) struggled to be present in the workplace during this pandemic due to being highly present in service-based positions (Jackson, 2020).

Black Parenting Consciousness is needed to help protect Black children from the continued struggles within our community. The need to protect, provide, and elevate our children has been ongoing. Historically, Black Mothers were forced to degrade their children to shield them from potential White purchasers (DeGruy, 2005). DeGruy (2005) gives examples of how slave Black Mothers would belittle their children in public by saying things like they were not capable of doing good work, were not smart, and had bad behavior to keep their children from being sold or molested by the enslavers. Things have not changed much, even with continued awareness of equity issues and laws consistently used to tear down Blacks and their offspring. Black Mothers constantly have worked to create environments for their children that shelter them
from early experiences of racism and that they have hoped would protect and strengthen their racial self-esteem (Dow, 2019).

According to Williams (2017), "Many Black parents consider racial climate and academic quality when thinking and making decisions about their children’s schooling experiences. However, few past studies have directly asked Black parents about the role they believe race plays in their children’s schooling” (Williams, et al., 2017, p. 932). In their 2017 study entitled “Black Mothers' Perceptions of the Role of Race in Children's Education,” Williams conducted interviews with 76 Black Mothers between 2001-2004, asking what role they believed that race would play in their children’s schooling. Through their interviews, they uncovered that the need for racial diversity and awareness of discriminatory practices was a major factor when deciding where they wanted to send their children to school (Williams, et al., 2017). While the data for this study were collected nearly 20 years ago as a part of a larger longitudinal study on the relationship between race and education, Black Mothers are still dealing with the same issues.

The concept of Critical Race Parenting originally emerged in 2016. It served to aid in better explaining the ways parents and children can work to understand topics such as racism and white supremacy. To date, Critical Race Parenting has grown in popularity with many peer-review journals publishing around the topic (Matias & Bitz, 2021). Critical Race Parenting has been utilized in provoking discussion on parents' use of counter storytelling to express the lived experiences of parents of color (DePouw & Matias, 2016). Contextualism is a key way that Critical Race Parenting can allow others to understand the struggles of Black Mothering fully.

One such analogy to Critical Race Parenting within the U.S. is to that of the Greek myth Sisyphus. As Sisyphus did, rolling the rock up the mountainside only to have to roll down again is exactly the struggle the Black community has with raising critically conscious children. A
huge step back is shown in Donald Trump being elected president of the U.S. and his administration taking office, which furthers the regression (Montoya & Sarcedo, 2018). Aspects of reproduction that legislative policies dawn over a community are obvious in the Black community. As Dorothy Roberts states about titling her book,

When I decided upon the title of my book about Black Women's reproductive liberty, I chose “Killing the Black Body.” I think that is a more honest title. The book is about the Black body - the unique way in which repressive reproductive policies have interpreted and attempted to regulate Black bodies. (Roberts, 2014, p. 857).

This is a far different tone than when Roberts initially cautioned against allowing such fears to prevent scholars from developing a theory that is Black specific. Pre-2000’s, it seems difficult to imagine a Black specific problem gaining any traction due to the stigma around being Black. Roberts (1998) noted, “We should be concerned about avoiding blackness when so many people still feel uneasy about ‘loving blackness’” (p. 862). She went on to suggest that underprivileged Black Women’s autonomy was not taken seriously enough. Most women who are prosecuted for doing drugs are women of color who smoked crack. Due to the stereotype surrounding the issue, Black Motherhood as a whole is devalued (Roberts, 1998).

In the 21st century, Black Mothers, among many other groups, must think critically and make radical choices about their children’s educational future and housing security. However, Black Mothers have an added layer of what they had to include in their conversation. Safety and security have become a top priority over their children's educational needs. In contrast, many families are scavenging, looking for toiletries, or seeing if/when they have a job to turn to. Black Mothers are being faced with having a hard conversation about how our children, especially our sons, are currently targets and not safe, no matter wherever they go. The intersectional realities
of Black Women's life experiences and being a mother have combined to create the unique terms in which Black Mothers experience the pain of loss (Smith, 2016).

In Maslow’s (1943) “Hierarchy of Needs,” his second tier addresses the need for safety and security. However, this fundamental need speaks to every surface of one-size-fits-all needs of physical, emotional, and financial safety. Maslow detailed the need to work towards upward mobility, including feeling safe in your home, having your financial needs met, living somewhat debt-free, and having emotional security with your family and community. Maslow's discussion of these needs does not address how Black Mothers do all these things while dealing with issues in their community. Black Mothers have fought to achieve upward mobility to allow them to live in neighborhoods with better school systems for their youth and environments not riddled with high crime rates. Yet upward mobility for Black Mothers has continued to come at a cost and ongoing challenges. For Black Mothers to mobilize and achieve safety and security, their need to be seen and heard has become even more pressing.

Black Mothers in the 21st century must continue to find ways for themselves and their families to adapt to their ever-changing communities and to find ways to explore the relationship between the need to continue to manage issues within social injustices as well as the need to create a relative new consciousness about where they feel they fit in today’s society. In Dawn Marie Dow’s (2019) book, Black While Mothering, she details how convoluted the lives of Black Mothers are and dissects how Black Mothers look for different means to keep their children connected to their “true” Black identity. Dow (2019) conducted interviews throughout the S.F. Bay Area with middle-class Black Mothers, whom she classified into three kinds of “identity borders” to describe what they must live through to maneuver their Black middle-class identity. Dow (2019) noted that various racial and ethnic minorities had adapted these borders to help them participate in predominantly White workplaces.
The first of these borders in Dow’s (2019) book comprises Black Mothers who are *border crossers*. This group of mothers is looking to find ways to raise their children themselves and still navigate within representative Black communities (whether birthplace or other Black communities) while learning to exist within more privileged White communities. These women came from less privileged communities and worked their way up in socioeconomic status. These women then make a conscious effort to keep their children connected to their Black roots, which may mean taking trips to see family in places often in poor areas such as West Oakland or the Antioch/Stockton areas. The deep history of how racism infiltrated and continues to thrive in all the basic systems required for modern life—housing, schooling, etc. is shown by how these mothers look to upwardly mobilize in privileged communities without losing sight of their deep-rooted Blackness that lives within their communities (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, 2021). This often means that these mothers intentionally stay within a lower socioeconomic status and in poorer communities.

The second border Dow (2019) describes is *border policers*. Border policers are the Black Mothers who ultimately believe that racial isolation is best for their [children]. They believe their [children] are best protected while living in a predominately White upper-class neighborhood. These Black Mothers often work in White, “male-dominated” workplaces and typically grow up in racially isolated, White-dominated environments, where they do not necessarily see the positive Black representation. Border policers are often mothers who supervise their children closely and make sure that they and their children are involved in Black-led community activities while participating in Black-led recreational activities, religious affiliations, and belonging to Black sororities, among other affiliations (Dow, 2019). Ultimately, Dow discovered that these mothers do not believe that their children need to have the
experiences of being poor or living in poor neighborhoods in order to have Black cultural experiences.

The last category in Dow (2019) is the *border transcenders* - Black Mothers who challenge traditional views of racial authenticity. These mothers look to redefine the Black Mother experience and often do so by procreating with men outside their race. These mothers reject post-racial society norms and believe that race plays a small part in what an individual gets out of life. They seek for their children to have diversity across all aspects of their life, including religion, relationships, and other environments. These are typically the mothers who do not seek to provide their children with Black-led community activities, unlike the border policers and crossers.

These three borders in Dow's (2019) book illustrate how middle-class Black Mothers have to conform to various identities to find ways of being positive parents. Positive parenting involves caring, communicating, empowering, guiding, and consistently providing for a child's needs (Johnson, 2020). In comparison, Tara Yosso (2005) has argued that every community has its cultural wealth that could be used to help uplift and mobilize themselves by recognizing the potential of each tenet of their wealth, such as aspirational, social, familial, navigational, linguistic, and resistant capital. She proposes that a community must identify and build upon its cultural wealth to be uplifted and empowered (Yosso, 2005).

Black Mothers’ adaptation of Yosso’s (2005) cultural wealth model would allow them to critically look at how their historical contributions to mothering have allowed them to build strong foundations for their families and communities through becoming educated, resisting negative stereotypes, the navigating system of oppression, as well as creating jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities out of oppressive situations (such as providing childcare, being
hairdressers, etc.) (Yosso, 2005). It also means setting aspirational goals in leading our nation in leadership roles, such as that of our aforementioned current Vice President, Kamala Harris.

In contrast, Dow (2019) argues that Black Mother border transcenders are looking to disguise whatever wealth their community has to conform to privileged White upper-middle-class norms. The border policers are looking to not be seen due to fear for the safety of their children if seen too much in their Black element. Differently, the border crossers struggle to upwardly mobilize while being one with their Blackness due to a lack of opportunities close to their communities. Ultimately these three identities illustrate Dow’s conclusion that even though Blacks are joining middle- and upper-class demographics, they still find the need to stay connected to their culture, race, and community (Dow, 2019).

Black Mothers are constantly forced to choose the lesser of two evils to find adequate ways to care for their children. The #BLACKLIVESMATTER movement has helped shape society’s view on the ongoing issues within the Black community. It has created awareness within the Black community of the issues from the continued injustices. For a mother to properly care for her child, she must first address how she has cared for herself. Lack of proper access to maternal health care and negative health outcomes due to racial and systemic discrimination have plagued our community. However, little to nothing has been done about it.

In June 2020, the nation became increasingly aware that Black people were dying at higher rates than any other community, even the elderly. Our community has been dying at 1.5 times the rate of the rest of the U.S. population, constituting approximately 21% of the total U.S. pandemic deaths while only making up about 13% of the U.S. population (Duque, 2021). These devastating numbers directly correlate with intergenerational minority poverty, suggesting that the obstacles to overcoming self-sufficiency are often intersectional and interinstitutional. Disproportionately impacted communities are more likely to be disadvantaged across various
institutional dimensions, like unequal access to quality education, good-paying jobs, affordable housing, safe neighborhoods, quality food, and health services (Duque, 2021).

Recently in 2021, Actress Anika Noni Rose began a podcast called “Being Seen,” where she addresses the chronic issues that have continued to plague Black Women. In her recent interview on “The Wendy Williams Show,” she stated:

I was looking to create a space where Black Women were prioritized and able to talk about the stigma that Black Women walk around with daily, such as unaddressed issues regarding their health. The hope is to eliminate the stereotype of the strong Black Woman. We are not stalwarts nor mothers of the earth, but we are thinking, moving, vulnerable creatures. We should be allowed to fill those things because when we [Black Women] sit in the space that says we are always strong, it does us no favors in the medical system, where we say something hurts, and they say we are fine because we are strong. This can be seen with women such as Serena Williams in ways HIV disproportionately affects Black Women and lack of healthcare access. (Rose, 2021)

Whether you are a single mother or a mother with a spouse, being a Black Mother poses similar challenges. Black Mothers’ historical role of being caregivers continues to emerge and show that it does not discriminate regardless of who was present in the house. It would be safe to say that all of us mothers are in the same boat and trying to figure out ways to be a caregiver to our children while working, cooking, cleaning, teaching, and fulfilling all other stereotypical roles of mothering while the roles of the father have remained virtually unchanged (O'Reilly & Green, 2021).

The need for new research and resources on Black Mothering comes from this dual pandemic. Black Mothers have had to take the responsibility of multitasking and navigating how to survive a hidden disease and teach our children to navigate the apparent targeting of our
family and community members. The need for access is limited to daily necessities and to be taught additional survival skills that apply to the Black community.

**Summary**

The challenges of Black Mothering are complex and underacknowledged. Social injustices have plagued the Black Mother but have never broken her spirit. This could be due to the tremendous faith they have and hold dear to their hearts. As far back as the Black Women of the slave era, their struggle remains enshrouded in unrevealed history (Davis, 1981). Different ways to correct the unequal opportunities and disadvantages of the Black Community must be taken seriously by all parties and not just the Black Community. The enactment of the Nineteenth Amendment and the creation of the Abolitionist Teaching Network are a good state, but more must be done. Critical Race Theory is finally gaining traction and with time I am confident the wrongs of past ancestors can be corrected with the correct administration in office.

To fully address the need for New Consciousness, we must first attempt to hear the lost voices of the Black Mothers and “Othermothers” who got us to this point. Powerful writers such as Dumas (2016) and Collins (2002) serve as role models for others to join forces to advocate for this repressed population. Black Mothers in the 21st century must continue to find ways for themselves and their families to adapt to their ever-changing communities. They must find ways to explore the relationship between the need to continue to manage issues within social injustices as they redefine themselves.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose of Study

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this narrative research study was to explore the experiences of Black Mothering in the Bay Area. I conducted interviews over the course of six months with a total of 7 participants, one being myself, since I am also a Black Mother and the others were with a group of six Black Mothers from the Bay Area that included my friends and their counterparts. This study researched the relationships of single and married parents living in the Bay Area and how Black Mothering has been directly impacted by the various pandemics that continue to take over the Black communities.

Research Design

Narrative research aims to explore and conceptualize human experience as it is represented in textual form. Aiming for an in-depth exploration of the meanings people assign to their experiences, narrative researchers work with small samples of participants to obtain rich and free-ranging discourse. The emphasis is on storied experience.

(Salkind, 2010, p. 869)

I chose narrative research for my study because I wanted to spend time diving deep into the culture and the experience of the Black Mothers within the Bay Area. This research allowed me to bring a voice to the voiceless and for me to bring light to a variety of worthy movements to recognize the maltreatment of Black Women, such as #SAYHERNAME. This campaign is constantly working to have our slain Black Women be seen and unheard.

Research Questions

The unique challenges of the Black Mothers positioned me to ask several questions with hopes of clarifying some of the experiences of our Black moms. I developed the following
research questions as a way to look at the different impacts the community, family, media, and personal experiences have shaped our circumstances.

1. How do Black Mothers negotiate parenthood while being unseen and unheard?

2. What does it mean to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area?
   a. How have Black Mothers created opportunities for their children?
   b. What are Black Mothers’ experiences of educating their children (i.e., what type of school do their child participate in)
      i. Does their experience create inequities or new learning opportunities for Black Mothers and/or their children?
      ii. How do Black moms use this time to educate their children on social issues?

3. What does it mean to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area during multiple pandemics?
   a. COVID-19
   b. Racial Injustices
   c. Police Brutalities

4. What are Black Mothers’ experiences of being a super-strong Black Mother?
   a. What are the dynamics in their Black family?

Participants

The participants in my research were a group of Black Mothers between the ages of 25 to 45 years old from the Bay Area. As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, I gave participants the option to be interviewed via Zoom or in-person depending on the comfortability of both the participants and the researcher. The participants ranged in age and social-economic status and had one or more children biologically or inherently by adoption, step-child(ren), or
assumed care of child(ren). These participants also varied in educational backgrounds, but the majority had some form of trade or technical skills or higher education degree.

The mothers that I chose to interview were all women whom I have known and trusted for a period of two years or longer. These are women who I knew experienced different levels of hardships as a mother of Black children. I also included myself as a participant since I have been a single Black Mother up until my recent marriage two years ago in June 2020. These participants were chosen due to the multiple intersections that they share, which include being Black, woman, mother, and living in the Bay Area.

While I love and appreciate the women that I have chosen, they embody every area of what Motherhood means to me and they do it in a way that works best for them and their families. I chose the topic of Black Mothering because there continues to be a missing focus on the needs of not only parenting while being a Black Mother but also mothering Black children. When I think of Malcolm X’s quote at the start of this proposal, I think of all the challenges that Black Women alone face. But when you add navigating parenting while not being seen and heard and trying to make sure that your children are not being left behind, their educational and personal journey becomes another dimension that I believe is important to explore. The women I chose are great candidates because they are fully immersed in the #BLACKLIVESMATTER moments and educating their children is more than what is just taught in schools. Black Mothering has also included teaching their children additional life skills that will hopefully let their children live to see adulthood.

**Research Setting**

The study took place in the Bay Area (in the Northern California region) depending on the participants’ preference. The participants are from communities within the geographic range
of Alameda, Oakland, Union City, Hayward, and San Leandro, California. The Bay Area was chosen due to my close relationship with the city of Oakland, California, and its history regarding African Americans. All of the participants are also Bay Area natives, who have since branched out and moved out of the Bay Area due to the ongoing effects of gentrification and its financial impact on finding adequate housing and decent school systems for our children.

This study is unique in the sense that it looked at the impact of Black Mothering during the various pandemics and endemics currently plaguing our communities, such as COVID-19, crime on Blacks, global warming, and gentrification. It also considered the impact of the largest presidential election in history in 2020 that came after four years of a White supremacist leader. While various layers could be looked at, due to the limited resources for my study, this study was restricted to the Bay Area to focus on a group of women facing similar obstacles in terms of the resources available to them in our communities. These obstacles included limitations in access to adequate education, housing options, family support, and employment opportunities.

**Data Collection**

I collected data for this study by conducting narrative research interviews with the participants. The objective was to allow Black Mothers to tell their stories in a raw, authentic manner that allows them to fill as if the needs of their fellow mothers and children were seen and heard. Narrative research permits readers to build their knowledge and understanding of issues through the voices of the interviewees (Squire, 2014).

These interviews, both individual and focus group, were held between the period of January 2022-July 2022. Due to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, I gauged the comfort level of the participants and offered the option to hold the interviews by way of meeting
them at a chosen location or by doing video conferencing via Zoom or Facetime. I gave the option to use pseudonyms for the participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to capture the in-depth experiences and to be able to capture the voices of the often-unheard Black Mothers.

The researcher also had the participants write a letter to their biological mother and children in a diary-like format which the researcher will then analyze in a time diary method or autoethnography. The purpose of this letter was to offer an in-depth expression of the Black Mothers’ experiences, hopes and dreams for their children with a hope that it will offer a future understanding of their expectations for their children. In addition, the act of writing to their mother gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences with their mothers and to tell them what they wished their mothers would have told them more about as a child in addition to what they were most grateful for.

