Journal of the Motherhood Initiative

Building Racial Equity in and Across Motherhood

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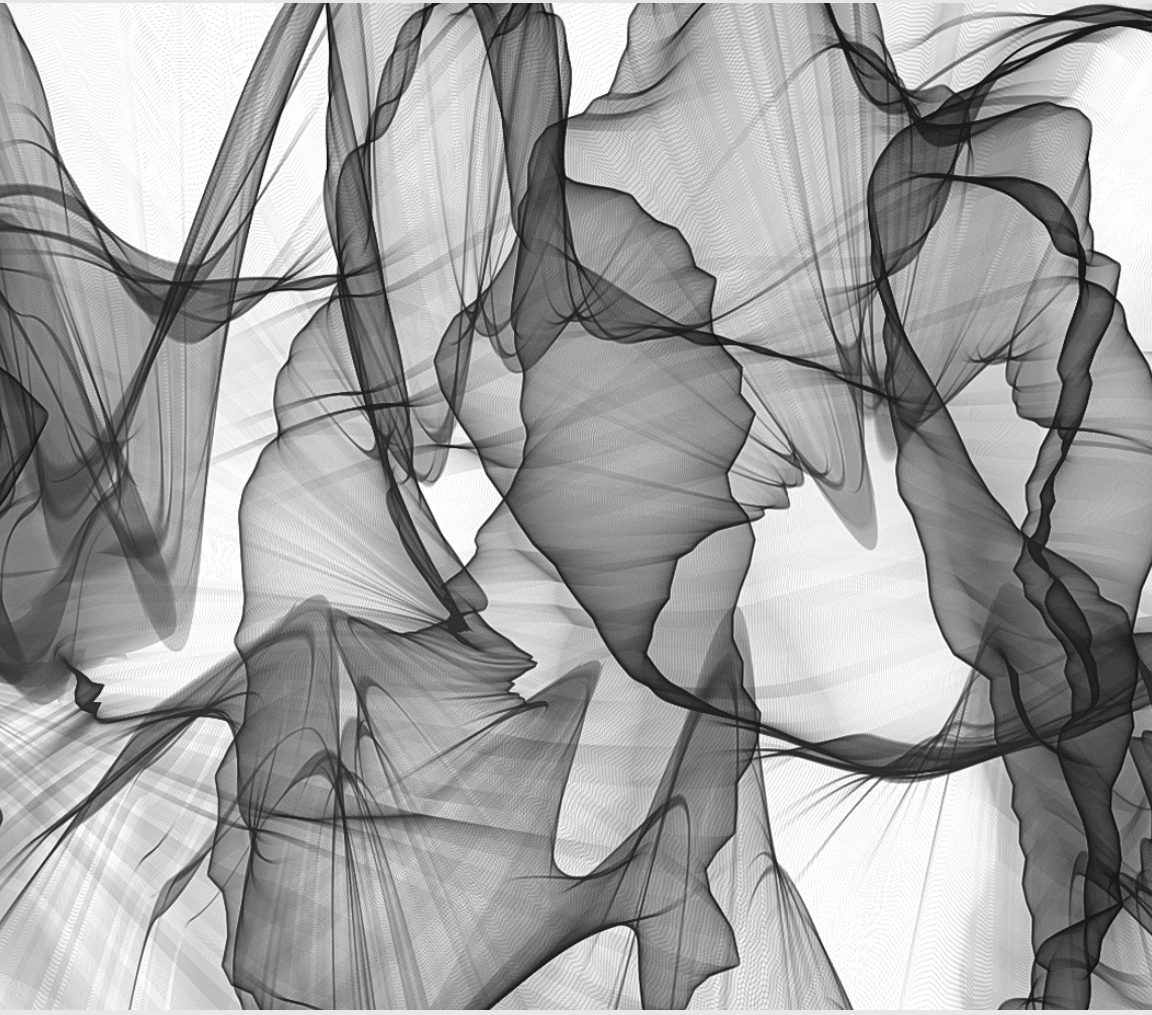

Denise Handlarski, Akanksha Misra, Margarita Levine, Jacqui Getfield, Pooja Bhatia Narang and many more

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DENISE HANDLARSKI

Radical Reclamations: Reviving Jewish Birth Practices

This article uses autoethnography to explore a rabbi's difficult labour and birth experience and how it led her to research on Jewish birth practices. Religious and ethnic birth practices are often elided in patriarchal and Western culture, and the uncovering and reclaiming of such practices are an important site of empowerment for mothers and for women[1] whose knowledges have been supressed. Through reclaiming birth practices, there is also a reclamation of traditional knowledge, bodily autonomy, women's community, and personal empowerment.

In using autoethnography, the author locates herself in the discursive formations of such reclamation and empowerment as well as engages in the Jewish cultural practice of dialogue with text and tradition, thus merging personal, professional, traditional, and transformative research, writing, and practice.

Introduction

I am alone in the birthing room. It is cold, sterile, and different from the cozy home birth I had imagined. We are in a birth storm, and the midwife gets called away to a fast and imminent birth down the hall. I can hear the woman screaming. My husband left a while ago to get some food to keep his energy up, but it's the middle of the night, and nothing is open. The minutes tick on, and the pain is getting unbearable. I think back to my birth preparation to see what I can draw on for comfort and strength. All those pregnancy and birth books but nothing for this moment—nothing for when my screams meet the screams of the woman down the hall. I begin to despair. I begin to sing the familiar tune: Kol ha'olam kulo, Gesher tzar me'od, Veha'ikar lo lifached k'lal (The whole world, Is a very narrow bridge, The Important thing is not to be afraid).

This article combines autoethnography with nontraditional forms of research to discuss the radical reclamations of Jewish birth practices. There is little

published material on Jewish rituals for birth, largely due to the patriarchal nature of the religion (Firestone). Women's traditions have been elided and subsumed, particularly because women's traditions and rituals were most alive during times in which most women were not afforded the tools of literacy. The result is that much knowledge around labour and birth have been buried. Thankfully, we are at a time of great reclamation and resistance to patriarchal Judaism. Jewish feminists have been working to uncover and revive Jewish women's practices (Grenn). When I gave birth for the first time, I was already an ordained rabbi and an academic. I was no stranger to research or to Jewish tradition and wisdom. In the difficult moments of labour, however, I realized I knew nothing about how my female ancestors approached and supported one another through birth. I began a journey of becoming a certified labour and birth doula specializing in Jewish spiritual birth practices so that others may experience the support of these radical reclamations in the face of patriarchal and male-dominated religion/culture and birth environments.

Why Autoethnography?

Autoethnography is "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner 739). By cultural, I believe Ellis and Bochner mean the wider society, but in my circumstance, it has to do with my ethnic, religious, and cultural Jewishness. Culture is often considered in writing on autoethnography: "The intent of autoethnography is to acknowledge the inextricable link between the personal and the cultural and to make room for nontraditional forms of inquiry and expression" (Wall 146). In *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life,* Robin M. Boylon and Mark P. Orbe consider how an individual's interaction with their culture, particularly minority cultures, brings together "self-reflexivity" and "intercultural inquiry" (15) and how autoethnography meets intersectionality when "socially stigmatized identities" are negotiated (22). This style of research is culturally appropriate from a Jewish perspective because so much of how Jewish culture and religion are transmitted is via storytelling (Buxbaum), and autoethnography draws on the features of good storytelling in order to evoke meaning in ways that transcend traditional academic writing (Bochner and Ellis).

I learned about Jewish birth practices through the stories passed on in women's communities, and I add my own stories here as a way of joining together the voices of women through the generations. In many cultures, birth stories are an important part of transmitting knowledge between women (Farley and Widmann). Perhaps it is unsurprising that one can find many autoethnographic accounts of pregnancy, pregnancy loss, birth, and new

motherhood (Sell-Smith and Lax; Lupu; Fraser; Kurz, Davis and Browne; Hull). Bringing together not only the reclaimed voices of women and birth but also the reclaimed traditions of Judaism is the purpose of this research. In each section, I share some of my own autoethnographical reflections and then pair these with autoethnographical research—research about autoethnography as methodology and autoethnographies as research and writing—and how these inform and help reclaim birth practices. My hope is that the bridging of personal narrative with this research and redeployment of radical knowledge will help to resist patriarchal religions and patriarchal medical systems, which work to elide Jewish birth practices.

Methodology

Although some of this research comes from books and articles, much of my knowledge comes from the teachings of Orthodox Jewish birthworkers who have learned via oral traditions the rituals and traditions discussed here. Therefore, the methodology of this article is nontraditional both in terms of being unable to cite original sources lost to oral tradition—a common problem faced by feminist scholars doing the work of reclaiming buried or hidden women's knowledges (McGregor)—but also because feminist autoethnography, which centres the "I" in an attempt to reclaim and recover feminine selfhood, is itself not taken seriously in academic research (Etorre). In order to research Jewish birth practices I took a course with Chana Newman, an Orthodox Jewish doula and birth educator, who has access to community-based knowledge. I also took doula certification classes via Doula Canada. This, in addition to more common academic approaches to research, is how I came to the understandings of these reclaimed spiritual birth practices.

We Don't Know What We Don't Know

I became a doula, and specifically a doula specializing in Jewish birth, because of my own experiences in labour and delivery. I had planned for a home birth with my first child. We had a tub in our kitchen for a month. We had practiced breathing. We carefully planned lighting and music. We were pumped. And then my daughter refused to come out. We had to go to the hospital three times for the drug that induces labour. And then when I went into labour at the hospital, I had to stay. This change in birth plan and place threw me. And the intense contractions brought on by the drugs and the back labour didn't help. I had one intervention and then another, finally ending in a caesarean. During that tough labour, I found myself googling "Jewish birth practices" and "spiritual birth." I was desperate for anything to help me focus that was rooted in Judaism. As a Jew and a rabbi, so much of how I ground myself and connect with life's most sacred moments is through Jewish culture and

ritual. But I realized in that moment that even as a Jewish leader and feminist, I didn't even know what I didn't know about how my ancestors gave birth. For a moment, I was angry at my teachers and rabbinic mentors, but they also had never been taught anything about Jewish labour and birth. I struggled while playing Jewish music I was pulling up on my phone between contractions. Luckily, my daughter is healthy and wonderful, and although it was a tough birth, the outcomes were good. Still, it took some healing to get over how she came into the world.

With my second child, I wanted to prepare differently. I knew labour and birth can go any which way, but I also knew that I needed to prepare myself mentally differently than I had the first time. For me, that meant going to my cultural roots. I am a humanistic Jewish rabbi, meaning I offer teaching, programming, and ritual around Jewish history and culture. Being Jewish is important to me. I wanted some Jewish connection in labour and birth. So I began researching Jewish birth rituals, blessings, practices, and stories. I got my hands on Jewish birth art and affirmations. You should have seen the bag I took to the birth centre or hospital—it was loaded with stuff. And then, of course, the birth went nothing like how I had imagined. This time, it was fast and furious. I went into labour at my daughter's second birthday party and didn't make it to the cake before I had to leave. I was concerned I'd give birth in the car on the way to the birth centre. Thankfully, all was well and I had a beautiful birth in a large and luxurious birthing tub, and my son came into the world healthy and happy. The bag full of the Jewish birth stuff? Still in the car.

Birth is a little addictive. I became really interested in it—how it's discussed, how it's treated in film and art, how it's seen in our society. And I remained interested in Jewish birth approaches and ritual. I decided that I wanted to offer women and birthing people support and guidance, with a Jewish inflection. That's how, in addition to being a professor, a rabbi, and a mother, I became a doula.

It is astonishing that so little is known about ethnic, religious, and cultural approaches to birth given that around half the population gives birth, and every human was once birthed in some way. It is a testament to the power of patriarchy that so much birth wisdom has been suppressed. It is a testament to the resistive power of women and minorities that sacred birth practices are still taught and practiced. There are three main reasons, I believe, that sacred and traditional birth practices are under threat: The medicalization of birth; patriarchy and colonial religion/culture; and the Western prioritization of the individual over the communal/collective. These three features of what bell hooks calls "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" coalesce to suppress ethnic, cultural, and religious birth knowledges. These features are why even I, a scholar and a rabbi, had no training or teaching about spiritual and sacred birth practices. These features are why when these practices are recovered and reclaimed; they offer such liberatory potential.

Penny Simkin, the well-known childbirth educator, says that a good labour experience relies on the three Rs: rhythm, relaxation, and ritual. This is my

experience as well. And it seems to me that some of that ritual can and should reflect the culture of the person in labour. Simkin refers to rituals that birthers come up with spontaneously, such as rocking, tapping an object, and stroking or brushing a body part in a rhythmic and ritualistic way. Ritual is a hugely powerful cultural and religious tool (Kuile). For many Jews, lighting Shabbat candles, saying blessings, or connecting with other birth rituals can be a source of great comfort, but most birthworkers have no training or experience in cultural competencies and culturally specific ritual knowledge related to birth (Noble et al.). In Jewish culture, as in other cultures, there are communities of women who hold and perpetuate such knowledge. In the case of Judaism, there is a long-standing tradition of having women birthworkers, like doulas, present at a birth. The reasons for this come from patriarchal and sexist laws within Judaism known as Niddah, or purity laws (Cristofar). According to these laws, a man cannot touch a woman who is bleeding (in menstruation or childbirth). While this is problematic from a feminist perspective, and Jewish feminists have challenged and debated the practices of Niddah (Avishai), these laws have created a need for women to support women in birth, which has, paradoxically and ironically, had a hugely positive impact on women's birth experiences. Because men could not support women in birth, there are large networks of women birthworkers who retain traditional knowledge. I learned from Chana Newman, one such Orthodox birthworker. In my own work, I wanted to bring some of the spiritual teachings for birth to Jews who were not necessarily so observant as to require a doula due to the *Niddah* laws but for whom Jewish spirituality and culture could still be empowering during birth.

Patriarchal Judaism has not upheld and sought to teach birth practices, but these networks of women and birthworkers have kept it alive. Once the medicalization of birth became widespread, doctors and nurses were not trained in this cultural knowledge, but these networks bring the spiritual and sacred knowledge into hospitals, birth centres, and homes. It is mobile and mobilized knowledge and has survived the centralized medical system's attempt to wrest control of birth away from traditionally female midwives. And finally even though Western culture is highly individualistic, often sacrificing the collective and communal in favour of the individual—taking women's communities around birth and mothering and dividing us into nuclear family units—these sacred knowledges and communities around birth persist. It's a remarkable resistance that despite all of the factors that have caused the suppression of birth knowledges and networks, these sacred practices survive and, in some communities, thrive. To reclaim birth traditions is truly radical. These traditions have a decolonizing and feminist ethnic at their core; they reify women's knowledge and religious/cultural practice and bring them to bear in one of life's most sacred moments.

The Body, the Community, and the Sacred

I am part of a network called Imeinu Doulas. The word "imeinu" means "our mothers." After my difficult birth experience, it has felt so empowering to learn about and then team up with an international group of women who are bringing Jewish spiritual practices into birthing spaces all over the world. I am taking classes from the Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute, where they prioritize uncovering women's hidden histories and rituals. These have to do with reclaiming connection with our bodies, our earth, and one another. It is such a powerful and different approach from the kind of Jewish practice I have always experienced, even in fairly feminist Jewish circles.

Some of my practice now involves monthly New Moon rituals and circles. Jewishly, women get together at the new moon. Organizations like At the Well are helping women connect with one another to offer ritual and sharing circles, reclaiming this ancient practice. I am studying the birth art of feminist, Jewish artist Judy Chicago (DeBiaso). I learn about how the image of the "Tree of Life," a central Jewish metaphor for the Torah, is also imprinted on the placenta, which has its own "tree of life" design. I learn about the psalms that are traditionally said at a birth. I learn about women's prayers, tachines—written in Yiddish because that was the language Eastern European Jewish women spoke, without access to Hebrew, the language of scholarship and traditional prayer (Tarnor). These prayers are about labour, birth, and safeguarding women and babies. I revisit Anita Diamant's The Red Tent, noting the skillful hands of the midwife and the rhythmic refrain she uses. Through this knowledge, I help heal from my own births. I also help heal the ancestral amnesia. I will help bring these teachings to others. I will help revive and reclaim them. I will help resist the severing of women from our traditions, from one another.

It is so powerful to be part of a network of doulas who are reviving these traditions. Doulas are birthworkers who support the physical, emotional, and informational needs of the birther. I add spiritual needs to that complement. Being a doula is in itself a resistance to Western and patriarchal models of birth (Abramson et al; Mahoney and Mitchell; Krapf). That, combined with the Jewish reclamations, feels like such an exciting challenge to the traditional birth world and the traditional Jewish world.

I learn about the tachines, women's prayers uneducated women had to write on their own because nothing in the traditional prayer book reflected their experience or served during this moment: "I pray unto You, Lord, God of Israel, that you consider my prayer as You did that of Mother Channo, the prophetess who prayed for a son" (Tarnor 16). The biblical story of "Channo," (usually translated as "Hannah") from the biblical Book of Samuel is understood by these women as a proof for the efficacy of prayer in pregnancy. How exciting to have access to these insights about what women, excluded from houses of study, would have had about the texts that I write about today.

There are many women-created understandings/interpretations, midrash in the Jewish tradition, that extend original biblical stories, making them anew for each age (Weisberg, *The Crown*). I explore the "customs and folklore of Jewish birth" (Klein). I learn about Judy Chicago's birth art (DeBiaso) and the birth art of so many others. With my clients, I encourage them to use such an image as a focal point during labour. Together, these images connect Jewish women through the generations.

There are many beautiful and inspiring Jewish labour and birth practices, such as reciting Psalm 121, the Song of Ascents (Nadav). Jewish professionals and authors have connected Jewish teachings with traditional childbirth education (Finkelstein and Finkelstein; Weisberg, *Expecting Miracles*). But the most profound learning I do is with doula and childbirth educator Chana Newman. She teaches me Jewish birth meditations and visualizations, Torah and Talmud teachings about birth, and the segulot, a protective ritual that Chasidic Jewish women often practice. This is a radical reclamation for me of knowledge that, as a secular Jewish woman, I have never learned. This is how women's knowledge has always been shared—woman to woman as well as context- and culture-specific—across time and distance. It is so different to the traditional academic learning I have done. Although it is so important to honour knowledge and teachers and cite sources, some of these many teachings have no citable original source. This is women's wisdom passed down through community.

Judaism prides itself on being a book-learning culture. I have read and written many commentaries on traditional text. When Chana Newman teaches me to see the Book of Exodus anew, it is nothing short of revelation. The Exodus story, a cornerstone in Jewish culture, is of how the Israelites fled Egypt as slaves and found freedom in the promised land. Newman taught me to see the story as a birth narrative. It begins with the midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who defy the Pharoah's order to kill Israelite sons. It ends with the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, a watery passageway that "delivers" the people to freedom. Just as the Book of Exodus is the story of the birth of our nation, women literally birth the nation every time we bring a new Jewish child into our community. Considering text anew in this way opened my heart and mind to a new dimension of Jewish study and story.

Newman also taught me such a lovely practice of women in labour reciting the Misheberach, the prayer for healing, but directing it outwardly to others who are sick or suffering. In this moment of distress and pain, she channels her focus to the healing of others, reminding herself of our interconnectedness. In the Misheberach, it is traditional to call in the person you are offering wishes of healing to according to their maternal line. We say the name of the person in need of healing, and add name, "daughter/son of" and their mother's name. We are reminded that it is traditionally and still so often mothers who

care for the sick and who care most about the sick. How beautiful that as a woman is on the verge of becoming mother, she can unite with the mothers before and around her in this way.

Empowered by this traditional wisdom as part of my doula journey, I myself now offer workshops and trainings on spiritual birth practices in an attempt to widen the net of those who can access these teachings. I offer some of these teachings here as a way to continue to share this cultural knowledge and because I believe it is important for people of all cultures to find the practices that resonate with them. It is my hope that these are useful in themselves and that they inspire research on different birth traditions across many cultures as we work together to resist patriarchal and imperialist birth. In that vein, here are my top five things to do for a spiritual birth.[2]

1. Find a spiritual focal point. For me, it was birth art by the Jewish feminist artist Judy Chicago. It let me concentrate on something outside myself and connected me with my tradition and the many women in my culture who have come before me.
2. Create a sheet of blessings, prayers, and affirmations that are spiritually significant to you. Part of what I offer my clients is sources for these blessings and affirmations, but you can collect these yourself as well. Have your partner/birthing coach practice saying some of them so that they can offer these to you when needed. You may wish to create signs or posters of some of them to hang up in the birthing room/space
3. Find a song from your culture that is meaningful. I used "The Whole World is a Narrow Bridge," or in Hebrew, "Kol Ha'olam Kulo Gesher Tsar Me'od." Have this easily accessible on your phone and the phone of your partner/birth coach. Perhaps create a playlist of several such songs.
4. Practice visualizations in pregnancy you can use in labour. They may have to do with the cultural values you hope to instil, for example prayer for healing. There is a Jewish midrash (story) that babies learn the Torah in the womb. Create a visualization around this or any other image.
5. Create ceremony for the transition to parent (for example we Jews use mikvah/ritual bath) and/or baby welcoming (for example Brit Milah/ Brit Shalom/ baby naming)

Concluding Thoughts: Endings and Beginnings

After that challenging first birth, I saw a flyer for something called "Birth Fire." Three doulas in my neighbourhood were hosting a bonfire in a local park where we were invited to write and burn our painful birth stories. I attended, leaving my five-week-old daughter at home for the first time. Hearing others share about their difficult and painful births was hard but healing. We were in it together. I wrote my story, and I threw it in the fire. Release. In the Hebrew Bible, when people make

sacrifices at the Temple, some are called burnt offerings. Distinctions are made between those that get burned and those that get burnt up. The immolation renders something into nothing. While my labour and birth experiences are always with me, in offering my words to the fire, I was able to let go of some of the pain of it, making more space for settling into my new role as mother. Connecting with others in the birthing world, the Jewish community of birthworkers especially, helps ground me as I unite these many parts of myself: scholar, doula, Jew, rabbi, teacher, and mother. For many mothers, labour's end marks a new life, a new beginning. As each new life joins the tapestry of connection, community, and culture, we forge newness and continuity together, again and again. I will not birth again, but I can help enrich the birth experiences of those who come next, using the wisdom of those who came before. This is a most radical reclamation and resistance to the forces that seek to divide and hide our connections and our practices. Jewishly we say, and to the women who have given and will give birth, I say: l'dor v'dor, from generation to generation.

Endnotes

1. There are many people who give birth who do not identify as women. It was impossible to know how many nonbinary and trans people gave birth and what their experiences were like until very recently. The knowledge I share here comes from traditional women's communities within Judaism. There have certainly been people who would not have wished to be identified as women who were part of those circles. My hope is that today we can discuss women's communities with that understanding—that is, recognizing the importance of uplifting the voices of women while being mindful not to erase the voices of those who do not identify as women.
2. For example, I explain these in a video on the "Jewish Mommy Life YouTube channel": www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_desbyK_ME.

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JANET GARCIA-HALLETT AND POPY BEGUM

The Anticarceral Promise of Deregulating Motherhood and Decriminalizing Substance Use

Carceral systems in the United States (US) criminalize individuals who engage in substance use and marginalize them under the guise of public safety. In particular, the US war on drugs has disproportionately affected incarceration rates of economically disadvantaged Black women—a majority of whom are mothers of children under the age of eighteen. Within carceral systems, social workers have dual and fluid roles as both social service providers and compliance managers who enforce the carceral logics that disadvantage Black mothers. This article asserts that social practitioners, especially social workers, should advocate for anticarceral efforts and engage in community-based practices that reduce harm, remove stigma, and replace perceived criminality with dignity.

Introduction

In the United States (US), there is an overreliance on defining people as threatening to public safety, which, in turn, leads to policies that deem penal control and carceral oversight appropriate responses to societal problems. The excessive dependence on carceral systems is grounded in carceral logics that idealize penal interventions to punish individuals labelled as offenders. For instance, "carceral feminism" describes the feminist movement's attempt to prevent gender violence through increasing penal power and state control over abusive men (Bernstein). Specifically, carceral feminism saw criminalization, law enforcement surveillance, and penalization as necessary responses to curb interpersonal violence against women. This focus, however, did not address state violence against Black women but rather exacerbated it (Whalley and Hackett).

Criminological and feminist scholarship have highlighted the overlap of gendered and racialized oppression in the criminalization of Black women

(Bush-Baskette; Collins; Garcia-Hallett; Harmon and Boppre), but carceral feminist scholars have been less attentive to the increasingly important roles that social workers have played in reinforcing systems of social and penal control (see Leotti; McKim; Pollack; Valenzuela-Vela and Alcázar-Campos). Historically, the field of social work has promoted social justice and advocated for social reform on behalf of disadvantaged individuals, but by working within carceral systems, they have increasingly adopted a culture of control (Garland) that is, in many ways, diametrically opposed to the culture of care the field was founded upon (see Addams). In particular, social workers working with Black mothers with histories of substance use find that their dual and, at times, conflicting roles within carceral systems put them at odds with professionals in the field who remain committed to the original aims of social work. Yet social work is "inevitably involved in the processes of governmentality" (Leotti 450) and is inherently a profession that acts to uphold the status quo by managing risk.

This consciousness-raising article (Petre and Rugg) explores how the role of social workers has risen to the forefront in systems of carceral control. Reviewing the histories of social work policy in the US and more recent policy developments, this article examines how support services created to ameliorate the most detrimental effects of the carceral systems are now being used to extend state surveillance and control of marginalized and criminalized Black mothers, both within systems of incarceration (e.g., jail and prison) and, more poignantly, in court-mandated postrelease programs, such as drug treatment and reentry programming (Carlton; Kim; Valenzuela-Vela and Alcázar-Campos; Whalley and Hackett). In doing so, this article contributes to the social work literature by examining the extended role that social work plays in the carceral state and how social work interventions often clash with a culture of care that prioritizes the best interests of Black mothers and their children. First, this article will discuss the state control and violence of criminalizing mothers' substance use. More specifically, it will explore how social constructions of motherhood create racialized differences in how Black mothers are viewed and treated by the general public, policymakers, and social agencies and examine how racialized drug policies have allowed state actors to blur the line between substance use and offending to regulate Black motherhood and criminalize Black mothers. Second, using a matricentric framework, this article will investigate how the field of social work perpetuates state surveillance and control of Black mothers battling substance use. We argue that an anticarceral approach promises a more humane response to substance use. However, such an approach depends on community-based resources that actively challenge social workers' complicity in reinforcing carceral logics that criminalize substance use (Bush-Baskette). This article concludes by suggesting ways to deregulate motherhood and decriminalize

substance use by implementing and supporting anticarceral efforts that are community based and community driven.

State Control and Violence of Criminalizing Mothers' Substance Use

There are 231,000 incarcerated women within systems of incarceration in the US, many of whom (101,000) are incarcerated in local jails (see Prison Policy Initiative). Although the number of incarcerated women in the US remains significantly lower than that of incarcerated men (Carson; Guerino et al.; Harrison and Karberg; Mauer), the number of imprisoned women increased by 832 per cent between 1977 and 2007—an incarceration rate double that of imprisoned men over that same period (Sufrin; see also Prison Policy Initiative). Still, criminological discussions about the war on drugs focus on men, not women, despite the increased presence of women in carceral systems during the late twentieth century. The unexpected surge in women's incarceration during this period was not due to an increase in criminality or an increase in violent crime perpetrated by women (Chesney-Lind and Pasko). Rather, the increase was partly an unintended consequence of the second-wave feminist movement that prioritized gender equality in the 1960s and 1970s and reshaped public responses towards women that were less chivalrous. These policies increasingly labelled women as offenders and were more punitive for nonviolent crimes like drug crimes (Chesney-Lind and Pasko; Steffensmeier et al.). In fact, between 1986 and 2018, the percentage of incarcerated women in state prisons who were convicted of drug crimes increased from 12 to 26 per cent (The Sentencing Project). However, compared to white women, Black women were incarcerated for drug-related crimes at a much greater rate between the mid-1980s and early 2000s (Harmon and Boppre; The Sentencing Project), demonstrating that the increase in women's incarceration at the end of the twentieth century was primarily driven by the incarceration of Black women for drug crimes (Bush-Baskette; Harmon and Boppre). Research also shows that Black women are overrepresented in correctional facilities compared to their presence in the US general population (Bush-Baskette), whereas white women remain underrepresented in jails and prisons compared to their numbers in the same population (Harmon and Boppre). This disproportionate incarceration of Black women and their overrepresentation in carceral systems is an outcome of policies and practices conceived and implemented during this tough-on-crime era (Alexander).

Black Women at the Blurred Line between Substance Use and Offending

Punitive policing policies passed during the War on Drugs were meant to curb drug use and minor drug crimes in Black communities that politicians depicted as being out of control (Bush-Baskette; Harmon and Boppre). Hastily

considered draconian drug legislation passed in the 1980s and 1990s treated drug possession as a crime in itself. Rather than implementing anticarceral community-based services as a safety net for economically disadvantaged individuals who used drugs, the penal logics animating these drug policies fuelled a reliance on carceral settings to respond to substance use (Sufrin). As Beth Richie and Kayla Martensen note, "What is considered a crime is fluid, not static" (13). What was once a nebulous line between substance use and abuse was increasingly defined as "offending," and the punishment of individuals who used drugs reinforced a culture of control (Garland) in lieu of providing care. As a result, the discretion that social workers once had in providing care to women battling with substance use was increasingly taken out of their hands. Judges also found their discretion removed by the carceral logics behind sentencing guidelines, requiring mandatory minimum sentences for specific drugs and specific amounts of drugs. For example, strict drug policies included longer prison sentences for small amounts of crack cocaine (which is smoked and financially accessible) compared to shorter prison sentences for powdered cocaine (which is snorted, injected, or swallowed). Even though the majority of crack cocaine users are white (Mauer), the harsher punishments for possessing crack cocaine primarily affect Black communities because Black individuals are more likely to be policed and subsequently convicted of possession charges (Alexander; Bush-Baskette; Hansen and Roberts; McKim).

Black women are at the intersection of two marginalized groups and are systematically oppressed because of their racial background and gender. In a racialized society, Black women are more likely than their white counterparts to be policed, prosecuted, and punished with incarceration (Bush-Baskette; Carson; Ritchie; The Sentencing Project), rendering them targets and victims of punitive drug policies. In fact, by the end of the twentieth century, the increase of Black women incarcerated for drug offenses in US state prisons was double the increase of Black men and more than triple the increase of white women (Mauer; Mauer and Huling; Sabol et al.). Approximately 1.2 million women are under the supervision of US jails, prisons, and probation or parole agencies (The Sentencing Project), a majority of whom are women of colour (Black and Latinx) with histories of substance use (Frost et al.; Sufrin). Furthermore, in a patriarchal society, Black women are exploited as labourers under neoliberal practices that expose them to extraordinary levels of state intervention—primarily during their prime fertile years when they are most susceptible to state control and regulation of their motherhood (Sufrin).

Socially Constructing Motherhood and Regulating Black Motherhood

The increase in incarceration rates of Black women during the war on drugs is partially due to the intersection of gendered expectations of women, racialized constructions of what motherhood should (or should not) entail, and the regulation of Black motherhood. Women with children are subjected to socially imposed notions of how mothers should actively perform their ever-evolving familial role (Arendell; Garcia), yet motherhood is assessed through white, middle-class, heterosexual ideologies and expectations. Put simply, motherhood is socially constructed as being child centred in which mothers are emotionally, physically, and financially invested in nurturing and caring for dependent children (Arendell; Hays). Yet not all women assume the ideal roles of mothering or neatly fit into gendered belief systems, which uphold patriarchal definitions of motherhood. Women experience motherhood differently according to the social-structural resources available to them (Collins). Black mothers, in particular, are expected to uphold "intensive mothering" practices (Hays x), but they must navigate these expectations without adequate community-based resources to carry out maternal roles. In this way, social constructions of motherhood not only bolster the reproduction of privilege and hierarchy but also expose Black mothers to greater state surveillance and regulation (Garcia-Hallett; Golden; McKim; Sufrin).

Although gender expectations have evolved over time, particularly with the second wave of the feminist movement, the so-called goodness and badness of mothers continue to be measured by perceived mother-child interests. Mothers are expected to avoid actions that are deemed detrimental to children, geared towards mothers' self-interests and either uncommitted or intermittently committed to children's interests—all perceived signs of imperfect or bad mothering. Substance use is viewed as a contradiction of mothers' responsibility to be constant nurturers and, as such, is treated as an indicator of a bad mother. Researchers remind us that "a stereotypical image of a female drug user is inextricably linked to maternal roles in which assumptions are made about parental fitness in ways different from other types of offenders" (Cho and Tasca 423; see also Chesney-Lind and Pasko; Freiburger; Ritchie). The public concern about mothers using controlled substances has exposed mothers to severe punishment for their drug use compared to women who are not mothers (Spohn). This disparity between mothers and nonmothers demonstrates that, when there is legal discretion, a maternal identity may be treated as grounds for harsher sentencing for drug crimes (Cho and Tasca). For example, mothers convicted of property crimes may receive some leniency in their sentencing when they reside with children, but the same leniency is not given to mothers convicted of drug crimes (Freiburger), illustrating the comparatively greater stigma and penalization of drug possession (Cho and Tasca).

Yet public concern with maternal substance use disproportionately critiques and affects poor Black mothers who are aggressively policed by the state, especially by the child welfare system and the criminal legal system (Bush-Baskette; McKim). Media and political outlets in the late twentieth century were filled with images of Black mothers allegedly abusing state finances and producing drug-exposed children with life-long physical and psychological problems (Bush-Baskette; McKim). These racialized moral panics about the corrosive effects of drug use (especially crack cocaine) contributed to the state regulation of Black motherhood (Bush-Baskette; Roberts). In her book *Invisible No More*, Andrea Ritchie presents several scenarios in which Black mothers have been dehumanized by police officers who perceive Black women's bodies solely "as vessels for drugs ingested, swallowed, and concealed" (52) subjecting them to sexual abuse, physical harm, and death. Punitive drug policies enabled the penal confinement of indigent Black mothers perceived as institutional burdens and "bad mothers" who deserve to be incarcerated for possessing the source of their substance use (Bush-Baskette; McKim). For example, the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act categorized women battling substance use as criminals to be punished rather than individuals worthy of assistance, especially when these women were bearing children (Bush-Baskette; Roberts). Such carceral logics justify policing women's bodies and their pregnancies: Mothers are penalized in carceral systems under the justification that they have put fetal health at risk (Bush-Baskette; Jackson; McKim; Sufrin). Notwithstanding the effects of substance use during pregnancy, Renny Golden argues that the "threats related to poverty, such as substandard housing, homelessness, lack of prenatal care, and poor nourishment, are identifiable detriments to fetal health, yet there is no public commitment to their eradication" (46). In other words, socioeconomic marginalization (like restricted access to quality healthcare) does not initiate as much public outcry as perceived individual moral failings (Golden; Jackson). Such an individualized lens surrounding mother-blaming fuels punitive responses to Black mothers engaging in substance use.

Under tough-on-crime practices, health and treatment centres have become hunting and dumping grounds for poor Black mothers who go there in search of services only to find themselves labelled as "offenders" and pushed into states of hypersurveillance (Jackson; McKim; Noble et al.). Indeed, a range of social, legal, and medical services have been put in place to regulate and control them that scholars have termed "transcarceration" (Maidment). In contrast, white middle-class mothers who use drugs are able to reap the benefits of their racial and class positionality and have more resources at their disposal (e.g., private health insurance). As such, white middle-class mothers with substance use problems overwhelmingly seek drug treatment from private physicians, thus diminishing their contact with carceral systems (Hansen and

Roberts). By contrast, poor Black mothers who use drugs have far fewer resources at their disposal. Consequently, they are relegated to social service agencies whose express purpose is to surveil them, which makes it difficult for Black mothers to avoid state control and their overrepresentation in carceral systems (McKim; Roberts).

Perpetuating the State Surveillance and Control of Black Mothers

Although the social work profession is justice oriented, it is not exempt from welfare practices that fuel the oppression and incarceration of Black mothers. Carceral systems function with a penal culture of control (Garland), which affects the culture of care that social workers can provide justice-involved individuals in these carceral spaces. In what follows, we will examine how in this continuum of care and control, social workers play a dual and, at times, conflicting role when practicing social work within carceral systems, particularly on behalf of Black mothers who have histories of substance use.

Regulating Black Motherhood Vis-à-Vis Deservingness

The social work profession prides itself on a culture of care, yet many social work practices are grounded in a culture of white benevolence in which care is directed towards white mothers who are seen as deserving care. By contrast, because of inequitable practices and racial stereotypes, Black mothers are not seen as deserving of the same access to care but rather as deserving of hypersurveillance and carceral systems of control (Blackstock; Dominelli; Garcia-Hallett; Roberts; Rutman et al.). For example, the slogan "save the children" was a familiar trope employed during the war on drugs that demeaned Black mothers for using controlled substances and depicted a "crack baby" crisis, creating a moral panic about Black children born with exposure to crack cocaine (Bush-Baskette; McKim; Roberts). The social work profession became complicit in this politically-driven and racialized initiative to save so-called crack babies from Black mothers. In fact, social workers typically report Black mothers to child protective services at much higher rates than white mothers (McKim; Roberts), contributing to maternal separation and family disruption in Black communities. Although the "crack baby" crisis was ultimately shown to be largely a hoax, social workers' attentiveness to children's welfare and saving children came at the long-term expense of Black mothers' welfare (Roberts).

In the Clinton-era welfare reform period of the mid-1990s, states made it increasingly difficult for people to access vital social and medical services, especially for Black mothers who were depicted as "welfare queens" (Cammett). As a result, substance use became a major theme in narratives about who was or was not deserving of help from the state (Bush-Baskette). During this

period, it was difficult for poor women to receive welfare (Cammett), and many had to prove that they were drug free to receive and continue receiving benefits from the state. Such neoliberal values of self-sufficiency minimized state accountability to provide support and reinforced the role of social workers to report mothers for suspected drug use and noncompliance to social constructions of motherhood (Bush-Baskette; Kim; Kuri and Fierheller). As a result of these neoliberal welfare policies, social workers have become forced to perform their duties under the politics of deservingness and to function as gatekeepers to support while weeding out so-called undeserving Black mothers from receiving the assistance they need to tackle their substance use (Cammett; Sufrin).

Regulating Black Motherhood Vis-à-vis Individualized Fixing

Even when social workers provide mothers with care to tackle their substance use, social work practices are often grounded in a deficiency framework that forces them to accept personal responsibility for their substance use that problematizes them as deficient individuals (McKim; Sered and Norton-Hawk; Sered and Norton-Hawk). The underlying message within a deficiency framework is that mothers battling substance use are inherently flawed and, thus, need to be fixed into abstinence through state surveillance and control (Leotti; Netherland and Hansen). Yet Black mothers are susceptible to greater surveillance and criticism for challenging social constructions of motherhood.

Publicly supported drug treatment programs rooted in carceral logics reinforce the notion that Black mothers can only be fixed via compliance and confinement (Carlton; Carlton and Russell) and require them to take frequent and spontaneous drug tests over an extended period of time. Mothers in treatment are then threatened with incarceration if they relapse or somehow do not abide by imposed societal scripts of rehabilitation as fixed individuals (Sered and Norton-Hawk). The focus on preventing any and all substance use, however, disregards the time, effort, and setbacks in the bumpy road towards recovery (Rutman et al.). Instead, treatment programs should support progress and recognize that recovery from substance use is a continuum of small steps. In theory, drug treatment programs are intended to support mothers through their recovery, but in practice, they function as means of state surveillance and penal control of Black mothers (McCorkel; Sered and Norton-Hawk).

Considering social workers' multilayered roles as support givers, behavioural enforcers, and compliance managers (Kim; Leotti; Valenzuela-Vela and Alcazar-Campos), the following section reviews some ways social service providers can adhere to an anticarceral social justice mission that does not sustain and reproduce punitive carceral systems.

The Promise of Anticarceral Feminism in Social Work

Although social workers have been complicit in reinforcing the notion that incarceration and penal programs are suitable responses to substance use, this article argues that the social work profession can advocate for systemic change towards anticarceral efforts (Leotti; Richie and Martensen). Knowledge gained from intersectional examinations of penal control and its impact on gendered and racialized disparities has fuelled the rise of anticarceral feminism, which is "driven to undermine and dismantle the structural injustices that shape practices of criminalisation and imprisonment" (Carlton 288). As such, whereas carceral feminists rely on social control and partnerships with carceral systems, anticarceral feminists maintain that programmatic support systems are best accomplished outside of carceral settings, and they advocate for community-based and community-driven reform efforts to protect and support women (Carlton; Kim; Richie and Martensen; Rojo; Whalley and Hackett). Yet anticarceral efforts and discussions among social workers have remained largely ignored (see Leotti). The remainder of this article explores the importance of anticarceral efforts to decriminalize substance use and support community-based and community-driven efforts that actually support Black mothers battling substance use.

Decriminalizing Substance Use

To achieve social justice within anticarceral practices, it is important to address the existing policies and practices that perpetuate carceral logics and fuel penal control. Individuals battling substance use problems are often incarcerated on possession charges for carrying the source of their addiction (Kopak and Hoffmann), but such minor drug possession should not come with prison sentences that in practice criminalize and punish substance users. Confinement does not tackle underlying social-structural mechanisms leading to substance use nor does confinement effectively reduce substance use (Carlton; Carlton & Russell; Davis). Therefore, there must be institutional transformation in how social systems view and respond to substance use by decriminalizing the small possession and use of nonmedical substances and substances deemed as illicit (Whalley and Hackett).

Scholars have extensively documented the harmful effect of drug policies on the disproportionate incarceration rates of Black women and their overrepresentation in carceral systems, despite their low risks to public safety (Bush-Baskette; Cho and Tasca). Scholars have also shown how the incarceration of Black mothers complicates their ability to be caregivers, weakens mother-child ties, and disrupts support networks and familial resources, both monetary and otherwise (Garcia-Hallett). Incarcerated mothers may also initiate drug use or find that their drug use is exacerbated

behind bars as a result of stress and inadequate support, which illustrates how punitive drug policies can cause more harm than help (Sufrin). This widespread knowledge of ineffective and harmful drug policies has shifted social, political, and penal responses to substance use, contributing to recent declines in the incarceration rates of Black women for drug convictions (Carson; Mauer). In fact, the incarceration rates of Black women decreased by 60 percent between 2000 and 2019 (The Sentencing Project), almost entirely due to declines in drug offenses (see Mauer). These recent declines have been long overdue, and although they are not enough to combat the harms already done to Black families and Black communities, continuous declines may reduce the overrepresentation of Black women and mothers in carceral systems.

Decriminalization efforts such as those in British Columbia, Canada, may be one model to address substance use in a noncarceral way. In 2022, British Columbia declared a three-year exemption (2023–2026) to Canada's federal drug laws and decriminalized the possession of opioids, cocaine, methamphetamine, and ecstasy for personal use (up to 2.5 grams). Individuals are not required to seek and receive treatment as part of this exemption, but the province has implemented harm-reduction programs to help meet public demand (Woo and Gee). Decriminalization "favours health-care over handcuffs," as said by Vancouver Mayor Kennedy Stewart (qtd. in Paterson), by replacing arrests and charges for small drug possession with providing information about resources and referrals for treatment services. Such decriminalization efforts could protect mothers from further disruptions in their mothering by giving them a chance to receive help without stigmatizing and criminalizing them.

Deregulating Black Motherhood

By parting ways with false dichotomous frameworks and narratives of Black mothers' deficiencies, the deregulation of Black motherhood can diminish the overlap between the child welfare system and the criminal legal system (Roberts). Social workers should be wary about using a dichotomous framing—that is, deserving versus undeserving—when implementing treatment or allocating resources to social work practices that continue regulating Black motherhood. Likewise, criminologists should avoid a dichotomous framing—that is, good versus bad—when assessing individual progress or program effectiveness (Rutman et al.). In a dichotomous framing, when mothers are deemed bad because of substance use, the children's welfare is put in opposition to mothers' welfare, which creates "a false dichotomy between parents' rights and children's rights" (Stein 586). More specifically, mere substance use is often coupled with dichotomous notions of child neglect (see McKim; Roberts), which prioritize children's need for saving over mothers' need for treatment and support services (Stein). Child welfare guidelines typically

stipulate that substance abuse justifies removal of maternal custody or additional stipulations in order to regain parental rights. These efforts by child welfare services are focused on saving children, but mothers are too often criminalized, penalized, and left without sufficient support (Roberts; Rutman et al.). In their attempts to support children, social service providers must also provide mothers with support and remain mindful that mothers' need for support should not discount their simultaneous parental interests and capabilities to be an effective parent (Kuri and Fierheller; Rutman et al.). The decoupling of substance use from dichotomous notions of child neglect would, in turn, allow social service providers to give simultaneous support to both children and mothers without the threat of criminalizing mothers for seeking help.

The stigma of maternal substance use and the labelling of Black mothers as "addicts" or "bad mothers" fuels the deficiency frameworks used to justify penal interventions to fix mothers. Problematizing Black mothers instead of interrogating existing patriarchal, racist, and classist systems enables "the government to appear to be concerned about babies without having to spend any money, change any priorities, or challenge any vested interests" (Pollitt 288). Such deficiency framing in regulating Black motherhood maintains their chastisement within social systems as well as their sociopolitical criminalization within punitive carceral systems (Bush-Baskette; McKim; Roberts). To deregulate Black motherhood, social workers should shift the focus from fixing Black mothers to seeing them as products of their circumstances while acknowledging that substance use is a common coping mechanism to trauma and emotional turmoil (McKim).

Community-Based and Community-Driven Efforts

As a result of the politically blurred and indistinct line between substance use and offending, in addition to the definitional fluidity of social workers' role, mothers have been sent to jail and prison rather than given community resources to help them tackle their substance use in an anticarceral manner that does not adhere to carceral logics or rely on penal institutions (Roberts). We propose anticarceral efforts that divest from carceral partnerships to reinvest in community-based coalitions and community-driven initiatives. The anticarceral movement advocates for decarceration and for varied forms of transformative justice practiced outside of carceral systems to uphold a liberatory approach that uplifts marginalized communities (Carlton; Kim; Whalley and Hackett). Possibilities for such transformational change are embedded in collaborative community-based efforts—as with treatment (Whalley and Hackett), housing (Shabazz), and mental health (Jacobs et al.)—that do not rely on state structures or neoliberal state politics (Whalley and Hackett). Coalition building among community organizations and local

advocates can address community needs and help offset and tackle the underlying state oppression of Black mothers that triggers their substance use and results in the removal of their children and incarceration for drug charges.

