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Santa Barbara

Watch Momma Work: Black Women Navigate Motherhood, Employment, and Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Sociology

by

Nia Zee Flowers

Committee in charge:

Professor George Lipsitz, Chair

Professor Jean Beaman

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June 2023

The dissertation of Nia Z. Flowers is approved.

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June 2023

Watch Momma Work: Black Women Navigate Motherhood, Employment, and Education

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by

Nia Z. Flowers

DEDICATION

This is for the Black mothers whose backs carried, hands labored, and hearts healed to make this work possible. I write this for us. We are here…We have been here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to start first by thanking God and the beautiful souls around me that brought me closer to spaces of healing. I now understand the strength of spirituality as a gift of resilience in the face of the unimaginable. I am humbled by those with skin like mine that have had the courage to still hope for better tomorrows, sing spiritual hymns to liven their spirits, and pray before bed with their children despite discouraging messages that suppress the Black radical imagination. I thank the spirits of those that revived this light in me, reminding me that the work is bigger than the scholar.

I next want to thank my daughter, Skylar, for choosing me and gifting me with motherhood. I do not doubt the intention of your purpose on this world, for the beauty of your spirit can heal the most pained hearts. You remind me to pause, release tears of fears but also find the many reasons to smile. Our "Gracie's corner" jam sessions were not just me playing your favorite songs, it was me trying to model how to live authentically and unapologetically, dancing and singing in a car without tinted windows, without a care in the world except to share pure joy from within. You are my pure joy. I am teaching you to never let people and spaces police your spirit. You were born with the spirit of freedom within you. I carried you in my belly as the pandemic restrictions were at its heights. I went ABD 2 weeks before my scheduled c-section. I had no baby shower and could not have familial visitors in the hospital. I struggled to nurse you at first, and cried as they wheeled you to the NICU for the first few days. I have navigated depression and anxiety and became a single mother learning to coparent and negotiate housing instability that accompanies poverty. In all honesty, behind my smile and laugh, I have been scared this whole time; but bravery is having the courage to face your fears, and mothering has certainly been an act of courage for me. You are my catalyst to not only study motherwork, but embody it. My love for you knows no conditions. Everything I do and everything I write is with the knowing that I am your mommy and I do this for you.

I also want to give thanks to my own mother, Eteneshe Flowers. There are not enough words to express how thankful I am to have been raised by you. No one on this earth is more kind or more gracious in my eyes, for I know the depths of your compassion. You are an angel to me, and your voice has been a harmonious reminder of a mother's resilience. Every step I take forward takes into consideration your sacrifices that made it all meaningful. My passion stems from you, nourished with your affection and manifested with your best intentions for me. I love you for everything you do for me, for teaching me how to practice my politics of love for humanity, seeing everyone as "somebody's somebody," humanizing those that people point fingers at, people like us. I thank you for teaching me how to mother and never allowing me to get too old to be mothered.

And to my father, Douglas Flowers, I appreciate you for supporting me. I love you for never allowing conditions of gendered racism that hardens the souls of men like you to prevent you from finding your way back to me. Your love for me is not caged by pride or toxic masculinity. You cook me rice and beans and jog alongside me on the track (always doing an extra lap to show me your strength) in a way that has expanded my conception of fathering. My curiosity and critiques of social problems stems from your capacity to explore. You are the epitome of an organic intellect, demonstrating the value of wisdom from lived experiences.

Thank you to my village of family that has never missed a single event of celebration or tragedy. I would not trade you all for the world. Thank you to my "second mom" Meseret, my brothers but actually cousins Eyouel and Alazar, the aunt that raised my mom Almina, my fellow academic cousin Konjit, my big sister/cousin Yenee and her husband Josh, and my favorite nephew of all time Joshy. I do not tell you all enough, but I would be nothing without you. Everything amazing about me comes from the beauty of our family. In addition, thank you to more of my family: Carolee, Indira, Andrea, Keiana, my daughter's father Sirrele, Mrs. and Dr. Mansala, Mesaly and Rekik. Also, thank you to my family abroad and my family in the village of Hattieville in Belize. I also want to pay respect to the family members that live in our hearts and lie to rest, my little cousin Ethan, my godmother June, and my Uncle George. My village also includes my dearest friends that have been part of my family. I specifically want to acknowledge my "twin" born on the same day as me, and the person I can talk to and laugh all day every day with. She is the person whose heart warms me and passion for creativity inspires me, and the person who knows the most about me, Tiffany Aliyah Davis. Thank you to my daughter's God mommy, Nasia Turner, who has always encouraged me, gave me a safe place to get away and watch "Caresha Please," taught me the value of self-love and respect, cried with me at church, and livened every memory we share since our time as undergrads at UCLA. To my soul sister, Katherine Maldonado, thank you for our writing retreats and reggae dance time, your brilliance and resilience through motherhood, your prayers and meditations, your peace and power that moves not only me, but all those you encounter. Also, thank you to my bestie Timera Durant who taught me how to merge loyalty and love, my UCLA girls that always shows up and out Ashley Tornero and Dashawn Willis, my dear friends and closest colleagues Sekani Robinson and Trevor Auldridge Revelas that have made graduate school feel safe and accessible, and all of my homegirls and homies that I love and celebrate with. I thank those who have been rooting for me along the way from near and far, I appreciate you all.

To my dissertation committee, I always brag that I have the best committee of all time. In addition to each of your brilliance, I particularly respect and admire your commitment to producing scholarship that shapes the canon. I am honored to have been mentored by some of the most genuine and extraordinary scholars I have ever met. Thank you, Denise Segura, who was actually the first professor I met at UCSB while I was still an undergrad, the reason I applied for the sociology PhD in the first place, and my biggest supporter in applying for and being awarded the Ford Foundation Pre-Doctoral Fellowship. I would also like to thank Jean Beaman who encouraged me to be courageous on the job market, not being afraid to apply for tenure track positions and top post docs. Thank you, Ingrid Banks who has been like family to me, giving me "the real" always, and the first professor's office I ever felt safe enough to cry and share my positionality outside of being a scholar. Also, a special thank you to Terrance Wooten who was always just a call or zoom away, whose conversations gave me hope in a time where I felt helpless, and whose tenacity and wit is unparalleled. And lastly, to my advisor, George Lipsitz, I want you to know that being your student has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I remember being so nervous praying that you would say yes, the first time I asked you to be my advisor, especially because Robin D.G. Kelley recommended you as a good fit. I had no idea that your mentorship would revolutionize my way of thinking and writing. You know when to be tough and when to give affirmations, never handholding me and always giving me speedy edits. You helped me find my voice as a writer, showing me how write both boldly and

beautifully. I thank you by writing this dissertation and I hope to continue to make you proud.

I sincerely appreciate each mother in this study for sharing your story with me. Your stories not only made this work possible, but they also helped give me a sense of hope and community in a vulnerable time where I became a mother myself. Thank you for your courage and bravery, for your kindness and realness, for your prayers and “keep going, girl.” You each inspire me. I am humbled to be in community with you all.

And to the city of Los Angeles, particularly the families in Inglewood, I see you and you are not forgotten. Thanks for producing me, and know this project is just the beginning for us.

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Flowers, Nia. "Working All the Time': A Qualitative Analysis of Black Motherhood, Employment and Education." (*Revise and resubmit*)

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Flowers, Nia. "'Just Make It Home Safely': Black Mothers' Parenting Strategies Against Racialized Policing and Institutional Inequalities."
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Oct 2019	"Fruits of Momma's Labor: Black Motherhood in Los Angeles." Ford Foundation Fellowship, Annual Conference.
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COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENTS

2020 Center for Black Studies Research Town Hall, UCSB
Led dialogue on systemic anti-blackness and the impacts on UCSB students.

2020 Free-Dem Foundations Presentation, UCLA
Discussion facilitator between academics and activists on race, gender, and mass incarceration.

2019 Arts, Activism, and Imagination Symposium, UCSB
Collaborated with artists, activists and academics to address and ameliorate issues at the intersections of race, class, gender, citizenship, and sexuality

2017 Her Dream Deferred Week, UCLA
Volunteered with the UCLA African American Policy Forum to acknowledge and denounce police brutality and mass incarceration experienced by Black women.

OTHER RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2015-2016 Ronald E. McNair Scholars Research Program, UCLA
Conducted qualitative research on Black feminist pedagogy and perceptions of Black womanhood.

2014-2016 Black Male Institute, Team Project Leader, UCLA
Gathered survey data to assess college access of Black males in urban schools.

2014 "Sister to Sister" Research, Team Project, UCLA
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ABSTRACT

Watch Momma Work: Black Women Navigate Motherhood, Employment, and Education

by

Nia Flowers

This study identifies, analyzes, and contextualizes the ways Black women perceive and perform motherwork in Los Angeles. I specifically explore the following questions: (1) How are Black women's work trajectories impacted by their mothering experiences in Los Angeles? (2) What impact does education, their own and their children's, have on Black mothers' work trajectories? I focus on how Black women negotiate their work relationships after becoming mothers, illuminating their matriculation into performing motherwork. I understand motherwork as the racially gendered labor women who mother enact as parents and as workers in the economy. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Black women who have experiences mothering and working in Los Angeles. Rather than demonizing or glorifying the mothers in this study, I describe and interpret their viewpoints, providing a platform for them to conceptualize and voice their social roles and realities.

In analyzing the ways Black women merge family and work responsibilities, I conceptualize and define the term *modes of motherworking* which describes the multidirectional ways Black mothers navigate between, within, and at the intersections of family labor, employed labor, and educational labor. This study also identifies three distinct

modes of motherworking: adaptive motherwork, incorporative motherwork, and transitionary motherwork. When discussing Black motherwork, this study takes into consideration Black women's histories with economic and education-based discrimination, reproductive injustices, and anti-Black gendered ideologies of families to better understand Black mothers' decisions navigating social institutions. This study particularly highlights the importance of education as a critical space of Black women's labor and thus an important component of Black motherwork.

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I. Introduction

> Work is a part of our lives for the majority of us…you see Black mothers working all the time, but you're at better peace when you know that your children are okay…If that takes me moving in a better area so they're in a better school, then I'm going to do that. If that takes me working these sixteen hours to pay for this activity and that activity, then I'm going to do that."
> -Tina, *Black mother from Los Angeles (South Bay)*

These words come from Tina —a Black educator, registered nurse, mother to two now adult children and grandmother to a toddler aged granddaughter —when discussing the intersections of Black motherhood and work. Her observation of Black women "working all the time" aligns with sociological discussions that emphasize the significance of Black women as both mothers and workers for their families and communities (Dow 2016, 2019). Tina's remarks also elucidate the ways education remains critical in Black women's understandings of motherworking. While acknowledging the diversity among Black mothers' life experiences and histories, this study identifies, analyzes, and contextualizes the ways a group of Black women perceive and perform motherwork in Los Angeles. It explores the following questions: (1) How do Black mothers navigate employed work after becoming mothers; and (2) What impact does education, their own and their children's, have on Black mothers' work trajectories? I focus on how Black women negotiate their work relationships after becoming mothers, illuminating their matriculation into performing motherwork, and exploring how they view the educational responsibilities of motherwork while raising children in Los Angeles.

I understand Black motherwork as the racially gendered labor Black women who mother enact as both parents and workers in the economy. Motherwork is a term conceived by Patricia Hill Collins to discuss the ways Black mothers have historically navigated the reality that their lives have allowed for little separation between public and private realms.

Essentially, Black women's gendered labor for family at home remains inextricably linked to their employed work in various economic sectors. In this study, Black motherwork takes into consideration Black women's histories with economic and education-based discrimination, reproductive injustices, and anti-Black gendered ideologies of families to better understand Black mothers' decisions navigating social institutions. It expands our usage of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) to think not just about how identities intersect to inform Black mothers' lives, but also the ways sites of labor intersect in Black women's familial obligations and commitments. In particular, this study highlights the importance of education, in addition to employment and familial care-work, as a critical space of Black women's labor and thus an important component of Black motherwork.

Theories of mothering can lack intersectional frameworks and analyses, a shortcoming that perpetuates white hegemonic ideals based on the normative heteropatriarchal nuclear family unit (Chodorow 1989; Hays 1996). These tend to embrace a universal model for conceptualizing motherhood that generalizes from the experiences of white, middle-class families and assumes a sharp dichotomy between public and private spheres (Chodorow 1979). These family ideals remain entangled in longstanding historical notions of true womanhood that vilify mothers, specifically Black mothers, that do not conform to white heteronormative nuclear familial roles (Giddings 1984). Following Daniel Patrick Moynihan's inaccurate yet influential 1960's report on the Black family, researchers and public policy makers too often portray Black women as supposedly failing to take care of their children and emasculating their Black male partners (Geary 2015; Steinberg 2015).

As eyewitnesses to the injustices perpetrated at the intersections of gender, race, sexuality, and class, Black mothers have formulated innovative strategies of child rearing,

creating an inventory of ways to survive and thrive despite being demeaned and defamed in the larger culture. Black mothers have continuously battled discrimination at the hands of racial capitalism and dehumanization from hegemonic ideologies rooted in anti-Blackness that have shaped social science research, public policy, and the American imagination. The term Black mother is haunted by a history of racialized colonialism, in which enslaved women were denied maternal privileges, having their children ripped from their arms and stripped from their protection. The progeny of slave women enriched the holdings of slave owners, even those produced by the terrors of rape, subsequently fueling a system of social control by which Black women's wombs served as exploited, abused, and neglected spaces of productive and reproductive labor (Davis 1983; Roberts 2017). The afterlife of slavery and the cultural myths of problematic Black families created in its wake have strategically characterized Black women as domineering matriarchs and excessively procreating welfare mothers (Collins 2000). Blaming Black mothers and attributing the problems of the Black community to deviant parenting diverts attention away from the racist institutions and practices at the heart of racial capitalism. It allows those in power to evade responsibility to redress pervasive discrimination in employment, education, housing, and healthcare.

Despite their incessant battles with institutional injustices, Black women's profound determination to uphold their roles as mothers has proved crucial to the survival and success of Black families. They are the maternal innovators of community-based social practices that continue to build inter-generational wealth of cultural capital and inspire hope of transformative change. Their demonization in popular culture, public policy, and social science research does not flow from objective evidence about their behavior and beliefs, but rather because, as Dorothy Roberts has demonstrated repeatedly, condemning Black mothers

for the poverty of their children supplies racial capitalism with its central legitimizing trope (Roberts 1993, 1997, 2002, 2011, 2017). It portrays people with problems as problems, as innately unfit for freedom. It emphasizes Black families' disadvantages while ignoring the many ways in which they have been taken advantage of. By faulting Black mothers for Black poverty and family fragmentation, it advances an understanding of all inequality and injustice as natural, necessary, and inevitable.

Intersectional theories grounded in Black feminism have contested these pathological portrayals of Black women (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Omolade 1994; Roberts 1997; Collins 2000; hooks 2000), while empirical work on Black families has reframed and contextualized the practical work performed by Black mothers (Stack 1974; Joseph and Lewis 1986; Kaplan 1997; Moore 2011). These studies provide a point of entry for my research that uses first person testimonies about motherwork to provide a space within social science research to contemplate and analyze the experiences, aspirations, and achievements of the people whose lives it implicates.

This research attempts to provide this space, exploring and analyzing the significance of Black motherwork and attempting to contribute to further understanding its function in Black women's lives. Thus, Chapter 2 focuses on conceptualizing Black motherwork historically and within the sociological research. It first situates the importance of Black feminism and controlling images in analyzing Black women as workers and mothers. It then discusses the significance of education in Black motherworking strategies against anti-Blackness in the schooling spaces for Black children. Lastly, this chapter describes the historical legacy of reproductive injustices against Black women, highlighting how this informs the context in which Black women become mothers. It specifically points out that

Black women have had all three tenets of reproductive justice violated: the right to have a child, the right to not have a child, and the right to parent that child safely.

Chapter 3 introduces a concept I devised called modes of motherworking. It explains how Black motherwork not only includes the intersections of employed and family labor, but it also acknowledges education as an additional site of Black women's labor. This chapter also introduces the term educational labor to provide additional language for discussing Black women's racially gendered labor for educational pursuits. It argues that anti-Black racism in school informs Black mothers' access to and strategies for choosing schooling spaces for their children. It also discusses the ways Black women serve as educators to their children, having to teach them how the intersections of race, class and gender shape the institutional discrimination their children will likely navigate, but also teaching them not to be bound by the constraints of racism by using education as a tool of racial empowerment towards economic mobility, educational access, and community solidarity. Lastly, Chapter 3 presents a typology of three modes of motherworking: adaptive motherwork, incorporative motherwork, and transitionary motherwork. This typology serves to better explain the different ways Black mothers make choices on how to balance labor for family, for employment, and for education.

The subsequent chapters utilize the narratives of Black mothers I interviewed to convey the relevancy of each type of motherwork. Chapter 4 discusses adaptive motherwork, Chapter 5 incorporative motherwork, and Chapter 6 transitionary motherwork. I conclude with brief take away messages from the stories shared by these mothers, acknowledging the limitations of this study and also reimagining new ways to better serve Black mothers.

A. Methodology

1. Structure

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty Black women who have experiences mothering children and working employed jobs in Los Angeles. Interviewing represents a way of valuing the participants' interpretations (Charmaz 2014) while shifting the source of knowledge from that of the researcher to that of the subject, aligning with the goals of Black feminism. The interviews ranged from one to two hours, with most averaging an hour and a half. After getting permission from the participants, I recorded interviews with my cell phone recorder and later transcribed them. Given that all of my participants were navigating busy schedules that included childrearing, work commitments, and/or school responsibilities, asking for only one to two hours of their time increased the likelihood that some would participate. Some participants made clear that they simply only had an hour of their time available. When asked "Is this still a good time for an interview," many replied "yes" but explained that they were either driving to pick up or drop off children, watching them, or on their commute to work. The majority of interviews were collected over phone/video call in accord with the preferences of the participants, though two were done in person. For instance, one participant (who at the time was caring for her toddler aged son with special needs) asked if we could interview in person because it would be easier to participate and care for her son simultaneously.

I had ten interviews completed before the outbreak of Covid-19. Prior to the pandemic, I passed around flyers in spaces where I frequently would see Black mothers, like grocery and convenience stores, malls, neighborhood apartments (in the Inglewood area), and clubs and organizations that cater to Black women particularly. I also relied on snowball

sampling, asking the participants if they knew other Black mothers in Los Angeles. Three participants were recruited from snowball sampling. Employing snowball sampling reveals how Black mothers form community among one another, as well as how they conceptualize who they consider to be a Black mother. I expected the pandemic to halt recruitment and willingness of Black mothers to participate completely, especially given the disproportionate ways the pandemic impacted Black family life and economic stability; however, my experience was quite the contrary. Though the pandemic created conditions so I could not easily pass out flyers in person given social distancing and stay-at-home mandates, I was able to digitally send my flyer to Black mothers by emailing organizations, texting extended networks, and posting on social media spaces while also continuing my usage of snowball sampling. In addition, Black women and mothers, like my own mother, aunts, cousins, friends, colleagues, and community members (many of whom were still working as "essential workers" despite their varying class statuses) sent out flyers to their networks.

I also became a Black mother myself in the midst of completing this project, getting a first-hand experience of what it means to be a Black woman navigating family, work, and education in Los Angeles. For example, I recall nursing my daughter while conducting interviews during the height of the pandemic, similar to the ways my participants communicated juggling multiple commitments to family and work. My matriculation into motherwork, plus my positionality as a Black woman "from the city," created a deeper sense of rapport with my participants. For instance, many of the mothers conveyed that they felt comfortable being their authentic selves as they saw my intersectional position as a researcher but also *one of them*. Many mothers felt comfortable cussing throughout their interview or making culturally relevant jokes as they knew I would understand. Mothers used

language like "you know how it is," understanding that I was also a Black mother navigating schooling systems, complicated co-parenting, and insecure housing situations. Never was I perceived as a social worker or even an "outsider." This is important because it informs the type of data that I was able to gather as a qualitative researcher full of details and truths while a perceived *outsider* may have been met with suspicion about academia's curiosity into their lives. When Black mothers saw a fellow Black mother from Los Angeles doing a study on Black motherwork, they expressed eagerness to share their stories.

Though one does not need to be of a community to study it, being from it can shape the richness of the interview data, the potential data analysis, and thus the researcher's ability to contribute to existing theories. The Black mothers did not hold back in sharing their experiences, describing themselves to me as "open books," even giving me advice as a young mother. Many of the mothers said they "had fun" and understood the value of this project, recommending other mothers or organizations they thought I should contact. One mother even asked if she could pray with me and for my project at the end of the interview, bringing us both to tears, underscoring the emotional labor that accompanies qualitative work at times. While doing this project, thus, I became more than a passionate Black woman (daughter of Black immigrants) from Los Angeles trying to conduct research that reflected the voices of Black mothers I saw being ignored in much of sociology conversations of family and work. I, too, was one of those Black mothers. Thus, this research is not merely a study of Black motherwork, it is a product of it.

2. Field Site

I chose Los Angeles as my field site given my access to and familiarity with it, but also considering the metropolitan area's rich racial and economic diversity that complicates

mothers' experiences. Black mothers live in a range of neighborhoods, including some that are frequently associated with poverty and violence, but also in others known for their prestige and exclusivity. Rather than demonizing or glorifying the mothers in this study, I describe and interpret their viewpoints, providing a platform for them to conceptualize and voice their social roles and realities.

Los Angeles County has a population of 10.2 million people, with an ethnic composition that is 49.1% "Hispanic or Latino", 25.3 % white "not Hispanic or Latino", 15.6 Asian, 9.0 Black, and 3.3 "Two or More Races" (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). The Black population in Los Angeles makes up more than one-third of the state's total Black population (UCLA Labor Center et al. 2017). With respect to gender, 33% of households in L.A. County are headed by women (Los Angeles County Commission for Women 2016). With regard to Black families, 20% live in poverty and more than 60% of these families are households headed by single mothers with children under the age of 18 (Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation 2016).

Historically Los Angeles has been conceptualized as a space of both refuge and opportunity. This particularly applies to the millions of Black families fleeing the unbearable racialized violence and economic discrimination in the south during the Great Migration from 1916 through 1970 (Sides 2006; Wilkerson 2010). Those families heading west imagined Los Angeles as a space of hope and opportunity for attaining employment with decent wages, owning assets that would appreciate in value over time and be passed down to future generations, and accessing better schooling opportunities for their children. They generally did not anticipate, however, the structural racism, employment discrimination, and interpersonal prejudice that they would face upon their arrival. Their movement into Los

Angeles triggered violent backlash from white communities attempting to protect the resources and privileges they secured from the white spatial imaginary of defensive localism and hostile privatism (Lipsitz 2011).

Not only did Black migrants face economic discrimination, but their movement into Los Angeles triggered violent backlash from white residents attempting to protect their conception of their white spatial imaginary (Lipsitz 2011). Racial covenants restricted Black people from buying and living in homes in white neighborhoods until housing covenants were ruled unenforceable by the state in the *Shelley vs. Kraemer* case ruling in 1948. This ruling did not stop angry white residents from terrorizing families of color, including acts of racialized vandalism and violence. This resistance grew from fear of seeing areas that were once predominately white change into multiracial transitional cities that now included Black, Mexican, and Chinese residents (Sides 2006). Although some of these places remained racially diverse areas, many of them became racially segregated as Black when they had previously been segregated as white. White families left areas like Compton, Watts, Leimert Park, Gardena, Hawthorne, and Inglewood, and created new white spaces in on the west side and in the south bay (e.g., Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica, Bel Air, Beverly Hills, etc.) and in regions in the San Fernando Valley, commonly referred to as "the valley." Many Mexican families moved into neighborhoods in East Los Angeles, which often became Mexican barrios that experienced similar social and economic struggles as Black neighborhoods (Sides 2006). With a growing number of Blacks becoming formally educated, Black middle-class families moved into suburban areas that were once inhabited by whites including View Park, Windsor Hills, and Baldwin Hills (Hunt and Ramon 2010). When entering these areas, one sees a billboard sign near the intersection of Slauson and Overhill that reads, "The Black

Beverly Hills," a reminder of this racialized class divide. Suburban Black families attempted to create new Black places in spaces in close physical proximity to inner-city poverty but located on hills and behind palm trees that created an illusory barrier from the problems of the Black poor. When *de jure* segregation was ruled illegal, de facto segregation remained evident.

Gerrymandering and redlining strengthened housing segregation which reinforced school segregation, even well after the *Brown vs Board of Education* ruling in 1954. Considering that schools attended by students of color were underfunded, many Black families wanted to enter racially integrated spaces to increase their children's opportunities to attend better schools. While students were largely required to attend schools in their local areas, white students who attended racially mixed schools were granted waivers to attend a predominately white school outside of their areas (Sides 2006). When the Los Angeles school board ignored the 1962 ruling in *Jackson vs. Pasadena School District* requiring schools to integrate, Black parents led efforts through direct action to advocate for their children. Their efforts along with the advocacy by NAACP, ACLU, and other prominent Black leaders opened the door for the founding of the United Civil Rights Committee (UCRC). The UCRC organized the largest march in the history of LA on June 24, 1963 (Sides 2006). They protested for educational equity throughout the summer, while some whites decided to organize an anti-integration and anti-miscegenation counter protest.

Because Black families may have imagined Los Angeles to be free of the overt racialized violence that characterized life in southern states, they did not fully anticipate nor were they prepared for their incessant battles with the militarized agents of institutional violence known as the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Throughout the 1950s and

1960s, the LAPD took extensive efforts to increase rapidly their police force with officers, many of whom did not live in the neighborhoods they were policing. With excessive law enforcement practices that criminalized spaces and policed racialized bodies (Horne 1995), it is no wonder that Watts erupted with rebellion in 1965, along with New York City, Chicago, Newark, Detroit, and countless other cities during the 60s (Camp 2016). Police brutality and mass incarceration in Los Angeles continued to be fueled by the War on Drugs, which disproportionally targeted and criminalized Black men and women. Black families were drastically impacted by an anti-Black political apparatus attempting to get "tough on crime." Thus, Watts would not be the last incident of insurgency in Los Angeles.

Racialized anger ignited in 1991 after Latasha Harlins, a Black teenage girl, was wrongly accused of stealing a bottle of orange juice and then brutally shot in the back of the head by Soon Ja Du, the Korean store owner (Stevenson 2013). Although the incident was caught on camera and Du was found guilty of voluntary manslaughter, Judge Joyce Ann Karlin only sentenced her to five years of probation and 400 hours of community service. This sentencing revealed the racialized stereotypes that paint Black girls and women as aggressive and violent, while suggesting that Asian women are passive and docile (Stevenson 2013). Internalizing such stereotypes caused people like Judge Karlin, and many others, to dehumanize the bodies and attitudes of Black people, and thus disregard the value of their lives. The anger of the Black community exploded in the 1992 LA Rebellion, when Latasha Harlins's death was followed by the viral video of the attack on Rodney King by four police officers who were later acquitted by an all-white jury in Simi Valley.

Images of Black people looting and rioting in Los Angeles dominated news accounts and public perceptions with little regard to the legacy of pain felt by members of an

aggrieved community struggling to be seen as human beings. In reality, these distorted images engrained in the collective memory of many Americans both ignore and neglect the lived experiences of the plethora of ways marginalized people survive and make meaning of their lives in LA. They ignore the workers commuting to the city from the outskirts attempting to maximize their yearly income while minimizing their monthly mortgage, and those afraid of being pushed out of their apartments because of rising living expenses caused by the trendiness of their gentrified cities. They erase the children who grow up in the depths of poverty, living in food deserts, next to schools that are dropout factories, negotiating feelings of danger because of the accumulated gun violence from both the police and from some community members. They have no room to relate to the strikes led by teachers in LAUSD in 2019, demanding funding and improved learning spaces for children enrolled in public schools who are not wealthy enough to attend private school nor lucky enough to live close enough to a high performing charter school. My study takes another approach. Its evidence is grounded in the perspectives of mothers struggling to raise families in this complicated city.

