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Leading from the Margins: An Intersectional Qualitative Analysis of the Leadership Experiences of Black Mothers

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Abstract

This study sought to inform individuals and institutions about the benefits of having historically excluded people—those relegated to the margins of society—in leadership positions. Specifically, this study aimed to learn how being a Black mother influences one's choices, career opportunities, and experiences as leaders. While the literature review included an examination of the sociohistorical context for Black women's oppression, this study focused on the present-day oppressions that Black mothers in leadership positions face and how they resist. In examining the relationship between race and gender within the construct of motherhood, this study conceptualized this existence as a Black motherhood identity. The four-tiered conceptual framework was a lens to view the convergence of intersectional identities, oppressions, and values and their influence on Black mothers' leadership. Black feminist theory and intersectionality were the theoretical frameworks leveraged to address the study's research questions, as they captured the myriad ways Black mothers navigate and resist intersectional oppressions and reimagine their position in social hierarchies, respectively. An intersectional qualitative methodological approach was utilized to center the knowledge and experiences of the historically excluded and marginalized study participants, allowing them to tell counterstories to dominant narratives. The study design consisted of a primarily semi-structured approach to the focus group and interview protocols. The findings show that Black mothers in leadership positions face workplace barriers but are deft at leveraging aspects of their identity to lead effectively. Based on the conceptual framework and the findings, this study has generated three recommendations for practice and future research to help workplaces dismantle barriers to equity and inclusion.

Organization of Article

The article is organized as follows: First, in the introduction, the context and background, as well as the purpose and importance of the study, are provided. Then, the researchers give an overview of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, as well as the methodology. Next, a comprehensive study of literature primarily pertaining to Black working women is given. The literature review is focused on examining the barriers that impact and inform Black mothers' lives, work, and leadership. This is followed by the methodology section, which includes an overview of the study's design, the setting for the research, and the sources of data. Lastly, the findings of the study, which include an overview of the participants and the themes that emerged from conversations with them, and recommendations for practice are provided.

1. Introduction

On May 25, 2020, with a smirk on his face, Derek Chauvin, a White Minneapolis police officer, knelt on the neck of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black father, for more than eight minutes, killing him (Barrie, 2020). The brutality of George's death led to protests in every U.S. state and eventually crossed borders, becoming an international movement for racial justice (Barrie, 2020). In reflecting on the moments leading up to the murder of George Floyd, Grady-Hunt (2020) stated the following:

> As George Floyd was dying, he used his last breaths to call out to his mother, Larcenia Floyd. "Mama, Mama. I love you." Larcenia Floyd preceded her son George in death by two years. …When he called out for his Mama, in his abject isolation, he connected to an instinctual awareness of who Mama is. For most of us, she is our first experience of love and protection. (pp. 4, 7)

This quote is significant because it centers on Black mothers' importance. Black feminist theorists have long contended that motherhood is a social practice for Black families (Collins, 1991; Hooks, 1984; Lorde, 1984). Beyond being a physical state, motherhood is communal, collaborative, and collective. With this more inclusive definition of motherhood in mind, the experiences and practices of all Black women raising children in their homes will be explored, including biological mothers, adoptive mothers, step-mothers, and othermothers. The latter includes sisters, cousins, aunts, or grandmothers (Collins, 2009).

Not only are Black mothers often their children's "first experience of love and

protection" (Grady-Hunt, 2020), but they are also leaders in their families, communities, and society. This study is about Black motherleaders. A motherleader describes a woman's interconnected, interwoven, seamless nature as both a mother and a leader in her home, family, community, and workplace (Collins, 1991). There is a long history of Black mothers empowering their families, taking collective responsibility for the well-being of their communities, and leading freedom and social justice movements (Allen, 1997; Love, 2019; Watson, 2020). Arguably, Black mothers are the unsung heroes of the past's abolition, anti-lynching, and Civil Rights movements, and the #MeToo, anti-voter suppression, and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements of the present. Yet, even when people occasionally acknowledge Black mothers for their contributions, they are seldom lauded for their leadership. However, Black mothers' profundity in parenting Black children in an anti-Black world, coupled with their critical roles as arbiters of liberty, advocates of justice, and perfectors of democracy (Hannah-Jones, 2019), make them highly effective in their leadership.