Anticarceral interventions require a shift from viewing police officers as the only or best first responders during health and mental health crises, such as overdoses. Instead, policymakers must recognize community-based initiatives as more humane, promising efforts to best meet individuals' needs (Kim; Sakala et al.). Anticarceral initiatives have taught social workers about the harms of calling the police. Rather than improving the situation, police intervention often escalates mental health and medical emergencies (and results in police violence). The negative encounters with the police have encouraged social workers to refer to mental health professionals or medical emergency responders who are trained for drug-related crisis scenarios (Jacobs et al.). This shift allows Black mothers to have their health needs met without the additional threat of escalation, police violence, or criminalization. In addition, mental health workshops on how to respond to drug overdoses allow community members to serve as "crisis interventionists" (Jacobs et al.), thus limiting interactions with agents of social control and keeping interactions community based. These examples demonstrate anticarceral interventions for providing services and keeping resources grounded in the local community, allowing marginalized communities to create some stability that has been afforded to more privileged groups who are not hypersurveilled.

Anticarceral interventions are not only based in the community; they should also be driven by the community that it is intended to serve (Chowdhury et al.). As such, Black mothers with histories of substance use should be recognized as the community assets they are and given the autonomy to actively develop community-driven initiatives that would be the most useful for others sharing similar backgrounds and experiences (Kim; Sakala et al.). As researchers have noted, "If the state actually cared about women as it claims, it would stop building new gender responsive cages, close down the existing ones, and allow the imprisoned mothers, sisters and daughters to return to their families and build real community-based programs to support them" (Rojo). Too often, social workers—as outsiders—are consumed by the practice of telling Black mothers what they need to do in order fix a wrong or improve a perceived deficiency. Social workers must listen to and treat Black mothers as community experts who know what they need for recovery, how to navigate motherhood, and how to heal communities and create support networks. As "credible messengers" for transformative justice, Black mothers are the "true agents of change in the effort to end mass incarceration" (Chowdhury et al. 358).

In all, anti-carceral interventions to support Black mothers in their recovery from substance use must coincide with three elements:

- the decriminalization of substance use;
- the deregulation of Black motherhood by parting ways with deficiency and dichotomous frameworks; and
- a reinvestment in community-based and community-driven efforts.

Conclusion

This article argues that social-structural efforts should be made to diminish the criminalization of substance use and support mothers with substance use issues, rather than add to the degradation that Black mothers experience in society. In order to divest from carceral partnerships and reinvest in community-based and community-driven initiatives, social workers must first understand the socio-structural and political oppression that Black women and Black mothers are forced to endure (McCoy). Social workers should also recognize the existing ambiguities in their role as well as the part they currently play in supporting carceral logics that harm Black mothers. Mothers may be unable to avoid public stigma for their substance use, but social workers can help offset the negative effects of carceral systems by advocating for and participating in liberatory, anticarceral practices. It is important that social workers prevent the perpetuation of criminalization, avoid women's stigmatization as bad mothers, and avoid a hierarchical positionality in assisting Black mothers with substance use histories. As Ping Kwong Kam argues succinctly, social workers must step away from individualized treatment and, instead, put the social back in social work to combat carceral logics and promote social justice.

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AKANKSHA MISRA

Letter from a Mother to a Daughter to a Mother: Caste, Patriarchy, and Intergenerational Trauma of Narcissistic Abuse

This creative nonfiction piece is an autobiographical narrative of a daughter, career feminist, and survivor of maternal narcissistic abuse. Written as a letter to her daughter, which is frequently interspersed with the author's own internal monologue with her narcissist mother, it demonstrates how narcissistic abuse by mothers passes on as intergenerational trauma from mother to daughter through the abused body. By centring the intergenerational trauma of narcissistic abuse by mothers, this letter challenges mainstream discourses around motherhood that uphold the image of the sacrificing and loving mother. It also reveals bad mothers not just as cultural tropes or emblems of patriarchy but narcissistic individuals who actively sabotage their daughters' lives through their own unprocessed traumas. The letter is ultimately a feminist intervention because it shows how systems of caste and patriarchy combine not only to create narcissistic mothers but also to shelter their abuses. In other words, it demonstrates the inseparability of individual and systemic abuse. By centring the body—at once abused and hurt but also loving and desiring—as the main source of experience and healing, it proposes a vision for feminism that acknowledges the intertwined nature of individual and systemic forms of gender violence and elevates queer kinships, as sources of love and nourishment, beyond the figure of the biological mother.

Dearest M,

This letter is not a cliché. Don't let it be. Yes, like most such letter legacies we see in movies and read about in books, it is meant for you to open at some point in your life. Perhaps when I am gone. Perhaps when you are at an age when your childhood innocence has given way to the perils of adulthood. Or perhaps when you yourself stand at the cusp of parenthood. Or perhaps never.

But always remember: This letter is not a cliché. It is not the validation of the strength of womanhood or of the beauty of motherhood or of the selfless love of a mother for a child. This letter is a messy rendition of the wishes and whimsical desires of people that are lived at the expense of their children's bodies and of the fleshiness and pain of motherhood that nobody wants to talk about. People idolize motherhood, place it on a pedestal, and some of these people in your life might be shocked if you show them this letter, may pity you for having a mother who would cut open the venomous pain in her soul onto a piece of paper, and may even explain it away as the random rantings of your mother—a middle-aged hysterical woman—because yes my darling, the people who uphold the sanctity of motherhood the most are also quite often the most afraid of encountering its dark side and women's deepest desires. Such is the irony of a society that demands too much from women while giving them too little. Don't let these people ever take from you what you are about to read and understand in the following pages my dear daughter. This letter is not a cliché! Don't let them drag you back to the world of mothering clichés. Don't let it be.

This is a letter about the fine line between love and hate. Pleasure and pain. The self and the other. Indulgence and abuse. This is a letter about how the world works and about how narcissistic abuse by mother figures manifests as the silence of daughters, for the world is too invested in the beauty of motherhood. This is a letter about how the emotional abuse and neglect by mothers as well as their murderous excesses—their pride, their desires, their trauma—are passed on through the crushing disembodiment of their daughters. She did this to me M, my mother. She birthed me into this world—into her own nightmarish vision of domestic hell. And what else could she do? That was her job. A beautiful, light skinned, North Indian, dominant-caste girl. She was born only to procreate the dominant-caste race.[1]

M, I'm sorry to be telling you things today about your Nani, my mother, that I never mentioned all these years. What's the point I thought. She was far enough away to not be a constant presence in our lives and to not use you, my children, to manipulate me and deceive the world around us. Manipulate? Deceive? Yes, my dear. Those are words that people don't want to hear associated with mothers. The same people who might make you feel ashamed for having a mother who slams motherhood are the ones most spellbound by the veneer of the selfless and loving (grand)mother. And why wouldn't they be? Motherhood in our culture has always been under attack and so many pressures. At once symbolizing the unconditional love that a human mammal has for their child, motherhood has also historically stood for the love of one's nation and the pillar on which patriarchy has rested and thrived.[2] Who has been at home taking care of children and the elderly while wars are fought? Who has had to sacrifice personal desires to work outside the home in order to

be with the children? Within this larger systemic context of patriarchy and nation (sorry my dear for going all academic on you, but I couldn't help including some reading recommendations in this letter!), defending individual mothers against perceived slander is an understandable and ethical feminist gesture.[3] From the unpaid reproductive labour of motherhood to the over- and undermedicalization and scrutiny of mothers' bodies—as well as the glaring racial, religious, class, gender, sexuality and ability-based discriminations that result in accusations against certain mothers for inflicting adverse consequences on their babies[4]—the unacknowledgement of mothers' labour, pain, love, and desire is truly emblematic of our misogynist, heteronormative, and patriarchal culture. However, what I am about to tell you about Nani isn't mother slander because it isn't about her at all, as it had been all my life from childhood until well into adulthood. For a change, this narrative is more about me, a daughter, and you, my daughter. It is about us and the powerful nature of intergenerational trauma. It is about how trauma passes from mother to daughter and manifests as aches, sores, and memories in the body and how the collective systems of patriarchy, caste, and motherhood produce and facilitate individually abusive mothers, who suffocate their children and prevent them from speaking up and breaking the silence of narcissistic parental abuse. The system, my dear, our society, has already set me up to be a monster in writing this candid letter to you. Our society can only read this letter as an attack on a mother rather than the journey and heartfelt confessions of an abused daughter and her attempts to heal the passage of motherhood from her body to her daughter's. But I am alright with that my darling because all that matters at the end is that you understand.

So as I was saying, always remember that motherhood can of course be beautiful, selfless, and full of love. But it can also be ugly, selfish, and a site of intergenerational transfer of trauma. My mother committed a sin by birthing me into a cruel world in which she could not give me love and her sin passed on from me to you. I love you M, but believe me, it has taken a lot of emotional and psychological work and time for me to feel this love and say it. I was a wreck when you arrived—all nine pounds of you with your perfect little fingers and toes—but I couldn't love you. I didn't love your older brother for even longer. They call it postpartum depression my love, but I know that was my mother's sin living through my traumatized body—a body so crushed by the lack of love and support and so tired of pretending to be tough, to be feminist, and to be normal. It was a body that had only given but never received love. Your mother's body. From her mother's body. I write this to clear the sins of mothers who don't love and who birth daughters who are unable to love. I am coming clean to you M. So please, read on.

Love M. Never underestimate the power of love. How many times I held you and your brothers in my arms, knowing how much you meant to me,

feeling a stir of heavy, beautiful emotions but unable to love. Here I was—a transnational feminist studies professor with astute understanding of institutional and systemic discrimination and violence. Yet I could never understand what felt so violating at a personal level when I lectured on families and mothers and caring labour. When I confront people and situations that demand my love, I still have to stop myself from going numb and from feeling that if I give too much of myself, I will only get hurt. How many times have I stood speechless in a room of elite feminists or even my less privileged peers who talk about their gender and race-based abuse but have had a loving family to go home to? They had mothers to take them into their arms and to look after their children while they could be the best of who they were, despite the structural racism and sexism of our world. I have had to bite my tongue in a world where on the surface I have privilege—and, yes, I do have privilege, such as caste privilege, light-skin privilege, English-speaking privilege[5]—but how do I tell them, how do I tell the world that I never had the most important gift you can give a human when you bring them into this world? How do I say that, well, at least you had your mother's love to fall back on. I never had that. I love you, M. Always remember that.

And love is precisely why we need to talk about the abuse committed by narcissistic mothers. Mother, the socially framed and upheld highest pillar of love and comfort, can also be the source of greatest pain and injustice for her child when she is a narcissist. I am no expert here, my love, on the topic of narcissism. I am not a psychologist or a therapist. But I am a feminist scholar, and I am aware of how historically women, quite often mothers, have been labelled "mad" and "hysterical" to mask and explain away the injustices of patriarchal abuse.[6] And in writing this letter to you as a daughter and as your mother—after having gone through some years of qualified therapy that has identified me as a survivor of maternal narcissistic abuse—I hope to make a feminist move by subverting the labels often associated with women who speak out against abuse. By shockingly exposing the messiness, trauma, and fleshiness of intense narcissistic maternal abuse, I hope to show, for both our sakes and also to some extent for my mother, two crucial things. One is that systems of caste, nation, and patriarchy, and relatedly motherhood, create and often mask maternal abusers. But in addition to that, and more importantly, how some acts of feminist subversion—in this case the candid confessions of a mother-daughter and her attempt to think about narcissistic maternal abusers through the society and the body—necessarily involve discomfort on the part of readers. It requires them to reckon with the ideas of motherhood that they themselves have grown up with and with their own life and childhood as a part of a society that keeps connections between individual bodies and systems of oppression invisible.[7]

A narcissist mother can come in all shapes and forms—from the outright

malignant narcissist mother to the apparently homely looking, caring mother. "How lucky you are to have a mother who cooks such wonderful meals for you," they said. What could I say? How could I tell them the truth? How can I even now speak my truth? It has taken forty-three years of living, two years of therapy, and many failed relationships to realize that my mother didn't give me love—the most important ingredient to make a child feel safe and explore the world and develop tools to navigate tough situations and relationships in a healthy way. It has taken many heartbreaks, bouts of severe depression, and postpartum anxiety to realize that not only did she not give me love but that she also actively despised my existence, jealously competed with me, and sabotaged every meaningful connection I endeavoured to make with other people.

You did this to me Ma. Remember that fateful evening just after my divorce in 2008? Remember when I told you that your brother had sexually abused me for eight years and how I had endured it in silence? A counsellor whom I happened to speak with randomly at the time had told me that telling you this fact will start healing the painful chasm that had always divided us. But little did she know, nor did I, that your narcissism was the real reason why that gulf existed between us to begin with. That your narcissism meant that I was nothing more than your status symbol, a vessel for your desires and visions of womanhood. That when I told you this shameful fact, you would simply lash out at me saying, "You are only saying this to get sympathy" and "Shut up, such things happen in families all the time." And as if that weren't enough, implying that it was most likely my fault for bringing the abuse upon myself. I had failed you in every possible way as a daughter by breaking the silence around my abused body. I had shaken the mythical fortress of honour built around dominant caste women's vaginas. The consequence of that, combined with your perplexing jealousy (how many times did you yell at me in hysterical rage, "You think you are beautiful, but you are not! Remember that!"), turned out to aggravate your hatred towards me. You did this instead of taking me in your arms as a loving mother and telling me that even though the abuse happened, it was all going to be okay. That's all I wanted, Ma: love.

The greatest gift that parents give you is the gift of love and safety that enables you to develop tools to navigate the world and survive healthily. I know what you are now thinking my dear M: "Oh please mom, you are one of the most social and well adjusted people I know!" How do I tell you my dear daughter that beneath that veneer of social charm, strength, and self-sufficiency is a child, a little girl, who could never grow up—a girl who still suffers constant anxiety, who always puts others first, and who always double guesses herself and her intuitive prowess. I have always tried to be as normal as possible because I know now that nothing that happened to me was normal. I was taught to be nice but not kind. I was taught that affection disguised as

love was always, and always, conditional. Nani only loved me when I did as she demanded, and even then, I was never quite right. I was supposed to be cheerful around people but not laugh too hard. I was supposed to do well in school yet was verbally abused for studying too much—"Who is going to marry a girl who is only into books? Have you even entered the kitchen yet?" Whatever I felt in my gut was always wrong; it had to be affirmed by her. I was repeatedly told that I was selfish if I wanted anything and that I should be selfless and think about others. So yes, my darling daughter, your mom is a vivacious, intelligent human who still deep down suffers heart palpitations when you kids are late coming back from hanging out with your friends: "What happened to them? Are they alive? Was it my mistake to send them? Am I a bad parent? What if I am the reason something has happened to them." I am a middle-aged woman who still cannot answer the question "What do you want?" without feeling selfish, without thinking about others around me. And even though I know that I am a spectacularly gifted intuitive and emotional person and that my gut and my heart are the source of my strength and compassion, they still bear the scars of repeated insults and abuse from my childhood and lie dormant in situations where I need them the most, leaving me spiraling and anchorless, falling back into unhealthy habits and memories acquired through a lifetime of abuse. My mother's voice still haunts me relentlessly, creating much self-doubt. So don't be fooled by what you've grown up seeing my dear. It has all been built on layer upon layer of sedimented trauma and pain.

And this is where feminism failed me in as much as it saved me. In some ways, feminism has failed daughters of narcissistic mothers. Don't get me wrong M: Your mother is a diehard feminist. Had it not been for the power of feminist thought, the joy of feminist activism that I was so lucky to partake in after that dreadful betrayal by my mother in 2008, and later the intellectual rigour of reading and discussing feminist works for my PhD, I would have never understood how gender oppression is so deeply systemic. I would have never seen how my own mother was also oppressed by the same system of dominant-caste honour in India—which is tied to women's bodies and shrouds sexual abuse in silence[8]—as I was. Feminists are so right in pointing out that the concepts of choice and empowerment are structural; it is our social location and context that inform the choices we make. But there is also an individual, agential aspect of choice that often gets overlooked in feminist analyses. Not all oppressed women choose to oppress. Not all folks born into misery choose to accept their fates. There is a driving force that is deeply embodied—passionate, energizing, and exhilarating—that drives people to choose and achieve the most extraordinary things under the most excruciating circumstances. Think about gender oppressed folks in any walk of life—arts, sports, politics—and think of your own humble mother, who chose to run

away from her abusive home and country to build a life and family for herself with zero money in Turkey, a land unknown to her people, which was also possible of course because of her educational privilege. What is that frenzied passion that drives our bodies to commit death defying feats and achieve dizzying success in the face of structural doom? Where is the feminist language for that kind of embodiment that cannot be captured in such words as "agency" and "resistance"? These words somehow remove the fleshy messiness of fighting and loving and living within systems of oppression and replace them instead with a more distanced, sanitized, conceptual, and somewhat orientalist aura? As if all those oppressed people (read: only women of colour) exist under oppressive systems that either kill them or are resisted through their agency. Done. Does that make sense? I need to explain this in the flesh my darling, for this is a kind of fleshy feminism that my words are just not able to capture. If you are reading this while I am still alive and alert, come and ask me, and watch my face and body and hands and legs move and twist and contort and sway and swing as I explain to you what I mean.

You did this to me Ma. They told me repeatedly that I was wrong, those flying monkeys, the narcissist enablers, the society, those aunts, your husband- my father. They told me that I was overreacting, that I was hypersensitive, even that I was a liar. They gaslighted me, those flying monkeys, the narcissist enablers, the society, those aunts, your husband- my father. They told me that you were a wonderful person with a heart of gold. They told me that even though you were cold on the surface, deep down, you were the one who loved me the most and had only my best intentions in mind. And I believed them Ma. For what is a child to do in a world where the hegemony of biological maternal love remains unchallenged? I believed them all along, giving you the benefit of doubt, and blaming myself instead for a love that I never felt. All that guilt-tripping worked, Ma, because I was primed to be guilt tripped. I was led to believe all along that deep down all your abuse was driven only by your love and concern for your daughter, and so all the negativity that I was feeling was ultimately my fault. Such is the power of the maternal love illusion. So convincing was the brainwashing by your supporting group of enablers that until recently, I kept on trying to explain away your behaviour. As a feminist professor, I know that you are also the victim of caste-based gender oppression and of child sexual abuse, although of the latter I have no proof. Every time you said something to hurt me, I kept on reminding myself of how it must have been for you, a girl in her early twenties, to have been married off and sent away to a far-off land—a girl who had never stepped outside of her small northern province in India but was handed over to a man you had barely known and shipped away. And then, a year later, you were pregnant. You were sick all the time, all alone, and then had to make it back home, seven months pregnant, as dominant-caste Indian tradition demands. There, you suffered

scorching heat of the Indian summer and appeased your husband's family with round-the-clock cooking and cleaning, which would finally be alleviated in July, as you moved to your natal home, and the first monsoon storm took away your pain but also gave you one in the form of a baby girl. This child was another reminder of your tormented womanhood, another burden that you too would have to bear only to get rid of later. But the fact of the matter is Ma that no matter how hard I try to explain away your meanness, your cruelty, your irrational jealousy, and vile abuses as symptoms of systemic gender-based violence of your body, there is no excuse for what you did to me. I understand your pain Ma, for I too am a woman, but I cannot rationalize your abuse. And I am damn angry Ma—angry with you and angry with this world full of enablers, like my father, who protect narcissistic monsters like you. And I will remain angry, not because I can't change you—no one can—but to remind myself to never do the same to my own children, especially my own daughter, my darling M.

So much of this is resonating for you as a woman isn't it M? And here of course I am taking the liberty of imagining your future gender; you may not even identify as a woman. But as someone who would definitely be seen by many to embody some kind of womanhood, so much of what I am saying resonates with you doesn't it my dear? You can say that my experiences are not symptoms of narcissistic maternal abuse but rather simply of the patriarchy that we live under—common experiences of most women who are constantly dismissed and gaslighted and asked to shrink themselves and their desires. Of course they are. They are symptoms of systemic gender inequality. But they are also symptoms of narcissistic abuse. And this is precisely the point that I am trying to make. How can one separate the system and the individual? We are all products of a society. It is the system of caste-based national abuse of Indian society that enables narcissistic mothering. Caste-based racial discrimination works through women's bodies by keeping the dominant caste women's honour tied to her vagina and sexuality within the domestic confines of heterosexual monogamy at the expense and dispensability of caste-oppressed women's bodies.[9] My mother's narcissistic need to control my life and sexuality was invisible to others precisely because it upheld the systemic norms of a dominant caste society driven by the sexual control of young women. Her inability to love is most likely caused by herself being raised in a toxic patriarchal, dominant caste society where women are unloved and unvalued. She once told me how lucky I was that my parents celebrated my birthday. When she was a child growing up, with four sisters and two brothers, it was only her brothers' birthdays that were remembered and celebrated. Imagine what kind of feelings of self-love and self-worth a girl would have growing up in a society like that? So the point I am trying to make here is not an individualistic or a systemic one; instead, I am arguing that the individual and the system are inseparable

and that narcissistic abuse finds shelter and therefore remains invisible within a patriarchal culture of gender-based abuse.

I will in fact go so far as to say that perhaps one of the greatest indications of the inseparability of systemic gender oppression and narcissistic abuse by mothers is the fact that daughters of narcissistic mothers growing up in a toxic white capitalist patriarchy are rendered more susceptible to all kinds of other abuses than those who grow up in healthy, loving families. Yes M, I am talking about grooming. Narcissism grooms people for all kinds of past and future abuses: sexual, emotional, and physical. My sexual abuse as a child would have happened in any case but was made much easier because of the narcissistic abuse I had been experiencing at the hands of my mother. Since I was unloved and constantly devalued as a person, how could I have trusted my gut, how could I have approached parents I knew would never believe me? How could I have stopped my abuse? How could I not have become easy bait for another narcissist, several years down the line, this time my white mother-in-law? She was, once again enabled by a system of white patriarchy that upholds white womanhood and used the familiar tools of manipulation, jealousy, and mixed messaging to utterly gut my self-worth. She used my lack of confidence as a young mother to physically and emotionally distance me from my first born, your older brother. On the day he was born, she took him away from me and put him in another room. She constantly told me how much work babies were, yet she never helped me in any meaningful way, which further fuelled a lifetime of insecurities. I remained a silent and distant spectator to my own decline and that of my relationship with my baby. I had already been raised to believe I knew nothing and that speaking up was being disrespectful and selfish. What could I say or do? Deeply triggered and made to feel further shame for a body that I had already been shamed for throughout my life—a brown lactating and nursing body so vile to my upper-middle-class white mother-in-law's racist sensibilities—I just kept on drowning slowly and slowly into a void of postpartum depression and anxiety that I could never come out of even by the time you were born. Will you forgive me my darling for not loving you both enough when you were babies (I had healed significantly by the time your younger brother arrived), for not remembering your early years in detail because they were too traumatic, and for not being kinder to the little girl you were because I had still not learned to nurture the little girl in me who had been so crushed by narcissistic abuse? I am so sorry M. But I do love you. Never forget that.

You did this to me Ma. Your constant control, criticism, and scrutiny of my body fundamentally altered my relationship to it. Well into my adulthood you would talk to my cousins behind my back, telling them to stop complimenting me to my face, because their compliments will somehow give me an illusion that I was beautiful. What illusion Ma? I see daughters of loving mothers,

many of them my own friends, who are so confident in their bodies and the way they look because they were loved, and their opinions are always upheld and respected by their mothers. And I get so jealous. How could I ever even begin to feel beautiful in a body that was always in excess yet never enough? Too sexual but not light skinned enough. Too thin but not good enough to wear everything. My hair too curly but not thick enough. My limbs too awkward and clumsy. My nose too big. My skin too oily. I could go on and on. These are not feelings anyone else made me feel. Only you, Ma. My body wasn't enough, wasn't good enough to warrant any attention. When a jealous roommate in college burned my foot with boiling water, the scar was just not big enough to show to a doctor, the pain just not great enough for my screams and the attention I was supposedly seeking. When my face erupted in cystic acne (years later I can say from the poison you were feeding me, both the food and your trauma), I couldn't sleep or face the world because of the blood and pus and deep scars that marred my face. Yet you still didn't deem it necessary to get me medical attention or to just hug me once and tell me that I was still beautiful, that my hormones will eventually calm down, and that it'll be alright. When I was sick from a mysterious infection for over a month and couldn't get out of bed, you said I was exaggerating my illness instead of showering me with care and love. When I gave birth—not once, not twice, but thrice—all alone in foreign lands with no one beside me, you didn't think it was necessary to come and physically and emotionally support your only child and her body. My body was worth nothing when it lay cold and hungry in a rat-infested Turkish hostel, slipping away from the life that you had chosen for me, a life in which, for you, I might as well have been dead.

Yet my body was also too much. It was always inviting too much attention, always wanting too much sex. It was always asking for too much rest. Do you remember how you kicked me out of bed weekend after weekend and splashed water on my little face on Sunday mornings because the rest that my growing child's body needed after a week of intensive schooling was an inconvenience to your pathological desire to constantly clean? Do you remember calling me "a burden on this earth" because apparently I never did enough chores? Your jealousy and your own narcissistic insecurities know no bounds. Shame on you.

As a system, patriarchy, M, thrives through a similar disembodiment of girls', daughters', and children's bodies, just like individual narcissistic abuse. Disembodiment doesn't mean that the body is invisible in this system. It is both at once hypervisible and invisible at the same time—just like my body was to my mother, at once not enough and too much. In a patriarchal system, such as the society we live in, our bodies are invisibilized through hypervisibilization; our desires are shrunk by the constant shaming and sexualizing of our bodies. Our carnality is erased in the name of honour,

selflessness, and morality. My dear daughter, when this happens in the kind of society we live in, our bodies are rendered powerless and susceptible to whatever people, in my case a narcissistic mother, throw our way. Therefore, our only way to fight back against a system that crushes our bodies, creates narcissistic monsters, and upholds motherhood by invisibilizing the pains and tortures rendered by narcissistic mothers is to reclaim our bodies, recentre our desires, and listen to ourselves. But how do we do that?

Science is now supporting what feminists and survivors of narcissistic abuse have been saying for a long time. It is all about centring the lived experience of our bodies and reinvesting hope, beauty, and faith in them.[10] All our life force M is in the gut. Gut bacteria. Good gut bacteria are what make you healthy and thrive. Good gut bacteria cured your raging eczema as a child. Those itchy, red sores all over your body were my painful legacy to you; you were born from a hurting body, which still carried the trauma of abuse it had yet to heal from. As you grew inside me, I was still in pain and had out of many years of practice of disregarding my body, shunned it and had become blissfully unaware of what I ate, what I exposed it to. I firmly believe my darling that your horrendous eczema was the physical manifestation of my unprocessed trauma—the passing of my mothers' lovelessness and sin and the severance of my own sense of self from my physical body.

But I listened and learned, M. Moreover, I started feeling. My body. My pain. I went to therapy. I immersed myself in works of radical women of colour feminists.[11] I actively sought out and basked in the pleasure of meaningful physical intimacies and adventurous sexual encounters.[12] And I started healing. I started listening to my gut again as well as to my heart, head, and body. This healing is still an ongoing process; this act of reinventing one's relationship to one's body. It is never complete, and there are always setbacks because old habits die hard. The body always remembers, M. Just when you think you have mastered your pain and defied patriarchy and narcissism, memories come flooding back, and even the slightest trigger sends you spiraling into depression, and you lose connection with your body again. But the body is also resilient. You just have to listen to the gut. Gut bacteria. We nurtured your good gut bacteria through good food, love, and care. And so began our metamorphoses—you and me—our resistance. Our own act of feminist defiance. Your eczema healed slowly and slowly. It was a process. And, sure, we know that it can sometimes be triggered. But we also know our bodies now, and we love ourselves. We know that we have each other, and that everything, my darling, is going to be alright.

It is late my love, and I have to go. But always remember that your mom loves you. And don't worry about me. Although I never had that much idolized mother's love, I learned to love myself and to be kinder to the little girl inside of me. Once I accepted that I can't change my mother and reinvented my

relationship to my body—and understood through the lens of feminism and experience why racial- and caste-based systems of patriarchy need to invest in the ideal of motherhood—while turning a blind eye to narcissistic abuse by mothers that they themselves create, the pain started to ease. I started seeing other ways of loving and models of motherhood and kinship that can be fulfilling even if they don't emanate from a biological mother. I surrounded myself with powerful mother figures—feminist mentors, teachers, activists, and friends—who have been instrumental to my growth and healing. It is because of my chosen mothers that I am alive and writing this letter to you. I sincerely hope that you too are able to surround yourself with such love from your chosen families and remember that as important as the love of your mother is, love is beautiful and comes in all shapes and forms.

Most importantly, though, always remember that this letter is not a cliché. It is not just some assortment of words but a soul laid bare in the flesh. Touch it, feel it, own it. It is borne of your mother's body—the pain of trauma and desire intertwined in the flesh that is yours. Do whatever you want with it but remember it always comes back to the body and not the words. This letter is about us, mother and daughter. And although people around you may be shocked at how it brutally exposes our most intimate lives, this letter is also beyond us as individuals. It is a feminist manifesto about caste, patriarchy, intergenerational trauma, narcissistic abuse, pain, and love that is lived through the flesh. This letter is not a cliché. Please my darling: Don't let it be.

Love,
Mom

Endnotes

1. There is feminist scholarship, my dear, on the ways in which eugenic ideas of nation and development have always worked through the wombs of child-bearing folks, especially those from privileged racial and ethnic groups. This is most evident in fascist regimes, such as Nazi Germany, but also takes place today in 2022. Tanika Sarkar's book is one recommendation in the context of India.
2. There is a plethora of popular culture imagery and movies (remember the Bollywood classic *Mother India* we watched together?) that thrive on this topic, and there exists many feminist works on it (see for example, Yuval-Davis).
3. Demeter Press is an excellent source for scholarship and other writings on motherhood, including feminist analyses of mother blaming (see for example, Reimer and Sahagian).
4. Oh my, I can go on and on about how medicalization of motherhood continues to penalize mothers from different race and class backgrounds

(particularly Hessler).

5. And these are obviously not mutually exclusive my dear. Being of Indian origin, my dominant caste status has, in fact, endowed me with the privilege of a certain kind of education and success that remains systemically inaccessible to many in India (see, for example, Varghese et al). For you, your mom has always been Indian, but you must understand that Indianness in the United States obfuscates the brutal workings of caste (see, for example, Chakravorty et al). Therefore, acknowledging caste and other privileges remains vital to my feminist ethic in discussing the workings of motherhood, self, narcissistic abuse, and lack of love. Oh, and I hope you read Yashica Dutt's memoir for a nonacademic but no less thoroughly researched and extremely personal and powerful take on the origins and everyday workings of caste in India.
6. I will refer you to a Demeter volume once again (see Wong).
7. This my dear is a profoundly philosophical and difficult concept to grasp. In simpler words, we don't always think about how our bodies, social worlds, and ideas are connected. What is the connection between the corporeality of mothering and social ideals of motherhood? Rethinking those connections has always been a part of my own scholarship on feminist phenomenology.
8. Oh my, where should I even begin pointing you to the literature on sexuality and caste? Chatterjee's classic essay is a good one.
9. See Sharmila Rege for a powerful read.
10. For instance, in the context of the United States, I highly recommend Cherríe Moraga et al.'s seminal collection.
11. Here, I am specifically referring to anything and everything by Audre Lorde and the activism of the Combahee River Collective (of which Lorde was a part).
12. The underrated role of the erotic and pleasure in everyday activism is now increasingly being brought to the fore by feminist and queer activists from around the world. For example, see an interview of my friend Moses on the same topic (Khubchandani). And also check out adrienne brown et al.

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JOHANNA KIRK

"Sisters in the Struggle": Can Postmodern Dance Make Space for Dancer Parents?

Forged in the wake of the antiestablishment and antibourgeois movements of the 1960s, postmodern dance in the United States has long prided itself on its nonelitism and its inclusivity of dancer body types and life experiences. However, even today, the postmodern professional dance world is particularly unhospitable to dancers with children and dancers who are pregnant. In this article, I describe a meeting between female dancers with dependents who were grappling with how the dance world might make room for dancer parents. In this meeting, they were offered the challenge to become "solidarity for themselves" and to carve out spaces together to make dance culture more parent centred, or at least more parent friendly. I discuss why this challenge was met with apprehension and skepticism by some professional dancers with children and why matters of dancers' and choreographers' race complicated their conversations about maternal rights and dance professionalism. I proceed to discuss how some dance communities (especially those of colour) have created their own systems of pre-, ante- and postnatal care within their professional dance spaces, which fully avoid allopathic medicine and rely instead on webs of somatic practitioners and their own body intuition to monitor and optimize their health. For example, dancers become trained as doulas and organize community meetups and movement classes, in which individuals can enjoy a safe space and are encouraged to represent their personal experiences through their moving bodies. I interpret this culture making through dance as an important intervention in healthcare as well as in the postmodern professional dance world.

A largely overlooked reality of the professional dance world is that it is populated primarily by females who are, quietly, making decisions about pregnancies and parenthood during their choreographic and performance careers. In my experiences as a student of dance and a dance professional, pregnancy and parenting were never directly discussed nor were the dilemmas

they create for many dancers. This was the case even in my world of postmodern dance, which in contrast to many professional genres welcomes diverse dancer body types and life experiences. Forged in the wake of the antiestablishment and antibourgeois movements of the 1960s, postmodern dance in the United States (US) has long prided itself on its nonelitism and gender equity. However, although the concerns and aesthetics of postmodern dance emphasize egalitarianism, pregnant and maternal bodies remain largely absent from its dance culture, making them an intriguing litmus test for postmodernism's professed inclusiveness.

Today, as an academic who works between dance and qualitative health research, I study postmodern dancers' diverse experiences of pregnancy and maternity and how dancing reveals, supports, or complicates these experiences. Moreover, I investigate how the practices of postmodern dance—such as bearing witness, making sense of bodies through attunement to sensation, creatively responding to unfamiliar experiences of self, and creating sharable and trusting communities with others—can enrich practices of pre- and postnatal care. Through my work, I appreciate dances and choreographic processes that productively destabilize conventional ideas about dancers' bodies, mothers' bodies, and the power dynamics of the art world, and I recognize choreographies and performances by pregnant individuals and parents that confront professional dance culture with its implicit exclusions. I celebrate choreographic works and company models that productively stretch who can participate in concert dance while also acknowledging that this work of stretching boundaries from the inside is challenging and occurs despite multiple points of friction.

Speaking to these points of friction, this article aims to shed light on the stresses that dancer-mothers face as they strive to balance their commitments to parenting and their vocation. It excavates a roundtable discussion revelatory of how and why many dancers are reticent to engage their motherhood in their creative work and why some, in the name of professionalism, keep their artistic and private lives decidedly separate. The examined conversation also exposes how dancers' separate-spheres attitude, which might protect their livelihoods, protects a (patriarchal) status quo and puts additional invisible labour on mothers in both their professional and family lives. Not only does this conversation disclose dancer perceptions of the ways in which race does and does not meaningfully intersect with their ideas about professionalism as well as their praxes of parenting, but it also reveals and problematizes perceptions, largely among white dancers, of why Black dance spaces are more hospitable to maternal bodies—perceptions that hamper mothers' intradance solidarity work. The roundtable launched a call to action for mothers to be change makers within the dance field; however, the dialogue illuminates the obstacles (many of which are deeply internalized by dancer-parents) that interfere with

mother-artists rallying behind such a call. Thus, it offers a case study in why progress toward mother-embracing professional dance spaces is slow.

My Entry into This Work

I know at an embodied level both the pleasure and precarity of life as an experimental dancer-choreographer in an urban hub. After my undergraduate studies in dance at Barnard College, I stayed in New York City gigging as a freelance performer and choreographer. During this time, I regularly took classes at Movement Research—a nonprofit organization that offers dance instruction, workshops, residencies, and performance opportunities for free or at low cost. Movement Research aligned with my artistic and pedagogical values, with its focus on improvisation, postmodern dance, and experimentation as well as its dedication to dance as not only an artform but also a vehicle for community building and a practice with a "vital role within society" (Movement Research). Per its mission statement, the organization "strives to reflect the cultural, political and economic diversity of its moving community, including artists and audiences alike," and part of the way that it works to meet this goal is by offering regular programing that engages artists and audiences not only in collective movement practices but also in discussion of the dance field at large, the political and social climates surrounding it, and how dancers might build toward its best and most inclusive future (Movement Research). Towards these ends and to address emerging whispers of discontent among dancers with dependents, in 2017, Movement Research organized a studies project to explore the question "Does the dance field make room for dancer parents?"

From my situation now as an interdisciplinary academic researcher, I feel implicated and deeply enmeshed in dance while also—especially with the passage of time and my personal journeys into motherhood and academia—invested in reflecting on it from new perspectives and with measured criticality. Likewise, my scholarly subdisciplines of motherhood studies and the medical humanities have helped me to gain a useful vantage point on the dance world as have my research methods, rooted in feminist qualitative interviewing and interpretive phenomenology (how individuals perceive and make sense of the phenomena of their bodies). To better understand dancer-choreographers' perceptions of the relationships between professional dance culture and parenthood, in 2019, I began IRB-approved, boots-on-the-ground research in New York City, during which I collected interviews with experimental choreographers who are parents, about their lived experiences of their bodies in familial and professional spaces. I did ethnographic research in intradance circles of care and compiled interviews with dancer-parents, which I examined using the inductive analysis technique of grounded theory (Charmaz). I also

conducted archival research in New York City dance collections and centres, during which I encountered a recording of a roundtable conversation that was part of the aforementioned Movement Research project. It discussed the titular question and was open to the larger dance and New York City performance communities. I was happy to uncover this recording, as several of my interviewees mentioned the event during our conversations and remembered it as a watershed moment, which broke a long silence within the dance world about the pressures of juggling careers and families. As a former member of the subculture of dance that orbits around Movement Research, I was familiar with the panelists, and I had recently been in conversation with the moderator, Nia Love, who was in artistic residence in the university department where I was teaching. What is more, I recognized many of the recorded voices of those in the audience, some of whom were among my interviewees (although I respect their anonymity within this article).

I find this to be a timely conversation to revisit five years hence, when dancers, many of whose livelihoods remain on hold due to the COVID-19 crisis, face unprecedented financial strain, overlapping with unprecedented childcare responsibilities. My interviews have shown me that many dancers are having to rely more than ever on their dance training, philosophies, praxes, and communities to be their village for creative making, selfcare, and childcare. I contend that the majority-female dance world has a unique capacity to support women's health and maternal rights, but to do so, it must first overcome stubborn inertia rooted in artists' respect for tradition. That being said, every day, mother-artists productively expand and transgress the boundaries of traditional concert dance and, in so doing, manifest not only innovative art but also a dance culture that welcomes and supports more individuals' experiences. To recognize as much, this article closes by appreciating the work of contemporary vanguard mother-dancer-choreographers who are actively culture building to create the dance spaces that they personally need and feel other parents deserve.

Parenting as a Burden or a Boon to Choreographic Processes and Company Culture, and the Challenge of Claiming Full Personhood in Dance

When the Movement Research roundtable discussion on parenthood convened, Samantha Speis—current codirector of the celebrated US dance company Urban Bush Women and mother of two—was among the handful of artists invited to contribute. In addition to being the only panelist working in the space between postmodernism and African diasporic dance, she was also the only Black panelist—that is, aside from Love, the moderator, who is a mother of four, grandmother of two, and has decades of experience navigating the experimental dance world as a parent. It was quickly apparent that when it

came to facing and fearing dance world discrimination based on becoming pregnant or having additional child-related needs, Love's and Speis's experiences differed tremendously from their colleagues'. For instance, Speis explained that Urban Bush Women faced zero penalties if they decided to have children, and not only were children welcomed into rehearsal and performance spaces, but they were also treated as valued members of the company—members whose needs informed the company's needs. With this security and support, she, her codirector Chanon Judson, a mother of three, and other Urban Bush Women were undeterred from starting families while dancing with the company. What is more, Speis's two daughters, Aminata and Aicha, accompanied their mother to every rehearsal, performance, and on every tour (as they had in-utero), and Aminata even performed with the company as a toddler in Speis's 2018 choreography *Hair & Other Stories*.

In contrast to Speis, the rest of the panel spoke of the immense financial, physical, and emotional stresses of pregnancy and parenthood within the postmodern dance field and the unequal treatment they received because they had chosen to be parents. Speis, who had brought her daughter Aminata to the panel, was compassionate but could not relate to these experiences. Dancing for Zollar while pregnant and then with a baby in tow instilled in her fierce confidence to unapologetically declare without qualification: "I shouldn't be judged for having a child. I shouldn't apologize for bringing life into this world." After all, this was just, she explained, "owning what [her] reality is." Having had her experiences with Zollar, she refused to be involved in any projects that did not make space for her as a "whole person," and being "whole," for her, meant her children would always have the right to occupy the same space as their mother, just as they had when she was pregnant with them. She emphasized: "My reality is I have a daughter, and she goes everywhere with me, [and] if you don't want me in your space, then I don't want to be in your space!" When Aminata was born, the Urban Bush Women treated her not as a baby to be tolerated but as the eighth person in the otherwise seven-member company. Speaking to the disparity between her professional experiences and those of her peers, she concluded: "It really makes me think about how we [the experimental dance community] think about … professionalism and the thoughts and the assumptions around children and parents." In saying this, she presented a challenge; she put responsibility not on those in positions of power or on a biased system outside of the panelists, which was inflicting inequities upon them, but directly on herself and her peers. She suggested that together, they could change their thinking and assumptions and thereby develop their ideas of what is possible in dance spaces.

Perhaps feeling affronted by her bold self-assertions and also doubtful that Speis truly felt no shame or anxiety about bringing her child to rehearsals, copanelists pressed her: "But who takes care of your baby when you're

performing?" To this, Love and Speis answered in emphatic unison: "the company!" Others were incredulous that such could be the case—that parenthood could be copacetic with professional dance company culture. In retort, one panelist described her preference for keeping her art and family in totally separate mental and physical spaces because she did not want to "burden the work with her messy life." Another seconded this sentiment, adding how hard she had worked to be taken seriously as an artist and how she now worked hard not to lose the ground that she had gained by letting others see her (in her mind, pejoratively) as a "mommy." These artists painstakingly guarded their personally erected barricades between art and life, making it impossible to fathom themselves as both mothers and serious dance professionals. Their comments, in addition to exemplifying a pressure felt by many working mothers regardless of career path, belied a lack of experience with (even incredulity towards) professional environments in which collaborative childcare is part of the company culture.

Examining What Divides and What Connects Mothers in Dance: Intersections of Race and Motherhood and the Possibility of Othermothering within Dance Company Culture

As the panel progressed, Love and Speis continued to voice their lived experiences of dancing and parenting, which were distinctive from their peers'. As white attendees spoke to these differences, race gradually entered the subtext of the conversation. Eventually, one panelist said outright what others were dancing around—that Speis's positive experiences had to do with her being a "Black woman working in a Black company." In other words, she ventured that Black dance spaces are more inclusive of dancers' lives outside of dance. The panelist continued that in her "white space" of professional dance, the attitude was more "No! We're not gonna take all of you. We're gonna take the one part that we can control." To this, there was a hum of agreement among others in the room.

Now, there are histories within many Black communities—including communities in Africa, the African diaspora, and the US—of communal childcare within extended families and networks of friends and neighbours. However, especially in the US, biological mothers are often different from children's primary caregivers because of economic necessity—not tradition or cultural preferences and certainly not because of skin colour. As race, class, and gender scholar Patricia Hill Collins argues, charging one person with full responsibility for mothering a Black child is often not feasible for Black parents because mothers have to bring income into their families. Consequently, othermothers—women who assist "bloodmothers" by sharing mothering responsibilities—have traditionally been central to parenting (Troester).

It is possible to see the Urban Bush Women as othermothers for company children. For example, Love described rehearsing a piece with Speis and Zollar at Jacob's Pillow, the storied dance retreat tucked away in the Berkshire mountains, during which Speis "strapped that baby to her back and … did all of the work, and when she couldn't, somebody just took the baby and somebody else had the baby and strapped the baby … " Her words merged with and then faded to a pantomime of the choreography of deftly passing a baby between ready hands, which attached that baby to various bodies within the larger body of the company. She appreciated how, through this collective choreography of care, rehearsal continued without incident.

Still, the audience members' insinuation that motherhood is easier for Black dancers took the conversation into rocky territory. Indeed, motherhood is never simpler for Black women in the US—a country with a history of forced hysterectomies, rape, and medical experimentation affecting women of colour. Unlike many white women, especially those who are not poor, women of colour are burdened with multiple oppressions simultaneously, which affect their experiences of and access to maternal support both inside and outside of dance. Furthermore, in addition to the transgenerational trauma that Black women carry in their bodies, the daily stress of racism, stereotyping, racial profiling, and what psychologist Joy DeGruy has defined as "posttraumatic slave syndrome" affects Black women's psychological and physiological health while making many reticent to look for healing resources within the medical system. Considering the history of violence towards Black women in the US and the history of white patriarchy violently interfering in their fertility, Black women have, out of necessity, created traditions of intracommunity maternity care. Such traditions are strong and offer models for larger community organizing around motherhood, and such traditions certainly exist in dance.

However, within the Movement Research conversation, the type of communal childcare modelled by the Urban Bush Women was attributed solely to company members' skin colour; thus, other intersectional aspects of dancers' identities that both require and inspire their company model (aspects of identity that they may share with non-Black dancers) were overlooked. Problematically, such selective attention and hasty conjecturing by white dancers forward counterproductive and false binaries between Black and white spaces of dance and Black and white experiences of motherhood. Such unnecessary categorization and differentiation directly counteract the work that is possible if mothers band together and work from shared experiences towards shared goals. Furthermore, and as critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw argues, there is no existing discourse that addresses the intersectional complexity of pervasive stereotypes of Black motherhood. I contend that spaces of dance are conducive to initiating new strands of discourse, as they foster choreographies and communities that appreciate and express the more

dimensional personhood of individuals and that offer new points of connection between individuals who are participating in a common project and invested in a shared vision. However, when white dancers assume, wrongly, that Black dancers are both more maternal and, implicitly, less professional than white dancers (as they did in the Movement Research panel), they bolster simplistic and divisive broader patterns of social thought and reinforce reductive stereotypes. They thereby limit what dance and dancing communities can be and do and who they can include.