3. Participants

The mothers in this study represent a wide range of employment trajectories, marital statuses, and locations in Los Angeles County. While the mothers' education levels range from high school diploma to PhD, they are all formally educated. This is not surprising given that "In 2014, 87% of 18-35-year-old women held a high school or postsecondary degree" in Los Angeles County (Los Angeles County Commission for Women 2016). In addition, data reveals that since the 1980s, Black people in Los Angeles are more educated than before; the

number of Blacks with postsecondary degrees doubled and the number of those without a high school diploma decreased to 10 % (UCLA Labor Center et al. 2017).

The mothers also vary in their stages of mothering, with some currently raising toddlers and school-aged children, while others who have adult children reflected back in the interviews on their earlier experiences. Thirteen mothers had minor-aged children, six mothers had adult-aged children, and one mother had both minor-aged children and an adult-aged child. Given the way Black women's engagement with family and work can change throughout their lives, this study uses a life course approach (Heinz and Kruger 2001; Elder and Shanahan 2006; Mendenhall et al. 2013; Maldonado-Fabela 2022). I employ a life course approach by beginning all interviews with questions about the participants' early lives including their experiences being mothered, witnessing mothers in their communities navigate work and family, their ideologies around motherhood, and their matriculation into motherhood themselves. Participants were also asked about their educational and work experiences including their K-12 schooling, higher education if applicable, and job/career aspirations and outcomes. Utilizing a life course approach in this way provides insight into the ways Black mothers shape and reshape their perceptions and performances of motherwork. I intentionally use the term Black to provide inclusivity to mothers who identify as African American, Afro-Caribbean, and/or African. All of the mothers identify themselves as Black. Of the twenty participants, three are Black immigrants, four are Black Americans born to at least one immigrant parent, and thirteen are Black Americans born to Black American parents. I decided to use pseudonyms for my participants in an effort to protect their privacy.

This study is not intended to be representative of the perspectives of all Black mothers within Los Angeles County. It is intended to be socially significant rather than statistically significant. This research provides an in-depth, racially gendered case-study analysis of twenty Black mothers and their experiences with mothering in Los Angeles. I utilize interviewing as a way of seeking "logical rather than statistical inference, for case- rather than sample-based logic, for saturation rather than representation" in my analysis of Black women in Los Angeles (Small 2009:28). This study, as a result, may not include some Black mothers with intersecting identities of sexuality, vulnerable citizenship documentation status, ethnic origins, and special needs/disabilities. Nonetheless, it uses a sociohistorical framework to situate the stories of twenty mothers whose testimonies uncover intersections of family, work, and education in their lived experiences in Los Angeles.

II. The History of Black Motherwork

A. Black Feminism, Controlling Images, and the Market Family-Matrix

Black motherwork can be understood as the racially gendered labor Black women perform as workers in the market economy and as mothers to their children and community. The term motherwork was developed by Patricia Hill Collins (1994) to expand feminist theories on mothering which traditionally treated public spheres of market work as distinct from private realms of domestic labor for family. Collins (1994) disrupts this perspective because it is dominated by a literature that centers the experiences of white, middle-class, nuclear, heterosexual families in a way that marginalizes the diverse experiences of women of color with family and work. She posits the use of the term motherwork as a way of discussing the intersections of these realms in the fluid ways women of color have navigated spaces of work and home historically. In addition to challenging the supposedly separate spheres of market work and private family labor, the term motherwork challenges assumptions that associate economic employment and political participation with masculinity, while associating childrearing and domestic work as feminine forms of labor. It highlights that women of color, particularly Black mothers, have worked in the economic sector as both unpaid laborers and employed workers. Gender has never protected Black women from experiencing the racial economic exploitation of their physical labor and reproductive labor.

In acknowledging the racially gendered work that Black mothers perform on behalf of their communities, the term motherwork speaks to mothers as both individuals with unique and diverse identities but also as maternal figures in their communities where collective identities around race, family, and resistance to oppression are shared among Black women

and mothers. Motherwork also challenges feminist theorizing that characterizes the father as an oppressive patriarch who supposedly monopolizes power over the domestic space as the financial provider and thus becomes the ultimate deciding voice in matters of the home. In this normative expectation of family formation, women's political struggle for autonomy would be in relation to her husband's authority. Black mothers, however, have not traditionally navigated families in which their husbands are sole financial providers; thus, their partners are not viewed through the same lens of white patriarchy (Jones 2009).

Collins's (1994) description of motherwork includes three core themes rooted in women of color feminism: survival, power, and identity. Though Collin's (1994) analysis of motherwork refers to women of color feminism more broadly, each theme is relevant in understanding Black motherwork in particular. Survival informs Black motherwork in that Black children continue to experience conditions of poverty including over policing, exposure to violence and drugs, environmental hazards, and housing instability (Williams 1999; Gillborn 2005; Drake and Rank 2009; Rios 2011; Staggers-Hakim 2016; Henderson and Wells 2021). The work that Black mothers enact for their children and for their careers and jobs is in the context of this racial discrimination. Black families, as a result, include conceptions of family beyond nuclear, middle-class norms as they have needed to expand past normative definitions in order to survive (Jones 2009). Black families have been maintained in large part because of the racially gendered care of motherwork (and other mothering) of Black mothers, grandmothers, aunties, godmothers, and church mothers (Collins 2000). Black women are seen as pillars of the Black family within their communities, despite their histories of encountering and resisting state and interpersonal violence. Black motherwork has also included their fight for empowerment by countering

racist ideologies and teaching the value of racial equity to their children. The motherwork of Black women includes teaching their children about their racial identities in a context in which people of color are disproportionally impoverished and incarcerated. Thus, Black motherwork involves the learning of how anti-Blackness has operated in this world, but also an unlearning of white supremacist ideologies that have proliferated issues of colorism and internalized anti-Blackness in the community.

Black women's roles as mothers generate an oppositional knowledge that is constantly being reshaped. Understanding the realities of discrimination faced in a heteropatriarchal, white capitalist society, Black mothers must prepare their children to face obstacles and hardships. Mothers negotiate complicated terrains, teaching their children to navigate social systems strategically while still resisting racial domination (Gonzalez 2019, 2022). Collins (1994) addresses the dialectical relationship between oppressive institutions that seek to control Black motherhood and efforts taken by Black mothers to assert agency and preserve power over motherhood.

This study deploys an intersectional approach that contextualizes motherhood in relation to the systematic ways race, class, and gender inform mothering experiences (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2000). Because researchers can tend to conflate womanhood with motherhood, treating the mother and child as a single entity (Glenn et al. 1994), this research pays attention to development of personhood and expressions of agency among women. In addition, it works to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Black women's experiences with regard to age, sexual orientation, social class, region, and religion. Though a flexible intersectional lens should be employed when studying mothers across racial and class lines, it

is implausible and particularly egregious to attempt to study Black mothers without an analysis of racialized and gendered oppression, both historically and contemporarily.

Black feminism as a social and theoretical framework builds from ideas expressed in the Combahee River Collective Statement, which advocated for the implementation of Black feminism as a political catalyst toward human freedom. The Combahee statement, created by Black women in 1974, recognized Black women's incessant struggle for survival, understanding the ways in which identity and politics can intertwine in struggles to dismantle heteropatriarchal, capitalist systems rooted in imperialism (Combahee River Collective 1983). The collective envisioned a radical shift to a human-centered society devoted to the social, political, and economic liberation of all people, particularly those historically marginalized by race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. This study draws from Black feminist theory and its prioritization of knowledge gained about work and family from the lived experiences of Black women whose social locations stand at the intersections of race, class, and gender oppression (Collins 1989, 2000). It values Black mothers as key contributors to understanding gendered labor for family and employed labor for the market considering that they are the very group who disproportionately has had to navigate both mothering expectations and work obligations, often needing to create innovative strategies to implement balance.

In an attempt to center the significance of race in understanding gendered work, scholars engage with Collins's concept of motherwork to analyze particular conditions confronting mothers of color (Ladd-Taylor 1994; Udel 2001; Caballero et al. 2017, 2019; Edwards 2021). For example, Susila Gurusami (2019) deploys the term *decarceral motherwork* to describe how formerly incarcerated mothers challenge controlling images of

deviant Black mothering by focusing on their children in response to the state surveillance that consistently threatens not only the custody of their children but their own freedom from state confinement. The *Chicana Motherwork Anthology* includes accounts of care work and intergenerational collective resilience against state sanctioned injustices as key conceptions of motherwork (Caballero et al. 2019). In particular, it discusses histories of migration and the ways that it shapes perceptions of mothering and work, encompassing the role of community care work in familial survival.

Building from this, I believe it is important to also incorporate histories of migration in our conversations about Black motherwork. Black family life has continued to be shaped by Black migration domestically and internationally, particularly if we expand our perceptions of Black Americans to include Black immigrants who become American and form a family in the United States. Domestically, Black family life has been shaped by the Great Migration, in which many Black families had little choice but to flee the South during Jim Crow segregation in which racialized terror and economic discrimination made living conditions unbearable for Black communities (Gregory 2006; Derenoncourt 2022). Many Black Americans in Los Angeles, including some mothers in my study, have this history in their familial stories. Internationally, Black migrants come to the "states" in search of economic opportunity, often leaving difficult living conditions (Pierre 2004; Benson 2006). Thus, I find it important to complicate understandings of Black motherwork by taking into consideration the diversity of Blackness as reflected in the stories of my participants.

Scholars have also delineated the ways Black women's motherwork has served as a tool for educational advocacy and collective resistance against racialized school discrimination and marginalization (Cooper 2007; Bailey-Fakhoury and Frierson 2014;

Watson 2020; Watson and Baxley 2021). Terri N. Watson and Gwendolyn S. Baxley's (2021) research describes how care work performed by Black women educational leaders advocating for Black youth is critical for acknowledging and addressing anti-Blackness within school systems. Watson and Baxley (2021) argue that these Black women educators performed motherwork in their participation in a community center that provides food for Black youth, designing a culturally responsive curriculum, challenging anti-Black zero tolerance policing of students, promoting critical consciousness of Black identity and culture, and creating community with students' parents to understand their needs holistically. These studies have opened possibilities for my project on Black motherwork and conceptualizing and defining Black women's engagement with education as educational labor, as a component of Black motherwork that intersects and differentiates from family labor and employed labor. The research on Black motherwork and education shows how Black women's educational labor is a critical component of Black motherwork. The expanding literature on motherwork invites analyses that link the concept of motherwork theoretically to the voices of Black women's experiences with motherhood, work, and schooling. This dialogue has the potential to generate new ways of knowing and understanding family and work. There is a value of putting the history and evolving theories of Black motherwork — and motherwork more broadly—in conversation with emerging empirical and theoretical scholarship. It can provide evidence about how Black women's lives continue to display the multifaceted ways motherwork shapes their histories and the everyday realities of family and employed work.

Black feminist theorists identify a number of controlling images used throughout history to pathologize and essentialize Black women as mother workers in an effort to justify

discriminatory social practices (Collins 2000). These images are critical to this study because they have constructed and reconstructed public perceptions of Black women. As a result, Black mothers, including those in this study, continue to navigate and negotiate these labels that fail to frame accurately their interconnected roles as women, mothers, and workers. The controlling images relevant to this study include jezebel, mammy, matriarch, welfare mother, and Black lady. I describe these ideal types in the following way:

Jezebel*:* The jezebel represents a hypersexual Black woman, contemporarily referred to as "THOT," "hoochie," "hoe," "trick," and "slut." The practice of labeling Black women as sexually deviant has origins in slavery, when white slave owners justified the rape of enslaved women by stigmatizing them as temptresses with a seductive allure (Collins 2000). Shifting the blame onto enslaved women was a tactic used under white supremacy to control and terrorize Black women's bodies while perpetuating a distorted view of Black women's sexuality. This allowed masters to rationalize their acts of horror since they expanded their labor force by impregnating Black women (Davis 1981; Hartman 2016; Roberts 2017). The Black family was viewed by white capitalists as a continual source of labor needed to fuel racialized capitalism. The children of enslaved women were automatically given enslaved status even if the offspring were products of rape by the slave masters (Spillers 1987; Omolade 1994; Jones 2009; Hartman 2016). Black women were neither recognized nor respected by whites who viewed enslaved Black bodies as sub-human to justify tearing apart mothers from their children and husbands from their wives by selling them to the highest bidder on the slave auction market. The Black woman's body was essentially seen as an object to be controlled and manipulated for white familial economic stability (Roberts 2017). The jezebel image continued to be used in the Jim Crow era by white rapists and has

persisted well into this era of mass incarceration. Politicians have used the image to characterize Black women as excessively fertile, having an irresponsible sexual appetite, and producing too many children with different fathers, allegedly in order to increase the cash benefits they would receive from social services.

Mammy: The idea of the mammy has roots in slavery but became prevalent during the Jim Crow era to describe subservient Black women who worked in homes of white families. During enslavement, Black women labeled as mammies performed the majority of the domestic (family) labor of the home, with white mistresses operating as managers policing this racially gendered labor. This labor is racially gendered because it was considered Black women's work and thus undervalued and surveilled work. Enslaved women performed the domestic work of cleaning, cooking, and caring for white babies to afford white mistresses leisure time. The labor of Black women was not confined to domestic spaces considering that many Black women (including pregnant women) worked in the fields alongside their male counterparts and were held to similar expectations. While some Black people were allowed to work in the homes of their masters, this did not exclude Black women from also being responsible for the maintenance of their own households. Black women, thus, were constantly navigating between domestic and public spheres while performing productive labor (Collins 1990; Glenn 1992; Dill 2015), leaving them little time to care for their own children. In his essay, "The Black Mother," originally written in 1912, W.E.B. Du Bois (1995) refers to the Black mammy as a "foster mammy" who is forced to take care of white children at the expense of her own children. This is a precursor to Collins's (1986, 2000) argument that the mammy has an outsider-within social location, in which white employers mask exploitation by claiming her as a sort of family member, ultimately blurring the line

between labor and love. The Black mammy represents the dominant group's idea of the proper relationship between Black women and white patriarchy. She is stripped of her humanity because her value was linked only to her household services.

Integral to the ideology of the Black mammy was the expectation that she would teach obedience to her children to accept the unequal and exploitative place of Black people, reinforcing their roles in the white power structure. As previously mentioned, Collins (1986) situates Black women's historical experiences within the context of the exploitative work they most often perform to argue that Black women have developed an "outsider within social location," providing them with unique insights on how society is structured to perpetuate the unequal distribution of power. These distinctive insights stem from a collective wisdom formed from a legacy of struggle for survival. The "mammification" of Black women is not exclusive to their devalued work as domestics historically, but continues into their contemporary employment sectors, which can range from service jobs as waitresses and retail cashiers, clerical work as secretaries and administrative assistants, and even professional careers as educators, healthcare providers, and social workers (Omolade 1994; Collins 2000). Black women are often expected to perform unpaid emotional labor by regularly doing a level of mothering in their workspaces. Essentially, the image of the mammy strategically sends a message of white superiority rooted in the exploitation of Black women's labor in the capitalist political economy.

Matriarch: The image of the matriarch, propagated by the Moynihan Report, refers to the large number of Black families that are female-headed households. Moynihan (1965) criticizes Black mothers for creating a matriarchal culture that they supposedly transmit to their children which allegedly stunts the growth of Black people by emasculating Black men

and further burdening Black women. He states that the pattern is formed by Black women being better educated than Black men because Black mothers prioritize the education of their daughters, not sons (Moynihan 1965). He describes Black women as being disgusted with Black men's inability to find work, and thus they choose to alienate Black fathers from their families. The matriarch is considered a *bad* mother because she spends too much time away from home, leaving her too little time to supervise her children's behavior. The matriarch is blamed for her alleged inability to abide by typical gender expectations of white patriarchy, including letting her husband do the employed work whole she stays home to care for the children. Conforming to the separate spheres of gendered labor enshrined in notions of true womanhood, however, requires material and social privileges that Black women defamed as matriarchs do not enjoy, especially in contexts of mass incarceration, unemployment, and violence.

Welfare Mother*:* After the election of Ronald Reagan to the Presidency in 1980, the image of the mother as welfare queen was used by the president and his followers to justify the government's extreme cuts in social welfare programs that many working families needed to survive (Collins 2000; Alexander 2010). Despite some Black women using these services (which they are legally entitled to), many could still barely afford to survive (Roberts 1994). The "welfare mother" counters the normative expectations of white families because she is viewed as being alone, with no husband to help her raise children. The stigma associated with the welfare mother was used to control the fertility of Black women through forced sterilization and other coercive measures used to suppress Black births (Roberts 2017). Similar to the matriarch, the welfare mother is labeled as a bad mother. It is not because she is too busy and aggressive like the matriarch but instead, the welfare mother is

demonized for her alleged passivity. She is depicted as sitting around all day collecting government checks, which sets an example of a bad work ethic for her Black children.

Black Lady: The image of the Black lady describes middle-class, professional Black women that uphold Black respectability politics (Collins 2000). Despite their success in a system stacked against them, they are nonetheless demonized as well. They are alleged to prioritize their work over relationships and motherhood, and hence become stigmatized as too aggressive to marry, explaining why they are largely unwed. The Black Lady is also viewed as stealing jobs from more qualified and deserving job seekers, particularly males. The rhetorical portrayal of the Black Lady became revived in response to affirmative action policies which were designed to level the playing field for minorities in education and work places. Although the greatest beneficiaries of affirmative action were white women (Crenshaw 2006), Black ladies were blamed for being in positions they *did not belong in.* This helped contribute to the idea of reverse racism, which argues inaccurately that unfair advantages are given to minorities to fill a quota, an argument that essentially reflects the powerful sense of white entitlement that actually dominates the labor market.

Despite these pathological portrayals of Black women and their motherwork, sociologists grounded in intersectional theories have conducted research that centers Black women's experiences with work and family, revealing their differences from hegemonic white ideologies of gendered labor expectations (Kaplan 1997; Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2008; Clarke 2011; Barnes 2016; Dow 2019). Scholars have also demonstrated the resilience of Black families to survive the racist atrocities of systemic family separation and economic exploitation, adapting their family structures and roles to accommodate their lived realities while maintaining their familial values and relationships (Gutman 1977; Davis 1983). The

pervasive presence of anti-Blackness in U.S. social institutions and its historical legacy in the lives of Black communities directly shape the ways Black women continue to understand their gendered responsibilities of work and employment to provide for their families.

In *Mothering While Black*, Dawn Dow (2019) introduces the concept of a market family matrix of conflict and an additional matrix of integration, in an effort to discuss Black mothering ideologies contextualized in Black women's histories and sociological perspectives. The market family matrix of conflict that Dow delineates represents white women's gendered labor for family and attendant struggle to enter into the workforce and engage in employed labor. It arises from hegemonic ideologies that separate private domestic spheres from public market spaces. Scholars (largely studying white families and women) describe these separate spheres as realms in which women remain primarily responsible for family life, where family work is still gendered as women's work, and thus undervalued and unpaid (Hays 1996; Bianchi et al. 2000, 2012; Crittenden 2002; Correll et al. 2007; Ridgeway 2011). As Sharon Hays (1996) articulates in her book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, intensive mothering is expected of women regardless of their work status. Women are expected to serve as the primary nurturers responsible for childrearing and child well-being. Mainstream norms equate performing intensive mothering to "good" mothering, which attaches a stigma to women who maintain full-time career status in order to secure income and express individualized identity. These hegemonic ideologies frame motherhood as bound to womanhood in a way that devalues women's contributions to the workforce and absolves men of parental responsibilities within domestic spaces. Some researchers describe how women are not only held accountable for childcare, but they are also depended on to perform the majority of domestic work chores including cooking and cleaning, even if they

maintain their market work commitments (Hochschild 1989; Bianchi et al. 2000; Hook 2010). Although the gap between women's and men's unpaid labor is dwindling—with men's unpaid labor increasing over time, women still do more of the unpaid labor and less of the market labor than their husbands (Bianchi et al. 2000, 2012; Sayer 2005). Despite evolving mothering ideologies and increased availability of childcare options, hegemonic conceptions of mothering directly contradict workplace expectations of optimal worker efficiency (Williams 2001). The sociological literature on the family discusses how women who become mothers experience a wage penalty (Waldfogel 1997; Bianchi 2000; Lundberg and Rose 2000; Budig and England 2001; Staff and Mortimer 2012). Women pressured to modify their work commitments are often torn between conflicting expectations to be available to their children's needs as mothers and to perform at the same level at work as their male counterparts and their female counterparts without children.

Dow's market family matrix of integration, in contrast, explains the sociohistorical ways that Black women have always been culturally and economically expected to work regardless of their class and marital status. Dow argues that Black women construct a mothering ideology quite different from the hegemonic white perspective of mothering. Black mothers perceive their roles and responsibilities differently. She indicates that Black women embrace cultural expectations of "good" mothering that involve mothers being financially independent by working outside of the home and sharing childcare responsibilities with their kin and community networks. Yet work is not merely a way to provide income (especially for middle and upper class women who could if they chose rely on their husbands' incomes). Work is also a means for personal fulfillment. Mothers with advanced degrees can view not working after years of schooling as unacceptable to them,

their families and their communities (Stone 2007; Damaske 2011; Barnes 2016; Dow 2019). Relying on kinship care that includes drawing on shared efforts by networks of relatives, neighbors, and friends is often a fundamental strategy for Black women's integration of market and family work (Stack 1974; Jones 2009; Dow 2019). The African motto "it takes a village to raise a child" remains a key idea in informing Black mothers valuing, centering, and relying on community childrearing.

The family matrix of integration takes into consideration that Black women have worked for wages outside the home in large numbers regardless of their marital and class statuses (Jones 2009; U.S. Department of Labor 2020). The majority of white women, in contrast, prior to the 1970s enacted —some willingly, others succumbing to systemic pressures—a glorification of domesticity that largely relegated them to the personal space of the home performing intensive mothering and domestic labor (Welter 1966; Roberts 2002). While white women (particularly those who were middle-class and affluent) were prevented from engaging in employed labor, many Black women were expected to work. Seeking and maintaining employed work in Black communities has never been seen as exclusively the province of men, but rather has been understood as a necessary parental contribution to familial survival and stability. While many white women accepted ideologies that a woman's responsibility was solely to her children and husband within the home, Black women developed an idea of feminism (or womanism) that combined family labor and work outside the home. In his book *Black Wives,* sociologist Bart Landry asserts that Black women's feminist ideologies and practices demonstrate that Black middle-class families initiated and instituted an innovative gendered egalitarianism within their familial dynamics that would later be adopted by white American families generally (Landry 2002). Black women

essentially embraced and embodied the praxis of motherwork. Their labor and care work is racially gendered because race is central to their gendered histories and experiences with market labor, reproductive labor, and family labor (Davis 1983; Barnes 2008, 2016; Roberts 2017; Dow 2019). Because anti-Blackness is embedded in the social and economic institutions of family and work that Black mothers in general navigate, race is often relevant to the strategies that the Black mothers in this study devise while negotiating these institutions.

Some Black professional women, however, struggle with the ways in which their goals of economic independence and career success conflict with desires to alter their work relationships so they can prioritize their marriage and their children. The upper-middle-class Black women in Riché Barnes's work (2016) challenge and complicate integrated mothering ideologies by altering their work commitments for the sake of family. Barnes identifies strategic mothering as the varied ways Black women negotiate their work relationships to prioritize and accommodate their roles as mothers and wives. Their strategic mothering is a demonstration of what she terms a neopolitics of respectability, the term that Barnes uses to complicate Evelyn Higginbotham's (1992) articulation of the general "politics of respectability" in Black communities. Strategic mothering is seen by Black middle-class mothers as a tool for racial uplift that centers Black family structure and stability.

Elaine Bell Kaplan's (1997) book, *Not Our Kind of Girl,* on Black teenage mothers in urban spaces, also demonstrates challenges to integrated mothering ideologies given that these young mothers often do not have the support of their own mothers during pregnancy, much less a domestic network of extended family to help with childrearing. These young mothers struggle to maintain a network of kinfolk since they live far away from one another,

pay increasingly high rent, and experience demanding working conditions. Kaplan illustrates how the Black teenage mothers in her study experience a poverty of relationships in which they are isolated from family and friends and neglected by failing school systems.

Sociological studies that center Black women elucidate the diverse ways Black mothers navigate between and within spaces of family, community, and work. They demonstrate the complicated ways race, class, education, and career trajectories shape Black women's understandings and experiences with mothering. The sociological literature on Black women and work invites further questions on how education shapes Black women's decisions about family and employment. Given the value of education in Black women's lives and Black families historically, in what ways do motherwork and education intersect in Black women's negotiations with family labor and employed labor?

B. Black Motherwork and Education

This section focuses on Black women's educational labor and its relevance to their motherwork. It unpacks the significance of schooling for Black families and the contradictory ways it has enabled Black social mobility while also denying Black humanity through institutionalized racial discrimination. Black women are mothers, other mothers, sisters, sister-cousins, cousins, aunties, nieces, and daughters, but also educators and students within these Black families. This section interprets the history of Black education in a way that affirms and acknowledges Black women as both producers and recipients of educational labor within Black families.

During the era of slavery in the U.S., the prospect of literacy in enslaved Black communities instilled fear in the hearts of the outnumbered southern slave masters who

recognized that reading and writing could be fundamental and complementary tools for community mobilizing. Following Nat Turner's slave insurrection in 1831 inspired by his religious interpretations of the Bible, the majority of slave states (with the exception of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Maryland) passed laws criminalizing the literacy of enslaved people as an attempt toward social control. Enslaved communities, nonetheless, understood the interconnectedness of literacy and political freedom (Cornelius 1991; Cutter 1996; Span and Anderson 2005). Enslaved women and men demonstrated a commitment to enacting educational labor by creating their own alternative learning spaces, secretly reading and writing and developing community learning networks among one another and sometimes with sympathetic whites (Williams 2005). This performance of educational labor sets the foundation for Black communities to continue challenging hegemonic sites of schooling only accessible to whites. Schooling for Black people has never been confined to the classroom as many enslaved Blacks sought any available opportunities to read and write despite the threat of physical and psychological punishments.

Pedagogical practices geared towards literacy for enslaved Black communities directly developed Black critical consciousness about abolition beyond the plantation (Douglass 1966). It is important to note that enslaved Black communities developing literacy in defiance of white supremacy was a pronounced demonstration against colonial ways of knowing and exclusionary practices of schooling. By learning to read and write, enslaved Black communities challenged the racially oppressive ideology and laws that asserted Black education was a crime. Black people reasserted their humanity through schooling, transforming criminality into skillful resistance against racial tyranny and towards educational freedom. Formerly enslaved people like Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass

used their literary skills to share the horrors of slave experiences such as familial separation at slave auctions and sexual violence against Black women and children. This provided early examples of counter-storytelling in support of abolition and chronicled detailed pathways to freedom (Equiano 1793; Brown 1847; Douglass 1966; Jacobs 2009).

During the Jim Crow Era, Black mothers navigated the segregating schooling that relegated them to separate, underfunded and unequal educational facilities. State and federal governments clearly cared little about Black education, elucidated by the deteriorating school infrastructure along with outdated schooling supplies (Fairclough 2001; Kelly 2010). This disregard for Black schooling did not deter formerly enslaved Black people from using available resources to expand learning opportunities for themselves and their children. Heather Andrea Williams (2005), in her book *Self Taught,* points out that after emancipation Black women and men prioritized education by becoming teachers and developing schools with the support of Black churches and the Freedman's Bureau. Her work challenges the problematic, yet widely accepted narrative constructed by the white historical imagination that paints northern Yankee teachers as the saviors of learning, guiding *helpless* Blacks into educational prosperity (Jones 1992). Black leaders and organizers, in addition, constructed dozens of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) that would later produce numerous renowned Black intellectuals and writers including Toni Morrison, Martin Luther King Jr., Alice Walker, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois (the founder of American sociology), and many more. Though Black communities transformed "segregation into congregation" (Lipsitz 2011), the reality remained that as long as schooling was segregated by race, the majority (if not all) of Black schools would lack resources and opportunities compared with all-white schools.