Black mothers' roles in bringing attention to the inequitable impact of the coronavirus pandemic and its debilitating effects on Black communities and their centrality in seeking justice for families in the aftermath of police killings of Black men, women, and children cannot be understated. When the COVID-19 pandemic was in the early stages of wreaking havoc on the living, leaving many dead in its wake, the murder of George Floyd brought renewed attention to the ubiquity of anti-Blackness and the relentless state-sanctioned violence against Black people globally (Barbot, 2020; Barrie, 2020; Perez, 2021; Thelwall & Thelwall, 2021). During this time, under the overarching umbrella of advancing equity, two very different conversations were happening in workplaces throughout the United States.

One discussion focused on the need to dismantle barriers to leadership opportunities for Black employees and others who hold historically excluded identities (Creary et al., 2021; Meikle & Morris, 2022). The other concerned the pandemic's impacts on the plight of working mothers. Specifically, this conversation was about how the lack of childcare options and a loss of safety nets forced working mothers to leave the workforce or make other tough choices (Kirwin & Ettinger, 2022; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). Just as these two conversations were, for the most part, happening in silos, very little research married the two topics. Likewise, there is a paucity of scholarship on the barriers to leadership for Black working mothers. In this study, the researchers connected these two seemingly parallel discourses.

Black working women constitute 4.4% of management positions (e.g., managers, senior managers, and directors), 1.6% of Vice President roles, and 1.4% of C-Suite positions (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Fifty percent of Black female workers are mothers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019; Wilson, 2017) whose lived experiences in navigating and interrogating anti-Black, anti-woman, and anti-mother systems and structures account for their adaptive and resilient lea-

dership styles and the centrality of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their leadership practices (Cyr, 2021; Ross, 2014; Sarid, 2021).

However, Black mothers are rarely considered in the literature, theory, and scholarship on leadership. To silence Black mothers' voices in the canon of leadership further marginalizes them and their experiences (Grimes, 2005). This study addresses this gap by exploring Black mothers' perspectives, experiences, challenges, strategies, and practices in organizational leadership positions and providing a theoretical underpinning of their identity negotiation within institutions not built with them in mind. In speaking about the lack of women of color in leadership positions, Purushothaman (2021) noted the following:

> The message is that we are different from the White male leader who created the corporate ideal of leadership, and the delusion we are told is that we need to be more like him when, in actuality, our differences are part of our power. (p. 9)

Moreover, the mainstream epistemology about leadership, as it concerns the role of women, "has been constructed, canonized, and theorized from a White hegemonic female perspective" (Grimes, 2005: p. 1). Black women are centered in this study to counter the supremacy of Whiteness and patriarchy in scholarship on effective leadership. This study focused on Black motherhood's critical and challenging role in work and leadership.

While all working mothers may face challenges in the workplace, the researchers have chosen to specifically center and address Black women's work and leadership experiences. Among the research on the anti-woman and anti-mother barriers to career advancement that women of all races and ethnicities face, there is minimal mention of the impact of anti-Blackness in exacerbating the leadership representation gap. Furthermore, there is a dearth of scholarship on how Black mothers leverage their cultural knowledge and lived experiences to inform their leadership practices. That is, there is not enough written about the unique leadership attributes of Black women. Collins (2009) understood how motherhood as a social identity can be both oppressive and liberating to women, and this study addressed how Black working mothers negotiate the tensions between and demands of mothering and leading.

2. Overview of Theoretical Framework and Methodology

According to Lorde (1984) and Rich (1986), when focused on the lives and circumstances of Black women, categories such as "womanhood" and "motherhood" lose their universality due to Black women's unique experiences of living under oppressive systems (as cited in Craddock, 2015). Black feminist epistemology centers on the experiences and perspectives of Black women (Collins, 2009), countering the near erasure of Black women in the discourse on womanhood and motherhood. Therefore, Black feminist theory (BFT) is the primary lens utilized in this study. BFT is a critical social theory encompassing bodies of

knowledge that grapple with the central questions facing Black women as a collectivity (Collins, 2009). BFT seeks to account for the specific ways in which Black women are subordinated by their "multiply-burdened" identities (Crenshaw, 1989) while simultaneously acknowledging the myriad ways in which they resist the subordination (Collins, 2009).