**Data Analysis**

The interviews were recorded using Zoom, which offered transcriptions after the interview. I also shared the transcripts with participants to check for accuracy. The researcher then reviewed the transcripts to look for common themes in the interviews in order to gain more insight into the lives of the participants and to capture the meaningful narratives shared by the participants. The interviews built upon preexisting knowledge and themes around Black Mothers, and I then found potential tools and resources that could be used going forward to help Black Mothers with building a community to help uplift and find new ways to support one another. The researcher created summaries of the interviews and provided them to the participants for their review.
The letters to their mother and children were also analyzed for common themes which then were used to encourage respondents to report, in sequence, the activities that they undertook during a specified period of time while being directly impacted by one or all the pandemics (Farrall & Weller, 2012).

**Ethical Considerations**

In order to follow all the guidelines required for conducting research, I submitted an application to the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) in January 2022 and gained approval to conduct research. Once my approval was received on Jan 31, 2022, I provided each participant with a consent form that included the details of the research study.

Sharing one's story is never easy, especially when some of the truths that you disclose may become a sensitive reality that you didn’t know you felt. As I shared my letter to my sons previously, I thought about the perception people may have about me, my life, and my struggles. However, I realized all of that is just a part of my testimony and the reason why I am able to be at a point in my life where I can not only share my story but the story of others with hopes of shedding light on what it means to be a mother while Black. With that being said, since I understood there were many vulnerable issues that were brought up, I did my best to ensure the safety of the individuals and their mental health before, during, and after the interview process, by checking in and making sure they had access to care if needed.

As the researcher I was aware that the interviews could have potential lingering effects on the participants. As a result, the researcher provided the participants with local resources to support them with mental health concerns or any other issues that may arise through the interview process. I sent a list of Black mental health professionals and shared it with my
participants as well as offered follow-up time to be able to talk about things that may have stood out to them. As the researcher, I did my best to ensure that I followed all ethical guidelines and protocols and was mindful of any personal conflicts that arose from the participants telling their stories. I let the participants know that they were able to stop interviewing and I let them review my findings and allowed for omission while keeping the integrity of my work.

Narrative inquiry is the study of experience. In order to understand the experience, we have to understand the experience over time: stories come from somewhere and go somewhere. We have to understand that it is a body in the world, so it's always both personal and social. (Clandinin, 2018). Using narrative research allowed me, as a researcher, to examine my participants through questions, observations, storytelling, and translating art, words, and lifestyles into a lesson. These things can all be great, but when thinking about the challenges, there were sometimes unsaid biases that came from trying to transcribe someone's feelings and emotions into research.

Our feelings and emotions belong to us and when trying to describe these, this can get lost. I can think of situations as a mother, knowing that I provide my children with the same love, attention, and support, but they all receive and express that love differently to me in return. This will make me believe that as they grow older, their detailed account of what it meant to grow up with me will have a different meaning for all of them. I can only imagine it would be the same for the individuals who tell their stories to ethnographers.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore how seven Black Women who grew up in the Bay Area navigated mothering while being Black in the midst of multiple pandemics. My goal was to break down how Black Mothers are able to remain super-strong during continuous critical moments that plague our community. Many of the mothers learned at an early age that being a Black Woman was going to pose its challenges and that they were going to have to fight harder for a place and purpose within whatever environment they existed. The data that I collected allowed me to better appreciate the lives and experiences of Black Mothers; while I am a Black Mother myself, all of our journeys are different but our struggles are the same.

As I went through the process of writing this dissertation, I experienced great difficulty in finding personal memoirs of our Black female ancestors and their experiences as mothers. It is a known fact that Black Mothers have not only been mothers to those they’ve birthed but have also been “othermothers” to the children of the masters they were enslaved by and to children in their community. The experiences of Black Mothers have often come from the accounts of the men who were raised by them. This chapter will begin to do what history has not done so well – to record the actual voices of Black Mothers and their own lived experience. My hope while going through this journal of recording their stories is to be able to allow these women to be seen for the great mothers, employees, women, and superhumans that they are.

The narratives that shape this chapter manifest my passion and commitment to bring light to the voices and experiences of Black Mothers who often go undocumented and unseen. Black Mothers have continued to raise our children through various epidemics but without ever truly being acknowledged for all trials and tribulations that come with raising children for a society
that has never acknowledged our worth and presence. The interviews I conducted with six Black Mothers are represented as participants’ profiles with the hope to give a voice to all readers as to who these women are and the gifts they bring to their children and community.

**Participant Profiles: Demographics**

All of my participants identify as African American (Black) cisgender females and all were raised in the Bay Area, mostly in the city of Oakland. Out of safety and consideration for my participants safety pseudonyms of their choosing will be used in place of the actual names. One of my participants, Lashonda, may stand out since she came to the Bay Area in her teenage years, and her experience of mothering also includes mothering a daughter with special needs. Additionally, my participant Simone is the only one who has yet to complete a college degree.

Table 1 below presents basic demographic information about the seven study participants, including myself:

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Marital Status/Gender Identity</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Class Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amauri</td>
<td>Divorced heterosexual cisgender female</td>
<td>1 son, 1 daughter</td>
<td>Corporate philanthropist</td>
<td>Middle class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameryn</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1 son</td>
<td>New to working</td>
<td>Upper middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>cisgender female in education,</td>
<td>post-graduate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>post-graduate experience primarily</td>
<td>experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in health care administration</td>
<td>primarily in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>health care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamiyah</td>
<td>Bi-racial</td>
<td>3 girls, 1 son</td>
<td>Works in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td>education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cisgender female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kassie</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 biological sons, 4 step children</td>
<td>Works in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td></td>
<td>education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cisgender female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lashonda</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1 son, 1 daughter (special needs)</td>
<td>Works in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td></td>
<td>education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cisgender female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikita</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3 sons, 1 daughter (2 biological, 1 step son, 1 step)</td>
<td>Works in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td></td>
<td>education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cisgender female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper middle class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower middle class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction of Themes

Below are the major themes that emerged from the interviews:

1. “My “Mother” Shaped Who I Am and How I Mother” (Maternal figures)

2. Black Mothers move to create opportunity (education and financial) and secure safety for their children.

3. The fear of Black Mothers comes from the safety and security we cannot always provide.
   a. How can I protect my children when I don’t often feel protected myself?

4. Black Mothering means I’m a superhero: Being resilient, super strong and wearing many hats, and not always having balance.
   a. With or without the presence of the father I still feel overwhelmed (Amauri exception)
   b. Black Mothers would love to have a community of other Black Mothers they relate to converse with.

5. I have to fight to be seen everywhere.
   a. Work
   b. Partners
   c. Media
d. Healthcare

6. I was raised to always have faith.

In my first theme, “My ‘Mother’ Shaped Who I Am and How I Mother,” I spoke to this section and labeled it “Maternal Figures.” In this section I highlighted how each of the mothers was influenced by their own mothers whether biological or an “othermother.” My participants, Cameryn, Kamiyah, Simone and myself, represented those whose direct impact came from our biological mothers. The other participants, Amauri, Lashonda and Nikita, were all raised and most influenced by “othermothers’ who were mostly their grandmothers and aunts.

My second theme is “Black Mothers Move to Create Opportunity (Education and Financial) and Secure Safety for their Children.” I labeled this section in my participant profiles, “Opportunities for Our Babies.” In this section I discuss how Black Mothers find ways to keep their children busy, how they made choices for their children's education, and how many of them dealt with issues of social justice. While all Black Mothers provided various opportunities for their children, many of them not only spoke to the need to relocate to provide their children with educational opportunities but also identified the need to put their children in neighborhoods where they felt they would be more safe and able to flourish.

The third theme, “The Fear of Black Mothers Comes from the Safety and Security We Cannot Always Provide,” was addressed in “Navigating Pandemics.” Here I discuss different issues that came up for the mothers during the pandemic and how each unfolded differently in their household with varying members in their homes becoming ill, people being impacted differently by the continued police brutalities. One of the most noticeable differences was that all these mothers were aware of social injustice issues but addressed them differently based on the ages of their children.
The fourth theme is “Black Mothering Means I’m a Superhero: Being Resilient, Super Strong and Wearing Many Hats and Not Always Having Balance.” I discuss this in the profile section labeled, “The Unseen Superhero.” In this section I highlight these mothers' positive attributes and discuss how who they are personally and professionally makes them a superhero.

In my final two themes labeled, “I Have To Fight To Be Seen Everywhere” and “I Was Raised To Always Have Faith,” I have addressed these themes in the summary of my focus group since this was a shared experience that all of the mothers could identify with. I used the time in my focus group to dive deeper into these two themes that constantly emerged and unfolded in a positive light.

The following sections depict the stories of seven different Black Mothers including myself and our journey of parenting in the Bay Area. All the mothers share the common values, morals, and commitment to their self-care and to the constant education and protection of their children. All of these mothers have different backgrounds.

**Participants Profiles: Stories**

**Amauri**

**Background**

Amauri, 32, was born and raised in Bayview, a neighborhood in San Francisco. She was raised by both her mother and father until their divorce when she was 2 years old. At this time she was sent to her fraternal aunt, with whom she was raised until she entered the seventh grade. She spent her seventh and eighth grade years living with her fraternal grandmother in Nebraska, and then later returned to San Francisco for high school. During the course of her childhood Amauri's parents were always around but they were not active role models in her life in her early
years. As a child Amauri was exposed to different forms of religion; at one point in time, she was a practicing Muslim and then later began practicing Christianity.

At the age of 16, Amauri became a mom to a son whom she also began to raise in San Francisco. Amauri was married at the age of 18, but due to her son’s father being in and out of county jail, they got divorced due to toxic traits (emotional, mental and physical abuse) in the relationship that weren't healthy. By the time their son was around 10 years old time passed & growth we were able to heal in different ways to be able to reconnect to learn how to co parent their child. Now her and her son's father have maintained a positive co-parenting relationship with his father. She is able to count on him for needs whether financial, physical, or emotional for her son.

Later on, Amauri had a daughter with a different father, their co-parenting experience has been very challenging; they barely spoke for years and would communicate through his parents. He just did what he was supposed to do as a parent for the most part which she detailed as picking up, purchasing clothes and shoes. When she began dating again, her father wanted to go to court when her daughter was around 5 years old. This allowed them to obtain an order that worked best for both parents.

Amauri currently works as a corporate philanthropist where she manages high dollar grants for nonprofit groups at a company called Salesforce. While she has not formally completed any degrees, she has completed several job training programs that have allowed her to be successful in her industry.

**Maternal Figures**

At an early age, Amauri began to experience an alternative form of mothering. She wasn't raised by her biological mother even though she maintained a relationship with her. When she
got pregnant as a teen-ager, she knew that she wanted to be a present mother. Even though she did not grow up being raised by her biological mother, she ended up moving in with her in order to get support, which opened a door to help them heal from old wombs.

A lot of Amauri’s decisions as a young adult were made from the examples of mothers that she had in her own life as well as pulling from the negative experiences in her life that she didn't want to model. Amauri’s early childhood influences impacted her and contributed to her decision to not further her education. She always felt as if she had the opportunity to go away to school but she didn't go. When she had her son, the great aunt that raised her offered to keep her son while she left to go away to school. She declined and ended up staying in the Bay Area because she felt like she didn't want to be like her parents who basically gave the responsibility of raising her to somebody else. (Interview with Amauri, March 23, 2022)

While her family played a major role in her upbringing, other influences like the media and outside environments also impact how she mothered. Television shows such as *In the House* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* made some of the most notable impacts with positive representation for Amauri. These shows represented the non-traditional blended families that still found ways to support one another even through life's trials and tribulations. Amauri had a tight relationship with her blended family, blood or not she was shown love by the people who chose to take part in her upbringing. People in her life, such as her step-grandfather, gave her a type of unconditional love that wasn't compromised because of blood. Family to Amauri was shaped around who was there in good and bad times more than it was about the biology of what society might say connected them.
**Opportunities for Our Babies**

*Activities.* Creating opportunities for her children is very important to Amauri. Through the support of her children's father, Amauri was able to introduce her son to non-traditional Black activities such as dirt biking. Even though her son was often the only Black kid participating, it was important to her and his father to engage their son in things that interested him and would keep him involved and out of trouble. Not only does he participate in dirt biking competitively but he also plays basketball recreationally and participates in his school's Black Student Union (BSU). Her daughter, on the other hand, also participates in her school's BSU, but she is less interested in physical activities and more creative. Amauri’s daughter shows her talents by participating in her school's yearbook committee and other activities that allow her to be social and use her creative skills. Additionally, Amauri is very involved with her children’s school and makes it her goal to participate in the PTA (Parent-teacher association) as well as creating opportunities for youth through her community engagement.

*Education.* Amauri made the decision to have her children participate in public school education because of her own positive experiences as well as having an aunt who taught in public school. She believes in the ability of public schools to provide for her children. Also Amauri has created opportunities for other children through her work in the nonprofit world. For example, she developed her own young women's support group in Oakland called “I Am Me.” Amauri has shaped her life and career to give back to others and to provide opportunities to young people in the Bay Area. She has seen the importance of not only providing opportunities for her own children but for her community as well.
Navigating Pandemics

The racial attack on the Black community has a long history of taking over our communities. While trying to create an opportunity to provide female empowerment to her young daughter, Amauri’s daughter was denied an opportunity due to the likely fact that her daughter was Black and larger in size.

… the program was for girl’s empowerment. But my daughter and another little girl had an altercation at school and the other little girl was a different race. I don't remember what she was. But she ended up getting accepted to the program and they basically said my daughter couldn't be part of the program because her and the little girl had an altercation and they couldn't come to an agreement. And I just thought that that was completely wrong because if the program is about girl empowerment, why would you kick someone out or not give them the opportunity to be in the program when there should have been some type of resolution that could have come from that. Because I think she might have been in third grade. But my daughter has always been taller too. So I feel like they label her as the bully because she's the bigger kid. (Interview with Amauri, March 23, 2022)

Amauri’s response to what happened to her daughter was to create a girl empowerment group, called “I Am Me” for young girls starting at the age of eight years old. Racism has shown up in all stages of life for Black people. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to hear stories of youth being denied opportunities based on the color of their skin, especially when thinking of how youth such as Ruby Bridges had to be the face of segregation during a time where she could likely be killed just solely on the color of her skin alone.
**The Unseen Superhero**

Amauri feels she has to fight to have her voice heard. She has to be strong; have thick skin, be able to and know how to effectively advocate for your children, “you have to be able to educate yourself and be able to educate the people that are in the room when it comes to you standing up for your children, and even educating your kids as well. (Interview with Amauri, March 23, 2022)

Amauri’s motherhood journey, while unique among the participants, is very similar to many women around the world. As a young girl, her journey to adulthood was fast-forwarded when she became a teen mom. Her journey through motherhood helped to shape her views and womanhood. She has continued to wear her superhero cape through her community advocacy, her work with philanthropy organizations, and her utmost desire to continue to have Black children have health spaces to be seen and heard.

**Cameryn**

**Background**

Cameryn, 37, grew up in Oakland, California, and was raised by both her parents until they divorced when she was 10 years old. Cameryn grew up as a Christian and attended church regularly with members of her family. After the split of her parents, Cameryn remained living with her mother and older sister. With the support of her parents, Cameryn was able to attend private school from kindergarten through high school. Cameryn was the only one of my participants with whom I had a close relationship since we met at school when we were six years old and have been friends ever since.
After high school, Cameryn went on to pursue higher education. She has achieved her Master’s degree and is currently awaiting the beginning of her doctoral program. At the age of 24, Cameryn was living in Georgia to pursue new opportunities, and this is where she met the father of her now 12-year-old son. Shortly after his birth, she made the decision to move back to the Bay Area where she had the support of her mother to assist in the upbringing of her son as well as to pursue other opportunities.

In her decision to move, the issue of parental rights came up. Her understanding was that in the state of Georgia, if a child is ‘legitimized’ (meaning if their paternity is established with the father), then the woman has fewer rights than the father. When she moved to California, she learned that the same was not true to this state. Cameryn and her son’s father are currently co-parenting from afar, but she currently has sole physical custody and legal custody of her son.

Cameryn solely provides for her son, and over the years, she has found that it is easier to not expect anything from her son's father. He has an inconsistent visiting schedule with his son since he still resides in Georgia but does offer some financial support. Cameryn has never let these issues of not having consistent support from his father get in the way of her achieving her dreams and providing a beautiful home and life for her son.

Cameryn recently purchased a home in the Central Valley. She determined that buying a home in the Bay Area was not the best financial decision as it did not offer her the total package that she wanted to be able to include for such a large purchase and, hopefully, long term commitment. This was a huge transition for Cameryn, since a part of her change in residence meant her mother coming to live with her. This has proven to have its own set of challenges and advantages. Cameryn has spent many years working in the healthcare industry where she has worked for organizations such as planned parenthood in upper management. She has recently
taken her talents and transitioned to working in higher education at California State University, San Jose.

**Maternal Figures**

Cameryn's biological mother was her greatest role model. While having many “othermother” examples in her life, her mom represented the superhero in her life. Her mother introduced her to spirituality, and Cameryn is a self-identified Christian woman. Before the passing of her grandmother when she was young her grandmother was also a large influence in her life. Her mom gave her the skill and understanding of instilling values, such as understanding how to balance a checkbook, always paying yourself, and knowing how to show your children that it is important to work for what is important to them.

While Cameryn was raised by her mother, she also shared that her village was strong. She had positive examples of other women, such as her sister, godmother and grandmother. All of these women contributed to her motherhood.

My mom is the main source. I would say maybe when my grandmother was living, when I was younger, that would be another kind of equivalent of a mother figure. But you know, my mom is my mother figure and she's here. She lives with us so it's good. She helps a lot with Santos. And the interesting part is I'm starting to understand. They talk about this. You start to understand your mother as a woman as you have children. And now I can see sometimes some of the decisions they had to make or sometimes when they had to say no. It was for a reason. You have to maintain balance with children. You can't give them everything. They have to know there are some things that aren't always available to them or whatever. For my reason, it wouldn't be, oh, I can't afford it, but it would also be like, you just can't have everything in life. And it was the same thing for
us. It was never like, “Oh we can't afford it.” It was just mostly probably because it's like, “You can't have everything. There are some things that you have to be patient about.”

(Interview with Cameryn April 8, 2022)

**Opportunities for Our Babies**

**Activities.** Cameryn has always been diligent about exposing her son to every accessible opportunity. Her belief is that young boys need structure and her job was to provide it. She saw at a young age that her son had a love of water and unfortunately within the city of Oakland, where she resided before the local schools did not provide this as an opportunity. Her son has grown to be a great swimmer, plays Lacrosse, has been a part of various school clubs and does well academically. Her move to the Tri-Valley was a transition for her son who had been attending the same private school that Cameryn and I attended as youth.