Even after the monumental *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling in 1954 called for desegregating schools as a prerequisite for democratic citizenship, Black students remained relegated (and continue to this day) to stay in segregated schooling systems (Orfield 1975, 1984; McNeal 2009). The ruling proved to be more symbolic than widely impactful, considering the unwillingness of states to enforce the law due to the lack of federal government intervention and the subsequent absence of institutional change. Though only few Black students had the opportunity to integrate into white schools, their stories deserve attention as they reveal critical and inspirational examples of educational labor, particularly by Black mothers.

Think of the story of Lucille Bridges, the mother of Ruby Bridges, the first Black student to attend an all-white school in New Orleans. Black history celebrates Ruby as an icon of Black educational triumph, with former President Barack Obama even paying a visit to Norman Rockwell's painting entitled "The Problem We All Live With" which depicts 6-year-old Ruby walking in the center of the four federal marshals that escorted her to the school doors. Less attention is paid to Ruby's mother, Lucille Bridges, who was photographed walking hand-in hand alongside her daughter with a vicious white mob mocking and harassing them. Lucille Bridges chose to send her daughter to an all-white school though aware of the threat of racial violence and the resistance from state police to comply with federal integration laws. Federal marshals accompanied Ruby and Lucille because southern state actors and residents viewed Black families' pursuit of equal education as a threat to white racial order. Lucille's courage to face these realities of racialized dehumanization, to stand with democratic principles of freedom, and to risk violence to herself and her first-born daughter is an exemplary illustration of a Black mother's

educational labor. Lucille embodies a component of educational labor which entails Black mothers willfully defying and disrupting state policies that marginalize their children's educational prospects.

While efforts toward desegregating schools have been made through magnet programs and busing initiatives (Tyson 2011), little change has been seen, as evidenced by schools that are obviously disproportionally dominated by a particular ethnic group depending on the given neighborhood. Racially segregated schooling, coupled with divestment from schools disproportionately attended by students of color, breeds educational inequality that Black children and their parents have to navigate. The result of this inequality is often characterized as an achievement gap, a concept used to theorize and contextualize why students of color (particularly Blacks, Latinx, Native Americans, and certain Asian populations) underperform on standardized and westernized measures of learning compared to their white counterparts. The alleged achievement gap, however, in reality reveals an opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings 2006; Howard 2010; Tyson 2011), where race, class, and gender merge to structure inequality in classroom settings. Derrick Darby and John L. Ruby (2018) argue that schooling practices maintain the *Color of Mind*, a concept they devise to describe the racialized ideologies of inferiority used to marginalize Black students in learning spaces. They articulate that the supposed Black-white achievement gap is a product of indignities and injustices against Black students that can be ameliorated by removing the Color of Mind from educational institutions.

Further unpacking this phenomenon, Karolyn Tyson (2011) counters the presumptive effort taken by neoliberals to explain Black academic underachievement by focusing on their supposed resistance towards *acting white.* Instead, she highlights the fundamental role of

racialized tracking in the formation and usage of the *acting white* slur amongst Black youth. Racialized tracking refers to the ways that race impacts how students are grouped based on perceived ability, and thus placed into segregated classrooms (Tyson 2011). Tyson (2011) argues that students begin associating achievement with whiteness as a result of racialized tracking that formed after desegregation, clarifying society's tendency to confuse cause and effect. Thus, institutions produce the ideology of education equating with whiteness because historically the education of Blacks has been delegitimized. Additionally, Tyson's (2011) work challenges scholars like John Ogbu (1978) who tend to homogenize Black Americans as not believing in the practical importance of education. Tyson (2011) points to the limits of Ogbu's (1978) conclusions by providing narratives of low-income Black families that actually do promote school, even in cases where the parents have minimal formal education.

The theme of Black families valuing and prioritizing education can also be found in Shirley A. Hill's work, *African American Children.* She uses a social capital framework to challenge pathological portrayals of Black families and uncover the "parenting work" that Black parents employ while raising their children. Hill (1999) asserts that Black parents are more likely to choose education as their top priority for their children relative to being kind and compassionate or having a loving strong family. Low-income Blacks are even more likely than affluent or middle-class Blacks to do so (Hill 1999). Often influenced and at times deceived by paradigms of racial individualism (Gordon 2015), there are many low-income, high performing Black students who believe education is their path to success, and consequently incorporate a strong work ethic to achieve the uncertain and illusory promises of the American Dream. Though they understand the prevalence of racism in restricting social mobility, they believe education is their tool to overcome institutional barriers (Lang

1992; Perry et al. 2003; Oliver and Shapiro 2013). These aspirations, however, are grounded in disappointing realities: educational attainment has proven to increase the rates of employment and earnings for both Blacks and whites; however, these rates are lower for Black graduates than whites with similar education backgrounds (Economic Policy Institute 2015).

Given the complicated educational terrains that Black families continue to negotiate, my study also considers the ways that education informs their parenting practices. Black parents tend to consider race to be a salient factor in which schools they seek out, what educational and extracurricular programs their children participate in, and with whom and where they allow their children to congregate socially (Dow 2019). It is no secret Black mothers perform the majority of the parenting work for Black children (Jones 2009). Black mothers must prepare their children to face obstacles and hardships. Mothers negotiate complicated situations, teaching their children to navigate social systems strategically while still resisting racial domination. Collins (1994) addresses the dialectical relationship between oppressive institutions that seek to control Black motherhood and efforts taken by Black mothers to assert agency and preserve power over motherhood. Dawn M. Dow's article "The Deadly Challenges of Raising African American Boys: Navigating the Controlling Image of the 'Thug'," demonstrates how racism impacts the gendered parenting of middle and upper-class mothers. These mothers negotiate and actively disrupt the controlling image of black men and boys as "thugs" with four strategies that Dow (2016) identifies as rooted in experience, environment, emotion, and image management. Experience management centers exploring diverse activities for sons while environment management prioritizes monitoring the spaces their sons navigate. Image management focuses on appearance while emotion

management centers behavior to reduce the chances that their sons will be viewed as dangerous and criminal. In contrast, Dow (2019) found that mothers of daughters focus more on building their self-esteem and self-worth. To do so they use peer group management to foster their daughters' feelings of belonging in social settings as well as toy and media management to ensure their daughters are exposed to positive images of Black women.

This research signifies the importance for understanding the ways Black mothers develop parenting strategies in relation to education and the racial realities that Black children navigate in accessing schooling. Given the significance of education in Black families, this literature opens the door for the part of my research that takes into consideration the labor that Black women perform in particular educating their children and navigating schooling spaces as an aspect of Black motherwork.

C. Black Motherwork and Reproductive (In)Justices

Black motherwork also includes Black women's experiences having their reproductive capabilities exploited and manipulated at the hands of racial capitalism. The movement for Reproductive Justice (RJ) was founded by 14 Black women seeking to complicate the pro-choice/pro-life debate, devising three central components to reproductive freedom: (1) the right to have a child, (2) the right to not have a child, and (3) the right to parent that child safely. This framing provides inclusivity to discuss and denounce Black women's historical legacy with sexual violence, bodily mutilation, forced sterilization, mass incarceration, and family policing as direct violations of their reproductive liberties. It opens conversations to discuss the ways social, political and economic policies and regulations that affect Black mothering and families are also inherently reproductive justice issues. Black women have had each tenet of reproductive justice violated. In this section, I detail Black

women's experiences with reproductive injustices to show that Black women's historical struggle for reproductive freedom is fundamental in situating and understanding their racially gendered labor as mother-workers.

Black women have repeatedly had the first tenet of RJ, "the right to have a child," violated throughout histories filled with racial terror. Black women, first and foremost, have fought to be seen as mothers and to have the humanities of their families valued and respected. Understanding Black women's racially gendered battle to be recognized as legitimate parents is an integral part of understanding Black women's motherwork (Roberts 1993). Black women's bodies have been contested sites of struggle where they have fought to assert their agency to determine how and whom their reproductive labor serves. Black women's reproductive capacities were exploited to expand the Black labor force under slavery, but in contrast the eugenics movement portrayed Black women as unfit to reproduce, let alone mother and raise their children (Roberts 2017). The eugenics movement promoted ideologies that Black communities genetically passed down socially inferior traits that would supposedly breed degeneracy and crime (Pernick 1996). Eugenicists feared that Black people would intermingle with whites disrupting their supposed white racial purity and superiority. Unpacking Black motherwork involves addressing the ways racism informs ideologies that delegitimize Black family formation.

Eugenicists even found allies in the birth control movement, as Dorothy Roberts (2017) details, in which birth control was also valued for its potential to limit the growth of those labeled socially unfit. Given the racial ideologies influencing those deemed unworthy of procreation, poor Black mothers were particularly impacted. Roberts points to the encouragement of the long-term birth control implant called Norplant in poor Black

neighborhoods that originally was created by the Population Council to limit population growth in Third World countries. Given that Norplant requires a doctor's visit to remove it, women trying to have children can only do so at the discretion of the doctor. Norplant was also discovered to have irreversible side effects, rendering some users unable to have children in the future (Smith 2002; Roberts 2017). Norplant was specifically encouraged and incentivized for poor women. Medical doctors and staff were noted to withhold information about its negative side effects and also to pressure women into using Norplant after giving birth. In several states, women on welfare have been offered additional money if they choose to use Norplant and some women arrested for crimes were given an option of choosing between jail time or Norplant (Taylor 1992; Henley 1993). Norplant was one of the few birth control options provided by Medicaid. Some poor Black women were threatened with termination of social services if they did not use it (Roberts 2017). The complicated history of the birth control movement reveals how reproductive injustices shape Black women's context of forming families and becoming mothers. Their decision to reproduce and parent is in direct opposition to ideologies of their maternal unfitness. The choice to navigate Black motherwork, thus, is a political act of resistance.

In addition to birth control, eugenics ideologies of Black mothering contributed to the implementation of compulsory sterilizations. Justifications of sterilizations centered the prevention of the supposedly "feeble minded" and criminally inclined from reproducing, which meant poor Black women and poor whites labeled socially deviant (e.g., single mothers) in the eyes of white supremacists (Ladd-Taylor 2017). While eugenics-minded feminist advocates supported the sterilization of Black women, most sterilizations of Black women and other women of color were administered by white doctors at a time when white

women found it nearly impossible to get sterilized because of fears that declining white birth rates would undermine white supremacy (Roberts 2017; Ross and Solinger 2017). During the 1950s and 1960s, incidents of Black women getting sterilized without their consent increased with little widespread public attention (despite leaders like Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer speaking out against such reproductive injustices in the South). Impoverished Black women have spoken of going to the hospital for an unrelated medical procedure and coming out sterilized without their formal consent. While government funding was provided for sterilization of poor women of color, the Hyde Amendment prevented the use of government money for abortions (Gurr 2011; Ross and Solinger 2017).

This bodily violence to Black women's reproductive capacities connects to the dark history of medicine in which Black women's bodies have been mutilated for advancement of gynecological research, with little regard for their bodily autonomy or reproductive plans (Washington 2006). Black men's bodies have also been mutilated during slavery and Jim Crow when Black men were castrated along with being lynched due to suspicions of sexual impropriety with white women (Ross 2004). Black bodies have been mutilated in ways that have shaped Black reproduction and Black family life. Black women understanding this history of medical misconduct can distrust medical institutions that continue to let racial bias shape high mortality rates of Black birthing women (Gamble 1993; Oparah and Bonaparte 2015). One of the first institutions women are expected to navigate when they become pregnant, the hospital, is also a site in which Black women have been treated as mere bodies rather than mothers. It should also be noted that the legacy of sterilizing vulnerable women of color continues to exist with the ways that women in prisons have been sterilized without their consent, particularly in the state of California. Considering that Black women are

disproportionally incarcerated, and the fastest rising group of women incarcerated, issues of incarcerated women getting sterilized disproportionally impact Black women, many of whom are already mothers (Whatcott 2018; Hayes et al. 2020). Black motherwork should be understood in the context of the aggrieved Black mothers struggling in conditions of poverty that are continuously policed and punished rather than provided mental health services, rehabilitation services, educational pathways, job opportunities, childcare accessibility, and housing stability. The War on Drugs beginning in the 1970s disrupted Black families by targeting and incarcerating Black mothers (and fathers) using or involved with drugs, even if the woman was pregnant (Beckett 1995; Small 2001).

The criminalization of Black women for using drugs during their pregnancies points to a contemporary maternal-fetal conflict. Rather than treating this issue as a public health problem, these women are accused of not only utilizing illegal drugs but also child abuse and endangerment (Ocen 2017). Controlling images of Black women as drug users fuel campaigns that demonize Black women's wombs as spaces of danger for Black children, ignoring the structural economic, political, and social inequalities that plague their everyday experiences. Since Black women are more likely to use public hospitals and experience racialized bias, they also have a higher likelihood to have their babies drug tested and reported to CPS by doctors (Roberts 1996, 2002, 2017, 2022). Though Black women and white women use drugs at similar rates statistically, white women are more likely to be able to afford private doctors that can treat drug use as an illness not a crime. Incarcerating Black mothers during their pregnancy, subjecting them to state surveillance, and then removing their children and placing them in foster care are justified as ways to protect the unborn children while policing their mothers. In analyzing the crack era, Dorothy Roberts observes

that Black women were criminalized for carrying their babies to term when using crack cocaine which was racially associated with the urban Black community and unscientifically viewed as more damaging than use of alcohol or cigarettes.

In addition, incarcerated pregnant (often Black) women are given substandard healthcare, inadequate nutrition, and even shackled during their deliveries (Luker and Luna 2013; Sufrin 2014; Roberts 2017; Ferszt et al. 2018; Ocen 2018). Though human rights organizations have condemned the shackling of incarcerated pregnant women as inhumane and torturous, many states have yet to create any anti-shackling legislation (Ferszt et al. 2018). This resonates with the historical maternal-fetal conflict under slavery where masters would whip and torture the bodies of pregnant enslaved women while attempting to protect their fetuses (Roberts 2017). Such egregious acts would include digging a hole in the ground large enough to enclose a pregnant belly, force an enslaved woman to lie down, and whip her on her back. This dehumanizing separation between the mother and her fetus demonstrates the conflicted, vested interest of the slave master to terrorize enslaved women as a means of social control while also attempting to preserve the fetus as valued property.

Not only have Black women been denied the right to have children, but they also have had to fight to exercise their right not have a child (the second tenet of RJ). In analyzing the era of slavery, Black women's bodies were exploited as both *mules* for manual labor and "procreative vessels" for reproductive labor (Spillers 1987; Omolade 1994; Jones 2009; Hartman 2016). Understanding Black women's histories of forced, unpaid reproductive and manual labor with little control over their bodies, their children or the fruits of their labor remains significant to understanding Black motherwork as a political expression of Black women's agency to prioritize their labor to and for their family.

Despite eugenics ideologies denouncing Black women as socially unfit mothers, Black women using birth control as a way to assert agency over their lives in that they control their reproduction without policing their sexual relations can be seen as a demonstration of their freedom to control how and when they negotiate the paid labor force by planning and timing their children. Black women in the south, post-Civil War used old African traditional methods of birth control and abortion, while some Black women in the North have reported putting Vaseline over their uteruses to prevent pregnancy (Roberts 2017). When birth control clinics became available to black communities, many Black women were eager to have more choices in planning their reproduction. Enthusiasm is seen in Black newsletters describing birth control as a part of women's rights as early as 1894, revealing how Black women conceptualized the correlation between economic and social mobility and their ability to control when they matriculate into motherhood or even if they want to at all. In fact, from 1880 to 1940, Black fertility rates dropped drastically (Roberts 2017).

Black mothers exercising their political agency over their right to access to birth control —despite the push and pull of capitalist demands that decide to either exploit Black reproduction or deny it — reveals the political power of Black motherwork. Du Bois was one of the first Black leaders to advocate for birth control for the Black community as a tool for racial justice by giving political power to Black women and mothers Though Du Bois push for birth control was not free from class elitism against poor Black communities, he and other scholars informed of Black women's histories with reproductive injustices, understood that Black women having more choices and access to birth control would mean greater economic mobility for women, Black families, and the black community at large. Access to contraceptives would give Black women the sexual autonomy to explore sex and pleasure in

a way that does not conflate sex with procreation, giving Black women sexual freedom and subsequently a choice to begin Black motherwork. Currently, reproductive injustices are being perpetuated and expanded since many states have restricted and banned abortions after the Supreme Court ruled in favor of overturning of *Roe v Wade* on June 24, 2022. This violates the reproductive rights of all people, but particularly Black women who are overrepresented in women getting abortions (Dehlendorf et al. 2013). In addition, the states that have taken active steps to implement the abortion ban tend to be southern states that have a large number of Black mothers and children, and a deep history of reproductive injustices against Black women's bodies.

Black women have had to perform motherwork while having the third tenet of reproductive justice violated: the right to parent a child safely. This tenet speaks not simply to Black women's need for bodily autonomy as a core component of their human rights, but also addresses the conditions for which they are expected to raise their children. Since Black families first formed in the United States, Black mothers have known that their children have been seen more as commodities and laborers rather than people with educational dreams and political aspirations. During enslavement, Black mothers often could not protect their children from working under extreme economic exploitation, living in inhumane conditions with minimal food, shelter and clothing, and witnessing horrendous acts of physical and sexual violence. All members of Black families including women, children, and elders were laborers whose work enabled the accumulation of white wealth. Black men did not benefit from patriarchy in the same way that white men did; not only did they not have control over their own labor, but they also had no control over the labor of their wives and children. White

men, and to some extent white women, determined the productive and reproductive labor of Black women (Davis 1983; Jones 2009; Roberts 2017).

During the Jim Crow era, Black mothers and their families navigated a segregated world rife with unequal access to education and unchecked employment discrimination. They endured the everyday fear of Black men and boys getting lynched for their mere existence, for their imagined threat to the "purity" of white womanhood. Imagine the agony felt when Emmet Till's mother discovered the brutal murder of her 14 year old son at the hands of two white men, and note her courage to have an open casket to display the inexplicable horrors of anti-Blackness (Whitfield 1991; Harold and DeLuca 2005). Racialized violence also impacted Black women and girls who survived brutal sexual attacks while their assailants were never jailed. Such attacks include the assault of Recy Taylor, a twenty-four-year-old mother, kidnapped and raped by a group of armed white men on her way home from church (McGuire 2011). White male criminals were rarely prosecuted for violating the bodies of Black women by the then nearly universally all-white juries and judges. This delineates a system of control institutionalized in a "justice" system, in which white men can serve as the criminal but also the judge and jury considering the crime. This establishes white male identity as immune to punishment by the law when the victims are Black and female. This structure upholds racially gendered systems of violence and terror that perpetually reproduce impunity for criminal perpetrators in power (Segato 2010). As a result, Black women were left in vulnerable positions where their bodies were subjected to attacks without any shield of justice to protect them (Hine 1989). Not only could they not protect themselves, but they also could not protect their children and husbands.

A sense of fear amongst Black mothers based on their inability to protect their families persists in today's context where mass incarceration and police brutality disproportionally steal the lives of Black people. In a nation where prisons are funded more than educational institutions, where the rhetoric of "law and order" justifies placing Black parents and children behind bars (Alexander 2010), where a white law enforcement officer can shoot and kill a Black person with impunity, one thing remains clear: Black lives are disposable under white supremacy. Consider the case of 18-year-old Mike Brown, who was shot multiple times by Officer Darren Wilson, and left lying dead for four hours on a blistering hot street in Ferguson, Missouri. The nature of this killing was undoubtedly gruesome; however, the way that Wilson characterized Brown when speaking in court also reveals the denial of Black humanity (Taylor 2016). Mike Brown's body was left for hours in the St. Louis summer heat, guarded by police officers with guns using dogs to keep mourners from the body. They denied Brown's parents access to remove their son from the street. The case of Mike Brown, along with the history of violence that has plagued Black lives for generations, stirred the insurgency of Black Lives Matter. In addition to Mike Brown and numerous Black boys and men who have been targeted, Black women and girls are disproportionally jailed and victims of police brutality (Crenshaw et al. 2015; Gross and Hicks 2015). Deaths like those of Miriam Carey, Tarika Wilson, and India Kager are examples of Black women, particularly mothers, whose lives were deemed disposable at the will of the state. After the arrest and subsequent death of Sandra Bland, the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) initiated the #Say Her Name campaign to bring attention to the ways Black women and girls experience racially gendered violence by police.

In addition to the criminalization and state violence that Black mothers and their families experience on the streets, they also experience policing within their homes. The child welfare system, often critiqued for serving as a family policing system, disproportionally invades Black homes, punishes Black mothers for conditions of poverty by removing their children for as long as seen fit and placing the mother and family under state surveillance in exchange for social services. Dorothy Roberts's (2002, 2022) research on the child welfare system avoids directly blaming caseworkers and judges, and instead reveals the systematic racism that disproportionally impacts Black families. She highlights that Black families statistically do not have higher rates of child maltreatment, but they are overrepresented in the child welfare system and are the least likely of all parents to be given in-home services or reunited with children taken from them. Recent data reveals that while Black children make up 13 percent of the national child population, they are consistently over 20 percent of the foster care population (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2019). Roberts also discusses the lack of a standardized, scientific evaluation for removing children from supposed harms at home, which allows for biases and misunderstandings by authorities about Black familial parenting arrangements and realities. The child welfare system perpetuates controlling images that pathologize Black women as mothers, viewing their conduct and deficiencies as problems justifying policing their domestic spaces. She argues that the child welfare system's assessment of poor families of color ignores the social, political, and economic hurdles parents from aggrieved groups face while trying to raise children. They are held accountable for responding to family crises while social institutions escape scrutiny of their failure to implement preventative measures that would minimize the removal of children. For many poor families, the child welfare system is one of the few ways

they can receive services such as assistance with substance abuse and domestic violence. To do so, however, parents have to categorize themselves as unfit and thus acknowledge parental abuse or neglect in order to receive services for themselves and their children.

While mainstream portrayals in media and public discussions frame child welfare as supposedly saving children from harm and abuse, the reality is that most children, specifically Black children, are removed because of a judgment about neglect (Roberts 2002). Neglect is often conflated with poverty. It can be defined as having inadequate food supplies or experiencing housing instability. Children can be taken away if they are left unattended while a parent is working or running errands because the family cannot afford childcare. Mothers who experience battery and violence that seek protection by calling an abuse hotline or the police can have their children removed for neglect for exposing their children to violence. This creates a relationship of distrust between domestic violence survivors and the state, essentially punishing and further traumatizing mothers by making state protection contingent on jeopardizing their parental rights. Drug use can also be labeled as neglect, especially for poor families who are more likely to take mandated drug tests and less likely to have access to rehabilitation, prescribed drugs, or therapy. Black pregnant women are more likely than women of other races to be drug tested, and in some states criminalized for not only neglecting their unborn baby, but also abusing them. This can result in their newborn baby being placed into foster care. Even in cases when a child appears injured and is taken to the hospital, doctors are more likely to report Black families than families of other races for suspected abuse (Roberts 2002). While drug abuse, domestic violence and poverty are components in most child welfare cases, Roberts articulates that "Black children [are] more likely to be placed in foster care even when their parents were

employed, drug-free, and not receiving welfare; even when they came from small families and safe neighborhoods; and even when they had no disabilities or mental health problems" (2002:52).

When analyzing the child welfare system, it is important to underscore the vested interest the state and private businesses have in placing and keeping children in foster care. Foster care is a multibillion-dollar business that not only provides federal money to states based on the number of children in foster care, but also a system that is increasingly becoming privatized. While billions of dollars are spent on foster care, less money is allocated to providing resources to impoverished families as a preventive measure. Dorothy Roberts outlines how it would actually be cheaper for the state to provide resources to families than to remove children and place them in foster care. In addition, this money is almost never seen by the foster youth themselves who often struggle to have their essential survival needs met for clothing, food, and educational resources. The abuse foster youth face while in foster care is also largely ignored by the child welfare system, though the alleged abuse that caused their initial removal from family is well documented and punished. Most children in foster care are poor, and Black children are overrepresented because they are disproportionally poor and targeted for racialized punishments. The over policing of Black people as a result of the War on Drugs has contributed to the tearing apart of Black families through the incarceration of parents and funneling children into foster care. Poor families are surveilled and policed by the child welfare system, while wealthy families can handle their familial problems privately. Black children are also more likely to be in foster care longer compared to their white and Latinx counterparts and are the least likely to get adopted and least likely to be reunited with their families (Roberts 2002). Roberts emphasizes that the

racial disparity of Black families involved in the child welfare system is unconstitutional because families have a constitutional right to not have their parental rights terminated on the bases of race, religion, or culture. She contextualizes the child welfare system within three major political frames: (a) the disregard for family preservation and incentives for adoption, (b) welfare reform implementing work requirements that conflict with child welfare, and (c) the mass incarceration of Black parents and children.

The mass incarceration of Black people, particularly those who are poor, is rooted in the systematic marginalization and even exclusion of Black people from the market economy and the continuing effects of state control over Black families historically through slavery and Jim Crow segregation. Mass incarceration exploded with the War on Drugs, beginning in the 1970s and continues today. Drug addiction and substance abuse have been treated as crimes rather than health conditions when the drug users are poor and Black (Alexander 2010; Roberts 2012, 2017). Roberts (2012) discusses how Black women have become the fastest growing group of incarcerated women, with the majority of their alleged offenses related to welfare fraud or drug abuse, and only rarely to violent crimes. Since the War on Drugs, Black children are at a greater risk for experiencing maternal imprisonment than their white counterparts (Wildeman 2009). The rising rate of incarceration of Black women has worked to destabilize Black families, making Black children more likely to experience housing instability and mental health issues (Geller et al. 2009; Roberts 2012). The incarceration of Black fathers also makes it dauntingly difficult for now single mothers who not only have to raise their children, but also accommodate the needs of their incarcerated and returning from incarceration partners. Black women tend to be the primary care providers for their households, so their incarceration makes Black children more vulnerable

to placement in the foster care system. Black children in general, but especially those in foster care, are disproportionally funneled into juvenile detention centers (Barth 1990; Roberts 2012). Because Black children experience harsher sentencing compared to their white counterparts, many teens age out of juvenile centers and are placed in adult prisons (Roberts 2012). Mass incarceration perpetuates an intergenerational cycle of locking up Black parents, placing their children in foster care, and confining those children in juvenile centers and prisons.

Anti-Black systems of schooling, family policing, and mass incarceration that continue to devastate Black families are a violent assault on the third tenet of reproductive justice which asserts that people have the right to parent their child safely. There is no safety in systems that refuse to see Black women as mothers whose survival is fundamental to the Black community. One step toward ameliorating this reproductive injustice is valuing, protecting, and promoting their freedom to perform Black motherwork in environments free from racially gendered oppression.