Philosopher and political activist Angela Davis argues that through art, it becomes possible to create a community of resistance to white patriarchy: "Art can assist people to learn not only about the objective forces at work in the society in which they live, but also about the intensely social character of their interior lives. Ultimately it can propel people toward social emancipation" (200). Yet a prerequisite to such emancipatory work is that erroneous beliefs about how race divides need to be reexamined and, where appropriate, superseded by shared priorities to work towards furthering all mothers' rights and wellbeing in the dance world as well as racial equity in and across motherhood. Following Davis, the imaginative acts and fresh collaborations that are at the heart of dancemaking will naturally lead mother-dancers into uncharted territory and reveal what is possible together; however, the path must first be cleared of false and polarizing race-based assumptions. Only then, can collaborative innovation transpire.

Working towards Becoming "Sisters in the Struggle"

In the context of the Movement Research panel, Love asserted that the choreography of mutual caregiving worked within Urban Bush Women not because it was a company composed of Black women, somehow innately endowed with the capacity or the impulse to collectively mother, but because it was a company that with the exception of one male member was entirely female and—especially because all-female, female-directed companies are still rarities in the dance world—they valued what their situation afforded them. They also shared an understanding of the economic precarity of both making a life in dance and sustaining the type of company they were carefully manifesting together. Consequently, each artist was willing to make certain commitments in the interest of sustaining Urban Bush Women and its distinctive methods of making art and community. Love clarified that male choreographers (or male-minded choreographers) can have empathy for mothers, but "empathy doesn't support what we're doing" because what Urban Bush Women was doing was actively appreciating what is possible and possibly better when mothers and children are fully included and supported in creative processes. She continued that what does support the simultaneity of mothering

and making art is to have "sisters in the struggle," which, like Speis, she invited the other panelists to be for one another. Echoing Speis, she encouraged the room to create for themselves communities in which they hold space for one another to be artists and mothers without apology and with gratitude for how this mutual support enriches everyone's experiences. In other words, Love argued that maternal solidarity need not have anything to do with race. It is a matter of sisterhood, and this sisterhood, as achieved by Urban Bush Women, needs to be the work of mothers looking to change their daily professional lived reality.

In her own experiences within the postmodern dance world, Love fondly remembered US experimental choreographer Liz Lehrman, who is white, being the first artist to employ her once she had a daughter. At the time, Lehrman had no children of her own. However, welcoming Love's child furthered her goal to deconstruct the notion of patriarchy as it permeated experimental dance and to proactively invite more bodies into her art. In other words, inviting Love and her daughter into her professional space was not a maternal instinct; it was a political act, and it was her choice as someone with the power to create and model for audiences and other makers new ways for people to be and make together. She was a sister in the struggle and a maternal ally.

Backwards Steps and Baby Steps as We Work towards "Solidarity for Ourselves"

As the Movement Research panel drew to a close, Love asked the panelists the following: "When do we become solidarity for ourselves? … Can we move in this revolution or are we trying to dismantle the master's house with the same fucking tools?" With fervency, she continued: "Are we really gonna dismantle this patriarchy that keeps always burning and breaking us down? I feel like we can do something more, and we're not."

After several moments of tense silence, another panelist hesitantly spoke but only to shift the conversation back to a familiar track—the pressure she feels as a mid-career artist not to lose the sparse dance opportunities that she currently received by imprudently rocking the proverbial boat. Others rallied behind this sentiment, which also offered an alternative to, in that moment, committing to the sisterhood work Love was charging them to do. However, one panelist cut in and returned focus to Love's challenge. Addressing the moderator directly, she said that although she had a hard time fathoming herself organizing and resisting in the ways that Love was encouraging her to do, to hear how Love, Speis, and Lehrman "completely reject" the patriarchal status quo was inspiring. She continued: "It's hard to unlearn fifteen years of professional training and twenty years of training before that." These

experiences had taught her never to expect to be asked "What do you need?" but rather to make her life outside of the work appear to disappear so as to uphold the willing suspension of disbelief that artists are only their art. While afraid to make a next move, she was excited that there could be "a different way to do things"—that parent-choreographers could become solidarity for themselves. In that moment, a baby step towards sisterly solidarity in postmodern dance was made.

Later, another step was made at a Jacob's Pillow talk back, in which Speis and her two daughters shared a single folding chair—the physical, professional space that Speis was allotted. As the camera person tightly focused shots to crop out her children for the purposes of video documentation and the others involved proceeded with the customary choreographies of a "serious" discussion, between "serious" people, about "serious" art, Speis proceeded to dexterously engage in a complex, compact improvisation of parenting while also eloquently responding to the moderator's questions. She did so until a sister in the struggle quietly intervened to bring another chair on stage for Aminata and another swept Aicha away from the stage lights and staring eyes. To be sure, such small steps of solidarity happen quietly every day in dance communities, and it is fortunate that they do, for such small steps of solidarity are requisite for artists like Speis to persevere with their art in the face of a dance culture that consistently tests such perseverance.

The Sisterhood and Birth Justice Praxes of Dancer-Doulas and Existing Intracommunity Choreographies of Care for Maternal Bodies in Dance

For her part, in addition to creating a welcoming space for pregnant persons and mothers in her own choreographies, Love supports her community as a birth doula. As a doula, she offers encouragement and care for friends and dance colleagues, such as Urban Bush Women dancers Marjani Forté-Saunders and Paloma McGregor. Doula-ing is also part of her intracommunity justice work—it is a means to protect and care for Black, brown, and Indigenous pregnant bodies, since these bodies have been and continue to be grossly mistreated by the medical system in the US. Recent data report that Black women in the US are 243 per cent more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes than white women, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that Black and Indigenous women are two to three times more likely to die of preventable causes surrounding pregnancy than white women ("Memphis Midwives"; Center for Disease Control and Prevention). Some in the health sciences argue that because of racial bias, Black women in particular are less believed when they share symptoms and concerns, and this feeds a vicious cycle of distrust between physicians and patients. Low-income pregnant women of colour remain the most vulnerable,

the most stigmatized, and the most untrusting/untrusted in clinical spaces (Bridges). They are the least likely to receive adequate prenatal care and the most defenseless to having their bodies controlled by the medical-industrial complex.

In response, a growing population of experimental choreographers, like Love, offer supplemental or alternative maternity care, which incorporates the politics and sensitivities that inform their dancing bodies into their practices of care. For example, Ogemdi Ude integrates somatic healing methods from her dance background as well as her commitment as an art activist to the wellness of Black, brown, femme, and queer communities into her birth doula care. She advertises this care as nonjudgmental support that is "radically inclusive and affirming of POC, queer, and trans folks" (Ude). Testament to this budding phenomenon, Movement Research hosted *Passage: A Dialogue with Doulas, Dancers, and Caregivers*, and it began a new studies project exploring dancers whose embodied practices include doula-ing.

Other examples of experimental choreographers who have extended their movement praxes into care and advocacy for pregnant and parenting dancer populations include the following: Molly Lieber, who is a prenatal yoga teacher as well as a lactation consultant and hosts a breastfeeding support group (mollyslactationcounseling.com); Hilary Clark, who offers classes in pre- and postnatal Pilates as well as parental bodywork (www.citrinebrooklyn.com); Anna Carapetyan, who works as a birth doula and volunteers as an abortion doula (www.heartandmindbirth.com); Margaret Paek, who structures and guides a recurring dance improvisation jam for movers and their children (https://margaretpaek.com/page/1-Biography.html); Ana Maria Alvarez, who hosts a weekly podcast in which she interviews artist activists about their experiences of making while parenting (www.contra-tiempo.org/ana-maria-alvarez); Meg Foley, who created an ongoing conversation group exploring queer motherhood (www.megfoley.org/blood-baby.html); and parent allies like Miguel Gutierrez, who, as a company director, has made sure that pregnant and parent collaborators receive the compensation and conditions that they need to fully participate in his creative projects (www.miguelgutierrez.org).

What is more, many artists make dances surrounding pregnancies that create spaces, practices, and communities to protect their health and share their lived experiences. Such choreographers are typically independent artists in romantic partnerships with other artists or parenting on their own, and they sustain themselves in urban centres with high costs of living. Thus, regardless of their cultural, racial, or educational backgrounds, many are in financially precarious situations at the times of their pregnancies, and they continue to be as parents. Accordingly, their access to healthcare is often

bounded by state-specific statutes of Medicaid. As follows, part of their experience of pregnancy is confronting the limitations put on their body-selves by a society that, by and large, does not value their work in financially measurable ways and by a medical system that does not value their somatic self-awareness. However, as I explore in my current book project, for some, making work while pregnant offers tactics for self-definition, self-observation, and self-care, which directly combat their experiences of feeling defined, observed, and managed in clinical contexts.

Many such choreographers find in their dancing bodies the means to see and assess themselves without reliance on the objectifying *medical gaze*. Their dances, which involve regular praxes of deep somatic attention, allow for more individuated inventories of somatic flux, which they observe both as and with their bodies. Their self-observations allow them to participate in their bodily and personal transformations because their assessments are epistemologically different from those that label or rank the health and normalcy of their bodies. In other words, their self-aware artmaking allows them to experience themselves as the subjects of their own pregnant experiences, not the objects of medical experts' knowledge. Such artists explore their pregnancies artistically so as to interrupt choreographies of *medicalizing* pregnant bodies because in their dances, they render the evident and diagnosable unfamiliar and open to new meanings or opacities. These artists celebrate art's ability to overthrow accepted reference systems in favour of "deconstructivist unknowability" (Küppers, 2). Such overthrows matter because whereas medicine necessarily pursues certainty and tries to close the gap between one's body and its representations, art can and, I argue, should do the opposite. While medicine promotes "a translucent body whose data are visibly available," artists may experience and stage their bodies as unrecognizable (25). I appreciate the importance of dance artists' ability to insert new gaps or to reveal and explore the existing gaps in what the empiric system of medicine can know, show, and say about bodies by foregrounding what can be known only to/by individual bodies. Likewise, I appreciate how, choreographically, artists may position their pregnancies within their larger experiences of their bodies in society—including their experiences related to race, class, culture, and sexuality—and position their pregnancies within more dimensional personal stories, which also include stories of intentionally not becoming pregnant or stories of pregnancies resulting in abortions, miscarriages, still births, and adoptions.

For me, choreographers' navigations of the theoretical and physical spaces between bodies having biological, cultural, and artistic experiences of themselves create new possibilities for dance, new communities, and new experiential insights for witnesses to ponder. From my purview, all these gains are of value to a variety of discourses of the body—including health science, praxes of self-care, as well as social performances of health, self, ability, and

professionalism—as individuals continue to challenge and grow understandings of what it means to have a body, to reproduce, to create family, to create art, to be or not to be female, to be a mother, to take care of one another, and to "become solidarity for ourselves."

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TIPSUDA CHAOMUANGKHONG

Examining Self and Finding a Healing Path: Internalized Racism and Intersectionality of a Thai Mother-Scholar

When President Trump called COVID-19 the "Chinese virus," media outlets picked up the term and spread it like wildfire. Many Asian Americans experienced both verbal and physical abuse and an unprecedented rate of discrimination towards them in places that used to be more inclusive. A sixty-seven-year-old Asian woman got brutally attacked in New York City for just being Asian—an incident that revealed to Asian people that the United States (US) no longer welcomed them. These anti-Asian hate crimes combined with postpartum depression (PPD) made me emotionally ill. Desperate for uplift, I took on expressive writing as a therapeutic tool to cope with the childbirth trauma, oppression, and racism I experienced. Through rounds of thematic analysis, I used four different themes to restory the critical events: 1) my earlier racial identity: colourism in Thai and American cultures; 2) (denied) access to spaces: immigrating while Asian; 3) being silenced during labour; and 4) baby love leads to (Asian) self-love. This article examines the role of internalized racism and racial inequity that a Thai mother-scholar experiences while immigrating, settling, and giving birth in the US.

Introduction

COVID-19 broke out in late 2019, and ever since, the world has never been the same. Many people lost their jobs, their homes, as well as their wellness—both emotional and physical. As the virus spread around the world, there was an increase in racism towards Asian people for the erroneous belief that they were responsible for causing and spreading the virus. Many Asian people got verbally and physically attacked in the United States (US) (Chiu). These racist discourses surrounding Asian Americans, especially Chinese Americans, have made it challenging for them to survive while also dealing with the challenges

posed by the virus itself.

In this article, I discuss my experiences as a pregnant Asian woman immigrating to the US during the pandemic and the discrimination that I faced for being Asian. I also offer my insights on internalized racism, which I have suffered from, especially because of the anti-Asian discourses circulating in the public, but I also explain how I have begun to heal from such self-hatred through the love that I have for my daughter.

In the next section, I explain how I used expressive writing as a therapeutic tool and discuss my writing journey from fall 2021 to the end of spring 2022. I also talk about how I used AsianCrit in my data analysis. Then, I present a woven narrative of the most critical moments of my journey based on the themes constructed through analysis. I would like to warn readers that some of the following sections explicitly recall experiences of trauma, which may trigger those who had a traumatic childbirth. Lastly, I conclude the study with its significance and implications.

Data Collection and Analysis: Expressive Writing and AsianCrit as an Analytical Lens

I felt the need to write down my thoughts and find a way to cope with the flashback I experienced from a traumatic caesarean section. I found myself describing the event generally but felt blocked after a few sentences. I, then, sought a writing system to help my writing become more expressive and dug deeper into the experience while being safe about the process. This is when I came across a book called *Expressive Writing: Words that Heal* (Pennebaker and Evans). The book is based on James Pennebaker's earlier work about the potential of expressive writing to help people feel better and improve their mental and physical health. Research on expressive writing shows that after just four months of writing, participants felt less stress and an improvement in their health (Baikie et al.).

Some skepticism, however, remains regarding the health benefits as a result of expressive writing. A study divided postpartum women into three groups for a randomized controlled trial: an expressive writing group, a control writing task group, and a normal care group. It found no significant difference between women in those groups. However, many mothers in the expressive writing group in the same study reported experiencing significantly less stress after writing, and they reported spending less money on health and experiencing an improvement in their quality of life (Ayers et al.). Although expressive writing may not work for all postpartum mothers, due to low feasibility (Crawley et al.), it is a viable option for those who spend fifteen minutes per day for a few days in a row to write down their thoughts, secrets, and traumas as the first step of healing.

After confirming with the IRB that self-studies, such as narrative or autoethnography, require no approval, I proceeded. Over the course of twenty-one months (from November 2020 to March 2022), I wrote in seven sessions for three consecutive days each time. The stretch over time covered changes and major events in my life; it also helped me not to focus solely on certain themes. I used the following writing prompt from Pennebaker:

> For the next 3 days, I would like for you to write about your very deepest thoughts and feeling about an extremely important emotional issue that has affected you and your life. In your writing, I'd like you to really let go and explore your very deepest emotions and thoughts. You might tie your topic to your relationships with others, including parents, lovers, friends, or relatives; to your past, your present, or your future; or to who you have been, who you would like to be, or who you are now. You may write about the same general issues or experiences on all days of writing or on different topics each day. All of your writing will be completely confidential. Don't worry about spelling, sentence structure, or grammar. The only rule is that once you begin writing, continue to do so until your time is up. (162)

After collecting twenty-one expressive writing sessions, I transferred all the data onto qualitative software to begin thematic analysis. According to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Thematic analysis can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (9). The flexibility of the analytical method allowed me to explore what my writings contained and how the core and subthemes could help me understand my experiences as I navigated through the COVID-19 pandemic with multiple identities. I took the inductive approach to analysis as I did not have particular research questions to guide (or narrow down) my interpretation of data. The six-phase framework for thematic analysis was implemented (Braun and Clarke). The initial analysis resulted in five themes: race talk, empowered voices, struggles, spaces, and eventful events.

I then looked over the data again with two questions in mind: 1) What events in life have wounded or hurt me emotionally and physically? and 2) What or who seems to be the main causes of those wounds? These questions aligned with the original prompt questions on the "very deepest emotions and thoughts" (Pennebaker 162). For each round of analysis, I used AsianCrit (Iftikar and Museus), which is an analytical framework used to explore the racialized, oppressed, and discriminated realities of Asian Americans. The framework has seven tenets:1) Asianization is a white supremacy construct; 2) transnational contexts focus on how racism shapes Asian Americans within particular contexts; 3) (re)constructive history can be used to challenge the racism experienced by Asian Americans; 4) strategic (anti)essentialism sees racism as

a social construct; 5) oppressions intersect; 6) story, theory, and praxis can be used to challenge the norms of white people and offer different perspectives; and 7) it should lead to social justice acts (Iftikar and Museus 940-941).

Findings

The second round of analysis reworked the themes into new ones relating to trauma and racism: 1) my earlier racial identity: colourism in Thai and American cultures; 2) (denied) access to spaces: immigrating while Asian; 3) being silenced during labour; and 4) baby love leads to (Asian) self-love. Using these themes as a springboard, I interwove the narrative with rich insight into the other connections I made while writing it. The narrative is also filled with raw and vulnerable feelings, which I could only present with a restoried narrative so as "to take the reader by the throat, break her heart and heal it again" (Allison 193).

In my narrative, I used all tenets of AsianCrit to understand my writing choices and how my expressive writings could be understood through the critical lens:

1. Asianization: The immigration officers, doctors, and racist people I encountered did not know the difference between me, a Thai person, and a Chinese person. Lumping us all together devalues the beautiful traditions and histories of each ethnicity. In the case of the COVID-19 outbreak, hate crimes, hate speech, and microaggressions targeted all Asian Americans and other Asians, which could be explained by limited exposure to other cultures or knowing someone from other cultures personally leading to the dehumanization in their treatment towards others.
2. Transnational contexts: Asian Americans are always seen as not belonging in the US, no matter how many generations their roots go back. As an Asian, I was discriminated against by immigration officers, who tried to prohibit me from entering the country while pregnant. One explanation could be that they were afraid that I would give birth to my child in the US, who would then be eligible for American citizenship. Unfortunately, some mothers do this for their children to have better opportunities. But because they targeted just me, an Asian pregnant woman, despite having full documentation of my study plans, I felt as if I were a baby smuggler. The unequal relationship between the US and Asian countries can help explain the discrimination that Asian immigrants experience at the border.
3. (Re)constructive history: In this article, I contribute to the collective narrative formed by Asians to tell our side of history and expose the racism experienced by Asian people.
4. Strategic (anti)essentialism: I did not feel an Asian identity until I stepped off the plane in the US. In my home country, I am just an

ordinary woman; race is never a factor. But I do now acknowledge that "race is a social construction shaped by economic, political, and social influences" (Kim 27).

5. Intersectionality: I present layers of my identities, both imposed and chosen, that are reinforced by oppression and racism and discuss how my lived experiences are influenced by them.
6. Story, theory, and praxis: The article aims to add to the literature on Asian mother-scholars during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the role of internalized racism and its effects at the personal level.
7. Commitment to social justice: I aim to use this article to advocate for other Asian immigrants who may have also experienced discrimination and racism due to COVID-19 and other systemic reasons. Voicing my experience sheds light on the dehumanizing nature of the immigration process, as well as the healthcare system, for people of colour.

The following narrative not only explores institutionalized and globalized racism towards Asians but also understands internalized racism as a product of colonialism and white supremacy. Although it is hard to admit that I hated being Asian, I want to give hope that self-hatred can be overturned with love. I also want to highlight how some of my behaviour during my teenage years (e.g., getting a nose job and skin bleaching) was a product of my internalized racism and American imperialism.

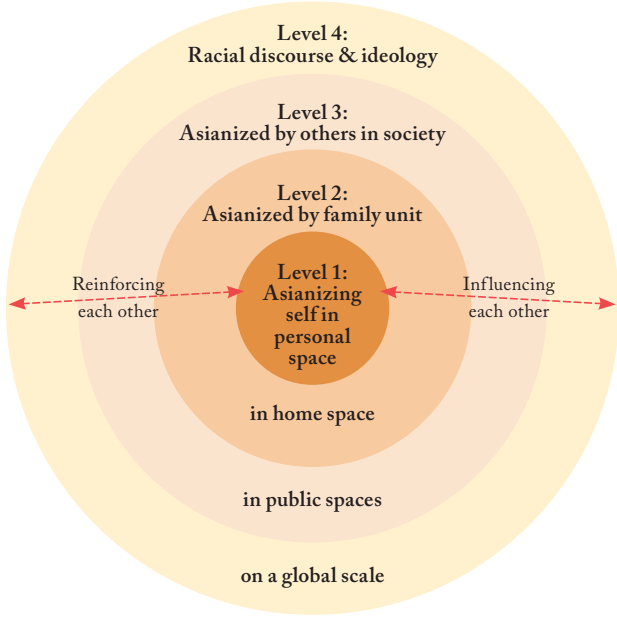

Figure 1: My conceptual model of how racism works in my experience

The figure shows different levels of racism and/or Asianization that I experience from a personal level to the global one. I strongly believe that although these are different levels of units, each one reinforces and influences the other. The lines can be blurred, and multiple levels can be at play simultaneously, as can be observed in my narrative below.

(Re)story Time: My Earlier Racial Identity: Colourism in Thai and American Culture

Ever since I was young, I always fantasized about becoming whiter and more American. In fact, many Thai women grew up using whitening cream to bleach their skin. Having whiter skin is believed to be associated with wealth; poor people working in the field and under the sun get tanned, darker skin, whereas richer people have fairer skin for not having to work outside. Trying to appear more attractive and successful, everyone, even men, uses whitening cream and limits their exposure to the sun.

I was told by many people that I was lucky to have my mother's fair skin growing up. I always tried to keep the pale look, and because of my big sister's influence, we would do a spa day each month and use household products and herbs (e.g. honey mixed with ginger) to rub on our skin to keep it fresh and clean. Having healthy and glowing skin was our goal as teenage girls, so when I developed an autoimmune disorder, which resulted in occasional rashes on my skin, boys no longer found me attractive, and women were reluctant to become friends with me. It was hard in school when we had to wear our school uniform with knee-length skirts because I would always get a rash on my calves, and it would show. With unhealthy-looking skin, I became insecure about my looks and always craved to fit in. I wanted to be the girl that people found attractive. Hollywood movies made me wish every day to become a white girl with blond hair. I thought that all my problems would disappear if I were white.

Fast forward to my first time in the US. From 2009 to 2010, Washington State was my home for one year during my exchange program. Suddenly, I was noticed by boys. I was different, and my naturally tanner skin seemed to attract their attention. I learned, then, that I wanted to be more tanned. My American host sister, who was white, would go to the tanning salon often. Being a cheerleader, she attracted many people, and they all seemed to just want to be around her. I started going to the salon as well, and I would tan so much to the point where I would just look sunburned, like a lobster, which was far from the healthy brown that I aimed for. Many boys approached me to ask for my number, and suddenly girls wanted to be my best friend. I felt popular. I felt seen.

Not long after, I flew back home. The tanned skin I got from tanning so much confused my parents. They could not fathom why someone would want

to be that tanned, and they thought that living abroad meant that I would get to have beautiful pale skin without even trying. Washington weather would have kept me pale, but I just wanted to fit in. For the first time, I found myself at a crossroads. It was the first time in my life that I questioned my identity: Am I still a Thai girl (following Thai culture and norms) or am I more of an American girl now?

That was the beginning of the confusing and constant negotiation of my identity formation. Language became a big part of my (new) identity—an Americanized Thai girl. I went on to study to become an English teacher at a large university in Thailand, and there, people saw me as an Americanized (almost) white girl. They thought that my fashion sense and American accent made me more white than Asian—as if Asian Americans were not fluent English speakers. Often only white people are considered American or capable of speaking English.

When I returned to the US for my master's degree, I was again greeted with warmth, and once again, I was exotic in white men's eyes. My skin rash never made them stop pursuing me, and I think that is part of the reason why I was more drawn to Western culture and men.

In Thailand, I would never become "Thai" beautiful. It is funny, though, that following Thai beauty standards mean you basically do not look Thai. Celebrities often get double-eyelid surgery and a nose job to get a bigger nose, along with injections to lighten their skin tone. I was just like many other girls who followed the trend, and I ended up having surgery to get a bigger nose—one that does not look so Thai.

I remember when I was thirty-five weeks pregnant with my daughter, I got a 3D ultrasound just to see what she looked like. The Thai nurses were cheering around because her nose seemed so big, like the white girls in the movie.

One nurse said: "Wow! Your baby is perfect! Look at that beautiful nose!"

"Thank you!" I replied. "I am very happy about this."

"Is her father white?"

"Yes! He is American."

I was proud to say that she took after her father—she looked so white.

(Denied) Access to Spaces: Immigrating while Asian

I was already aware of my Asianized identity in the US before COVID-19 spread across the world. However, I never felt the obvious microaggressions towards me because of my racial identity. I always felt welcomed and even popular in high school. During my master's degree in Arizona, I also felt welcomed.

In early 2020, I went back to Thailand for a semester gap before I knew which PhD program I got accepted into. I was running around the farm,

fixing up my old house, and settling myself into farm life—when one day, I realized that I was late. When I took a pregnancy test, it returned positive. I was overjoyed, and my parents were happy for me, despite not having a ring on my finger yet. I think they forgave me, or that they just had so much love for me that the Thai tradition of not having sex and pregnancy before marriage was thrown out of the window. Within a period of four months, everything developed fast. As I grew another human inside of me, COVID-19 grew even bigger. I was afraid about how I would get my pregnant body across the sea to reunite with my partner. And the uncertainty about how governments would regulate travelling and immigration policies due to COVID-19 also caused me anxiety.

Despite having all the legal documents to enter the country, I was greeted with an unwelcoming attitude from immigration officers. I had already entered the country about twenty times, but this was the first time that I got put in an interrogation room. Knowing that I only had a two-hour layover, I felt anxious about missing my next flight. After thirty minutes, an officer finally came into the room to question me. He asked the same questions five times: "Why are you here? What are you going to study? Where is it again?" Finally, I broke my politeness: "Sir, does it have anything to do with me being pregnant?" He was stunned and said, "No, it has something to do with President Trump announcing last night that student visa holders cannot enter the country." Until this day, I still could not find proof of the new policy he claimed. I felt illegal in my body. Before we parted, he said, "Make sure you don't use public assistance for baby delivery. It would be rude if you used my tax dollars when you're not a citizen." My alienated, Asianized, and criminalized body felt numb. Panting and sweating, I made it to the gate and boarded my flight.

My pregnant, almost two-hundred-pound body was overworked. I found my seat, and the lady seated next to me looked disgusted, pulled up her mask, and left her seat. That was when I felt that it was no coincidence that border control held me earlier. It is just how it was now. During the pandemic, my Asian face signalled that I am a COVID-19 super spreader and that I am no longer welcomed in public spaces.

My racial identity was amplified, and I began to hate myself. I tried to stay strong and push through, but continuous racialized experiences further reinforced my preexisting internalized racism. In the holding room, I only observed people of colour: a few Somalian-looking people, and the rest were Asian people. No whites. I was alarmed by how quickly President Trump's anti-Asian rhetoric had taken hold in the country.

Hate crime towards Asian people in the US increased because COVID-19 was believed to have first originated in Wuhan, China. People lost their jobs and their sanity during the months-long lockdown, and the Chinese and

anyone who looked like them were blamed and targeted. Although my experience at the airport was not physically traumatizing, it increased my fear and emotional distress about my well-being and how I would walk around with my half-Asian baby in my arms and feel safe again.

Being Silenced during Labour

Once I got to Phoenix, I called a recommended gynecologist to schedule an immediate appointment. I knew that the eighteen-hour flight time upset my baby, as she did have a strong reaction whenever we reached a high altitude. I was to be seen the following week, and at that point—I was at thirty-two weeks—anything could happen. I wore a mask over my face, walked into the doctor's office, and was greeted by friendly nurses and other staff members. I was shown to the examination room to be seen by my new doctor. A nurse rushed in and asked if I had just flown in from another country. Again, I wondered if they asked all new patients this question. I told her that I arrived a week ago from Thailand, and her mask lifted firmly once again. She told me that I would need to leave the premises immediately and to come back next week. I went downstairs and waited outside for Uber in the 109-farenheit Arizona heat. I felt humiliated, disrespected, and discriminated against. I just thought that it did not make sense since I was already in the facility and the rate of COVID-19 patients was much higher in Arizona than in Thailand as a whole. No possible logic could explain this, but I just kept my mouth shut and went home.

The following week, I returned and explained that I felt that I did not get treated fairly and that they should have asked me on the phone about my travels before booking me in for a physical appointment. The doctor apologized, and since he seemed nice, I kept seeing him.

After seeing him weekly for a month, I was at week forty. I felt small leakage of water on my pants, and I called the on-call nurse, and she recommended I go in. I thought that I would see my doctor soon at our weekly check-in in a few hours, so I decided to just wait at home. I went in and told him about it, and without examining or testing the water content, he told me to just go on about the regular plan he had for me at week forty, which was to do an ultrasound to check whether the baby was healthy. The baby was perfectly fine, so I just left feeling like I had asked the question about the water and maybe the doctor just thought about it and indirectly answered my question by sending me to get an ultrasound as per usual. I was too intimidated by the authority of American doctors and nurses to voice my concerns and ask further questions.

Nighttime came, and I felt so much pain. I decided to go to the hospital, and the nurse quickly confirmed that the water was in fact fluid from the amniotic sac. The doctor on call was an African American doctor. I felt more comfortable

knowing that education research often praised teachers of colour for advocating for their students of colour. He asked for my birth plan and knew that I wanted a vaginal delivery with an epidural. I did my research and felt that this was the right choice for me. As I was screaming my lungs out because of the painful contractions, I begged him to administer an Epidural as we had planned; instead, he just stood there looking at me and said, "It is only six centimetres wide. I can't believe that your pain tolerance is this low." He then called in a specialist to do the procedure.

I felt insulted, but the guilt was stronger. I thought about how much of a bad and selfish mother I already was. I received the epidural I asked for and never saw that doctor again. Finally, I remember shaking uncontrollably and feeling cold. I was told that I was infected and needed to go to the operating room for an emergency caesarean section.

Baby Love Leads to (Asian) Self-Love

I would never have imagined, though, that having my own baby would fix internalized racism for me. I remember thinking that she is perfect. I loved her big doll eyes, her wide cheeks, tiny lips, and small nose. No matter how many times I looked at her, she stayed gorgeous. She presented a new definition of perfection and I loved her wholeheartedly. We have been told that she is a perfect blend between the two of us, and I really do agree. Her Asian features are beautifully placed on her face, and I cannot love her dark hair more. Suddenly, I realized that being Asian is enough.

The immense love that I have for her reflects onto me. During the early days of breastfeeding as well as holding and kissing her tiny hands, I would often go to the bathroom, look at my own face in the mirror, and say, "I love me. I am beautiful." People kept making comments about which of her features resembled mine, and without thinking, I examined my face in the mirror, found each of her features, and realized that I was perfect as I was. My baby helped me transcend the internalized racism I felt towards myself.

Watching her grow has been the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. She is capable and smart and makes me realize that all my success must have come from the unconditional love that my parents had for me. Although experiencing racism and discrimination can break our hearts, our spirits remain strong from the love we receive from family.

My experience gives me hope that if we diversify schools and workplaces and have others truly get to know us, Asian Americans and Asian people, they would not be able to hate us anymore. I hope that mother-scholars can come together and create a safer society for every child to feel safe and thrive in. Asian Americans should not feel fear and discrimination in their own neighbourhoods.

Discussion and Implications

The "new normal" looks different for different people. For me, I experienced unprecedented direct microaggressions and was targeted by immigration control, doctors, and white people. Although the incidents (so far) have only been verbal—nothing that would fall under the category of a hate crime—the impact has made my mothering experience and the forging of my new identity as a mother-scholar much harder. Protecting myself and my child from racism during the pandemic has been challenging, but I believe that through all of this, I have learned to love myself and my Asian self for who I am and how I look. I believe that if my baby can change my point of view about my race and make me love myself, as individuals, we can do more to confront racism.

Mothers may talk more on social media and multiple platforms about the power of love and the importance of understanding of one another. But I also believe that to do race work and identity work, one must understand oneself and one's darkest secrets and thoughts before becoming fully ready to take on advocacy tasks. Through expressive writing, I discovered many dark secrets I tried to hide (e.g., sexual abuse as a child). We all have baggage that we carry with us every day in life. Examining trauma and negative experiences through writing helps us to gain clarity that we may begin to take control of the narrative, not to mention an improvement in mental and physical health.

I believe that expressive writing helped me to control my anxiety when I could not use my medication due to breastfeeding. I also visited the doctor fewer times. Future research on academic mothers should examine the benefits of expressive writing for them.

Psychologists recommend being direct about the effects of internalized racism in order to help Asian Americans identify it, confront it, and then develop a healthier body image and a better overall sense of wellbeing (Chopra). In terms of my internalized racism, I thankfully believe that I am on the healing path towards self-love and acceptance. The power of expressive writing and narrative inquiry has greatly helped me with this task.

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MARGARITA LEVINE

The Biopolitical Corporeality of the White Female Body: Exploring the Experiences of Women Descended from Central and Eastern Europe Residing in the United States

This study draws upon twelve interviews with women of Central and Eastern European descent currently residing in Los Angeles County, California. It utilizes the concepts of "biopolitics" and "empire" to explore how various scales of power generate the ideology of white moral motherhood and connotations of race in the socio-political context of the participants' places of origin and the United States. The findings show that reproductive measures, policies, and regulations deracialize by default, reinforcing the hierarchy of motherhood experiences with the top belonging to the white, heterosexual, middle-class women. By identifying race-blind and institutionalized descriptions of the female body and the way women explain reproductive politics, the study achieves three goals. It revisits women's constructs of the ideal motherhood, explores why race is removed from their paradigm of thinking, and illustrates how white supremacy lives in and among the transnational female residents.

Introduction

This article examines how the white female body has been structured by its biological characteristics in such an intricate way as to define differentiated social collectives that is turning whiteness and white motherhood into a stagnant, hegemonic ideal in Central and Eastern European regions. Another essential objective of this study is to show how its participants view, understand, and assign meanings to their female bodies within the biopolitical agenda of their countries of origin. Two other goals are to reveal why in Central and Eastern Europe the racialized female body is mainly understood as an

ethnocultural body and to illustrate how whiteness is "called out" only after relocation to the United States.

This study also explores how ideas around biopolitics (Foucault) and empire (Hardt and Negri) shape white, heterosexual, middle-upper-class women into model female citizens. It is done with the help of the social welfare that serves as one of the primary agents of socialization for the female population in Central and Eastern European regions. These concepts reveal issues related to the docility projects with female citizens, white privilege, and a race-blind environment. They help to uncover the invisible work done to personal narratives to corrupt the meaning-making process about the female body and control women's reproductive behaviour, which later results in the diffusion of these constructs across nations and time.

Demographic Crisis

The reason why white female motherhood and the female body have recently become the centre of biopolitics in Central and Eastern Europe is due to the demographic crisis. In these regions, demography is often reduced to re-production alone and is referred to as the "women's domain" (Paxson 210). Two main socio-political factors have resulted in the rise of transnational discourses and practices related to the white female body in Central and Eastern Europe: the aging population as well as the decline in fertility rates. For example, the fertility rates in most Central and Eastern European countries are below replacement level, as low as 1.3 and high as 1.7 or 1.8 births per woman (Arkhangelski et al. 11; Philipov et al. 209), and the number of people aged sixty-five and above is expected to increase by about 67 per cent, from 76 million to about 128 million in 2050 (Lisiankova and Write 77). There are projections about the further growth of the aging population in Europe: for every hundred people of working age, there will be fifty-three individuals aged sixty-five and older by 2050 (UN 20).

Historical events such as wars, famine, ethnic deportations, and refugee flights have also caused a long-standing demographic decline in Central and Eastern Europe (Romaniuk and Gladun) as have changes in the reproductive behaviour of the European population stemming from changing family values as well as increased access to modern contraceptives (Aassve et al. 317; Stankuniene and Jasilioniene 705–742; Romaniuk and Gladun 330).

Demographic Panic

One of the most recent reasons for the demographic panic is the heightened rates of youth emigration from Europe (Hoff; Stankuniene and Jasilioniene). Another reason is associated with a fear of refugees and "evacuees" (Slogar and Chapple 25) coming from war-torn, non- European regions, who it is believed will replace the European population (Douglass et al.; Klaus et al.; Melegh).

This demographic panic is also based on the increased number of people of colour residing in Europe, the cradle of whiteness. On the one hand, these imaginaries challenge the hegemonic status of Europeans as global colonizers; on the other hand, they draw attention to the European authorship and proliferation of racial discourse across nations, including the United States (Smith 7). Europe has a long history of viewing ethnic minority groups as different. Their presence is turned into acute cultural or religious problems that need to be resolved. De Genova et al. connect this history to the Nazi period and Stalinism. However, the researchers refer only to the genocide of Jews. With dissimulation of race and minorities also come sentiments of past European Enlightenment and morals with a paltry recognition of racism in some nation-states but a dominant perspective that racism is a completely "foreign" idea, brought from the west.

Literature Review

Pronatalist Measures

In response to the demographic decline governments try to increase the birthrate by implementing measures that affect the value orientation, attitudes, reproductive behaviour, and understanding of motherhood among the female population. Consequently, the physiology of the female body becomes the state's biopolitical focus, as it tries to encourage more women to give birth. This biopolitical project is most apparent in the case of pronatalist welfare.

Overall, the European pronatalist strategies applied to boost birth rates are either incentive based or coercive in character (Bradatan and Firebaugh 182). The most common incentives are financial support for childbearing and employment opportunities for mothers. For example, the Russian Federation attempted to increase fertility in 2007 through the Maternity Capital Program (Slonimchyk and Yurko 2). Hungary encourages motherhood by providing financial support and childcare programs (EU 9). The program Family 500 Plus in Poland promotes multiple childbearing and many others (Wisniewska et al. 490). Although pronatalist programs and access to new methods of contraception in many European countries are a progressive step towards women's wellbeing, it negatively affects the birthrates in several countries.

However, limiting access to new resources of contraception and restricting access to abortions, or criminalizing them, are regarded as coercive state measures. For example, Romania and Bulgaria went through a period of abortion abolition and enforcement of legal procedures to reduce divorces and illegal abortions, believing that those were effective ways to improve the demographic situation in their countries (Teitelbaum 405). More recent coercive measures in European countries prioritize European-born women over foreign-born ones. The arrival of more foreign-born women is believed to

result in a significant burden on social welfare, including housing, childcare and employment support, education and training privileges, and other benefits (Burgoon et al. 6–7; Taylor-Gooby et al. 10). Although there is great debate about how to accommodate the needs of the women in Europe regardless of their citizenship status the primary merit for being eligible for any benefits still revolves around ethnic or racial closeness to Europeanness. Many European countries that were former colonial powers have deep-seated institutional and individual racist practices. With the rise of the extreme right, neo-Nazi groups, and nationalistic political parties in some European nation-states, the race-migration nexus has amplified and exposed old and new routes of racial institutionalization (Naidu 392–393). Most importantly, this political line included the construction of the ideology of moral motherhood or ideal motherhood (Malacrida 101–102). The focal point of these ideologies has been to reinforce childbearing and parenting as the primary duties of female citizens, with white European motherhood becoming the paradigm.

Dispositif and Gyniatric Apparatus

To understand the constructs of white moral motherhood, it is imperative to revisit the biopolitical mechanisms and strategies involved in developing this ideology. Foucault examined the ways biopolitics incorporates "dispositif" or "population apparatus" ("The Birth of Biopolitics" 19) to govern human life, including the physiological processes. Other studies applied the notion of the "gyniatric apparatus" (Gunn and Douglas Vavrus 113) to show how this power mode draws on the reproductive system to build collective discourses about the female body as abject. This apparatus is used mainly in the research that addresses the biological surveillance of women's lives in the discourses of fertility, birthing, menstruation, and other topics (Christler; Gamella et al.; Vlasenko). Other feminist research also explores how national biopowers employ "gyniatric apparatuses" and "natal panopticism" (Garwood 19–28) to maintain patriarchal gender-related norms across nations. This biopolitical mechanism scrutinizes the female body discourse on parenting and employment (Patterson and Forbes 131). According to this research, drawing on the female body's physiological capacity to give birth, biopower creates a system of state regulations and policies that assign women to childrearing, making it their primary role in society. In the guise of providing care to female citizens, biopower limits women to specific responsibilities in their domestic and professional spheres (Gedvilaite-Kordusiene et al.; Sereda). In this manner, it enforces the ideology of moral motherhood or ideal motherhood (Malacrida 101–102) upon female populations and develops a rhetoric of motherhood normality (Knowles). According to this group of researchers, the ideology of moral or ideal motherhood includes such characteristics as bearing children as well as caring for the child's development and wellbeing. Caroline Knowles

also outlines how ideological and administrative regulations speculate on the medical discourse regarding how a disrupted mother-child bond negatively affects the child's mental and physiological development. This moral ideology is replicated in all spheres of women's lives, including the biosurveillance of religious migrant women, who must be emancipated through access to reproductive services and participation in mandatory medical exams.

Theoretical Approach

This study builds on Michael Hard and Antonio Negri's concept of "empire" and Foucault's concept of "biopolitics" to understand the ways Central and Eastern European women who are currently residing in the United States understand the female body. Previously, a biopolitical framework was widely used in studies related to the issues of social reproduction and citizenship (Rose 134–137), the biomedical surveillance of citizens (Crampton 394), and the biomedical discourse of totalitarian regimes (Prozorov 6). However, these research projects predominantly focused on examining national discourses and practices on the body of citizens (Kudaibergenova; Stella and Nartova). In this study, biopolitics is applied to the female body to demonstrate how power agents trigger docility. This evidence is derived from the interviews with the participants who originated from the studied European regions and moved to the US. Docility is accomplished through a multilayered system of social welfare policies and a neoliberal context of life in the participants' past and current residencies. As a security technology, biopower supports the model ethnic populations and excludes the ones who do not fit the schema. As a part of immigration procedures, the biopower has a mandate to guard the biological patterns of the migrating female residents and perpetuates state-driven racism transnationally.

Additionally, this project uses Hard and Negri's idea of "empire," which presents itself as an "order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity" (xiv). The authors of the concept emphasize how the empire sustains hierarchies within a population, exemplifying a supranational power with a dispersed network around the globe, which confines its loyal female members to contest its legitimacy and influence using various mechanisms. One common way of doing so is through the encouragement to consume niche products and services that dictate what female body is most socially valued. In this regard, the notion of empire helps to debunk how these pervasive schemas of governance control women's lives transnationally by preserving a hegemonic position of the female body as white, heterosexual, and reproductive. Another way of influencing the female population is via the social welfare programs that support reproductive intentions and behaviour. In this manner the "empire" sustains and broadens

the number of its female followers around the globe.

Few studies used the concept of "empire" to explore the female body in transnational maternal discourse. Hard and Negri applied it in only two contexts: bodies incorporated by empire for exploitation (Empire 410) and bodies under obsessive scrutiny and regulation in religious fundamentalism through sets of dietary and bodily restrictions, sexual mandates and prohibitions, as well as practices of mortification and rejection (Commonwealth 32–33). Therefore, the present work is based on the synthesis of a theoretical and conceptual framework to reveal the less known constructs about the white female body discourse and motherhood that women acquire through the pronatalist welfare in their countries of origin and the neoliberal principles of mothering in the US.

Methodological Approach

Research Design, Participants, and Recruitments

This is a phenomenological study that uses a transnational feminist methodology (Fernandes 11–12) to explore the white female body as a site of knowledge about another country.

Twelve participants were recruited via a snowball sampling by distributing flyers among friends and acquaintances who resided in Los Angeles County. The participants were chosen according to the following criteria:

1. eighteen years of age or older, including sixty-five-year-old women and older
2 identify as female and heterosexual
3. born in one of the following countries: Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Slovakia, or Ukraine
4. moved to the US as adults (eighteen years of age, including sixty-five-year-old women and older)
5. currently reside in Los Angeles County; and
6. speak and write in English

Instruments

There are four sections of the interview protocol. Section one includes eleven questions about the demographic information of the participants. Section two has one question about the participants' personal views on the primary purpose of the female body. Section three includes fourteen questions about biopolitics in the participants' country of origin, and section four has fourteen questions on the participants' reproductive intentions and behaviour in the US.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

The data analysis for this study had the following steps:

1. transcribing all interviews to convert them into digital files;
2. designing the participants' demographic portrait;
3. creating of informational profiles for each participant by reducing their interview material to the most pertinent parts;
4. sorting participants' informational profiles into two groups: individuals from Central Europe and individuals from Eastern Europe;
5. comparing and colour coding of participants' informational profiles on common themes and subthemes within the defined groups and between them;
6. interpreting of the themes and subthemes to develop a comprehensive analytic framework; and
7. coding the words and phrases in specific quotations to illustrate the findings of this work.

Findings

Defining the Primary Purpose of the Female Body

The participants spoke about the primary purpose of the female body without referring to their racial and ethnic background. Women largely discussed their body discourse based on biopolitical scripts penetrating all spheres of their lives in the places of their origin. Their bodily self-conceptualization had two types of connotations: collectivistic and individualistic. Most meanings were related to the idea that the body should be engaged in a reproductive service to their country. A few participants, though, thought the female body had a unique purpose unrelated to the duty-bound narrative common in their societies of origin.

All participants recognize that childbearing is the primary purpose of the female body. They perceived it as a mission, illustrating an internalized sense of reproductive duty, which they acquired in their countries of birth. For example, Helena, fifty-one and from the Czech Republic, associated the female's body purpose with the "reproduction of generations." Another participant Solomeya, seventy-one and from Ukraine, similarly believed that the female body is for the "continuation of generations." Others said that the female body is not an individual possession but "intended and given by nature" (Trayana, fifty and from Bulgaria) and "cannot be complete until it gives birth to a child" (Yana, forty-one and from Russia). The interviewees' responses suggest that the female body has to be treated as an entity with a predestined purpose that benefits society.

Only two participants talked about the primary purpose of their female body, contextualizing it as an individual choice, dream, or goal to become a mother. For example, Rainbow, thirty-eight and from Hungary, said that she made several attempts to get pregnant, and finally her dream to have a child came true. In her opinion, "The body is for giving birth and breastfeeding first of all." Similar to her, Flower, thirty-seven and from Hungary, believed that "the body is for taking care of children, bearing them, and then taking care of them afterwards, for being there for them." Such answers illustrate how the ideology of moral motherhood is enacted by women who assume that the primary purpose of their body is to bear children.