**Education.** Cameryn made the decision when her son was born to make sure that her son received the best opportunity no matter what. Opportunities meant being afforded the opportunity to give her son the best education, be able to travel and be able to grow up in a safe and happy environment. Her son began his educational journey by attending a private school in Oakland California. Which happened to be the same one that she attended as a child, and with this opportunity it has allowed him to excel. Cameryn decided to find her son a STEM charter school when she moved to the Tri-Valley area. The school also had other opportunities that were not available for free within the affordable parts of the Bay Area.

**Navigating Pandemics**

For Cameryn the COVID-19 pandemic marked the beginning of many ends and beginnings for her. During this time, she had ended a long-term relationship with her boyfriend
whom she had been with for several years. Then she realized that she was back to being independent and she didn't have a partner to help her and have her back as she had had the last several years. While she had always been a single mother, in the presence of a healthy relationship and partnership, having a partner can offer a lot of relief that Cameryn expressed she lost.

While already dealing with the uncertainties around COVID-19, Cameryn, who has also always been a fairly private person, had to let go of a part of her small circle that existed. Her fears during this pandemic continued to rise because locally it has always pretty much just been Cameryn and her mother. When the pandemic entered into our lives formally in March 2020 Cameryn feared how her job, her interactions, and connection to the world she already existed in would impact her and her son but also her mother. She realized quickly that no one was coming to save her and that she would have to learn to navigate this pandemic for safety of her and her son and she would have to find a way to do it alone.

**The Unseen Superhero**

Honestly, I was thinking, God, to be a Black Woman, even though they[society] made us feel like it wasn't, I think that's the best thing ever. Right? ((Interview with Cameryn April 8, 2022)

Above Cameryn is telling me her thoughts of what it means to be a Black Woman and is sharing her views and beliefs of how much power there is in our melanin both literally and metaphorically. Her visibility has been a constant question as far back as she can remember and she goes on to say.

To be a Black Mother, it almost feels like this generation, we have everything on our backs. Like the responsibility feels like it's on us. It's almost like they're watching to see.
What are these young Kings and Queens going to look like, speak like, feel like in the next let's just say 10 years, right? Because our kids will be adults in that timeframe. So it almost feels like we are under a microscope. We are under scrutiny constantly. If I can be honest, being a Black Mother right now looks like as a collective in the black community, a lack of male leadership. Because while there may be males in the home, those males may not be the fathers of the children or they may not be the father of all of them. We're not at a point where we have two parents getting married, having children staying together. We're not there anymore as a collective. So it's just finding leadership roles in other ways, whether it's uncles, coaches, older brothers, cousins, barbers, all of those roles, which is interesting though, because initially if we talk about village, back in the day village didn't mean, okay, this is your dad. So if you had a male looking over the children, the male children, that may not have been the father of all the children. But as a collective, all the men gathered all the boys and that was the leadership. And even girls. But even now, that's not even happening, and I'm talking about the full community. That's not even happening. (Interview with Cameryn, April 8, 2022)

Kamiyah

Background

Kamiyah was born and raised in Vallejo, California. She was born to a White mother and Black father and is the youngest of four children. She grew up with both parents in the household until they separated when she was around ten or eleven years old. At this time the children were separated by gender and her and her sister remained with her mother and her brother went to stay with their dad. At the time of their separation her parents only moved down the street from one
another so they still functioned as a single-family household and did things such as spend
holidays together and have family dinner together at times

Kamiyah shared the following story about her family dynamics. Her dad was a Southern
born sharecropper and had her when he was almost 50 years old.

He grew up in Arkansas in the 30s during the pre-civil rights movement… and my mom
is white and grew up in Napa in like a Catholic family with hella kids, and eventually
went to Santa Cruz and became a hippie. And I think that her hippiness really impacted
how we were raised. (Interview with Kamiyah, March 24, 2022)

Kamiyah believes that the Southern values her father grew up with shaped the dynamics of her
family, her house was divided into Man vs. Women work.

Kamiyah has been married for six years now and has four children under the age ten
years old with her husband. Additionally, Kamiyah holds a MA in Education from Stanford’s
Teacher Education Program, a BA from University of California, Santa Cruz, in American
Studies, and her EdD will be completed in 2024 from University of California, Davis. She
previously taught Academic Literacy at the University of San Francisco.

**Maternal Figures**

Kamiyah believes she is a lot like her mother. People that know them well often compare
the two as being very much alike. Kamiyah noted that her mother was a teacher; now she is too,
and she attributes that to her mom. She credits her mom for many strengths, such as her
nurturing spirit, empathy, and compassion. Kamiyah grew up with an understanding that men
and women were said to have different places in society. A woman was supposed to, in a way, be
submissive to a man and allow him to run the household as he saw fit. She experienced her
mother in a vulnerable state of not wanting her children to be reprimanded aggressively, but she also wanted to abide by the rules of their relationship.

Kamiyah expressed the following about how her aunt (her father’s sister) said Black children should be raised

My aunt told her you have to hit Black kids, like that's how they get raised in America and that's how you know they'll be okay. Like, it's not negotiable. So I knew she didn't like it, you could tell, and she (Kamiyah’s mother) wouldn't step in to stop it either. And I think that also has to do with a history between her and my father of abuse that happened before I was born that I wasn't privy to till I was an adult. But I don't want to be like that, so when I think my husband is too aggressive or violent with the kids, I step in.

(Interview with Kamiyah, March 24, 2022)

Opinions like this can definitely lead to the man feeling disrespected and can cause confrontation in a relationship. However, Kamiyah indicated that her responsibility first and foremost is to her children's safety. She constantly strives to find healthy ways to communicate with her children and spouse.

Kamiyah was raised with two different views of how to raise a child. Her mother encouraged her to allow her children to explore, make mistakes, be in control of their learning, and to use more empathy and compassion in disciplining. But on her paternal side, she was taught by women that extreme measures needed to be taken in order to raise “good” Black kids. Kamiyah decided to go on the side of her mother and has allowed her children to just be kids and teach them along the way. Hearing this from Kamiyah reminded me of something my grandmother told me so many years ago: “Just because you have kids in the same home being raised with the same parents doesn’t mean they won't experience you and life differently. Every
person is their own and it’s our job to foster whoever they are trying to become as long as they are good human beings.”

Social media has provided Kamiyah with somewhat of a healing space to her as a mother with sites such as Black Twitter. Black Twitter has created a space where people can connect, process, and unravel things that come up for them, especially within the Black community. Black Twitter is a part of the Twitter network but is a community of Black people who differentiate Black issues through the use of hashtags such as #Blacktwitter.

**Opportunities for Our Babies**

**Activities.** Kamiyah’s children are all fairly young so the older two are the ones most involved with activities. Her eldest daughter has been on a dance team for years, and her son has begun playing flag football as well as baseball. Kamiyah and her husband have kept the children engaged in other activities such as modeling, sports and various educational activities. During the pandemic, and even afterwards, she regularly took trips to the ocean, trips to the Exploratorium, and Academy of Sciences. As her children continue to grow older and develop more curiosities around different activities Kamiyah’s philosophy supports her talking to her children about their interest and helping to nurture wherever their curiosity takes them.

**Education.** Academically. Kamiyah has found various opportunities that will help her children long term. She has them in a Spanish immersion school where they are learning Spanish, and all of her school age children attend this same school. As an educator herself, she understands the value of having access to opportunities so she has made sure to provide her children with opportunities available to them. Her goal is to continue to expose her children to various languages and cultures and she has the understanding that once they learn one language it will make it that much easier for them to learn another. Compared to the rest of the globe, the
United States is behind. The US does not prioritize the learning of multiple languages which is why Kamiyah wants her children to have this chance. Learning multiple languages opens up opportunities in the work world as well as when they travel to other parts of the world.

**Navigating Pandemics**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kamiyah had to make choices about how her house was being run. She was fortunate during this time to be working in a job with a fairly smooth transition to online learning, which allowed her to be fully present to her four children at home. While she does share the four children with her husband, she has found that she, like many mothers, assumes all roles and that her children often look to her even if dad is sitting right next to her. For her family, the pandemic was a stressful time since everyone was essentially “stuck” under one roof and tension was rising. Questions about discipline and ways to handle situations took over her household, putting a lot of strain on her relationship. Kamiyah and her husband had to find a way to “find themselves” together again due to all that had piled up during the extended lockdown. Kamiyah found that she was often categorized as being “super-strong,” which isn't how she wanted to be seen.

**The Unseen Superhero**

As a Black Woman, it has been both a gift and curse to always be seen as these superhuman persons when sometimes you just want to hide behind your invisible cape and just cry and feel vulnerable. Not all superheroes wear capes though. Kamiyah is a vision and a model of motherhood. Through her husband's transition to find steady employment she has maintained a steady breadwinner and maternal figure in her household. She has been able to work through issues that have tested her sanity which include caring for her terminally ill mother, holding
down her house, showing up for her children even when she didn't have it in her but also still showing up for her students and community. Kamiyah has maintained her sanity through the support of her friends and feels that without them she would not be who she is today. She has found a way to continue to find balance in being a mom, wife, teacher, political advocate, and someone who engages in her community. And her cape continues to stay raised high even when she feels it isn’t there,

Kassie (Me)

Background

I was born and raised in Oakland, California. I am the only child to my mother and only daughter to my father. Up until I was about 16 years old, I had a very inconsistent relationship with my father and was essentially raised by a single mother. My mother and father were both born to large families so neither of which had a desire to have many children. As a young child I can remember wanting siblings and having the need to form relationships with people. But my circle always included older adults and while I had plenty of cousins, the ones that were my age and close were all males. I grew up a tomboy and can recall a time on the playground when one of my female classmates asked me why I always only hung out with the boys. Little did they know, that was all I was accustomed to. But the other side of me knew that I wanted to be social and be a part of sleep-overs and socializing opportunities. Hanging with the boys was not going to allow me that chance.

I grew up attending Catholic schools up until I was in the 10th grade. As I grew up, I was very involved with sports such as basketball and cheerleading. In the 10th grade one of the most horrific moments in history happened which was 9/11. I can remember being in class, when one
of the nuns rolled the TV in and started airing the news to inform us of what was taking place. The Twin Towers had just been hit, and the casualty number was rising. Things went downhill from there, I had a classmate who lost a family member in that moment, and the way that this moment indirectly impacted me came a few months later. Due to the crash in the stock market, my mother, who had been a banker pretty much all of her life, had been laid off and our life was changing. My mother solely put me through private school, and at this time a decision had to be made. I could have continued in private school but decided to go to public school to offer some relief to my mother. That choice was given to me, and to this day, my choice to attend public school still feels like it may have been one of my worst decisions.

Fast forward, at the age of 21, I became a mother to my first son. At 23 and 24 I would become a mother to two more sons. My older son has a fairly non-existent relationship with his father and my younger kids’ father and I had a very toxic and unhealthy relationship, which resulted in my filing for full custody of my children as well as a restraining order for a period of time. Over the years things have changed, but as a mother my motivations to pursue my education came out of fear of falling into a system that wasn't meant to see me as a Black Woman be successful. I was born and raised a Baptist and have attended church since I was a little girl. While religion did not necessarily stay strong in my life, my spirituality did.

**Maternal Figures**

My relationship with my mother has always been good. She has been the person who has always been there for me through all the highs and lows of my life. She definitely sacrificed her happiness for a long period of time to ensure I was a happy and spoiled little girl. My mother didn't date much, and when she did, it was very unlikely that I would meet the guy unless it was really serious. As I mentioned earlier, after 9/11 occurred, she gave me the decision to stay at my
current school or go to another high school. At this time for a few different reasons, I decided that going to a public school was best for me and I had a few friends there already.

My mother was the middle of seven children and was always described as the responsible one. She was the first (and only) to purchase a home of all her siblings. She and her older brother were the only two who managed to maintain full time employment, and she always made sure to save and explain the power of credit and having money saved for a rainy day. My mother definitely has always been overly cautious and very careful about everything in life, and I have lived life almost the polar opposite.

While I appreciated her dedication, I resented her inability to take risks and to push boundaries that would have opened other doors for her. My mother was also never very affectionate with me and up until recently when one of my children asked why I never said “I love you” to either of my parents. I can't remember the last time a conversation ended with, “Talk to you later, I love you.”

My maternal grandmother was also another major figure in my life. She was there through it all and seemed to always understand me even when it felt like my mom didn't. My grandmother was a nurse and never had a lot. But she always instilled that she would rather give me her last and see me happy to do it for herself. Grannies are magic.

Opportunities for Our Babies

Activities. My children have all been involved in activities since they were a few months old. While I was low income for a long period of time, I knew that I wanted my children to learn how to swim since that was something that wasn't taught to me and I felt it was a necessary skill. As they got older, I was able to have them participate in basketball through Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), as well as through Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball.
Additionally, I have sent my children to summer away camps such as CYO and Camp OVY that all offer low to no cost camps for children. Lastly, my children while in middle school participated in The Village Method (TVM), which is a program centered around African American student learning and community connection.

**Education.** As a young single mother, I made a lot of what I felt were bad decisions for my children's education earlier on. While I really wanted to send them to private school, I was young, uneducated, and didn't have the ability to finance that goal. The next best thing I could do was to try to get them in a school that had diversity. Unfortunately, the schools in the Bay Area that were primarily Black were schools that lacked funding, proper staffing, low educational attainment, etc. I made the decision to move to Hayward after the birth of my youngest son in 2011 because I had a great childcare person and friends close by who all formed a small village that helped one another with school pick-ups, drop-offs, activities, etc.

As my children got older and my education and employment became more stable, I made the decision to move them to a school in Union City that was fairly diverse for the area and had great reviews in terms of education. My children stayed there through elementary school. Then I made the decision when my oldest went to high school and my middle son to middle school to send them to a charter school that was 6th-12th grade. The decision came from knowing my son struggled with negative influences in a larger school environment. I knew he needed to be in a smaller space where he was being constantly supported, which was a great decision. He was able to maintain being a straight A student. I was able to have him participate in concurrent enrollment since he has been taking two college classes a semester since his freshman year of high school. This opportunity was something I knew nothing about, and I am excited to see how far ahead he will become at the end of senior year.
Navigating Pandemics

COVID-19. The pandemic has definitely been one of the most trying times as a mother. The expectations, needs of my family, and fear of what was happening in our society completely put me in a place of disbelief. I was called to do jobs I couldn't exactly figure out how to navigate, such as thinking back to doing math in middle school, I truly found out in this that I am not smarter than a fifth grader. I had to figure out how to balance being a chef morning, noon and night, not gain too much weight, be a detective and locate PPE items for my family, keep everyone social distanced when someone got sick, maintain my own peace, still be a partner, keep logging into work and creating a safe, learnable and teachable space, and be present for all the issues that were showing up across everyone's household. I was tired.

While dealing with the worldwide impact of COVID-19. I remember when social media began sharing videos about what was happening to George Floyd. All I could think of was, “Not another one.” Another one meaning, not another one of our Black men lost by the hands of yet another police officer, not another Black man whose parents, children, friends would have to go without their loved one in their life. Everyone was at home during this time; the streets were fairly bare because the fear of the disease taking our loved ones plagued all of our communities. But the fear of COVID-19 almost felt easier to deal with than the chance of being killed by an officer. I can honestly say I feared what the police would do to me and my Black family more than I feared COVID-19.

COVID-19 didn't discriminate. The police did. With the minimum opportunity that my children had to go outside and the fear of their personal health being at risk, I found myself leaning on that more to tell them to stay inside or to just hang out in the backyard. Little did they know that my fear was not just of them getting sick but of some police officer mistaking them for
an adult or thinking they were up to something. There were threats coming from everywhere. The orange man was still our president, and it felt as if hate was everywhere. A black cloud loomed over our community and fear fed this cloud. All I could do was tell my children I was sorry and that I had no answers of how to help them. The only thing in that moment I could do was keep them inside and pray they make it to see another day. That prayer is still going.

**The Unseen Superhero**

It is hard calling myself a superhero because I feel like everything I do is something I have to do; yet I forget the strength it takes to follow through with just getting out of bed and making sure that everything is taken care of. I did my best and continue to do my best and make sure my kids can just live in kid land as long as possible. But I have realized that that is not always our reality. I have had to make sure that my children are also aware, like in the movie *The Hate You Give*, it is a parent’s responsibility to let our children know that even though they may be innocent, in our community, the Black community, we are guilty until proven innocent, even though the law technically says otherwise. I can only hope that the cape I wear continues to work as armor and protect them from all the hate that the world wants them to feel.

**Lashonda**

**Background**

Lashonda, 46, was born in Iowa City and raised by her maternal grandmother and step-grandfather in Iowa. She eventually moved to California where she first lived in Palo Alto in the South Bay. During sixth grade she moved to Modesto, where she finished high school. After she graduated high school, she moved back to the Bay Area to live with an aunt.
Lashonda grew up with both of her biological parents in and out of her life. She is one of four children. She has three brothers, two of whom are deceased and the other serving a life sentence in prison. Lashonda was married at a young age and worked hard to break the cycle that she went through with her parents. She is the mother of two children: a 15-year-old son and a 21-year-old daughter with special needs. While she and her children's father are no longer together, they still co-parent their children well. Lashonda holds her Bachelor’s degree and plans to pursue her Master’s degree in the future.

**Maternal Figures**

As mentioned above, Lashonda grew up with several different maternal figures. Her grandmother was the primary caregiver, but she felt as if all the women in her life were instrumental in raising her and gave her the essential tools she needed to become a woman. She described her grandmother as “a very strict, mean person. traditional Black Christian grandmother who didn't take no mess.” But her grandmother also showed her empathy and would give her the space to make mistakes and walk her through, growing through them. She had an Aunt Lynette who would refer to her as ‘niece daughter’ and would take care of her as if she were her own.

While she didn’t grow up with her mother, she did have a relationship with her. She continued to hold some resentment towards her, which came out once she became a mother herself. Her mother shaped her experience in a way that would show her the things that she didn't want to do and who she didn't want to be as a mother herself. Lashonda shared that her mother being in and out of prison had a direct impact on her struggle with drugs over the years. While Lashonda knew that her mother wanted to be better for her, there were a lot of things that her mother struggled with that didn't allow her to be there as her mother. Her resentment towards her
mother would last until her young adult years when she became a mother herself. Then she could confront some of the issues that drew them apart.