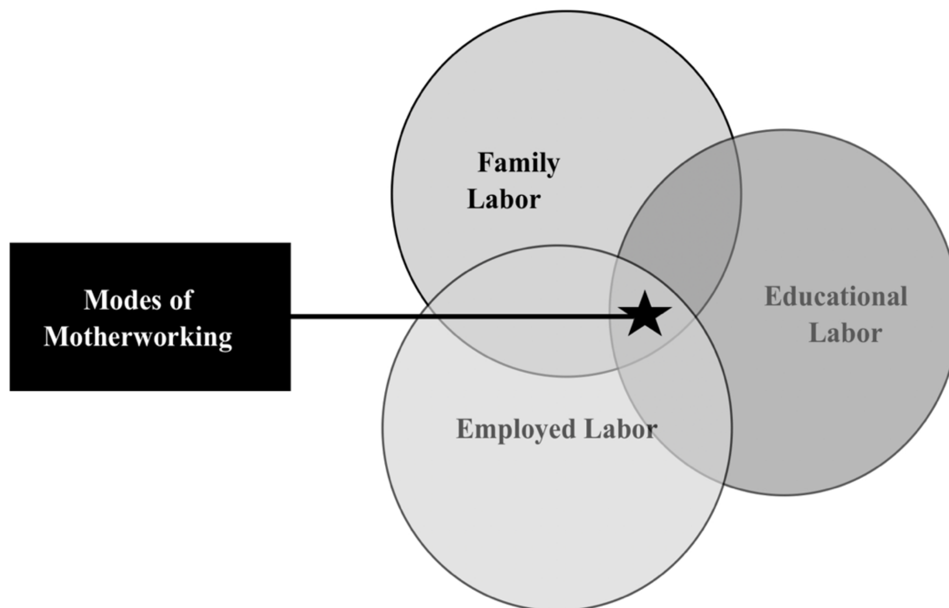
III. Modes of Motherworking

In analyzing the ways Black women merge family and work responsibilities, I conceptualize and define the term *modes of motherworking* which describes the multidirectional ways Black mothers navigate between, within, and at the intersections of family labor, employed labor, and educational labor. Modes of motherworking conceptually builds from Patricia Hill Collins's description of *motherwork* and Anita Garey's usage of the term *weaving* to better frame the interconnectedness of work and family in women's lives. Modes of motherworking provides language to continue challenging purported dichotomies between public market work and private domestic work while also adding important and overlooked discussions of education as a key site of Black women's labor for family and work. I add additional discussions of educational labor to emphasize the significance of education for both mothers and their children, and for the ways Black women understand and approach family labor and employed labor. Employed labor refers to the waged or salaried labor individuals perform for the market. Family labor refers to the domestic labor carried out in the home through childcare and meeting essential needs (providing food, clothing, etc.) which can also include care for extended families and community members. Educational labor can be understood as the work Black mothers enact for their formal schooling and credentialing endeavors as well as informal knowledge attainments for themselves, their children, and their communities.

Although education certainly intersects with family labor responsibilities as well as pathways towards employed labor, distinguishing education as its own space of labor elucidates the nuanced and complicated ways education remains a significant site of Black women's motherwork. Black mothers raising Black children while navigating educational

institutions understand how anti-Blackness shapes schooling experiences, but they do not allow racism to restrict their educational aspirations for themselves or their children. Education continues to serve as a transformative site of hope for social mobility, economic stability, and career attainment for Black families. Findings from this study support sociological research that identifies Black women as schooling strategists for themselves and their families (Cooper 2007; Allen and White-Smith 2018; Dow 2019; Watson and Baxley 2021). The term educational labor provides useful language to identify and interpret the ways Black mothers in particular experience the racialized realities of school-based marginalization in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education as mothers of Black students and as Black students themselves. The perspectives of my participants support unpacking education as a site of Black mothers' labor in which Black women serve as educational proxies for their Black children, journeying alongside them throughout institutional and community-based sites of schooling.

Figure 1. A conceptual model of modes of motherworking



There are two reasons, I argue, for addressing education as a sphere of Black women's labor when discussing Black motherwork. First, racial realities and histories of racial trauma inform what type of schools and educational spaces Black mothers have access to for their children, and this reveals the ways that Black women's motherwork has involved educational advocacy against anti-Black educational discrimination. Unpacking this educational labor is critical because for Black mothers their labor as mothers has not simply been for family at home or for their jobs; it has involved directly confronting anti-Blackness in schooling and opening educational opportunities for themselves, their families, and their children. Second, educational labor, similar to labor for family and employment is not bound to a particular space. For Black families, education has never been confined to the formal classroom nor have their pedagogy and curricula been limited to traditional subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic. Black mothers have worked as educators for their children and for the children in their communities as formal teachers in the schoolhouse but also as informal educators for navigating a world in which racism, sexism, and homophobia shape structural and interpersonal anti-blackness. Thus, education remains a key site of Black women's labor and *modes of motherworking* conceptually stresses the importance of attending to educational labor to better understand Black women's motherwork, showing the ways it intersects, informs (and is informed by) and differentiates from their family labor and employed labor.

In unpacking the concept of Black women's educational labor, I first argue that anti-Black racial discrimination in school spaces shapes the context of schooling for Black children and thus demonstrates how Black motherwork significantly involves Black women as educational advocates and strategists for their children. Despite *Brown v. Board* banning

segregation in schools federally in 1954, efforts to desegregate schools in Los Angeles did not begin until the 1970s with a busing program that allowed a small number of Black and Brown children to attend white schools (Boustan 2012). White flight subsequently changed the racial demographics in Los Angeles. Areas like Inglewood, South Central, Watts and Compton that once were inhabited by a majority of white families became underfunded and underserved inner cities that now house predominately Black and Brown communities. Faced with the influx of Black families migrating west during the Great Migration, white families were not pleased to have Black neighbors (fearing their property values would drop and crime would rise) or to have Black children attending schools with their white children. This caused a strong backlash from white families unwilling to disrupt their sense of racial order and entitlement to well-funded educational spaces. The history of educational inequality is important because it continues to shape the racially segregated schools that currently exist in Los Angeles. The vast majority of Black children that attend schools in Los Angeles attend racially segregated schools in which more Black students equals less school funding and resources (Rothstein 2015).

The Black mothers in my study describe how their educational labor of navigating schooling for their children starts before kindergarten and even preschool. When women get pregnant, many have to negotiate their terms of maternity leave (if they can even do so) instantly, think critically about when they will go back to work, and decide where subsequently to place their child in school. Even during pregnancy, mothers have to plan their time at work in order to search for childcare resources. The Black mothers in my study insist that they do not merely want a space where their children will be supervised, but they also want a learning-based environment for their infants and toddlers while they are at work.

They understand and hear stories from families, friends, and community members of cases where Black babies and toddlers are not treated with the same care as their non-Black peers, and hence navigating early childhood educational spaces requires a strategy to mitigate their children's experiences with school inequality. I argue that finding early childhood educational spaces is an important component of Black motherwork.

The Black mothers in my study viewed themselves as their child's first educator and their guide to and through educational systems. Some mothers, as a result, decide to turn their homes into early childhood educational spaces. For instance, Jasmine's ability to work all-nighters as a flight attendant and subsequently get full days off, granted her the ability to provide home-based learning for all four of her children until each of them turned five. Jasmine spoke of the educational inequality in her neighborhood of Inglewood where daycare centers, preschools and K-12 education sites are often overcrowded and under-resourced. She did not want her children to get "left behind" and as a result took a *second shift* (Hochschild 1989) as their primary teacher in a learning structure she describes as homeschooling. She delineates constructing a curriculum of age-appropriate infant-to-toddler learning that included teaching letters, numbers, and shapes, and making arts, crafts and music. She structured her home pre-school to convey the life skills and independence she knows her children will need later in life. Jasmine even made sure to take the children on field trips to local history and science museums and conceptualized the public library space as an additional resource to aid her educational labor. She details:

> Oh, it was very important… I wanted them to be able to know how to read, you know, to know how to write. I was focused on that the majority of the time. And always, I would read to them at night…I always took them to the library. I would always go to the library. That was our little thing. And it was almost like an everyday thing. We would go to the library, we would have a little snack with us, we would sit and take the

> books out. We had this library box at home, and they would put all their little library books in it. I loved that. Library books.

Alyssa was also able initially to turn her home into a learning space; however, her task was complicated by the reality that her son has special needs. She felt rejected by day care centers that were not inclusive enough to accommodate her son's needs, disappointed with the unstructured spaces in the available centers, and flabbergasted by the high prices of well-regarded Montessori schools. Alyssa decided to employ her own sister as her son's educator, tailoring the environment to both his learning and medical needs. This was a temporary solution, but it afforded Alyssa some time eventually to find a local LAUSD preschool that is inclusive to children with special needs. Nonetheless, she expresses frustration because she has to send him to an after-school day care center where little educational learning is fostered. She explains:

> In terms of early childhood education, I have a lot of thoughts because my son has special needs. And I have not been able to find an educational space that really works for him. He is in a preschool program now at an LAUSD public school, which is actually our [local] school. Which I'm really happy about that… I didn't think that I would find that. You know, but it's preschool…we will see as he gets older, whether the school is going to continue to work for him. But in terms of finding day cares, when I was looking for somewhere for him before he got the age where he can go to the school, it was just very difficult because there's not enough affordable, inclusive options. You know?…Right now, he's going to an in-home day care, after school. And it's not very professional. They watch TV all the time. But…he's there because I feel like at least his physical needs, like he's being diapered, you know, like all of that is being taken care of. It's just these little old ladies, you know. They're watching him, but they're not teaching them…They just turn on the TV…

Other mothers also expressed their frustration with finding affordable, education-based spaces to send their child while they are working. Sara recalled how powerless she felt when she went to pick up her twins from a day care center run by an older woman unable to keep up with all the children she was watching –and discovered that her son had a busted and

swollen lip. When she inquired about his injury, the care provider simply told her that she did not see anything. Though frustrated, Sara's financial limitations forced her to keep sending her children to that center until her children were of sufficient age to matriculate into a government subsidized preschool and kindergarten nearby. Sara spoke of the difference "back home" in Ethiopia where she could have the support of family, friends and the community members. Ideologies around American individualism and outsourcing family labor if you can afford it run contrary to the communal understanding of childrearing she had grown accustomed to experiencing. Grace, also an Ethiopian immigrant, attested to this reality and the limited options for poor, working mothers. Given the labor-intensive work schedules these mothers often navigate coupled with the limited, affordable childcare options and limited familial support that some Black women (particularly Black immigrants) can experience, picking an educational space is less of a *free* choice and more of a *constrained choice* (Barnes 2016).

Grace shares her frustrations with her limited options for childcare, stating:

> Actually, trust me, I didn't like it. It's in the house, it's a bunch of kids…like she has five or six kids. But I have no choice but to put him there because first, I have to get up at like 4 am to go to clinic, because it's in Tarzana. So I have to leave from home, it's 4:30. So this is the only place open. She takes the kids. That's why I have no choice…

Grace describes eventually being able to switch schools and send her sons to a private Christian early childhood education space. This was important for her because it aligned with her faith-based practices, and she felt it would be a better academic learning space for her son. She was not prepared, however, for the racialized stereotypes her son and their family would experience. Her son came home one day with a busted lip and his father, upset by the incident, went to the school to inquire. Rather than being perceived as a concerned father with perhaps cultural differences of communication (he is originally from Trinidad), he was

pathologized as an angry, aggressive Black man and the school threatened to expel their son. Though Grace and her husband decided to remove their son from this school anyway, the incident speaks to the ways Black families navigate stereotypical assumptions and labels that are rooted in anti-Black ideologies about their supposed deviance.

Although acknowledging the difficulties of finding early childhood educational spaces, some mothers expressed positive experiences with their available learning spaces. Brittney discussed how the day care center in Inglewood to which she sent her daughter shattered the stigma attached to schools in Inglewood. Although she was told by her peers that all schools in that city are too "hood" and "ghetto," Brittney was pleasantly surprised to see her toddler actively learning, mentioning for example a spelling bee the staff put together. Hailey also had positive experiences with early childhood education, having the financial means to send her son to a Montessori school. Nonetheless, she describes a concentrated process of finding a safe place that she could feel comfortable with for her child, especially given her demanding job and the fact that her son would have to spend anywhere from seven to ten hours a day, Monday through Friday, in this educational space. This educational labor is intentional given that she is raising a Black son living in a predominately Asian and White community where he can experience hypervisibility that leads to either tokenization or criminalization. She details her educational labor process of choosing a school, declaring:

> I looked at Montessori schools and to see what they were about. So just figuring out the different types of childcare. And with that, looking at the cost. I literally visited like fourteen schools. Yeah it was crazy…The place he goes to now, well he's been going there, they have cameras in the room. If you go through the front office, it shows all the locations. So that's what I wanted. Safety. I also wanted him to learn. I didn't want it to just be to play. I wanted it to be where it's a learning environment, like a school environment… it's literally like you have a curriculum. He learns a lot of stuff. You know they even give us homework for him. Also too, the types of activity were a combination of things…They were learning arts and crafts, music, and things like that….and another thing that it was clean. It needed to be clean. When we walked in,

> they were cleaning. …And then also too… I felt comfortable with the staff…. energy wise…

Navigating public education for K-12 schooling in Los Angeles remains a difficult task, especially for Black mothers. It requires meticulous strategizing to pick the best school within one's district attendance zone. This becomes particularly tricky since funding for public schools is partially based on local funding derived from property taxes. Some mothers are fortunate to live in neighborhoods where homes have a high property value, and thus they feel comfortable sending their children to the local school. For instance, Brittney, a pharmacist and mother of two girls, resides in Culver City, which is well known for having diverse schools that have high ratings based on student test scores and are well funded and college oriented. She describes her Black motherworking process of choosing the best local school in Culver City that also balanced what she understood as racial diversity. She speaks of her fear of tokenization and hyper-visibility of her Black daughter when deciding which school is best, stating:

> Yes, so then she went to elementary school in Culver City. I chose that because it was more diverse. Now they do have one closer. I looked up their scores, they have the best scores, but the demographics, [mostly] Caucasian. For me, I wasn't comfortable with that. You know, I wanted her to not be the token. So, I wanted to find something that had a mixture. You know, a mixture of White, Black, and Latino… It is a struggle, but I don't want that to be the focus. Especially if she sticks out, like there's twenty kids, and she's the only Black kid, you are going to notice her…but if it's 10 of each, you know 10 black, 10 White, she's just going to be blended in. I would rather that.

On the other hand, Crystal, a mother of three, expressed frustration and complications for performing this educational labor given the lack of options in schooling for her children. Although she lives in an area that has homes with high property values, she expressed concerns because the city's busing program allows children who live outside of the neighborhood to attend, coming from areas like Compton, Watts, and South Central. As a

result, many of the white families that live in the neighborhood choose not to send their children to the local schools, particularly the local middle and high school. Unfortunately, many students getting bused in come from schools with even less funding and educational support, and rather than giving more funding to underperforming schools to help level the playing field, funding is reduced at schools that do not meet certain students' test performance standards, which further perpetuates the problem. This causes many families to look for alternative ways to get their children into higher performing and better funded schools. One common way is using someone else's address to get into a school outside of the parents' neighborhood. Though navigating alternative methods of accessing decent education can be seen as a radical act of Black Motherwork, it can also include the risk of punishment in the form of fines, incarceration, and potential involvement of child protective services. Crystal was curious to explore this method given her understanding and personal experience with school inequality, however she feared the risk of enacting such educational labor, noting:

> So, it's challenging because my friend lives in Culver City, and his son is still in elementary. So, I was going to use his address, like yo, I want him to go to Culver. So as soon as I called the school and said he has to live with his uncle. [They said] "He has to live with you!" And reading their policies, they do checks at the houses to make sure you really live there. So, I thought about that Black lady who was homeless. Remember, she had her car parked across the school. And she used their address because she's homeless, and they charged her, and she went to jail.

In response to underfunding and overcrowding in public education, some Black mothers strategize by sending their children to charter schools which do not have to follow strict district requirements and instead abide by their own charters and receive funding based on enrollment. While controversial, the rise in charter schools, particularly in underserved neighborhoods, has granted some children living in marginalized communities' access to

quality education. Shaina, an African American mother of two from South Central, speaks highly of her son's charter school, which is a part of a network of tuition-free public charter schools that prioritize pre-k through 12 education in a manner that challenges racialized tracking by attempting to provide equal education for all their students. Shaina was elated to discover that this school was near her home, finally finding a learning space she could trust to properly educate her child, particularly after her own schoolwork intensified and she was no longer able to provide a space for active learning at home for her son. She was particularly drawn to the social justice, pro-Black curriculum that enabled Black students to feel at home among other Black students guided by Black educators. Shaina spoke about how the school system felt familial in the way that they support their students and families:

> Out of all the schools that I looked into, [this] was the one I chose and went to because they seemed to be the only one who kind of matched what I was doing with mine. And that, plus the relationships that I've built with the teachers, school officials, and whatnot, and they made me comfortable enough to leave him there and know that it was okay, because I needed to stop what I was doing at home so I could finish schooling, and know that, he will still be okay. Yes, as much as they needed to. They knew my situation. Because you start with them, um, almost a year before your scholar even starts. That's what they call them. They don't call them kids or children, they call them scholars. So they were very supportive, they were like a family. Sometimes I didn't get to that school, Nia, until like 5:30…but he was okay. He had his homework done, they were very supportive. It was like his teachers were all at my graduation, yeah it was very supportive.

Lila, an Ethiopian mother of two sons, describes her educational labor that led to finding a high performing school for her sons to attend. Although they attended regular public schools for elementary and middle school, her Black motherwork involved strategically moving the family to a dwelling across the street from one of the highest performing charter high schools in the San Fernando Valley. Rather than raising Black sons in a neighborhood where Black children's needs in schools could be marginalized and ignored, Lila wanted to ensure that they were in a school environment that promoted rigor, discipline, safety, and college prep.

Despite the growing number of public charter schools, some Black mothers' educational labor includes paying tuition to send their children to private school. Many of the mothers described how they sent their children to private preschool and kindergarten before sending them to elementary schools. Some could easily afford it, others scraped up whatever money they could, and others found need-based scholarships to help. Jasmine, a married flight attendant, was the only mother of my participants who sent all four of her children to private school for elementary, middle, and high school. By only reporting her own income and excluding her husband's, she was able to qualify for partial need-based scholarships that enabled her children to attend a high performing elite private school on the Westside of LA, an area well regarded for its beautiful beaches and expensive homes. Although sending four children through private schooling in Los Angeles on two middle-class salaries was a challenging act of educational labor, Jasmine felt it was crucial to send her Black children to private school to maximize their access to quality education and increase their chances of excelling through college. She found an organization that has helped children of color attend private schools in Los Angeles in order to increase high school graduation rates in the community at large. She describes the school saying:

> I saw the quality of education had rose so high…the kids, two of them had this English teacher, who was so phenomenal, a Black lady…And she taught them how to write. And these kids, by the time they got to college, they were writing stuff where the professors in their colleges were saying, 'Wow, this is fantastic!' …It's the quality of the education. And also, one thing, the way this school, in particular, the way they make them think outside of the box. They were very socially aware, social justice. And they would go on marches…and all the kids go to college. Unless they choose not to. A lot of them go into entertainment and they don't want to go to college. But otherwise, everyone in that school…it's a fantastic school. All the kids go to college, all different types of colleges studying every kind of thing. And it's a great school. I'm grateful that they went there, and I'm grateful for the experiences. I think it was a good choice. My sister in Dallas thought I was nuts. 'Why you paying all that money to go to school. You could have a house. You could buy a house. Move to Dallas, and you could buy a house.' I'm like, 'No, I'm okay. I want to do this. This is important to me.'"

These findings complicate discussions in Annette Lareau's (2011) study in which she describes race as being less influential than class in parenting practices. Though racial identities may not have yielded noteworthy differences in parenting practices in Lareau's study, this study and research on Black mothers and childrearing approaches show specific ways that they have to negotiate racialized, gendered, and classed spaces while investing in their children's educational pathways. Dawn Marie Dow (2019) describes how Black mothers navigate schooling for their children by attempting to balance considerations of their children's schools' racial demographics and records of academic achievement. Some mothers feel discomfort with sending their children to schools with little racial diversity despite a school's record for high academic achievement, expressing concerns about racial isolation of their Black children. Barnes's (2016) study demonstrates how affluent Black mothers view their negotiations with work responsibilities as a way to ensure that they prepare their children for the realities of living in a world plagued by racism, while teaching them the importance of Black histories and traditions.

In addition to access, for many Black mothers, racial dynamics within the school spaces can also shape how and to what extent some Black mothers participate in their children's education. Black mothers understand that school curricula and pedagogical practices are generally rooted in anti-Blackness, so serving as advocates for their children is not race neutral maternal involvement; it demonstrates the ways in which Black motherwork is an educational tool against anti-Black racism. Black Motherwork serves as a political act against racial inequality in schools, as Black mothers guide and support their children through school spaces where Blackness often leads to experiences ranging from policing and punishment to tokenization and hyper visibility. Black mothers know this not only in their

experiences as mothers, but also in their previous experiences as daughters as they navigated race-related marginalization in schools. All of the women conceptualize their labor in motherwork beyond their employment endeavors. They all perceived their responsibilities of motherwork to include ensuring their children have productive educational spaces and teaching their children how to navigate the realities of racialized oppression.

When discussing K through 12 educations, the Black mothers in my study all view their involvement in their children's schooling as a critical component of their conception of motherwork. They all describe involvement as being responsible for making sure their children attend the best available and accessible school, getting their children to and from school, and encouraging and supporting the educational endeavors of their children unapologetically. They feel especially accountable for their children's learning, and so they strive passionately and aggressively for their children's success. Tina reminiscences about one of the many times she actively participated in her child's schoolwork, asserting:

> And you know you gotta excel from day one…Like I remember one time [my daughter] got in the car, and I'm like, "What did you get on the project?" And she says, "I got a 98." And I was like, we stayed up all night long on that, we spent X amount of dollars at Michaels on that mission, what do you mean we got a 98? …and it was always we. It was not her…Oh well, I'll be there in the morning because I want to know what 100 looks like.

Participation in their children's schooling is viewed as a necessary aspect of educational labor in their motherwork because of the race of their children. Raising Black children to navigate Los Angeles school systems, mothers feel accountable to serve as maternal proxies to ensure that their children are not left behind or pushed out of schools and into jails, drugs, and poverty. Most parents may feel some level of responsibility for involving themselves in their child's schooling to the best of their ability, but for Black mothers the stakes are higher. Not doing so could mean their Black children do not receive a quality education which

reduces the probability that they will have the tools to acquire higher education, get a good job, and pursue a pathway of social mobility. Lila, a mother to two sons, delineates this racially gendered educational labor:

> Oh yeah, I never missed anything, all the way through high school. I just believe it's important to get involved with your kids…They are Black males…so I want to make sure [I know] what's going on with them. So by going to school and talking to the teachers…I have communication with the teacher in case anything goes wrong, we talk to each other. I email them if their grades are bad…

Many of the mothers in my study describe how their educational labor does not stop once their children graduate from high school. In addition to helping their children apply for colleges and scholarships, they also describe supporting them while they are in college. For many of these mothers, the dream of their children getting into a notable university is seen as the ultimate affirmation of their educational labor. Many of them use language like "We got into this university." Blackness is not removed from their perception of this motherwork. For instance, around a fourth of the participants spoke of specifically wanting their children to attend one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). They did not simply want their children to get access to higher educational spaces, they wanted their children to experience and normalize Black excellence and cultures in college spaces. Other mothers that did not necessarily speak of HBCUs still spoke of how groundbreaking it is for their Black child to attend a top institution in which race did not prevent them from breaking the educational glass ceiling.

In addition to the ways race shapes schooling and Black motherwork, I also argue that exploring educational labor within Black motherwork is important because Black mothers have served as maternal educators in their communities, in which teaching is not limited to the classroom space or curriculum, but rather includes intergenerational lessons about the

legacy of white supremacy in the fabric of social institutions and how to safely survive and keep hopeful in the face of mistreatment. All of the participants understand teaching their children racially sensitive life lessons as a responsibility of motherwork. Black motherwork cannot be removed from the context of racialized systems of social control. An augmented sense of fear amongst Black mothers persists in today's context where mass incarceration and police brutality disproportionally steal the lives of Black people. The history of racially gendered violence that has plagued Black communities for generations stirred the insurgency of Black Lives Matter and the #SayHerName campaign (Crenshaw et al. 2015; Gross and Hicks 2015; Taylor 2016). Given the sociohistorical context of policing Black bodies, even the bodies of Black children, I was specifically curious about how the mothers in my study taught or planned to teach their children to interact with police, especially in the context of Los Angeles where police brutality was so unbearable it led to the Watts Insurrection in 1965, and later the LA Rebellion in 1992.

First, I noticed that gender impacts the way in which mothers prioritize the conversation about police brutality, despite all of them having a fundamental understanding of the racial dimensions of relationships with the police today. For instance, Brittney mentions that she told her eleven-year-old daughter to call the police if anyone tries to kidnap her, likely drawing inspiration from the fear instilled in the public by the news and media sources. This is different from, yet related to, Shannon Malone Gonzalez's work (2019, 2022) on the "police talk" that Black mothers have with their children, and the ways in which gender shapes the lesson of the conversations. Gonzalez (2019) articulates how Black mothers are keenly aware of police shootings experienced by Black boys and thus center their gendered advice with rhetoric of "making it home," while for Black daughters the

lessons focused primarily on evading sexual assault. Applying a gendered lens to racial policing includes expanding our conceptions of where policing occurs and on whose bodies. This is interesting considering Black women's overrepresentation with experiencing family policing from both police officers and social workers in their homes. Gonzalez's (2022) research also describes how class informs this racially gendered advice, with middle-class Black mothers employing what she calls "respectability talk" as a way to avoid drawing police attention by abiding with norms of the Black lady controlling image. For working-class Black mothers, she describes the strategy as "predatory talk" in which the advice is avoiding sexual assault and harassment from police.

Though my participants also prioritize conversations with their sons around making it home and their daughters around sexual assault, I think it is also important to remember that these Black mothers understand the ways in which violence has been sexualized for Black women and girls at the hands of police, in the form of egregious rapes but also groping that can accompany beatings, assaults and even pat downs. The mothers in my study are aware that racial violence and police brutality impact Black women and girls in school and public spaces. They are also aware of how for Black women and girls, physical violence at the hands of police and other officials often accompanies sexualized violence. I would even argue that this shows a critical consciousness of how physical violence against Black girls by police officers can be viewed (and perhaps should be viewed) in the context of Black women's histories with reproductive injustices. Black mothers' conversations about police with their daughters place gendered state violence against Black girls and women in the context of sexual violence; hence, the talk can be viewed more as an act of educational labor

that considers the long history of Black girls fighting for bodily autonomy particularly in public spaces.

Mothers with Black sons emphasize that they constantly tell their children to be extra cautious around police. They feel they need to teach them how to survive, reminding them that getting pulled over or searched by a police officer is not the appropriate time to resist. Crystal discusses how she constantly tells her son to be mindful of his appearance (not to drive with a hoodie on) and his movements (never making too swift of a movement around the police). She expresses her discomfort with having this conversation with her son, highlighting that both city and school police utilize anti-black surveillance practices. She describes a *code switching* that she recommends in which she encourages her son to have spaces where he can feel "authentically Black" without fear of policing but also to be aware that her son's interaction with the police is the time to be mindful of anti-Black stereotypes against Black children. This includes racially gendered stereotypes of Black kids as older and capable of aggression against authority, and thus a potential threat and a viable recipient of violence in the mind of a white police officer. Nicole, a mother to one adult son, describes an incident where her son went with friends to a Black Lives Matter protest, saying he wanted to take a selfie and was later perceived to be an agitator and arrested. She details the utter fear she felt as the officer broke the news to her, worrying how she was going to explain to her husband that their son was in police custody. Luckily for Nicole, her son was released, and no jail time was required. That did not erase the fear she felt, constantly searching online to ensure that there was not a warrant for her son's arrest or an expected court date. She also points to the parental conversations she had to have with her son about the value of political protests for racial justice, but the absurdity of risking arrest for a mere photograph for social

media likes. She informed her son that if he genuinely wants to protest against police brutality, she will support him, including helping her son understand the way race and gender will shape the risks of doing such. This act of Black motherwork demonstrates how lessons about police behavior are complicated by vital conversations mothers make sure to prioritize as an aspect of their educational labor.