Reproductive Intentions and Behaviour in Eastern Europe

The following sections explore the biopolitical blueprint in pronatalist welfare, the constructs of white motherhood through time and space, women's reproductive behaviour and experiences shaped by being white. The findings strongly suggest that the biopolitical goal of leading white female citizens into docility had been successfully achieved. The participants demonstrated the habit of normalizing their female body by relating to the social realm via biological capacity to give birth, endorsed by accredited institutions, such as social welfare. They shared that most Eastern European countries inherited the Soviet social welfare system, which included financial compensation to mothers for bearing children and a secured workplace during maternity leave. For example, the oldest participant, Solomeya, seventy-one and from Ukraine, recalled that at the time of her youth, women received financial compensation for bearing a child: a payment before and after giving birth as well as a monthly salary for one year of maternity leave. After independence, Ukraine devised a reformed plan to increase fertility rates. Kviatoslava, forty-six and from Ukraine, recalled that there were changes in childbearing compensation in the 1990s. The state provided substantial financial support for every child born in the family. The interviewee, Yana, forty-one and from Russia, shared that Russia had a similar program to the Ukrainian welfare program, called Maternity Capital. As she explained: "Definitely, it boosted the childbearing in the country. In my time, many women went for two or more kids. This money helped to promote their financial stability. You got compensation only when the kids reached adolescence." Similarly, Olivia, thirty-one and from Russia, recalled: "In our district, we had a one-year paid maternity leave and one-time compensation for a child right before birth." Alyona, thirty-one and from Belarus, spoke about a similar program in her country. These experiences show how robust pronatalist measures condition white female citizens in Eastern Europe into believing that childbearing is the female body's sole function. The participants spoke nostalgically about these programs when life for white mothers was more comfortable.

Reproductive Intentions and Behaviour in Central Europe

This section focuses on how social and economic investments in the Central European region try to organize nation-states by distributing resources along racial lines. The shared history of pronatalist financial support and employment accommodations have become a bridging point for white mothers. Women who originated from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary compare incentive-based welfare endorsing childbearing to the Eastern European system of the past decades. While the states of Bulgaria and the Czech Republic currently struggle but maintain paid maternity leave, Hungary turns to coercive measures. The states in question have cut monthly maternity leave payments and exchanged them for tax deduction. As Maria, thirty-eight and from Bulgaria, said: "In the first year of maternity leave, you were paid ninety percent of your salary. You could also return to work without being afraid that your job will be taken." Even though two participants Helena, fifty-one from Czech Republic, and Trayana, fifty from Bulgaria, did not give birth in their countries of origin, they discussed what their close relatives and family friends experienced giving birth there. They confirmed that they have welfare analogous to other Eastern Europeans. Lea, fifty-four and from Bulgaria, thought the Bulgarian state is not doing enough for mothers. She talked about how the government recently reduced payments to women and suggested mothers should rely on grandparenting as the primary source of financial support and care for their children.

Flower, thirty-seven, and from Hungary, was concerned about the unfavourable conditions for motherhood in her country of origin due to the white supremacist agenda in politics, which touches all spheres of life, especially motherhood and women's position in the country. She noted: "After we joined the European Union, motherhood was not endorsed in any way, and treated as if it was a woman's issue only. Women who want to have kids felt they were not protected and very vulnerable." These changes are problematic since they contradict EU requirements such as guaranteed welfare for women. The presented study contests the social and institutional status or identity of the white female citizens who are protected by economic and political privileges. Participants' reflections show how identity or perception of identity can earn access to resources. It is essential to highlight that privileged status or identity is not solely related to financial means but also self-worth, visibility, recognition, and a sense of entitlement.

Views on Reproductive Intentions and Behaviour in the US

This section examines the participants' collective subjectivity. This approach aims to problematize the deracialized identity of interviewees as a group by discussing how white racial framing consistently appears in their observations, comments, and interpretations of other women's experiences around them after relocation to the US. The participants see the tendency toward numerous families in the US compared to their origin countries. Most interviewees stated that in America women's intentions to give birth are directly connected to the cultural and ethnic identity of female residents the participants observe every day. Some participants discussed how certain ethnicities could pass as white whereas others could not. They also said that Latina, Jewish and other women of colour tended to marry and have kids earlier than white women, who tended to get married and have families after thirty. For example, Lea fifty-four and from Bulgaria, admitted the following: "Women from South America have family and kids at a young age. For them, family and children are a priority, and then comes all the rest." These answers reveal that the participants also reflect on the cultural differences in motherhood in the US. Many concluded that American women do not give birth while being married as much as women in European countries. As Yana, forty-one and from Russia, shared: "Women have kids here whenever they can, whenever they can afford that, and this is great." When commenting on motherhood in the US, some participants lamented that American women prefer to postpone childbearing to later ages. For example, Daria, sixty-three and from Ukraine, stated: "I feel that late childbearing, like in America, does not work for anybody well: both for women, their children, and grandparents. It is difficult to communicate because of a big generational gap. As a grandparent, you are useless." Such an opinion suggests that the participants' countries of birth influence the way women perceive and understand parental intentions and behaviour of American women.

Most participants had difficulty defining whether the government endorses childbearing in the US. They compared welfare in their countries of origin with that available in the US. The women admitted that they do not see much support for mothers in the US, including a short maternity leave and little financial support for single mothers or low-income families. They were also concerned by the lack of accommodations for working mothers with very young children, such as affordable childcare and employment security. The participants thought the difficulties of balancing career and motherhood in the US were harder than in the countries of their origin. For example, Rainbow, thirty-eight and from Hungary, said: "It breaks my heart when women prefer the office and hire somebody to take care of their infants, or they drop them at a nursery for the entire day. To choose an office over a human being is a strange choice for me." This answer signifies the struggle to

accept that the self-entrepreneurial type of motherhood is another way to be a parent in the country of their current residency.

Some participants saw a lack of bonds between parents and children in American society. As the participant, Alyona, said: "No bonds means no responsibilities for each other. I am saddened by what I see in America." Some women were also not at ease with the number of divorced and remarried people. Flower, thirty-seven and from Hungary, had this to say: "People marry and remarry here and there. Divorces are a new normal. They are very messy. The kids are tossed here and there." The participants had difficulty understanding the various forms of partnership in the US and the high number of divorces. In their countries of origin, the nuclear family was recognized as the only legitimate one and placed greater importance in the grandmothering role.

Discussion

Intersectionality

The first research section examines how the participants assign meanings to their female bodies following the socially valued scripts of heterosexuality and whiteness. They do that via identifying with their European coethnic groups who are all educated and middle class.

Self-Conceptualization

The second research section taps into the core meanings of the white female body. The study shows that the participants believed the primary purpose of the female body is to reproduce. Two women stated that motherhood and children were their dream experiences. Some also described the female body as unique, and it served a different role for every woman.

The third and fourth research sections examine various aspects of biopolitics in the interviewees' past and current residency. Previous literature provides some ideas on how the nation-states rely on the female population as a source of biological capital to balance their demographic development (Ongur). The outcomes of the study show that both in the communist era and in the European Union, the social role of the female citizens was primarily perceived via their reproductive ability. This biopolitical approach brought about positive side-effects for the regimes, such as a docile female population, which secured a patriarchal throughout Europe. However, evidence suggests a significant recent reduction in programs supporting mothers in Central European countries. The incentive-based programs and employment accommodations were significantly reduced or converted into tax deductions, putting mothers in an often precarious situation.

The impact of continuous biopolitical pressure was also acutely evident in

the participants' observations of motherhood after their relocation to the US. The results revealed that the participants resented neoliberal principles of self-entrepreneurial mothering in the US and favoured state-endorsed social welfare programs, similar to those in their countries of origin. This finding explains how internalized norms live in and among white, middle-class, and heterosexual female residents. Such views on the female body and the role it plays in society coexist with the abundance of related ideas in the multicultural US, preserving patriarchal and racial female body discourse for generations.

Redomestication of the Female Body

Current scholarship (Repo) indicates that far-right regional governments supported by social media in EU members have reversed the policies that ensured women's freedoms and financial independence. The results mentioned above are consistent with the report *The EU Member States Under the Spotlight*, published in 2015, which discusses the violation of women's rights in many EU members, including the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Hungary (Carvalho 11). The redomestication of the female population at present is also a pivotal biopolitical line in Eastern Europe. It is evident in the participants' answers related to the popularization of incentive-based policies that they condition women to bear more children, which conserves the collective discourse that the primary role of the female body is to reproduce. One more interesting result is related to the issues of white female docility and entitlement in the context of reduced pronatalist policies. The evidence above indicates how white identity and high socioeconomic status in Central and Eastern Europe are bound to state welfare. However, once this privilege equilibrium is challenged, it triggers participants' internalized sense of entitlement and status.

Future Studies

Future research may explore various dimensions of knowledge production about the ideological constructs around the white female body. One way to develop this topic is by exploring what strategies women of this racial and ethnocultural background use to deny, defend, or avoid addressing racism. Future research may also examine the issues related to white privilege in the context of the current Ukrainian exodus.

Limitations

There are a few limitations of the study that could be resolved by various means in the future studies. Most of the participants who took part in this project were educated and middle-class women. It would have been helpful to include working-class women in the study.

Another limitation of the study is the ethnic and sexual representation of the study population. All the participants identified as white heterosexual women and belonged to dominant ethnic groups in their countries of origin; thus, having more participants from minority groups would be important. By overcoming these limitations, future studies can develop a broader perspective on the racialized female body discourse as well as a better understanding of motherhood in the transnational realm.

Conclusion

The article has focused on how women of Central and Eastern European descent who currently live in Los Angeles County, California, interrogate their personal female body discourse through their experience of transnational residency. This research aims to fill the gaps within existing literature by incorporating a transnational paradigm of knowledge about the female body and the role it plays in societies of the participants' countries of origin as well as the US. It explores how their personal body narrative is affected in nuanced ways by institutionalized and racialized narratives existing in the context of the white biopolitical corporeality of their home countries. The study contributes to the scholarship about the diverse nature of transnational body discourses and practices as they are formed in a particular historical and political context. It highlights the effects of biopolitical governance on the female residents of these European regions via the ideology of white moral motherhood which is based on the biological features of their female body. The findings reveal that adherence to the white moral ideology includes the belief that giving birth is a duty of female citizens, adhering to state regulations, feeling entitled to welfare accommodations despite having high socioeconomic status, and lastly, being aware of their privileged racial and ethnic history and identity. Since the influence of moral ideology overpowers the participants' constructs, they believe the neoliberal approach toward motherhood is insufficient to accommodate mothers' needs.

The study opens new facets of the Foucauldian theorization of biopolitics and Hard and Negri's concept of "empire" in their implication for the female body and how it is conditioned by state welfare policies as well as a market-driven economy. The current research applies these concepts as analytical tools to encourage racial theorization concerning practices of the female body. As the outcomes of this research project show, the concepts of "empire" and "biopower" join their forces to create "gyniatric apparatus" – the most reliable and effective way of managing and controlling the female population. The joined forces create more sophisticated ways of manipulating the female population by targeting the meaning-making process of the female body and influencing women's perception and behaviour. The powers sustain the

patterns of the institutional framework of understanding and representing the white female body, which travels with transnational female residents around the globe. This apparatus creates a hierarchy of female bodies in which the white one remains on top.

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LAUREN MCCLAIN AND NATASHA GERSTENSCHLAGER

Being an Academic Mother during a Pandemic: The Roles of Home and Work on Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic affected life for everyone. However, as mothers tend to be the primary caregivers and default parents, early research has shown that mothers were responsible for a disproportionate share of work related to children during the pandemic. Given the oppositional identities of professional academic work and mothering, this increase in parenting for mothers naturally affected their work as academics and likely negatively affected their mental health. Faculty mothers of colour had the added burden of operating in a racist institution as well as contending with racial unrest, an antagonistic president at the time, and higher rates of mortality among Black and brown people from COVID-19. In this project, we use an intersectional approach to evaluate the effects of COVID-19 on academic mothers through the lens of race and age of youngest child, focusing on heightened anxiety and poorer mental health. We utilized a survey administered to collegiate faculty in the United States. We share results from our mixed-methods study, highlighting both quantitative and qualitative results to better tell the story of academic mothers during the pandemic and how these roles during this time affected their career and mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed life for everyone. From stay-at-home orders, virtual schooling for children, closed childcare facilities, and working from home, our once segmented lives began to co-exist in the same physical spaces. Most people felt the impact of these changes, but it has been argued that mothers have been affected the most. Mothers tend to be the primary caregivers and the default parents (Collins), and during the time of school shutdowns and daycare closures—combined with work-at-home orders for most professional careers and the impossibility of getting childcare help from grandparents or others outside the home—early research has shown that women took on a disproportionate share of helping children with virtual

school and caring for children during normal work hours, forcing them to cut back their work hours. They were more likely to be working on two tasks at once and more likely to be interrupted during a larger share of the day (see Andrew et al. for a thorough discussion). In the academic arena, where balancing research, teaching, and service was already a challenge, the pandemic exacerbated the varying abilities of mothers with children at home to spend their time on what is often needed most for tenure and promotion—research (Sallee, Ward, and Wolf-Wendel; Tambling, Tomkunas et al.; Langin). Professional academic work and mothering are oppositional identities: "The attributes and behaviors that define the ideal fulfillment of one identity are in direct conflict with those that optimally fulfill a second, also important, identity" (Hodges and Park, 2). Oppositional identities are associated with poorer mental health, as individuals, in this case academic mothers, struggle to be successful in both roles. This is especially true in the context of a pandemic, which places increased demands on academic mothers.

Simultaneously, the nation reckoned with racial injustice in the wake of the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Brianna Taylor, which heighted anxiety for people of colour (Burch and Jacobs). Furthermore, COVID-19 and the response to it have been racialized. Chinese Americans were more likely to experience racism in the form of microaggressions and violence, since the virus was first discovered in China. COVID-19 mortality rates are higher for racial and ethnic minorities than for whites (Gross et al.) due to comorbidities, such as higher rates of hypertension in Blacks and diabetes in South Asians (Chung and Li; Devakumar et al.; Go et al.). Although faculty of colour may be more insulated from racialized factors that have hurt communities of colour during the pandemic—such as not having health insurance, becoming unemployed, working frontline jobs that increase exposure, living in congested households, or being undocumented and thus less likely to seek care for a COVID-19 infection—they may be more likely to have family and friends who are contending with those issues. All of this adds to the stress and worry faculty of colour feel (Goldmann et al.). These pandemic-related and current event factors coexist among the backdrop of academia, which has been characterized for its underrepresentation of racial minorities and the more challenging ladder faculty of colour have to climb to get to the higher ranks (Griffin; Perna; Webber and Gonzalez Canche). In this project, we use an intersectional approach to evaluate the effects of COVID-19 on academic mothers through the lens of race and age of youngest child, focusing on heightened anxiety and poorer mental health. We utilized a survey administered to collegiate faculty in the United States. This dataset employs both quantitative and qualitative questions and uses a mixed-methods approach. We also use an intersectional lens to examine the ways in which faculty mothers of colour fare compared to faculty mothers who are white,

considering they work in racist and sexist institutions and live in a racist and sexist country (i.e., the US). To build racial equity, we need to examine how race and gender operate simultaneously to affect the experiences of mothers in the academy. We anticipate readers of this research to be academic mothers, particularly those of marginalized communities, and academic administrators. We want to present the results and ask this community to consider how the stories presented resonate with them, how their personal stories are incongruous with the stories shared, and why we generally saw similar stories presented across races for academic mothers. We invite you to continue this conversation with us and in your institutions to inspire change.

Race, Gender, and Parenthood in Academia

As of 2018, of the 1.5 million faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the US, 40 per cent were white men, 35 per cent were white women, 7 per cent were Asian/Pacific Islander men, 5 per cent were Asian/Pacific Islander women, and 3 per cent each were Black men, Black women, Hispanic men, and Hispanic women (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics). Although it is clear that there is a racial and gender imbalance in university faculty overall, it is even more telling by rank in that women outnumber men in the role of assistant professor (54 per cent), instructor (56 per cent), and lecturer (55 per cent) positions, and whites hold 80 per cent of professor positions. Research has shown that women and faculty of colour are less likely to be promoted and are more likely to leave university positions than are white men due to barriers in retention and advancement (see Griffin for full review of literature). Women and faculty of colour are often not taken as seriously as white men. For faculty women of colour in particular, research shows that they spend more time dealing with students who challenge their authority (Martinez et al.; Pittman; Tuitt et al.), colleagues who are not as supportive or devalue their work (Gonzales and Terosky; Turner and Myers), and administration who demand they engage in more service work to satisfy diversity requirements on committees or tackle diversity initiatives (Padilla; Tierney and Bensimon; Turne; Turner et al.), in addition to thinking about their clothing, hair, or tone so they are seen as scholarly (Ford). Women and faculty of colour spend more time on teaching, service, and advising and less time on research than white male faculty (Bellas and Toutkoushian; Misra et al.; Thompson; Turner et al.), although that distribution in time is often not preferred by them (Winslow). Women receive requests for internal (department, college, and university) service more often than men and white faculty (Guarino and Borden; O'Meara et al.) and often take on a mothering role with students who seek them out for emotional support (Griffin).

Historically, the academy has been designed by and for white men who are childfree or who have stay-at-home wives to tend to housework and childcare so that their sole focus is on their work (Williams). For women who intend to become or who are mothers, navigating academia can be especially challenging. Lewis Coser argues that universities are "greedy institutions" that "seek exclusive and undivided loyalty" (6). Wolf-Wendel and Ward argue that along with universities, parenthood is also a greedy institution. Women's biological clock and the tenure clock are ticking at the same time for most women who intend to have children, presenting competing demands on women's time and attention (Wolf-Wendel and Ward), especially early in women's careers and when their children are young. Taking an intersectional approach, we can understand that faculty women of colour experience the dual burdens of serving in an institution that marginalizes them as women and scholars of colour (Perna).

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Changes to Work-Home Life

Extensive literature shows that prior to the pandemic, women who are mothers experience a motherhood penalty, even in academia (Wolf-Wendel and Ward), in terms of salary, retention, promotion, research productivity, and demands on their time (Griffin; Guarino and Borden; Kitchener; Misra, Lundquist, and Templer). The business model of academia (Bunds and Giardina) has resulted in mothers in particular feeling like they "have to do more, be more, and struggle to feel 'enough' in any of their roles" (Burk, Mausolf, and Oakleaf, 226). The pandemic heightened anxiety among mothers, who also took on the disproportionate share of caring for children and helping school-aged children with virtual school or homeschooling (Collins et al.). Mothers also saw an increase in time spent doing housework and less time enjoying leisure activities (Burk, Mausolf, and Oakleaf). Dealing with a global pandemic full of uncertainty, a shift in work responsibilities via online teaching and a hampered ability to conduct research, a greater set of demands at home, and a lack of boundary between work and home life and has been overwhelming for mothers.

Fathers and childfree women and men experienced some of this, too, especially if they are caretakers of aging parents, and their experience is important as well. However, our focus here is on academic mothers with children living in their household. As academic mothers of young children ourselves, we felt the strains of the pandemic on our home and work lives. The vast literature that has emerged in just two years on the impact of the pandemic clearly shows that academic mothers have bore its brunt, so our focus here is to examine their stories through a mixed-methods study, which focuses on academic mothers' mental health. We specifically examine the various

experiences of mothers by considering the age of their youngest child and their race.

The Current Study

The current study uses a mixed-method approach to examine the relationship between home and work experiences during the pandemic and the mental health of academic mothers while specifically examining the age of the women's youngest child as well as their race. We expect that academic mothers, regardless of race, will have experienced declines in mental health and increases in anxiety during the pandemic. We also expect mothers of young children and mothers of colour to experience poorer mental health than mothers of older children and white mothers. Finally, we anticipate mothers of colour and mothers of Black and Brown children will be more likely to make references to the racial environment in the country as contributing factors to their anxiety and mental health.

Methodology

In this study, we sought to comprehensively understand the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic affected academic mothers through the lens of race regarding their anxiety, mental health, and career. Although quantitative data provide a numerical understanding of a situation, we also use qualitative data to offer more nuance to academic mothers' experiences and to better describe the context (Bryman). Additionally, as white faculty outnumber faculty of colour in the academy and in our data, we want to amplify the voices of faculty of colour through their qualitative narratives, given that their smaller numbers yield less statistical power in quantitative analyses. For these reasons, a mixed methodology is appropriate for this research. Particularly, we utilized a convergent parallel design, whereby quantitative and qualitative data were implemented concurrently (via the survey described later), analyzed independently, and mixed during an analysis of the results (Creswell and Plano Clark). In the following section, we describe our participants and then the quantitative and qualitative strands for data collection.

Survey Design and Participants

In the spring of 2021, pandemic and academic work-life data were collected from academics in the US through an online survey (via Qualtrics). IRB approval (1720396-2) was obtained from Western Kentucky University. We recruited a convenience sample of faculty in the US through email listservs at our university and through professional associations as well as social media posts on our personal pages and in groups for academics. We also asked

colleagues at our and other universities to share our study with their networks. An online survey link was provided, which included forty-five closed-ended and nine open-ended questions about the pandemic and academic work-life balance. These questions measured the following areas: work productivity, changes in workload and work-time allocation, university policy changes, university support in favour of positive family functioning, information on household and childcare labour distribution, changes in time spent with children (including help with virtual education), other caregiving responsibilities, satisfaction with work-life balance, mental and emotional health, help seeking thoughts and behaviours, self-care, changes in financial status, and questions on a variety of sociodemographic characteristics. As an incentive to participate, we entered participants into a raffle for one of nine fifty-dollar Amazon gift cards upon the survey's completion. The survey took an average of fifteen minutes to complete. After cleaning our data, our sample size was 734. Faculty at all ranks from forty-eight states participated. For this analysis, we limited our analytic sample to academic mothers with children in the household (n = 314).

Thirty-three per cent of mothers in our sample had a youngest child between the ages of zero and four; 37 per cent between five and twelve; 19 per cent between thirteen and seventeen; and 10 per cent aged eighteen and over. The academy has never been an inclusive environment, and, unfortunately, our sample reflects that. The race distribution of our sample was highly skewed: 87 per cent identified as non-Hispanic white; 1 per cent as non-Hispanic Black; 4 per cent as Hispanic; 2 per cent as Asian or Pacific Islander; 1 per cent as another race; and 5 per cent as biracial or multiracial. These percentages were a bit more over representative of whites and under representative of faculty of colour for women faculty at degree-granting institutions nationwide. As of 2020, the race distribution of said faculty was 75 per cent white; 12 per cent Asian/Pacific Islander; 6 per cent Black; 6 per cent Hispanic; and 1 per cent or less American Indian/Alaska Native or individuals of two or more races (National Center for Education Statistics). Of note, twenty-nine of the 313 mothers (almost 10 per cent) did not report their race/ethnicity. We can only speculate on this pattern of participation by race. Perhaps faculty of colour, who have been particularly overburdened during the pandemic simply, had less capacity (e.g., time, headspace, and interest) to take the survey. Perhaps we did not do a good enough job of advertising the survey in spaces carved out by faculty of colour. Perhaps people chose not to report their race even if they did take the survey because they did not think their race was important to their story or experience or were uncomfortable sharing their race. We cannot be sure.

Sample Description

Variable	N	Proportion of sample in category or mean	SD	Min	Max
Youngest Child is					
0 - 4	308	0.33		0	1
5 - 12	308	0.37		0	1
13 - 17	308	0.19		0	1
18+	308	0.10		0	1
Race/Ethnicity					
Black	285	0.01		0	1
White	285	0.87		0	1
Hispanic	285	0.04		0	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	285	0.02		0	1
Other Race	285	0.01		0	1
Biracial	285	0.05		0	1
Union Status					
Married	313	0.85		0	1
Cohabiting	313	0.08		0	2
Dating	313	0.05		0	3
Divorced	313	0.28		0	4
Never Married	313	0.14		0	5
Same-Sex Union	313	0.02		0	1
Partner in Household	313	0.88		0	1
Rank					
Adjunct	313	0.10		0	1
Full-Time Instructor	313	0.13		0	1
Assistant Professor	313	0.28		0	1
Associate Professor	313	0.29		0	1
Professor	313	0.14		0	1
Administrator	313	0.01		0	1
Annual Household Income (in thousands)	274	119.60	34.73	25	155

Table 1. Participant Descriptive Statistics

As for union status, 85 per cent of the sample were married; 8 per cent were cohabiting (living with a romantic partner but were not married); 5 per cent were dating; 28 per cent were divorced; and 14 per cent had never been married. Only 2 per cent of those in unions were in same-sex unions. Overall, 88 per cent of the sample had a partner in the household. Ten per cent of the sample were adjunct faculty; 13 per cent were full-time instructors; 28 per cent were assistant professors; 29 per cent were associate professors; 14 per cent were full professors; and 1 per cent were administrators. Annual household income was measured in $10,000 ranges and was recoded to the midpoint of each range in thousands of dollars. For example, the range of $30,001-$40,000 was recoded to thirty-five, and the highest category of over $140,000 was coded to 155. This coding strategy creates a continuous approximate annual household income variable. For this sample, average annual household income was $121,569 with a standard deviation of $36,786. About 30 per cent of the sample had an annual household income less than $80,000; about 42 per cent were between $80,000 to $140,000; and 28 per cent were over $140,000.

Quantitative Approach

Dependent Variables

Depression and anxiety (referred to here as depressive symptomology) were measured with four items through the following question: "Over the last seven days, how often have you been bothered by the following problems: feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge; not being able to stop or control worrying; having little interest or pleasure in doing things; feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?" Responses were as follows: nearly everyday (3); more than half the days (2); several days (1); or not at all (0). Responses were summed to create an index that ranges from 0 to 12, with higher scores indicating more depressive symptomology. This scale has been shown to be valid and reliable for use with a general sample (Löwe et al.).

Overall happiness was measured with a single item and through the following question: "Overall, how would you rate your level of happiness?" The responses were extremely happy (5); somewhat happy (4); neither happy or unhappy (3); somewhat unhappy (2); or extremely unhappy (1).

Focal Independent Variables

Satisfaction with work-life balance was measured with a single question: "How satisfied are you with your work-life balance currently?" Responses ranged from very satisfied (5) to very unsatisfied (1). Changes in time spent at home is a series of questions asking respondents whether they spend a lot more time (5), a little more time (4), the same amount of time (3), a little less time (2), or much less to no time (1) in each of the following areas since the pandemic

began: spending positive, quality time with children (direct play, outings, enjoyable conversation, etc.); spending time directly engaging with children's school activities (virtual school, homeschool, school work, etc.); spending time with children that is not as enjoyable (disciplining, supervising, etc.); spending time with partner; daily housework (cooking, cleaning up after meals, snack prep, etc.), other housework (sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, laundry, etc.); exercise; and self-care (however they define that). For each category, if the respondent reported the area does not apply to their life (time with partner, for example), they were coded at 3, indicating that there has been no change in that area. The correlation between exercise and self-care (which could include exercise) was 0.67, so we decided to keep both measures in the model. Respondents were asked whether they are responsible for caring for elders in their family to which they could respond yes, regularly (3), yes, occasionally (2), yes, as needed (1), no (0).

Changes in time spent at work was a series of questions measured the same way as changes in time spent at home but in the areas of teaching, research, service to the university, service to the discipline, and administrative work. If respondents reported that an area was not part of their job, we coded them as 3, indicating that there has been no change in that area. Each area was included separately in the analysis. On a scale of strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1), respondents reported their level of agreement with the following statements: I have input on the modality of my course offerings; I teach the courses I want to teach; and the amount of time I spend dealing with student issues has increased since before the pandemic (answering questions, responding to emails, etc.). Each item was included separately in the analysis. Respondents were asked "How supported do you feel by your university during the COVID-19 pandemic?" to which they could respond very supported (4) to not supported at all (0). Sociodemographic controls included a categorical measure of age of the youngest child in the household, the number of children in the household, race/ethnicity, union status, professional rank, and annual household income (in thousands).

Analytic Strategy

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistics for all variables can be found in Table 2. OLS regression is employed to examine depressive symptomology. Both models include all sociodemographic controls. Model 1 includes satisfaction with work-life balance as well as the home-related variables, and Model 2 then adds the work-related variables. The full results are presented in Table 4 and are discussed throughout the results section by theme with the qualitative results.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Depression (Sum)	287	4.23	3.36	0	12
Took Medication for Mental Health	285	0.30	-	0	1
Saw a MH Professional	286	0.24	-	0	1
Overall Happiness	287	3.39	1.04	1	5
Satisfaction with Current Work-Life Balance	287	2.27	1.26	1	5
Home-Related Variables					
Changes in Time Spent at Home					
Positive Time Spent with Children	300	3.45	1.27	1	5
Time Spent on Kids' School Work	299	3.79	1.14	1	5
Negative Time Spent with Children	300	3.78	1.01	1	5
Time Spent with Partner	299	3.09	1.39	1	5
Time Spent on Daily Housework	300	3.93	1.14	1	5
Time Spent on Other Housework	299	3.56	1.24	1	5
Time Spent Exercising	300	2.44	1.38	1	5
Time Spent in Self-Care	299	2.07	1.14	1	5
Responsible for Elder Care	288	3.40	1.00	1	4
Work-Related Variables					
Changes in Time Spent at Work					
Time Spent on Teaching	313	4.13	1.10	1	5
Time Spent on Research	312	2.19	1.09	1	5
Time Spent on University Service	309	3.26	1.19	1	5
Time Spent on Disciplinary Service	311	2.56	1.13	1	5
Time Spent on Administrative Work	313	3.33	1.07	1	5
Have Input on Course Modality	308	3.84	1.25	1	5
Teach Classes I Want to Teach	307	3.86	1.01	1	5
Time Spent Dealing with Student Issues Increased	308	4.27	0.92	1	5

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Qualitative Approach

As previously mentioned, nine open-ended questions were included in the survey that asked about the following: work productivity; changes in workload and work-time allocation; university policy changes; university support in favour of positive family functioning; information on household and childcare labour distribution; changes in time spent with children; other caregiving responsibilities; satisfaction with work-life balance, mental and emotional health; help-seeking thoughts and behaviours; self-care; changes in financial status; and questions on a variety of sociodemographic characteristics. These nine questions were analyzed qualitatively utilizing a cyclical approach to analysis. In this cycle, the authors first took time to engage themselves in the data, which were uploaded to the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. During this initial read, the authors were looking to "immerse [themselves] in the details, trying to get a sense of the [data] as a whole" (Agar 103). Each author reflected on the responses individually, documenting "short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur[ed] to the reader" (Creswell 183).

After that initial read, the authors met to discuss these findings. This led to the development of an initial codebook. As such, this initial codebook included many in vivo codes, utilizing language as expressed by the participants. After the initial codebook was developed, we each applied these initial codes to the same subset of the data to achieve interrater reliability to "mitigate interpretative bias" (Walther et al. 650). For this subset of data, we randomly selected thirty responses from six of the free-response questions to code individually. We cycled through this process twice and reached agreement on codes in nearly all responses. This result led to a refined codebook, in which new codes were added, some previous codes were deleted, and many codes were merged. (The final codebook is available upon request.) We also created definitions and descriptions of the code to ensure reliability in subsequent individual coding.

After this, we split the entire data set evenly among the three authors to code responses to all questions. This article focuses on coding for six of the nine questions from the free response part of the survey (see Table 3 below). After this individual coding was completed for this subset of the qualitative data, the authors met to discuss the codes applied and what themes—which are "broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell 186)—emerged from this process. The remainder of the free response questions are currently being analyzed.

Question Wording	Response Was Used in the Current Analysis (*)
Please use this space to discuss your productivity and how it has changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.	*
Please use this space to discuss changes that have been made [at your university], whether those are positive or negative changes in your opinion, and whether and how they impact you.	*
Please use this space to discuss how your university handled this academic year (2020-2021) and your feelings about how it impacted you.	
Please use this space to discuss how your university plans to handle the next academic year (2021-2022) and your feelings about how it will impact you.	
Please use this space to discuss your childcare arrangements and how they may have changed as a result of the pandemic. You may also use this space to discuss how your time with your children has changed as a result of changes to childcare and your feelings about that.	*
Please use this space to discuss any caregiving responsibilities you have beyond caring for your children.	*
Please use this space to discuss your physical, mental, emotional, and/or psychological state during this pandemic.	*
Please use this space to discuss any changes to your financial situation as a result of the pandemic.	
Please use this space to address any other issues or concerns you may have with work-life during the pandemic.	*

Table 3. Open-Ended Survey Questions

Results

In this section, we present the results of our quantitative data set and a large subset of our qualitative dataset and develop a more robust understanding of the struggles of academic mothers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of race regarding their anxiety, mental health, and career-related struggles.

Quantitative Findings

We first present the results of the OLS regression models found in Table 4. In Model 1, greater satisfaction with work-life balance is associated with lower levels of depressive symptomology (-.70). An increase in time spent with a partner is marginally significant (at .10 level) and indicates that more time spent with partner is associated with less depression. An increase in time spent on other household chores—such as sweeping, mopping, vacuuming, and laundry—is associated with higher levels of depressive symptomology. In Model 2, when work-related variables are added, the magnitude of satisfaction with work-life balance declines slightly but remains significant, and time spent in other housework remains unchanged. A reduction in time spent in research is marginally associated with depression. An increase in time spent dealing with student issues is associated with higher levels of depression, whereas feeling supported by the university is associated with lower levels of depression. Interestingly, the intercept in Model 2 increases over Model 1 (8.25 v. 6.43). It seems that work-related factors may have a more negative relationship with depressive symptomology and that feeling supported by the university can mitigate that relationship. In both models, we do not see that the sociodemographic controls, including race, are related to reported depressive symptomology, except for the number of children in the household but in an unexpected direction. In Model 2, having more children is associated with lower levels of depression than having fewer children. This could perhaps reflect higher levels of postpartum depression with a first child, having help from older children, or more confidence in mothering after having more than one child. These are simply speculations.

	Model 1			Model 2		
Variable	**B**		**SE**	**B**		**SE**
Intercept	6.43	***	1.61	8.25	***	2.40
Satisfaction with Current Work-Life Balance	-0.70	***	0.19	-0.47	**	0.20
Home-Related Variables						
Changes in Time Spent at Home						
Positive Time Spent with Children	-0.28		0.18	-0.22		0.18
Time Spent on Kids' School Work	-0.15		0.18	-0.06		0.18
Negative Time Spent with Children	0.30		0.23	0.15	†	0.22
Time Spent with Partner	-0.29	†	0.15	-0.29		0.15
Time Spent on Daily Housework	0.06		0.25	0.10		0.25
Time Spent on Other Housework	0.51	*	0.23	0.50	*	0.22
Time Spent Exercising	-0.15		0.17	-0.12		0.17
Time Spent in Self-Care	-0.28		0.23	-0.25		0.23
Responsible for Elder Care	0.29		0.20	-0.23		0.20
Work-Related Variables						
Changes in Time Spent at Work						
Time Spent on Teaching				-0.12		0.20
Time Spent on Research				-0.37	†	0.20
Time Spent on University Service				-0.06		0.18
Time Spent on Disciplinary Service				0.04		0.19
Time Spent on Administrative Work				-0.26		0.18
Have Input on Course Modality				-0.09		0.16
Teach Classes I Want to Teach				-0.01		0.21
Time Spent Dealing with Student Issues Increased				0.51	*	0.23
Supported by University				-0.48	**	0.18
Sociodemographic Characteristics						
Youngest Child Age	0.21		0.22	0.21		0.22
Number of Children in Household	-0.46	†	0.25	-0.53	*	0.25
White (v. Not White)	0.32		0.55	0.26		0.54
Union Status	-0.10		0.11	-0.06		0.11
Professional Rank	-0.01		0.01	-0.01		0.01
Annual Household Income (in Thousands)	0.22		0.15	0.19		0.15
R^2	0.26			0.34		
Model F	***			***		

Table 4. OLS Regression Analyses of the Depressive Symptomology Scale (n=259)

In a subsequent analysis (full table available upon request) using overall happiness as the dependent variable and all of the variables in Model 2 here, the only variable that was highly significant (.0001) was satisfaction with work-life balance—in that those who reported more satisfaction with work-life balance also reported higher levels of overall happiness. Those who spent more time on research than they did before the pandemic also reported a higher level of overall happiness (b=0.30, p<.05). In the qualitative results discussed below, we explore the extent to which age of youngest child and race/ethnicity have an impact on academic mothers' narratives about their experiences with the pandemic and their mental health.

Qualitative Findings

We present the qualitative data according to themes that emerged from our analysis of the subset of questions that enhance what the quantitative results show. The two themes we present are negative mental health and career-related struggles. The themes are presented according to the age of the youngest child and by the mother's race/ethnicity. We categorized the age of the child as 0–4 years, 5–12 years, 13–17 years, and eighteen and older. For those who have multiple children, we classified their overall response as being that of the younger child, as we assumed that younger children often require more attention and parenting. For example, if a person stated that they had an eighteen-year-old and a three-year old, we classified them as having children under the age of five. We recognize this as a delimitation of the study and encourage readers to take this into consideration as they review the data.

Negative Mental Health

A theme that emerged was that of negative mental health, and we share the most saturated codes related to this theme in Tables 5 and 6. The frequencies in the tables represent the number of times each code was assigned to respondents in the groups in the columns. In Table 5, we see eight different negative mental health codes, as they are distributed among mothers by age of youngest child, and Table 6 shows the same distribution of codes among mothers by race.

Interestingly, as seen in Table 5, parents with their youngest child under the age of five were coded with these particular codes most often (126 instances). Additionally, these parents expressed the most burnout, feelings of depression, and feeling overwhelmed. Parents with the youngest child between ages five and twelve expressed the most anxiety, distress and worry, and lack of energy or motivation. As age of the youngest child increases, we see the frequency of these codes decrease.

When looking at non-white mothers in Table 6, Hispanic mothers received the most amount of the negative mental health codes (sixteen instances)

followed by biracial or multiracial mothers (ten instances). Hispanic mothers most discussed feeling burnt out or overwhelmed in their responses. Biracial or multiracial mothers had a more even distribution of these negative mental health codes.

	Youngest Under Age 5 (n=126)	Youngest Age 5-12 (n=149)	Youngest Age 13-17 (n=70)	Youngest Age Eighteen or Older (n=47)	Totals
Negative MH Overall	13	8	5	1	27
Anxiety	17	18	11	2	48
Burnout	36	27	16	8	87
Depression	11	8	6	2	27
Distress or Worry	15	22	6	9	52
Lack of Motivation/Energy	6	12	6	3	27
Overwhelmed	16	10	5	3	34
Total Number of Codes	126	116	57	30	329

Table 5. Number of Mental Health Codes by Age of Youngest Child for Mental Health

	Asian Mothers (n=6)	Biracial or Multiracial Mothers (n=14)	Black Mothers (n=4)	Hispanic Mothers (n=10)	Native or Other Mothers (n=3)	Missing Race Mothers (n=29)	White Mothers (n=248)	Totals (n=314)
Negative MH Overall	0	2	0	0	1	1	19	23
Anxiety	1	1	0	2	0	0	39	43
Burnout	1	1	3	7	0	2	66	80
Depression	0	2	0	0	0	0	22	23
Distress or Worry	0	1	1	1	0	0	40	43
Lack of Energy/ Motivation	0	2	0	2	0	0	22	26
Overwhelmed	0	2	1	4	0	0	28	35
Total Number of Codes	2	10	5	16	1	3	236	273

Table 6. Number of Mental Health Codes by Race for Mental Health

A Hispanic female with two children, of which the youngest is under age five stated: "I am exhausted and hanging by a thread. I feel so overwhelmed that I find myself postponing a lot of small tasks for work, which adds to my anxiety and stress." Another Hispanic mother with their youngest child under the age of five expressed similar upset:

> [During] lockdown daycare was closed; both kids home; husband works outside home, thus low productivity. The level of exhaustion during this time was like nothing I had ever experienced. even more than when dealing with an infant. My mom was sick for one month, early in the pandemic, likely COVID. So it's not just the fact that I was busier. The exhaustion and anxiety about what's to come also lead to insomnia and made everything worse. Having the oldest child doing virtual learning at home is also extremely distracting. Writing grants and papers with these distractions plus constant childcare responsibilities is impossible.

A white transwoman with one child between the ages of five and twelve expressed a gut-wrenching sentiment that demonstrates how difficult the pandemic was for them: "I have been depressed and anxious for nearly a year, with very little relief. I have had two complete nervous breakdowns. This has been the hardest year of my life, and I feel lucky to have made it through alive."

A Black female with the youngest child aged five to twelve discussed the struggle of mothers during the pandemic and emphasized the difficulty of managing their own stress and anxiety as well as that of others:

> I'm tired of managing student stress and anxiety related to COVID and online classes—juxtaposed against my own worries and anxiety about COVID, teaching online, and managing my children's worries and anxiety. I can't focus or muster the energy to give anyone, including myself, the energy they need to be sustainable much less successful. I can't or don't want to spend time crafting cogent responses or emails in this pseudo professional environment.

A white woman with one child between the ages of five and twelve talked about the added level of stress and anxiety that their family experienced during the pandemic due to their child being Black: "My child is Black, so the events of summer 2020 added another layer of stress and anxiety."

When looking across nonwhite and white academic mothers, the responses are similar and equally revealing—academic mothers' mental health was overwhelmingly negatively affected as a result of the pandemic. It is important to observe that although we saw similar responses across nonwhite and white academic mothers, this does not discount the added stress and anxiety related

to being a Black female and hearing about the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other Black Americans on the news or being a Chinese American and dealing with increased anti-Asian racism. Additionally, given the sparse nonwhite responses overall in the survey, the cases that are highlighted here indicate that mothers of all backgrounds suffered greatly during the pandemic. A white female with one child under the age of five succinctly summarized the feeling: "What happens going forward? We are never going to be able to make up for this lost time. How will mothers ever catch up?"

Career-Related Struggles

A second theme that resulted from our qualitative analysis was that of career-related struggles. For this theme, we share a subset of our negatively-coded career-related themes: extra work, increase in workload, lack of support, blurred boundaries, and decrease in productivity. Similar to the previous theme, overwhelmingly, academic mothers with their youngest child under the age of twelve were coded with these codes most often (fifty-two total instances) as we can see in Table 7. Similar to the previous theme, we see that as age of the youngest child increases, the application of these codes decreases.

When we examine these codes against the mother's race, we see again that Hispanic mothers received the most instances of these codes (fourteen instances), followed by biracial or multiracial mothers (ten instances; Table 8). The story continues to support the narrative that academic mothers faced unparalleled struggles during the pandemic.

	Youngest Under Age 5 (n=126)	Youngest Age 5-12 (n=149)	Youngest Age 13-17 (n=70)	Youngest Age 18 or older (n=47)	Totals (n = 314)
Extra Work	28	25	14	28	95
Increase in Workload	17	15	5	5	42
Lack of Support	6	2	2	0	10
Blurred Boundaries	12	11	2	2	27
Decrease In Productivity	37	47	14	5	103
Total Number of Codes	100	100	37	40	277

Table 7. Number of Codes by Age of Youngest Child for Career-Related Struggles

	Asian Mothers (n=6)	Biracial or Multiracial Mothers (n=14)	Black Mothers (n=4)	Hispanic Mothers (n=10)	Native or Other Mothers (n=3)	Missing Race Mothers (n=29)	White Mothers (n=248)	Totals (n=314)
Extra Work	1	4	1	4	0	3	75	88
Increase in Work Hours	0	0	0	3	0	1	33	37
Lack of Support	0	1	0	3	0	0	5	9
Blurred Boundaries	0	1	0	0	0	0	27	28
Decrease in Productivity	0	4	1	4	0	2	79	90
Total Number of Codes	1	10	2	14	0	6	219	252

Table 8. Number of Codes by Race/Ethnicity for Career-Related Struggles

An Asian mother with youngest children aged five to twelve shared the following:

> Balance has shifted to the immediate/most urgent (teaching, committee work) and away from longer term commitments (research, writing, program building). The burden of the former has actually increased, with new teaching technologies or tasks entering the mix and new committee obligations to help the institution adapt to the times pop up. As a result, there is no time or energy left for the latter, and productivity has dropped to almost zero.

A Hispanic mother with one child under the age of five indicated the overwhelming struggle they faced career wise:

> Starting fall semester, I was required to teach synchronously on Zoom and in the classroom. These ate up enormous amounts of my time and increased stress. Over the summer, I was "strongly encouraged" (read: required) to complete training on pivotal pedagogy and spent the entire time rebuilding my courses from scratch and teaching online. It was exhausting and terrible. All of my productivity screeched to a halt…. There is no time for self care … I can't keep doing this and am actively and aggressively seeking new employment and to get out of academia altogether. I've never felt [so] unsupported and unsafe at a job before (and I had some pretty crappy jobs before I became an instructor).

A white female with the youngest child aged five to twelve captured clearly the blurred boundaries codes that we used to describe responses in which respondents discussed the blurring between home and work life: "Our kids are home all of the time. We have no childcare. Our time has no clear division between work and home, and it's miserable. Nothing ever gets complete attention. Kids interrupt meetings and classes; emails interrupt home life. Five minutes into this survey, and my son has asked me for help three times." This frustration and sentiment were found often throughout the survey results. An interesting case to end with is a nonbinary white mother with the youngest child under the age of five. They discussed many of the struggles academic mothers faced during the pandemic as it related to the academy:

> The pandemic caused a high tide of work planned for spring 2020 to surge into summer and created a massive amount of work to adjust to academic year 2020-2021. It took me until winter break (Dec. 2020) to finally have things level off. Now, I'm actively trying to not take on new work and in desperate need of some time off, which I cannot afford over the summer because of the financial impact the pandemic has had on our family. We are down two income sources (my partner, and my eldest child) because of COVID and promised jobs that never materialized amid the financial crisis. I'm doing a ton of emotional labour for my students, past and present, and my colleagues who have lost jobs or are facing the potential of job loss. I'm also doing emotional labour for my family, who feel trapped at home and isolated, which has dramatically impacted my ability to work. Because we were pressured to teach in person, but not given classrooms big enough to assemble as a group, I've had to redesign all my undergraduate courses this year to work in hybrid forms. It's been phenomenally time consuming, and I am unable to fully keep up. The experience has been miserable enough that I'd be content to leave a TT [tenure-track] position and never return to university work.

These responses reveal many of the struggles academic mothers saw: an increase in workload and stress without any support from their university, blurred boundaries between work and home life, and a decrease in overall productivity that is needed to be successful in academia. Unfortunately, we also see that these experiences led some of our respondents to consider jobs "actively and aggressively" outside the academy, a true tragedy for students and universities, particularly if those leaving are traditionally marginalized mothers.