There were periods where she lived with me and my kids and my ex-husband. So she lived with us, we were close. As I said, she could work a nerve because it was her personality. Sometimes our personalities didn't vibe. I was a young woman trying to come into my own as a young wife and a young mother. By that time, my daughter was born and I'm trying to run my household and she was kind of coming in and trying to interfere…. I'm sure she felt like she was trying to give guidance and advice and all that good stuff, but my issues with her not being there for me when I was growing up, kind of got in the way of that, of her feeling like, "oh, now you can tell me how to raise my baby and you didn't raise yours". So that was pretty much that. So we bumped heads a lot. But I loved her to death and we tried to figure it out. (Interview with Lashonda, July 15, 2022)

**Media.** The media have played its part in shaping the views of many people in society, but to Lashonda the media has had a mixed depiction of mothering. To Lashonda the things that she witnessed fed into the negative stereotypes of how Black Women were seen as being too mouthy, hard headed, oversexualized, as well as exposing how unprotected we are as human beings. She mentioned the existence of reality television and how it emphasized this existence of women that looked like material gold diggers, living off the support of their exes or child support. This would be seen as women who were incapable of having their own through hard work and exposed a level of singlehood and single parenthood that seemingly online appears to impact Black Women, at least on TV. Overall, Lashonda has not felt that she has seen positive representation of women in the media.
Opportunities for Our Babies

Activities. Lashonda’s children have both taken part in different activities to keep them busy. At the age of two years old, her daughter KiKi, was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Her daughter is non-verbal but has been actively engaged in educational activities that keep her busy. Currently Lashonda has Kiki participating in her local school district’s adult care program where they do various activities from going to the library, taking trips to the mall, and going to Costco. Lashonda’s ex-husband also spends much time helping with their daughter; he is often seen taking her on long walks and spending daddy-daughter time.

In contrast, her son has participated in local summer camps such as the YMCA, Chabot Space & Science Center, as well as being a part of the Junior Giants baseball team from early childhood until about 12 years old. Culture has shifted a great deal from when we were children. Lashonda reflected on how we had more safety as children. Now she feels conflicted because “We could be outside from sunup to sundown and nothing happened to us.” In contrast, how many parents feel more at ease to have their children home and engage in video games? Because they are home, they are safe and it is one more night we get to know our children are with us.

Education. Due to Lashonda’s daughter having a severe disability, there has not been much opportunity for her daughter to obtain an education. Her daughter functions at roughly a preschool level, but Lashonda describes her daughter as such a joyful presence and full of personality. Lashonda has been fortunate enough to find opportunities through her local school districts to have her daughter attend a form of a day school. Here her daughter was able to be socialized and offer Lashonda and her daughter's father some relief during the workday.

Her son, on the other hand, has attended public school his whole life, and Lashonda said that she firmly believes in the public school system.
Navigating Pandemics

The COVID-19 pandemic has raged through millions of homes. It has shown its ugly head and forced families to have to create a new level of intimacy and togetherness that not many people expected, needed or potentially even wanted. That was no different for Lashonda’s household. The pandemic forced her to have to assume a few new roles. While there was a lot of expressed empathy for other parents, teachers, and caregivers, she knew that she had to be more prepared to entertain, teach, and maintain a strong sense of self so that she could be present for her children. Lashonda stated that having grace and exhuming patience on her children's teachers and work is what helped her get through.

When it came to navigating the social issues plaguing the Black community, Lashonda prides herself with providing her son with the necessary skills to survive. She emphasized that he had to "be aware of your surroundings, have your antennas up, pay attention to people that are in your life and not.” When she has had to travel with her son, she has always had to make sure that he was socially aware of how his Blackness could be targeted in whatever community that they were in. What was important was that she was able to be aware of these things so that she could help him.

The Unseen Superhero

Lashonda is a fighter. From how she has navigated raising her children. She has raised a child with a disability and is now obtaining her degree as an older student who oftentimes felt like giving up. Lashonda currently works in education and has committed much of her life providing for her family and supporting other students.
Nikita

**Background**

Nikita, 42, was born and raised in Hayward, California. She was raised with her younger brother by her mother and step father until his passing when she was about six years old. Nikita didn't have a strong relationship with her biological father but she did have a strong male presence in her life. Being raised by a single mother did not appear to make Nikita feel as if she was at a deficit for anything in her life. Her mother, up until she was in the eighth grade, paid for her to attend private school, and she transitioned into public school in the ninth grade.

Growing up, Nikita was fortunate enough to have the full support of her maternal grandparents who played a major part in her upbringing. Nikita is married and lives in Hayward with her husband with their two biological sons and stepson. She has been with her husband for 11 years and married for nine of those years. Nikita's blended family consists of her and her husband and they have three boys in the home, two together and one from her husband's previous relationship. Their family is “all one family, we help each other, and we support each other when we get in trouble together. We do well together, we're just one unit trying to just navigate life.” (Interview with Nikita, March 22, 2022)

**Maternal Figures**

Nikita was raised by a very loving family and spoke very highly of her mother. Nikita said that she grew up wanting to be just like her mother: “I remember a lot of times just being, watching my mom and saying, she's strong, I know that financially, she just got it, and when I grow up, I want to be just as savvy as she was financially.” Her mother did everything for her and her brother. She felt as if her mother sacrificed herself for the sake of her kids, since she
gave up things such as financial desires, relationships with her friends, and finding love. She just knew that her mother wanted to be able to provide for her family and was going to do it by any means necessary, which meant working multiple jobs in order to provide.

Her mother was also very intentional about not bringing people home who would negatively influence them. Her mother has exemplified humility and shown them what it means to work for what she wants without making excuses to obtain it. Nikita spoke highly of her family's maternal influences and shared that she isn't engaged in the social media world which assists in providing more peace of mind to her already frustrating day.

**Opportunities for Our Babies**

**Activities.** Nikita keeps her boys engaged in activities. Whether it's sports or academics, she tries to put them in activities throughout the school year. During the school year her children participate in afterschool programs and during summers in camp programs. But many of these were impacted when COVID things shut down. Nikita is usually the one that makes sure to keep the children engaged, to try to keep them challenged, and more or less so busy that they don't have time to get into trouble. She has had them consistently in sports. Basketball is the current dominant sport in her household, but she has also enrolled them in activities such as karate, swimming, track, and baseball.

**Education.** Nikita's two biological children are both enrolled in private schools. Private schooling to Nikita reflects her upbringing as well as her ability to control what kind of education her children are able to receive and giving them the potentially best outcome. Additionally, as their biological parent, she was able to make a choice for her own children, but she didn't have the same control over her stepson. She saw some notable differences between her children in private school and her step son in public school. She noted that all the children
enrolled in public school during the pandemic were allowed to pass to the next grade without truly checking whether or not they were truly prepared for the next grade. This differed from the children enrolled in private school who were made to attend summer school if they did not show competency to be able to be successful in the next grade.

Navigating Pandemics

I asked Nikita what was one of the biggest challenges for her as a mother during COVID-19, and she replied:

The very first thing that I remember was the children coming home, and now I was a teacher and I was not prepared, I didn't want to do this job, but I'm now having to do this job, and my husband would get up and leave to go to work every day, and I was home literally a day in and day out with the kids trying to manage homework. We didn't even have enough devices in the home, so everybody had to be online to go to school. So, we had to borrow laptops, rent an iPad. I mean, it was the worst experience and I found myself just overwhelmed, just completely overwhelmed. (Interview with Nikita, March 22, 2022)

Nikita recalled conversations with her husband where she expressed to him that she was struggling and even with all of the best that she was giving that it was still a lot to manage. Tired was an understand to express what she felt dealing with the feelings of wanting to make sure that your family was healthy and happy but also knowing that there was an unknown plague that was taking down so many people without any discrimination. Her mental health had been attacked and ultimately there was no end in sight. Even the presence of vaccinations did not cure anyone from the heart of what could happen. She expressed how she felt when her youngest caught COVID and the feeling was that the end was near:
When the youngest one contracted it [COVID-19], it was this overwhelming fear that impacted not only him, but the whole household. Like “Oh my God, we're going to die. We got COVID, we watched the numbers on TV.” (Interview with Nikita, cite)

As a mother to Black children, especially boys, Nikita felt that there was never really a period of time where she disconnected from the political issues that stayed present in society. As Black men, women and children such as Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin and most recently George Floyd continued to get killed by the police. The media coverage allowed Nikita and her family the space to have real time conversations about what was happening and why everyone needed to remain safe. It forced her to have tough conversations with her children as well as made her continue to think of ways to do her best to keep her children from becoming a victim.

The Unseen Superhero

While not a single mother, Nikita struggled a bit with being seen by her spouse, as well as times of being seen in the workplace. Her struggle to be seen and obtain relief has been an ongoing struggle. While she values her spouse and his contribution to the family, it still doesn't remove the additional layers that dealing with these pandemics has added to her plate. Through all the challenges of dealing with an unappreciative workplace, children who need mom to assume additional roles, and a feeling of needing more support, Nikita put on her cape and continued to mother and do an excellent job. Also, through this process, Nikita finished a major accomplishment of achieving her Bachelor's degree from Clark Atlanta University.

Simone

Simone, age 25, was born and raised in Vallejo, California. She has five siblings - four living and one that passed in 2019. She was raised by a single mother; she knew of her father, but
he wasn't active in her life. She didn't attempt to have a relationship with him until she was 18 years old when they re-sparked a relationship via Facebook. When she got pregnant with her first child, she and her father began connecting in person and have maintained a relationship to this day. Not long after her pregnancy Simone at the age of 21 was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes and mentioned that she needs to make so many more decisions than the average person, which can be very frustrating at times.

Simone is newly married and the mother of two children. At the time of our interview, she was pregnant with her son who is now a few months old. She also has a daughter who is four years old. She and her husband made the decision to have a non-conventional arrangement; they do not live together under the same roof, but do live very close to one another. As a mom to two toddlers and currently living alone, I asked her what type of support she receives from her husband. She stated “...today [I can feel like] I’m strong and [can be] preparing dinner and tomorrow I'm not feeling good so he'll pick up the slack basically, or if I'm washing [clothes] today and I don't feel like washing next time around, he'll do it. So I feel like he's just all-around supportive, I guess. Depending on what's needed.” (Interview with Simone, March 24, 2022)

**Maternal Figures**

Simone has come from very humble beginnings and expressed a level of pain and disconnect from her mother. She described her mother as having a hard exterior and being not supportive, unaffectionate, and an inadequate provider. Simone definitely expressed how much she loved her mother, but the relationship that they had was not what she would consider a “normal” mother-daughter relationship and she hopes to be better than that as a mother to her children, (SHE IS!)
While Simone’s mother had some bad traits, she also definitely had good ones. Her mother was strong and raised five children alone, but her resilience created a board that removed the positive parenting experience. Since her mother raised five kids by herself, Simone appreciated the resilience and the strength that her mother gave her. But with that, it kind of hardened her. When Simone would go through things in life, she felt like she didn't have enough support for that motherly love. As Simone got older, she realized that her mother was battling her own issues, which made it hard for her to be there for her.

Simone was made to be independent without any formal guidance and education from her mother. When she was 10 years old, her mother stopped cooking for her, and when she was 13, her mother stopped waking her up to go to school. Her rationale for not cooking was that she was working full time and did not have the time; so since she was providing the food, then she and her siblings needed to figure out a way to fend for themselves. Additionally, she had the theory that if her children were really motivated and wanted to go to school, they would get themselves up and go. She said her mother said things like “If you want it, you're going to make it happen.” At this time Simone learned to start using things like an alarm clock, wake herself up, get herself fed, and find her own way to school.

Simone uses all of these incidents with her mother as motivating factors of ways she doesn't want to be. She wants to be the mother who has compassion and empathy and allows her children the space to grow as little people, but with the support, validation and reassurance of their mother.

**Opportunities for Our Babies**

**Activities.** Simone has been looking to find ways to keep her toddler daughter active. She most recently had her daughter enrolled in gymnastics, but the environment has not been suitable
for her due to the type of attention she believes her daughter needs. Simone believes her daughter would benefit from more one-on-one contact and saw that while her daughter was in class she wasn't given the tools to focus so she wants to find other activities for her instead. She is currently exploring the options of karate and we discussed swimming as well as other activities to keep her active.

**Education.** Simone’s children are too young to discuss educational opportunities. Her four-year-old daughter was recently enrolled in preschool. She did discuss the possibility of homeschooling her children later since that is a strong belief from her husband.

**Navigating Pandemics**

Simone’s daughter was very young from the beginning to the “end” of the pandemic. Societal issues were not things she had to discuss with her daughter at this point since she would not be able to grasp what was going on. The pandemic was a time for her to process everything that was going on in society though. While having children too young to understand, she was aware of the harsh realities that lay ahead waiting to become the reality of her children. She knew that eventually she may experience the same level of helplessness that she sees so many other mothers go through and that she just has to be prepared to keep her children informed.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Simone lost her job and her daughter’s daycare was shut down for an extended amount of time. Simone stated that she used this time to work with her daughter on educational projects as well as just keeping the two of them active during the process.
**The Unseen Superhero**

This superhero was very unique from all my other participants. She is currently working on her Associate’s Degree with hopes to transfer and become a nurse. Simone has faced many obstacles over the years and despite all the challenges that have come her way, her cape still remains on her back even when it gets torn. She always finds a way to continue to fly and navigate whatever comes her way.

**Focus Group**

The focus group consisted of all of the participants except Simone, who was not able to be present due to her infant son being hospitalized. The remaining participants all met via Zoom on Sunday, October 16, 2022, and we spent about two hours addressing themes that came up in our initial interview that I felt that I needed to expand on.

The questions that we addressed in the focus group were as follows:

1. How do you feel Black Women struggle to be seen in society?
   - Peers
   - Employers
   - Society
   - Other parent(s)
   - healthcare
   - Other

2. What can be done to increase our visibility? Or is it possible to be seen?

3. What role did spirituality play in your upbringing?
**Group Introduction**

Before I got started asking these questions, I had my participants introduce themselves and their current family dynamics, detailing who lived in their home and how they ran the household. During this time my participant Cameryn told us how she recently moved her mother into her house that she just purchased and that there has been an adjustment in the power dynamics that exist in their household. Her current family dynamics include the shift toward how to parent without being overshadowed by the wisdom of her mother. Cameryn’s openness in sharing created an atmosphere where all the other mothers almost instantly began expressing what some would consider fairly personal stories of the challenges in their family dynamics, while being grateful to hear how others did things.

After the introduction of my participants, they all contributed to a word cloud (shown below) where they all listed words that described what it meant to be a Black Mother. Common themes included: “being everything,” “resilient,” “loving,” “strong,” and “powerful.” While a main goal of my dissertation has been to come from an empowerment standpoint as opposed to a deficit mindset, it was quite interesting to see how the mothers' descriptions primarily highlighted positive affirmations.

**Discussion of Themes**

In the discussion of the themes, I used this space to inform my participants of what came up most consistently throughout and the things that I wanted to dive deeper into. During this time all of the women offered new input on some issues that resonated with them a little more and offered additional insight to thoughts around each question. The subject of the superhero mom was met with the inability to be Batman without having a few Robins in the background holding
them down. (Unfortunately, there are no notable women superheroes with sidekicks). They expressed so much power in having support.

**Why Aren't Black Women Seen?**

This question was a very important question to go back and dive into further with my group. While I felt that in my initial interviews with these women that we had uncovered some of their beliefs about being unseen I truly felt that this was important to come back and discuss in a group so that all the women could benefit from the discussion of hearing one another break down what it meant to be unseen in other Black Mother’s world. An important thing to highlight is that even though my study focuses on the stories of Black Mothers, a lot of our struggle of being unseen is shared with Black Women without children.

Black Mothers’ struggle to be seen is not exclusive to just not being seen in one location. In the group discussion the struggle to be seen in the workplace, house, healthcare system and in society were the most common areas that came up.

**Work**

At work Black Women struggle to be seen and carried across many work environments. None of the participants shared that they never had a time where they didn’t feel seen or heard in the workplace but all the women said as they grew in their careers they fought to be in spaces where they could be seen. Nikita shared that she had worked for a company for 15 years and quit the organization in 2019 “out of frustration because of the lack of opportunities for promotion, for projects, for the simple things that other[white] colleagues were being afforded.” When asked if she felt if it was due to her race and/or gender she stated “both”.

Nikita then explained:
You're talking about an organization that was established in 1913 so you have over a hundred years of legacy, mistreatment of exclusion in an organization that historically even present-day is a male white-dominated industry…. so, in 2019 after maybe 13 years of service, I said I was tired of being passed up and overlooked for these same opportunities that were being afforded to others, who had less commitment, less work, ethics… less everything. (Interview with Nikita, March 22, 2022)

Nikita had worked and given herself to an organization that undervalued who she was and her contributions as a Black Woman. To hear this made me think about some of the experiences that I had also experienced as a Black Woman in the workplace. I can remember working for a company where my boss sent out a message saying she didn't want to work with the “Black Bitch” any longer and they were going to find a way to get me fired. What they didn't know was that they had accidentally copied me in the email and I read it.

It was one thing to think that someone had it out for you but another to see it for yourself. Similarly, the other shared statements about the issues of being seen in the workplace. It almost feels as if the better you do in the workplace, the more you know, the more you are challenged. Cameryn stated:

In [work] spaces, we have to overdo it, we have to, if they ask for a 20-page PowerPoint, you are doing 30. If they're giving you projections, if you're asking for projections for three months, you're giving them the 12-month projection just so they know you're on your stuff. So, in that space, as a black woman, it's almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy. We show up, not necessarily doubting ourselves, but knowing that we're going to be doubted. So, we come with more, we come with the extra hours, we come with the extra
work, we come with just all the extra. Thinking that that's how we're going to be accepted. (Focus group interview with Cameryn, October 16, 2022)

The superhuman qualities seen in the Black Woman aren't always seen as a benefit within the community. My participant Amauri shared how she struggles constantly to be seen in Corporate America. She, like all the other participants except Lashonda, found that she is often one-of one, Black Women in her division and sometimes the entire workplace. She has worked primarily in Corporate America and feels like never had anyone there who truly guided her and taught her what she needed to know so she had to keep creating a way for herself. Our inability to be given chances to do the same amount of work as others to get the same pay and opportunities has long existed. Work no matter what the role for us has never come just because we are who we are but always for what more we can do.