Shaina, given the critical consciousness she developed from continually living in housing projects merged with her interest in social justice, understands that neither gender nor age will prevent a Black child from getting harmed. She emphasizes the importance of teaching her children, her nephews, and her nieces the realities of navigating this world as a Black person. She communicates that they need to be aware yet respectful, negotiating the balance between dignity and survival.

> … honestly, you're never too young to learn. And I have a nephew, as young as five, and I'm also talking to him about his interaction with the police. My main thing that I try to teach them, is yes very aware, aware of what's going on, and take those stories into consideration when dealing with them, but also to not fear [police]. Don't feel like you have superpowers or that you're superhuman…don't be very resistant, be very respectful, and not just because they're police, but because they are human, and they have a job to do. But at the same time, teaching them that [the police's] way of doing things is not always right. And it just may not be the right time or the right place. We don't want to be, you know, the next topic on the news…

Two mothers expressed complicated sentiments regarding police talk with their children because they had police in their family. Chloe, a mother of two boys, articulates how she has four law enforcement officers in her family and at first would jokingly mention the police when her son would misbehave. Understanding how race shapes police interactions, however, she says she no longer makes those jokes because she does not want her son to think the police are coming for him. Because of her family members in law enforcement, she says that she does not think that all police officers are "bad," but does acknowledge the

realities of structural racism when thinking of teaching her son that there is a time and place for safe resistance. Kendra, also a mother of two boys, struggles with this conversation since her sons' father is a police officer. She would like for him to handle the conversation as a Black man and father but sees how his role as an officer shapes the lessons he teaches to their son. For instance, because he works for the police, he does not think his children should worry in that "they will be protected." Kendra, however, would rather have him teach them also how to safely navigate police if their father is not present, especially as Black boys.

While most of the mothers acknowledge the impacts of race and gender on policing, Alyssa speaks specifically about her fears raising a Black son with special needs. Although her son is still a toddler, she expresses her deep worry that his interconnected identity will impact not only the police's perception of him, but also his ability to understand the situation and act accordingly. She stresses her fear of not being able to teach him how to assess and negotiate an already complicated situation. She delineates:

> And there's also been a lot of talk about, you know, race and policing. Maybe not enough attention to things like mental health and disability and policing. You know? A lot of people with disabilities have been disproportionally killed because of mental health challenges, because of that lapse in communication with law enforcement, and the escalation when people don't do exactly as they're told or they're confused by what they're being told. I think about it a lot. I don't know yet. You know? I mean, I know I'll tell him to be careful, I know I'll tell him, you know, do everything that they tell you to do, and don't move quickly… he definitely won't have any toy guns.

The mothers in my study, regardless of their class, understand and emphasize the importance of their children developing racial consciousness as a means of survival. These mothers feel accountable for teaching their children lessons the classroom never seems to emphasize. The experience-based knowledge they pass down to their children illustrates how teaching is a fundamental aspect of motherwork; thus, motherwork is an educational tool.

They feel responsible to have “the talk” with their kids: the talk on how to endure in a country founded on anti-Blackness, a talk Black mothers are simply tired of having.

This study presents a typology that identifies three distinct modes of motherworking: 1) adaptive motherwork, 2) incorporative motherwork, and 3) transitionary motherwork. *Adaptive motherwork* refers to how women make major changes to their work trajectories and/or aspirations to specifically accommodate their childcare responsibilities and their children’s education. *Incorporative motherwork* describes how women maintain their work relationships and expectations while mothering, finding strategies to combine their careers and jobs with their children’s needs and schooling. *Transitionary motherwork* delineates how women experience mothering while pursuing higher education, either becoming mothers while already in school or enrolling in school after matriculating into motherhood. These three modes of motherworking are not fixed mutually exclusive categories, but instead are fluid descriptions of the options Black women embrace as they navigate spaces of education, family, and employment. It is also important to note that although modes of motherworking conceptually focus on family, work, and education as key sites of Black women’s labor, they are not the only sites of Black women’s labor as these spaces vary depending on their varying mothers’ intersectional identities.

Eight of the twenty mothers were currently performing adaptive motherwork at the time of the interviews. Another eight of the twenty women were currently performing incorporative motherwork. The remaining four participants were currently performing transitionary motherwork. However, eleven of the twenty participants had experience with transitionary motherwork at some point in their mothering experience. Thus, seven of the eleven mothers were recalling their transitionary motherworking experiences while currently

performing either adaptive or incorporative motherwork. Of the seven, five were currently enacting incorporative motherwork and two were doing adaptive motherwork. The following chapters (4 through 6) will detail each category of motherwork to demonstrate the ways Black women make decisions around family, education, and work.

IV. Adaptive Motherwork

Adaptive motherwork delineates how women stay within their given employment fields but make major alterations to their schedules and/or changes in their job positions to balance their familial responsibilities. These mothers, whether having great or limited flexibility, adjust their work relationships to accommodate the childcare needs and the school schedules of their children. For mothers performing adaptive motherwork, the intersections of family labor and educational labor (specifically their children's education) shape their performance of employed labor. Eight mothers were performing adaptive motherwork at the time of their interview.

Tina, an African American college-educated mother of two adult children, altered her career as a hospital manager when she entered into motherhood. Though enjoying the good pay and fast pace of the hospital scene, Tina was fully aware that her ideas of mothering, especially for Black children in Los Angeles, would require her aligning her work schedule with their school schedules. Tina, however, did not want to end her dreams of working in a health-related field as she had completed her undergraduate degree with goals of helping the Black community as a health official. Instead of working in the hospital, Tina made a major switch and took on a role as a health coordinator and educator at a school in a predominately Black neighborhood. Though not paying the same as her hospital administrator job, Tina's ability to merge her health-related interests with her new mothering responsibilities fueled her strategy of navigating adaptive motherwork. Her new schedule, though still very busy, coordinated precisely with her children's needs as she was also working in a schooling site with normative hours of around 7 am to 4 pm. Mitigating scheduling issues allowed for Tina to always be able to "see mine off to school." She describes not being able to always pick

them up as her work commitments or their involvement in extracurricular activities increased. But as a busy working mother, her adaptive motherwork allowed her the ability to be physically present in morning car rides which were filled with morning affirmations and intentions for the day, strategies for navigating problematic teachers or classmates, or playing their favorite songs to liven her children's spirits before they traveled to school. She could also ensure that they always had a good breakfast, a problem that Black children have traditionally compared to their white counterparts because they have less access to nourishing and affordable meals before school that would improve their scholarly performance (Nicklas et al. 1993).

Tina spoke of the importance of having the flexibility and time to be able to be involved not simply in her children's lives, but specifically their education. While most parents feel responsible for being present to help guide their children through schooling, Black mothers like Tina feel particularly accountable given the ways school structures make it easy for Black students to experience pushout and policing (Dow 2016, 2019). Tina, thus, performs adaptive motherwork by altering her career trajectory, switching from hospital manager to educator so she can have the time to drive them to and from school as well as participate in her children's extracurricular activities like dance class, karate, recitals, science fairs, and game tournaments. Restructuring her work allowed her the space to perform educational labor by putting her children in extracurricular activities that centered Blackness, revealing the ways educational labor for Black children is not colorblind in Black mothers' approaches. Tina mentioned coordinating with her then-husband to drive her son to Orange County to join a college readiness program specifically to help Black parents and students with applying for colleges. Through this program, she elatedly recalled her son getting to

visit the White House and meet members of the Congressional Black caucus, which symbolically represented her hope for Black children to aspire to seats of political power. As for her daughter, she was involved in a college-access program that focuses on structuring educational and extracurricular activities for young Black girls. Tina describes how wonderful the program was for her daughter in flying her out to visit top colleges across the country. She never wanted her children to feel that they did not have the educational resources to combat stereotypes of Black underachievement. For Tina, ensuring her children participated in Black-oriented extracurricular activities was critical educational work as a mother, underscoring the significance of race in the educational labor of her adaptive Black motherwork. Tina spoke of the potential pitfalls for her children of television and idle time, particularly in Los Angeles where access to drugs and gang activity can harm Black children, stating: “So we didn’t have none of those, cartoons, no…No idle time. No. People would say, ‘When do you let them kids rest?’ No, they’re Black. They can’t.”

Tina’s perception that Black children needed to work harder and avoid idle time is a register of her recognition of anti-Blackness within and beyond school systems. If Black students are labeled as “lazy” or “loud,” this can increase their likelihood of being tracked into lower-level classes that continue to undermine their subsequent educational trajectories (Oakes 1995, 2005; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Davis 2014). In addition, understanding a mother's upbringing and ideologies around Black mothering and education can provide insight into Tina’s remarks. Tina’s family moved west during the Great Migration, seeking not only job opportunities but also educational opportunities for their children. She attended the private Christian school because her parents sacrificed their earnings to invest in private school education. She describes how they could not even afford their own place when they

first arrived in Los Angeles, so they stayed with her aunt until her parents could afford to purchase their own home. She smiles recalling how her father was one of the first Black people to buy a home in Compton, an area that was still predominately white at the time (although soon to change after white flight.) She also was raised by a mother who highly valued education not just for her children but even for herself. Tina remembers watching her mom "work and study all day long and raise us," as she raised her children but also went back to school to get her bachelor's degree and two additional master's degrees. In applying modes of motherworking conceptually, Tina can draw on what she learned watching her mother who performed transitionary motherwork (to be described in chapter 6). She recalls attending college as an undergraduate at the same time that her mother earned her second master's degree. This background information is important because it reflects ideologies around mothering that normalize Black women changing their work status in order to center education. Though Tina had not performed transitionary motherwork herself, watching her mom do such shaped her ideas around educational labor, thus influencing how she reoriented her career to center her children's education.

Tina's upbringing provided lessons on how Black motherwork for education can work as a tool to fight conditions and ideologies rooted in anti-Blackness. She remembers not being able to play outside as her mother worked as a nurse in the emergency room during the 1965 Watts Rebellion and engaging in conversations with her parents around the Civil Rights Movement and about pursuing higher education as a tool for resistance. Tina even transferred from a University of California school, a predominately white institution, to an HBCU to feel a sense of cultural belonging in her education. She underscores how learning among Black scholars and attending Black cultural spaces like fraternity and sorority step shows taught her

the importance of culturally relevant pedagogical practices and spaces for Black educational success. As a result, in performing adaptive motherwork she adjusted her career to ensure that her children had access to enriching, Black educational spaces.

Jasmine, a married African American flight attendant with four adult children, also describes performing adaptive motherwork, altering her relationship with her employed work to specifically accommodate her children's education after becoming a mother. Originally from New York, Jasmine was working as a flight attendant living in Los Angeles when she got pregnant with her oldest child. Nervous about how she was going to manage the work intensive schedule with her new maternal responsibilities, Jasmine sought the advice of a senior flight attendant, another Black mother on staff. Jasmine recalled verbatim the invaluable advice given to her by her colleague that led her to start performing adaptive motherwork. She said, "Sweetie, the best thing for you to do is all nighters to Boston, New York and D.C. That way you will be home with your kids more. It's going to be hard on you, but you'll be home." Jasmine took this advice and adopted this drastically new schedule for the remainder of her career. Prior to having children, she would work full-time for a few weeks and then have a week off. She knew, however, that working full-time for a few weeks would not allow her the time to provide maternal care to her children, particularly her planned involvement in their education. Jasmine's adaptive motherwork schedule gave her this flexibility, allowing her the time to even *homeschool* all four of her children until they were ready to attend elementary school, and continue to maintain active involvement in their primary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling endeavors.

The advice coming from another Black mother in the workspace is not coincidental. In addition to Jasmine, many of the mothers —regardless of which Black motherwork

strategy they chose— looked to the wisdom of the Black mothers in their families, community, and especially the workplace. Black women can often find camaraderie in a workspace where the work relationship also functions as a sisterhood of sharing advice on work family balance and a place for venting about the stresses of it all (Hall et al. 2012). This is important considering that workspaces are not traditionally the safest places for all women, especially Black women, to share their pregnancy statuses and plans to alter their work schedules (Mehra et al. 2020). This is especially the case since many workplaces uphold an ideal worker expectation of employees with little regard to the gendered realities of family life in which women, regardless of their work statuses, still perform the majority of the childcare work and domestic labor of the home space (Bianchi et al. 2000, 2012; Sayer 2005). Many women, consequently, have experienced a motherhood penalty as matriculation into motherhood often accompanies lower pay, fewer work hours, and slower upward trajectory in any given field (Waldfogel 1997; Bianchi 2000; Lundberg and Rose 2000; Budig and England 2001; Staff and Mortimer 2012). Because Black mothers are key financial providers in their families regardless of their marital statuses or education levels, they cannot afford the motherhood penalty. As a result, Black women have innovated resistance strategies against work demands that strip agency away from their ability to become mothers and raise children without compromising their work goals or paychecks. This uncovers the way Black motherwork becomes a tool for community among Black mothers at work for strategizing ways to maximize their work efficiency while also prioritizing their maternal obligations.

Jasmine underscores how she homeschooled all four of her children until they were ready to begin K-12 education, further showing how education starts as soon as children are

born, reflecting the continual need to expand definitions of education to include early childhood learning for infants and toddlers. Jasmine understood that her approach may be considered atypical, as many may not even consider what curricula are necessary for toddlers since structures of free play are more normalized in daycare settings. Raising and educating Black babies living in Inglewood, however, Jasmine did not believe that learning was absent of play, art, and creativity. Detailing her pedagogical approach and ideas of learning, Jasmine says:

> My kids, when I first started having them, I would homeschool them at first. When they were just little babies up until kindergarten. It sounded silly, but I wanted to make sure they knew how to read and how to write. I set up for each little kid when they came in [to the bedroom converted to a classroom] their lesson plan. Then, we would have play time. I would always make sure we had play time. We would have creative time [where] they would make paintings and stuff…Go to the park because we had two parks near my house and I'm in downtown Inglewood so it's always been a decent nice area…We would go to the [local] library. That was our thing, and it was almost like an everyday thing…We had this library box at home, and they would put all their little library books in it. I loved that.

Jasmine understood this educational labor as critical to helping her children have a strong foundation of literacy before they entered elementary school. She proudly spoke about how all of her children were able to read and write before starting primary schooling, noting that her youngest son was especially gifted. She tells a story of when her youngest son first started kindergarten, remembering other parents, "majority white parents" as she says, were shocked at how much more advanced he was relative to the other children. She recalls "a bunch of white parents cornering [her]" inquiring what parenting practices she employed so that her son could read so well. She laughs remembering the incident, understanding the racial undertone of the parents' surprise. It was not simply that her youngest son was perhaps more advanced with reading than his peers; she discusses how she felt they were shocked that a Black child specifically was reading far better than his white peers. In understanding

the educational inequalities that leave Black children statistically underperforming on reading and math compared to their white and Asian counterparts (Howard 2010), Jasmine takes pride in knowing her educational labor and willingness to perform adaptive motherwork was the primary reason for her youngest son's educational excellence.

The value of education in Jasmine's understanding of Black motherwork is even seen in her naming her educational labor for her children's early childhood education as *homeschooling*. For Jasmine, raising Black children and being a Black mother meant that home would be the first site of education for her children, and thus an integral space of her educational labor. She sees the home as a space to expand Black education to include conversations around culture, religion, and safety, but also a location for traditional school curriculum and grade-level expectations for reading and writing. In describing her adaptive motherwork schedule as a flight attendant, she would work one full day away from her family (from 10pm to 10pm the next day) followed by three days off where she would focus on homeschooling. On the days she was away working, her husband would take on the family labor for the children and the house, although her husband would not lead or participate in homeschooling. She joked how her husband's days watching the children full-time, which would be about twice a week, turned into the children's "free" days off from homeschooling (aligning somewhat with traditional schooling of having two days off for the weekend.) This shows the ways Black fathers can and do support Black mothers in their decisions around family and work, a popular theme among my participants no matter their marital statuses, despite popular perception of Black fathers' perceived absence. That Black fathers are present, however, does not obviate the way in which educating Black children is seen primarily as the responsibility of Black women.

Even after all of her children were in primary schooling outside of the home, Jasmine chose to keep her all-nighter work schedule. Though such hours could be labor-intensive and exhausting, Jasmine saw the flexibility as an opportunity to stay involved with her children's education. She had the time to do research on schools in Los Angeles area, realized that she was not comfortable sending her children to any of the available public or charter schools, and consequently joined a program that helps Black and Brown children attend private schooling. The educational labor of finding this type of program was imperative for her, given the racial disparities in school and the importance of finding a school that would align with the standard of curriculum and teaching she had implemented in her own home: not just the substance of her pedagogy, but the method of actually having individualized attention for learning and instruction for her Black children so that their needs are personally addressed. She remembers the excitement of finding private schools through the organization that held these standards of learning, holding academic rigor and social justice awareness as key priorities. Though Jasmine describes how her extended family could not understand her decision to spend so much money on private schooling, Jasmine and her husband were willing to invest financially in their children's education at all costs (even solely reporting her income when applying for need-based scholarships.) The pressure for her to do so shows that entering middle-class status for Black families in a city like Los Angeles with high housing costs also entails educational expenses for middle-class Black children that are not easily afforded, particularly for multiple children.

Michelle, a married African American mother of seven (three stepsons, three daughters, and one adopted "niece/daughter"), also navigated adaptive motherwork with education in mind when she became pregnant with her oldest daughter. Prior to getting

pregnant, she found work in U.S. customs and then in banking where she met her husband. The two fell in love, wed, and began living together in the Hawthorne area of Los Angeles. Michelle became a stepmother to her husband's three children (who were living out of state with their mother) and later became pregnant with her first biological daughter. While pregnant, she and her husband decided to take the skills they learned working specifically in collections where he worked in a corporate office and she in banking to form their own company. She describes how she and her husbands' relationship grew stronger from her decision to perform this adaptive motherwork, referring to him as her "best friend." She bursts out in laughter remembering a time when she was chasing a guy up the street while noticeably pregnant to deliver his collection notice, one of many "funny and crazy" incidents they would experience on the job. Her decision to perform adaptive motherwork and start a business was to ensure economic stability, but more importantly to have time available to be involved in her children's lives and educational pursuits.

Though managing their own business took a considerable amount of time, it also allowed Michelle flexibility to tend to her mothering and her work responsibilities. For most jobs, bringing a child into a busy workspace may not be welcomed. Because she and her husband were their own bosses, however, they could bring their children into the workspace as needed. This challenges normative assumptions that compartmentalize the home as the only space of family labor and work as the site of employed labor. For Michelle, the workspace included a room with couches, chairs, and a TV so her children could have a safe space for homework or leisure. Michelle also discusses how working with her husband and their business allowed her flexibility to be present for her children's educational pursuits as two of her daughters were highly focused on performing arts and the other one on athletics.

She recalls driving them to and from acting auditions and sports practices across the town to ensure that her children could pursue their interests. Raising Black daughters, Michelle felt it was important to expand ideas of Black education to include arts and athletics. This was such an important aspect of her educational labor within her adaptive motherwork that she even hired a nanny to help with the family labor of cooking, cleaning, and caring generally for the children's basic needs. Michelle's decision to outsource help for the family labor responsibilities so that she could be more present to perform educational labor (and employed labor) underscores the significance of distinguishing education as a site of Black mothers' labor, avoiding conflating educational labor and family labor.

Though Michelle spoke proudly of the educational labor she enacted for her daughters, she had thoughts about things she thought she could have done better. For instance, her daughters spoke of wishing they had attended schools with more Black peers and were involved in more spaces that centered Blackness as they went to predominately white and Asian schools. Though Michelle valued these schools for their standards of academic excellence including college prep, a plethora of AP courses, specialized performing arts, and even an opportunity for one of her daughters to earn an associate degree while still in high school, they struggled as Black girls navigating gendered anti-Blackness. She described how socially her daughters felt ostracized from birthday parties, dating, and forming deep sisterhood friendships because they did not go to school with other Black peers. Though Michelle understood her educational labor of performing adaptive motherwork as a way of addressing her daughters needs as Black girls, she laments wishing that she had more options for schools that provided high quality learning spaces and Black cultural diversity.

Despite these limitations, performing adaptive motherwork by forming a business allowed Michelle and her husband to change their career path from collections to start a printing company when they realized there was an increasing demand for prints (during the 90s and early 2000s). They even expanded their business ventures to work with their daughters' schools, providing printing services for games, dances, and other yearly school events. Michelle describes this as an important window into her daughter's educational spaces where school administrators and teachers would get to know her and her husband personally. She thought this to be important given that her daughters tended to be the only Black girls in their schools, and her and her husband's visibility of as Black parents was important in negating potential assumptions about their familial lives, assumptions that Black children are assumed to come from single parent, impoverished households. It also allowed Michelle and her husband the chance to develop deep connections with school officials which meant that they could simply call them personally if that became necessary.

Michelle details how after 9/11, however, their business slowed in a manner that they were struggling economically and decided to move to Florida for a few years. Michelle is originally from Florida. She grew up there living with her parents and sisters in one of the back houses (in the rear of a larger main house) her grandparents allocated for their adult children to raise their own children in without worrying about rental costs. For Michelle, grandmothers enacting motherwork to help their adult children balance work and family, especially in times of economic hardship was seen as a normal help that she could access in her own time of need. They stayed at her grandparents' house in Florida temporarily, and then Michelle and her husband bought a house, moved Michelle's mom in for help, and attempted to expand their business in Florida. Though Michelle was ecstatic to be able to

own an acre of land which would be nearly impossible in Los Angeles with its skyrocketing housing prices, she also described how the Florida economy and California economy were vastly different in their experiences with the demand for printing. Struggling to the point of needing government assistance, Michelle and her family decided to go back to Los Angeles and continue their printing business. When doing so, one of Michelle's sisters (an already single mother) passed away. Michelle and her husband adopted their two-year-old niece, raising her as their own. They moved their family of now four daughters into Michelle's late sister's one bedroom apartment which was in a subsidized low-income housing development. This allowed them time to build back up their business and maintain housing albeit in a space that was cramped and crowded. As their business began to expand again, they underreported their income to the government to maintain access to their subsidized cheap housing. Michelle's experience navigating adaptive motherwork highlights the ways housing instability, domestic migration, and educational aspirations inform Black women's decisions about family and work.

Kendra, a single African American mother of two young boys who recently separated from their father, also navigated familial support and complex housing in Los Angeles while performing adaptive motherwork. Kendra was living in Inglewood with her mom and her siblings, went to school for her EMT license, and was doing ride-alongs with aspirations of becoming a paramedic. She describes enjoying the excitement and thrill of the job, while also being able to help the community. When she became pregnant, however, she decided it would be best to switch fields from paramedic work to nursing in order to find stability consistent with her new mothering responsibilities. She also knew that a paramedic salary would not provide her with the economic flexibility to pay for her children's childcare and

schooling spaces, and thus wanted to ensure that she could care for her children independently. Switching fields, however, would require more schooling; hence, Kendra needed to perform transitionary motherwork by enrolling in nursing school (to be discussed further in Chapter 6) so she could fully switch fields and complete her transition into adaptive motherwork. Once she became a nurse, she started working in the emergency room in order to tend to her career aspirations in a fast-paced hospital workspace, where performing adaptive motherwork did not mean sacrificing her personal goals of career fulfillment.

Kendra articulates how the increase in pay provided enough income for her to afford the expensive childcare to which she started sending her son. Her financial troubles were complex given that she was now a single mother but could not apply for government assistance without first attempting to receive child support from the children's father (a former Navy officer and current police officer). This puts many Black mothers in a situation in which asking for much needed government help to pay for quality education for their children also means pressuring mothers to "come for" their children's father's paycheck which often creates dissonance between the parents. When she finally found a schooling space for her son, Kendra was frustrated to learn that the childcare (advertised as a pre-school with a structured academic curriculum) was an overpriced daycare center that merely supervised the children while they played. It was not until her oldest started kindergarten and his teacher informed Kendra that he was behind that she realized he was not learning anything academic-related at school. At this age, he was supposed to be able to identify sight words, count to 100, and identify shapes. Kendra was already struggling to manage the educational labor of earning money to afford the schooling space while working an intense

12-hour nursing shift at an underserved and underfunded hospital located in a low-income neighborhood in Los Angeles and also taking her son to school and picking him up afterwards in between her work schedule. To learn that the hard-earned money she was spending on this educational space as a commitment of her educational labor was not actually educating her child completely flabbergasted Kendra. She had to find her son a tutor and enroll him in summer school, an additional act of the educational labor of her adaptive motherwork, forcing her to work overtime while relying on family help thankfully afforded her some time and money to be able to perform her jobs at work and at home.

Though Kendra ensured her son was on track for his grade level, she was now dealing with issues around her son's internalized anti-Blackness. She describes his first kindergarten as mostly made up of Latinos and whites and where he was one of few Black students in the school. Kendra recalls how her son would draw himself with lighter skin tone shades and when she said to him, "That's not your skin color," he replied, "Well that's the color I want it to be." When looking at his drawings, she would often see him draw himself with spiky hair as well, similar to the other children at his school, although his hair varied from tight kinky curls to a cut fade. Unhappy with the lack of racial diversity in that school, when Kendra moved to the Westchester area in LA she made sure to put him in a school with other Black young people. This can be seen as evidence of the educational labor she enacted having to consider racial demographics not simply because they enrich learning or check a diversity requirement, but because they can shape how young Black children look, value, and love themselves in educational spaces.

Similar to Kendra, Chloe, a single African American mother of two elementary school-aged boys, was working as an EMT when she became pregnant and realized the need

to alter her work commitments by switching work to school spaces. She was able to switch from doing daily 911 calls to working in the public school system as a health coordinator, a job for which an EMT license is required. This is a reflection of her adaptive motherwork; similar to the other mothers, she was able to align her work schedule in school spaces to her children's school schedule. This adaptive motherwork was especially important given that she and her partner decided to separate 6 months before our interview. Prior to separating, they all lived together with her partner's parents in a gated community in the Inglewood area. When they separated, Chloe moved in with her dad who lives closer to South Central, a neighborhood she feels is far less safe than her partner's home in Inglewood. She and the children's father had a difficult time initially with the breakup, but eventually they "sat down [and] discussed what went wrong in the relationship," and now she describes them as "really good friends." They eventually agreed to a custody agreement in which she has the boys Monday, Tuesday and half of Wednesdays, he has them the other half of Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, and they take turns getting them on the weekends. Wanting things to be "as fair as possible," this schedule allowed for them to have an amicable agreement outside of courts that tend not to understand the complications of Black family life. Chloe even describes family activities they coordinate together despite their separation, showing ways Black parents learn to co-parent despite labels that marginalize them as simply "single" parents. Many of these mothers describe that though they are single in that they are free to date and get a new partner, they are not alone in raising their children. Many of the fathers that co-parent with the mothers in my study show their commitment to being actively involved with their children. Her co-parenting schedule gives Chloe the flexibility on her

days without the children to work part-time doing 911 calls as well as catching up on chores, running errands, and spending time on self-care.

Chloe's extra shifts plus stable school salary gave her just enough to pay her bills, buy groceries for her and the children, and pay half of the $2300 a month tuition —an actual reduced combination rate for sending two children to the same school, with each child's tuition normally around $1300 a month. Similar to Kendra, Chloe also expressed frustration that in order to qualify for government assistance to get help financially, she would have to stop working. She says, "As Black women, we have to choose to either go to work or watch our child." Deciding to work, she wanted to put additional educational labor into funding a private early childhood education space that starts from 6 months until children are ready for first grade. Not only was Chloe willing to perform adaptive motherwork to find and afford such a space, but she was also willing to spend the extra money on schooling rather than spending it on her own apartment. Though she desired to have her own place and was not particularly comfortable living in the South-Central neighborhood, Chloe would rather have the money to send both of her sons to the top schools available known to prioritize child independence, literacy, math, arts, crafts and culture.