Discussion

Our goal for this study was to highlight the experiences of academic mothers during the pandemic by age of youngest child and race/ethnicity using an intersectional approach, with the goal of finding ways universities can build racial equity into their policies and procedures to help mothers succeed. Using an online survey of US university faculty in March of 2021, we examined quantitative and qualitative data that show poorer mental health is associated with being overwhelmed at work and at home. Mothers of young children (under the age of twelve) express more concern than mothers with older children about their decrease in productivity, their increase in workload, blurred boundaries between work and home, and feeling less support from their universities. Seventy-two per cent of these codes were among mothers with young children. They also expressed more negative mental health issues as a result. In fact, mothers with their youngest child under the age of twelve accounted for 74 per cent of the negative mental health codes among academic mothers, and for each of the seven negative mental health codes, these mothers accounted for 70 per cent or more (except lack of energy/motivation for which they accounted for 66 per cent of the codes). The quantitative results mirror that and show satisfaction with work-life balance to be the primary factor associated with overall happiness and level of depression. Additionally, feeling supported by the university is associated with lower levels of depression.

Research prior to the pandemic warned of a "leaky pipeline," whereby women are hired by universities in equal numbers to men but are less likely to be promoted and more likely to leave academia altogether. Women's early years in their academic careers pre-tenure are also prime childbearing years, but women with young children experience reduced time in research and increased time in teaching and service, whether they want that distribution or not, which makes them less competitive for tenure. As greedy institutions, universities have not traditionally been supportive of faculty with family obligations, creating a less supportive environment, which women are more likely to leave. The pandemic has exacerbated these problems. Women have taken on a disproportionate share of the work at home and with children, coupled with the increased demands of transitioning classes online and helping needy students. Unfortunately, this has led to many academic mothers expressing disdain for their university or academia in general or expressing that they are actively trying to leave the academy. Universities need to acknowledge the unique challenges their faculty are facing and work to be more supportive environments. This might mean changing tenure and promotion requirements for a few years to acknowledge that faculty have had to cut back on research to increase their time spent on teaching. This might mean holding off on making time-consuming changes that require heavy

committee work. It might also mean hiring more faculty to share the teaching load burden, offering raises to compensate people for the extra time they are putting into their jobs, or providing other incentives to ease their burden. We encourage academic administrators to seriously consider these and other solutions to help retain mother-scholars.

In terms of race, our sample includes a slightly lower proportion of women of colour than what actually exists in institutions of higher education in the US (13 per cent in our sample versus 24 per cent in the US, although the distribution of women who are mothers nationally is unknown). Furthermore, 9 per cent of mothers in our sample did not report their race. This result from our convenience sample is not surprising. Minority racial and ethnic faculty are underrepresented among university faculty, as the academy is still a white institution full of systemic racism (see Griffin for full review). Faculty of colour are asked to serve on more committees to ensure they are diverse, although with fewer faculty of colour available to fill those spots, these faculty are overburdened. Students of colour are more likely to seek mentorship and support from faculty of colour, again placing a difficult burden on those faculty. Finally, given the events of the summer of 2020, the continual need for people of colour to fight for their lives to matter in our society, coupled with the higher rate of mortality due to COVID-19 among people of colour, it is not surprising that faculty of colour would be less likely to have the time, energy, or headspace to complete our survey. This argument could also be made for mothers in general in that the most overwhelmed, anxious, and burnt-out mothers are the least likely to participate in our study. What this says to us is that we are likely underestimating negative mental health for all academic mothers and especially faculty mothers of colour. Nonetheless, our findings are supported by other research that showed that non-Hispanic Blacks in general in the US South were less likely to experience worsened mental health and symptoms of anxiety than were their non-Hispanic white counterparts during the pandemic (Goldmann et al.). Their results and ours could be showing the strength and resiliency of people of colour to handle extreme life challenges, given their history of dealing with discrimination and other race-related challenges. The lack of difference between white mothers and mothers of colour in our study is a fascinating finding. We would expect faculty mothers of colour to experience even more negative mental health consequences due to the intersectional challenges of the last few years; however, it seems that these challenges have been difficult for everyone to navigate. That does not mean that everyone has had the same experience, but it does mean that, for this sample, faculty women of colour and white mothers are faring similarly.

Despite the likely underestimation of negative mental health and challenging home and work circumstances of academic mothers, what we have shown here

is that academic mothers, especially those with young children, are struggling. Their jobs are demanding more of them and adding new tasks without taking any tasks away. They have also been challenged at home to provide regular care to their children and help school-aged children with virtual school. They lost the physical boundary between work and home during that first year of the pandemic and were pulled in multiple directions all day long, often working late into the evening, on weekends, and over breaks to get it all done, yet they still feel behind. Research productivity halted for many, yet research requirements for tenure and promotion have not changed. As one academic mother said, "How will mothers ever catch up?" Universities need to do better by looking at the lived experiences of faculty and making accommodations in the years to come, as the effects of the pandemic will last longer than masks will.

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Endnotes

1. After data quality checks, we deleted cases who were in the survey for five minutes or less and then if their progress was less than 40 per cent. An additional four cases were deleted due to seemingly poor quality responses.

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POOJA BHATIA NARANG, ARWA ALSHEHRI, AND GLORIA PARK

Three Mothers in Academia: Looking Inwards, Taking Stock, and Moving Forward

Grounded in relational cultural theory (RCT) as an approach for developing women's sense of self and maintaining connections with one another and with all women across racial, ethnic, and age divides, three mothers in the academy come together to restory our experiences of being and becoming mothers while navigating the higher educational landscape. We focus on critical incidents (Farrell) to create our collective autoethnography. Critical incidents are events that are unplanned and unanticipated and allow one to think about "what happened, why it happened and what else could have been done to reach their goals" (Farrell 3). Sharing our experiences means prioritizing the stories that are often overlooked in higher education institutions, where whiteness and male superiority abound. Specifically, we focus on what it means to navigate institutional expectations, given the mothering norms and responsibilities facing women of colour, who already exist on the margins. Coming together across racial, ethnic, and age divides in the academy led us to disclose specific events that challenged our professional and mothering responsibilities. Although we differ in terms of ethnicity, age, as well as academic and marital status, we still discussed the challenging nature of balancing home and academic lives both before and during the pandemic. We conclude with implications that focus on specific strategies for ourselves as well as others in the academy to support and nurture the development of mothers in academia.

Pooja, Arwa, and Gloria came into this collaborative writing project as mothers in academia. As mothers, as women of colour, and as teacher-scholars studying and working at a predominantly white institution (PWI), our stories of experiences are full of racial, gendered, and aged tensions. In this collective endeavour, our goal is to showcase the diversity within women's experiences (e.g., Park, *Narratives of East Asian Women*), especially women in the academy, across racial, ethnic, and age divides. A community of practice such as this

publishing endeavour has allowed us to be reminded of the power that comes with collective stories, which become a fuel for others to come forward and share and educate one another (Goldberger et al.). Although we are at different stages in academia, which illustrates that women's experiences can both converge and diverge to show their diversity, our experiences and stories point out critical themes in bringing more awareness and attention to mothers of all ages and status in academic communities around the world (Castañeda and Isgro; Crittenden; Evans and Grant). Equally important are how the societal and contextual spaces perceive and normalize women in academia in terms of our worth, credibility, and productivity in teaching and scholarship. Our work, in this piece, is one way to dismantle the societal values that privilege white male scholars above all else (Park, *My Autobiographical Poetic Rendition*; Park, *Narratives of East Asian Women*).

We situate our stories of experience using Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly's concept of narratives as "a way of understanding experience" (20). They continue to argue that "[narrative inquiry] is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (20). Thus, we are both participants and researchers trying to make sense of our individual yet collective experiences of what it means to be mothers in academia.

We are both storytellers and inquirers of those stories as we navigate and focus on what particular stories to share and why those particular stories are critical at this particular time in our academic journeys. As such, we move in and out of one another's stories of experiences while we make sense of our own as well as others' stories. To this, Clandinin has argued that "Whether inquirers begin with telling stories or living stories, we enter into the midst of stories. Participants' stories, inquiries' stories, social, cultural and institutional stories, are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin" (47). As such, we came into this work as both participants and inquirers and journeyed through the following data collection and analysis steps, not in a linear but a circular fashion, as we continued to move in and out of one another's stories, weaving in and out and making sense of our own stories in the process. In what follows, we describe the steps of our data collection process.

Step 1: We drafted and restoried three separate but interconnected stories of experiences (henceforth, vignettes) that allowed us to reflect on our identities as mothers in academia. In doing this, we did not give one another any specific guidelines other than to reflect on our experiences as being and becoming mothers in higher education.

Step 2: We shared the stories we drafted; in turn, these shared stories triggered other stories that were buried in us. As we spent time sharing our drafted stories, we noticed overlapping stories of experiences and spontaneously encouraged one another to be open to sharing even the most uncomfortable

experiences.

Step 3: We discussed three overarching themes emerging from our shared vignettes, which allowed us to maximize our vignette to no more than one thousand words per each.

Step 4: Given the themes and focus on mothers in academia, we employed a theoretical perspective highlighting relational cultural theory (RCT) and social role theory to zoom in on these particular areas in the discussion and implication section of our collaborative writing.

Although there are many different ways to design a collaborative writing project such as this, we emphasized our stories of experience (i.e., vignettes) as the starting point in sharing the method of inquiry used for this collaborative writing. In particular, our writing includes excerpts from our mothering experiences at various points in our lives, which ultimately led to three interconnected emerging themes. We move away from the traditional structure of an academic paper by injecting creative headings throughout the chapter and discussing the interconnected three themes in conjunction with some of the insights and strategies that we share with other mothers and mothers-to-be in academia. Moreover, our collaborative writing emphasizes how the act of mothering eventually became the source of empowerment, identity construction, and agency for us. Ultimately, mothering aided us in deconstructing and challenging the dominant paradigm and societal expectations about what constitutes a good mother and replacing it with one in which mothering transcends the caregiver and gatekeeper labels.

Through drafting our vignettes, we also bring to light the perceived workplace discriminations and the lack of institutional support that further complicate the process of identity re/construction as teachers, students, and mothers. Although we describe our coping mechanisms and how we exercised agency to manage mothering and academia, we occasionally leave it to our readers to think of possible solutions, for we are proponents of understanding and embracing multiple ways of knowing. Ultimately, our collective goal is to connect with women in similar situations and to share our subjective truths as many brave women and mothers in academia have done (Guy and Arthur 890). In the next section, we review the body of scholarship that has helped us theorize our stories of experiences.

Situating our Stories in Relational Cultural Theory and Social Role Theory to Demystify Mothering Stereotypes

To ground our experiences, we mainly draw from relational cultural theory (henceforth, RCT). RCT was first developed by Jean Baker Miller in 1976. By 1997, with the contributions of Jean Baker Miller and Pierce Stiver and other multicultural, feminist, and social justice advocates and theorists, RCT was

introduced as a theoretical framework to tackle sociocultural issues that affected mental health and people's growth (Comstock et al.). The RCT is an approach that "is grounded in the idea that healing takes place in the context of mutually empathic, growth-fostering relationships" (Comstock et al. 279). The hallmark of RCT focuses on "growth-fostering relationship," which argues for making sense of one's worthiness. In order for this relationship to be realized, one needs to feel that thoughts and feelings should be heard and understood (Guy and Arthur; West 95). In other words, the cornerstone of RCT is building connections so that we can be heard (Guy and Arthur; Miller and Stiver)

As mothers in academia, Batsheva Guy and Brittany Arthur argue that such connections are a way of developing women's sense of self and maintaining relationships through sharing stories as a hope to develop connections and as "a path out of isolation and disconnections" (890). RCT goes against Western norms that claim growth happens through isolation and independence, but through relationships and connections (Banks; Guy and Arthur). In other words, women, especially mothers in academia, can grow and become stronger through sharing their stories with one another. We can develop our identities through supportive relationships in which we feel heard and understood. Guy and Arthur shared their "vulnerable and authentic dialogue" (890) about their motherhood during the COVID-19 pandemic to develop connections despite being isolated. Grounded in the work of Miller and Stiver's conceptualization of RCT, Guy and Arthur paved a way for other mothers in academia to step out of normalized practices of mothering/womanhood and openly share their experiences of vulnerability and discrimination to promote personal growth as well as supportive relationships both on the personal and public levels. Our goal of drawing from RCT is to shed light on the importance of sharing our vulnerability in order to support and hear each other's voices. We hope that this article inspires women in academia to reflect on and share their stories because our stories matter. We deserve to be heard and understood among our communities.

In conjunction with the work of Guy and Arthur, we also use social role theory (Eagly and Wood), which argues that men and women are assumed to have characteristics that prepare them for "sex-typical roles" (Eagly and Wood 459), yet these roles can always be challenged by women to dismantle societal level discourses and empower other women to do the same. People exercise various gender roles and stereotypes in everyday life by performing certain social tasks, such as parent or employee. These gender roles and stereotypes appear natural and inevitable because they are said to represent innate sex characteristics (Eagly and Wood). These roles and practices continue to exist even though today's modern society claims to show egalitarian gender attitudes. This is evidenced by the massive amount of research conducted in

this area. When we searched for research on gender roles and stereotypes over the last decade, we found hundreds of articles (Castle and Woloshyn; Isgro and Castañeda; Toyibah; Randles; Vigil). Similarly, we got a long list searching for mothering stereotypes and norms (Hampson; Meeussen and Laar; Williams). The research's findings imply that both stay-at-home and working mothers continue to be stereotyped (Castle and Woloshyn; Meeusen and Laar). Thus, creating work-life balance is more challenging for women than men (Hampson; Gorman and Fritzsche; Park and Liao; Toyibah). If a mother is at home, she is unquestionably responsible for providing childcare. Additionally, if she is employed, she must alter her career pursuits and negotiate her circumstances. Mothers have eventually embraced these widely held preconceptions; in fact, they define mothers in most cultures (Park and Liao; Toyibah).

Due to the conventions and expectations placed on mothers, they frequently view childcare as their primary responsibility (Castel and Woloshyn; Newman and Henderson). Joyce Castle and Vera Woloshyn, for example, emphasize that although we talk about gender equity, many women struggle to break free from the assumption that a woman's primary responsibility is that of a caregiver, regardless of whether she is a stay-at-home or a working mother. While this good mother attitude can be detrimental to both stay-at-home and working mothers, it can exacerbate the situation for the latter leading to parental burnout (Meeusen and Laar) and poor performance at work (Castle and Woloshyn; Meeusen and Laar; Vigil). Good mother norms can lead to emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion for working mothers due to their gatekeeping behaviours, such as taking charge of most family tasks from their spouse, which can also lead to poor work-family balance and career ambitions (Meeusen and Laar).

Furthermore, research on mothers in academia demonstrates that mothers who strive hard to achieve success in academia are victims of biases (Williams) and gender stereotypes (Toffoletti and Starr). Additionally, they are discriminated against based on gender and race, resulting in an endless list of cognitive biases (see Williams). For instance, a man's late arrival is often overlooked, whereas if a mother is late, it is always associated with childcare (Williams). The maternal body has also been a concern in the academy (Isgro and Castañeda; see also Tyler), as it is considered messy and "monstrous" (Gatrell).

These gender stereotypes and standards are troublesome. Our testimonials show that intensive mothering norms expect women to focus more on family life and put herself second. Furthermore, maternal gatekeeping behaviours, which involve inhibiting the father's involvement in childcare and other family responsibilities (Allen), can complicate motherhood and trigger other established gender roles. The pandemic has also added extra layers of complexity to mothering (Burk et al.; Minnello et al.; Ségeral), making the

difficulties of balancing motherhood and academic pursuits much more apparent (Langin).

We firmly believe that a shift in the culture of care is necessary; otherwise, mothers will continue to (re)negotiate their family and work life within the framework of good mother norms (Vigil).

Our identities as women, mothers, and students are often shaped by other people: spouses, family members, other-mother scholars, and academic administrators. To this end, we must voice our concerns about workplace racial and gender discrimination and good mother stereotypes. Raising awareness in this direction is critical for understanding that a culture of care (Leininger) at home, in academia, and beyond is necessary for mothers' wellbeing and growth and, importantly, as a way to liberate ourselves from deeply ingrained (good) mothering ideologies and to transcend mothering labels. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to address such questions as "what makes a good mother," we hope that our stories will spark discussion and raise awareness about the need to end the vicious circle of labels and good mothering norms. We begin the next section with a brief self-introduction highlighting who we are as mothers in the academy. We then focus on short vignettes to highlight the three interconnected themes emerging from our shared but diverse stories of experiences in our home and academic lives.

Pooja: Married Mother of Two from Indian Descent

I belong to a conservative Indian Punjabi family, in which women are supposed to do all the household responsibilities, including taking care of the kids. It does not matter if she is working. I grew up watching my mother juggling multiple roles; my father never lent a helping hand to her. My mother raised my brother and me while working as a full-time schoolteacher and a full-time housewife. Although my mothering experiences are quite different from my mother's, being a woman, wife, and a mother, I had to juggle multiple roles in balancing academia and motherhood.

In 2010, I started teaching English to female English learners in Saudi Arabia. A year later, I gave birth to my daughter. It was an emotionally difficult year for me for various reasons—losing my father, being away from my family during pregnancy and childbirth, having a caesarean section, and experiencing physical changes in my body, to name a few. In 2015, I gave birth to my son. Things have been really challenging since I became a mother of two kids. Workplace discrimination, as well unintentional and intentional gender stereotyping, has made this journey much more difficult. Although my overall work experience was positive and my husband and his family were supportive, I was reminded, at times, of my ethnicity, gender roles, and expectations. It is these critical incidents that I share in my narrative and how I navigated them.

Arwa: Single Mother of One from the Middle East

I grew up in a conservative society, in which making personal choices or sharing opinions were uncommon for women. When I was twenty-one, I struggled to get my family's approval to study in Canada. It was my first time travelling outside of my country. I was amazed by the way my teachers treated me. They were excited to hear my voice, but I was never able to participate or express myself. A year later, I moved to Australia, and I graduated with a master's degree. I experienced freedom and independence for the first time at age twenty-two.

In 2012, I came back to Saudi Arabia and started teaching English at a university for almost five years. During that time, I was teaching, supervising, and mentoring according to my university's policies. I was unable to use my skills or my creativity because I had to follow certain protocols. I felt useless so many times, but I never knew what to do.

In 2017, I went through a huge crisis in my life. I got divorced while I was pregnant. I realized that I needed a change that would help me keep moving. I was lucky to receive another scholarship from my university to pursue my second master's degree and my PhD in the United States (US). As a graduate single mother living in a foreign country, I have been through a lot of challenges. I struggle to balance between my motherhood duties and my studies. However, my educational journey in the US has encouraged me to share my voice and to negotiate my identity.

Gloria: Married Mother of One from Korean Descent

I started my tenure track position at a university in central Pennsylvania in 2008. I got married and started a family later in my life because I was focused on earning my doctorate. My entire life was a whirlwind of events. My family and I immigrated to the US at an early age, and we focused on learning the language, navigating the cultural and social norms, and making a life for our family. I never really thought about becoming a mom, but I did want to continue with my education and break away from feeling marginalized due to being in someone else's country and trying to fit in. Even though in my Korean culture, there is an unstated cultural norm that all women should get married at a certain age and not focus so much on their careers or professional trajectory, my parents were somewhat different. They wanted me to continue with my education; in 2003, at thirty-six, I met my husband, who was thirty-four. When we began to imagine and plan for our future, I started to think about what it would be like to have a family. We got married in 2005, and I was almost done with my dissertation. My dissertation defense occurred in 2006, and, finally, I felt that we could start a family, since I had finished my degree.

With a couple of failed pregnancies, I gave birth to our son in 2008, three months before I started my tenure-track position at a public university. Since then, I have been challenged, given my gender, race, and age. Although nothing was directly said to me and the intentions might have been noncoercive, the impact was rather detrimental, as I understood how mothers, especially older first-time moms of different racial and linguistic backgrounds, were negatively perceived in the academy.

Our Vignettes and Emerging Themes

In this section, we discuss our overarching themes through vignettes.

Theme One: Navigating Institutional Expectations, Mothering Norms, and Responsibilities

A caring and supportive work culture can help employees balance work and family life (Kossek et al.; Miller). One of the critical ways to navigate the institutional landscape is to promote a culture of care and support, which can ultimately help women juggle multiple roles (Isgro and Castañeda). Other studies demonstrate that with support from both home and institutions, women can achieve work/family balance, which can help them be more connected to one another and with the institution (Grassetti; Grenier and Burke; Vigil). The question is, though, what does this culture of care entail?

Our lived experiences indicate that a culture of care goes beyond providing the basic amenities to mothers in academia. It involves the following:

- Promoting gender equality at workplaces with regard to salaries, promotions, services, and teaching loads;
- Providing daycare services outside of standard working hours for both professors and student parents; and
- Sharing lived experiences with their students to help them navigate motherhood as well as connecting current students with alumnae for further networking with mothers at different stages of their academic and professional development.

The culture of care also involves self-care activities. It is our responsibility to take care of our wellbeing to give our children the best we can and pursue the careers we enjoy. We need to learn how to take care of ourselves and to release any stress and anger in a healthy way. Louise Hay suggests the following healthy daily routines:

- Add meditation to your daily routine to keep yourselves balanced and energized;
- Let go your old beliefs that hinder your positive progress and block your worthiness;

- Remind yourself that you are "perfect, whole and complete" the way you are! (32)

Theme Two: Navigating Outside Forces, Such As the Global Pandemic

Support from spouses, partners, or other family members can help mothers navigate the challenges during the pandemic and beyond. Spousal support can also act as a way to model children's behaviour. To this end, we extend the definition of culture of care by bringing spousal support into the picture. A culture of care should encompass care from the institution as well as from the family. This culture of care is much needed to model children's behaviour, navigate motherhood challenges, and break gender stereotypes. Importantly, such practices are necessary for creating "me" spaces. To this, we suggest the following:

- Having friendly conversations with your spouse and your family about your feelings and concerns;
- Taking a break from mothering and other obligations and incorporating other family members in the process; and
- Teaching children how to be self-sufficient and care for their fundamental needs, especially boys.

Theme Three: Mothering as a Form of Support for our Students, Modelling for our Children, and Empowerment for Ourselves

Displaying agency and setting examples for others, especially for our children and student mothers, are critical (Grassetti). It is important to note that we, as authors of this work, came together as faculty (Gloria) and students (Pooja and Arwa) who have similar experiences as mothers in higher education. We, especially Pooja and Arwa, became more forthcoming about expressing ourselves and our mothering journeys through this collective experiential writing project. Importantly, reflecting on our mothering experiences has enabled us to recognize that motherhood is a source of empowerment for our children, ourselves, and other newly minted mothers in academia. As such, we encourage mothers in academia to become a conduit of care and power for their students by doing the following:

- Providing academic and emotional support;
- Reflecting on how our voices can be a conduit for understanding our intersectional identities within and beyond the academic walls;
- Focusing more on self-reflexive practices with like-minded colleagues;
- Challenging existing policies to advocate for student mothers, which includes (but is not limited to) allowing them to bring their children to class in the case of emergencies and allowing a leave of absence when their child is sick.

Pooja: Indian Woman with Challenges in Balancing Motherhood and Academia

In her vignettes, Pooja highlights the workplace discrimination she has faced due to her ethnicity and gender stereotypes, which have made her motherhood journey at times difficult. Although she could not do much about the discrimination she faced at the workplace, she went against societal norms and broke gender stereotypes by exercising her agency.

A Non-Arab Expat Mother in Academia: Choose it or Lose it!

Things nearly spiralled out of control in 2015 when I became a mother for the second time. My husband's work-related travel forced me to take on multiple roles. When my husband was not around, I had to pick up my daughter early from her school and drop her off at the university daycare with my son. Initially, it was okay; however, after a while, her school and teacher began complaining. This situation could have been easily handled if my workplace had supported me. But this did not happen. The English instructors in my college had two shifts, one from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and the other one from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Even after many requests to my supervisor and the administration, I was rarely given a morning shift. These shifts were frequently given to Saudi instructors and the program coordinator. All these instructors were either single or had grownup children. I was the only one who had a toddler and who had a genuine reason for wanting to teach in the morning. However, I was treated differently due to my ethnicity. Not only me but also one of my other colleagues from India, who joined after me, was treated in the same way. This was not good enough! After a few months, the university's daycare, which was initially open till 4:00 p.m., reduced its hours to 2:30 p.m. This meant that I had to pick up my children early, which I couldn't do because I was still teaching at that time. Even if I did manage to pick them up, I wasn't allowed to bring them to class. I couldn't do anything but leave my kids with my driver. Kids would just sit in the car and wait for their mommy to finish her shift. As I recall this incident, tears steam from my eyes. Later, I found a private daycare for my kids, but it was too expensive. A lack of culture of care in my institution complicated my journey. It affected me both financially and psychologically. As an expat, I didn't have a choice but to get going.

Am I Not a Conventional Mother?

I have been aware of socially formed gender stereotypes since I was a small child. My mother's lived experiences testify to how gender stereotypes are extensively used in my society. I held on to this concept for a long time because of her perfect mother image, which included balancing numerous roles: mother, teacher, wife, and even student at one point during her teaching

career. She never had any family assistance. I also performed these expectations at various times in my life. To illustrate, I postponed my PhD admission three times before joining it in 2019. However, when I tried to resist these labels and decided to join a doctoral program, my husband and I were continually reminded of our conventional roles. Many people around us (family and friends) told me, "How can you leave your kids with your husband and go to the US to do a PhD?" or "How can your husband take care of them? He is a man."

In 2019, with my husband's and my in-laws' support, I finally came out of this vicious circle of societal norms that treat men and women differently. To pursue my PhD dream, I left my kids with my husband and went to the US.

My PhD and COVID-19

Pursuing a PhD in the midst of COVID-19 was the beginning of another chapter in my mothering journey. It's a story about juggling the intricacies of the pandemic with the demands of my doctoral education. It forced me to again assume the caretaker position; I was back to square one. During the pandemic, my PhD courses shifted online, so I chose to return to my family in Dubai. Since my children's school went online, I was obliged to be with my children the whole day to assist them with their online studies, particularly with my son, who was still too young to adjust to the online learning environment. Juggling my PhD work, my children's online studies, and other family obligations took a toll on my health and sanity. Sleepless nights and busy days without a break almost turned me into a zombie.

To better survive, I decided to create "me" spaces. I began staying up late and working on my dissertation, which I still do now. This meant that I could not wake up early to prepare breakfast for my children and husband or prepare my children for their online studies. A day in the life of a typical sanskari (cultured) Indian bahu (daughter-in-law), patni (wife), and ma (mother) begins with the following: waking up before everyone else, taking a shower, lighting a diya (lamp), saying morning prayers, serving tea to everyone, preparing breakfast, and preparing children for school. However, by exercising agency, I once again defied the traditional image of an Indian woman and a mother that my mother had always modeled for me. I did this not just for myself but also for my daughter, who would be reminded of these gender stereotypes in the future. I also did it for my son, who might perpetuate these myths when he grows up. I did this for everyone.

Arwa: An Arab Single Mother's Challenges

As a single mother, I always have a lot of responsibilities. Being a mother in academia and an international student makes it even more challenging. My journey as a graduate student started in August 2017, when I was seven-months pregnant. When I had my daughter, my mother stayed with me for three months. However, when she left, it was only me and my daughter. As a graduate student, I had classes that started at 2:30 p.m. and at 5:30 p.m. Most daycares close in the evening. I was able to find a daycare that would take care of my daughter in the afternoon but never found a place to take care of her in the evening. Sometimes, I was left with no option other than not going to class or taking my daughter with me to class. That was the most stressful phase of my study life.

Another issue I struggled with was money. Daycares are expensive. I applied for a program at my university that would support me with the daycare fees. Surprisingly, I waited for almost four months, but then they told me that the priority was for bachelor students. I was never able to get it. I felt awful because I was a student like everyone else. I could not have a social life, and I isolated myself from everything and everyone. When my daughter was two years old, I had to put her in a full-time daycare. I paid almost half of my salary every month, but it was a good choice for both of us.

During the last four years, I have experienced fear of not being able to submit my assignments on time and fear of not having enough time to finish all my reading for my classes. I have never discussed any of this with my professors, and I rarely asked for extensions. I was determined to be like any other student. However, I was and am still scared of not meeting my professors' expectations. One day, I had a meeting with one of my great professors to discuss my paper. He said, "Why are you always apologizing when you submit your papers? You are a good writer." I was shocked because I had never noticed that until he said it to me. I thought about it for a minute and answered him, "Because I can do better." He provoked me to think about what "do better" means to me. Why has my work never been enough for me?

My professor's question was just something that he noticed, and he wanted me to appreciate what I was doing. I knew that I spent hours looking for resources, and it took me a week or so writing that paper, but no matter what I did, it was always not enough. My biggest challenge was organizing my time and creating a balance between myself, my family, and my education. I struggled a lot, especially during the pandemic when my daughter's daycare was closed for a couple of months, and I had to study from home. It was a huge distraction, but it was also my spiritual awakening journey. I had to face myself, my fears, and my weaknesses. It was a turning point in my life.

Discrimination Kills Talents!

In 2013, I was hired as an English instructor at a university in Saudi Arabia. I worked hard to get that position permanently in 2016. During my years at that university, I was able to prove myself as a hard-working teacher, which had given me the chance to work as a coordinator for one of the English business courses offered by the English Language Center (ELC) there. I also worked as a tutor to help students with low grades to facilitate lessons and encourage them to pass their courses. Just as Pooja suffered from discrimination, I did too. Before I was permanently hired, I was on a contract, which did not go very well. I was always treated differently from other teachers, even though I had the same degree and same nationality. The only difference was that I was hired by a company, not by the university. I was given more work and less money. I was asked to cover other teachers' classes. On my off days, they would call me and bring me in for proctoring instead of those who could not come. I was not able to complain because I wanted to work and build a future career. Two years later, I got hired permanently, and I was finally able to experience some privileges.

Gloria: Korean American Woman's Motherhood in Academia

Gloria highlights several interconnected events that compelled her to reflect on being a new mom in her first tenure track faculty position (Park, "My Autobiographical Poetic Rendition," *Narratives of East Asian Women*). These narratives have been written and published elsewhere, and instead of direct excerpts, she restoried them during the collective writing into a poetic rendition as shared below:

Dark and Dubious Daycare

My husband and I entered this particular daycare, it was lunch time…
A dark room, with baby dining chairs pushed against one of the walls;
I couldn't peel my eyes away from the toddlers sitting in their dining chairs…
Some using their tiny fingers to pick up food
some just staring at us as strangers
Some their face down on the food tray…
taking their afternoon zzzzz…
It is so unclean, disorganized, how could this be a daycare…??

Even before I locked my eyes with Kevin's, I asked myself, "How can I leave my three-month-old at a place like this? Maybe, I am not meant to be here working full time as a professor?" These types of all-or-nothing thinking continued to emerge as we checked out daycares in the community.

Although it is difficult to imagine such a place exists as a daycare, even after

fourteen years, it is still part of my consciousness that had haunted me for the first few years of my journey in academia, given the images of darkness and unsanitary condition of the daycare. Fortunately, through a colleague's mom, we found a perfect place for our son, and then he was enrolled in the university daycare when he was seven months old. These horrible images of certain daycares we visited brought back other memories of how I navigated my mothering and my professor identities. Below are two interconnected snapshots of narratives that have been re-storied from Park (2013).

Sensing, Feeling, Living

Gloria further questioned her identity as a credible and productive teacher-scholar; you see, mothers are seen as mothers first then scholars in academia, where the perception is that one cannot do both very well. Given this mindset, my salary and other benefits were compromised when I first started my faculty position.

What does it mean to be a new mom of a three-month-old child in my first tenure track position?

I sensed the indirect attack on my newly minted motherhood…

I felt it…

I lived it…

Why would there even be a question of me being less productive?

… less competitive?

In a capitalistic society, even though we are in it for educating the future democratic citizens, I sensed that I was offered below my well-deserved salary…

Did I not fight for what I deserved because I also bought into this societal level discourse and felt that I could not live up to the expectations of highly productive teaching and scholarship?

Perhaps, I was scared that I couldn't do it…

Irony of all ironies, even though I was perceived as less than… I was comfortable being at my institution because of the type of work and the students' needs, and to me, those things validated my worth.

Three Sections, One Teaching Prep

Gloria's teaching load and prep were also monitored and decided for me during my first semester.

Given your daycare needs, you are receiving a Tues/Thurs schedule …

Translates into one prep teaching load in semester one.

How wonderful and considerate?

I enjoyed teaching three sections of undergraduate research writing my first semester,

But what about graduate teaching?

Wasn't I hired to teach TESOL teacher education courses?

I was not given any graduate course teaching in my specialization.

I reflected on the administrator's decision and started to think that perhaps, my identity as a new Mom, a woman of colour, or other visible identity categories had something to do with this decision.

Yes, I was grateful, but one administrator also thought that I would not be able to do the graduate teaching work because of my need to put my mothering identity first. In this thinking, moms, especially new moms, cannot do both well. In this particular scenario, graduate education is placed on a pedestal, and undergraduate writing courses can take some hits, especially by those in challenging identity positions, such as myself as a new mom. Although some may think this is ludicrous, now that I am a program director and one of the most senior faculty members in my program, I believe in having a conversation with those in positions of less power and vulnerability. Thinking back, it would have been worthwhile to have had a choice in the matter of my course selection. I might have taught three sections of the same undergraduate writing course, or I might not have. The point here is that the administrator took that choice away from me by stating that I was going to teach three sections.

Moving Forward

Just as these experiences are legitimate and valid experiences in themselves, the more we share them in public spaces, the more we can raise critical awareness of these discriminatory practices in the academy. Whether these acts are intentional or unintentional are beside the point; their effects are real. Higher education communities need and can do better to raise awareness that parenting is both partners' responsibility.

It is important to teach youngsters about demystifying taken-for-granted gender roles. To do this, we must reconceptualize our thoughts regarding mothering standards and abstain from acting and performing according to societal level discourses that privilege certain ways of thinking about gender roles. Fathers contributing to family duties can also serve as an example for children, guiding them away from problematic assumptions. As our experiences illustrate, unlearning gender assumptions requires a great deal of courage, support, and time. As a result, it is vital to establish these principles early on. But how are we going to do that? In theory, frequent informal conversations with children can help teach them that both parents can do similar household chores as well as perform caretaking responsibilities.

As stated earlier, this collective experiential writing has been both therapeutic and empowering. We see it as a productive way to uplift mothers

in academia. We encourage you to take a stance and engage in this continuous movement forward.

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JACQUI GETFIELD

Black Mothering in the Diaspora: Empowerment in the Caribbean Cradle and Resistance in the Canadian Crucible

Mothering is personal; mothering is cultural; mothering is political. This article explores Black mothering, motherhood, and motherwork within social institutions of health and education. The experiences of Black mothers are the backdrop against which the paper investigates empowered mothers and their negotiations. It posits that the notion of empowered mothering has existed always within Black, African-descended communities. Empowered mothering breeds resistance, and so it has been passed down for generations. In this article which features the ethnocultural impact of race on mothering, I employ the lens of critical race theory and I investigate mothering through Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality concept. Intersecting sites of oppression, such as class and gender, emerge in my analysis of the phenomenon of empowered Black mothering. In this article, I reference the work of scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Crenshaw, Erica Beatson, and Delores Mullings as I unpack how empowered Black Caribbean diasporic mothers perform acts of resistance. This article is an extension of a recent presentation delivered at the International Association of Maternal Action and Scholarship (IAMAS) 2021 conference.

"Mumma a ashes betta dan Mumma a grave"
—Jamaican proverb

Proverbs or pithy sayings can be interpreted in many ways and so have many meanings. "Mumma a ashes betta dan Mumma a grave" can be interpreted as a warning that we should appreciate the mother who is at the hearth (fireplace or fireside) cooking, and therefore caring for her family. This mumma (mother) is a nurturer and so is to be appreciated while alive. When she is dead, she cannot care for her family in physical ways, and therefore those left behind cannot share, receive, or reciprocate love and care. Upon passing this life, she

will be a memory. There can be other meanings of this proverb—that the mother (mumma) is useful and is to be cherished even though she lives in poverty and even though she may be old and is no longer as strong or as vibrant. This aging and/or impoverished mother, though "in the ashes," is still a wise guide; she has invaluable lived experiences, and she is therefore to be honoured, loved, and acknowledged while she is alive. So, we should not wait until mumma dies to give her flowers (meaning to compliment her or treat her well). The saying reminds us that the mother who is alive is better than the memory of a deceased mother because once she transitions through the grave, the dead woman is no longer accessible in the same real and material ways to her loved ones who are left behind on earth. I begin with this old, but certainly not trite Jamaican saying, which I am told my maternal grandmother would often repeat to her children throughout their lives.

This article seeks to demonstrate how Black motherhood is constructed and how Black mothering is an act that is defined by how it is passed down within and across cultures. This article explores Black mothering, motherhood, and motherwork within social institutions of health and education. Since anti-Black racism is endemic to the Canadian society and since Black women who mother children are excluded and disregarded routinely in everyday situations, it is purely an academic exercise to try to distinguish or separate Black Caribbean mothers from the larger representation of Black mothers. For this reason, I use the term "Black mothers" to include Black Caribbean mothers in this article and elsewhere. In this article, my personal narrative and my perspectives are fuelled by those of the Black mothers in my recent doctoral research, and I urge consideration of the sociocultural context of empowered African diasporic Caribbean mothering (Getfield, *Prescriptive Partnerships*). By "diasporic," I mean nation-states in which emigrants from the same home country make their new home. Living in the diaspora of one's home country is a result of either voluntary or forced migration. In the diaspora, like elsewhere, there is no one essential story. There are many stories and innumerable counternarratives; there are many cultures that comprise the many Black/African communities across Canada. In this article, I contend that the gendered mother role is influenced by mothering practices, which like our beliefs, attitudes, and values are passed down from generation to generation. As a result, it is my belief that motherwork is highly subjective because it is determined or influenced by each person's diverse historical, social, and cultural practices. And these traditional and cultural practices are tied to our ethnic and racial realities. Yet my mothering and my approach to motherwork differ from the one who mothered me in many ways. As Erica Beatson reminds us: "Motherhood is socio-historically specific and constructed based on the ideals of a given culture and society" (74). My mother raised her children in Jamaica; I am raising my children in Canada. These are two nation-states with

distinct social and cultural realities, prejudices, and economic demands. Even though my own mother and I have experienced mothering and motherwork in two different locations, my life in many ways has reflected my mother's, even though I did not consciously plan my life events to mirror hers. Seemingly, my mother's thoughts, actions, and behaviours have been more a part of me than I had realized or planned. How did this come to be?

I begin by unpacking Beatson's quote above: I note how the concept of social location has influenced both my mother's mothering practices and mine. My maternal grandmother was poor; my maternal grandfather was a local fisherman. My mother's mother was formally undereducated, and she did precarious work when she could find it and when she was not heavily pregnant with her nine children. Not being pregnant was very rare for my grandmother during her twenty-year childbearing period starting in the late 1930s. Whether in the ashes (by the hearth) or in the grave (fully transitioned), I believe that our mothers' lives can inform mothering practices for generations to come. Poverty, and the lessons it teaches, seem to have been the best contraceptive for my own mother, who repeatedly explained her resolve to extricate herself from impoverishment by way of a formal education. Her college diploma led to a profession in teaching. She was immensely proud of her professional accomplishment. During the formative years of my womanhood—around fifteen to twenty years old—it seemed to me that my mother seized every opportunity to share with my (female) cousins and me how her life choices were mobilized by her desire to ensure her children's lives were markedly different from her own. My mother's period of mothering began after she had established herself as a professional teacher. In what was then a colonial society where women were marked by the shade of their skin and demarcated by where their family was positioned in the society; poor, phenotypically Black women in Jamaica had to fight hard and long to become a professional. It was only after attending teachers' college, where she established the foundation of her career, that my mother felt she would no longer be at risk of a future marked by poverty and neglect. With this background, let me state my own social location: After amassing two formal degrees and years of professional experience, I took on the challenges of motherhood. I became an older, mature mother who was deemed to be an at-risk mother by specialist doctors.

Migration stripped me of familial support. I left the warmth of my birth country and all that was familiar (including friends and siblings) when I migrated to Canada. In addition to the challenges of settling into a new country, with new rules and new ways of doing and thinking, I was challenged to figure out what it means to be a good mother in my adopted country. On arrival in my new country, I learned mothering practices that seemed so different and foreign. In Canada, for example, I learned that it was customary

for new mothers to be introduced to the social norms of mothering and related parenting practices in prenatal classes sponsored by community organizations, hospitals, and the government, in discussions at individual and group sessions, and through access to countless books on childbirth and parenting. This seemed to be true, regardless of whether the mothers were immigrants, naturalized citizens, or born in Canada. In Canada, it was not hard to find reading material, since community libraries are numerous: in fact, I surmise they are as plentiful as churches and rum bars (also called drinking establishments) in Jamaica, which are seemingly to be found in every community.

In Canada, however, there is a dearth of information about Black maternal health and the realities that exist for Black women in hospitals, and there is not much data on Black women's relations with health professionals either (Mpinga). For this reason, I am among the Black women who depend on their own mothers, relatives, friends, and community organizations to share experiences with racism. They prepare me for possible encounters with professionals in child services as well as in the healthcare, education, and justice systems. As a first-time mother, I began my mothering journey determined to trust the healthcare system and related institutions. I had no choice. I had too many health issues that seemed to require more sophisticated responses; my health issues confounded my mother and my aunts. Plus, it was extremely important to me that I appear to the medical professionals that I knew how (and was inclined to learn how) to be a good mother. In the eyes of systems fuelled and maintained by white supremacy, it has been my experience that being a good mother results from learning the ways of the dominant culture, but such so-called good mothering does not come naturally to me, and it demands constant practice. I self-identify as a Black mother; in the early days of mothering, I desired all medical professionals with whom I interacted to think of me and treat me as though I were a good Black mother. Little did I know, back then, that there were contradictions inherent to the intersecting social identity of being a good Black mother. I certainly did not know that my positionality automatically disqualified me in the eyes of the more powerful other. Being low-income, formally educated at the tertiary level, Black, and single, I did not realize that under patriarchal motherhood, I should not even have dared to hope to be considered a good mother. In my ignorance, I did not know how futile these aspirations were in a country that espouses and privileges middle-class White values, behaviours, and attitudes as well as promotes stereotypes and myths about Black women.

In this article, I engage with Andrea O'Reilly's concept of "empowered mothering" as explicated in Beatson's article that focuses on Black Caribbean diasporic (m)othering under patriarchal motherhood. Mothering, according to Beatson, is anything but natural or innate (74). I have come to realize that good mothering implies there are societal rules and conventions that must be

learned by mothers and then taught to Black children so that they too can achieve the societal expectations of successful citizens. For this reason, some critical scholars include mothers and motherwork among the normalizing forces that maintain the status quo in mainstream society and related dominant cultures (Getfield, *Prescriptive Partnerships*). Furthermore, Beatson explains that society's responsibility is to raise the nation's future citizens, and future citizens are required to display the norms, values, and attitudes of the mainstream culture. And, Black mothers are required to comply. To this end, I sometimes feel as though I am under strict monitoring in institutional spaces. Under constant, heavy surveillance, it is reasonable for me to conclude that immigrant and Black mothers comply by self-censoring and distancing ourselves from our diasporic cultural knowings. If, and when, we Black mothers or our children deviate from society's norms and values, there is no grace—we and our children are quickly reprimanded and disciplined. Seemingly, there is little wiggle room. This suspicion is substantiated by the disproportionate number of Black and Indigenous students who fail the education system in Canadian provinces each year. Black children are disproportionately removed in high numbers from their homes through child protection services as well as the Children's Aid Society. Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* revealed Black women's ultimate fear for our children—the fear of them being removed from society through maltreatment or death. And for breeding and reproducing society's problems, Black mothers are punished in one way or another, continually. I agree with Audre Lorde that we, Black mothers, are fully aware that we must deal with the real threats that are a part of our real-life everyday experiences and those of our children's lives. In the next section, I unpack such terms as good mother, empowerment and resistance, as well as race and racism.

Good Mother

In Canada, the good mother is widely thought to be middle class, affluent, white, heterosexual and able bodied (See Mullings and Mullings-Lewis 106). In Jamaica, the population is predominantly Black, so considerations of the good mother are nestled in cultural expectation of doing what is best for the child in keeping with mainstream society's rules. In Canada, where the mainstream society and related dominant culture are predominantly white and non-Black, the Black mother is said to be perceived as the antithesis of the good mother, and, as a result, many professionals have sustained and reproduced deficit perspectives of the Black mother (Mullings and Mullings-Lewis 107). In my doctoral study titled *Prescriptive Partnerships: Black Mothers of Disabled Children and Educators in Ontario's Public School System*, (Getfield 85), I showed that diasporic mothers migrate into spaces with their own

cultural understandings of what it means to be a good mother. Therefore, diasporic mothers are armed with cultural practices and understanding passed down from their own mothers: the teachings of one generation of mothers resonate throughout their children's and grand-children's lives. I believe this to be true regardless of whether the mothering experiences were favourable or not and it is irrelevant whether the mothers of diasporic mothers are in the ashes or in the grave.

Cultural understandings and related definitions of the "good mother" in diasporic countries may be similar to or different from cultural understandings and definitions of the "good mother" in the Global North. So, it is up to each mother to decide how she will best support her children's development and growth in their new homeland. In educational spaces, for example, will the Black mother choose to fight a powerful system of regulated professionals or will she choose to disengage from the system altogether in the best interests of her children? Will she cooperate with education professionals even when she disagrees with their decisions just so that she will appear to be a compliant good mother? Will she choose to play along to get along? Are these choices even real when one considers that the more powerful educator can unilaterally decide when to disregard Black mothers (See Getfield, *Prescriptive Partnerships*)? In the next section, I discuss my experiences of empowerment, capitulation, and resignation.

Empowerment

At the time of my children's birth, I had little familial support. Living in the diaspora, I was subjected to increased attention and surveillance from the state. After a rather eventful birthing experience at a large hospital in downtown Toronto, I was allowed to sleep for what seemed like only a few hours. As soon as the nurse woke me up and I had barely opened my eyes, she declared cheerfully yet firmly that she had to ensure I was up and on my feet that day—walking. My body was not ready to comply. Still somewhat disoriented, I was wheeled to the NICU to be introduced to my two babies. The nurse insisted that I had to learn how to bond with my babies, without delay. I had to spend a week in the hospital during which there were lessons on such topics as breastfeeding, how to lift my newborn babies, how to swaddle them, and how to hold and soothe them for long periods. That week in the hospital was no joke; it was emotional and physical work even though I was still in recovery from a Caesarean section. The resident social worker made several appointments with me during which time she quickly brought me up to speed regarding what was expected of a mother of premature twins. This also meant that she skillfully explained in a seemingly nonthreatening manner what the hospital and child protection services deemed to be unacceptable,

and she pointed out the signs of maternal ineptitude and gross incompetence (and therefore neglect). I recall that I kept asking myself if this was the hospital protocol—if all mothers got the same level of attention. I could not figure out if all mothers were duly informed (and warned) in such a manner; I couldn't help but wonder at the amount of money that Canada could afford to spend in its efforts to be so diligent with *all* mothers. But I dared not ask about the hospital protocols. I convinced myself that the hospital staff were being caring and preemptive. I thanked God that I lived in such a rich country that could afford to be so caring and preemptive with every new mother of multiples!