Healthcare

The healthcare system can be one of the scariest places for Black Women, many go in but most come out misdiagnosed, mistreated and misunderstood. And childbirth is where it is seen the most. Lashonda shared when she gave birth to her son the challenge of being heard came up several times. Lashonda’s request in the hospital at the time of her son’s birth was to put him on breast milk only, so she had this request put in her medical chart. Then she recalled the following:

I don't remember what time it was. But I just remember [the nurse] brought my son to me and the following conversation happened

*Nurse: Don't worry, I fed the baby.*

*Lashonda: Wait, I haven't pumped yet.*

*Nurse: Well I just gave him some formula.*
Lashonda: (now officially frustrated) Woman! In his chart it says breast milk only. Why are you giving my baby formula?

Nurse: Oh, well you were sleeping and you looked tired.

(Focus group interview with Lashonda, October 16, 2022)

Lashonda shared how not heard and not seen she felt as a mother, whose opinion matters, whose wishes for her own child would not be honored. She was in a vulnerable position after just giving birth and she did not feel seen or heard by the healthcare professionals who were supposed to be there to support her.

My own experience as a first-time mother was quite traumatic. I had two major instances where I felt unseen and unheard as a Black Mother to be. It was Friday, October 14, 2016, which is what would be one week before my first son was born. I had gone to the doctors for my check up since my due date was quickly approaching. I checked in to Kaiser Hospital in Hayward and at this time was seeing a fill in doctor since my primary was out sick. This doctor, who “happened” to be a White male I had seen at my previous appointment and I didn’t give a great vibe from him. The nurse had taken my blood pressure and weight prior to me entering the room as a routine part of the princess. When I saw him this time I went in and weighed 147lbs. I told him that I was dealing with what felt like sharp pains (not educated on the language of false contractions or Braxton Hicks), the doctor essentially said this was normal, took my blood pressure again, mentioning it was very high but not making any comments other than that. The doctor sent me home.

Fast forward a week later on Friday October 16, 2016, I would enter the hospital again, I was in pain, yet unfortunately I would be met by the same doctor again. The nurse had me step on a scale and I was at this time 179 lbs. I had gained 32 lbs. in one week’s time. My blood
pressure was still high. I feel inclined to mention that, my grandmother was a nurse, she asked me after every appointment how I was doing but since I was listening to the doctor, they told me everything was fine, so I thought the same. I didn't know how at risk I was. The doctor, and I will never forget his words said “Oh wow, you've gained a lot of weight this past week, I think everything looks good, you don't have to keep coming back”

I knew at this moment something wasn't right. I was 21 years old, a first-time mom, trying to remain independent through the process and pretty much pushed everyone out because I was embarrassed that my son's father didn't show up. As soon as I got home everything became a bit of a blur, I remember feeling hurt and concerned and I called my mother to tell her what happened. She told me to call the advice nurse, which I did and they told me to immediately go to the emergency room. I did and all the doctors and nurses that came in were baffled how I was not kept when I went to the doctor’s earlier that day. Unfortunately, the mistreatment did not end there.

While in the hospital, the doctor was monitoring me because they noticed that my son was losing fluid in the amniotic sac and my son was going into distress. During this process I was also abnormal. (I remember none of this my mother had to feel me in). The doctors were just drugging me up to keep my pain level down and we thought we would still have more time since I had another month before my son was even due. That wasn't God’s plan. I just needed someone who cared enough to be concerned about my well-being.

**Home**

All the mothers had very different views of what it meant to be unseen at home. Mothers like Amauri struggled to find a voice with her teens where she wanted to offer a more relaxed
environment in her home during the pandemic and in general but struggled to find the balance of what message her children were really receiving from her.

Having a spouse in the home did not necessarily guarantee a mother’s visibility or being seen more. Kamiyah, who is married shared with us:

I am effectively a single mother financially because [my husband] is not bringing in much money and I am a single mother during the day because he is gone. I understand that I am not(sing)le, because I know there are single mothers on the call and I cannot fully understand. But from what I was used to having in terms of a partner, it feels like [the support no longer exists] and I am struggling to do it all with the four babies and by myself. (Focus group interview with Kamiyah, Oct 16, 2022)

Nikita shared that her home is one of the only places where she has her true and authentic voice.

This is the one place where I feel confident, I feel comfortable in having my voice and having it heard. Although sometimes I wonder if they're [her husband and children] listening to me or not. Is it going in one ear out rather, but this is the place where I feel, surrounded in a place that I belong. (Focus group interview with Nikita, Oct 16, 2022)

The truth is that whether the father is living in the home or out of the home most of the mothers have shared feeling vulnerable and not fully valued. Even while Nikita shared that in her home, she felt this was a safe place for her. She also spoke about how when things go south in her home her children and her husband will oftentimes look to her to fix it, even when she doesn't have it in her to do. Even though I feel like my husband and I have worked together with building a healthy blended family relationship I find that sometimes I still feel like I carry more bags. I brought 3 children into our shared home and he brought one. Responsibilities can sometimes feel
like a burden and I end up feeling like it’s too much to ask, sometimes it has felt like a struggle to be seen by my partner even though I know he loves me and cares deeply for my biological children, I believe that my fight to be vulnerable while remaining strong hasn't always been able to work well together.

In society there seem to not be many gray areas on how Black Women are depicted. We are either seen as loud, distastefully dressed, uneducated, lazy, etc. Or we are seen as the powerful, independent forces who often lack vulnerability, at least in public. Kamiyah brought up how for Black Women “have it hard as hell” while as Black Women we can fully understand the struggle of the Black man she mentions that it often gets overlooked by our Black m

“I have to navigate white folk's racism then come home and navigate my partners' sexism. It's just exhausting, and I think that's why I'm like, and that's why I need my girlfriends to help me work through that” As a Black Woman, she is, WE are, exhausted.

**Education**

Kamiyah and Nikita both highlighted how in education being a Black Mother continues to be exhausting. Kamiyah spoke to the viewpoint of being an employee while Nikita spoke to the pressures of being a mother.

Kamiyah shared how there are mass numbers of Black Women that work in education, noting various theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins, BetKamiyah Love, etc., but while being highly represented in the educational system her Blackness is often called upon to solve all Black issues and that is not always realistic. “I have other things to do than to help every individual white teacher deal with their racist policies. But I do feel like what you are saying, when we develop, when we get to that point where we have the education, people look at us, but continue to ignore all the other black women.” (Focus group interview with Kamiyah, Oct 16, 2022)
Other Black Women, being the young girls that Nikita educates daily, whose voices too, need to be heard and needed to feel valued. While all the women agreed, this led Nikita to share that 9 out of 10 times the children and families of the kids that her children go to school with are of another race.

I always feel like I need to show up and make them comfortable to be around me or my husband or my family as a whole. And so, I am seen, but I want to make sure that they are seeing me the right way. And so, I come into those conversations and yes, this is where we live, this is where we go to school, or this is where we work, to make them comfortable that they have someone that is at their level or in a space that is non-threatening to them because their preconceived notions could be all the opposite of what I am and who I am. And so, I have to make sure that they see me for who I am and who my family represents. You talk about being tired, Kamiyah, just that exhausting process as I meet new parents every time to go back and redo this all over again. For every new school year or every birthday party that we go to, to show up and say I am seen, but I want you to make sure you are seeing me the right way. (Focus group interview with Nikita, Oct. 16, 2022)

I Was Raised in The Church

The church was a common theme that came up for all the mothers in addition to the fact that many of these mothers attended regularly or semi-regularly as children. As they grew up, they continued to still feel connected to God or a spiritual presence, but their attendance at routine services is not something any currently participate in. For Amauri, church was a routine occurrence with her grandparents. As she got older, she grew distant from the church, but when she had children, Amauri
I really felt that it was important for my children to be able to have a relationship with God. Now that I'm older, I believe in God, but I also believe in the universe and higher powers and things like that. So, spirituality has been playing a role in my life, my entire life. (Focus group interview with Amauri, Oct. 16, 2022)

Similar to Amauri, Cameryn grew up with her grandparents initiating and continuing her connection to the church. To Cameryn, God is the most important relationship in her life and instilling that in her son, as she put “in a non-Bible-thumping way” and not through a portal of “there's only one way for you to have a relationship or strengthen your relationship with God.” She wants her son to navigate knowing that God is the foundation of his life:

He doesn't have to call him God, he can call him whatever, but knowing that there is a higher power greater than him is important to me. I will feel like [I’ve done] my work with him if he continues that throughout his life. (Focus group interview with Cameryn, Oct. 16, 2022)

On the other hand, Kamiyah had a bit of a different journey with the church. Kamiyah’s mother made the decision to go to a Baptist church as a way to connect her to the Black community, since she is white. Over time Kamiyah grew distant from the church when she realized how sexist and homophobic it came off, which made her no longer interested in attended. When her mother was diagnosed with cancer, she saw how powerful the church community was and how it kept her mother alive. She saw how much her faith allowed her to navigate that journey to feel like she had a chance against cancer. Kamiyah shared she still leans into the faith, but not the organized part. She eventually found a church that was welcoming to people [and] that aligned more closely with her values.
My own experience with the church was impacted by my summers in the South. While I grew up in California with my mother and her side of the family, I used to stay in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, with my fraternal side almost every summer. I spent a lot of that time with my fraternal grandmother. The south was - and still very much is - a very religious state and the town is mostly centered around the church. Going to church while I was younger was a daily experience as I felt as if there was something to do daily, whether it be Bible study, church service, preparation for service, community engagement, and the list goes on.

In my youth, God was a very big presence in my life. My mother and maternal grandmother did attend church semi-frequently, but became less involved due to the constant nuisances in the church and contradictions of people's personal connection to the world, views of single motherhood, and homophobia. The church began to make my mother and grandmother feel as if it was a place where they would be judged as opposed to a place that would make them feel safe and secure. As I got older, around 12 years old, one of my childhood friends invited me to go with her, and it became almost a ritual for me to attend church with her and her family. I also went with my father during the infrequent times that I saw him.

Fast forward to my young adulthood to now. While I definitely believe in God and stay close to faith, I too have begun to feel disconnected to the church due to the contradictions of the people I've seen run the church and how people close to me, such as my father, have preached the gospel but don't follow their own advice.

WE are tired, Black Mothers are exhausted. There is this constant need to keep proving ourselves, being better than the person in front of or next to you. Throughout this process the women spoke in depth on how they were unseen but then the real question became how do we change this. Nikita was one great example of change, as Nikita betted on herself and stepped
away from a job that was at the time not offering her a work environment that displayed a sense of equity or inclusion across its company. Nikita knew that she deserved to be in a space that was going to pay her what she deserved and give her a chance to grow. A few months after Nikita’s exit in 2019, the same company that she previously worked for contacted her and asked that she come back. In this new role Nikita would now be working in management with better pay, but now being valued at what she already knew she was worth. It was a hard decision but it felt right to Nikita.

For me increasing visibility meant having representation in the hospital room. My grandmother saved me. When I was in distress, my mother had to call my grandmother, who was on her way out of town for her birthday trip. My grandmother came in and took over. My grandmother had been a nurse for many years and knew the ins and outs often better than many doctors did. She came in and told the doctors what medicines I did and did not need to be on. She tried to get them to let her do my epidural, and I'm pretty sure she was ready to deliver my son. 

What I and other Black Mothers - Black Women in healthcare - needed was people like my granny, who cared enough to find out, who understood that no two stories where the same, who paid attention to the little details such as my fast weight gain and constant high blood pressure that had just began my third trimester. I needed to be seen and heard as a Black Woman.

As Cameryn expressed:

… to increase our visibility... Even when we're met with resistance when we're met within invisibility, I think it's important in terms of, and I'm talking about professional spaces, bringing more of us with us. Nepotism is real and it's not just afforded to white individuals. Nepotism applies to us. (Focus group interview with Cameryn, Oct 16, 2022.
In different generations, you’re going to see changes in parenting just because of circumstances.” Our mothers brought things to the table based on the education they did or didn't have on how to be our mothers. I believe we could all say we genuinely loved our mothers even if we didn't always feel the love the way we felt a daughter should receive it. (Focus group interview with Nikita, Oct. 16, 2022).

**Summary of Findings**

Where do we go from here? This is a question I still find myself asking. As a Black Woman, the struggle to find answers and new ways to be seen and heard somehow feels like it will forever be a moot point. To be seen doesn't always mean to be seen in a positive light; to be seen and heard doesn't always mean that the message is going to be what we had hoped. As I think about the outcomes of my interviews and even reflecting on my own life, it appears that where we as Black Women struggle the most is with having and securing a strong foundation of support in and out of our personal lives.

Cameryn and Nikita had positive role models from their biological mothers which has carried on to the positive mothering experience that they have with their own children. Their mothers have both served as aspirations of who they wanted to be like when they got older. Then we have Kamiyah who had a great mother role model, but she felt that the lack of Black Mother figures in her life potentially made it harder for her to be prepared to raise her Black children.

Simone was raised with her mother, but they had a large disconnect throughout Simone’s life, which Simone said was due to her mother’s inability to be vulnerable and compassionate to her as a youth. This made Simone want to not take on the attributes of her mother. Then there was Amauri and Lashonda who had little to no relationship with their biological mothers and
were raised by other family members. Both of these women suggested that their moms served as an indicator of what not to be like and they both made tough decisions as mothers to ensure that as they raised their children that they always showed up and let their children know that they were worth sacrificing for.

These women all defied odds and made sure to show up for their children regardless of what obstacles may have gotten in their way. Through the presence of spirituality, their following through with their personal education, keeping their superhero cape intact, these women have all proven to be great mothers. Even though they have continued to struggle to be seen in society, they have all worked to create visibility and have all said that a great way to collectively support one another being seen is by showing up, supporting one another, promoting opportunities, We are all about finding ways to bring one another on, and ultimately being unapologetic about our Black skin and continue to fly strong as the superwomen we are.
CHAPTER V:

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND
CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

Chapter IV illustrates the accounts of seven Black Mothers who grew up in the Bay Area and their experiences as not just mothers but also as Black Women. These stories provided counter narratives to the traditional views of our women in history which leave out the voices of our Black Mothers. In the process of finding resources to even write this dissertation, I found a big absence in the captured narration of ordinary Black Mothers’ lives. I chose this topic at the beginning of the pandemic before anything was written; but since then, I have seen the presence of various podcasts and even regular television shows that are referencing the harsh realities of being unseen and unheard as Black Mothers.

Using the framework of BlackCrit Mothering, which acknowledges the existence of a racially biased system, urges an understanding of what constitutes Blackness and challenges conversations beyond racism by emphasizing being Black and knowing what it means to be Black (Dumas & Ross, 2016). I've been able to discuss and begin problem solving with my participants in new ways to help us be seen as Black Mothers in systems that historically keep us out of view in a positive site. In this chapter, I present the following: 1) the emergent themes and discuss how they relate to the scholarly literature in Chapter II, 2) reflections on the research process and focus group, 3) participants’ recommendations, 4) my recommendations for future research, practice, and policy, and 5) conclusion.
Discussion

Below again are the research questions:

1. How do Black Mothers negotiate parenthood while being unseen and unheard?

2. What does it mean to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area?
   a. How have Black Mothers created opportunities for their children?
   b. What are Black Mothers’ experiences of educating their children (i.e., what type of school do their children participate in)?
      i. Do their experiences create inequities or new learning opportunities for Black Mothers and/or their children?
      ii. How do Black moms use this time to educate their children on social issues?

3. What does it mean to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area during multiple pandemics?
   a. COVID-19
   b. Racial injustices
   c. Police brutalities

4. What are Black Mothers’ experiences of being a super-strong Black Mother?
   a. What are the dynamics in their Black family?

Responses to the Research Questions

RQ1. How Do Black Mothers Negotiate Parenthood while Being Unseen and Unheard?

No matter where a Black Woman is in her life, the struggle remains the same. Regardless how high our degree attainment and how much we seem to accomplish, we still experience a continued sense of lack of security and visibility within our community. Throughout this process
of research and interviews, I hoped I would uncover a group of women who found security in a part of the world or a section of their life that would somehow shine a light on all other sections of their lives. Black Women have historically been oppressed in the fight to change that remains. As Cameryn mentioned, even if we are asked to complete a task with our counterparts, we somehow face this unspoken expectation that in order to be seen as “equal,” we must do more. This directly connects to DeGruy (2005) and McKinley (2020) who described that regardless of class and wealth, Black Women are still likely to face more family challenges than their White counterparts.

Even a married mother tends to bear ultimate responsibility for her child's actions because parenting is still seen as the mother's domain (Bethay, 2020). All the mothers, whether married, in a relationship, or single, all experienced similar feelings of isolation and, in some form, being overburdened. Lashonda was the only of all the women who didn't share many feelings of isolation or lack of support at work or in the co-parenting dynamics. Black Mothers need to be seen and heard, and U.S. mainstream society must acknowledge “that African American middle-class families are navigating high achievement pressures in a social context that presents multiple obstacles to their intergenerational social mobility” (McKinley, 2020, p. 112)

**RQ2. What Does It Mean To Be a Black Mother in the Bay Area?**

Creating opportunities for our children was something that all the mothers highlighted. Whether it be having our children participating in afterschool programs or sports, each mother made sure to explore the different opportunities available to their children through their school or community. Cameryn spoke about how her son was not interested in many of the sports that his school had to offer, such as track and field and basketball, but he did love to swim. When
Cameryn made the decision to purchase her home, one of her choices also included what school system to get her son into. She chose the charter school route which housed a competitive swimming program that her son could participate in.

Other participants such as Simone, with younger children, were still trying to figure out what kind of opportunities fit the needs of her child and she began with gymnastics. Simone was aware that she wanted her daughter to be able to receive more personalized attention, so she is still seeking other activities.

For Amauri, being a mother to both a son and daughter has given her the awareness that both of her kids thrive in different environments so Amauri has worked to stay active in her children's school while also creating a community organization that will continue to help Black girls find the beauty in themselves through representation and through the support of Black Women who will mentor these young ladies into their early adulthood.