Though her sons were only three and five at the time of the interview, Chloe describes her strategy for navigating schooling for her boys. Because of her experience working in a public school system, witnessing firsthand the impacts of underfunding and overcrowding on students and staff, it is her preference to send her boys to private schooling for their elementary, middle, and high school years. Chloe, however, does not think private school is inherently better than public schooling. If she did not live in South Central (and her ex in Inglewood), she says she would feel comfortable sending her children to schools in

Culver City because they are decently resourced and diverse, unlike the schools in her and her ex's neighborhood. This was important for her especially raising Black sons and understanding the labels that they tend to carry with them that lead to them being labeled as a "problem student" (Rios 2011; Rowley et al. 2014). She discussed how her youngest son did not speak at school, leading his teachers to label him a "mute," suggesting that he has a learning disability. Chloe was confused as she describes her youngest son as a chatterbox at home. She made sure to employ educational labor by visiting the teachers, communicate her concerns, and discuss solutions to help her son's individual needs. Seeing how quickly the teachers labeled her son was further validation of why she needed to be personally present to enact educational labor for her children by spending whatever it takes to send them to the best schools.

Lila, an Ethiopian immigrant mother with two adult sons living in the San Fernando Valley area, also recalls her adaptive motherworking experience waitressing in order to specifically have time for care work and her children's education. Prior to working as a waitress, she was working in low level managerial roles in department stores like Ross and Macy's. Switching to waitressing allowed her to navigate part-time work easier, switching restaurants at her convenience. When Lila first became pregnant with her eldest son, she was married, and thus decided to withdraw from work entirely to be present for her son during the first three years of his life. She saw herself as his first teacher, using her home space to spend quality learning time with her son, although not going as far as Jasmine to set up a homeschool curriculum. Lila felt strongly that by the time her sons were three, it was important that they attend pre-school not just for academic enrichment, but also for social and peer learning.

The flexibility of waitressing in performing adaptive motherwork was especially important after Lila decided to divorce her husband, sell their home, and rent a smaller apartment for her and her elementary and middle-school aged sons. Waitressing gave Lila the ability to choose a restaurant job and subsequently an apartment dwelling located in the neighborhood with the highest performing schools in the San Fernando Valley area. This was important for Lila because she understood as a single mother it was going to be difficult raising two Black sons in Los Angeles County with little help from their father and with the nearest family forty minutes away (the time to travel the peak traffic hours of the 405 freeway). With her oldest son transitioning into middle school at the time of her divorce, she picked an apartment that was within walking distance from a well-regarded middle school and also across the street from one of the highest performing high schools in Southern California for her son to matriculate into (her job was also walking distance from her new apartment). Choosing to work and live strategically next to these schools reflects Lila's adaptive motherwork in which her commitment to educational labor was reflected in her ability to tailor her job to adjust to her sons' schooling needs. Raising a Black son in Los Angeles County, in a part of a neighborhood where Black and Brown tensions rise high due to gang wars, living near her son's school was a strategy to make getting home accessible for him, as she would often work long hours and did not want her son getting involved in any trouble.

Lila's waitressing job also qualified her for government assistance because her wages were low enough and she could underreport the tips she gathered. Though Lila did not want to lose the ideal housing she found to apply for affordable housing elsewhere, she was able to use government assistance to get an EBT card in order to buy groceries for her children.

Unlike the other mothers who expressed frustration with not being able to get government assistance while working, Lila's low-income job allowed her to be able to do such. She describes how though she was savvy in navigating her limited choices, she does stress that she did not feel she had many options when it came to raising her sons. It was her dream to actually pursue a career as a flight attendant. With her busy adaptive motherwork schedule, however, plus the economic demands of raising two sons with little familial help, Lila knew she could not manage going back to school to pursue her dream job. Instead, she chose to work the waitressing job she felt would give her sons, especially as Black boys, the best chance to attend their dream universities and pursue their career passions, a hoped-for fruit of her educational labor of adaptive motherworking.

Sara is also an Ethiopian immigrant performing adaptive motherwork in Los Angeles who was not left with many choices choosing a job. She is a mother to five-year old twins and lives in Inglewood with her husband, though she describes him as emotionally abusive to her, absent as a father to her children, and contributing very little financially. Originally from the Ethiopian capital city Addis Ababa, she and her husband migrated to the United States with their children who were just babies at the time. When they arrived in Inglewood, they were met with limited job opportunities and high rental costs for rundown housing. Sara found work at a local convenience store as a cashier, applied for government assistance, and enrolled her children in a state-funded local school that was completely free of charge for her. Not knowing much about social, economic and educational institutions in America, Sara was dedicated to ensuring that her children had a decent school to attend, especially because the first daycare center she signed them up for lacked any type of instructional learning and struggled simply to supervise the toddlers.

Though Sara found a job, housing, and a decent school for her children, she was left with little choice but to perform adaptive motherwork when the job hours she was offered conflicted with her mothering responsibilities. Her manager insisted on giving her late afternoon hours that conflicted with the time she would need to pick her children up from school through dense Los Angeles traffic, care for and feed them, help with homework, and put them to bed. She could not rely on her husband's support since he was often out drunk or out of the country flying back and forth to Ethiopia. She also lacked the support of her mother who was in Ethiopia with her family, and thus Sara had to take fewer hours at work which meant compromising what little she could afford already to care for her children. She makes this sacrifice in her job to perform the family and educational labor of taking care of her children and serving as their maternal proxies from school to home spaces. Sara expressed feeling depressed as this way of living was completely contrary to the cultural norms she knew "back home." She describes how work family balance is different in Ethiopia where families have more help from grandparents, where outsourcing help is cheaper, and where neighbors are always available as additional babysitters. She juxtaposes that with her current context in Los Angeles where she does not "feel at home," does not know her neighbors, struggles speaking English, and is constantly bombarded with news stories that show high crime and drug usage ultimately creating an everyday frenzy of fear in her mind.

In addition to not being able to take on more work hours due to lack of family or economic support with extended childcare, Sara's work journey also demonstrates adaptive motherwork because in Ethiopia she obtained a bachelor's degree in business. Her plans, coming to the United States married with twins and a new degree were wrapped in the lure of

the American Dream, unaware of the racialization process that happens for Black immigrants particularly in urban spaces like LA. Her business degree was not given the same respect as one obtained in the U.S., which meant Sara had very few choices about where she could work since her degree now contributed nothing to her career pursuits. This reflects American ideas around which countries have legitimate education systems that are respected (often those with roots as colonizers) and which grant degrees that are not (often those with roots as colonized). This contributed to her feelings of depression since getting her degree entailed great difficulty and was something she was very proud of and hopeful it would grant some economic opportunities. Her adaptive motherwork, thus, is performed under the full weight of conditions of urban poverty where Sara has little choice in how she can provide educational labor for her children or employed labor for herself.

Lastly, Trinity an African American mother to two children ages ten and eight, describes the way she also altered her work relationships to accommodate her children's needs, reflecting her adaptive motherwork. She specifically switched from working as a hair stylist to become an operations manager at a local store. Trinity describes not having much familial support or the help of her children's father after she left their tumultuous relationship which she tried to make work multiple times but his physical abuse to her resulted in the involvement of child protective services. She describes the fear she felt knowing that his actions of physically harming her could lead to punishment for her and her children, their potential removal and entrance into an unloving and neglecting foster care system (Roberts 2002, 2022). Trinity was not able to afford her own place initially, and her relatives asked her to pay high prices for rent to sleep on the couch. She recalls never feeling she had genuine support from her mother who struggled with a drug addiction and thus could not perform the

intergenerational Black mothering of Black grandmothers that often sustains Black women's ability to balance busy work and family schedules (Hunter 1997).

Before working as an operations manager at a local drugstore, Trinity describes working in public storage where the pay was decent, but the hours completely conflicted with her maternal responsibilities. Similar to Sara, she was assigned to work hours in which she also did not have anybody to watch her children and could not afford to hire help. Trinity worked around this by taking her children to work with her, risking receiving punishment from her employers. She got away with it for a while, but eventually she could not convert her new job into an after-school, educational/extracurricular space for her children. When her children got a little older, she describes having to teach them how to stay home by themselves while she worked nearby. They were instructed not to go outside or open the door and informed of what to do if they needed help or needed to reach Trinity in particular. Leaving her children at home also put her at risk for CPS intervention, a reality she was fully aware of but had no choice but to risk. She knew she was not neglecting her children by having to work while they are left at home for a few hours given that ideally, she would rather have had familial support for childcare, the money to outsource help, or the financial freedom to be present there herself. For Trinity, however, the most she could do was to ensure her new job was right next to the apartment in case she needed to get home. Not having to worry about her job being far away from their home saved Trinity worries about commuting and accessing her children.

Though Trinity had managed to find a small one-bedroom apartment that she could afford on her own, she still expressed her frustration with the inability to afford a bigger place with more living space and bedrooms for her and her children. In addition, the

neighborhood they lived in was also home to deteriorating primary and secondary schools that her children had little choice but to attend. Trinity describes having to make a tough decision and reach out to her aunt, whom she describes as her only genuine familial support system. Her aunt lives in Palmdale, located in the outskirts of LA county, where she owns a home with multiple bedrooms (as property costs there are far cheaper than LA city) and her home is located near high performing, well-funded schools. Her aunt acknowledged Trinity's struggles trying to provide a stable living and offered to "co-parent" with Trinity, allowing her two children to live with her in Palmdale so they could each have their own rooms and access to quality education as Trinity "got on her feet." They agreed to have the children live in Palmdale so Trinity could focus on building her finances and stabilizing her work schedule, and then on the weekends and school breaks, the children would stay with Trinity in Inglewood. Although Trinity did not want to be away from her children throughout the week, she points to the lives that she and her children would discuss dreaming about, lives full of financial freedom and educational opportunity. As a result, she was willing to perform this focused employed and educational labor by sacrificing her desires to be near her children but enhance their future academic opportunities and enable them to inhabit bigger living spaces.

Trinity's adaptive motherwork involved a sort of "long distance mothering," in which she made sure to be present in her children's lives while they were with her aunt via phone and video call. She describes calling them often to ask them if they need any shoes, clothing, or school supplies. Trinity never wanted her children to need things that she could not provide. She would also check in regarding their schooling to see if they got their homework finished each day and she communicated with their teachers when needed. Trinity also

decided to maximize her employed labor (and access to alternative income sources) with the extra time afforded to her because her children resided in Palmdale. For instance, she describes getting to work more hours and perform better at her job, resulting in a raise and upgraded title. She also describes subleasing her apartment and using the money to rent a bigger two-bedroom apartment that she lives in. Though navigating legal loopholes, Trinity understood that making the sacrifice to be away from her children would ensure that she had enough money to pay for all of their educational needs which includes saving for her "HBCU college plans" for them. With her children away for the semester at the time of the interview, Trinity was even renting out the second bedroom to "a friend who needs help" so she could have extra money to save up and spend with her children that upcoming summer. She spoke of her dreams to establish her own business but was afraid that switching careers again would compromise her ability to afford to pay for her children's needs. Given the support her aunt was providing in aiding in Trinity's adaptive motherwork, she also understood that exploring her dream business idea of "year-round carnival food" that could be her big break was not at the moment worth compromising her stability with fears of what a business failure would mean for her and her children's lives.

V. Incorporative Motherwork

Incorporative motherwork refers to women who integrate their mothering responsibilities into their ongoing work trajectories and aspirations. These mothers may make minor adjustments to their work hours to coordinate with their children's education schedules, but essentially, they maintain their relationship to work. For mothers enacting incorporative motherwork, family labor, employed labor, and educational labor do not dictate the performance of the others. Mothers performing incorporative motherwork value family and education just as much as the mothers performing other types of motherwork. They simply employ what Dawn Dow (2019) refers to as integrated mothering ideologies that normalize their work outside of the home and their familial obligations as coexisting responsibilities of Black motherhood. The mothers performing incorporative motherwork rely on help from kin as well as childcare and educational institutions that are often costly. Whether family or outsourced, incorporative mother workers seek safe (enough) spaces of care for their children to assist in their ability to maintain their employed labor. Similar to other mothers, these mothers are also still performing the educational labor of navigating complicated relations with childcare facilities, pre-schools, and K-12 schooling spaces that they desire to be both academically rigorous and racially sensitive, helping with homework, finding extracurricular activities, and often driving children to and/or from school. Unlike adaptive mother workers, however, they do not adjust their jobs and careers around this educational labor. I identify eight mothers that were performing incorporative motherwork at the time of the interview.

The experiences of Kayla, a newly married African American mother to an infant daughter, demonstrate incorporative motherwork. She grew up in a suburb in the South Bay

region of Los Angeles, attending primary and secondary school locally. She then graduated from a school in the University of California system and subsequently earned a master's degree in teaching from a private university in Los Angeles. Prior to becoming a mother, she worked as a middle school English educator for the Los Angeles Unified School District. While teaching, she became pregnant and got married to her husband who has an elementary school aged son from a previous relationship. Even with her new responsibilities from pregnancy and step mothering, Kayla continued working until a week before she went into labor. After giving birth to her daughter, she took seven weeks off for maternity leave and resumed teaching full time, thus maintaining her pre-motherhood relationship with work. Although initially residing in Los Angeles, she and her husband soon decided that they wanted to buy a three-bedroom home in the inland empire. Even though they both have careers and have access to childcare from grandparents in Los Angeles, they collectively decided that they would rather commute for over an hour each day in traffic in order to become homeowners which required evade the increasing prices of housing in Los Angeles County. Kayla emphasizes her passion for teaching, saying, "Education chose me...I was bound to do something education based."

Though Kayla expresses a passion for teaching, and having chosen that pathway prior to having a child, her understandings of it as a profession that Black women can pursue to balance work and family are informed by her own upbringing. As a young girl, she watched her mother work as an educator with a work schedule that allowed for the time flexibility she needed to raise her daughter. Though Kayla did not make career choices particularly to align with her foreseen mothering responsibilities, her context of watching her mom perform Black motherwork as a teacher informs her perception of the field's accessibility, decent and stable

pay, pathways for upward mobility, and family-friendly work culture. Kayla expresses deep satisfaction from her work in the classroom, getting to mold the minds of young children through English courses that better their writing skills. This is especially important to her sense of "giving back" to the Black community given that Black children consistently underperform on reading and writing tests. Kayla's focus on teaching English courses, though she enjoys it, was not her original plan as an undergraduate student. At first, she had dreams of pursuing a career in the medical field, considering being a family health practitioner or perhaps a physician assistant (PA). Her plans were completely stifled when she was met with the reality of taking science and math courses at a large, predominately white college as a Black woman. She articulates not feeling prepared to handle the material, although she was a high performing student at her high school. Kayla's experience speaks to a common experience among Black students who are too often not given the resources or support in navigating STEM classes and extracurricular enrichment activities in elementary, middle, and high school and thus feel underprepared when they attend higher education (Davis 2020). Though accepting of her educational journey and career choice as a teacher, Kayla wants to ensure her daughter does not feel the isolation and lack of preparedness she felt as a Black woman pushed out from STEM fields.

Though Kayla's incorporative motherworking means she does not reorient her employed labor based on educational labor (or family labor), she does understand that providing a high-quality education for her daughter is critical to her Black motherwork. She specifically speaks of wanting to send her daughter to private school as she grows older. Currently, she has been balancing caring for her daughter at home (as she was working remotely during the pandemic at the time of our interview), while also relying on the help of

her husband, his mother, and her own mother though all were essential workers and actively working during the crisis. At the time of the interview, Kayla was in the process of searching for an early childhood educational space for her daughter as work and school began resuming to in-person again. Given her experience as an educator and lessons taught to her from other Black women educators, she had a list of requirements she sought for her daughter's schooling space that included cleanliness, child to adult ratio of no more than four to one, and an organization where "when I send my kid a water bottle, I want to get that bottle back." Kayla's strategy for balancing her incorporative motherwork was to find a childcare location in Los Angeles —although she lives in the inland empire—near her job, her husband's work, and both respective grandparents' homes. Since she would be commuting to Los Angeles daily to teach once classes resumed to in-person, she wanted to find a schooling location to which she would have easy access and also be close to other family and community members (all located in her hometown of Los Angeles) in case she was unable to get to her daughter's school right away.

In addition to finding a high-caliber schooling space, it is important for Kayla to give her daughter experiences with diverse extra-curricular activities and Black cultural spaces. She articulates how she made sure to enroll her daughter in swimming programs as an infant, especially as a young Black girl. Her perspective speaks to the ways Black families, historically, have been excluded from public swimming pools, and that Black neighborhoods are often underinvested in and lack even a local pool and swim instructors (Wiltse 2014). For Kayla, normalizing swimming for her young daughter was not just a way to ensure her safety, it was also a way to counter assumptions about Black people being disinterested in swimming. Kayla's experiences, particularly due to her middle-class upbringing, involved

lots of travel, exposure to diverse cultures and languages, and fun activities like horseback riding. As a result, she was interested in having a stable career before she became a mother, so she could afford to pay for and invest time in the educational labor of participating in these activities with her daughter. She also wanted her daughter to share her experiences performing in Black churches, thinking of the ways a Black spiritual space that incorporated performing arts would be a great learning space to ground her daughter in Black cultural traditions and practices. She felt it was important to expose her daughter to Blackness through music, arts, and religion, however not essentialize Blackness to limit her daughter's participation in activities in which Black children are underrepresented. She embeds this educational and family labor into her already existing employed labor as a teacher, finding ways to incorporate her work and mothering duties into a manageable lifestyle, with the help of her family and community.

Hailey, a married mother, raising her toddler age son on the outskirts of L.A. County, began performing incorporative motherwork after becoming a mother a few years prior. Hailey commutes about four hours a day during prime traffic hours getting to and from home, work, and her son's school. She has a master's degree in social work and secured employment as a psychiatric social worker for L.A. County. Hailey eventually moved her way up into the realms of administration. She is currently employed in a supervisory position where she manages two county wide programs that cater to the needs of families, including their mental health. In that job, Hailey trains staff, works with partner agencies, and devises new policies and procedures with other leaders in administration. She describes this process, relating:

> I literally have to leave at like 4:30 [am] to get to work by 6:30 [am]…And after that, I pick him up from school… Sometimes we get home at like 6:45 [pm]…the latest like 7

> [pm]…getting him fed, getting myself fed. And then, you know, trying to get him a little time to play… And then after bath, getting him ready for bed is a whole process. And then maybe [my husband] will get home anywhere from 9 to 10 [pm]. And when we get home, I'm usually about to fall out…And then we start the process all over again, Monday through Friday.

Hailey's busy incorporative motherwork schedule does not provide her with as much time to perform educational labor or family labor as she would like, but it does grant her the economic stability to provide her son access to the best Montessori school she could find. After giving birth to her son, Hailey diligently compiled a list of fourteen potential schools throughout Los Angeles (with a willingness to commute to the best location) and generated another long list of mandatory requirements in order for her to decipher the location where she would feel most comfortable. Though she describes her husband as a "very active father" that is present in her son's life and extracurricular activities, she also points out that the burden of this educational labor of securing the best early childhood education space was primarily on her. It was her job to find the schools, make the phone calls, visit them for her own inspection, and then make the final decision.

For Hailey, choosing a school was critical given that her infant son would end up spending the majority of his day at that educational space. Thus, she was willing to invest over $1500 a month to pay for tuition for schooling that starts at 6 months continues to 6 years, and lasts from 5 am to 6 pm, while also having a low teacher to student ratio, the presence of cameras for security, academic based curricula, arts and crafts, and attention to cultural diversity. Though she appreciated the school's attention to diverse cultures through projects and dance performances, she did not feel completely comfortable that her son was one of only two Black children in the Montessori school. She decided, however, that academic rigor and safety for her son at this age would weigh more heavily in her decision of

choosing a school rather than the presence of other Black students and teachers. This does not mean that she did not value incorporating her son into spaces that Black children frequented. She specifically spoke of her son's love for basketball and her decision to enroll him in a travel league (of which she and her husband are major advocates) to play with others, specifically Black boys, throughout the region. This was important for her exposing her son to children who looked like him so he would not struggle with feelings of not belonging at his educational learning space.

Though Hailey enjoys that her job provides her with a stable middle-class income where she can invest in her son's education and extracurricular activities, she expresses feelings of overwhelming tiredness. Though her lifestyle clearly demonstrates an incorporative motherwork model, she shares a curiosity about performing adaptive motherwork in the future, perhaps changing her position in her field by working in school settings to match her schedules with her child's education. This, however, seems like a financial sacrifice she feels her upper, middle-class lifestyle in L.A. County cannot afford. Hailey and her husband both earn six figure salaries, and switching to a school site could mean a nearly fifty percent reduction in her salary which would put them in an economic situation where her husband's income becomes primary. This would also shift the way they divide bills, which currently is equally and then they keep and utilize the rest of their individual money as they see fit. They are also collectively saving to purchase a home, putting large portions of each of their salaries aside for their goal. Staying with incorporative motherwork, consequently, allows her to keep her goals of paying for her child's education and providing a house for him to inherit, which are other components she sees as essential to her mothering responsibilities.

Brittney also performs incorporative motherwork. After becoming a mother, she maintained her career as a pharmacist. She describes having a rigorous job schedule, leaving at 10 pm to work graveyard shifts while also raising two daughters, ages one and eleven. She is originally from New York, received her graduate degree in pharmacy, and moved to Culver City for employment. Her daughters have two different fathers, with the father of the eldest daughter playing a minimal role in co-parenting and the father to her recent baby providing parental support to both girls and partner support to Brittney. Her job as a pharmacist requires her to work for five days and then grants her five days off. With the support of her new partner and the flexibility in her work scheduling, Brittney was able to integrate her mothering expectations with her preexisting work obligations. Despite the intensity of her workload and wishing she could be home to tuck in her daughters at bedtime, she expresses joy that she is able to attend her eldest daughter's daytime activities.

> But balancing, it's hard because what I have to do is –something has to give. What I have to sacrifice is my sleep, in order to make a lot of things work. So, I just make sure she does a lot of extra-curricular activities. Like the ones that she had to do, it would have to be the ones on campus where she doesn't have to get picked up or dropped off. So, what I would do is the cooking class, the science class, and the chess class right after school, and she would have to just walk across to another room. Just so she can get some extra stuff going on. If it was anything where I have to pick her up, it would be hard for me because I'm using that time to sleep…in order to function at night. (*She laughs)*. It's tough.

Brittney describes help from her partner and a few friends as important to her ability to maintain her incorporative motherwork schedule. Brittney characterizes her partner as "hands on" with their daughter, taking the lead in caring for her while Brittney works at night. She also speaks of his involvement with his stepdaughter (her oldest) taking her to track practices and helping plan birthday parties, for instance. She also recounts receiving help from her friends when she needed assistance picking her daughter to and from school (if her partner

could not help), and also organizing transportation with another parent when their daughters participated in dance class together. Brittney attributes this small community of support as vital for raising her daughter in a way that maintains her job while balancing mothering obligations.

Contrary to Kayla who pursued education after being pushed out of STEM fields, Brittney actually would have liked to have a career in education. She always had a passion for teaching but chose a career in pharmacy because of her mother's encouragement and assurance that it would provide her with a higher income than teaching, and thus provide economic security long-term. Brittney was nervous watching years of teachers' strikes and pay cuts, recognizing that a job as a pharmacist would not make her susceptible to the same treatment. She does not regret this decision, since she does not worry about paying for bills or educational expenses. She describes, laughingly but seriously:

> But I am definitely glad I chose that major because there are certain majors you might have a passion for, but if you cannot keep up with your bills, you have to put that passion to the side and find something that is gonna at least cover the important things, or at least fund your passion (she laughs).

Kayla, Brittney, and Hailey all finished school and began their careers before they became mothers, informing their entrance into and perceptions of their incorporative motherwork. All three were already formally educated with graduate degrees. All are middle-class and married with the support of their husband's incomes and care-work. They had conditions of economic stability from already being established in their careers prior to forming families, so incorporating mothering into their current lives without changing their careers is a strategy that they can manage due to their economic resources. The remaining five mothers also experience incorporative motherworking, but navigated transitionary motherwork at some point prior. This section focuses on their incorporative motherworking experience (and

Chapter 6 discusses transitionary motherwork). It should also be noted that not all mothers that perform incorporative motherwork have spousal help (or even spouses at all) or have a middle-class job and salary.

Grace, an Ethiopian immigrant and mother to two elementary school aged boys, works as a surgical technician on the west side of Los Angeles. She describes loving her job and performing so well at it that her boss asked her to be a leader in her field. Her duties include "assembly, packing, washing, and sterilizing." Prior to working in the West LA area, she was struggling at health facility in the South Bay which she left after six months due to the intense work demands outside of the job descriptions where she says, "they make you do everything.". Though Grace has experience with transitionary motherwork, her current Black motherwork qualifies as incorporative because her educational labor no longer shapes her employed or family labor. Unlike the aforementioned mothers performing incorporative motherwork, Grace does not have the same level of support from her husband. She describes her marriage as deteriorating, in that her husband does not contribute enough financially or in domestic labor for her to justify staying with him. She is bothered that his work ethic does not match hers. The majority of the educational labor of navigating their children's schooling, the family labor of caring for them and the home space, and the employed labor of bringing home money falls on her shoulders.

Grace also lacks support from her family as they are located "back home" in Ethiopia. There were a few times occasionally that her mom or sister would fly out and stay to help for a month, but they were ultimately not close enough in proximity to help as much as she needed. Because of her experience, she feels strongly that young mothers should stay close to family, stating:

> This is America. What I've seen in America is that you need to have family. You need to have somebody…I know people grow up like, "It's okay." No, that's a lie because you need to have…so many things…your kids don't have school sometimes, [or] they get sick sometimes…If you don't have support, then you are struggling. I was struggling with that!

When Grace says, "This is America," she is referring to ideas around American individualism that contrast with the context of her hometown in Ethiopia where ideas around communalism inform family life and formation. She learned the "hard way" that the United States would not only shift her understanding of how mothers balance work and family, but also prevent her bachelor's degree in business from Ethiopia to be recognized in a way that provided her any credibility on her resume as she sought employment. Learning the politics of how discrimination would impact her work trajectory and the financial hardships she would endure consequently, Grace wishes she had friends and family nearby as a support network.

Taylor, another Black mom with experience performing incorporative motherwork, also describes not having family support while raising her daughter as a single mother. Taylor was originally born in Thailand, where her father met her mother. She describes herself as an "army baby," as her father was in the military which resulted in them living in many different places across the U.S. and overseas. When she eventually settled in Los Angeles to attend college, later to experience transitionary motherwork, she was without the company of her parents who were living abroad. Her sister eventually moved to Los Angeles, which gave her some sense of family, but ultimately, she performed incorporative motherwork without much help. Taylor's incorporative motherwork involved her working an L.A. city clerical job. For Taylor, her responsibilities as a mother did not influence her decision to choose this profession. In fact, ending up in this job was actually quite random for

her in that she learned about the position when she discovered that her daughter's aunt (on her dad's side) was taking an exam for placement into an entry level position. Taylor laughs remembering how she passed but her daughter's aunt did not. She describes never having had career ambitions to pursue any particular field (though she majored in psychology), instead she just sought financial security. This was not necessarily inspired by her mothering plans as economic stability has been something that she has always sought.