During their second week of life, while my babies were still in the NICU in a hospital near to our home, although no one said it explicitly, it soon became clear to me that I had to attend intensive training sessions to learn how to attend to my two children's needs at night and during the day. The nurses presented these sessions as being optional; they may have mentioned the nurses' shift change time and suggested that I could choose to arrive around that time each night. They did not pose my involvement as a mandated, required, time-sensitive action. So, I totally missed the Canadian language cues. (Canadians tend to frame instructions as options, so they use questions like "Do you think it may be useful to… ?" or "What do you think about doing such and such?) So I thought my attendance at these sessions were at my discretion and availability. The first night I was late because I had exerted myself too much on my first day home, so I experienced severe discomfort later that evening. But I knew I just could not stay away from my newborn babies; I wanted to see them and to hold them. It was only at the last minute that I decided to forgo sleeping in my own bed in order to spend the night with my babies. I quickly made my way to the hospital. When I arrived mid-shift, I could tell the nurses were not amused. They were no longer the friendly conversational crew of nurses with whom I had interacted earlier. It seemed to me that somehow my lateness had confirmed what they knew and expected all along. The problem was that I did not know for sure exactly what they had expected. That night I was under the watchful eye (also known as surveillance) of these health professionals; one nurse after another repeatedly and strongly encouraged me (also known as instructed and reminded me) to sleep at the hospital for the rest of the week so that they could teach me how to care for my newborn twins. My spirit told me to tread softly. Without hesitation, I complied.

That week, to me, they seemed well-intentioned because their instructions were relayed in a tone that communicated sincere care. So I truly believed they would have done the same thing for all new mothers of multiples. For the entire week, the nurses made it a point to come into my room to wake me up so that I could attend to the twins during the dead of night. Under their constant supervision, in the wee hours of the morning for an entire week, I

learned to feed my two babies, burp them, change them, bathe them, and put them back to bed. During that week of recovery, I learned to perform the duties of mothering in a sleep-deprived state as I cared for twins with exceptional needs. During that week, I tried to grab a few hours of sleep during the day when I was allowed to go home. Looking back, years later, eventually it became clear that the training was the test, and the test was the training. As a result of that dichotomous experience during the second week of my children's lives, I felt empowered because I learned the rules of the dominant culture. I had figured out that I could safely break the rules I thought to be unnecessary. That experience prepared me to distance myself from the state policing and child-protection apparatus. Delores Mullings and V. Mullings-Lewis explain: "The socio-political conditionality that helps to create a suspicion of mothers certainly influences the way women mother their children. These contexts are indeed complex, woven with intricacy and detail historical malcontent of women and mothers" (105).

For me, it is important to study the social construction of Black mothers. It is important to investigate societal suspicion of mothers generally, but because of racism (and anti-Black racism, in particular), it is also critical to extend the mothering discourse by gathering Black mothers' personal narratives to learn about their mothering experiences. In this article, an intersectional lens is therefore a critical imperative to analyze Black mothers' experiences along the lines of race, gender, class, and nationality.

Race and Racism

To theorize Black mothering within White spaces, I lean heavily on the introductory chapter of *Critical Race Theory: The cutting edge* (Delgado and Stefancic xvi - xvii) and so I focus on the following CRT tenets/insights, found therein:

1. Racism is [a] "normal, … ingrained feature… [that] looks natural to persons in the culture…;"
2. Interest Convergence "holds that white elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for blacks only when such advances also promote white self-interest…. Change that is too rapid would be unsettling to society at large";
3. Racial oppression can be challenged by storytelling, meaning when racialized people narrate their own life-stories and when "writers analyze the myths, presuppositions and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down"; and
4. Every culture "constructs its own social reality in ways that promotes its own self-interest…. Our social world, with its rules, practices and

> assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed, rather we construct it with words, stories and with silence"

The idea of a dynamic society that is socially constructed through words, stories, and silence aligns with perspectives offered by Patricia Hill Collins in *Motherhood and Space*. Collins speaks about Black motherhood being a series of constantly renegotiated relationships with other Black women, Black children, the wider Black community, and with the Black mother herself. From the experiences shared in my doctoral study, patriarchal motherhood (meaning normative motherhood) requires us to perform in ways expected by social institutions, including health and education. Although researchers focus on how individual mothers perform and enact motherhood, it is also important to investigate the actions of Black women who resist normative pressure (Getfield, *Prescriptive Partnerships*). Resistance is natural and normal—a salient feature in the survival of Black women. Beatson, Collins, and Mullings are among the theorists who posit that resistance has been woven through Black mothers' ways of being and knowing in white societies. Within the dominant white culture, some mothers are resolute that they and their children must not only survive but thrive (Getfield, *Prescriptive Partnerships*).

By the term "race," I refer not to the biological grouping of people according to perceived skin colour or complexion (See Ladson-Billings' "Introduction") but the social construction of groups of people that results in disadvantages and disregard being meted out to some minority groups and benefits to the dominant group (Ladson-Billings 44-45). The group that resides at the centre of society is culturally and financially dominant and therefore more powerful. Race is linked therefore to power and domination. Race performs a necessary role in societies that maintain whiteness, as it sorts who is in power and who is dominant in society. The doing of racism, as well as the ordering and organizing impact of race, will influence how transnational women experience services and access support in the Global North. Since race underscores who is dominant and more powerful, it indicates whose ways of being are prioritized and upheld. Therefore, race and racism will result in the celebration of some mothering practices and the rejection of others (Getfield, "Parenting and Schooling in a Pandemic"). Although critical race theory is foundational to my analysis, through Black feminist ideologies, I am able to further develop my understanding of how empowerment and resistance are realized in Black mothers' lives, actions, and thoughts as well as along several axes or sites of oppression (including race, gender, disability, nationality, and class). Black and racialized women are socially constructed on the periphery or margins of society.

Since racism is common and therefore taken for granted in social institutions, I prioritize race even as I gesture towards the equal impact of the other sites of

oppression (Ladson-Billings). For this reason, I have chosen critical race theory as the main theoretical lens to explore and investigate the Black mothers' experiences of empowerment and resistance. The intersectional nature of this study requires that I look at all sites of oppression rather than imply that there is a hierarchy in which race is always first. When Black mothers receive discriminatory treatment, researchers can never be sure if the disregard or exclusion results from the mothers' race, their gender, or their class. However, critical race theorists including David Gillborn and Gloria Ladson-Billings maintain that in a society built upon whiteness, white supremacy, and the interests of a dominant White mainstream culture, racial inequity will result from racist practices, stereotypes, and assumptions.

My doctoral research focused on seven Black mothers and how they possessed a visceral understanding of schooling in Ontario based on how they applied the ideas about education and schooling that they themselves learned in their birth county (or where they were raised as young students at the primary or secondary level). I believe the same is true about Black mothers' experiences with healthcare in the Western world. I posit that transnational women will therefore differently experience the healthcare and education systems in the Western world.

Time and Geographic Spaces

"Immigrants," "diasporic women," "newcomers," "naturalized citizens of Canada"—these are all terms and labels used to set apart and distinguish the experiences of transnational beings. However, it does not matter if the Black mother is a recent immigrant, has been a naturalized citizen of Canada for decades, or is a fifth generation Canadian who was born and grew up in Canada, Black mothers' relationships are being constantly renegotiated and reimagined in physical spaces across Canada. Those who identify as Black mothers are encouraged to focus their attention on the home, in the school, in the church, temple, mosque, or synagogue, and in the wider secular geographical community. For these reasons, by necessity, my approach differs in part from the one who taught me, by example and by words, how to mother. Our mothering practices and considerations differ because of our respective temporal and geographical location. I have been (re)negotiating mothering and doing motherwork in the Greater Toronto Area. And let me state the obvious: Whereas my mother's most active period of motherwork revolved around her children in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, I began mothering towards the end of the first decade in the 2000s. In addition to the different time periods and the different home countries, we also mothered in different ways because of what our children needed. For me, foremost among mothering activities is my children's development—they must be fully and actively aware

of what it means to be a Black male in Canada (James; Mullings and Mullings-Lewis). This awareness of Blackness and the understanding of the power of whiteness is critically important to Black children who live in a white society (Dumas). Education of Black children must focus on race because the success of Black students and mental health of Black children depend on their awareness of Blackness and what it means to be Black in white spaces (Getfield, *Prescriptive Partnerships*; Getfield, "Family Engagement"). Colour-blind educational policies do not include the acknowledgment of race or racism and do not value the Black family's engagement practices, which include child development activities in the home aimed at spirit building, emotional upliftment, as well as achieving and maintaining positive mental health (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler). Therefore, I posit that Black motherwork is critically important in all geographic spaces and at all times.

Blackness matters, and it matters greatly therefore to unpack how institutional racism has resulted in the disregard, marginalization, and exclusion of Black people. To tease out the impact of institutional racism and the resulting effect on Black mothers, I employ the following definition: "Anti-Blackness is not simply racism against Black people … antiblackness refers to a broader antagonistic relationship between blackness and (the possibility of) humanity (Dumas and Ross 429). Putting it all together, then, what does it really mean to be or become an empowered Black mother? In the next section, I will discuss the concept of resistance.

Resistance

The purpose Beatson's article titled" Engaged Empowered Mothering" is to examine "how Black Caribbean diasporic women confront patriarchal motherhood (75)." Furthermore, Beatson explains the challenge faced by mothers generally: " Patriarchal motherhood is normalized through the state's investment in its perpetuation (75). She explains that the potential for empowered mothering is in "resistance to the nation state." Beatson (76) cites Erika Horowitz as she asserts: "Empowered mothering utilizes resistance as a strategy to decipher the dominant discourse and provides alternative discourses through a sense of personal agency (qtd. in Beatson, "Engaged" 76)."

Diasporic Caribbean mothering as performed by Black Jamaican mothers or Black mothers of Jamaican descent also takes place in female-headed households (See Bose-Duker, Henry, and Strobl). Some households include extended family; others are sole-parent families, whereas other households are traditional nuclear families. My doctoral research reveals that while Jamaican mothers may seek their husbands' opinions on education matters, they do not consult with their husbands or significant others about their mothering practices. By extension, to my mother, her sisters, my female relatives, and my

friends and their mothers, it would be laughable if a mother in our circles sought approval regarding her mothering practices from strangers in a new society when we do not expect that same mother to seek approval from her own husband. In Black Caribbean, and specifically Jamaican circles, such a mother would be deemed irresponsible and would receive immediate, swift, and harsh responses from peer mothers as well as from people they do not even know.

A shared culture, a common identity, as well as shared goals inspire the resistance we stage as Black mothers in the Caribbean and African diaspora (Beatson). We share a common African heritage, as Black people. Generation after generation, we pass down knowledges through stories and ways of being and doing. For this reason, in the diaspora, some Black mothers are inclined to perform motherhood as they would have done in their home countries. Some of us even reimagine and rewrite history, as we tweak our families' recipes and even our accents and as we choose to assimilate or not. Motherhood is reproduced through negotiation with self, with our children, and with our community. And as Black mothers, we resist daily as we negotiate and renegotiate motherwork. We resist as we teach our children the essence of who they are; we are the conduit of our respective traditions and culture. The homes of Black families are sites of resistance. In our homes, we must teach our children how to respond to various kinds of oppression because as Black mothers, we know that the keepers of the dominant culture within our society devalues and disregards Blackness—relegating the entire Black family, including Black women, men, and children to the periphery.

The Act of Black Mothering

Mothering is a gendered activity; typically, the woman (meaning those who identify as female) performs the role of mother. It is usually the female gender that has been expected, by societies across the world, to assume the responsibilities for the duties associated with mothering, including working as agents on behalf of their children in education and health spaces. Black mothering is an action, not a noun. It is an action that for some Black mothers begins when the child is in utero to ensure the safe delivery of a healthy baby. In the Caribbean and elsewhere, pregnant women are referred to as mothers. Mothering is an activity to which the mother is expected to attend from the minute the mother realizes she is pregnant. For many Black mothers, this action begins even earlier—if or when she plans to become pregnant. It is not the custom in the Caribbean to attend prenatal or parenting classes. Epistemologically and ontologically, as Black mothers, we know what we know and we practice what we know because of our own mothers (regardless of whether these mothers are in the ashes or in the grave) and because of

female and male relatives who have mothered us. Black mothering is familial, in that family members, not just the individual mother, contribute to the act of mothering. As an engaged Black mother and as a researcher who investigates Black mothering, I have discovered that Black Caribbean mothers regard and define themselves as good mothers. Black Caribbean mothers resist the Western notion that the label "good mother" is reserved for white, middle-class, and married mothers. The Black women I interviewed for my doctoral research deemed themselves to be good mothers.

Black Caribbean mothers engage in resistance when they disengage from ableist and racist educators and decide to instruct (teach) and repair our children in the home. In so doing, they resist the oppressive interaction between home and school—when the school has abandoned or continually disregarded Black students. Some Black mothers also ensure their children attend church, the mosque, or the temple so they learn to grow in their faith, learn religious beliefs, and know where to turn to when the racist and ableist world turns on them. For many Black mothers, including those in my doctoral research, we opt to teach our children values, beliefs, and attitudes that will help them to surmount challenges and therefore have a chance to thrive in a racist society. Faith groups serve several purposes; they are also places where many Black mothers feel a sense of belonging.

Although some diasporic mothers do not, at first, have a sense of belonging to our new adopted homeland, this feeling of belonging develops as the years go by, as we build communities of support. Within these groups, we form bonds of belonging outside of our own families and relatives in our adopted home, in Canada. As empowered Black mothers, whether we were born in Canada or migrated to Canada, we confront patriarchal motherhood on many fronts. The job of Black mothers is to repair the harm perpetuated against our children in the public school system. When the school system derides and punishes Black students because of what the teachers and administrators perceive to be misbehaviours, the Black mother must take all the time necessary—sometimes weeks and months—to help the student to rebuild their confidence and self-esteem. In keeping with O'Reilly's definition of empowered mothering, some Black mothers have defined themselves as advocates while others have embraced motherhood as "a political site wherein the mother can effect social change" (Beatson 77).

Conclusion

This article has focused on the experiences of Black Caribbean mothers through the personal narratives of one mother. There is no one essential story, and so this article is not intended to be the full story about all Black mothers or all Black Caribbean mothers. Certainly, this article does not wish to

generalize about all Jamaican mothers. However, it shares alternative mothering practices and related struggles of resistance. This one story is subjective, and it privileges the storyteller's experiences, but since the personal is political, this one story is to be seen as a credible source of knowledge that has political implications, since it reverberates and gives voice to the struggles and resistance of many ordinary Black and Black Caribbean mothers who live in the diaspora of their home countries. This single story sheds light on similar stories, but other stories still need to be told, both in Canada and beyond. This one story can be powerful, since it gestures towards possible ways in which change can be manifested in the healthcare system and in schools, specifically in Ontario.

I interpret my story thus: When a mother is single, an immigrant from the Caribbean, Black, and outside of the normal age of mothering, she is considered lacking by Western normalized standards. Such a mother is assumed to be lacking because she does not fit the normal, standard expectations of who and what a mother should be and do. Such a mother transcends and deviates from Western ideas of what a mother is able to do. She is abnormal, and therefore she (and her offspring) is to be set apart. Her ability to mother is questioned. The mother is to be treated with suspicion and is to be watched.

In my case, the prevailing thought was that as a Black mother who must care for premature twins born in Canada, and who may themselves be deemed to have special health needs that fall outside of the norm, I had to be put under surveillance because I might harm them, intentionally or unintentionally. My ways of knowing how to mother (based upon my country of origin) were viewed as foreign, unfamiliar, and therefore suspicious. I had to be trained and then tested by regulated professionals to understand how care must be delivered in Ontario and how mothering is to be practiced to meet hegemonic and normalized expectations of mothering and motherwork. These professionals assumed I did not have the required community cultural wealth of knowledge to help my children.

Anti-Black racism continues to have serious consequences for Black mothers. Going into a hospital can yield serious negative consequences for Black mothers who may say or do what they consider to be normal or natural. For diasporic or immigrant Black mothers, such natural actions could be to their detriment. What is normal in one culture can be pathologized and therefore deemed unacceptable in another. For the Black mother, hospitals and schools can become sites of disablement, and professionals within those settings can become catalysts of disabling conditions when they pathologize Black mothers and disregard Black mothering practices.

This article raises the question: Within a White society that is marked by anti-Black racism, is Blackness by itself enough to raise suspicion? Or is

suspicion raised by the disabling nature of intersecting oppressions, including Blackness, disability, class, country of birth (nationality), and gender? The immigrant mother who lives in a diasporic community will experience motherhood differently from the mothers who were born and raised in Canada, even though all of them are women. Some mothers are othered not just because of their skin colour but also because of their citizenship status. Other mothers experience disadvantages and prejudice based upon their multiple identities. Their foreign-based knowledges and practices contribute to them being othered and feeling othered in a racist society. To compound matters, they do not have the same support of their family members and relatives as they would have had they been back home in their birth or home countries.

For the first ten years of my children's lives, my own mother was a great help to me physically. In real ways, she taught me how to care for my babies and showed me how to guide and guard them as they grew. For ten years, she attended to her earthly mission. Now that she has transitioned, her teachings, her lessons, and her life guide me through many decisions that I must make as a mother (and in other roles) as my children progress through the elementary public school system in Ontario.

So, I end as I began: Mumma a ashes betta dan mumma a grave! But does the physical location of Black Caribbean mothers matter? I conclude in this way: The grave is inconsequential. Black motherwork is never done; it carries on, in, through, and beyond the bloodline. Black mothers continue to love, care, and work beyond the grave.

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JANELLE BRADY

Strategies for Resistance: A Study on Black Mothering as Practices of Disruption for the Schooling of Black children

Black student learners in Greater Toronto Area (GTA) schools face a host of barriers to fair and equitable education. Research has demonstrated that Black students have higher rates of suspension and expulsion (James and Turner 35-37), have lower expectations, face more severe punishment and are ultimately "pushed out" of schools (Dei et al. 10). Black mothers have long employed resistance strategies to combat such barriers, such as navigating race and racial microaggressions (Allen and White-Smith 412), racial and class socializing of their children (Turner 248), and developing an overall understanding of how race impacts their children's education (Williams et al. 937). Much of the literature on Black mothers' experiences and effective social and political mobilization comes from an American perspective, and thus further investigation of such action in the Canadian context is warranted. This article draws on findings from a doctoral dissertation project on Black mothering experiences in the kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) education system. Thirty-three mothers, primarily from the Jane and Finch community in the GTA, participated in three focus groups and three one-on-one interviews. Using a Black feminist theoretical framework, this article focuses on three key study findings: the systemic racism faced by student learners, the intersectional systemic racism faced by Black mothers, and the resistance strategies employed by Black mothers. By analyzing the data emerging from this qualitative research, this article explores the resistance strategies of Black mothers, which open up new possibilities for Black educational futurity.

Introduction: Exploring Education-based Injustices Faced by Black Student Learners

Anti-Black racism is prevalent in the Canadian state as noted by scholars, such as in its historic mistreatment of Black people (such as slavery and

discrimination; Cooper), in media reporting (Crichlow and Lauricella), and in policing (Wortley and Owusu-Bempah). Since the killing of George Floyd, much attention has focused on police brutality and state-sanctioned violence. As demonstrated, contrary to mainstream ideology, anti-Black racism is not, however, confined to policing. It is deeply embedded in all major social institutions, including schools. There is extensive evidence documenting this fact. For instance, in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Black students face higher rates of suspension and expulsion (James and Turner 35). In Ontario, there is an underrepresentation of Black educators (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators 11). Furthermore, Black students are not represented adequately in the curriculum (Katawazi). Despite these great barriers Black student learners face in school, Black mothers have continued to resist racism within these sites. However, Black mothers' strategies of resistance in schooling and education, particularly survival strategies, are understudied. In this article, I highlight the unparalleled impacts of anti-Black racism in schooling and education as well as the survival strategies of Black mothers. The article serves as a challenge to oppressive systems and a reclamation of Black mothers' onto-epistemologies. It is written to administrators and educators of Black children, who tend to predominantly occupy white middle-class positionalities, to Black mothers to reaffirm their practices, and to wider communities who can benefit from such a dialogue rooted in disrupting and challenging systems of oppression. The next subsection describes anti-Black racism, the conceptualization of Blackness I employ, and further establishes the context of anti-Black racism in schooling and education.

Anti-Black Racism in Education: In Context

Anti-Black racism centres the specificity of Blackness within the context of systemic racism (Dei, *Anti-Racism Education* 129; Benjamin 60). In this article, I focus on anti-Black racism to highlight the unique location of Blackness within a system of white supremacy. I conceptualize anti-Black racism as part of a project of white supremacy, in which whiteness not only centres race but also ableism, gendered oppression, transphobia, homophobia, citizenship and belonging, ethnicity, classism, sexual oppression, and the dominance of Christian ways of knowing and being. Through this perspective, I engage systemic racism not through an all-encompassing people of colour perspective but rather via a Blackness approach. Anti-Black racism is embedded within the specificity of anti-Black racism, so responses, mobilization, and strategies of resistance ought to be anchored through collective action as opposed to fragmented individual responses. Such fragmentation can perpetuate a divide-and-conquer politic of Black and racialized communities, which can benefit the logic of white supremacy (Brady

122). By employing Blackness as a political space (Dei, *Reframing Blackness* 20; Mirza), I anchor the lived experiences, resistances, and connectedness of Blackness and community in a sphere with differences while in conversation, tension, and existence with each other.

Furthermore, Black students in the GTA face a plethora of barriers, which have been the subject of academic investigation for several decades. For example, George Dei argues that the term "push out" should be used in place of "drop out" when discussing attrition of Black students, as the latter term emphasizes on the individual learner rather than the structural barriers they face, one of which is anti-Black racism ("Drop Out or Push Out"). The TDSB has reported that 54 per cent of all human rights complaints are race related, with anti-Black racism encompassing a large portion of such. This has led to calls from the president of the Ontario Black History Society, Natasha Henry, as well as from anti-racist scholar Dei, for an overhaul of the Ontario curriculum to make it more representative through the inclusion of Black history (Katawazi). Carl James and Tana Turner, in a ground-breaking report, note that Black students face higher levels of discipline and punishment in the Greater Toronto Area. For instance, they are twice as likely as white and other racialized students to be suspended, and almost half the Black student population has been suspended at least once despite only making up approximately 12 per cent of the student population.

One of the educational injustices faced by Black students is the longstanding practice of streaming (Curtis 65), whereby Black students are often placed in limiting programs and infrequently in gifted programs or university-track courses. In 2020, the Ontario provincial government began efforts to do away with this longstanding practice after decades of community advocacy. Despite the common assertion by many white Canadians that racism is only an American phenomenon, it is clear that the school-to-prison pipeline exists in the Canadian context as well (Salole and Abdulle 159). Furthermore, the school-to-care pipeline[1] is also rampant in Canada, and Black and Indigenous children are also overrepresented in the ranks of children in care (OHRC).

The stated documentation of anti-Black racism in schooling has been accompanied by many calls to disrupt and challenge the status quo. However, the role of Black mothers who navigate anti-Black racism within schools has been underinvestigated. Black mothers have long fought for their children and others within the wider community against the barriers posed by anti-Black racism in schools. Black mothers are not simply adult allies to children who face systemic oppression. They are themselves uniquely situated in positions that other them based on gendered, raced, ableist, and classed lines. However, rather than adopting a deficit approach, in this study, the unique positionality of Black mothers is understood within their social-political and historical contexts, in which Blackness is not stigmatized but instead understood as a

site of resistance. By this, I steer from the deficit-based approach that individualizes the plights of Black mothers while removing social, political, and historical context-reinforcing stereotypes and other means by which inequalities are justified and entrenched into various systems. Therefore, reclaiming the unique and important role of Black mothers through a strength-based approach can serve as a form of resistance to anti-Black racism, heteropatriarchy, classism, ableism, and other forms of oppression. Despite these struggles, the strategies of resistance, as demonstrated through survival navigational instances employed by Black mothers, often go unnoticed in academic research and educational practice as do the injustices they face.

Mothers of Black children must navigate institutions, such as schools, in unique ways because of the anti-Black racism faced by their children. This article explores the navigation strategies employed by Black mothers to struggle against the systemic injustices their children face within Greater Toronto Area (GTA) schools. This study also attempts to provide a nuanced understanding of Black mothers' subject positions in the wider milieu of systemic anti-Black racism embedded within various systems of oppression, including patriarchy, racial capitalism, ableist normativity, heteronormativity, and whiteness. This study also aims to highlight what I am calling a "Black mothering" approach as a strategy of resistance to anti-Black racism and to bolster the possibilities of Black educational futurity.

Therefore, in this article I ask, what are the unique social-political locations of Black mothers that position them to resist systemic anti-Black racism faced by Black student learners? To answer this question, this article begins by exploring relevant literature and summarizing the theoretical framework of Black feminism. It then describes the study's research methodology, presents the study's findings, and discusses lessons that can be learned from Black mothering in a study on Black educational futurity.

Review of Literature: Documenting and Reclaiming Black Ontoepistemologies

The Survival and Resistance of Black Mothers in Historical Context

The legacies of Black women's survival are deeply rooted in our histories and the challenges we have faced. Particularly when it comes to Black mothers, resistance is rooted in strategies that are employed for survival. For example, as Nioki Wane states, "Black women are survivors and have always played central roles in Black history as the custodians of tradition and values" ("[Re] Claiming My Indigenous Knowledge"18). Black mothers are crucial in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Such knowledge is a key resource in struggles against white supremacist logic as it is applied to Black children and their wider communities. Toni King and Alease Ferguson postulate the

"motherline" as a process by which knowledge that challenges patriarchy is passed on and affirmed (4). Hortense Spillers describes Black women's interest in engaging in insurgency as opposed to gendered-normative ideals of mothering (80). Here, the insurgency can be understood as sites that disrupt the status quo and unjust systems. For example, racial capitalism perpetuates gendered norms, such as that of ideal motherhood; however, Spillers captures the resistance to such normative tropes of motherhood as a natural extension to womanhood and how Black mothers resist these systems. This is important because Black mothers' race saliency, which is the signifier of race, provides a critical site of resistance to taken-for-granted norms, creating more avenues for an insurgency, which can aptly be captured through survivalism.

To this, much of Black mothers' survival strategies are bound up with their relationships with Black children and their labour of care. For example, Sinikka Elliott and Megan Reid highlight the grief faced by Black mothers while raising children who face "daily assaults on their very being" (51). This is the experience of Black mothers as they engage in racial justice work for their children while navigating the education system. Furthermore, key aspects of Black mothers' care labour are warning their children of the racism they will face and working to instill racial pride (Hill 503). Unfortunately, the education curriculum in many schools often fails to provide opportunities for Black children to learn their histories and identities consistently, so it is often left to Black mothers to do the work of teaching racial pride (Mullings and Mullings-Lewis 111).

Beyond pedagogies employed by Black mothers' lessons, the everyday aspects of survivalism are expressed in Black mothers' othermothering practices. According to scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins ("Meaning of Motherhood"), Shirley Hill, and Wane ("Reflections on the Mutuality"), othermothers are those who extend the work of mothering and transgress the biological confines of motherhood. Through othermothering, Black women feel a level of accountability to all children in the Black community (Collins 5). This practice is captured through the mobilization strategies of women in the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). In their letter describing the origination of the BLM movement, cofounder Alicia Garza explains that the intent of the movement is to recognize state-sanctioned violence and the killing of Black transwomen and Black ciswomen, whose stories go unnoticed in the wider discourse ("Herstory"). In its focus on the BLM movement, the mainstream media has been preoccupied with the killing of Black cismen, and although BLM's focus on Black police brutality is important, this is not the full extent of the movement's concerns. This example shows how Black women have mobilized for the Black community's children rather than simply assuming responsibility only for their biological kin as divided across capitalist configurations of family in nuclear heteronormative arrangements. Othermothering stems from African

ontoepistemological family configurations, in which the extension of family subverts Western notions of nuclear families to include a broader set of relations, including but extending beyond biological relatives. Through othermothering resistance strategies, Black mothers do the work of survival not only for themselves but also for wider communities who combat violence, exclusion, and oppression.

The preceding section describes Black mothers' resistance strategies through survivalism, but it is important to highlight that our history does not start with colonization and slavery and to recognize the ontologies and epistemologies of African Indigenous knowledges as they relate to Black mothering. Nah Dove disrupts a matriarchy-patriarchy binary by employing a nuanced matrix to motherhood that is informed by African spirituality and can help inform current racial struggles (9). Although I have highlighted the influence of African contexts, there is merit to engaging the idea of an Africa beyond the continent to consider what unites those on the continent and in the diaspora (Dei, *Teaching Africa*). In reimagining African knowledge systems, we can see practices such as othermothering not only as responses to anti-Black racism and patriarchy but also as practices rooted in African ways of knowing and being.

Current Responses to Anti-Black Racism of Black Mothers

In current contexts, there are a multitude of forms anti-Black racism takes in schools, and thus Black mothers have employed a range of resistance strategies. In a longitudinal study conducted by Amber Williams et al., seventy-six Black mothers described their perceptions of race and pointed to the significance of providing children with racially diverse contexts and encountering Black educators in their schools. These mothers also shared their concerns about teachers' biases and stereotypical beliefs that could lead to the (mis)labelling of Black children, such as being hyperactive and in need of discipline. They also shared their experiences of microaggressions when advocating for their children. Quaylan Allen and Kimberley White-Smith describe the system navigation strategies Black male youths and their families employ. The mothers in this study saw education as a form of financial mobility and stressed the importance of teaching their sons how to navigate racial microaggressions.

In a study revealing anti-Black racism in school suspensions, Tunette Powell and Justin Coles describe a prevailing assumption that Black mothers are uninterested in their children's education or that they themselves are uneducated (86). These women describe efforts to combat such assumptions, including sharing credentials to undermine these stereotypes. At the same time, some participants also describe how they had internalized anti-Black racism by blaming themselves for its outcomes.

These examples illustrate some of the structural anti-Black racist inequities

faced by Black student learners and the resistance strategies employed by Black women. However, each of the studies summarized above took place in the United States. Although there is a similar pattern of anti-Black racism in Canada, the unique resistance strategies employed by Black mothers have not received sufficient scholarly attention.

Theoretical Framework: Engaging Black Feminism to Highlight Resistance Practices of Black Mothers

Black feminism is crucial to fully understanding Black mothers' system navigation strategies and responses to anti-Black racism when supporting their children. Black feminist thought is significant for the study of Black mothers' resistance because it draws on Black women's lived experiences, the connections between historical and contemporary struggles, our self-definition and situated knowledges, and because it has a liberatory praxis orientation (Collins 9). Black feminism offers a challenge to dominant positivist theories that reinforce a modern-colonial orientation to ways of knowing and being. Through Black women's stories, Black feminist thought theorizes our lived experiences and realities. In this study, it is through Black mothers' lived experiences that lessons on systemic racism, patriarchy, classism, and all forms of oppression at intersectional junctures are revealed, even as these women work to create more just educational outcomes for Black student learners. In the following sections, I describe some of the most salient features of Black feminism in relation to Black mothers' resistance strategies, such as intersectionality and the engagement of social location. I then extend the parameters of Black feminism through African epistemologies and ontologies to expand the nuances of Black mothers' effective resistance strategies.

A Black feminist theoretical framework draws on the concept of intersectionality, which examines the unique position of race, gender, and class colliding as roads at an intersection rather than mutually exclusive experiences (Crenshaw). Because of Black mothers' intersectional subject positions, system navigation, such as that done in schools, is not separate from this positionality. Intersectionality can be understood beyond the three dimensions of race, class, and gender. Black feminist thought aims to unpack the lived experiences of Black women from their contexts; similarly, African feminism is contextual to the experiences of African women. Both theories have overlapped, such as intersectionality. African feminist scholar Filomina Steady describes the intersections of racism, sexism, and the global political economy, which disenfranchises not only women but also men and members of the wider community, and therefore such issues of racial patriarchy and larger lopsided geopolitical forces cannot simply be resolved through individualist interventions ("African Women" 150). Thus, intersectionality can also be a

challenge to so-called objective and scientific ways of knowing and being.

Furthering challenges to so-called neutral ontoepistemologies, the notion of objectivity is challenged by Black feminist thinkers who support the significance of self-definition, which is defining and theorizing one's own experiences to extrapolate the wider issues of racism, patriarchy, classism, ableism, and all forms of oppression. Collins describes this type of theorization through self-definition as situated knowledges (*Black Feminist Thought*). Through the social-political locations of Black mothers, their advocacy strategies and resistances are enacted. Furthermore, we can employ Steady's concept of "socio-centric interests" to understand how Black women's mobilization strategies support humanity more broadly rather than just the interests of women ("The Black Woman"). It is through Black women's lived experiences that these "socio-centric interests" are engaged. This is congruent with the mobilization efforts of Black mothers, which seek to disrupt white supremacist school systems, as these efforts impact the entire school population and the broader communities in which schools are located, creating new opportunities for change.

The possibilities of Black educational futurity are entrenched in Black mothers' ontoepistemologies and mobilization strategies. I am employing the term "Black educational futurity" to denote a space wherein Black children, their families, and their wider communities can engage in education, be it in schooling or not, without the violence of anti-Black racism. I extend Black educational futurity to denote the intersectional experiences of Black community members, which are not simply defined by race but also class, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, place of birth, migration status and citizenship, disability, and language. Put simply, Black ciswomen cannot be free when Black trans disabled children are not. Black educational futurity is reimagining the possibilities for liberation now.

Although some theorists have critiqued Black feminism for reproducing the Global North's hierarchal theoretical dominance (Hudson-Weems), I draw on African women theorists to extend the possibilities of the Black feminist framework. I believe Black feminism has important features for the study of Black mothers' strategies of resistance, but it can benefit from African ontoepistemologies. Monica Coleman et al. refer to Oyeronke Oyewumi's "mothernity," which is "an African communitarian ideal" (105-106). Through this term, Oyewumi challenges Western colonial ideals of motherhood as natural by exploring terms used in various contexts in which people of African descent still engages ideas stemming from African community-oriented ideals of motherhood through language and praxis, furthering the idea of Africa beyond the continent as I described earlier. Just as the motherline includes knowledge transmission and collective ontoepistemologies based on African community-oriented and liberatory practices, the same is the case with

"mothernity" through knowledge transmission through mothers and community-focused ideals, which furthers the concept of resistance in Black mothering. In the following section, I point to some examples of such collective, liberatory practices employed when rooted in African ways of knowing and being.

Another important discourse for capturing Black mothers' knowledge production is described by Sharon Omotoso as "motherism," an Afrocentric alternative to Western feminisms; it is pertinent in African cosmologies and has led to the survival and unity of the Black race throughout time. This is akin to the notion of "socio-centric interests" described earlier; Black women mobilize beyond their individual interests to benefit wider communities—be it around environmental action or mobilizing around unjust structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) in the Global South (Steady, *The Black Woman* 4). Motherism is an active orientation towards resistance and change making, which challenges Eurocentric systems and relates to the struggle for justice in schooling and how Black mothers mobilize around disrupting and challenging the status quo.

This article seeks to further the challenge of the status quo by capturing the knowledge production and labour of Black mothers as they struggle for justice in the school system for their children and wider communities, and their actions for change are often lost and forgotten. The erasure experienced by Black mothers challenging injustices in schools is similar to the erasure of Black mothers' knowledge production in women's liberation movements (Rodgers). The above described the theoretical approaches that informed my aim of understanding the strategies employed by Black mothers to resist systemic racism in GTA schools. This study identified how this resistance occurs at the local school level through Black mothers as knowledge keepers. The next section describes the method employed in this investigation.

Methodology: Black Community Mobilizations and Sharing Practices

This article summarizes aspects of the findings of my 2019 doctoral research, which examines Black mothers' educational system navigation strategies and their intersectional social locations. This research is rooted in Black and African feminisms, is undergirded by African Indigenous knowledges, and takes a decolonial and liberatory approach. My research approach forefronts both the past and current injustices suffered by the researched. Thus, it was important for me as the investigator to adopt an asset-based approach as opposed to a deficit-based approach, so as not to reproduce the unjust research practices Black community members have often experienced, which serve to reinforce lopsided power relations between the academy and the community.

This article focuses primarily on the findings pertaining to Black mothers' resistance and survival strategies.

The study involved Black mothers from the Jane and Finch community in Toronto whose children were in the public education system from K-12, either currently or within the previous five years. Through trust and past rapport with some participants such as Elders, thirty-three participants were recruited to participate. Ethical approval was granted through the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Board. As well, posters, both digital and print, were shared by way of community channels and spaces. The qualitative orientation of the fieldwork led to rich data sets, which were analyzed to better understand Black mothers' experiences.

In the project, I had the opportunity to work alongside Elders in the Jane and Finch community, and I was given advice regarding planning focus groups and ensuring invites were shared widely. The Jane and Finch community, named after an intersection in the city of Toronto, is an underfunded inner suburb, which is racially and ethnically diverse. The neighbourhood has received much negative attention over the years, so community members have engaged in resistance practices through various grassroots organizing and political mobilizations (James). Much of this advice was shared in Elders' homes over a cup of tea and a meal. Thus, I attempted to ground my approach in lifelong relationships, which is important for conducting decolonial research (Smith 36). My research approach was also influenced by Joyce King's challenge to ideals of objectivity and neutrality. I intentionally examined my own positionality as a Black woman and member of the Jane and Finch community who went through the GTA school system and faced anti-Black racism. My own experience, as well as the experiences of other Black community members I worked with in a mentorship program I initiated some years ago, is what prompted my interest in this investigation.

The methods employed were focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews. In the focus group interviews, the seating formation was arranged in a manner akin to nia circles, which are part of African ontoepistemologies, whereby community members sit together in a circular arrangement and engage in group conversation rather than in a top-down fashion with the researcher at the front of the room and participants all facing forwards. Follow-up one-on-one interviews were held with participants who wanted to continue the conversation or had scheduling conflicts with the focus group dates. A total of three focus groups were held at various community centre locations.

For these focus groups, I hosted two of the focus groups, whereas the third was organized via invitation by a community leader, who leads a community centre-based mother's group. She invited me to lead one of her sessions and to hold a focus group with members of this group. I was honoured to accept this

invitation. Often researchers experience barriers that prevent them from gaining access to participants, but because of my years of community work, this stage of the project was filled with generosity and relationality. Each focus group included twelve to fifteen participants and lasted for two to two-and-a-half hours. Two of the one-on-one interviews were held in community members' homes, and the third was done by telephone, each lasting one to one-and-a-half hours. The data were stored using a safe encrypted device. For analysis, I utilized NVivo to conduct thematic analysis (Creswell 166). In the interpretation stage, I worked to determine the feedback provided from study participants (Creswell). A community check-in was held where the findings were shared with seventeen participants through a presentation prior to the writing stage. Check-ins are an important step to ensure that the researcher confirms the findings produced by the members of the study to ensure the participants determined their knowledge was adequately reflected in the results. At the session, members confirmed the findings and provided feedback for changes they wish to see in the schooling experiences of their children. The check-in session was combined with a back-to-school resource-sharing community conversation, in which relevant information was shared with participants as my way of giving back to the community. The findings illuminated key information regarding a study of Black mothering and anti-Black racism in education and beyond.

A key challenge of this research process was that participants would bring additional community members on site beyond the preset registration count because they understood the significance of discussions of anti-Black racism and education as it relates to their children. This led to a higher number of participants than required. In designing the research method, I followed the practice of underestimating turnout and recruiting slightly higher, approximately ten participants per focus group, in case of cancellations (Guest et al.), because the ideal number for focus groups is between eight and ten members to allow for a constant flow of conversation.

During the focus groups, I carefully facilitated the conversation to ensure all members had an opportunity to speak. Fortunately, there were additional informed consent forms, school navigation resources (James and Turner), dinner, public transportation tokens, and gift cards on site which I secured through my Ontario Graduate Scholarship funding to assist underresourced community members to participate. The next section describes the study findings.

Findings

The findings summarized here shed light upon many of the injustices faced by Black mothers, their children, and the wider community, but also the strategies of survival employed by Black mothers. Here, I focus on three main findings: anti-Black racism in schooling and broader contexts, the intersectional positionality of Black mothers, and othermothering practices. The names of all participants are anonymized to protect their confidentiality.

Systemic Racism in the Institution of Schooling

Focus group participants spoke of their frequent experiences with anti-Black racism as they navigated the school system for their children. They also described the anti-Black racism their children experience as they attend school. Mothers described several recurring issues that motivated them to advocate for their children or those of other parents, including streaming, suspensions, unfair discipline, and the condition of schools. For example, Roxanne described implicit streaming practices: "And I remember it vividly when my daughter was entering the high school system. I personally pull[ed] the teachers aside and I asked them … 'What is the difference between the applied and the academic?' [Teacher's response:] 'um, it's better your daughter start[s] in applied … then she can switch.' But that's not so; once you are in applied, you can't switch." Some of the mothers also related their own experiences of streaming. For instance, Sonia stated that although she was an honour roll student, she struggled with grade eleven science. This made her feel like she belonged in the applied stream: "[Back then] it was just applied and academic. So, I put myself in applied, right? And the teacher told me, like, what are you doing here? I need to, like, go back to academic, and I thought I belonged in applied because of the way that the teachers in the classroom made me feel."

Mothers also shared their experiences of their children being suspended. For instance, Rene shared that her child was bullied by a white student, yet the school administrators suspended her, and this happened in more than one school. Sonia also shared that her son was suspended in grade one at the age of six. Mothers in all three focus groups and in each one-on-one interviewed shared that their child had been suspended. One parent, Mona, shared that their son was currently suspended: "now, he get suspended since Thursday to today. So tomorrow he has to go back to school." These are just a few of the instances of systemic racism described by the participants during the research process. As Black mothers advocate for their children, they also face a plethora of barriers.

Black Mothering School Navigation Survival Strategies

In every interview, mothers shared strategies they had used to resist anti-Black racism within their children's schools. The importance of knowing one's rights was raised in each focus group and one-on-one interview. For instance, Roxanne, who takes a leadership role in the community, stated, "If you know your rights—every single day, know your rights. If you don't know your rights? Goodbye." She then went on to stress the importance of parents advocating for their children. Some parents mentioned that they grew up in Ontario and went through its school system and therefore know how to navigate it for their children and the wider community.

Another recurring theme was navigation strategies to combat stereotypes of single motherhood. Shanique described how the stereotype works: "When I was married [but] without my ring, they did talk to me a certain way. And then when I walked in with my ring on my finger, it's like, oh 'Misses,' and I'm like, didn't we talk like two weeks ago, and you were talking to me like I was a nobody, but now when I walk in with a ring, I'm all of a sudden somebody?" To combat the single mother trope, one strategy for navigating the school system that came up in all three focus groups and in two of the three one-on-one interviews concerned having male family members attend school meetings. For example, Jacqueline shared the following observations:

> They look at you different because they label you as a single parent…. They put all kinds of labels on you. But when the parents are there … there is more structure. So, when the kids misbehave and only the mother comes in, they look at you differently. They don't pay as much attention when the man is there, even when they have nothing to say, when you have report (cards), any kind of interaction with the school—even if it's a brother or older brother, uncle or whatever. But be present at the table, they look at you in a different way.

Jacqueline's observations generated much discussion. Some mothers felt that her claims reinforced patriarchal norms about what a good family is and challenged the notion that white educators are not also members of single-parent households. However, Jacqueline clarified that although she does not agree with the assumptions contained within her observations, the strategy of bringing a male family member to meetings has helped her and other parents navigate the school system. Barbara and others supported this position but suggested that those accompanying you need not be male by stating the following: "It's not only if you have a gentleman, but if you have an auntie—like me, in my case, I go with Rene…. If they [staff and school administration] see you alone and don't see anybody else backing you up they treat you differently. They do." In Barbara's case, she is involved in caregiving and support for another Black mother participant in the study—Rene, who lives in

Barbara's building. Barbara does not have biological children but assumes an othermothering role for relatives, neighbours, and members of the community. Thalia elaborated on this point in a separate focus group interview: "I would show them (educators and administrators in schools). I may not be married. But I do have support. And that's the thing that they often think people like us Black women—we don't have support." I now focus on some of the instances of survival strategies employed by Black mothers in the study.

Othermothering and Community Parenting Practices

Though not using the term, participants described othermothering practices as forms of resistance employed by individual mothers to meet not only their needs but also the needs of the wider community. For example, Thalia shared her experience of having to remove her son from a school due to his being suspended in grade three and being placed into a separate classroom for children with behavioural issues, all of whom were Black. This move occurred without her knowledge. In response, she drafted a letter in which she spoke not only for her child but also for other Black children in the school. She stated: "And although my child is my responsibility, I also felt a responsibility for those children that we were leaving behind. So, in writing my letter, I obviously touch base on those other children that were potentially being affected like that, too." Thalia removed her son from that school and placed him in a French immersion program, but she felt it was important to advocate for other Black children by writing a letter to the school board.

Othermothering practices also took the form of mutual support between parents. For example, some mothers shared how their friends would intervene in heated situations so they would not signify in ways that resemble the "angry Black woman" trope. For example, Gabrielle stated" "Because of your colour and because the rage that I'm in, and I'm upset, she [her friend] said don't go to the school. So …calm yourself." Othermothering is also carried out through fatherhood, whereby Black men—be it uncles, friends, family members, or brothers—also assume mothering work when they support parents by sometimes having a conversation with the children or acting as a representative in the schools, as highlighted by Jacqueline earlier regarding advice on visiting the school as a Black mother.

Knowledge Transmission of Black Mothers

Participants in the study also engaged in knowledge transmission to resist racist systems and a lack of Black students' adequate reflection in the school system (e.g., curriculum, educators, and pedagogies). Naomi shared her experience: "There was never a time that my son learned anything about his history, or his culture, [so] … I'll supplement at home…. I'll take him to stuff in the community, you know, I'll do that extra work myself. But … there's only

so much supplementing you can do.... So that he didn't get any of that in school." Similarly, Shelly-Ann stated the following: "I don't necessarily totally depend on the [school] system to teach my children about themselves.... [School] doesn't reflect who they are. It doesn't reflect their interest. It doesn't reflect the community interests.... I'm a teacher to them in their own sense of giving them their own purpose, making sure that they're involved in what they need to be."