These findings align with Dow’s (2019) study of the identity borders of Black Mothers. Her interviews confirmed that regardless of where the mothers lived in the Bay Area, as well as in other parts of the world, Black Mothers faced a continued need to maneuver their Black middle-class identity. Additionally, creating opportunities for the mothers meant to stay aware of what their children were lacking and to find ways to make up for the deficit. The opportunities for these mothers did not necessarily come from the struggle of being able to provide for their children but rather from the struggle of being able to adequately provide emotional and physical support for our children in a time when we are often struggling to find our own place in society.

**RQ3. What Does It Mean To Be a Black Mother in the Bay Area during Multiple Pandemics?**

The most common theme that came up when discussing what it means to be a Black Mother during these unprecedented times was being exhausted. Exhausted from hearing about
children, fathers, mothers, and loved ones getting killed for senseless reasons; exhausted from taking on the job of parenting when it should be just mothering; exhausted from wearing the hats of the teacher, mother, sometimes acting father, the doctor, nurse, repair(wo)man, mental health therapist, among so many other roles. Exhausted is what took over these mothers during this time. Regardless of these mothers' relationship status, all felt as if their struggle was - and continues to be - the hardest because they have to do all these things with the expectation of never breaking down.

The need and want to be able to be vulnerable is something that was a common theme for the mothers. Nikita stated that she sometimes wanted to just come home and not be expected to show up. She wanted to be able to just close her door and know that her partner had it, but that wasn't often the case. To have to continuously go to work, to organizations that oftentimes don't acknowledge the issues of the Black community, and then to go into the world still not being seen even with the hate and injustice often occurring right in front of our faces, often makes our experiences unbearable. To be a Black Mother in the Bay Area has meant to be someone who has had to learn to be numb to the feelings and beliefs of others, to be okay with not always being represented in the workplace, to understand that even if we want our children to have a Black community experience that we will have to create a community of our own that learns to uplift, and not be afraid of the possible negative opinions that may come along with it.

Walton and Campbell (2021) uncovered that during the COVID-19 pandemic, Black people showed a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19. This fact is attributed to the social and economic inequities of minority groups in the U.S. during a time where the majority of the world was trying to figure out how to remain safe from invisible disease, Black Mothers too had to figure out how to address these issues while also navigating what it would mean to allow their
children to go outside and get fresh air, or get a snack from the store, without seeming threatening to people in their surroundings communities. Black Mothers, especially those trying to balance more work hours with family life, were 40% more stressed than families without children (BBC, 2020).

**RQ4. What Are Black Mothers’ Experiences of Being a Super-strong Black Mother?**

**Maternal Figures.** My participants were split into two groups that represented the type of mothering experiences that they had. Half of the participants expressed a positive regard of their biological mother and their involvement in their upbringing, while the other half expressed a sort of resentment towards their biological mothers for not being the mother that they knew they deserved. Nikita felt that she had hit the mom jackpot. Her mother showed her what it meant to work hard and how sacrificing material objects to obtain grander rewards such as purchasing a home was so meaningful and helped shape the type of mother that Nikita is today. As Nikita shared:

… so when I think about my upbringing, my mom worked tirelessly to provide for me and my brother, I can remember being young and watching her do the normal nine to five, but then doing overtime to make sure that we had everything that we wanted and needed. Looking back in hindsight, knowing that she was preparing the way for a better life for herself to be financially stable and creating wealth for herself inevitably to take care of us the best way that she could. (Interview with Nikita, March 22, 2022)

Nikita’s mother's hard work and dedication carried over to the wants and desires of Nikita and her future. Her mother was her super hero and she shared one thing she knew as a child was that “she wanted to be just like her mom when she got older.” She wanted to represent what it meant
to never give up and to do everything possible to ensure that her children had the best life possible.

On the other hand, Simone shared how who her mother was and what she represented was not the living standard of what motherhood meant to her. Simone wanted to be a parent who could be empathetic, be there for all the major moments and milestones, and be there to show her children that they were deserving of a mother who showed constant affection and empathy.

Simone shared:

I felt like I didn't have like enough support or that motherly …so for me with my daughter, I hope to always be mindful of how that made me feel and to not allow life in the circumstances I'm going through as far as stress and all this stuff, getting the way of being there for her, like at emotionally, spiritually, whatever, you know, try not to have that hard on me too. And stay kind of open-minded and soft in a sense when it comes to giving her the support that she needs. (Interview with Simone, March 24, 2022)

Historically and presently, community mothering practices represent a central experience in the lives of many Black Women, and participation in mothering is a form of emotional and spiritual expression in societies that marginalize Black Women (Collins, 2002). The experience of being a Black Mother has appeared to evolve almost solely on the evolution of how our mothers received and chose to transmit what they learned about the practice of being a mother throughout history.

The ideal for all of the mothers was to move away from the stereotypical norms of what it meant to be a Black Mother in society. These mothers were not examples of the oppressive themes that Collins (2002) referenced as “the Mammy, the Matriarch, the Welfare Mother or the Jezebel” (p. 153). In actuality, these women were just superheroes who were misunderstood. On
the other hand, several did experience the “Othermother,” as both Smith (2016) and Collins (2002) suggested. The “Othermothers” that raised Amauri and Lashonda represented a group of phenomenal women who made the decision to raise children they did not birth but cared enough about to invest in the future.

**How spirituality guided us.** While it was not one of the questions that I asked, the subject of spirituality came up consistently with every Black Mother while we discussed their upbringing. I chose to use the word ‘spirituality’ rather than ‘religion’ because it seems to represent the mothers’ current connection to their current belief systems. The experience of the Black Mother through religion helped to shape history and how our Black Mothers were able to cope with trauma as different issues plagued our community.

As mothers continue to mourn the loss of their Black children, religion has been one of the most consistent forces that have helped these women cope. In the pandemic of police brutality, the church has served as a beacon and a safe haven for Black Mothers to convene to be able to mourn. The church has also served as a place where Black Mothers have set up their political shop. Black Mothers such as Mamie Till, mother to the slain 14-year-old Emmett Till, used the church as a political statement to show the horrific actions that happened to her son. The Black church served as a beacon of hope for the Black community, allowing for a safe space for solidarity. Hope was the primary source of inspiration for civil activities (Mohamed, et al., 2021)

Still today it appears that the older generations rely more on the church, and studies have shown that young Black adults today are less religious and engaged in Black churches than were older generations (Mohamed, 2022). The church, in a physical sense, has become less of a place that is needed to show our connection to our faith. The new generation of Black Mothers have been less engaged than that of the founding church mothers. The original church mothers were
the foundation of the Black church. They could be found in the front pews and the hierarchy of many churches. They were the glue that nurtured generations of worshipers (Ihejirika, 2015). The church has shielded our families during trying times. During slavery the presence of spirituality through song, praying and their belief is what kept our ancestors going.

There is no issue in life that our spirituality cannot connect us to. Whether we are praying and thanking God for protecting us from harm or thanking God for a gift such as getting a job or completing our degree. Spirituality has not faded from our lives. Our connection to spirituality has also shaped our use of herbal remedies as opposed to western medicine. In the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, I can personally account for the use of many herbal remedies when healthcare access was limited and untested. Additionally, due to many Black Women’s lack of trust in the healthcare system, oftentimes we will turn to herbalists (known to some as conjurers) to recommend remedies for illnesses from the common cold to cancer. This religious heritage also included the use of herbal medicine and charms, applied by conjurers, who were believed to be able to heal disease, harm an enemy, or make someone fall in love (Mohamed, et al., 2021).

**Recommendations**

**Recommendations for Research**

In the process of conducting interviews and facilitating the focus group, many excellent ideas emerged through these discussions that could be used to contribute to the future research. A few different things came up for me during my research that I felt would be great if only I had had more time and opportunity to explore them further. Ideas such as really exploring what it would mean for young Black girls to be taught what it means to become a Black Woman and
how to use their cultural capital to shape their womanhood. As a part of ongoing research, it would be important to continue to follow the lives of our Black Mothers and look at the impact on young girls who are nurtured and taught vulnerability at an early age.

For further research it would be great to conduct a longitudinal study that would start from following a group of young girls from the time they enter middle school on through early adulthood. While I believe that all stages of young Black girls' lives are important, it would be important research to record a large group of young ladies from the time they began puberty and explore the impact of positive mentorship in their lives. These mentors would serve as positive models to help guide them, expose them to positive behaviors, and teach things around mental health, personal health, job readiness and so forth. The hope would be that if/when these young ladies decide to become mothers that they would have the necessary tools to be both mentally, physically and financially prepared to take care of their young. While I am aware that all young ladies will not all become mothers whether due to choice, being biologically unable, or through other situations, it would be important to still positively reinforce these young women as they still need support in understanding the trials and tribulations that come along with being Black Women.

This type of study would allow us to see how the experiences and past traumas of the Black Mother can be changed with positive reinforcement at a young age and to view how outlets to deal with trauma early on could impact their ability to deal with other traumas later in their lives.

**Recommendations for Policy**

The inequities that Black Mothers face are not isolated incidents, but rather the by-products of systemic racism in our society that has festered for far too long (United States
Government, 2022). To explain this further in order to assess women's health and increase positive outcomes for women's health, we must first be able to deal with health disparities that exist along racial lines which includes “access to health care, adequate nutrition and housing, toxin-free environments, high-paying job sectors that provide paid leave, and workplaces free from harassment and discrimination” (United States Government, 2022).

Black Women need to be taken care of on all levels from the moment they step foot in their first classroom as a toddler to the time they step foot in the hospital to give birth to their first child. There should be policies put in place that address each area of inequity for the Black Mother with direct impact on Black Mothering, such as housing, unequal pay, lack of healthcare access. All of these policies would help to create a formal pipeline of support to tackle racial issues prior to conception.

**Recommendations for Practice**

In order for issues around inequities to be addressed, practitioners across each of these fields need to have formal sensitivity and bias training on how to deal with Black Mothers. Every culture and community come with their own shared experiences and health issues that are often predisposed due to race. As a result, it is important to offer tools that can help Black Mothers navigate these issues starting from preconception. To have support that can offer options for Black Women to get trained in fields, such as healthcare workers, mental health professionals, teachers, lawyers, law enforcement, would be a step in creating representation and understanding across all systems. Helping Black Women today to be seen and heard in society is to create spaces that allow us to grow and pay it forward to other future generations of Black Women.
While there is no one-size-fits-all answer, each participant addressed certain topics that could make for excellent tools for Black Mothers to use going forward. These recommendations for practice include:

1. Black girl empowerment groups
2. Black Mothering podcast
3. Black Mother resource website
4. Publishing the black mothering journals
5. Mothers of others group
6. Black mothering check in group

**Black Girl Empowerment Groups**

The first recommendation came up after my interview with Amauri. As she talked about her daughter and the issues that were coming up with body positivity and being comfortable with her own skin, the thought of having opportunities for our young Black girls came up. The fact of the matter is that many of these young women will one day be mothers who will be faced with so much adversity along the way that it is important to start teaching them now that they are great. While they are all beautiful and can be strong, we want them to feel that as young ladies it is okay to express vulnerability and love of self. Having groups for our young Black girls to support and empower them is a great form of motivation that will definitely carry on to adulthood. The lack of presence of biological mothers with my participants suggests that instilling young women with skills and tools to cope with motherhood as part of their future journey could help to heal broken homes before it happens. To teach these young ladies while they are young how to dig into their self-love is to also show them how their self-love will allow
them to love others. including the people they may raise whether biologically or in the role as an “Othermother.”

**Black Mothering Podcast**

The second idea is having a Black Mothering podcast for our Black Mothers who sometimes are looking to listen to other mothers with shared experiences. The ideal of the podcast is to have weekly/monthly check-ins and discuss topics about how to deal with your teenager, quick meal recipes, parenting in diverse households, etc.. The idea would be to just hold a platform where mothers can feel heard with their issues and receive useful advice or feedback.

**Black Mothering Resource Website**

The third recommendation is to have a Bay Area Black Mothering resource website. While talking to my participants, I heard so many different expressions of “I wish I would have known” or “I wish this opportunity had been shared publicly.” My vision is to have a website where Black Mothers can have a one-stop resource page that shares everything from jobs to educational opportunities, programs for their children, Black childcare providers and other culturally or personally relevant opportunities without having to look all over the place. I want to be able to have Black Mothers not have to work harder than they already do to get support that we already have to fight hard for.

**Publishing the Black Mothering Journals**

As a part of my contribution to this research, one thing that I believe is important in the topic of being unseen and unheard as Black Women is to create a space where Black Mothers will always be seen and heard and our voices will become a part of academic journaling history. The women all compiled very beautiful and meaningful letters to their mothers and children that
spoke to their experiences of being the child to a Black Mother as well as being a mother to Black children. To be able to come back even a decade from now and reflect on this experience would allow other Black Mothers to see that they are not alone in their plight to be seen and heard and that others mothers have fought alongside them.

**Mothers of Others Groups**

This subject came about during a talk with Kamiyah who mentioned that her white mother was not able to fully provide her the competencies that she needed in order to be prepared for the Black Mother experience and also couldn't tell her what it meant to be a mother while Black. The ideal of this group would be to hold a space for mothers who didn't reflect the race of their Black children to be able to have Black Women help them navigate many of the social, political, and cultural issues impacting them. This could include talking about a common topic like how to manage Black children’s hair and how/why their hair takes different kinds of care then just about any other race.

**Black Mothering Check In Group**

The last recommendation is very similar to that of the mothers of Others group with the expectation that Black Mothers who would like to have a safe space could discuss their issues in real time and be able to talk to other Black Mothers about the Black Mothering experience.

**Conclusion**

This process has been such a long and beautiful journey. I honestly don't know what I expected when I began this process. When I started my dissertation journey, I knew that I wanted to write about something that connected to who I was as a Black Woman, and this topic provided the opportunity to do just that. My struggle to be seen and heard has not just impacted one layer. Whether I am at work, home, or driving down the street, I always have to stay aware of who I am
and what I do to the space when I enter. As a mother, it has been even more important for me to recognize the things that I do and do not know and make sure that I educate my children on the process of being Black in America. This process wasn't just about the Black Mother experience, because I couldn't do it without talking about the experience of being a Black Woman.

My participants all proved to be very engaged with my process, and Nikita even mentioned how “MY success was her success.” This led me to think how the process of being seen and heard has to start with us. In order for Black Woman to be seen, it may just take us climbing ladders and setting the position for those who come after or beside us.

This dissertation process has allowed me to reflect on who I am and what my contributions to future generations would be. I can only hope that for anyone, and especially any Black Mother who reads this and is looking to see if they should keep going, the answer is “Yes!” If you don't know if it is for your child, then who will?
REFERENCES


https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html


https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2012.675173


Ira, P. (2021, April 1). *Black Women are the most unprotected and disrespected people in society.* Medium. Retrieved November 8, 2022, from https://medium.com/equality-includes-you/black-women-are-the-most-unprotected-and-disrespected-people-in-society-9a093b621b6f


Jackson, T. (2020, September 25). On Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Black people don't even have basic safety: Retrieved November 15, 2021, from https://drtaharee.medium.com/on-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-black-people-don-t-even-have-basic-safety-b2de658319cc


https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm


Roberts, J. D. (2021, June 9). Pandemics and protests: America has experienced racism like this


https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006

Zackodnik, T. (2004). "I don't know how you will feel when I get through": Racial
APPENDIX A: Demographic Questions

A. Ice Breaker:

Tell me something you've done recently for self-care that didn't include your child(ren)

Tell me something I don't already know about you.

B. Housekeeping

Do you want me to use your real name or an alias?

If alias. What name?

C. How do you identify as a mother?

Single-no support

Single - co parent

Relationship (with parent)

Relationship - (without bio-parent)

Married - (all children together)

Married - (blended house)

Other
APPENDIX B: Research and Interview Questions

1. Research Question: How do Black Mothers negotiate parenthood while being unseen and unheard?

   INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
   
   a. What does being Black mean to you?
   
   b. What does being a woman mean?
   
   c. Have you experienced racism/sexism in the workplace?
      i. What was the experience?
   
   d. Do you express concerns regarding negative treatment at work?
      i. Why or why not?
      ii. Do you feel like you would be retaliated against if you discussed job concerns?
   
   e. Do you feel safe in your community?
      i. Home?
      ii. Work?
   
   f. How do you stay connected to your culture?

2. Research Question: What does it mean to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area?

   INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
   
   a. What type of activities and/or organizations are your children involved in?
   
   b. What type of education does your child receive? (public, private, home-school etc..)
      i. Why did you choose this method?
      ii. Has your child ever been discriminated against while at school?
1. What was their experience?

   c. Are Black history/black social issues taught at your child's school year-round?
   
   d. Do you teach your children about Black history/social issues?
   
   e. Do you believe raising Black children is different than for any other ethnic group?
      i. Why?

3. Research Question: What does it mean to be a Black Mother in the Bay Area during multiple pandemics?

   a. COVID-19
   
   b. Racial Injustices
   
   c. Police Brutalities

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Have you discussed racism with your children?

   a. What was said?
   
   b. How does their father discuss racism with them?

D. Research Question: What are Black Mothers’ experiences of being a super-strong Black Mother?

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

   a. What are your current family dynamics?
   
   b. Who is in your household?
   
   c. If with spouse- what is each spouse's responsibility
      1. Financially
      2. Household
      3. Childcare
d. Do your fears change based on the gender of your children?
APPENDIX C: Focus Group Agenda

Black Mothering Focus Group

16 October 2022 / 6:30 PM /Zoom

Attendees

Kassie, Cameryn, Kamiyah, Nikita, Amauri, Lashonda

Unable to attend: Simone

Agenda

Introduction (6:35-6:45pm)

1. Name
2. Family household dynamics
3. Pseudonym? Address change? What's next?

Ice-Breaker (6:46-6:55pm)

Response: https://PollEv.com/free_text_polls/AREPnUgLdxYuZLWZsb2R4/respond

Themes (6:55-7:10pm)

5. What came up from all of your interviews?

Follow up Questions: (7:10-8:00pm)

6. How do you feel Black Women struggle to be seen in society?
   ○ Peers
   ○ Employers
○ Society
○ Other parent(s)
○ healthcare
○ Other

7. What can be done to increase our visibility? Or is it possible to be seen?

8. What role did spirituality play in your upbringing?

9. Were you able to work from home during the pandemic?

Writing Prompt: (8:00pm-8:30pm)

Writing Prompt:

Dear Mom, I thank you for…

Mom, I wish you would have told me and/or showed me….