Not having much familial support around, Taylor describes having to bring her daughter to work with her often. Her job gave her flexibility with this, as she worked from an office and could quietly sit her daughter down with a small laptop for entertainment. She even describes bringing sleeping bags for her daughter so that she could nap and rest while she worked. As her daughter grew older, she began allowing her to stay home by herself when she decided to take on fleeting part-time jobs working graveyard shifts at department stores. Her reasoning behind acquiring additional jobs had more to do with providing a stable household income and having the money to afford items for her and her daughter, and less to do with investing in her daughter's education. She describes how she wonders if she should have worked less so she could have spent more time getting to know her daughter as an individual, learning of her aspirations and perspectives. She describes not really being present for her daughter as much as she perhaps could have because she wanted to ensure that they always lived in a decent neighborhood, could eat at luxury restaurants occasionally, and buy name-brand clothes and shoes. Taking on additional jobs to supplement her income from her primary job gave her the money to afford a nice apartment in a suburban Black enclave that is known for being relatively safe and family friendly. This made Taylor more comfortable with leaving her daughter at home alone though in middle school at the time, as

she worked because she knew that their neighborhood was not known to be crime filled. Taylor did not anticipate that this would give her daughter the freedom to explore boys, drugs, and parties at a young age in a way that made her motherwork particularly challenging.

Taylor also wishes she would have invested more time in her daughter's educational pursuits. She describes choosing schools based on the convenience of proximity to her jobs. Luckily, the schools in her neighborhood were relatively "good" with science magnet programs and performing arts opportunities. Taylor assumed that sending her daughter to good schools meant her daughter would manage to get a decent education and an interest in attending college. She describes how her daughter would consistently fall behind, even after investing in tutoring programs to help address her writing and math skills. Taylor even describes how by high school her daughter was flunking most of her classes, partaking in drugs and engaging in underage sexual activity, and even got arrested for shoplifting. She made an agreement with her daughter for her to switch high schools worrying that she would drop out of her current school. Changing schools did help as her daughter started to perform better academically, avoid trouble, and did successfully graduate. Taylor, however, wonders if much of her daughter's struggle with troubles with school —in that her focus was primarily on its social aspects rather than academic concerns— results from her lack of presence as a mother. She now understands that similar to how her own mother's parenting style felt distant growing up, she unintentionally modeled that with her own daughter by focusing less on her daughter's academic aspirations and emotional needs and more on modeling an image of a "hard-working mommy."

Crystal, a mother to two sons and a daughter, had a different experience than Grace and Taylor in that she received ample support from her family and partner in performing incorporative motherwork. In acknowledging this help, however, she was clear that she no longer speaks to the father of her oldest son. She recalls how at first their relationship was cordial, and he co-parented minimally, though enough for her satisfaction, by providing money for their son regularly as supplemental support for her. Crystal specifies that their relationship took a turn when she had a conversation with his new girlfriend, thanking her for the money she paid for her son's prom photos but also addressing that she heard from her son that she and his dad were fighting in front of her son, which did not align with her parenting style. Her son's father and new girlfriend were highly offended by this incident, and now he simply and silently sends checks when he can. Crystal contrasts her ex with her current partner whom she describes as key to her success of balancing mothering and work. She lovingly says, "He gets on my fuckin' nerves, but if he wasn't who he is, I wouldn't be as successful." This reiterates the importance of Black men as partners and fathers in this study in helping Black mothers balance their parenting and work responsibilities, in this case Crystal's incorporative motherworking schedule.

Crystal works as social worker specifically focusing on commercially sexually exploited children. She explains how her job acknowledges firmly that these girls labeled as prostitutes and belittled as "hoes" should not be criminalized as they are children legally unable to consent to the work they are performing (Phillips 2015). She describes how the girls have pimps who sexually and physically abuse them while exploiting their bodies by coercing them to exchange sex for money, drugs, or housing. Though she says some of the girls are "renegades, which means they work for themselves," they are often young girls who

are navigating conditions of poverty and violence without help from family, support in school systems, and empathy from law enforcement. Many of the young girls that Crystal works with are poor Black girls living in inner city neighborhoods, often foster youth whose parents have either been imprisoned, killed, or are struggling with drug addictions. Crystal underscores her experience growing up in the inner-city projects, navigating streets that many of these girls come from and frequent, as a way she relates to them, humanize them, but also provide alternative pathways for them. She describes the level of motherwork she has to perform within her job, providing maternal care to girls that often do not have mothers present. Though she understands her importance in the girls' lives, she also feels pressure feeling overly accountable for kids she "didn't have any pleasure in making," as she puts. Nonetheless, she stresses the value of her workplace motherwork, particularly for Black girls who are often neglected and arrested rather than provided care, food, and shelter. She describes her rapport with the girls developed from her candid expressions that ensures them that she is from their community and has their best interest in mind, saying:

> You have girls that call you like, 'Fuck this shit,' when they are in group homes [after leaving their pimps] and going A-wall. They're like, 'I'm gonna go back home [with their pimp] because when I was home, I had money.' And you're like, 'You're not Julia Roberts. This is not *Pretty Woman*. You know how this shit is gonna' end.' So I pulled back to where social work 101, meet the client where they are at, so I meet them where they're at. If they're ready, they're ready. Because anyone in life, Nia, if they not ready, they not ready. But I'm here. They call me respectively because they know I'm with the shits so don't come off wrong.

Crystal's comments reflect how she serves not just as a social worker, but also a maternal resource and how she makes the girls feel comfortable expressing themselves authentically by understanding their complicated negotiations with wanting to return back to an abusive home of a pimp rather than stay at a foster home where physical and sexual violence are also prevalent. Crystal's sentiments reflect her understanding that the girls do need this level of

care and a safe person they can call, but she also believes in personal agency in that while the girls are not responsible for the situations they were born into, they do not have to feel trapped in conditions of gendered economic and sexual exploitation. When Crystal says the girls know she is "with the shits" and thus not to "come off wrong" she speaks of the importance of respect in these relationships. The girls respect Crystal in that she is not a perceived "outsider" providing advice without ever experiencing the realities of urban poverty. This sense of trust between Crystal and the girls provides purpose for Crystal as she continues workplace motherwork that intersects with he employed labor responsibilities.

Though available by phone at times for her girls, Crystal delineates how she is adamant about ensuring that she has a balanced work schedule of a little more than 9 hours a day as a strategy of her incorporative motherwork. She states, "Oh, I don't play those reindeer games with the fuckin' department. I work from 8 to 5:30 [pm]." This was important to her because of the busy schedules of her three children. She recalls a time when her children were going to three different schools, and she had to get them each to school before 8 am while also needing to be at work at the same time. She describes how she made it work by dropping them off early and splitting shifts with partners so that she could attend in a timely manner to each child's school and her work. Luckily, each of the schools was in a 4-mile radius of one another. Though managing a difficult schedule with a busy job and three children, Crystal remembers that her single mother raised four children with far less support. As she puts it, "I tell my mom, she's so dope, she had four of us…she didn't have no help. And I admire her." For Crystal, this inspires her to continue to work hard, ascend in the ranks of her career, and model to her children the strengths of Black motherwork.

Crystal's incorporative motherwork has afforded her and her children a middle-class lifestyle not immersed in conditions of poverty. They reside in the west side of L.A., living a life starkly different from Crystal's upbringing in South Central. Although she would rather send her children to a higher performing school, Crystal describes the schools her children attend on the west side as an improvement over the drop-out factories she attended as a student in South Central. She describes how her extended family still live in these neighborhoods and attend schools in ways that contrast with the schooling and living experience she provides for her kids. She articulates:

> It's just different. And to see the young men hanging out. And it's just like, my kids don't really understand it. And just, trying to explain poverty, and trying to explain, um, gang banging and why I want them to go to school over here. It's different from their cousins, their family that live, speak and act a certain way. My kids have been sheltered. They haven't been exposed to that kind of stuff.

She describes how this requires her to perform an additional educational labor of talking to her children about class differences within their community, and even within their family, that shape exposure to poverty and gangs. Though in their neighborhood she is not worried about her sons entering into a perceived "street life," she knows that as they grow older, they can simply drive a few blocks down and easily access urban poverty and the realities of class conditions that accompany it. Crystal was grateful for her support system and the career trajectory that allowed her to remain connected to Black urban struggles without feeling confined by them, navigating in and out of certain streets and neighborhoods,

Similar to Crystal, Imani, an African American mother with a toddler age son, also has a large support system that allows her to maintain her incorporative motherwork schedule. She works as an advisor in the California State University system and also manages a small business where she crafts jewelry boxes and small home décor items. She

describes her schedule as busy but manageable in that she goes to her primary job at 9 am, with an hour and a half break around noon, and then gets off work by 4 pm. She works her business job at her own convenience as demand requires. This allows her time to pick up and drop her son off from school and go home on her lunch break and tend to her personal needs and family labor responsibilities, and then go back to work at her job. She describes her work supervisor as a part of her support system in that she is flexible and understanding of Imani's need to balance work and her mothering obligations, working with her scheduling needs and even encouraging Imani not to work outside of her work hours. Imani describes how her supervisor provides direct mentorship on how to navigate her current job, and even helps Imani make plans to continue her schooling and enter into an educational leadership program in the next year or so to earn her doctoral degree in education, She notes how her relationship with her supervisor is special because they are both Black women, supporting each other in workspaces that can often isolate and ostracize women that value labor for their children and their education as much as they do their labor for their own career.

In addition to a healthy work environment, Imani describes drawing on her "big village" of family on both her and her partner's sides as instrumental to her balance of incorporative motherwork. She currently lives with her mother in a two-bedroom apartment in the San Fernando Valley area while her partner lives with his parents closer to South Los Angeles. They had this living arrangement prior to having their son, and although they are romantically together and partnered, they decided to maintain their living arrangements. This strategy, though atypical, provides many benefits to them. First, it allows them to have grandparents on each side that can provide direct help in childrearing, especially for Imani as the majority of the educational and family labor falls on her. Both sides of the family provide

significant help including assistance with pickups and drop offs, babysitting, and providing food, clothing and shoes. She smiles saying how she and her son never have to ask for anything because their extended family treats her son as their own son. She playfully asserts, "The first grandchild is the last child for grandparents." Imani specifically regards how her own mother demonstrates this grandparent love precisely, even watching her son as we conducted our interview via FaceTime. In addition to familial support with childcare and finances, Taylor also describes how their living arrangement provides them the opportunity to consolidate their debts, pay them off, and save to buy a house. She feels it is important for her and her partner to not enter into a living arrangement that entails struggling to handle the payments. Though they do not live together, she describes her partner as supportive of her career and a "great father."

Without worrying about paying for rent or clothing expenses for her son, Imani is able to focus her time and money on performing educational labor as a part of her motherwork. Rather than choosing an expensive school for her son, she was happy to find a daycare center run by a woman that watches other children in her family and community. This would allow her son to be in a location where she could feel comfortable about his safety, but also know that he would be cared for in ways comparable to the caretaking of his family. In addition, that daycare center would allow him to be around other Black children so that her son would not have to navigate "being the only" or "one of few." Despite appreciating the daycare center as a place she can continue sending her son to, she does note that they "don't do a lot of academics" there. As a result, she and her mom have to take on more educational labor, teaching her son his letters and numbers so that he does not fall behind. Because her mom previously worked as an educator, she felt comfortable with using

her as a supplemental resource for performing educational labor to compensate for the lack of academic enrichment at the daycare center. She describes their at-home pedagogical practices as "free style learning" where they do not have a structured curriculum, however they provide opportunities for teaching through toys, music, arts, and even cell phone apps like ABC mouse.

Nicole, a recently divorced mother of a son who just started attending a university, also performs incorporative motherwork. Prior to becoming a mother, she was already working as an educator in Compton and continued doing so after becoming a mother. Rather than changing her work to fit her new family labor and educational labor, she and her then-husband moved in with her parents temporarily to acclimate to the new responsibilities while getting to share responsibilities of domestic and family labor. Though also enjoying the flexibility of the job to balance family plus daytime work hours, Nicole describes her pursuit of teaching as a passion. She genuinely enjoys the classroom space as way to engage students' intellectual curiosities and harness their academic gifts. With the support of her parents, sister, and then-husband, she maintained her work commitments and schedule, especially in the beginning when she was in a probationary stage and was working extra hours.

Although she and her husband divorced after twenty years of marriage six months prior to our interview, she articulates how they both were active in their son's educational pursuits and extracurricular activities. Her partner's willingness to share the family labor of cooking and cleaning, and divide pickups and drop offs, made Nicole's maintenance of her incorporative motherwork not only sustainable but quite enjoyable. She describes how they became a "football family" when their son joined the sport. They would collectively attend

practices and games, and also build relationships with other players' families. Nicole describes how they forged a community of families where they could ask for help and advice around their children's needs. This was particularly important for Nicole because it was a network of other Black families that would also understand their son's racially gendered challenges and the value of this sports space as a safe place for Black boys to play, even roughly, outdoors without worrying about police perceptions of Black criminality. A group of Black children playing roughly at a park but not on an organized sports team could easily be labeled a gang in the eyes of the many police officers that often perceive Black boys as prone to crime. She describes this support system as also significant in her ability to navigate the difficulty of balancing raising a child, navigating school systems, and working full time.

Overall, the incorporative motherworkers in this study vary in their levels of family support and economic statuses, yet they all choose to find ways to incorporate mothering into their journeys without making major alterations to their scheduling or shifting fields. Their stories reflect the diverse ways Black women strategize the value of being involved in their children's lives and educations, but also keep their trajectory of career pursuits in mind as a way of blending personal career aspirations and plans with family life.

VI. Transitionary Motherwork

Transitionary motherwork delineates when women experience mothering while pursuing higher education, either becoming mothers while already in school or enrolling in school after matriculating into motherhood. Transitionary motherwork often entails women augmenting their work trajectories by actively pursuing higher education after becoming mothers. For mothers performing transitionary motherwork, their matriculation into motherhood inspires them to think critically about their work relationships as they apply to – and advance within –post-secondary school, and eventually specialize in a field they can call a *career* rather than a *job*. These mothers enter a temporary student status where educational labor (their own) shapes their relationships to family labor and employed labor. Of the twenty participants, four were currently performing transitionary motherwork

Shaina, for instance, was raised in the inner-city projects of South Central and became a mother while attending a California State University (CSU). With the overwhelming demands of mothering, her grades plummeted; she was subsequently placed on academic probation and later dismissed from school. Still determined to advance her education, she had to "start over" and attend community college. She got pregnant again, and her supportive partner died during her pregnancy, creating another obstacle in her path. However, it was the birth of her daughter that she said saved her. Shaina explains, "It took me a little minute, but it wasn't until I became pregnant with my daughter, that I decided that something was going to have to change." For her, becoming a mother to a daughter –perhaps imagining her being able to get a chance that her own mother never had after having her –allowed Shaina to envision educational attainment as the means by which she could change her own life and the lives of her children. At first, Shaina attended school during the day and worked at night.

Continuing her education was also work. Although in need of the paychecks that come with employment, she decided to quit her pattern of working in low wage jobs, to focus instead on her education and her children.

Shaina attributes the support of her mother as being instrumental to her ability to treat her schooling pursuits as work, granting her some time to balance her own implementation of motherwork. Her mother took over paying for the expenses of food, clothing, housing, and childcare, allowing Shaina to withdraw from performing employed labor and redistribute that labor specifically towards educational labor for herself. Shaina's mother not only took over the employed labor involved in motherworking, but also helping with the family labor of cooking, cleaning, and caring for Shaina's children. This would allow Shaina more time to focus on educational labor for herself in pursuing higher education, educational labor for her children in finding school spaces and involvement in their educational activities, and also balancing the family labor with her mom equitably. This redistribution of labor reveals the communal nature of motherwork, specifically highlighting the intergenerational motherwork performed by Black grandmothers. Black grandmothers play a critical role in helping their adult daughters raise their children by continuing to provide maternal care of a housing space without worries about food or clothing. Similar to when Black grandmothers were raising their own daughters to focus on education while they focused on employed labor and family labor, Black grandmothers often continue to do so when their daughters have their own children and continue their school pursuits. Black grandmothers, essentially, are key contributors to transitionary motherwork.

Knowing the help of her mother would not last forever, Shaina recalls thinking through which career would allow a balance for family and work. She describes being passionate

about the sciences, and at first considering being a medical doctor but became discouraged because as she says she "can't do residency and be a mom at the same time." Her mothering responsibilities would pressure her to choose a career that would not require too many years of postgraduate education but also produce a stable income and job security. After much research, she decided that physician assistant (PA) was the route to that end and so she majored in the natural sciences at a community college, earning her associate degree while obtaining the perquisites to enroll in PA school. After earning her AA, she transferred to a four-year university in Los Angeles and "grew to love the social sciences and humanities aspect of my study." Attempting to merge her interests, Shaina decided to pursue a master's degree in public health after graduating, where she would focus on urban health disparities and ways to advance social justice by helping impoverished communities of color. At the time of the interview, she was currently enrolled in a Master's of Public Health (MPH) program, articulating how she is "really loving" it, but also still considering pursuing PA school. Transitionary motherwork, furthermore, serves as a tool for Shaina to both pursue a career she is genuinely passionate in while still raising school aged children.

Shaina understands that being a student and a mother, though challenging, can have benefits in relation to access to housing. During undergrad, she was able to get into family housing on campus which was a complete a contrast from her previous apartment in South Central. The contrast was too drastic for Shaina at first. She describes it as a "little utopia" that initially "drove [her] crazy how quiet it was." As a result, she did not completely move, deciding to stay back home at first and just use the family housing that she was paying for as a "getaway vacation." She describes, however, how things changed when she stayed there for spring break and realized that she enjoyed the convenience of living near campus. For a

while, she was able to manage, enjoying the perks of being around other non-traditional student parents and their children. Although family housing was relatively affordable compared to the apartments in Westwood, it was more expensive than her low-income apartment unit that she previously shared with her mother who was still residing there. Towards the end of her undergraduate experience, she decided to move back realizing graduation was nearing and knowing she would have to look for a job and apply for graduate school and thus would need the help of her mother. She describes how she currently lives with her mom in their public housing unit while she attends her MPH program.

In addition, Shaina's transitionary motherwork provided her with the opportunity to model educational excellence to her children. She articulates how she and her son would do homework together and "it made him feel good and proud," doing schoolwork alongside a college student, he felt that "he's doing big boy things." Shaina remembers how she would involve her daughter in her studies, sitting her in front of her and reading, describing how her little study partner was very beneficial. It was really important for Shaina to have this space with her daughter because she felt on campus she was one of few students who had a child, and although spaces were open and friendly for non-traditional transfer student parents, they were not necessarily designed for them.

Her current MPH program is catered to working students, giving Shaina much more flexibility with her class schedule in graduate school than undergrad. She only has classes three days a week, during the evening, which gives her the chance drop her children off to school every morning and spend her days reading and doing homework. She describes how her aunt picks them up from school around 4:00pm, granting her an hour or so to catch up with them about their days, help with homework, and assist with anything they may need

before she heads out at 5:30pm to a class that begins at 6. She tries to make the care-work easier for her mom by meal prepping on Sundays, so that her mother only has to focus on washing the children and getting them ready for bed. When she comes home from class after 9pm, she tries to do more reading and prepare for the next day. She sometimes "crashes," recalling how the day before our interview she "started [her] readings during the day, and went to sleep for a nap, and did not wake up until like two something."

Alyssa is also pursuing a graduate degree while navigating motherhood, becoming pregnant while pursuing her PhD in the humanities. Alyssa grew up in Inglewood in a single parent household where her mom struggled as a single parent raising her and her sibling while on welfare. Given her context of poverty, Alyssa was determined to excel through higher education and eventually started working as lecturer for a CSU after attaining her master's degree. Alyssa decided to pursue her PhD, get married to her long-time boyfriend and become a mother. She tried to time her pregnancy strategically so that she could have a baby in graduate school, not wanting to give birth while on the tenured clock once she got an academic job or not wishing to wait until she got tenured as she may struggle with fertility in her early forties. When she was awarded a top rate multi-year fellowship, she thought it was the perfect time to have a baby with her husband who earned a stable, middle-class income. Although carefully planning how to merge family and career, particularly as a Black woman in academia, Alyssa could not plan for the news that her son had Down syndrome. She describes her journey raising her now toddler-aged son, accommodating his medical needs, while struggling to maintain her marriage and advance as a scholar. She recalls:

> I was just so isolated… I was very isolated from the world of academia period. So, I think during a period of time which was most important for professionalization, like going to conferences and networking, preparing for the market, I wasn't doing any of that because I was focused on parenting and he has special needs…The first year, in

> terms of his medical needs, was really the worst. Things have like gotten easier over the years, in that respect…it was really bad, that's why me and my husband separated before he was a year old. It was just really isolating…I just feel like a lot of shit came together at the exact same time to just put me in a really difficult position, between the complications in my own life, as well as the complications in my department. And it really sabotaged me, I feel like, in terms of career. You know? So, sometimes I'm like, dang, was this the right thing to do when I did it…

Alyssa had to adjust her graduate work so she could cater to the cost of her son's medical needs, while also dealing with a deteriorating marriage. Alyssa could not rely on her fellowship money like most awarded graduate students. Instead, after she became a mother, she struggled to balance teaching an intense course load as a lecturer, completing her PhD requirements, and changing day care centers to find a sufficiently safe and supportive educational space for her son with special needs. This made her question not whether or not she should have become a mother, but whether her idea for graduate school as the best time for having children was correct. Although Alyssa imagined that being on fellowship would give her the grace to work less or not at all, this was not possible due to the increasing financial costs of mothering. She articulates feeling overwhelmed by the reality that the time she should spend writing her dissertation especially while her son is in school, she has to spend either teaching, prepping for teaching, or grading. Her single motherhood status puts extra pressure on her economically where she cannot afford to live on her fellowship alone, though the intention of the fellowship is to have awardees withdraw from teaching. Alyssa, though knowing her student-status is temporary, expresses tiredness from the demands expected of her struggling to find time to write. She conveys how even though she is working part-time technically, the workload feels like full time because she is teaching three courses and commuting an hour to and from work, saying:

> I can't do it all. So when he goes to bed is the only time I can catch up on household stuff. And I don't have time to do [housework] and work, and do my teaching work,

> and do research. It just doesn't happen. So I'm finding out, now that he's in school, I'm figuring out some strategies to try and catch up. Um, so I drop him off, and I go to Panera bread, and I can work for maybe like an hour before I have to get ready and go to work. You know, I'm figuring out some ways to do it. But you know, he comes first. He has his various challenges and special needs, so I might get a schedule going, but then if he has specialist appointments or a medical crisis or something, then kind of, everything stops…with single mothering, and [his] special needs, and teaching part-time, and …if I could maybe take one of those out, *she chuckles.* It's too many intersections! I have too many intersections going on! …it doesn't balance.

Even though Alyssa expresses the frustration of not having as much time or resources to perform academically as her colleagues, she understands her motherwork as a "road back" to herself. Though she has challenges with medical expenses for her son, access to childcare, and exhausting work conditions, she articulates how "most of the challenges of motherhood haven't had to do with the actual mothering, it's been the context in which [she] mother[s]." Given her interest and research in Black feminism, she critically analyzes how mainstream feminism automatically equates motherhood to a subjugated role that prioritizes white women's histories. She provides a racially gendered analysis differentiating her perspectives from the white mothers in her mommy groups who would complain about losing their identity staying at home with their children. She says how perhaps because she can work from home, she did not feel that way. As a Black woman, she says, "I just felt like it's a gift and privilege to be able to stay home with your child that Black women don't get." She particularly distinguishes her role as a mother from that of a wife, expressing how she "lost herself in marriage," losing her sense of self, spending too much emotional labor mitigating their collective conflict rather than pursuing her individual happiness. Separating from her husband and co-parenting smoothly has allowed her to redirect her focus on her wellness as a way of contributing to her motherwork. She describes her role as a mother as the reason for

going to "yoga" and "dance" when she "felt like [she] didn't want to live." Her desire to fight to live happily felt like her maternal obligation to be present for her son throughout his life.

Though her marriage took pieces of her identity, she does hope that her "single mothering is temporary." She knows that she and her husband, though separated, can learn to love each other considering that most of their issues arose after her husband's mental health declined after learning of his son's diagnosis. Currently, Alyssa stays in the apartment they previously shared and he moved back in with his parents and watches their son two or three days a week. She considers their coparenting dynamic "amicable" and "supportive," especially giving her transitionary motherwork expectations. Alyssa also initially relied on the care-work before enrolling her son in school of her younger sister—— who understood how to care for her son's social, emotional, and physical health needs at a time she could not provide the family labor herself and could not find a space that was affordable and accommodating to children with special needs. Alyssa's experiences reveal the co-parenting and kinship care of other women family members like sisters, aunts, and grandmothers to support Black women in their ability to balance their own educational pursuits, work responsibilities, and mothering obligations.

Serena, a Belizean American mother to a toddler aged son, also recently separated from her fiancé but with no hopes of getting back together and is performing transitionary motherwork with the help of her mother and older sister. She is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in sociology at a California State University (CSU) nearby. She was enrolled in school, "on and off," struggling to maintain consistency because of her mental health struggles with anxiety. She recalls the anxiety being so debilitating that she could not go to class or do homework at times. When Serena became pregnant, however, she realized

that she needed to “push through” and eventually finished her prerequisites and was able to transfer to the four-year university she currently attends. She is living with her mother and older sister, dividing the rent, utilities, and groceries expenses equitably to afford a place in a “decent neighborhood” in west Los Angeles. This sharing of expenses allows Serena to afford her bills and maintain her schooling pursuits while working part-time as a nanny. Serena describes her older sister, who has no children of her own as a “second mom” to her son, showering him with toys, even coming home during our interview with a bag containing two toys for him. Her older sister not only buys gifts but also provides childcare for Serena’s son while she is at work from 3pm until 7pm. Serena sends her son to school from 8am to 12pm, watches him from 12pm to 3pm as she gets ready for work, works as a nanny for affluent children from 3pm to 7pm, and then gets her son and herself situated for dinner and bed. In addition to her nanny job, she also has money saved from school grants and receives government assistance due to her low-income status and lack of financial contribution from her son’s father.

Her career aspirations performing transitionary motherwork are inspired by her experiences being mothered. She is in majoring in sociology and human development, and plans to learn Spanish, with hopes of working in immigrant serving jobs helping undocumented children at the border. Her aspirations are informed by being the daughter of undocumented parents, particularly watching her mom negotiate systems of surveillance living in fear of the threat of deportation. She remembers her mother not having a driving license growing up because “she didn’t have papers” and would ensure that she did not make too many driving errors to avoid getting pulled over and recognized as undocumented. Though Serena was born in America and had American citizenship, she thinks of the impact

that being the daughter of an immigrant and learning "not to draw too much attention onto yourself" had on her anxieties and fear of familial separations that continue to devastate the lives of undocumented and mixed status families. She says she and her sisters used to panic when they had not heard from their mom after schooling, fearing that she was stopped by immigration officers and deported without their knowledge. Seeing how this impacted her family, she is passionate to use her transitionary motherworking experience as a step to provide help for families like hers.

Serena also spoke of her traumatic pregnancy experience during her transitionary motherworking in which she not only had her son during the midst of the pandemic with pressing Covid restrictions, but she also had him prematurely. At 33 weeks she was "bleeding really bad," and the doctors informed her she was having a miscarriage. She was told to go home and wait for the fetus to pass. With eyes full of tears, Serena could not help but think that she was not having a miscarriage and perhaps she should seek a second opinion. She felt disregarded specifically as Black woman, thinking that her opinion of the situation was not being considered. She went to a second physician and was told that she actually needed to have her baby early as he was experiencing medical distress. Her son was born at only three pounds having jaundice that required light therapy for healing and needing a feeding tube for nourishment. Her son was in the NICU for four weeks, in which her transitionary motherwork included navigating classes and her son's medical needs. Serena's experience underscores the complicated nature of Black maternal health and the ways it intersects with Black women's educational trajectories.