In terms of providing a sense of self, many participants in the study shared their advice and teaching to their children, such as Christine who stated: "You can't take that away.... You are going to go into to the world and let them know you are a Black child. And that's why you're different." Passing on key lessons on Blackness for their children was a prevalent theme in the study and happens despite a lack of such education provided in the schools, as described by mothers in the study.

Discussion: Reclamation of Black Ways of Knowing and Being through Black Mothering

Although Black mothers and Black student learners face a number of barriers based on their intersectional social locations, the findings presented here suggest that Black mothers employ a number of strategies to navigate a school system steeped in anti-Black racism. However, although race is salient, the Black mothers in this study faced repeated injustices when navigating the education system as a result of their multiple intersecting identities, such as through the single mother trope. The results also suggest that Black mothers are often silenced and told not to engage in advocacy, and when they do they face unjust consequences. Despite these barriers, Black mothers engage in a range of survival strategies, including drawing on community support, othermothering, knowing their rights, and supplementing missing curriculum for their children when that is lacking in schools.

The findings reveal that some mothers were careful to avoid presenting themselves in ways that might lead them to be stereotyped, such as being seen as the "angry Black woman," or to help fellow Black women avoid this trap. This points to the larger issue of Black mothers being judged through apolitical and ahistorical tropes and the resulting strategies they employ to avoid such stereotypes. For example, Williams et al. quote a participant who described thinking that an educator was hesitant to share key information at a parent-teacher conference about her daughter's progress because she was Black: "I think the reason why she didn't bring it up to me earlier is that she felt like a Black parent was probably gonna go in there and go crazy" (942). In this example, the sexist trope of the hysterical woman is intensified when combined with race leading to an ableist trope—"crazy." The relationship between Black

mothers and the school community can be fractured through these stereotypical ideas. Schooling injustices and assumptions of Blackness colour Black mothers' interactions within such institutions, create various survival strategies to reduce the chances of such barriers hindering their school navigation.

As noted above, othermothering was repeated across all focus groups and interviews in the study. It is a set of practices by which Black mothers can disrupt Western notions of motherhood and nuclear family arrangements. Othermothering, however, should be seen not only as a response to anti-Black racism but also as being rooted in African Indigenous ontoepistemologies. Thus, othermothering is not simply reactionary to oppressive historical systems, such as slavery or current conditions of poverty and inequality. Rather, it is part of African ways of knowing and being, and affirming this highlights that our histories did not start with colonization and slavery. Throughout the study, mothers would invite community members—such as male-identifying partners, relatives, and friends—to join them in their interactions with schools for support and to demonstrate that they were not alone when advocating in schools.

I think of Black mothering as active and not passive, and a possible avenue of disruption against systemic anti-Black racism in schooling, as demonstrated through the survival strategies of mothers in the study. Despite the barriers to be vocal because of their intersectional subject positions, Black mothers find creative ways to resist unjust systems in the community, such as reaching out to nonbiological family members for support. Black mothering practices include knowledge transmission passed through mothers through what King and Ferguson call the "motherline," Oyewumi refers to as "mothernity," and Dove labels "the nuances of motherhood," which was prevalent in the study by way of the knowledge transmission strategies employed by Black mothers, who supplement with their own teachings when the school curriculum and experiences lack histories and current realities that are relevant for Black students. Black mothers consistently describe a lacking in the education system; as a result, they work to provide a sense of awareness of Blackness for their children through an acceptance of difference, which is contrary to colour-evasive tropes bolstered in mainstream education. Moreover, participants consistently centre the embeddedness of Blackness within community contexts, which is a space for Black children to learn more about their identity in an interconnected frame, as described by both Naomi and Shelly-Ann in how they pass on race-positive knowledge. This is consistent with the community-oriented attribute of Black feminism that goes beyond the individual level (Collins 10). Participants in the study shared their examples of othermothering practices to care for and respond to issues related to the wider community, such as the letter Thalia sent to the school regarding a behavioural class with only Black students. Othermothering is a resistance strategy not

only for individual survival but also for wider community goals. Added to this, Black mothers' knowledge transmission serves as a form of filling in the gaps for racist systems, which omit Black histories and present realities in the schooling system; however, Black mothers find a creative ways to instill Black pride and sense of self for Black children, as evident by Christine's example of her advice to her child and to all Black children—"You are a Black child"—as well as Naomi's and Shelly-Ann's supplements for education, which lacks Black ways of knowing and being through curriculum and pedagogies.

Many of the methods Black mothers employ to navigate racist institutions are strategies for survival, which may sometimes uphold the very norms that they seek to challenge. For example, Jacqueline's advice of having a male partner accompany Black mothers in school meetings and interactions can be read as a form of heteronormativity. However, Barbara noted that support can also come from other community members, such as aunties. The designation of "aunties" is not included in the bureaucratic inertia of school official registration forms but is important when engaging African ways of knowing and being, which points to another mismatch between the school system and Black mothering practices. This response reinforces the intersectional social locations of Black mothers, which is a challenge to the stereotypical assumptions of single parenthood Black mothers are labelled with navigating school systems. The strategies employed may not be the same as mass forms of activism, such as demonstrations and marches, although these are also part of many Black women's experiences, but rather the transmission and sharing of knowledges and active advocacy strategies are important means of combatting systemic violence.

What I am referring to as Black mothering can move beyond survival strategies to also include activism, as was evident in this study as othermothering, advocacy, and sharing. Black mothering can also take up an intersectional orientation, which challenges assumptions of mutually exclusive markers of identity. Who is to say that a community member cannot be Black, queer, and disabled? This study shows how race, gender, and class are at the intersection of Black mothers' experiences, and this is nuanced with other markers of identity. Disrupting and troubling what it means to be a mother—a concept which is rooted in social reproduction practices that are foundational to the capitalist nation-state—are essential in community justice work. The participants' responses make clear that a transgressive orientation to motherhood already exists but is not clearly ascribed to Black mothers who challenge and combat complex systems. According to Steady: "Qualities of motherhood, perceived as being nurturing, compassionate, and protective, were considered essential to female leadership. In many ways, motherhood is a symbolic, ideological, and structural concept that cuts across gender and is, as well, a marker of individual attributes and characteristics" (*Women and*

Leadership 22). Motherhood can be a transformative space that cuts across classed, raced, gendered, and ableist positionalities. For instance, Jacqueline's thoughts on bringing a male-identifying person into the interviews can be read as counter-fatherhood as well because she does not specify that they ought to be a biological father. Barbara added that they can be an uncle, an auntie, or a friend, which troubles the notions of biological and gendered mothering but demonstrates that it can transgress these ideals. Thalia also stated the importance of having support from other people besides her partner, despite being married. Black mothers trouble the configurations of mothering through othermothering practices, wherein it takes a community to raise children. Thus, Black mothering is a practice that can transgress gender binary configurations of motherhood. The apolitical and ahistorical accounts of Black motherhood serve to reinforce the status quo. Through capturing Black mothers' rich resistance strategies, both past and present, Black educational futurity can be reimagined. For instance, a broader understanding of, and appreciation for, othermothering practices can disrupt notions of single parenthood, since Black mothers are then situated within the contexts of their families and wider communities as described in the findings.

Black mothering can serve as a site of disruption to unjust systems through new orientations to understanding the complexity of Black mothers' survival strategies employed in the schooling and education of their children and communities. If schools' staff and administrators and the wider community were to understand the complexity of Black mothering practices, as demonstrated through their survival strategies, it could result in new perspectives of Black mothers and wider communities and help to enrich the experiences of Black children in schools. Such an understanding can help create more just systems and enhanced Black educational futurity, not only for Black community members but for all communities.

Conclusion

In this article, I have described the educational injustices faced by Black children in GTA schools, the intersectional inequities faced by Black mothers in advocating and supporting Black student learners, and the resistance strategies of survival led by Black mothers. I situate the paper in Black feminism, which explores Black women's lived experiences in challenging wider systems of oppression. And I have called for a Black mothering approach, which provides insight into anti-Black racism in schooling and education and highlights the possibilities for Black educational futurity. Not only is futurity about the here and now, but it is also about better futures for Black children, families, and communities who have been disenfranchised through normative approaches to schooling and education. Centring the specificity of Black

mothering develops new orientations to learning and unlearning oppressive practices embedded within and across multiple systems, while providing opportunities to disrupt and challenge the status quo in education and beyond.

Endnotes

1. The school-to-care pipeline is a system where Black children are removed from their families and placed in care systems such as Children's Aid (Ajdei and Minka).

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ZEINA OTAKY RAMIREZ, CARMEN M. DONES, AND CINDY N. PHU

Journeys of Healing and Self-Actualization: An Autoethnographic Examination of First-Generation Mother-of-Color Professionals in Higher Education

As mothers of color in higher education professional roles, we share our experiences of being first-generation college students and mothers of color, as well as, our resolve to unravel the perceptions of intersectionalities connected to our experiences. Mothers of color experience different forms of sexism than men and white women—and different forms of racism. We consider solutions to address racial and gender disparities around attrition, degree completion in a timely manner, and gaps between transfer aspirations and outcomes for diverse student populations. To address the need to explore shared first-generation experiences at community colleges and a state university, in this article, we discuss current research on first-generation faculty, staff, and administrators; highlight autoethnographic narratives of former first-generation college students of color who are now higher education professionals; and continue the critical dialogue regarding the need to better consider education generational status as it intersects with other non-traditional student identities to shape student and practitioner experiences.

Acknowledgments

We want to acknowledge our First Mother, Mother Earth. We are thankful for the land, resources, energy, and life that we derive from our First Mother. We acknowledge our ancestors, particularly our mothers, and those who came before them. We hope to nourish all future generations through radical love, the passing down of our knowledge, and our passions for equity and advocacy. We acknowledge Matriarchal ways of knowing that value community and collective wellness, and rely on metaphorical and physical villages to maintain balance. In these communities,

the physical and spiritual are inextricably connected. Through the Matriarch, we will dismantle patriarchal and neoliberal capitalist ideologies that perpetuate racial and gendered violence. We acknowledge Larcenia Floyd, George Floyd's mother. The loss of any child to state-sanctioned violence is one loss too many. When George cried out for his mother, he cried out to all of us.

In light of recent events, we would like to acknowledge that at the time of editing this article, the Supreme Court struck down the protections of Roe v. Wade, which threatens reproductive rights for all women across the United States. We stand in solidarity with all female-identifying individuals, their reproductive rights, and bodily autonomy.

Through the framework of Critical Race Feminism (CRF)—which reifies our intersectional identities, anti-essentialization, lived experiences, and praxis—we highlight the ethnographic experiences of First-Generation Mother-of-Color Professionals (FMP) in higher education. Our journeys exemplify the intersectionalities (Crenshaw) and commonalities of being first-generation college graduates, Mother-of-Color Professionals, daughters of immigrant parents, and wrestling with the disconnect between institutional support on varying levels of the educational journey. Although some research covers the experiences of first-generation undergraduate students, there is limited research on first-generation professionals, especially mothers of color. Our purpose is to enact radical love through challenging the academic spaces of community colleges and universities to refuse the capitalistic, patriarchal isolation of individualism, and competition. Rather, we seek to hold space for each other through political acts of love to transcend systemic structures of oppression together with our intersectional identities in these spaces. We aim to start a discourse that is inclusive of FMP and that recognizes the impacts of familial and generational influences, our experiences in academia, and our desires for change; it is also a discourse that simultaneously advocates for our communities, junior faculty, university staff, and students. We wish to move towards a praxis that acknowledges the complexities of the lived experiences and journeys of mothers of color, faculty mothering professionals, and mothering students of color.

As FMP, it is imperative that we recognize the distinct disadvantage of navigating a complex institutional system as first-generation college students/graduates, who are "any student enrolled in higher education whose caregivers did not graduate from an American College or University" (Buenavista et al.). In addition, first-generation professional is defined as "any higher education staff, faculty, administrator, and/or scholar who was a first-generation college graduate" (Buenavista, Jain, and Ledesma). We extend the existing definition by adding the element of mothering—the term First-Generation Mother-of-Color Professionals (FMP) is any higher education staff, faculty, administrator,

and/or scholar who was a first-generation college graduate that self-identifies as a mother.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Feminist (CRF) theory informs our work. CRF is an offshoot of critical race theory (CRT), which explores how race and power interact, particularly to challenge white supremacy. The core values of CRF incorporate many of the tenets of CRT, which include: (a) race is a social construct, not inherent to individuals, and racism is imbedded in American culture; (b) CRF is interdisciplinary; (c) different groups are racialized in different ways, while whites control power and access to resources; (d) The lived experiences of each researcher are a strength to the study; and (e) Alternative methodologies, such as counternarratives, exist in academia. Additionally, Adrien Wing argues that CRF includes the following tenets: (a) CRF embraces critical race praxis and theory equally, and practice is a central component; (b) CRF incorporates feminism's tenet of gender-based harm caused by patriarchal systems; (c) CRF rejects CRT's essentialization of all minorities, specifically because it centers gendered experiences, unlike CRT; and (d) CRF can be applied globally to challenge laws affecting women all over the world. CRF delves deeper and adds the dimension of intersectional identities of race and gender, whereas CRT falls short in only examining race. Within racial identities, gendered experiences vary, as do mothering experiences; CRT does not consider the unique racialized and gendered experiences of women as a whole, and only reifies Crenshaw's work on intersectionality (Otaky Ramirez 58). CRF critically examines how the intersectionality of racism and cisheteropatriarchy play a role in the marginalization of women of color. Because of its flexibility in defining experiences, CRF has been used to frame United States scholarly research on "abortion, adoption, affirmative action, divorce, drug use, gangs, criminal justice, constitutional law, employment discrimination, torts, domestic violence, sexual harassment, reproductive rights, family law, the Internet, and even tax law" ("Critical Race Feminist Theory" 352).

On a global scale, CRF is utilized to address conflicts of religion and custom, female genital mutilation, war crimes, infanticide, and many issues that women of color around the world contend with under religious and cultural oppression from patriarchal worldviews. Utilizing CRF to explore our lived experiences as FMP allows for us to examine our intersectional identities to include not only our race and gender but our mothering experiences, personal beliefs, educational as well as our social and professional identities. Our mothering identity is salient and embedded as a core value of who we are and the lens we utilize to examine this work (Otaky Ramirez 101). As practitioners, our experiences inform our work to create environments that

are supportive of students of color, particularly mothering students of color, pursuing higher education. This calls for a more in-depth analysis of what it means to be an FMP. As CRF practitioners, we challenge the essentializing and pathologizing of mothering experiences, and posit that there are systemic and structural issues that perpetuate the marginalization of FMP identities through patriarchal systems (Otaky Ramirez 135).

First-Generation Literature

Research shows that 34 per cent of the undergraduate population are first-generation college students in the United States. Back in 1999, Patricia Gándara and Jolley Maxwell acknowledged increasing diversity within higher education over the past thirty years; and not much has changed to the overall approach for students. In 2009, María del Carmen Salazar, Amanda Stone Norton, and Franklin A. Tuitt outlined promising practices for inclusive excellence in the classroom for faculty as a call-out for institutional change, but they also acknowledged that not all faculty will engage in this practice because they believe they already practice inclusiveness and/or claim that it does not fit into their curriculum. The failure of institutions to adopt support structures inside and outside of the classroom will lead to unchanged completion and success rates for students of color.

Shelagh Rose, Rebecca Colina Neri, and Cecilia Rios-Aguilar argue that a guided pathways model grounded in "funds of knowledge" can improve student success in community colleges. We argue, the model can and should extend to universities. Cecilia Rios-Aguilar and colleagues describe "funds of knowledge" as follows: "The people's lived experiences and strengths that are related to the more familiar idea of social and cultural capital. "Funds of knowledge" include the skills, daily routines, cultural practices, work experiences, etc., that individuals accumulate throughout their lives" (64). Understanding the "funds of knowledge" students bring to an institution can better inform the institution on resources needed to support student success.

According to Carmen Dones, education is a promising opportunity for social and economic mobility for students who are generally low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented minorities. Lauren Falcon identifies the following obstacles facing minority university students: lack of college readiness, financial challenges, racial disparity, lack of self-esteem, and little family support. Moreover, she reports that low-income families may perceive college as a privilege for the rich and may view the decision to attend college as arrogant, all of which can have a negative impact on academics in higher education due to the perceived unattainability of a college education. Falcon also argues that first-generation college students can be successful through participating in college readiness programs, academic and social integration,

college culture assimilation, personal characteristics, and receiving increased family support (22).

Furthermore, Michael Stebleton and Krista Soria reveal that first-generation college students face specific obstacles more frequently than non-first-generation students, such as competing job and/or family responsibilities, weak English and/or math skills, inadequate study skills, and feeling depressed, stressed, and upset. For example, many Latino/a students attend college later in life, as they tend to work when they are younger in order to financially contribute to the family household. The conflict of prioritizing family values over academic values can be stressful for students, since they try to fulfill their familial obligations while contending with college ones. Low college completion rates for Latino/as have often been linked to low academic achievement as the causal factor. Nevertheless, Esau Tovar found that having supportive family and friends, receiving transition assistance from the institution, spending adequate time studying, and committing to the pursuit of a degree had a power influence on intention to persist to degree completion. When barriers were removed and interventions applied, Melinda Mechur Karp observed that students "enrolled in more terms and earned more college credits" (38).

Unlike most research attributing deficits in degree completion to the students, Arshad Ali and Tracy Buenavista explore the dialectical relationship between racism and capitalism as a contributor that shapes the outcomes of low-income students of color and the roles of schools in the reproduction of social, political, and economic inequities (1). We argue that better approaches to equity work can be done within the institutions to promote inclusiveness and a sense of belonging in higher education. Thus, discourse on the lived experiences of first-generation college students from an asset-based capital lens leads us to advocate to bridge equity gaps for degree attainment as well as social and economic mobility (Dones 45).

Mothering Literature

To date, no comprehensive research study has examined the intersectional complexities of first-generation mothers of color serving in community colleges and universities. Until the day that parenting is a gender-neutral concept, we must create a new standard to dismantle patriarchy within institutions of higher education through mothering solidarity (Phu 51).

To frame mothering solidarity, we must view mothering as a feminist act, as a social practice, and as inclusive. Mothers of color must nurture their children differently as they navigate the oppressive structures of white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and other intersectional systems of oppression (Gumbs et al.; Phu). Together, mothering as a revolutionary praxis (Gumbs et

al.; Oka) and Chicana M(other)work (Cisneros et al.) provide the foundation to reframe and reimagine how institutions of higher education can view mothering as a social practice to create inclusive spaces on campus. To take it a step further, parenting practice and philosophies can help with the reframing of parenting for students of color by borrowing from critical race parenting (Matias) and parenting for liberation (Brown).

Liberation can occur only when mothers can depend on one another, be inconvenienced by one another, and be accountable for one another. The manifesto for revolutionary homemaking as a praxis includes fighting for reproductive rights, gender inclusivity, reclaiming communal caregiving responsibility, politicizing familial love, developing spaces for healing work as well as structures that collectively distribute essential goods, facilitating collective critical reflections, and decolonizing our relationship to the earth and everything in it. Furthermore, the Chicana M(other)work collective demands for higher education to be more inclusive of mothering students. In addition to creating inclusive spaces, healing is also part of the solidarity of healing mothers and parentings. To achieve liberation as mothers and parents, Trina Greene Brown calls for (re)connecting with self to heal, (re)connecting with children through conversations, and (re)connecting to community to "return to our ancestral roots of raising children in a village" (156). Finally, Cindy Phu argues that we must create a mothering-receptive culture and dismantle antimothering climates to increase the sense of belonging among mothers and families in white academic spaces (153).

Our Mothering Counterstories

In alignment with CRF, we utilized autoethnography as our methodological approach to share our counterstories as FMP. Autoethnography is a method to researching and "writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis 273; Holman Jones). This approach serves as our counternarrative to the dominant narrative. As authors of this work, we claim intersectional identities that are parts of a powerful whole. We share the following narratives with many common identities, including being FMP, doctor/as, advocates, and researchers. In 2017, we met through our doctoral cohort at California State University, in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program and realized then that our experiences as FMP allowed us to view the world from a unique and powerful perspective.

Our relationships with each other are also a counterstory that was formed within the academic space, where we came together collectively with love, support, and solidarity. The three of us finished our dissertation together during the pandemic as we navigated the merger of our familial, academic,

and workspaces. We spent weekends together on Zoom researching, writing, and supporting one another with micro-affirmation and the affirmation that we would finish the doctoral program together. This work is a triangulation of our independent dissertation research focusing on first-generation college students, women of color in leadership, and mothering students of color with intersectional mothering experiences as first-generation professionals of color in academia.

We carry first-generation traits—such as overworking, perfectionism, anxiety, as well as real and perceived fears over our professional careers—and carry them into our writing, presentations, and collective action. With first-generation awareness, we as coauthors have a special understanding to support one another in unique ways, such as community writing, friendships, affirmations, and validations. Racially and ethnically, we are diverse and have a rich ancestry that cannot be silenced in our work against oppression and racialized and gendered violence.

Carmen: Mothering as a Dean of Academic Affairs

My collective experience of being a Latina/o first-generation student, daughter of an immigrant parent, and mother of color came with many challenges and added responsibilities of setting a good example, apportioning time and duties, and managing self-guilt while navigating complex institutional practices and procedures. As an embodiment of relations, this work refuses isolation and disconnection to reconnect and reclaim who I am and my connection to my community, ancestors, First Mother, and the knowledge that emerges within and across these spaces and relations.

My journey began with having to self-learn to navigate a complex institutional system. My parents married young, and neither of them completed high school. They never encouraged college in the home because, I presume, they did not know enough about it. Being lower-middle class, they expected their children to obtain employment after high school, as opposed to attending college in order to contribute financially to the household. Like one of my older sisters before me, I obliged and found jobs to help support the family after high school. My sister worked in a dental office and brought me in for employment when a position opened up. Because I was consumed with working, college did not resonate with me until my mid-to-late twenties. By then I had moved out, married, and had children of my own. Stebelton and Soria identify prioritizing family as a barrier to college. In my case, it was two-fold: first as a daughter and then as a mother. Nonetheless, my education was shaped by my experiences growing up.

I was the middle child of five siblings—two older sisters and two younger brothers, of which only one other attended college. My eldest sister received a scholarship to the University of Southern California (USC) but did not follow

through on accepting it for no other reason than she did not know how to navigate the system. She ended up at a community college, where she ultimately stopped out, only to enroll in a private for-profit university, where she eventually achieved her bachelor's degree. Since she was the only one before me to attend college, I turned to her for navigational support, even though she had never really learned the system. So, essentially, I had no one to guide me and thus had to figure it out on my own.

As a first-generation college student, I navigated the educational system by trial and error. I made the same mistake as many others. I started one semester and stopped out. However, when I decided to return the last time, I was committed and ready to take college seriously. As I reflect back, one challenge that could have made me stop out again was when I needed to breastfeed while taking a class. Although I explained to my male professor that I recently had a baby and might have to leave early, he never offered accommodations or advice on where I could pump. As a first-generation college student, I did not know where to obtain information on lactation facilities and did not know how to ask for it. Needless to say, I suffered through the class but achieved a high grade. That experience taught me to acknowledge mothering students in my class syllabi and in orientations. In addition, I advocated to create a comfortable lactation space that is accessible to students and identifiable on the college campus map. I often wonder how many mothers were pushed out of higher education due to the apathetic nature towards amenities necessary for mothering students. Moreover, attending college as a night student, childcare services were not an option for my other two children.

Having to spend time away from my young children to go to work and college full time was stressful. I was riddled with self-guilt, but that is what motivated me to do well this time around. I was not going to waste the valuable time that was taken from my family. Although the support from my husband was strong, I turned to the college for academic advisement to stay the path. When I consulted a counselor at the community college, he nearly derailed my path by insisting I consider a different major. Since dental hygiene was not a major available at the college he worked in and nursing was, he convinced me to take the nursing path instead.

As a vulnerable first-generation student, I complied. Well, sort of. I mapped out the prerequisites for the dental hygiene program and the nursing program, which were nearly parallel, and decided to pursue both paths. I figured if I did not get accepted to the dental hygiene program, nursing would be my alternative. Furthermore, this counselor never provided information on support programs, such as childcare, scholarships, or special programs, which I am certain I would have qualified for. That said, while I attended classes during nights and on weekends, few options for support services were actually available. As Mechur Karp observes, providing resources to remove these

types of barriers will allow students to persist. Nonetheless, I learned to navigate the system and completed my program of study while setting a good example for my children.

Immediately after achieving my degree in dental hygiene, I worked in private practice while continuing my education at a local public university to earn my bachelor's degree. Upon completing my degree, I was recruited to teach dental hygiene classes at my alma mater. As I continued to work in private practice, I concurrently taught college classes and earned my master's degree. After completing that degree, I obtained a full-time tenure-track faculty position and became the program director for the dental hygiene program and the department chairperson for the health sciences division. It was evident that academia was the path for me. Hence, I chose to pursue my doctorate in education—and although I did not need this degree for my position, I sought the tools to be an efficient and effective leader.

As the dental hygiene program director, I was able to diversify the program that had historically lacked people of color. It was my responsibility to recruit faculty and students and mentor them through the process of applying to the program. For students, I held information sessions, personally called them, and brought in college support and resource experts from CalWorks, counseling, federal outreach and student services programs, and financial aid to provide information to students. This gave students an opportunity to build connections with various leaders heading the support structures on campus. Patricia Pérez and Miguel Ceja found that having faculty, staff, and administrators who reflect the student body is an invaluable resource towards student success. By the time I moved on to becoming an administrative dean for the college, I had accomplished diversifying the dental hygiene program with 50 per cent people of color and transforming the program from an associate's degree level to a bachelor's degree level in the community college, furthering equity for underrepresented minority students by providing them an opportunity for social and economic mobility. Sharing similar life experiences as the students—such as being a first-generation college student as well as a mothering student, working full time while attending college, and having an immigrant parent—, the push now is to get the students to achieve higher degrees and employment opportunities beyond private practice, such as in academia.

I credit my achievements to having mentors throughout my academic journey as a student, professor, and administrator. My mentors have been instrumental in guiding my trajectory as a leader. As such, I share my journey as a form of advocacy and justice for women and mothering students in academia. In the words of the late Mary Church Turell, "And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long." As

a result of my experiences, I currently mentor other Latina first-generation college and graduate students.

Zeina: Mothering as an Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Student Conduct

In reflecting on my mothering and professional journey, it can be described as an anomaly. How does an Indigenous Palestinian girl with Lebanese nationality—whose father was born in a refugee camp, whose grandmother was illiterate, and whose mother barely completed eighth-grade—become a university administrator with a doctorate degree in higher education? My life journey has been one of many challenges, as I have faced anti-immigration and anti-Palestinian attacks as well as racial and gendered violence. My mothering journey was one of unexpected pregnancies, starting at the age of twenty-one. I was the first in my family to marry a non-Arab person—he is Mexican American and has been my life partner for over twenty-two years. The language of shame or "haram" was evident in the Arab culture that wanted me to assimilate but not fully, especially as it pertained to women. As an immigrant, whose family subscribed to the American Dream, high educational aspirations were seen as a way out of poverty and to upward mobility. Not only did I complete my higher education journey, but I also excelled, as did my two younger sisters. With tenacity and courage, we navigated higher education as first-generation college students in spaces that were not made for us.

At twenty-one years old, I had no business raising a child; but the universe had its way, and I had three children in four years. I became the guardian and keeper of beautiful mixed-race babies. As a spiritual being and humanist, I cannot deny that having my children at such a young age did not have an immense impact on where I am today and what my values are. While pregnant, I continued my higher education journey as a first-generation college student. I was eight-months pregnant with my first child when I became a full-fledged American citizen. I was nine-months pregnant with my second child when the Twin Towers were attacked, and the anti-Muslim/Arab sentiment was palpable. I was afraid to leave my apartment, since I was pregnant and could potentially face violence. By the time I had my third child, I knew that my life was going to center on justice advocacy for women. My undergraduate degree was in art and focused on gendered violence. My passion for women's advocacy is the thread that runs through my educational, professional, and spiritual journey.

Balancing family and school was always a challenge, and my priorities always shifted (Stebleton and Soria). I graduated eleven years after I began my bachelor's degree, with my kids in tow. My three children were almost school age, and it was time that I financially contributed to our family. After a failed attempt to start a career in the art industry by working at an art museum, the

commute and mothering of three little ones took its toll. I decided to reassess and found work at the local university in administrative support. I justified taking on this role by how close I would be to my children's school. It was then the universe made its own plans, and I changed my career trajectory. As a university employee, I took advantage of the employee benefits program and pursued my Master of Arts in educational leadership. During this time, I worked for amazing women and mothers, who created safe and inclusive spaces for mothers.

Sadly, I also worked for a female identifying administrator who exemplified the worst traits. I spent several years in an administrative support role while completing my master's degree working for a female-identifying administrator who upheld white supremacy and had no empathy for the plight of mothering professionals. She did not care that I had to drop off three kids no earlier than 7:30 a.m. because of childcare constraints and had a thirty-minute commute to get to work with a start time of 8:00 a.m. In Los Angeles, a thirty-minute commute can easily become a sixty-to-ninety-minute one on any given day. I had to build a thick skin and learn the language and game of the oppressor through code switching. Andrew Molinsky's work on cross-cultural code-switching defines it as "the act of purposefully modifying one's behavior in an interaction in a foreign setting in order to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior" (624). This administrator would not engage via conversation but sent lengthy emails criticizing my judgment, work ethic, and expectations. She always assumed the worst. I swore to myself that anyone who called my children "constituents" must not be human. Although I wished to quit, I had financial obligations and a degree to complete. The constraints on parents—particularly mothers—to remain in unhealthy work environments to provide for their children is structural in nature, as it upholds patriarchal oppression and white supremacy. It was at that time in my professional journey that I decided to never work for a supervisor who did not have children, male or female. The trauma, microaggressions, and gaslighting this individual caused hindered my ability to trust my judgment as a professional and has taken years to heal (Otaky Ramirez). When I left that role, I left with an electronic folder of emails in case I ever needed to file a lawsuit or take part in one.

Since I left that role, I have been fortunate to work for supervisors and administrators who value my skills and ability to bring my lived experiences to inform my work. They have supported my educational endeavours to attain my doctoral degree. It is through my doctoral work that I continue advocating for women of color, particularly student affairs professionals (Otaky Ramirez). Currently, I report to an administrator who understands the structural and systemic issues that continue to hinder equity for all students of color, including parenting scholars. The university I work at engaged in extensive research and

is currently developing identity-based resources centers, including the Thrive Center, which supports parent-scholars, transfer students, and first-generation college students, to name a few. Additionally, I serve and am one of the founding members of the Parent-Scholars Workgroup, which attempts to improve the visibility and support for parenting students at the university, both in the classroom and through support services.

I would be remiss to not highlight the impact COVID-19 has had on my work and personal life. Since the onset of the pandemic, my now college-aged children had their own challenges. During the pandemic, my youngest barely graduated high school due the virtual classroom environment. My oldest child had to step away from her visual and performing arts program because she is a tactile learner. And my middle child worked as an EMT while attending college full time. With one of my children being an essential worker, it brought another layer of challenges into our home in terms of health and safety. While managing all the personal challenges, though, the professional work never ceased for me or other mothers. Parents are collectively exhausted. Many colleagues began to experience burn out and have since left the university for better opportunities with less stress and more money. The great resignation has taken a toll on many.

With COVID-19 came a revolution of social and civil justice movements that have been long overdue. George Floyd's death was a catalyst for several uprisings. During the spring of 2021, for the first time in my life, I saw an influx of Palestinian activism and support against Israeli apartheid. For the first time, all the trauma of being a Palestinian refugee, an Arab without a motherland, was cemented and centered. The crimes of humanity against Palestinians were finally at the forefront. For the first time in my life, my voice was not silenced out of fear of retribution by those who carry anti-Palestinian sentiments. Through the connections I share with my sisters in my doctoral program, Dr. Phu and Dr. Dones, and with my amazing professors and mentors, Dr. Buenavista and Dr. Jain, this is the beginning of a journey of liberation, healing, and self-love. I am now beginning to understand the power I have inherited from my ancestors as an Indigenous Palestinian women of color, mother, sister, daughter, partner, and advocate.

Cindy: Mothering as an Associate Professor in Speech Communication

As I have navigated my mothering journey professionally and educationally, I continue to carry my family-inherited war traumas, intergenerational traumas, and my own educational traumas. I am an Asian American daughter of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrant refugees from Vietnam. While my parents worked tirelessly to provide for our family, I was primarily raised by my maternal grandmother. In balancing my work and motherwork, I continue to recognize the intergenerational labor of my grandmother, mother,

godmother, and the community of caretakers that supported me. I want to honour their mothering practices, the community of love they provided, as well as the multitude of sacrifices that they made to raise me and my sister in a foreign land where they barely spoke the language.

I struggled throughout my education, as English was my third learned language; Chinese Trieu Chow and Vietnamese were the languages used in my home. My encounters with language barriers and the struggles of navigating white academic spaces were part of my first-generation college student experience. Although I graduated with a speech communication degree, my success was in large part due to my participation in the university's speech and debate team, where I found my voice and made life-long friendships. I am now a tenured speech professor at a community college where I was formerly both director of the speech and debate team and coordinator of the speech tutoring center. After ten years away from education, I decided to pursue my doctoral degree in educational leadership and policy while I was pregnant, and I started the program when my child was four-months old.

My mothering journey began with a miscarriage. To this day, I carry the sadness at the loss of my first child. After a year of grieving, mourning, and coping, we were able to conceive my second. He has brought so much love and joy to my life, but the beginning of my mothering experience during graduate school while teaching full-time was isolating. When I was accepted in the program, I did not disclose to the director of the program that I was pregnant for fear that they would change their mind about my acceptance. Because of this fear, I did not explain that I had missed the meet-and-greet orientation meeting as I was going into labor during that time. Additionally, I was still breastfeeding early in graduate school, and I exclusively pumped milk for my child throughout the first year of the three-year program—before class, during the breaks, and after class at 10:00 p.m. As a first-generation college graduate student and faculty member at my college, I was not aware of the Title IX pregnancy and parenting student rights and protections.

As a coping mechanism, my family has always emphasized keeping the peace and avoiding unnecessary attention. I have always prided myself on being different from my family, yet in the most vulnerable moments of my needs for lactation accommodations, I kept my silence because of my fears of judgment, exclusion, and the perception that it may tarnish my professional reputation. The key that changed my deficit-thinking was representation and critical race love (Buenavista et al. 238). There was an Asian American advisor—who would become my mentor, dissertation chair, and life-long friend—announced during our formal orientation meeting that she was mothering an eighteen-month-old. She was also a first-generation professional and became my advocate and pushed me to request lactation accommodations, which completely changed my trajectory towards becoming an advocate for all

mothers, especially mothering students of color at the community college.

Without this advisor, I would have continued my struggles in silence and potentially dropped out of the program. In disclosing to my cohort that I was mothering a four-month-old, I found community with the first-generation mothers of color classmates—two of whom I am writing this article with: Carmen and Zeina. They have been there from the beginning with their solidarity, community, and mothering words of wisdom. As a new mother navigating academic spaces, my mothering peers provided me with love, affirmations, micro-affirmations, and support that we would start and finish the program together. Their support included gentle reminders about assignment deadlines, taking notes for me when I had to miss classes, creating flexible schedules in group projects together, showing empathy for when my child was sick or hospitalized, and most importantly sharing their own vulnerabilities with their mothering journey because they were also my peer-representation of successful working mothering students. Five years after my son's birth, my mothering journey continues as I am currently pregnant with another child.

I continue to do the motherwork necessary to support my child, my feminist fathering husband, as well as my family, community, and villages of support. I present my dissertation work, discuss the needs of mothers, hold space for collective communities to support motherwork, and push for positive social change for mothers. I am an active member of an international association that focuses on the needs of maternal action and scholarship. I am building a mothering-receptive community on my college campus and helping to open its first family resource centre. With a collective group of mothers working at my campus, we developed a support committee for parenting students that provides professional development workshops for faculty, organized workshops for pandemic parenting needs, secured funding and grants for parenting students, helped to develop a family resource center, and launched our first parenting student graduation celebration festival to recognize parenting students with their families and children.

When we collectively heal together from family-inherited trauma, intergenerational trauma, and/or educational trauma, we must also critically examine how the intersection of social categories—such as class, race, place, age, and citizenship—produces individual experiences of privilege and oppression as they pertain to xenophobia and how this positions Asian American elders and women within systems of vulnerability, oppression, and neglect. As an Asian American woman-identified body in white academic spaces, I condemn the verbal and physical violence and racist xenophobic rhetoric against the Asian community. A national survey revealed nearly three million Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have experienced some form of hate incident since 2021, and one in ten APPI women reported hate-

related incidents (National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum; Samson). As these numbers climb, mothering a toddler while pregnant makes me navigate public spaces differently, including campuses and classrooms, as most of these hate crimes have targeted women and the elderly. Acts of violence are not always physical, though; the verbal harms of racism, sexism, and racialized microaggressions also have long-lasting impacts (Solorzano & Huber). As Asian Americans, we are perpetual foreigners, and now more than ever, we continue to witness retraumatizing acts of anti-Asian hate and violence as we continue to mother (Matias, et al. 180). In response, I will continue to work towards collective change as we welcome our next child into this world.

Conclusion

As we continue to navigate our present with our past and future, we continue to stay connected to one another, as well as our communities, ancestors, and First Mother to reclaim our identities in refusing to accept isolation, disconnection, and competition. Our intersectionality, counterstories, and collective voice reframe our first-generation resiliency and our trust in maternal ways of knowing. Our intention is to honor and recognize mothering practices and the wisdom of our ancestors and our own mothers. This practice allowed us to reconnect with our First Mother and to seek more love for ourselves, communities, and uplift those who stand on our shoulders.

We stand in solidarity with parenting students as they become mentors and examples through intergenerational role modeling for their children to achieve social and economic mobility. By evaluating current practices in building family friendly institutions, generational commitments to sustain connections can be made. Through CRF, we affirm our mothering identities. Sharing our narratives of mothering experiences as a collective—the good, the bad, and the ugly-crying—heals past trauma and reaffirms our experiences. Through our praxis as CRF practitioners, we continue to antiessentialize our experiences, place the onus of our marginalization on patriarchal structures, and create healing spaces for ourselves and other mothers (Otaky Ramirez 136).

Healing means knowing that we are more than our intergenerational, contemporary, or educational traumas. We need to name and call out "anti-mothering culture/climate" in our pedagogy, practice, and policy to build a "mothering-receptive culture on college campuses" (Phu, "Sleepless in School" 247). Additionally, we must be intentional as mothering mentors to hire and support more first-generation mothers of color while simultaneously supporting them with campus childcare, maternity leave, family housing, and liberation (Phu 46). Collectively, we reimagine educational and professional spaces to include family, children, and diverse communities and work towards

intergenerational role modelling, intergenerational healing, and intergenerational support against systems of oppression.

As we continue to collectively challenge systems of injustice, we must keep George's cries out for his mother, Larcenia Floyd, deeply in our hearts and always remember that he cried out to all of us. Until the day that all of our children are loved, valued, and nurtured, we must continue to hold space for each other in healing, solidarity, and community.

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AYA KITAMURA

Who Cooks What, How, and for Whom? Gender, Racial, Ethnic, and Class Politics of Food in Asian Global Households

This article explores how the seemingly mundane practices of food preparation and consumption can become intersectional sites of gender, racial, ethnic and class politics in the contexts of global migration and household labour. It develops the idea of a "familial gastropolitics" (Vallianatos) by focusing on the experiences of Japanese mothers who have relocated to Hong Kong and Singapore and chosen to outsource housework to a female migrant domestic worker typically from a Southeast Asian country. How do these mothers reconcile their new role supervising a maid in a foreign environment with a traditional Japanese value system that ties notions of motherhood to the preparation of family meals? Analyses of original interview data as well as mom blog entries suggest, first, that many research participants adhere to the ideologies of Japanese motherhood by assigning to the maids only basic preparations before cooking (such as cutting up the ingredients) and the cleaning afterwards, both of which they still micro-manage. Disturbingly, several participants cited racial, ethnic, and class stereotypes of "them, foreign maids," who could never acquire the cooking skills and knowledge of "us, Japanese madams," when they described their experiences. The women seemingly drew on such stereotypes to sustain an ideal of Japanese foodways, such as obento (boxed lunch) making and other practices rooted in Japanese cultural nationalism and gender ideology. Simultaneously, there was a shared understanding among them that managing the family's foodways and running the household smoothly were the women's job, freeing their husbands of household responsibilities and reinforcing the third-shift labour of the mothers. The analyses reveal that gendered divisions of labour are sustained in complex ways in tandem with global disparities and cultural nationalism in the most private sphere—home.

Introduction: Familial Gastropolitics in Asian Global Cities

This article considers mothering in the context of intra-Asian migration, focusing specifically on cooking in transnational households. Food preparation and consumption everywhere are imbued with gender politics (Avakian), and mothers, who are usually the sole or main member of the family to cook, are likely to be entangled in the complex web of this politics (Guignard and Cassidy). When a family relocates across national borders, the food that they consume will almost inevitably be different, and the daily considerations that go into preparing meals, as well as by whom, may also change (Cassidy and El-Tom). And when the household takes on a migrant domestic worker, a common practice in many global cities, the new member of the household may bring about changes not only in relation to foodways but also in family dynamics. By studying this "familial gastropolitics" (Vallianatos) in the context of intra-Asian migration—namely, with a specific focus on Japanese mothers who relocate to Hong Kong and Singapore—this article will examine the intersectional politics of gender, race, ethnicity, and class that can unfold in global households.

Below, I focus on the experiences of "mother madams," whom I define as mothers who hire and supervise a domestic worker inside their private home. Instead of shouldering carework solely on her own, a mother madam chooses to outsource all or a portion of the housework as well as childcare. For a mother madam, food preparation is often a site of tension because it is she, as a household supervisor, who decides who cooks what, how, and for whom. The decision is personal as well as political, as the mother madam weighs not only her own preferences but also familial, communal, and social expectations on food and motherhood.

I engage with this complex nature of mother work through drawing on a feminist ethnography I have conducted since 2015 in Hong Kong and Singapore. Along with participatory and nonparticipatory observations of Japanese mothers' activities in those global cities, I have conducted in-depth interviews with mothers who moved from Japan to Hong Kong and/or Singapore and have experience of managing their households in the context of intra-Asian migration. These interviews typically involve the research participants and me, a mother researcher also from Japan and raising a child of mixed heritage, sitting together for two to four hours in a café, a restaurant, or their home and talking about our experiences as mothers. Although I conduct my interviews using this empathetic, feminist approach (Oakley), the ethnography I present here does not assume any sense of a natural or instinctive womanhood (Visweswaran). There is often empathy and camaraderie as well as dissonance and discrepancy between the research participants and me. The resulting narratives vividly point to personal dilemmas and difficulties of mothering in global contexts along with a wide range of political consequences

around the mothers' experiences.

Following this introduction, before analyzing the actual voices of the mothers, I first contextualize this study by explaining the specific position that food occupies in Japanese society. I discuss how the nationalistic significance of Japanese cuisine—washoku—is closely related to gender roles assigned to women, as exemplified in the importance attached to obento—a homemade (that is, mother-made) boxed lunch for taking to school. For the mothers in my research, relocating from Japan to Hong Kong or Singapore often means transplanting such culturally loaded food customs abroad. At the same time, the mothers from Japan, for the first time in their lives, are given a choice to employ a migrant domestic worker at home and occupy the new role of household supervisor. They face a new set of tasks and responsibilities that further complicates their familial gastropolitics.

In the next section, to explore the complex experiences of Japanese mother madams in Asian global cities, I refer to my original interview data with forty-two Japanese women in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Tokyo. I also draw on my analysis of twenty Japanese mom bloggers in Hong Kong and Singapore to explore how the women describe their motherwork abroad in a virtual space. Although only a small segment of the overall data is quoted here, the analysis demonstrates that the mother madams' narratives together construct a certain ideal of Japanese foodways, which is rooted in Japanese cultural nationalism and strengthens the racist and classist distinction between "us, Japanese madams" and "them, foreign maids." A closer analysis further reveals that the Japanese mother madams' painstaking efforts to provide Japanese meals for their Japanese family are structurally bound. The women's struggles derive from and in the end sustain the gendered divisions of labour that have long constrained women in Japan. Through uncovering such ironic consequences, this article discusses the myriad—global, national, and domestic—politics of food that the mother madams are positioned within.

Food Is Love: Nationalized and Gendered Meanings of Cooking in Japan

In Japan, as everywhere else, there is a particular sociocultural value attached to food; it is a part and parcel of Japanese identity, in which "pure white rice" has symbolized the "pure Japanese self" throughout Japanese modern history (Ohnuki-Tierney). Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney explicates how since Japan's modernization era in the late nineteenth century, rice repetitively surfaced in public debates and represented an essence that differentiated Japan from other Asian nations as well as Western countries. To be Japanese has come to mean to be able to appreciate the taste of white rice, the labour that went into the crop, and the ritualistic meanings designated to the food.

This metaphorical tie between Japanese food and Japanese identity has

persisted despite drastic changes to dietary patterns in postwar Japan; rather, because of the hybridization of food cultures, the uncorrupted, so-called pure Japanese culinary tradition has had to be revoked and reified. In 2013, after a long and fervent bid by the Japanese government, UNESCO recognized "Washoku, Traditional Dietary Cultures of the Japanese, Notably for the Celebration of New Year" as an intangible cultural heritage, aiding in the development of global and domestic washoku booms. The diverse and complex foodways that existed across time and place in Japan are now packaged in a particular set of rituals and aesthetics—an invented tradition—that is to be marketed globally while sustaining Japanese pride domestically (Bestor; Cwiertka). This form of cultural nationalism in return maintains the myth that Japan is a monoethnic and monocultural nation-state, thereby spurring on racism and xenophobia within Japan (Yoshino). Ohnuki-Tierney summarizes:

> This symbolic process renders food a powerful symbol not only conceptually but also, we might say, at a gut level. "Our food" v. "their food" becomes a powerful way to express a "we" v. "they" distinction (Bourdieu 1984), be it between classes, ethnic or national groups. The beauty and purity of "we" are embodied doubly in the body of the people and in the food that represents them, and, conversely, the undesirable qualities of the other are embodied in their foods. (Ohnuki-Tierney 233)

Furthermore, this amalgamation of food and identity in Japan is inevitably bound up with gender politics. Under the slogan of "good wife, wise mother"—the gender ideology that was coined alongside Japan's modernization in the late nineteenth century (Koyama)—the Japanese woman has borne the role of cultural guardian, cooking Japanese ingredients in Japanese ways for her Japanese family. Providing proper Japanese meals, teaching the ethics behind the food, and thus reproducing legitimate Japanese citizens have all been considered as the woman's job, even when Japanese families relocate overseas (Kurotani). This heavily gendered image of cooking has long tied Japanese women to domesticity.