My child(ren), what I have loved about being your mom

My child(ren), my hopes for your future are….
APPENDIX D: Voices of Our Black Mothers

As an opening to this space, I shared a poem that was recently shared with me regarding gratitude to my participants and them taking the time to be present with me that day. This poem serves as a reminder that we are enough

Radical Gratitude Spell

By Adrienne Maree Brown

A Spell To Cast Upon Meeting A Stranger, Comrade Or Friend Working For Social And/Or Environmental Justice And Liberation:

You Are A Miracle Walking

I Greet You With Wonder

In A World Which Seeks To Own

Your Joy And Your Imagination

You Have Chosen To Be Free,

Every Day, As A Practice.

I Can Never Know

The Struggles You Went Through To Get Here,

But I Know You Have Swum Upstream

And At Times It Has Been Lonely

I Want You To Know

I Honor The Choices You Made In Solitude

And I Honor The Work You Have Done To Belong

I Honor Your Commitment To That Which Is Larger Than Yourself

And your journey
To love the particular container of life
That is you
You are enough
Your work is enough
You are needed
Your work is sacred
You Are Here
And I Am Grateful
Amauri’s Letter

Dear mom, I thank you for

Doing what you felt was best. I know that as a mother, it is hard at times. I understand what you had to do in moments of uncertainty. I don't judge you for your decisions. I pray that you know this!

Mom I wish you would have told me and/or showed me

More about your childhood. I wish you would share your STORY growing up and becoming the woman you are today. Over the years our relationship has been rocky. Today, I feel like we are able to connect as women and start there. I'm happy that we get to have different conversations now and be able to learn from one another. I pray that one day you feel comfortable enough to share more of your story with me or even with someone who can help you break down the barriers you face today. You are loved and are an amazing woman.

My children, what I have loved most about being your mom...

Is my journey. A lot of people didn't think I was going to be able to do it.. not only was I a mom by 16 but then had a second child by 21. You both have been blessings to my life and I continue to learn and want to keep pushing myself out the box to be the best mom I can be to you both. I love our moments with each other, even when there is frustration because we are learning and stretching new limits.

My child(ren), my hopes for your future are....

To live a full, free, and happy life. To know who you are, who you are, and the power you hold. To hold your head high and be the best version of you so that it feels your spirit and soul with joy.

My concerns for your future are....
As you continue to grow, challenges will come your way and you will have to decide what to do. Sometimes, I'm concerned that with the world constantly moving that I make the right decisions when guiding. If you lose your way you remember that you can always lean on your faith.
Cameryn’s Letter

Dear Mom, I thank you for...

Instilling a strong sense of self and responsibility in me. Though physical touch and more emotional version of love wasn't your particular language, I know that I learned to navigate this world as a confident and sure woman. You raised me in a way where very few boundaries were set but I truly believe that this was because you knew that I naturally had a spirit of wanting to succeed and be great in this world. You knew that I would let nothing get in my way when it comes to becoming a version of myself that both you and I and the women who have come before me would be proud of.

Mom I wish you would have told me and/or showed me....

The truth about womanhood and motherhood! I sometimes wish that you did less shielding and more exposing me to exactly what it would be like to be the head of my household and the support of not only my life but many lives. While teaching me to be a strong and dependable woman, I wish I could have seen a softer side of you that knew how to truly and deeply love herself and who was open and willing to be loved by a man. I wish you would have shown me what it's like to be in love and find the love of my life. Part of me feels like I may have been able to open myself up sooner to a pure form of love but other parts of me know that this is exactly where I am supposed to be. I wish there were talks among the women in my family and the passing on of wisdom, positivity and strength. All things happen for a reason. I found those things on my own and I now get the chance to show you how to live and love unapologetically at any age! I'm grateful that God has granted us the opportunity to learn from each other as women and we are becoming lifelong learners together.

My child, what I have loved most about being your mom
I love seeing you grow into a young man who has naturally found his way and moral compass. I thank God everyday that being your mother doesn't feel like work. You are the most intelligent, pure hearted, loving, confident, strong and sure young man that I know. I love that there are so many things about you that are similar to me but so different at the same time. I love to learn from you and know that a lot of the things that I instill in you won't resonate until you start to navigate this world on your own and you begin to spread your wings. From the moment I brought you into this world, I knew I was meant to be your mother. Our bond is untouchable and unmatched. My hope is you spread the love that we have created and you bless people in this world with the love that you give. Your heart is huge and so many people deserve to experience your heart.

*My child, my hopes for your future are....*

Your happiness and personal form of success are my priorities. Speak up when something isn't right. Protect your heart when you know it's not being protected by others. Say yes to adventure. Say yes to newness. Do all the things that are placed on your heart and do it scared, nervous and unsure. Allow God to be your center and find Him in the way that you see fit. Walk away when a thing no longer serves you. Push through when you know that the outcome is worth it. Fight the good fight and know that the fight is enough. You don't have to prove a thing in this world. Your only competition is yourself. Your passion, journey and life are unique to you and there's a reason why God made us so complex. It's ok to be different and the people who understand you the most will be "your people". Know that your Mom is your #1 person and will always be here for and with you!

*My concerns for your future are....*
Trusting the wrong people! You have to know that my job is to guide you but I cannot make decisions for you in life throughout your entire life. The hard part about being a mother is mourning what I want for your life for what you want even if I don't agree or support it! While I have no fear that your life will be amazing, it will have its tests and challenges. Some of these I can relate to and others you will have to rely on your tribe of male friends and family to help you cope and support you through it. Know that your intuition is your guide and God will never steer you wrong but we're human and always desire to see what's on the other side of leading our own path. This is natural and I expect you to explore. You will always know what leads you back and it's never too late to restart a journey. You got this!
Kamiyah’s Letter

*Dear mom, I thank you for*

everything. You were an amazing role model for how to be a caring and supportive mother to my children while still being an agent of change in our community. And thank you for finding me

a black woman therapist when I was in middle school. I'm still benefiting from having a healthy relationship with therapy as a child.

*Mom, I wish you would have told me*

that getting married won't protect me from becoming a single mother. You knew this and I know that you hoped I would find a great partner. You also didn't encourage me to aspire to marriage, just to be happy. But I would have appreciated more honest conversations about the struggles of marriage and what I should have considered before picking a partner and getting married.

*My children, what I have loved most about being your mom*

is watching you each grow into your own person. I also love watching the relationships that you have with each of your siblings. You all bring me so much joy.

*My children, my hopes for your future are*

that you don't have to work as hard as me. That you find careers that are aligned with your passion while contributing to our community in a meaningful way. I hope that you remember that self love is the best love and to only give your heart to someone who recognizes your greatness and will love you unconditionally.
My concerns for your future are that our society is becoming more polarized and that climate change will make living more difficult. Through it all, be there for one another and make time for the things that bring you joy.
Lashonda’s Letter

Dear Mom, I thank you for...

Giving me life, you were going to terminate your pregnancy and decided not to and go into a treatment program instead. I also thank you for doing the best you could as far as trying to raise me the early part of my life being a repeat offender and battling drug addiction. Thank you for recognizing you had a problem and deciding to give custody of me to your mother. She stepped in and did the best job she could to mother me in your absence.

Mom, I wish you would have told me ...

That you were battling a drug addiction and were committing crimes that took you away from me, at times I thought you didn’t love me and that’s why you weren’t around. I hated and held resentment in my heart for your mother because I thought she was lying to you when she told me the truth about your situation. I wish you could have been honest with me so I could love on you more and her as well and not feel like I wasn’t loved enough. It felt like it was all 3 of us against each other. I also wish you didn’t do things like leaving me with strangers while chasing your drug addiction particularly a man once where anything horrible could have happened to me. I wish you could have been loved or whole so you would have never turned to drugs for self-healing from your childhood traumas. I wish we could have been the mother and daughter. I cried for so many nights and didn’t even know why I was crying. Lastly I wish we could go back in time and be whole again because so many parts of us are broken.

Dear Mom, I thank you for (written in the voice of her daughter)

First and foremost making the decision to give me life. Some are not afforded the opportunity to even be born. I would also like to thank you for doing the best you knew how to do in this journey called raising children. With raising me you definitely made some mistakes
along the way but I thank and appreciate you for being able to apologize for those mistakes. I
would also like to thank you for going back to school and pursuing your education which not
only bettered you as a person but as a mother. Taking the ECD classes gave you a better
understanding of and skillset to parenting. Some of the things I appreciate is your ability to
parent with patience and understanding. I would also like to thank you for nurturing the healthy
and strong relationship I have with my dad. Being divorced and co-parenting I’m sure is not an
easy situation but you, in all honesty, I can say handled it with total grace, compassion and with
my best interest at heart.

*Mom, I wish you would have told me that (written in the voice of her son)*

My brown skin was a threat to some in this society. I am a 15-year-old black male with
brown skin and I have begun to encounter forms of racism that I have been protected from
before. I come home from school with stories now that I never encountered before. As a
younger child it was easy to make friends with anyone but now my friend group is smaller. Part
of that is because I choose to be close to those that I feel are my real or true friends but that is
also dependent on how I’m treated by others at school. Sometimes I feel like my size being 6’2
and 220 lbs as a black male is a threat to some and they are intimidated by me and stereotype me
unnecessarily. And for this I wish you had given me a warning before I reached this stage.
Growing up as a young kid was full of loving my skin which is great but now, I know that some
in the outside world don’t love it and it’s a threat.

*My children, what I have loved the most about being your mom is*

The unconditional love that is given to me. It feels like you both wake up with an
automatic feeling of admiration for being a part of this family and my child. Kiki, my oldest and
my daughter, you sing a little tune when I come into your room in the morning and say
good-morning and how did you sleep. Khairee my youngest and my son you just love your mom
to no end, been called a mama's boy from birth. Now that you are coming into your manhood,
I’m seeing that you have developed awareness of wanting to protect me. You also have the same
affinity toward your sister but as the big little brother because she is special needs you always
held that feeling toward her. I see you admire the accomplishments that I have made and you
love them for me and always are my champion and cheer leader pushing me and reminding me
to go further. I have loved watching you grow physically even when I wanted you to go back to
being my precious little babies just as much as watching you two grow into the soon to be young
adults that you are. I’ve also loved having a hand in molding you into the awesome individuals
you are but at the same time knowing and recognizing how you both have developed into who
you are as people on your very own strengths and character.

My children, my hopes for your future is that...

It is filled with joy and wellbeing. I think as a mom that is the foundation of my hopes
and dreams for you two. Being able to live life being joyful and having overall wellbeing are at
the top of my list for my hopes and dreams for you. For you Kiki you were born with so many
obstacles that simply making sure you survived was an obstacle to overcome. Once you were
stabilized and began to thrive, we were able to focus on you being the happy joyful baby you
deserved to be. Now you are a master at the craft of being an overall joyful person. Waking up
singing and giggling throughout the day make it clear to me that you have that part of life
mastered. Kiki as far as your overall well-being, I want you to always feel safe with your
caregivers and the people who are in your life. The fear of leaving your baby or letting someone
else care for your babies when they are growing up, I know is a natural occurrence for moms.
The part that’s the scariest is having an adult child that needs some of the same level of care and attention as a small child from either caregivers or others in their life. My hope is that you will always have people who are kind, gentle and patient with you and will give you the level of care that you deserve with dignity. Khairee, my hope for your future is that you always stay true to yourself and know who you are as a person and be happy with that person. You are a young man coming into yourself in what unfortunately can be a cruel world. I want you to be joyful, be safe, and have abundant success. Being safe may be my most important hope for you because it can pretty much encompass so many other things, I hope for you like the two others I listed above. Being safe can bring joy as well as success. I hope that the success that you have in life is never limited to but definitely includes monetary success. With monetary success so many things can come like generational wealth for our future generations but you having success in life and relationships are so incredibly important to me as well. My hope is for you to take the college route early in life and not later like myself so you can have an ideal experience in achieving the goal of higher education. If college is not for you then as it’s not for some, I hope you choose a path in which you can still be educated in some other way.

_As I stated before, your safety and well-being. Thinking about how this has come up for me a few times in this letter to you two, it is now evident that your safety and well-being are my highest priority and my most worry. I think as a mom there is a blanket level of worry, we have for our children, but being a black mother adds another level of worry and the need for protection. There are certain barriers and obstacles that we face as black people that others don’t have to endure and this translates into having to make the adjustment needed to keep you both protected. This level of protection has to come in different forms, like Khairee, I must let you_
know that even though you are the amazing young black man that you’re growing into being, there is a threat to your very existence because of white supremacy and racism. Just simply living in the skin that you have is seen as a threat to society. And Kiki being a person living with disabilities that can make you vulnerable to be preyed upon if left in the wrong hands. I pray every day for your protection and for the strength of our tribe, we call family to be able to provide it. I end with a message to you both that as your mother I LOVE YOU FOREVER AND ALWAYS.
Nikita’s Letters

Nikita chose to write a separate letter to each of her children and her mother

Letter #1

Dear mommy,

I thank you for...

Everything! I know that may sound impossible, but it is absolutely true. I thank you for giving me life on that Friday night on October 26 in 1979. I thank you for your unconditional love and countless sacrifices to provide the best life within your control to me and my little brother. I thank you for always being there to tell me the truth. I especially thank you for the times you said no, Nikita. Tee hee hee! Yes, even when you said no I couldn’t go to the “best party ever” during my 9th grade in high school. Your amazing ability to keep both me and my brother safe, teach us responsibility, and provide for us as a single mother is why I love you so much. I thank you for your support as I transitioned from being a child/teenager to adulthood. You allowed me to make my own mistakes, learned valuable lessons through those mistakes, and you still had open loving arms when I needed my mommy’s hug to make it feel better. Now as a wife and mother, I thank you for being an amazing mother-in-law and nana to my family. They now get to experience the same (maybe even better) love that I have known my whole life.

Thank you for everything mommy!

Mommy I have one wish for you. I wish you would have showed me

The dynamics of being married and raising a family. This wish serves two purposes. I wish you would have spent some of your time dating and eventually finding another chance at love and a husband to share your life with. I am thankful for your dedication to your role as mother, but you deserve companionship too. The second part of that wish would have taught me
a lesson of how to maintain a partnership, raise a family with a two parent household, and still have time for myself. I am learning these lessons as I go and sometimes spend my time wondering if I’m doing it right. Praying that my choices lead to the outcome I intend to accomplish.

Mommy you’re the best parent ever and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. I have the utmost respect and admiration for you. I love you beyond measure. May we be blessed to enjoy many more years together on earth, experiencing love, laughter, and life lessons together. With all my love,

Nikita

Letter #2

Dear Jr,

*I want you to know I have loved*

you since the first day I met you, when you were 3 years old in February 2010. Before we met, I heard so many stories about how awesome you were because your dad loved talking about you. I take pride in saying I have 3 boys and a husband. What I have loved most about being your bonus mom is having you home with me. I miss you every single day you’re away from me. I know you have to share your time between two households, but I absolutely love it when it’s our time to be with you. Watching you grow up has been a joy and challenge, but mostly joy. I am proud to see the respectful, intelligent young man you are becoming. I look forward to seeing you mature into being a responsible dependable man. You’re an awesome big brother to Nick and Miles, which brings me joy.

*My hopes for your future are*
…very simple. I hope that you make good choices in your life and discover your passion to lead to your heart's desires. I know, I know, you're probably tired of hearing me say make good choices, but I really want you to hear it. It has been my role to help guide you with how to make choices and now you’re at the point in life where these choices are yours to own. So make good choices, and learn from the not so good choices. Yes, there will be mistakes, it’s part of life. But I promise to be here with open loving arms when you need my hug to make it feel better. Jr I hope you find confidence with every step you take on your life journey and find power and influence in your voice. I also hope you have joy and happiness in your heart!

*My concerns for your future are:*

simple and they are the same concerns I have for your two younger brothers. I am concerned about the world and society we live in. I worry that our society will judge you just by looking at you. They will make unfair assumptions about who you are, what you’re capable of doing, and ultimately hinder you from meeting your full potential. I am concerned this world will give you cruel and unjust treatment in your life and how you will respond to it. I pray you will have wisdom and thoughtful courage to endure these experiences when it happens, because it will happen, it’s just a matter of when and how often. I am here for you with a black mother's love to uplift you and reaffirm your greatness as a black man.

The most important words I want you to hear from me and always remember are, I love you Jr.

With all my love,

Cupcake

Letter #3

Dear Nickolas,
My first born baby boy. You are my miracle baby. I prayed for you, before I even met your dad, I prayed for a son and I knew I’d name you Nickolas. I prayed even more for you after learning about your heart condition when I was 5 months pregnant. One of my best days in life was June 24, 2011 when I met you.

I love being your mommy. I am so proud to say I have 3 boys and a husband. What I have loved most about being your mommy is watching you defeat medical odds and surpass expectations. I always say God gave you a special heart. That has two meanings for me. Yes, medically your heart is special and requires the attention of a cardiologist. But your heart is also special because it is very loving and kind. You are unselfish and care for others in ways that show compassion in a special way. I also love seeing pieces of me in you, for example our love for math. It's so much fun to break down math lessons with you. I love looking at pictures and seeing how similar our features are, we look so much alike. You are my miracle baby and we share a special bond as mother and son.

My hopes for your future are simple:

I want to see you happy and achieve all your heart's desires. Of course, I hope you will make good choices, which will lead to good outcomes for you. You will make mistakes, but I hope you will learn the most and remain resilient through those mistakes. When you make mistakes, my hope is for you to know you are loved and I am here with open loving arms to give you a hug to make you feel better. I also hope that you continue to defeat the medical odds and live a full healthy active life without limitations. Nick always remembers with every success to remain humble. I hope your future is filled with joy and happiness all the days of your life.

My concerns for your future are:
your medical stability with congenital heart disease and the way our society will treat you as a black man. Medical technology has advanced in many ways, which has improved the quality of your life for the last 11 years. My concern is one day there may be a situation when doctors or technology cannot fix something related to your congenital heart disease. I worry about the functionality of your heart and its limitations. I will remain by your side for every medical appointment, every procedure, and support your recoveries as long as I have breath in my body. My other concern is the same concern I have for your older brother and your younger brother. As you mature from a young boy into adolescence and adulthood, I worry about how the world will judge you when they look at you. They will make unfair assumptions about who you are, what you’re capable of doing, and ultimately hinder you from meeting your full potential. I am concerned this world will give you cruel and unjust treatment in your life and how you will respond to it. I pray you will have wisdom and thoughtful courage to endure these experiences when it happens, because it will happen, it’s just a matter of when and how often. I am here for you with a black mother's love to uplift you and reaffirm your greatness as a black man. The most important words I want you to hear from me and always remember are, I love you Nickolas.