Serena's pregnancy complications left lasting impacts on her son's health as he struggles with his speech and attention. She says he is currently in speech therapy in which

he has specialists visit twice a week to help him. Serena articulates how she and her son's father clashed with regard to their son's involvement in speech therapy. Serena had already been granted full custody and a restraining order because her ex was becoming controlling, stole her phone, and failed to appear to his custody hearing. Upset that therapy would interfere with his weekly court-approved visits, Serena's ex objected to his son's involvement in speech therapy. This made Serena's transitionary motherwork difficult because she feels she is the only parent capable of making the best decisions for their son. She does not want to have full custody and would rather have a balanced co-parenting situation, however, she knows her ex is incapable of caring for their son on his own. Her reality stands in contrast to her experience with her own dad serving as her primary care provider while her mom was the primary financial provider. Although her dad struggled with alcohol addiction, she described him as the parent that cooked and cleaned and played with her and her sisters, quite different from what she sees from her son's father. She even comments how her son's father sometimes uses "bullying" language, emulating the toxic communication style of his own father.

Raven, an African American mother of two boys and a daughter under the age ten, also has an estranged relationship with her children's fathers (the oldest having a different father) as she performs transitionary motherwork. She describes the father of her oldest coming in and out of prison, unable to provide much support financially or with childcare. She recounts how two years after enrolling in college, she had her first child. She remained enrolled in schooling until she gave birth, did not return fall semester but went back spring semester. Raven describes how her mother and aunts discouraged her from going back to school, thinking that finding "decent work" would provide a better living situation for her

and her children. Yet she felt that she should not give up, describing their discouragement as fuel for her to continue on her schooling. She applied for financial aid given her motherhood status, and that gave her money for housing and paid for her pharmacy tech school classes.

While in classes Raven's sister was murdered in a drive by shooting. This devastated Raven who knew her sister's proximity to "street life," dating a gang affiliated man who deals drugs, could create safety risks, but she never imagined she would actually have to bury her sister. She did mention that her sister's best friend and a neighborhood child were both shot and killed not long before her sister's death, explaining the context of violence that fills her block. Her sister's death happened around the same time she had her second child. Raven describes going through a combination of postpartum depression and grief from the loss of her sister. Her depression was exacerbated by the reality that her family moved to Walnut, still in LA county, but much different from her home in Inglewood. She describes how the extended family they moved in with created toxic home spaces that made even sharing food a fight.

Unable to maintain a comfortable environment in Walnut, Raven moved back in with her mom and tried to enroll back into school to continue her education. She recalls enrolling in a lobotomy course and failing, but not giving up. With the housing support of her mother, she was able to keep trying though consistently getting rejections from failing the entry placement tests multiple times. Her struggles were coupled with her chronic migraines, a condition that "runs in her family." Feeling discouraged but not defeated, she took another placement test and finally passed with four points above the required score. Raven elatedly began classes only to be hit by the impacts of Covid restrictions. She remembers how they were required to still attend classes though the majority of places had incorporated virtual

options for safety reasons. This was especially challenging for Raven whose mother was diagnosed with covid-19 and was suffering from critical health conditions. Deciding she could not risk going to class given her mother's health, her teacher began marking her absent which would impact her grade. She then realized she had to go to class and take extra safety protocols, as she had sacrificed too much and had come too far to give up on school. Though she was able to safely navigate in-person classes, she was labeled as "rude" and "difficult to work with," labels that would follow her through her clinical training period.

At the time of our interview, she was finishing up her last final and prepared to earn her pharmacy technician degree. Understanding that her degree is coming soon, she describes how she recently got an apartment for her, her mom, and her children in Long Beach without completely securing her job just yet. She says, last week, she walked into every pharmacy she could find, and finally found one in the heart of South Central that she would begin to work at as soon as she completed her program. She moved her mother in with her as she provides medical care for her since she was diagnosed with long-term Covid and is paralyzed as a result. With three children of her own, she describes how tired she gets balancing her mother's health conditions and her other responsibilities, but she is the only family member than can take on the motherwork responsibilities, and the only one willing to try.

Though there were only four mothers performing transitionary motherwork at the time of the interview, eleven of the twenty participants in total had experience with transitionary motherwork at some point in their mothering experiences. In addition to the four currently performing transitionary motherwork, seven mothers had performed transitionary motherwork (five currently performing incorporative motherwork and two enacting adaptive motherwork). These findings reveal the importance of employing a life course approach to

understand and uncover the ways that Black women's relationships with school, work, and family can change over time.

Taylor, though performing incorporative motherwork at the time of our interview, had experience with transitionary motherwork when she first had her daughter. She was an undergraduate student at a four-year university in Los Angeles majoring in psychology when she met her daughter's father who she remembered being "really cute" at the time. They became pregnant immediately, and she knew she had wanted to continue her schooling. She continued going to class throughout her pregnancy, gave birth to her daughter in the summer of her sophomore year, and continued to try to go to class. Without help from her parents who were living in London and minimal help from her child's father, Taylor would take her daughter with her to class, remembering having to leave lecture often as her infant daughter would cry. She was also working campus jobs to afford her expenses for her and her daughter. With such a busy workload, her attendance slowly decreased, her grades lowered, and she was placed on academic probation. She wishes there were more online educational opportunities then for non-traditional student parents when she was in school during the early 90s.

Despite the difficulties of motherhood and work, Taylor was determined to finish her education. She and her daughter's father moved into an apartment together fifteen minutes from campus. She worked and attended class, while he got a job working at Fed Ex. This afforded him a decent working-class salary, coupled with her student job paychecks, they were able to make a relatively comfortable living for themselves despite little family support. As they spent time living together, Taylor started to notice strange behavior from her daughter's father in which he was gone often, and her money would sometimes "be missing."

She discovered that her daughter's father struggled with a crack addiction and was often gone "getting high" if he was not working or caring for their young daughter. She describes a "crazy incident" where the cops raided her apartment looking for her partner who was involved in an armed robbery at a subway station. During the raid, she and her toddler aged daughter were in the bedroom. She calls her partner the "dumbest criminal ever," attributing his carelessness to his drug usage given that he used their shared car to get away from the scene which made him and his home an easy find for the police. Though a traumatic incident that she "will never forget", Taylor provides comic relief during our interview, joking that she "signed papers" and pretty sure she "was on an episode of COPS." She details how her daughter's father "got seven years" in prison, making her a low income, single mother still performing transitionary motherwork trying to get her bachelor's degree.

Taylor's partner's incarceration did not mean that they were romantically broken up, as she tried to make it work with him for two years after he "got locked up." Navigating the juxtaposition of systems of education for her and incarceration for him, Taylor still made an effort to "keep her family together," taking her young daughter to visit him in between her class and work schedules. During this time, she and her partner decided to get married "in prison" so that when she would visit, they could have conjugal visits in the trailers afforded to married incarcerated people. In the trailer, she noticed that he would get frustrated with their toddler daughter, who wanted all of Taylor's romantic attention. Turned off by their consistent issues, she decided to end things and focus on her daughter, her school, and her education. She learned that she was pregnant again from her conjugal visits, but decided to terminate the pregnancy as she could not manage to be a single mother of two children whose father is incarcerated. Never receiving any mental health resources to help her after her

abortion, Taylor decided she would never get pregnant again since she had to "kill her baby" because as a student she could not care for him. Angered by their breakup, Taylor's ex sent her letters from prison threatening her life. She reported it, and he received an additional three years on his seven-year sentence. Despite these challenges to her ability to perform transitionary motherwork, Taylor was able to graduate and secure a clerical job with the city of LA (described in Chapter 5).

Kendra, the mother of two boys, just started her nursing job at the time of our interview. She recalls her transitionary motherworking experiences as she had both of her sons while navigating schooling. For her first pregnancy, she continued to take classes while switching her concentration from furthering her studies as an EMT to the field of nursing that she felt would provide more stability for her as a mother. While pregnant, however, she continued to work as an EMT during the night shifts, saving up before her son arrived and keeping her connected to the excitement of the job. When her son was born, she was able to focus on her nursing classes, living with her mother and sister while her then-partner was overseas working in the U.S. navy. Though it was difficult having her partner so far away, she describes how she received a great deal of help from her mother and sister who shared the family labor of caring for an infant. The help they provided allowed Kendra to focus on her own educational labor with the goal of securing employment as a nurse that would provide a stable living for her and her son. A few months later, when Kendra's partner was discharged from the navy and took a job in the LA sheriff's department, she decided to move in with him. They lived together for three years. She describes their relationship as full of conflict especially because he paid most of the bills (replacing the employed labor that her mother was supplementing) but expected her to perform all of the family labor of caring for

the household for not just her son but for her partner too. This included "cooking all the meals" and cleaning, while also going to school and performing all the childrearing responsibilities. Her tasks also entailed performing all the educational labor of finding a schooling space for their son and navigating with teachers. She stresses how she "should have stayed with her mom and sister," in that she received way more help to manage her transitionary motherworking responsibilities from them.

Entirely overwhelmed by the gendered division of labor, Kendra decided to move out and get an apartment on her own for her and her son in Long Beach. Because she was not employed, Kendra decided to take out student loans and maximize her financial aid to afford her apartment. She was frustrated because she could not apply for section-8 subsidized housing without filing for child support against her child's father, something she was unwilling to do given their volatile relationship, the potential for their dynamic to return to toxicity, and the ways the legal system could potentially be on his side due to how embedded he was in power of local law enforcement. Nonetheless, she was able to afford a small studio apartment and set up a "bunk bed situation" that actually worked for her now pre-school aged son. She describes it almost as a little dorm, given that she and her son were both students, revealing the alternative ways Black women navigate the intersections of home as a site for living and learning. Kendra and her ex were co-parenting as he would have their son from Thursday to Sunday, which gave her some time to focus on herself and her school, dividing the family labor of childrearing. She explains how her son expressed being happier with Kendra's separation from his dad because it was "healthier with less fighting."

Though separated, Kendra describes how her focus on nursing school made dating difficult so she started to "mess around" with her son's father. This led to her getting

pregnant again while still navigating nursing school. Similar to Taylor, Kendra negotiated whether or not she should keep the baby. Her mom and sister encouraged her to keep her baby, but also to quit nursing school, get a job with her EMT certificate, and move back in with them. Her son's father told her to get an abortion as they were already dealing with complications in their own relationship and struggles raising one child. Kendra disregarded both of their advice and decided to keep the baby and stay in school, not losing sight of her goal to become a nurse. She remembers being exhausted during her first trimester falling asleep in class and yet "somehow kept passing." She knew she needed a bigger place than a studio to care for two children, and miraculously she found a two bedroom in the west side of LA, a nice neighborhood that usually would cost hundreds of dollars more than the deal she signed. She describes taking her board exams while seven months pregnant, passing, and getting a nursing job a few weeks after graduating. This allowed her to transition into a salaried job, no longer needing to live on student loans and scholarships.

Crystal, a mother of three, was currently performing incorporative motherwork at the time of our interview. She describes her negotiations with transitionary motherwork. Crystal had her first child at seventeen, graduated from a high school that has been labeled as a dropout factory, separated from her first child's father, and started taking classes at her local community college. While taking classes, she struggled working at low wage jobs, simultaneously balancing her course load and her relationship with the father of her two younger children. After twelve years of community college, she was able to transfer her credits and enroll at one of the largest and most prestigious research universities in southern California. Her life changed markedly as a result. Being a student made her eligible for residency in university owned family housing with reduced rent, pleasant living conditions,

and safe surroundings. After transferring, she found community support and academic resources in a university-based center that caters to nontraditional college students, providing jobs, peer learning assistance, and funded research opportunities. This helped ameliorate Crystal's initial doubts about whether she belonged at the university, as she describes:

> Because where I come from, my story, my background. Like, "Yo... I'm really here!" …then you feel out of pocket. You feel like you don't belong here. You feel like, "Am I really gonna' make it? Am I really doing this?"

Crystal's performance of transitionary motherwork was inspired by her desire to shatter glass ceilings and challenge stereotypes grounded in society's controlling images of Black women. Despite being the first in her family to attend college and lacking a framework for what it means to navigate institutions of higher learning, Crystal's role as a mother served as a catalyst for her educational journey. She perceives her education as a means of disengaging with the projected trope of the welfare queen. She recalls her struggles:

> [I] have three kids, [I'm] uneducated, and [I] have two baby daddies…I'm going to combat ascribing to that. Because we have to keep those behaviors going in order to keep the stereotype alive, right? So…I'm going to combat that by pursuing higher education. So yes, I'm all these things, however…I'm getting my education…I didn't want to be a welfare queen.

Reflecting on her own struggles growing up in the projects in a single parent household headed by her mother who is from Central America, Crystal was adamant about declaring her journey as ending the cyclical nature of poverty and educational failure, making way for a new cycle founded on personal strength and academic achievement. Not only did Crystal break barriers by graduating with her bachelor's degree, but she continued her schooling, and attained a graduate degree in social work. Crystal understands her transitionary motherwork as her attempt to lead by example not by mere words, reversing the common phrase parents sometimes say, "do as I say, not as I do." She describes how she expects her children to

attend college without making excuses, as she sees her sacrifices as opening the door for educational excellence.

> It’s no more first gen. I’m first gen. We don’t get to say that anymore. Nah, homie…Quit playing. [We both laugh] You didn’t grow up in no projects, you wasn’t dodging bullets, and at night you weren’t scared of hearing fire trucks. That’s not your truth. Like, you’re privileged.

Imani, an African American mother to a preschool-aged son, also understands the importance of her being the first in her family to obtain a bachelor’s degree and a graduate degree, not conceptualizing motherhood as a barrier to her higher education. Imani’s experience with transitionary motherwork can be contextualized with her experiencing being a young Black girl in South Central who was identified as gifted, and college bound. She was placed into AP and honors courses, recruited for college access programs, and without surprise attended a top four-year university. She excelled in higher education as a gender studies major and double minor in education and anthropology, getting to take classes she loved, discovering her passions before her entrance into motherhood. During her final quarter in college, with acceptances from multiple graduate programs, just a few months before graduation, her long-term partner died in a tragic accident, disrupting her entire sense of normalcy. She recalls how within a year, her life changed drastically, as she accepted the offer to enter a local graduate program because it was the only program that would allow her to defer for a year and begin the subsequent year. In the time of tending to her mental health and preparing for graduate school, Imani met a new partner and became pregnant, starting her first semester of graduate school while also starting her third trimester of pregnancy. Imani, laughingly, paints the picture of her “waddling to class heavy as hell” but still resilient in her educational pursuits. During this time, she also worked as a teacher in a charter school, being able to teach full-time since her classes were in the evening.

Imani recounts specifically delivering her son on “the last day of her first semester in her first year of graduate school.” She continued her schooling, relying on the care-work performed by her “village,” specifically her partner and his family and the motherwork of her own mother with whom still lived. She also speaks highly of the support of faculty in her program in supporting her as new mother. She remembers how professors would let her use their office spaces as a private area to breastfeed her son. This allowed Imani to tend to the reproductive labor of family care-work within a school setting while also catering to her responsibilities as a student. This support, she explains, was instrumental in her ability to finish her schooling and obtain a job within the CSU system. In fact, because she had so much support, Imani plans to continue to pursue her doctorate in Education while also expanding her family with her partner. She knows from her own transitionary experiences, that it’s possible to balance classes while also keeping her job, especially with more access to online courses.

Online graduate schooling is how Nicole, an African American mother to a college-aged son, recalls balancing her experience with transitionary motherwork. She was working as a substitute teacher when she became pregnant, and decided to move back with her parents for support with housing while she kept her job teaching and attended classes online. Not only was it accessible for her during her pregnancy and first year of her son’s life, but the pedagogy she was employing as a teacher in the classroom connected to the curriculum she was learning in her graduate program to get her official teaching credential. Another mother with experience performing transitionary motherwork, Chloe (a mother to two boys), desires to perform transitionary motherwork again and go back to school for nursing. Though currently performing adaptive motherwork as healthcare coordinator in the public school

system in LA, she had experience with transitionary motherwork when she went back to school for her AA degree and EMT certificate at a community college. Because Chloe has a heart condition and thus qualifies for disability benefits from the state, she is planning to apply for disability status to replace her income from employed labor and apply for financial aid to attend school. Her sentiments signify the value of education for Black women in their understanding of their maternal responsibilities and career aspirations, willing to take alternative routes to reach their educational goals.

Grace, an immigrant from Ethiopia with two sons, also had experience performing transitionary motherworking responsibilities. She originally grew up in Ethiopia with a family that strongly valued education, particularly her dad who encouraged her and her siblings to pursue college despite his own lack of formal education. She attended a university in Ethiopia, getting a degree in business administration. She later worked as a salesperson, marketing books for a publishing company, and later sold cars for well-known automobile manufacturers. Although she viewed that as a relatively good job that made possible a good lifestyle, especially in light of the limited job opportunities for women in Ethiopia, it did not meet the aspirations that motivated Grace to move to the United States in search of a better life, for better jobs and educational opportunities.

When she arrived in the U.S., she quickly learned that her educational credentials did not transfer over, forcing her to be de-skilled, to work as a cashier on the weekdays and as a caregiver on the weekends. While balancing her marriage and her two jobs, Grace got pregnant with her first son. She recognized that she could not balance these jobs and mothering long term. Grace quit her job as a caregiver and decided to go to trade school in the U.S., keeping her job as a cashier until she graduated and could gain employment as a

surgical technician. She explains how motherhood fueled her determination to balance work and school:

> I decided…before Obama leaves his office, I need to go to school. So, I went to school as a surgical tech…So for 18 months. Then I graduated…And then, in California, to get a job as a surgical tech, you have to start at the bottom. It's so hard…But life taught me a lot. Trust me …back home [in Ethiopia], my character is like a man…Even when I used to work back home, it's like I've been doing like a man's job. And I was independent… that makes me say, 'No, I need to go to school. I need to do for my kids. I need to be an example for my kids.' And still I push my husband. He has education, a diploma, but I want him to go to [more] school.

Grace affirmed her determination to continue her education. She strongly believes in self-accountability, constantly identifying perceived American opportunities for higher education and employment as privileges that her peers back home in Ethiopia are not afforded. Most importantly, her commitment to continuing her education is framed as a commitment to her children, thereby elucidating a central aspect of transitionary motherwork. For Grace, pursuing schooling and vocational training would not only expand her financial opportunities, but it would also transform the type of mother she imagined she could be for her children. Like the other mothers pursuing transitionary motherwork, Grace conceptualized her ability to advance through realms of higher education as reflective of her ability to be a good mother that does not give up on her educational dreams, not just for herself but for her children.

For these women with experience performing transitionary motherwork, becoming mothers reshapes their perceptions of how education and work inform their parenting expectations and responsibilities. They feel that becoming educated and increasing employment opportunities for themselves allows them to counter racially gendered stereotypical assumptions about their interconnected roles as mothers and workers. This finding resonates with Averil Clarke's (2011) discussion of how Black women may forgo

intimacy and family formation in an attempt to disassociate from societal stigmas regarding unwed childrearing. The women performing transitionary motherwork in this study, however, actively pursue higher education to counteract and complicate these stereotypes regardless of their marital or relationship statuses. Becoming a mother can be seen as another reason for degree attainment among some Black women, particularly those already negotiating stigmatizing labels regarding their marital and/or class statuses. In addition, these mothers regard themselves as students alongside their children and value their enactment of educational labor for their own schooling endeavors as a transformational model for their children. Many described doing homework alongside their children and the ways this created an atmosphere of shared knowledge pursuit. The mothers expressed how being a student themselves provided them with a unique vantage point to be mother advocates for their student children.

VII. Conclusion

The narratives of these Black mothers in Los Angeles reveal the importance of intersectionality in uncovering how Black women balance work, family, and education. Their lived experiences give voice to the reality that Black mothers continue to navigate school-based discrimination, conditions of poverty, stereotypes of their unfitness as mothers, exhaustive working conditions, policing and surveillance at home and on the streets, and exposure to violence all while trying to raise children. My intention in this research is to provide a space where we as social scientists can continue to learn from the experiences of Black women, specifically in regard to their racially gendered decisions around family and work. My work seeks to expand understandings of motherwork by including the relevance of education in sociological conversations of gendered labor. From listening and learning to the participants of this study, it is evident that education continues to be a site of Black mother's labor and thus necessary in our framing of Black motherwork.

To contribute to this conversation, I deploy the concept modes of motherworking to describe the multidirectional ways Black mothers navigate between, within, and at the intersections of family labor, employed labor, and educational labor. Modes of motherworking serves as a conceptual tool for challenging dichotomies between public market work and private domestic work and also adding important and overlooked discussions of education as a critical site of Black women's labor for family and work. Given the importance of education, this study proposes using the term educational labor to unpack the work Black mothers perform for the formal schooling of themselves and their children. This research acknowledges that Black mothers have navigated educational discrimination rooted in anti-Black social policies and histories of racism that have informed the

accessibility of educational spaces for their Black families, thus requiring innovative strategies to ensure that their children receive a quality education. Black mothers continue to serve as educational advocates for their children and community children to expand enriching learning environments as their children seek access to educational opportunities that prepare them for college and career endeavors.

Even during pregnancy, Black mothers have had to plan their timeline with work to find a learning-based environment for their infants and toddlers for when they return to work. While some may have access to Montessori schools and learning-based day care centers, others express how they struggled to find a place they can feel comfortable with and afford. When discussing K-12 educational spaces, the mothers in my study all view their involvement in their child's schooling as a critical component of their conception of motherwork. They all portray involvement as being responsible for making sure their child attends the best available and accessible school, getting their children to and from school, and encouraging and supporting the educational endeavors of their children unapologetically. Many mothers, however, describe feeling overwhelmed with accommodating to the demands of their jobs and to the educational needs of their children. Even with support from family and partners, Black mothers tend to be the one in the family who is primarily responsible for performing educational labor for Black children including researching and choosing schooling spaces, handling paperwork, helping with homework, contributing to pick up/drop-off, attending and participating in extracurricular activities, and paying for any necessary educational expense.

The mothers in this study also explain that their enactment of Black motherwork includes being teachers to their children. They understand that motherwork includes teaching

their children life lessons on how to matriculate into adulthood, preparing them for the realities of anti-Blackness while instilling them with the hope of change and justice. This specifically includes conversations Black mothers have with their children on how to navigate police interactions. All of the mothers were keenly aware of the realities of racial bias in how police pull over Black drivers, interact with Black students in schools, perceive Black people's attitudes as non-compliant and criminal, and too often utilize excessive force in their handling the bodies of those in the Black community. Mothers are aware that Black civilians are often seen as criminals and suspects before they are regarded as parents, community leaders, or even children. They also understand the legacy of police brutality in a city like Los Angeles, and many of them still reside in communities that often suffer from violence at the hands of police and at the hands of social workers enacting egregious family separations. Black mothers, as a result, perform an additional labor of teaching their children how to navigate systems that surveil their Blackness and view them with suspicion. They feel obligated to ensure their children understand how the legacy of racism leads Black people to continue to be mistreated by police, and how the rapid ways things can escalate can lead to a fatal encounter. Though having a myriad of ways they go about teaching their children, they all center their primary goal of providing instructions to their children on how to "come home safely." Thus, Black motherwork not only involves Black women's educational labor of navigating schooling systems, but also teaching their children to survive through the pitfalls of anti-Black policing practices.

This research specifically identifies three modes of motherworking: 1) adaptive motherwork, 2) incorporative motherwork, and 3) transitionary motherwork. Adaptive motherwork describes when women make major changes to their work trajectories and/or

aspirations to specifically accommodate their childcare responsibilities and their children's education. Incorporative motherwork refers to women maintaining their work relationships and expectations while mothering, finding strategies to combine their careers and jobs with their children's needs and schooling. Transitionary motherwork speaks to how women experience mothering while pursuing higher education, either becoming mothers while already in school or enrolling in school after matriculating into motherhood. These three modes of motherworking are not fixed mutually exclusive categories, but instead are fluid descriptions of the options Black women embrace as they navigate spaces of education, family, and employment. Each category reveals the different ways educational labor remains relevant to Black women's negotiations for balancing their employment and family care.

It is also important to note that although modes of motherworking conceptually focus on family, work, and education as key sites of Black women's labor, they are not the only sites of Black women's labor as these spaces vary depending on their varying mothers' intersectional identities. Future research on Black motherwork may expand to include other sites of Black women's labor, to further complicate Black women's maternal labor. The concepts central to this study, nonetheless, help provide an understanding of how becoming a mother impacts the ways in which some Black women engage their relationships with work, thus elucidating how they make meaning of their time spent crossing between and through these public and private realms.

Although the experiences of balancing work, family, and education faced by the mothers of my study are multifaceted and subsequently require complex solutions, their stories reveal steps I believe we can take moving forward. First, we can begin funding organizations that help Black mothers create community networks amongst one another that

assist with locating local educational spaces and other social resources. Motherwork has provided a plethora of Black mothers with lived experiences within sectors of employment and education that can merge into a collective wisdom that can be shared amongst local communities. All of the mothers in this study shared that Black mothers would benefit from more spaces that support their community dialogue of exchanging resources, giving affirmations, having other Black families for their children to play with, and overall building sisterhood between Black mothers. They understand that the African motto "it takes a village" that they all commonly refer back to is not a village bound by blood and biology. It is a village of real and fictive kin forged through shared love for community and also shared struggles with living conditions. It is a village that Black mothers rely on to raise their children while balancing work and education, and thus a village they all see as valuable to expand. While some of the mothers spoke of how social media has created platforms digitally for Black mothers to build community with one another, particularly during Covid lockdown restrictions that made gathering difficult, all of the mothers expressed wanting the value of in-person community spaces where Black mothers would feel safe to be present with their children. This is especially important for the many Black mothers in urban spaces like Los Angeles that may not always feel comfortable as women being out late with their children.

Another call to action expressed from the mothers is a necessary investment in public education holistically. For the mothers of this study, this is not limited to K-12 education. They acknowledge how early childhood spaces should involve safe, clean, comfortable learning spaces for children. Many of the mothers cannot afford the astronomical costs that come with sending a child to private school, even for infants and toddlers. The mothers

describe wanting more options for well-resourced schools in their neighborhoods where they do not need to "fake an address" and drive across town or hope that their children win a lottery for admission to a decent charter school. They also do not want to compromise on either having to send their children to an under-resourced racially mixed school with Black children present or a school that is high performing with qualified teachers and college-prep programs that have few Black students. They want both cultural diversity and academic enrichment. They also underscore the value of increasing free and affordable school-based extracurricular activities, after-school programs, and college-bound outreach opportunities for students, particularly students of color. Given that many mothers regardless of their class statuses described negotiating intense work schedules and their children's school activities, they all would benefit (along with other mothers) if schools were granted government funding to provide increased creative and scientific opportunities for their children.

This study, furthermore, is not intended to be representative of the perspectives of all Black mothers within Los Angeles County. The heterogeneity of Black mothers' viewpoints, along with the views of other racialized women, should never be constrained to a small box in our sociological imagination. Instead, it is intended to provide an in-depth, racially gendered analysis of twenty Black mothers and their experiences with mothering in Los Angeles. Due to time constraints, I interviewed participants that I could readily contact given my access. This study, as a result, may not have included some Black mothers with intersecting identities of sexuality, documentation status, and ethnic origins. It also may not cover Black mothers in all regions and cities within the Los Angeles area. This study, nonetheless, uses a sociohistorical framework to situate the stories of twenty mothers whose lived experiences in Los Angeles uncover the intersections of family, work, and education. It

validates and expands Black feminist theories and anti-racist scholarship that reframe our conceptions of Black families in an effort to humanize rather than demonize their behaviors (Kaplan 1997; Collins 2000; Vargas 2006; Moore 2011; Barnes 2016; Dow 2019). By exploring the diverse ways Black women perform motherwork while navigating learning spaces, we can do more than watch mommas work tirelessly, we can listen to and learn from them as agents of knowledge production and actors of social change.

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