One significant example is the obento. In her influential study published in 1991, anthropologist Anne Allison argues that the small lunch boxes that children take to their kindergarten serves as an ideological state apparatus in Japan. Drawing on the cultural symbolism attributed to food in Japan, she explains how the little obento boxes must be filled with different colours and shapes so that young children learn the Japanese ways of food. That is, the intricately created obento is a device where Japanese identity is instilled through Japanese ingredients, which are cooked and presented in Japanese ways by Japanese mothers. The teachers, another guardian of tradition, make

sure that mothers as well as children follow the prescriptions, at times interfering with obento contents and presentations. A colourful Pikachu face made with rice, egg, and vegetables would be good, enticing, and nourishing, whereas a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich would be frowned upon.

Allison thus argues that obento is both creative and regimented. A Japanese mother, in charge of making individually customized obento for her child, devotes much time, energy and creativity to it, but strictly within culturally sanctioned ways:

> The making of the obento is, I would thus argue, a double-edged sword for women. By relishing its creation (for all the intense labor expended, only once or twice did I hear a mother voice any complaint about this task), a woman is ensconcing herself in the ritualization and subjectivity (subjection) of being a mother in Japan. She is alienated in the sense that others will dictate, inspect, and manage her work. On the reverse side, however, it is precisely through this work that the woman expresses, identifies, and constitutes herself. (203)

In Chikako Nihei's words, obento has been a "ritual" that Japanese mothers engage in every morning because it is "often seen as a measure of a mother's love and care for her children." This custom—a source of "subjectivity (subjugation)" for Japanese mothers in Allison's words—frequently causes astonishment and embarrassment for mothers who are from outside Japan (Nakanishi; Stephens).

However, it is important not to dehistoricize and decontextualize this thesis. Since the publication of Allison's work, the emphasis has been mainly on how the obento functions as a symbol of love in Japan. However, the colourful, nutritious, and love-filled obento has been a strictly historical and class-specific phenomenon—historical because the anecdotal supports for the thesis are typically from the 1980s, a specific period when Japan enjoyed the ever-thriving bubble economy, the last stage of Japan's so-called miraculous recovery after World War II. It was a time when in urban middle-class contexts, corporate-warrior salaried men and professional-housewife women engaged in a strictly gendered division of labour in pursuit of national prosperity (Vogel; Brinton). In other words, it was a historical moment in which socioeconomic structures allowed middle-class women to stay home and carry out the obento ritual for their children every morning.

Even amid the bubble economy, women who engaged in paid work—including agricultural workers (Bernstein) and factory workers (Roberts) along with those in precarious temp and parttime employments—were not in the luxurious position to keep up with the urban, middle-class ideal. The children of those working mothers might have attended nurseries and daycares where lunches were provided or might have taken with them obento that were

less colourful, less elaborate than those made by the fulltime homemakers in Allison's study. Furthermore, since the 2000s, when the controversial "Womenomics" political campaign inflicted the dual responsibilities of paid labour and familial duties on women (Dalton; Hamada), the ways in which women engage in cooking have become far more diverse across generations, regions, and classes. That is, the realities have always been highly divergent when it comes to food and cooking in Japan.

Moreover, Klara Seddon, in her analysis of Japanese mother bloggers' obento, discusses that those intricate crafts are not necessarily a sign of an uncritical pursuit of motherhood ideology; rather, she argues, the obento presented in the blogs are a manifestation of the individuality and creativity of mothers in virtual spaces. The over-the-top presentations of food—as in the egg-and-vegetable Pikachu face—indeed appear not so much as examples of selfless devotion as of self-full expression. Seddon emphasizes that the new technology—namely, online communication via smartphones, which even the busiest mothers can easily take advantage of—allows women to playfully engage with the mother role. Women themselves may attach different meanings to their cooking labour.

It is this complex web of food and gender politics in Japan that the mother madams' experiences that I am analyzing below are situated within. Certainly, the obento and other food norms continue to yield their power as an ideological state apparatus, promoting maternal love and imposing work on mothers, as the research participants have middle- to upper-middle-class backgrounds and have the economic and cultural means to pursue the traditional "good wife, wise mother" ideology. At the same time, they have now relocated to foreign Asian global cities, in which cooking might be associated with a different set of expectations. In this context, do the women choose to stay within the ideologies of Japanese motherhood or not?

Food Is Management: Becoming a Madam in Asian Global Cities

Another layer of the complex contexts that my research participants find themselves in is that in Hong Kong and Singapore, unlike in Japan, carework tends to be outsourced without much reservation. Both cities have institutionalized national schemes in which migrant domestic workers from Southeast Asian countries, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand, work in local households, oftentimes as live-in maids. Those international arrangements are famously problematic; frequent cases of exploitation and abuse have been documented in both Hong Kong and Singapore. And when migrant workers themselves have organized and called on the governments to provide greater protections, the support they have received for workers' rights has been woefully insufficient (Constable; Lindio-

McGovern). The neoliberal cities are built upon such socioeconomic inequalities, and the global-elite families from Japan also constitute a part of the "global care chain" (Hochschild: Kitamura).

The Japanese women in my research accompanied their husbands on international job transfers, permanently relocated to the Asian economic hubs, or were married there; after moving, they found themselves eligible for the opportunity to hire help in their private home. They tended to be ill-equipped and hesitant new madams because they did not have such an option in Japan (Kitamura). They now needed to learn to allocate homemaking duties—such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, ironing, and grocery shopping—between themselves and the domestic worker they hired. When one is a mother, childcare, including obento making, also becomes a site of negotiation and potential conflict. Cooking thus takes on a new meaning; it is not necessarily something done out of motherly love but something that can be outsourced if she so chooses. She no longer needs to be the main preparer of meals for the family; instead, she can be the manager and supervisor of another woman who does the actual work.

For those Japanese mother madams in my research, therefore, cooking was at times a contested issue. On the one hand, the Japanese gender ideology that sanctions mothers to prepare homemade meals is hard to disregard. Especially now that they are overseas, the mothers are expected to maintain the family's Japanese identity through providing Japanese meals. Meanwhile, it is now possible for the women to hire help and have someone do all the above on her behalf. She is therefore faced with the question of how much and in what ways she should outsource carework. Below, through analyzing the actual data, I explore the entangled politics of food, gender, race, ethnicity, and class from the mother madams' perspectives.

Who Cooks? Domestic Hierarchy between Madams and Maids

As described above, my feminist-ethnography approach has allowed me to elicit honest and poignant narratives of mothering experiences. For one mother, Ms. Ueno[1], who had lived in Singapore for two years with her corporate executive husband and two preschool boys, shared stories of her hectic mothering experiences with a hint of humour:

> I'm sure I'd be frowned upon in Japan because our maid-san does most of the work. She cooks rice, washes, and cuts the vegetables for dinner. All I do is fry and season them. Cleaning and laundry are all done by her, and she feeds the children and puts them to bed. I do nothing, really.... Some Japanese people here [in Singapore] may be speaking behind my back—that I work only part time and still hire a maid and that the baby is always with the maid. But I don't care.

> Because I'd die otherwise. Look at my boys. They are wild. Picking them up at kindergarten is a two-person operation. I grab one, and the maid carries the other. I drive the car, and they'll start fighting in the back, spill water, vomit. I need the maid to sit between the two. Every day, she does housework, and I yell at the kids, "Don't ride your bicycle inside the house!" "Don't push your brother into the pool!"

Ms. Ueno hired a Filipina domestic worker, whom she called "maid-san" (with a Japanese honorific) as is customary among Japanese expat communities in Hong Kong and Singapore. With her husband frequently away from home for international business trips, Ms. Ueno struggled with raising her two "wild" boys, and motherwork was often overwhelming for her—so much so that she felt she "would die" if she had shouldered all of it on her own. Though declaring "I don't care," she was clearly acutely conscious of how others viewed her mothering.

Interestingly, although Ms. Ueno repeated that she did "nothing really" at home, she in fact kept a central role for herself in making meals. She had the maid-san take care of the preparations before cooking and the cleaning afterwards, but she decided the ingredients, methods, and flavours of the family dinner every day. This was a common practice among Japanese mother madams in Hong Kong and Singapore: The final execution of the cooking process was predominantly considered to be the Japanese madams' job. Ms. Iguchi, a stay-home-mom whom I interviewed in Tokyo after her return from Hong Kong, and Ms. Ishikawa, a wife of a Chinese American husband and a mother of three preschool children in Singapore, did the same and had a positive view about the division of labour.

> Ms. Iguchi: I miss my life in Hong Kong, where I had a live-in maid-san. At that time, I actually enjoyed cooking. The maid-san did all the prep work, and all that was left for me was the fun part, the finishing-up part. I didn't have to go shopping, chop up vegetables, or wash dishes. That was beyond helpful.

> Ms. Ishikawa: My husband says he likes to cook, but what he means is he likes to barbecue. Of course, he doesn't clean up afterwards. That's why I prefer for my maid and me to do the cooking together; she does the washing and cutting, and I do the actual grilling, stewing part. It suits me perfectly.

While a few mother madams said they left cooking entirely to the domestic workers they hired, the more common arrangement was that of the Japanese mother madam making Japanese meals using ingredients that were washed and chopped ahead of time by her maid-san.

However, as the interviews proceeded, some of the same mother madams began to disclose some discontentment:

> Ms. Iguchi: I grew up in Japan, so small differences between her and me sure bugged me. I had taught her how to cut vegetables for curry and thought that she had learned it. And then, one day, I found all the vegetables were diced up, like when you make minestrone. "No, that's not what I taught!" It frustrated me.
>
> Ms: Ishikawa: They are rough. That's how they grew up. She comes home from shopping and just dumps everything together into the fridge. I'm screaming in my head, "You are damaging the food!" but pretending not to notice.

Such food-related frustrations were common among the research participants, oftentimes in disturbingly stigmatizing manners. Other mother madams in Hong Kong and Singapore candidly shared the following with me:

> Ms. Kinoshita: I ask for a certain dish for dinner and coming home see something completely different on the table. The scary part is I'm getting used to it now.
>
> Ms. Yagi: Sometimes the vegetables are chopped in hyōshi-giri instead of sen-giri! I have to ask her again to cut them more thinly. Of course, she pouts because I make her redo all the vegetables.
>
> Ms. Amino: She takes beef out of the fridge and puts it in the hot pan right away. I scream, "No, we don't do that! You have to take the meat out thirty minutes before you cook it!" It's troublesome, but I closely monitor her cooking that way.

In many interviews, the mothers shared these types of "scary" and "troublesome" stories almost offhandedly, as if they were recycling an oft-cited, no-fail joke. There was a noticeable narrative pattern in these stories: The mother madams are happy that they can skip the bothersome parts of cooking but are not entirely happy because the maids do not cook to their Japanese standards. The frequent recurrence of such stories in the interviews was suggestive of the ways in which many Japanese mother madams commonly talk about the domestic workers they hired inside their communities.

The division of labour that we see in these households between a madam and a domestic worker—the former from Japan and the latter from Southeast Asia—is predicated on an unequal relationship. It is the mother madams who allocate the work and give minute instructions on the ways in which the work is to be done. While the degrees of supervision may vary, the underlying assumption is that "the maids know no better, and so we madams should train them"—as Ms. Amino, the mother in Singapore who was strict about meat

handling blatantly put it. The domestic workers' failures and shortcomings—by the Japanese mother madams' standards—are rarely narrated as the workers' personal flaw; they are instead collectively interpreted as what "they, foreign maids" are like. Studies have shown how employers of migrant domestic workers often subscribe to demeaning and stigmatizing stereotypes in Asian global cities (Constable; Lan); the Japanese mother madams here are no exception.

Mother madams' blogs also constitute a site where such problematic narratives are circulated. Among the twenty blogs I analyzed, there were some positive entries about intercultural food experiences that a foreign domestic worker brought to a Japanese expat family, but many had a different tone. For example, a mother madam in Singapore who has blogged about her experiences of global householding since 2015, frequently mentioned the difficulties she has with her maid-san. In one article, she responded to her readers' requests to share what obento her children took to their private Japanese school in Singapore. According to the mom blogger, every day she would decide the menu and leave shopping and cooking instructions for each item so that the maid-san could go shopping, freeze and defrost meat and fish, wash and cut vegetables, and fry, stew, and grill the ingredients—all to be completed by a specified time according to a specified method. One of the photos accompanying the entry showed a three-tiered obento, including one container of white rice, another container of miso soup, and a third container with small portions of fish fries, rolled eggs, fried green peppers with bacon, and cherry tomatoes. Following the colourful obento was another photo, this one of a whiteboard on which the madam had left detailed cooking instructions. The two photos showed the precise work that the domestic worker had performed according to the madam's prescriptions.

Not unlike the interviews above, however, the blog was seemingly not complete if it did not include some mention of the madam's discontentment: The maid-san was described as someone lacking the knowledge of nutritional balance and colour coordination. The three different containers were a necessary device, according to the mother madam, because for the domestic worker, balancing rice and other food items in one container was beyond her capacity. The texts were decorated with smiley- and winking-face emojis to create the same joking atmosphere that I had witnessed during the interviews.

It is interesting to contrast such blog entries to those analyzed by Seddon. Whereas the mother bloggers in Seddon's study exhibit their creativity beyond home through online communication, in this case, what the mother madam's blog showcases is not her own culinary or artistic creativity so much as her skill as a household supervisor. The domestic worker's obento making reflects the mother madam's ability to provide clear instructions that even a foreign maid-san can follow. The proud narratives are, obviously, at the expense of the

maid-san's autonomy and dignity as a professional domestic worker. Although most of the work was done by the domestic worker, it was the madam who decided whether the end product was up to par.

The research participants as well as bloggers often used the metaphor of an equal business partnership when describing their madam-maid relationship; however, the reality is blatantly hierarchical (Lan). Japanese mother madams are unquestioningly considered an expert and the maid, a novice. The hierarchy is understood and justified in disturbing terms such as "because they are not Japanese," "they are not educated," and "they grew up in developing countries." The mother madams' narratives together construct this distinction and hierarchy between "us, Japanese madams" and "them, foreign maids," entitling the Japanese mothers to assert their authority in their private homes.

As such, cooking, which has long emblematized the alienation of mothers in Japan (Allison), now in the context of intra-Asian migration and racialized global divisions of labour comes to exemplify the alienation of migrant domestic workers at the hands of Japanese mother madams. Japanese knowledge and methods of cooking are considered something absolute, something non-Japanese workers will never fully understand or acquire. The same xenophobic implications that Ohnuki-Tierney observed among public debates of food in Japan here surface in the personal narratives of global-elite mothers from Japan.

For Whom? Gendered Division of Labour in Global Households

Simultaneously, it is crucial to ask why and how the Japanese mother madams adhere to what they think is the Japanese standards of cooking in their global households. When examined closely, those decisions do not appear merely personal. Ms. Konno, who works fulltime in a local Singaporean company, is an illuminating example. She said, "I work in a Singaporean workplace, surrounded by my competitive, super-rational Singaporean colleagues. Just like them, I personally don't care what we eat everyday as long as we get a certain level of nutrition." However, food is in fact often a source of conflict in her family:

> My husband eats only Japanese food, so I had to teach the maid how to cook Japanese meals. I even bought an English cooking book for Japanese food.... He is okay when I make something that doesn't suit his taste. But he gets mad when the maid makes something that he thinks is not regular Japanese food. Not because the food tastes bad. He gets angry because he thinks I'm not doing the mother's job. That's why I don't let her decide the menu. It's my job, every morning, to decide what the family eats for dinner. I make sure to leave very specific instructions—two tablespoons of soy sauce here, not the big

> spoon, but the small one! Otherwise, the food tastes too salty, and my husband complains.

Ms. Konno's narrative was freighted with tension; she was torn between her own indifference to food and her husband's insistence on Japanese food and between how the maid-san cooked and how her husband liked the food to taste. Preparing family meals was considered Ms. Konno's responsibility; moreover, it served to evaluate Ms. Konno's motherliness, which as a working mother, she felt insecure about. Therefore, just like the mother madams above, Ms. Konno micro-managed the domestic worker's cooking in an effort to maintain good family relationships as well as her status and self-identification as a mother. Notably, while Ms. Konno thus assumed madam- and motherwork on top of her fulltime career, her husband, who never cooked, only ate the food that the two women in the household prepared jointly, occasionally complaining how "un-Japanese" it tasted. He was seemingly devoid of any emotional work, too.

Such cases of domestic negotiations with Japanese husbands who only ate Japanese food appeared in some other interviews; just like the maid stories, there was a clear narrative pattern where those stubbornly conservative husbands were mocked and ridiculed. Ms. Yoshihara, whom I interviewed a few months after her return to Japan from Hong Kong, was another example:

> We lived in Hong Kong, a gourmet heaven. What were we doing, eating rice and miso soup every day? All because my husband wanted Japanese food on the dinner table!… He doesn't like the food that nonfamily members cooked. So I made dinner almost all the time. It was a challenge to make Japanese meals in a foreign environment. I was always on the lookout for affordable ingredients from Japan. When I had to attend my son's school activities or afterschool lessons, I asked the maid-san to cook dinner. Four times a week, I cooked. Other times, I told her what to make, using this and that in the fridge. She had mastered only a few Japanese dishes, but we got by. At least, my family didn't complain.

Although the mother madams often spoke wryly of their husbands in the interviews—and presumably in conversations among themselves—they rarely seemed to defy outright their husbands' expectations. They would thereby fulfill the more general social expectations cast upon Japanese women.

This was yet another commonality among the research participants' narratives: The women almost always went to great lengths to make the researcher understand that they did not neglect their mother role and that they were a good mother. Ms. Konno, the conflicted mother in Singapore I quoted above, shared with me how she painstakingly tried to pursue the mother role, and Ms. Yoshihara, while resenting that they had to eat Japanese meals in

Hong Kong, also projected herself as a good mother who cooked "almost all the time." Presumably, the domestic worker cooked three times a week, but those times were deemphasized in her narrative because it was her, the madam, who oversaw the Japanese-ness of the family dinner, who enabled the family to "get by."

The strict and painstaking attention that the research participants pay to the maids' work in the kitchen is a result of their constant negotiations with family and society as well as within themselves. As discussed earlier, they impose Japanese—or to be precise, Japanese middle-class fulltime homemakers'—standards onto non-Japanese workers without considering whether that is necessary or efficient. That way, they recreate existing racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies within their homes. Meanwhile, their narratives suggest that the mother madams are in constant fear of being judged by others as a bad mother for outsourcing carework. As a result, Ms. Konno found herself assuming double and triple roles at home, overseeing family harmony. Ms. Yoshihara insisted that although she was occasionally away from the kitchen, the family's dinner was Japanese enough. Ms. Ueno, the mother of two "wild" boys whom I quoted in an earlier section, mentioned how the Japanese expat community might frown upon and speak ill of her behind her back—another social background of the research participants' daily motherwork. Their experiences as mother madams are never devoid of such familial, communal, and social relations.

When the mother madams calculate how much and in what ways they should outsource the cooking in their global household, they consider not just themselves and the domestic workers they hire, for there are other relationships that matter. Their families and other expat families as well as Japanese sociocultural norms interfere with their personal choices. Each woman tries hard to keep her family happy, when she herself may not necessarily be so. As the women's words above illustrate, it is the mothers who shoulder this emotional work—the third-shift labour—to solidify a gendered division of labour at home.

Conclusion: For Whose Privilege?

Throughout my interview research, food was a topic that surfaced spontaneously. Although most of the research participants celebrated the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the two Asian global cities as well as the level of gender equality they witnessed there, when it came to food, many Japanese mother madams were at pains to emphasize their adherence to what they saw as traditional Japanese norms and standards. Recall how, in one of the interviews quoted above, a research participant insisted on the Japanese cooking norm that vegetables should be cut differently when making curry and minestrone. Or

the other mother madam who referred to hyōshi-giri and sen-giri, cutting methods that she found were hard for non-Japanese domestic workers to distinguish. Such narratives served to establish themselves as proper Japanese mothers who, albeit overseas, provide proper Japanese meals for their Japanese family. Their narratives simultaneously subscribed to the imaginary distinction between "us, Japanese" and "them, foreigners" to leave unchallenged the problematic stereotypes that circulate among the Japanese expat communities all the while sustaining the structural socioeconomic inequalities endemic to the Asian global cities.

Concurrently, when examining the family gastropolitics of global households, it is necessary to study not only those who cook but also those who eat. In this particular intra-Asian context, those who do the cooking include the maids, who carry out the labour but are deprived of professional autonomy, and the madams, for whom the degree to which they should maintain their Japanese standards and norms of cooking overseas is a persisting question. Those who consume the meals are often exempted from the actual labour of cooking as well as from the emotional conflicts such daily rituals can give rise to. The maids are evaluated according to how knowledgeable and skillful they are in relation to their madams' strict standards, and the madams themselves are judged on the accuracy and authenticity of the food on dinner tables and in lunchboxes by their husbands and children, by the wider Japanese expat communities in which they live, and by Japanese society in general. The gendered division of labour is thus sustained in complex ways, in tandem with cultural nationalism, within the global households.

Food is thus a site where multiple hierarchical relationships intersect with one another. Racial, ethnic, and class stereotypes and inequalities are amplified through the subjugation of migrant domestic workers who do the labour of cooking. The gendered division of labour is strengthened when it is solely women—those who assume actual cooking labor and those who shoulder the emotional labour—who engage in food work. One may be inclined to ask now: Who cooks what, how, and ultimately for whose privilege?

Endnotes

1. All the research participants are referred to by pseudonyms throughout this article.

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CATHERINE MA

A Balancing Act: Unlearning and Embracing Chinese Immigrant Mothering

As a Chinese immigrant, motherhood involves unlearning patterns of thinking and behaving from one's upbringing and learning healthier ways to mother. Many view Chinese mothers as tiger moms, a harmful stereotype that does little to embrace the diversity of Chinese motherhood. This article draws on my lived experiences as an immigrant mother to my three American-born Chinese children. For me, the act of immigrant mothering entails a delicate balancing act where Chinese and American values often conflict. These conflicts highlight the racial inequities in how mothers are allowed to mother and experience motherhood. There is no one way to mother, but the heteronormative white, middle-class mothering style is dominant in how society defines good mothers. Little has been written about racial equity among mothers and how motherhood often details negotiating between culture-specific and American norms. My article seeks to explore racial equity and widen the boundaries of motherhood by exploring the impact of immigrant mothering practices, navigating Chinese and American cultures as an immigrant mother, reflecting on how my immigrant mothering has affected my American-born children, and lastly, understanding my cultural history and its influence on my Chinese identity. To widen the rhetoric on mothering, we must engage the narratives of racially diverse mothers to understand motherhood's multiplicities and complexities. Only then will we have a more inclusive view of motherhood that will build racial equity to benefit women and children.

I like to think that I'm not the typical Chinese mother who is often characterized as extremely strict, doesn't express affection, and only cares about obedient children who study all the time, but I think my American-born children see me as that critical tiger mom who only cares about grades. One time, my youngest mentioned how strict we were as parents, which led to my tirade about how we've never beaten him or his siblings when both my

husband and I were subjected to frequent beatings while growing up in a traditional Chinese immigrant family. This led me to see the cultural divide in our home with greater clarity. I see myself as an authoritative mother who is not as quick to yell as my mother, encourages open communication, and is willing to listen to my children's side of the story before I dole out any punishment. Those are the characteristics of authoritative parenting, where the child-parent relationship is bidirectional with open channels of communication, as opposed to authoritarian parenting, where relationships are unidirectional and parents hold all the power with little input from their children (Baumrind 412). I was first introduced to cultural conflicts in mothering when first-time motherhood taught me rather quickly that I could not be a stay-at-home mother because I wanted to pursue my dreams of becoming a psychologist, professor, and researcher. Sometimes pursuing my dreams seemed in direct conflict with my role as a Chinese immigrant mother because I felt guilty working on my degree when I thought I should be spending time with my babies and guilty for nursing my babies when I should be working on my doctorate. My maternal guilt was overwhelming, and although I was fortunate to know a few academic mothers, it would have been nice to know one who was Chinese because I needed help navigating the stark differences between American and Chinese cultures. My dear late colleague, Dr. Joy Noel-Weiss, helped alleviate much of my maternal guilt with her supportive advice when I was a doctoral student trying to juggle motherhood, academia, and life. She told me: "One of the best things about being in the moment is you will hear the little voice in your heart. Trust it, as you have learned to listen to your children, listen to your heart. It will help you find your place. The world will not leave you behind; you are contributing by simply enjoying your children and discovering who they are." Hearing her words of wisdom led me to value my inner voice, and I became less guilt-ridden when I took a break from work to play with my children. Her words also struck me because I had never heard anyone encourage me to trust in myself, as filial responsibilities often left me feeling I needed to centre my world around my family instead of my own wants and desires.

Growing up in a traditional Chinese household taught me that I needed to do more, and if I didn't kill myself doing everything, the world would view me as lazy, which is the kiss of death in many Asian families. This made me feel as though I were slacking for being in graduate school for far too long and feeling exhausted all the time because I was pumping every three hours for six months straight so my daughter could be exclusively breastfed. It took me a long time to unlearn those toxic cultural values and find a way to balance my career and family, allowing myself to rest when I was tired or enjoy a book without feeling guilty. This sense of unlearning meant constantly reevaluating my Chinese immigrant upbringing while adopting American values to create

a happy medium of mothering. I recently saw a meme posted by @ brownmamatrauma entitled "Why children of immigrants find it difficult to rest" (Ninad). It listed how rest feels selfish, we were taught that our self-worth was tied to our productivity, we associate rest with laziness, we feel guilty for not being "productive," rest feels like a waste of time, we feel guilty that our parents didn't have the same opportunities to rest, our parents didn't have the privilege to model rest or practice self-care, and we watched our parents work tirelessly to provide for the family. That meme reflected everything I felt as an adult immigrant and motivated me to try to parent differently. I want my children to know the value of rest, and if I didn't rest, how could they learn its importance?

One way the Chinese cultural value of family did prove essential in balancing my career and family was having an extended family unit. My husband, also an immigrant, is the oldest son, and one of his familial duties is to take care of his parents, so his mother lived with us. She stopped working as a seamstress once her grandchildren were born. Having a flexible teaching schedule and reliable childcare with my mother-in-law was instrumental in becoming my department's only full professor of colour. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the immense value of having reliable childcare and flexibility at work for women to balance the needs of their families and employment, but sadly, this is still not the norm in the United States (Kalluri et al. 1; Ma, "Reflections" 134). This flexibility also benefited my sister-in-law, as I would pick up my niece from school when she worked, and when she became a stay-at-home mother, she would pick up my children when I worked. In hindsight, I am in awe of how we all supported each other, and one of our greatest successes is how close our children are to each other as young adults.

In casual conversations with my Chinese friends who are mothers or grandmothers, we've concluded that there are numerous things we have to unlearn to help our children balance their identity as Chinese Americans because we all navigate between two cultures and generational differences that often clash. Although we grew up during a time when Chinese mothers were stringent and punishing, we are trying to break out of that authoritarian model. Recent research on Chinese parenting styles shows Asian parents are becoming more authoritative, in which communication, autonomy, and social-emotional skills are valued (Way et al. 68). In trying to nurture both Chinese and American identities in my children, I have to navigate the treacherous territory of instilling a sense of pride in them as they grow up in a country that forever sees them as a foreigner while continuously negotiating between Chinese and American values. This has been especially difficult with the increase in anti-Asian attacks during the pandemic, which I fear will continue for years to come. Between 2020 and 2021, there was a 343 per cent increase in anti-Asian hate crimes reported to the police in New York City (Center for

the Study of Hate and Extremism). I suspect there are many more unreported instances of anti-Asian hate crimes, such as the woman who verbally assaulted me at the supermarket. I considered pelting her with the canned food within my reach but was worried my husband would have to bail me out of jail. I always remind my children that the first thing people see when they meet you is that you are Chinese, so you need to be comfortable with that.

One Mom's Strategy against Anti-Asian Sentiment

As I grew up during the 1970s and was often the only Asian in my neighbourhood and schools, I am no stranger to racism. As a Chinese mother, I was hoping my children would be spared the prejudice I experienced, but racism never quite takes a break, and here we are dealing with discrimination again. When my children were in elementary school up until the eighth grade, I always volunteered to teach their classes about Chinese New Year and gave out treats. This was my attempt to reduce anti-Asian sentiment and teach their classmates some cool things about Chinese culture because I knew their Catholic school curriculum was not inclusive. In hindsight, I was also teaching these children a different view of what a Chinese woman could be, and they showed me how little they knew and cared to know about other cultures. More than once, I was disappointed in some of the children's behaviours, with their ignorant words and conduct that were reflective of their parents', but my master plan must have worked because none of my children were bullied in that school. I attribute part of that to my personality; my children's classmates knew I would call them out on their poor behaviour, and I was a novelty to the other parents, as I was not the typical Chinese woman because I do not put up with anyone's nonsense. I recall one mom who never went to college saying to me that immigrants were taking away all the jobs, knowing full well that I was an immigrant. I gave her the most intense look, prompting her to say that she wasn't directing her comment towards me. "I don't mean you, Cathy," she said. In hindsight, I should have asked her pointedly what job I was taking from her, a woman who had never set foot in a college setting. These are the conundrums I contend with: I have this insider status in which racists feel comfortable spewing their xenophobic rhetoric, and I feel responsible for educating them, which is exhausting at times. It is through experiences such as this that I teach my children how prevalent racism still is, and I wasn't always this pessimistic. I used to tell them that the election of Barack Obama was evidence that the world was getting better. Little did I realize that Obama's election was the catalyst that emboldened racists to vote an even bigger racist into the White House in 2016, and I had to face the grim reality that the world never got better. As a child of the 1970s, I grew up with the "look down, don't talk back" mentality, to accept racism, and to not question

inequities because I was a minority.

Being an academic and a researcher have helped me cope with the insanity that is going on right now and given me the tools to be critical, raise questions, fight back, and call out injustices. This goes against the stereotype of the quiet Asian who doesn't rock the boat. It does my heart good that my children learn about civil rights in school, have parents who discuss these issues at home, and see other mothers protesting with their children. Today, we are moving past the stereotype of the quiet Asian and seeing more dialogue between Asian parents and their children, in which children are influencing their parents' mindsets regarding race, challenging their parents' racist views, teaching them about LGBTIQ+, exposing the detriment of the model minority, and standing up against injustice. The days of keeping our heads down are disappearing, which is a critical step towards racial equity.

During the pandemic, I became a part of several online advocacy groups over Zoom, where I connected with a few Asians who felt inspired by my outspokenness to fight against anti-Asian racism, the model minority myth (MMM), anti-Blackness, and white supremacy. For those unfamiliar with the MMM, it is a dangerous assumption that all Asians excel academically, are financially secure, and do not need support (Poon et al. 469). This erroneous assumption is based on aggregated data from all Asian groups that do not consider generation status, education levels, financial stability, as well as other measures. The biggest problem with not disaggregating this data is that it creates an inaccurate portrayal of all Asians as successful, resulting in those in need being denied access to the support they are entitled to and creating stress for those who don't fit into narrow Asian stereotypes (e.g., excelling at math and science, being socially awkward). In addition, white supremacists perpetuate this myth to divide communities of colour by highlighting how Asians are the model minority; therefore, other communities of colour should strive to be successful like them. What most individuals do not understand is that poverty in communities of colour has deep roots in systemic racism, beginning with redline districts affecting the accumulation of generational wealth, access to quality education, good health, economic stability, fresh produce, and adequate transportation (Lynch et al. 2-3). A strong work ethic cannot adequately address these multilayers of systemic racism. Yet the model minority narrative of working hard to be successful is often touted as the sole remedy. Sadly, this mindset also encourages anti-Blackness by blaming communities of colour, especially Black people, for not overcoming these systemic inequities and inequalities on their own (Yi and Todd 570). The murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery deeply affected me, as George's last words called out for his mother, and it was Wanda Cooper-Jones, Ahmaud's mother, who pushed for the arrest of her son's killers. These incidences show the heavy burden on mothers of colour and how white

supremacy disregards the anguish of mothers who are unable to keep their children safe. I feel the world would be safer if more mothers were voted into positions of power, but the United States has still not reached that point. We have actually moved backwards with mothers fighting for the rights to their own body autonomy with the repeal of Roe vs. Wade (Totenberg and McCammon).

Within academia, the MMM continues its legacy of harm, as there are numerous examples where the success of Asians and Asian Americans are weaponized against other communities of colour rather than addressing the lack of systemic support offered to students of colour or the harmful pedagogy of educators from primarily white institutions who continue to teach using racist teaching practices (Dumas 16-17; Emdin 93-94). As the only full Chinese professor in my department, I am also subjected to the MMM. I am viewed as a high achiever and asked to mentor faculty members in and outside my discipline without any structural support or compensation for these additional time-consuming responsibilities. My white male colleagues are not asked to do this invisible labour. These structural problems support a racial hierarchy that upholds whiteness at the top while Black Americans are on the lowest rung (Yi et al. 297). I've been vocal about being lulled into embracing the MMM and wanting to assimilate into the dominant culture, especially if that was espoused in our upbringing, but that was because many of us were unaware of the racial history of Asian Americans in the United States. I remind Asians that it is never too late to learn about the longstanding history of Asian Americans and work on our identity, as that is a lifelong process. It was that realization when I began to embrace my Asian identity. Fortunately, a handful of states are incorporating Asian American studies into their K-12 curriculum. Illinois was the first state to mandate Asian American history as a part of their public school curriculum, along with New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and other states following suit (Bellamy-Walker). This is a critical step towards building a solid Asian identity that can positively impact Asian parents and their children in encouraging racial equity.

The Impact of Asian American Studies

The impact of expanding racial equity on maternal practices needs to start by providing education on the Asian and Asian American experience on all levels. Pride in my Chinese identity was awakened when I received a fellowship that focused on bringing Asian American studies into community college classrooms. It was like a boot camp for Asian American studies and just what I needed to learn about my Chinese heritage and history. That fellowship changed the trajectory of my academic career and my view as a Chinese immigrant mother because it gave me the foundation I needed to foster a sense

of Chinese pride in myself that would trickle down to my children. The required readings taught me much about the enduring racism that Asians have faced and their resilience throughout American history. Although I grew up with parents who embraced the MMM, I learned how it embraces a colonizer mindset that centres on whiteness and derails the development of a positive Asian identity. The most significant detriment of the MMM is the implied suggestion that there are good and bad minorities, which further divides communities of colour. Asian parents who buy into this myth unknowingly harm their children, as its premise embraces the white-colonialist standard as the goal to success in the United States, which breeds a growing self-hatred of being Asian, resulting in increased suicidal ideation among Asian young adults (Qiao). This self-hatred becomes an internalized form of racism.

As a professor of psychology who teaches courses on child and adolescent development, I am well aware of adolescent depression and the difficulties of accessing culturally sensitive mental health support. With all my research and educational background, I still find it hard to discuss issues regarding mental health with my children because I'm fearful of hearing them say how my mothering has contributed to their pain. Ironically, I have no problems discussing mental health with my students, but as a parent, I should address it more often with my children. I have shared my struggles with rage, imposter syndrome, and intergenerational trauma with them. Hopefully, the media coverage of Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka has opened up a dialogue about mental health amongst young people that can help normalize these difficult conversations (Fryer). I'm more comfortable discussing the importance of living an authentic life with my children. If they ever come out as nonbinary, homosexual, or transsexual, they know I would still love and support them. I often discuss the connection between happiness and living an authentic life, but little did I know how difficult it was to find authenticity in mothering.

Authenticity in Mothering as a Chinese Mother

How I chose to live an authentic life came shortly after I became a first-time mother. I saw how motherhood seemed to be an area of life where strangers felt compelled to offer unsolicited advice, often followed by cruel judgment. For me, this catalyst came in the form of breastfeeding, where I fell into the trap of being consumed with the mantra: The breast is best. Not having a nurturing maternal role model, I felt compelled to be the perfect mother. That unrealistic goal manifested itself in breastfeeding because I equated giving the best to my daughter by nursing her for her first year of life. I relentlessly sought to exclusively breastfeed her and refused to hear others tell me otherwise. It enraged me when well-meaning loved ones said to me that formula was just as good because I was determined to feed my baby the best and the best was

breastmilk. Ironically, while pregnant, I didn't have any dead-set plans on breastfeeding. I read up on all the popular books about pregnancy and motherhood because I am a trained researcher, but something snapped in me when I became a first-time mother. I had internalized breastfeeding as the best for my baby, and anything less would mark me as a monstrous mother who willfully didn't give her baby the best. Breastfeeding did not come naturally to me and was initially extremely painful with all three of my children. This was a rude awakening because all my research had brainwashed me that a good latch did not hurt, yet I was squirming with so much pain during the first three weeks of nursing each of my newborns. My stubborn personality made me pump for over sixteen months for my daughter, nurse my older son for two and a half years, and my youngest for over three years. Even though I surpassed the American Academy of Pediatrics breastfeeding recommendations, breastfeeding for me was not the positive experience that was marketed to pregnant women, and my rage towards that unfortunate truth inspired me as a researcher to make breastfeeding an empowering experience that was woman centered and not industry centered (AAP; Ma, "I'm MY Breastfeeding Expert" 204).

My research helped me understand parts of breastfeeding that often got lost between policy and practice, but the most significant gift from overcoming my difficulties in breastfeeding was learning the power of maternal voices, especially my own. I have yet to hear of any culture that values maternal voices as much as male ones. My stubbornness growing up in a traditional Chinese family that was viewed negatively by many became my greatest asset as a mother. Women are caught in a conundrum where they are criticized regardless of any decisions they make as a mother. Since there is no way out of this predicament, I decided that I would simply do what I felt was best for me. If I was going to be criticized, at least I got to do what I wanted in the end. That was the single best lesson I learned since becoming a mother, and it has benefited me in multiple ways in and outside of motherhood. This mindset confuses many mothers because I don't think many people have ever encouraged them to listen to and follow their gut instincts. We still live in a society where mothers are viewed and defined by the degree to which they are all sacrificing, child centred, and engaged in intensive mothering, also known as the "new momism" (Douglas and Michaels 620-21). We as mothers sacrifice a lot for our children, but who sacrifices for us? We are often put in a quandary where pleasing others is viewed as good mothering—the sacrificial mother encouraged by American society and Chinese culture, which are predominantly patriarchal. It takes courage to go against cultural norms and even greater courage as a mother to risk the wrath of society and her elders, who define motherhood in a misogynist way. For the most part, doing what I want is a feminist strategy to fight against the patriarchy. Audre Lourde's quote,

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." (125) rings true to me as a woman, wife, scholar, daughter, and especially as a mother, but it often labels me as selfish and not a team player. The new momism mentality is extremely robust as there are still times, though fewer, where I feel a twinge of guilt as I work on my research and question whether I should spend more time with my children. I hope to teach my children the importance of following their dreams, trusting their inner voice, and standing up for what is right.

The Black Sheep of the Family

As a child, I was often labelled stubborn because I always wanted to do what I wanted, which was frowned upon in my Chinese family. I see this personality trait in my youngest child, which can be annoying when it seems as if he is simply being defiant. Still, I understand him better because we share similar personality characteristics. My daughter regularly points out how I favour her younger brother over her. I try to explain to her that I'm just tired and have become more lax as a mother, but I also understand him better because we have similarly intense personalities, and he talks to me more often than she does, so I have a greater sense of his needs and vice versa. My explanations usually fall on deaf ears as she will detail how strict I was with her as compared to her brothers. It's difficult to explain the constant cost-benefit analyses I do as a mother to keep my children safe, especially during a global pandemic and amid anti-Asian racism. This will probably be a never-ending battle with her, but I am proud that she is expressing her authenticity of being annoyed at me. It takes courage to live with authenticity, and that is something I hope to instill in my children. I regularly remind them how lucky they are to have parents who support them, which was the opposite type of family environment that their father and I grew up in.

As an immigrant mother, I had to unlearn much of my upbringing and learn the value of extracurricular activities, play dates, birthday parties, team sports, well-roundedness, and social skills, which were not considered necessary by most traditional Chinese families. My upbringing focused more on self-sacrifice and filial piety, which was difficult for someone who wanted to do what she wanted instead of listening to what her elders told her to accept blindly. In many ways, the culture of individualism in the United States was better suited to my personality because I've always wanted to pursue my self-interests. Being this way wasn't always embraced by my Chinese family, and I was often scolded for being selfish and not doing as I was told. I felt my paternal grandpa understood me the most when everyone else found me rebellious. He always knew where to find me when I was outside playing in the parks to let me know it was time for dinner, never scolded me for playing video

games at the local pizzeria and was often quite impressed with my craftiness when I made gifts for him. He simply loved me for who I was, making him an outlier because Chinese culture, especially during his time, overwhelmingly favoured males over females. I am fortunate that my dad and husband are modern Chinese men who simply love their children regardless of their sex. Unfortunately, my grandpa passed before my children were born, but I often share stories of him with my children. Usually, my children don't see my internal battles to integrate the Chinese cultural ideals of collectivism with my independent nature. I hope they realize that sometimes being the black sheep of the family means being courageous enough to live an authentic life. I know it took me a while to embrace that status instead of trying to bend myself to the ways of my family, culture, and society, which often made me feel suffocated and miserable.

Learning to Mother

In many ways, striving to mother in an authentic way has been one of the biggest challenges I have encountered. Motherhood never came easy for me because there was much intergenerational trauma in my life where I did not have an example of what a nurturing and caring mother should be. I've noticed that many of my Chinese friends and students of colour also suffer from intergenerational trauma. How does one mother from that standpoint? This is not something I can easily blame on my mother because she also suffered from intergenerational trauma, as did her mother. I have learned to mother my children in ways I wished I had—supporting their dreams, showing affection, and allowing them to make decisions for themselves. Growing up in my situation frequently made me feel inadequate, but I was fortunate to have married a man who supports me unconditionally. It took me a long time to feel worthy of his love and to trust in someone who allows me to be unapologetically me. I grew up with a mother who often cursed at me in Chinese, beat me out of her frustration, and is still verbally abusive. Chinese people have the worst curse words, which have no English translation, and for a long time, I thought that was the norm in Chinese families. When I first became a mother, I felt I was going down that same path, but having a loving husband has helped mitigate my intergenerational trauma. There are numerous times when my children don't see how far their mother has come. I am not a perfect mother, but I have learned how to mother in a much less damaging way than my mother. These are the most challenging aspects of mothering for me—I have no roadmap besides knowing what I don't want to do, my children have no clue about the obstacles I have overcome and are critical in their clueless ways, and I don't have the mental energy to dredge up all the trauma I've survived to explain to my children fully. Writing about my trauma offers me an outlet to

reflect on my past and learn how to do better; my work provides an opportunity for readers to understand what mothers of different races and ethnicities face.

One lesson as a Chinese immigrant mother that may support racial equity in and across motherhood is the power that stems from mothering in a way that suits your nature. This authenticity is unique to each mother depending on the colour of her skin, those of her children, her cultural background, and her lived experiences. These facets will help her grow into her role as a mother. This is where the power of self-reflection, knowledge of one's history, and courage to move out of one's comfort zone can help a mother reclaim her power. We are living in a time when there is much division, and women's fundamental rights are continually being stripped away by malevolent individuals who fear the power of a united front of mothers. The combined voices of mothers would be a formidable force to strike out against white supremacy, misogyny, anti-Blackness, and the MMM. As divided groups, we are too busy fighting among ourselves. So much energy is wasted on superfluous debates—breast vs. formula, stay-at-home mothers vs. working mothers, or attachment parenting vs. the cry it out method of sleep training. The real problems that are killing mothers and children stem from racism, inequality, inequity, division, sexism, ableism, and all the other "isms." Mothering with authenticity can foster confidence in mothers, which would help us see with more clarity who and what are the real problems while working collaboratively to fight against injustice.

Learning how to mother is fraught with obstacles but allowing myself grace to learn from my mistakes is a necessary part of motherhood that should be normalized. The current rhetoric of motherhood entails a strive towards perfectionism, which is harmful and silencing. Motherhood is not about being a perfect mother. It is a transformative journey that involves constant change, adaptation, and flexibility. As I grow older, my focus on motherhood has changed from being entirely focused on one aspect (for me, it was exclusive breastfeeding) to one that is broader. I have learned to give myself more grace when I falter, and that view has led me to be less judgmental of other mothers, including my own. When I see her enjoying time with my children, I wonder if she has changed from a domineering mother to a kinder grandma. Dare I say she is a better grandmother than mother? I am fortunate to experience the complex layers of motherhood with multiple generations of women in my family because it allows me to witness how time affects how we mother our children and experience motherhood.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my two decades of motherhood, I realize how critical racial equity is for mothers. As an immigrant mother, I have frequently wondered if I was a good enough mother. I often fell short when I compared myself to the

American standards of motherhood or the new momism. Now that I am older and wiser, more confident in who I am as a Chinese woman, I realize that I was not deficient in how I mothered my children. I was merely judging myself based on the wrong standards. This is where the greatest need to build racial equity in and across motherhood lies. The traits many felt were problematic when I was younger were assets in becoming the mother I needed to be. Learning about the resilience of Asian Americans throughout history, pursuing my dreams, listening to my inner voice, and instilling pride in myself as a Chinese immigrant gave me the courage to mother in ways that worked for me. Expanding the boundaries of motherhood to be more racially diverse and inclusive can benefit mothers who fall outside the current and narrow definition of motherhood. With greater racial equity, women can have a broader experience of motherhood in more inclusive ways.

As I wrote this article, one of my mentees gifted me a book by Anna Malaika Tubbs. Her book honours the lives of three Black mothers—Alberta King, Berdis Baldwin, and Louise Little—who raised three sons who shaped our nation: Martin Luther King, Jr., James Baldwin, and Malcolm X. In reading her book, I realized how mothers of colour have often been erased from motherhood. This is a grave disservice to how we define mothering and provides evidence that we are far from racial equity in motherhood, but maybe change is coming with the advent of this book. Perhaps these books will help how we learn about mothers of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, which will allow women to mother their children in ways that suit them best, knowing that motherhood changes as women and their children grow. To have that freedom to navigate motherhood and embrace the unique way a woman mothers her children is a beacon of hope during these troubling times.

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