With all my love,
Mommy

Letter #4

Dear Miles,

My baby boy. I am so proud to say I have 3 boys and a husband. You are the youngest male of our household, but your presence is amazing and bold. I will never forget the day I first held you on Tuesday, August 5, 2014, that was one of the best days in my life. I also prayed for
you, especially when I learned about your kidney disease. Despite your medical conditions, you have an amazing talent to bring so much joy, laughter, and love to our family and the rest of the world.

*I love being your mommy*

What I have loved most about being your mommy for the last eight years is watching your personality grow. Miles you have always had a strong presence that commands attention in a big way, no matter where you are or who you are with. You have the ability to make others feel joy in a special way that makes being around you so much fun. I love your self-confidence, it often amazes and challenges me to see confidence in you at such a young age. I love our special bond as mother and son. You are the one that stays closest to me and I love that about you.

*My hopes for your future are simple.*

I hope you make good choices, never stop learning, and stay true to yourself. Yes, Miles it's important to make good choices, but always take the time to learn when you make mistakes. This will help you make better choices the next time. As you continue to grow up and find your way in life, be true to yourself and don't worry about what others will say. I hope you continue to be a positive impactful presence in the life of others with laughter and love. I hope you have joy and happiness in your own heart. Last but not least, I hope you know I am always here with open loving arms to give you a hug when you have tough days.

*My concerns for your future are:*

the same concerns I have for your two older brothers. I worry about your greatness as a black man and this society's ability to accept it. As you mature from a young boy into adolescence and adulthood, I worry about how the world will judge you when they look at you. They will make unfair assumptions about who you are, what you’re capable of doing, and
ultimately hinder you from meeting your full potential. I am concerned this world will give you
cruel and unjust treatment in your life and how you will respond to it. I pray you will have
wisdom and thoughtful courage to endure these experiences when it happens, because it will
happen, it’s just a matter of when and how often. I am here for you with a black mother's love to
uplift you and reaffirm your greatness as a black man.

The most important words I want you to hear from me and always remember are, I love you
Miles.

With all my love,

Mommy
Simone’s Letter

Dear Mom, I thank you for teaching me to be resilient. You have taught me that no matter what happens in life you have to keep going, granted that you may stumble, fall, or even feel defeated but as long as you're still here, you have an opportunity to improve your situation.

Mom, I wish you would have shown me more affection growing up. I know you were exhausted from having to work two jobs and then come home and care for not 1 but 3 kids. As a mother, I cannot blame you because I understand how demanding life can be.

My children, what I have loved most about being your mom is watching you grow and develop your sense of self. I love both of your silly personalities which y'all get from me, you're welcome) My children, my hopes for your future are that when in times of need or even when times are good you continue to put God first in yall your lives. I hope you both aren't afraid to chase your dreams. Most importantly I want you to love and protect one another because we are all we have. Always Be true to yourself and your values, never be a follower and stand on everything you believe in, and compromise for no one.

My concerns for your future are you'll see how ugly and cruel the world may be, despite knowing that there is still so much beauty in the world so don't let anything harden you or take away your joy.

I love y'all

- mom
Carolyn’s Letter

(My mother in-love)

Dear Mom, I thank you for

the love and protection you gave to me and sisters and brothers. We always had good, delicious food to eat, which you prepared for us everyday. We were sent to school neat and clean and properly dressed. You took care of our school needs. You taught us many things with your sayings and guidance, We knew right from wrong. You took us to church on Sunday so we could develop spiritually. You gave us the spark to succeed.

Mom I wish you would have told me and/or showed me

how to be confident and don't doubt in certain areas. we never talked about sex or what to look for in boys or a partner. We never had those conversations. We never talked about how to maintain ourselves once we became wives and mothers. We had very different lives. You were a stay at home Mom and I had to both work and take care of children. Maybe I should have known but I thought I had to take care of everything like you did. You and Dad never separated or divorced so I did everything to keep things going to the detriment of myself and my children.

My children, What I have loved most about being your mom

was your personality. You were funny and smart and were my road buddy. We traveled to Washington D.C. many times and you were great on the plane even as a baby. You played instruments, sang in the choir, went camping and was responsive to all the activities I put you in. We had fun.

My child, my hopes for your future

have already been achieved. You are a productive man and father. My hopes would be that you satisfy yourself. I hope you grow in kindness and understanding. Your confidence is at such a level that you know who you are and your equilibrium cannot be shaken. That you jump
toward the positive quicker than you jump to the negative in your thoughts and opinions on situations and others.

*My concerns for your future are*

that you grow in patience in love and that you realize how great you already are. I want your dreams to come true without undo struggle. I want you to be surrounded by good, intelligent people who can appreciate all you have to offer.
Kassie’s (My) Letter

Dear mom, I thank you for all the sacrifices you made for me as a child. I know you sometimes think I’ve forgotten but I will never forget the long nights you had to work, the sacrifices you made to for your happiness that you gave up because you wanted to ensure that not just my needs but my wants were met. I thank you for sending me to private school as long as you did to ensure that I was given the best education and opportunity that I could have. And last but not least I appreciate and thank you for never giving up on me. I know there were many times I scared you with the questionable choices I was making and the bad relationships I seemed to be surrounded by, but I thank you and appreciate you for never giving up or judging me even when you knew I knew better. If it wasn't for you I know I wouldn't be where I am today and I am forever grateful.

Mom I wish you would have told me/or shown me healthy ways to love. I know you didn't expose me to many of your relationships out of care and concern for me but I wish I would have seen you love me at an early age, I wish I would have known what a healthy relationship looked like so I knew how to recognize the signs of a bad one. I wish you would have shown me more about taking chances and betting on me. I know you always say your caution came from “the banker in you” but my fear of taking chances, I feel, showed up in my overcompensation in other aspects of my life. I just wish I had known how to lean on faith rather than fear. But through it all, I love you mom.

My children what I have loved most about being your mom

William, my firstborn son,

you know you are my road dog, my first true love, my first pain in the butt. I loved everything about being your mom. You spoiled me by making me think all my future children
would sleep through the night at birth, you have put me in awe in your transformation through adolescence to young adulthood. Your strength to overcome obstacles and find your peace through life is so beautiful to me and shows your resilience. While I know you wish there were certain parts of your life that could’ve been different, you've continued to be that bright star in the sky and you continue to show the world what you are made of. I love our time together eating, shopping, having you help me, and seeing you be a great big brother to your little brothers. Just know that even through certain disappointments I have never loved you less as my son and I look forward to what's ahead in your life. I love you son.

**LJ, my middle son,**

What I have loved most about being your mom is that you have never failed at independence. From an early age you have always been the person to go by the beat of your own drum, and while there have been many challenging times getting you to fall in line with the group, your independence shows me how great of a leader you can be and how you will never let anyone talk you into anything you don't want to do. I've loved our bonding time with you helping me cook and explore random facts about the world and watching random tv series that we never manage to finish. I’ve admired your resilience as you fought through the challenges of pandemic education and fighting to get back engaged in school. I know it hasn't been easy. I want you to always follow your heart but know that sometimes in order to get the results you want you will have to do things you don't want to do sometimes. (It’ll save you a lot of heartache). Keep being you and I promise to always support you along the way. I love you, son.

**Kayden, my baby boy**

Kayden, my Kayden. What I’ve loved most about being your mom is, first of all, getting your top-of-the-line hugs. You've always had a way of making me feel better when I was having
a bad day. You've always been very intuitive of other people's feelings and I can remember you being 3 years old, playing in my hair (which you still do) and telling me how beautiful I was and how much you loved me followed by the biggest hug. You've always been my child who has worn his heart on his sleeve and never cared about sharing your emotions. I hope that never changes. I've loved watching you grow into a smart, goofy, intelligent preteen who isn't afraid of taking chances and doing what feels right. I love your ability to be mindful of others and that you would give your last to someone even if you didn't have to. You are so compassionate and I never want you to lose that. I love you son.

**Isaiah**, my bonus son

What I have loved most about being your “bonus” mom is seeing how much you've grown since we first met when you were two. You are such a joy to be around and I still stand by the fact that you are the best dancer in the house. I’ve loved seeing how you do your best never to give up even when I know you are tired and frustrated. You’ve never let anyone tell you you can't do something and you've always done your best to show you can. Learning to blend families can often be hard and I know it can be challenging being the youngest kid at times but you have so much greatness in store being the youngest will never keep you from being the best at whatever you want to put your mind to. I’ve loved watching you grow and learn whether it was to read, do math, a new dance move or showing off what you've learned in one of the many activities your dad has had you in. I hope you know to never give up, keep being that fun, crazy, loving kid you've always been ,and know I will always have you along the way. I love you son.

**My children, my hopes for your future are**

That you live up to all the greatness I know you are capable of. I know you all have different visions for your future and most of you are still thinking about what your future will be
like, but I promise you one thing. If you can believe it, you can achieve anything. There is
NOTHING you can't accomplish. I just want and hope that you do what you love and what will
allow you to support yourself and your family (if you choose to have one). I hope that you don't become like your biological fathers. I know that says alot but you know why. I know I can't change the past but I hope you change the future. You don't have to be like them, you can be a
great father, a great provider, you can be a great man and I hope the stepfather I choose for you shows you what it means to be there even when times get hard. I'm sorry I didn't choose better for you but unfortunately without them there would be no you and I don't regret that even through all the heartache and broken promises they have put you all through. I hope that you trust yourself and what you want and know that whether you chose to be a doctor,
engineer, teacher or artist of some sorts just stay dedicated and never give up.

_My concerns for your future are that_

You wont understand how the world has been shaped to see you, as a Black Man, fail. As much as your step father and I try to let you know that being a Black male comes with a lot of pressure, I never want you to have to find out through personal experience. Please just always remember that you are worthy, you are needed, you are loved and your black life does matter, Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.

Love mom
Dear, Mom, I thank you for teaching me to be a compassionate and responsible mother and individual. For instilling in me to stand up for myself and others who may not have a strong voice. I remember as a shy 12 year old girl walking to my hall locker at school and noticing a classmate being teased and ridiculed by her classmates and shunned by teachers because she was pregnant. The victim of child molesting by her mother's boyfriend. She was crying and looked so afraid and lonely. I approached her and put my arms around her to let her know I cared and she now had a friend. A friendship that lasted after high school. My mother commented on me for stepping up and showing such kindness to my classmate when others did not.

Mom, I wished you had told me more about your childhood or adult struggles with grief and emotional pain to better prepare me for my own journey with these issues. I wished I had seen you "cry" or cry more or seen you be more vulnerable; because I would have known it was ok to show others TEARS does not always mean "weakness." Showing weakness does not always mean failure in yourself.

My child, what I have loved most about being your mom is watching you mature into the woman you are today- smart, fierce and driven to never accept less than what you think you deserve out of life.

My child, my hopes for your future are that you never know loneliness and experience the pain of losing your beloved and most all the feeling of losing yourself. That you will always have someone in your life to show up for you and reach out to you during your dark times. My concerns for your future are none because I know you got this thing called" living life to the fullest". Your, Mom
Natalie’s Art and Poems

Natalie is a close friend of mine, who was not one of my participants but who recently did an art exhibit on Black Mothering. I am including parts of her work to show appreciation to the various ways Black Women are creating spaces to be seen and heard.

‘Who does your mind belong to?’ related to this picture below.
Natalie’s poem, ‘Who does your mind belong to?’ She realized a lot of her behaviors were ones I didn't want and did not fully belong to me. She stumbled upon a revelation, that what we think we control about ourselves and our behaviors, and responses is only a reflection of our traumas and childhood upbringing. Our behaviors are not set in stone, but very malleable if we understand how to change them. It is up to us to control the ideas we adopt from other entities. The upbringing we have received was not our choice, but this universe gave us the task to change it. It was a call to challenge my identity. It was a call to action to take control of what social constructs I take into my identity as my own and it was a call to be intentional about how I want to behave and elevate on this earth. It was very therapeutic and healing for me to create being as I painted, I chose to clear my energy of any anger, resentment, insecurities etc. And open my life up to change and unlimited possibilities for me and the generations that will come from me.

Who Does Your Mind Belong To? Intro

The question is, “Who does your mind belong to?” Is it your parents? Your generational trauma? Depression? Your spouse? Social chaos? Anger? Naïveté? Pride? Conditioned normality? Who or what is doing the choosing of how you do the doing? Who have you delegated the responsibility of what goes in and what goes out of your mind? The Catalog of ideas within your psychology controls the way you behave, the way you react, the way you love, think and what we accept. So Who controls YOU?

As you walk through the valley of the shadow of the Electrifying Narcissist, The Protective Sociopaths, and gentle manipulators, what you fear is irrelevant, what you see is refutable and what you feel can be seen as a feast for the beasts of the wild. As you walk through the valley of the shadow of your mental oblivion, what is in your ARSENAL?? In what
way have you learned yourself and your enemy to prepare for the encounter of the things you don't know—you don't know. Your self-governance is a constitution only you have the authority to rewrite. All forms of amendment to this internal document require YOUR signature on that invisible line whether you thought you gave permission or not. So I ask you, and with new eyes ask yourself: who does your mind belong to?

Who is giving the material substance of content to your unconscious behavior. For instance: Who wrote amendment #483 stating: You have to be agreeable to the tradition of collective degeneracy and victimhood because that has been the social norm for over 400 years? Who wrote amendment #72 stating youth must never call out thine elders (be it respectfully or “Go off sis”), as pedophiles, liars and abusers because they are older? Who wrote amendment #3, stating: to tell and or address the truth is an assault on the ones closest to you. Who hand wrote the amendment #197 stating: I am uncomfortable with the reality of that truth presented, thus I am attacked. Who wrote amendment number #29 stating: Loyalty, forgiveness and strength are synonymous with how much abuse one can endure and repeat.

So again, I ask you, who does your mind belong to? Because if you did not cherry pick the basis of these lies in your self-constitution, you are not in control of your thoughts nor your identity.

Who wrote the fabric of the lies sewn into your identity? And better yet, Can you pinpoint the day and time you agreed to them? No? Give a psychologist some days and times to help you heal and I bet they can tell you how you give it permission every single day.

However, don't think my goal is to encourage you to take them out. Nope, I'm not interested.

The Goal is to acknowledge and examine, Change is on you. These adopted traits are
present and festering like dead bodies under the floorboards of your subconscious house. It stinks with a stench you can't identify because you live there. But every guest who loves you, every friend who values the amazing attributes built into that same constitution within yourself governance, were probably denied, or don’t know how to tell you but I Do- and will… you break. You reek of the stink of selfishness, Excuses, entitlement, narrowmindedness, cold heartedness, toxicity, denial, Stubbornness, and lack luster reciprocity on that phone conversation and it is time to clear up under them floor boards, Throw away the baggage of the way mommy and daddy dropped the ball and gather your arsenal of therapeutic weapons to rewrite your constitution that shapes your identity and reality. Lay waste to your shortcomings, or the universe will lay waste to your mental, emotional and physical prosperity. Gone are the days of respectability politics amongst the streets and in our dysfunctional homes. You do not get to Be the devouring beast AND the helpless victim no matter your race, gender, religion or sexuality. You do not get to idly stand by, helpless and unintentional, allowing your inner child to reak havoc in between the clothing racks and destroying the products on Isle number 5.

Mainstream the truth no matter how it hurts. On the assembly line of Ideals conditioning you on social media and fake news outlets, and ideas picked up from and involuntarily adopted from the top 5 individuals in your life, YOU better be the one criticizing, examining and cherry-picking what stays and rebuke what needs to go in the name of your overdue Healing. That is a constitutional right UNwritten by universal law for you to figure out the hard way through a life of incremental suffering, heartache, inclining stress and declining metabolism. As I should, As should you… And so it is.
Natalie shares, “this poem is about claiming your mind, body and soul to work for you. So many times that is not the case when it comes to tradition, the culture, your race, your sexual orientation etc. It's about being intentional and practical. Just like a vision board. They sit on my walls every day and remind me to claim my mind from negative self-talk and confusion from my purpose. Boosts my confidence in my womanhood on days I feel I'm falling short. It rerouted me back to my given path. It literally saved my life. I encourage every adult here to draft their own manifesto... “
Black Woman's Manifesto

“I, the Black Woman, reserve the right to unlearn anything, ANY condition, ANY mindset, ANY mentality, ANY traditional degeneracy and ANY curses that do not serve me. I HUMBLY refute all identities, Ancestral and Socially constructed, that do not foster innovation and limitless generational growth, and with nice-nasty grace, I DISRESPECTFULLY opt out of the Delusional fuckery. I hear and now, past and future, deem any contracts of malevolent intention null and void, fulfilled and henceforth seize and desist from my lifetimes, past and present, across All space, dimensions and time.

Cleared and transmuted into purified source energy, My mind and life force belongs to, and works ambitiously, FOR ME. I have learned and am still joyfully learning the will to live abundant and happy and to set a seed of purity and prosperity for my descendants. My karmic debt is paid in full and my soul is Glutinously reaping the benefits. My mind, body and soul belong TO ME. Anger, stress and discontent are only temporary gardening tools used conscientiously to chisel accomplishment. God and My ancestors bathe in my love and achievements and use all forms of love to reciprocate favor into my future existence. They cradle me with high spirits, ambition and protection as if I stand still in the eye of their hurricane only moving in the direction of their guidance as they blunder all that does not serve me and my loved ones. Just As the wind, I do not fear this hurricane.

I move with it in expectation of clarity and new beginnings. In the midst of cycling hardness I become soft, free flowing and aware with insight. Like water I bend, absorb light, bend light to my will, replenish, and transmute impurities into tangible gifts to bless all that God has created. I, the Black Woman, have realigned the bond with spirit to which balances my compass. I thank them anxiously for their gifts. And I thank myself in my day-by-day
remembrance of the unapologetic will to bend, elevate and thrive, As I should, As should you…

And so it is.