Intersectionality, a theory (Crenshaw, 1989) and methodology (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022) that explores the overlapping and often interdependent axes of identity that make one simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible, also applied to the study. Since the goal was to understand the experiences of Black mothers in the workplace, a methodology that centered on collecting data via speaking to them directly (i.e., interviews) was most appropriate for this study (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Therefore, using narrative inquiry as the primary form of data collection, an intersectional qualitative analysis was the methodology that undergirded the research.

1) Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are central to understanding the study's methodological approach. The terms are also the pillars supporting the conceptual framework.

- *Anti-Blackness* is the inability to recognize the humanity of people racialized as Black, resulting in unwarranted and inexorable violence against them (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

- *Anti-mother* is the act of treating mothering as if it is a woman's private issue, whereby institutions make no or very little effort to put into place policies and practices that support mothers (Coiner & George, 1998).

- *Anti-woman* is defined as misogynistic hostility toward women due to the belief that they are unequal to men and are not fully capable of engaging in all aspects of life (Hamisan-Khair & Mohd-Dahlan, 2017).

- *Black* is a category of racial identities describing people whose roots can be historically traced to a shared cultural and political identity emanating from descendants of Africans who were forced into a system of U.S. chattel slavery (Ghee, 1990). The terms "Black" and "African-American" are used interchangeably throughout this article.

- *Black feminist leadership* is a practical leadership framework in which Black women leverage their lived experiences to influence and empower followers to challenge social oppressions and injustices (Hanson, 2003; Rogers, 2005; Rosser-Mims, 2010).

- *Black feminist theory* is a critical social theory grounded in the belief that Black women are inherently valuable and their thoughts, experiences, and perspectives should be centered in any analysis, examination, and interpretation of Black womanhood (Collins, 2009).

- *Black motherhood identity* is Black women's self-definitions and sense-making of mothering while Black; it is the intersection of race and gender within the construct of motherhood among Black women (Craddock, 2015).

- *Critical race feminism* is a theoretical framework that centers the voices of women of color in analyzing how power relations, social identity, and oppression coalesce to form and inform one's lived experiences within social hierarchies (Verjee, 2012).
- *Critical race parenting* is a pedagogical process whereby both parent and child are engaged in a mutual exercise of teaching and learning about race while debunking dominant narratives, messages, and ideologies about humanity (Matias, 2016).
- *Critical race theory* (*CRT*) is a theoretical framework that focuses on the centrality of race and racism, with the former being a social construct and the latter embedded throughout society, including in institutions, legal systems, government policies, and workplace practices (Crenshaw, 1989).
- *Cultural wealth* is a framework within CRT that posits that capital is abundant (i.e., assets) in communities of color and other socially oppressed groups (Yosso, 2005).
- *Feminism* is the assertion that women are whole human beings capable of engagement and leadership in all spheres of life—economic, intellectual, political, sexual, social, and spiritual (Hooks, 2000).
- *Intersectionality* is the theory of how interlocking systems of power and oppression (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, class) shape the lives of people of color, particularly Black women (Crenshaw, 1989).
- *Mothering* is a powerful social construct centered on women's activities in nurturing and ensuring the growth and development of their children (Frances-Connolly, 1998). In this study, "mother" refers to birth mothers, adoptive mothers, stepmothers, and figurative mothers.
- *Motherwork* is the extension of mothering that is racially and culturally specific in that some mothers have the additional mothering responsibilities of instilling in their children the practices of survival, resistance, and empowerment, as well as mothering their communities (Collins, 1991, 2009).
- *Motherleader* is the interconnected, interwoven, seamless nature of a woman as both a mother and a leader in her home, family, community, and workplace; motherleaders are Black mothers in leadership positions (Collins, 1991).
- *Womanism* is a theory centered on Black women's experiences and their impact on humanity and links Black women's experiences to the human spiritual and physical struggle for liberation (Maparyan, 2012; Pellerin, 2012).

2) Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

This study aimed to explore how Black motherleaders perceive and make meaning of the impact of their intersectional identities on their careers and leadership experiences. With an overarching construct of resistance, four primary research topics informed this literature review and are the basis for the conceptual framework: navigating intersectional oppressions, negotiating identity, asserting inherent value, and leading from the margins. Anti-blackness, anti-woman,

and anti-mother were the common concepts that emerged from the research on navigating intersectional oppressions in the workplace. Black motherhood identity and cultural wealth were the key concepts under the umbrella topics of negotiating identity and asserting inherent value. Black feminist leadership, activist mothering, and community othermothering were the key concepts in leading from the margins.

Black motherleaders (re)negotiate, reclaim, and redefine what it means to be a mother while leading from the margins through a pro-Black, pro-woman, and pro-mother cultural wealth lens. The arrows in Figure 1 depict the bidirectional and reciprocal relationship between Black motherleaders and their life, work, and leadership experiences. In other words, the figure depicts how the lives, work, and leadership of Black mothers are formed and informed by their ability to navigate and contend with the ubiquity of anti-Blackness, anti-woman policies and practices, and anti-mother systems and structures in the workplace. Black mothers (re)negotiate what being a Black woman, mother, and leader means. Black mothers assert their worthiness due to being inherently wealthy with cultural knowledge, abilities, assets, and connections.

With resistance being a common theme throughout the review of literature on Black women in general, and Black motherleaders, specifically, it became apparent that Black feminist theory and intersectionality were the two theories that
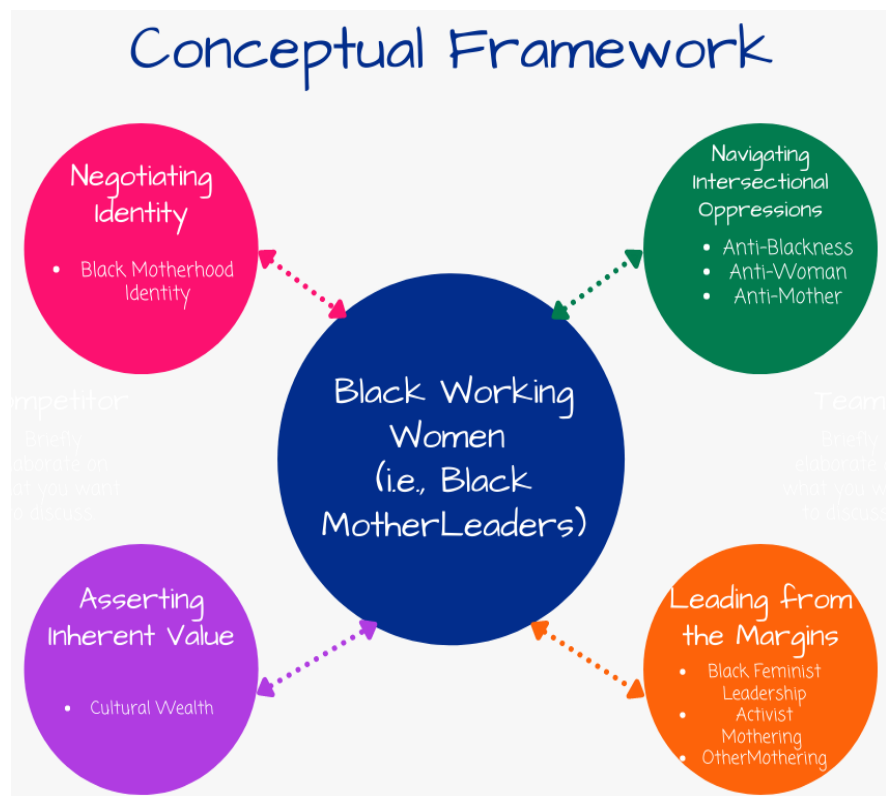

Figure 1. Conceptual framework. Source: Dr. Adiyah Aisha Ali, University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education, May 2023.

were best suited to both center the racial, gendered experiences of Black mothers and address the research questions within this study. The Black feminist theoretical framework captures the myriad ways in which anti-Black, anti-mother, and anti-woman structures, systems, policies, and practices marginalize, exclude, oppress, and subordinate Black mothers and how they, in turn, navigate and resist the intersectional oppressions (Collins, 2009). Intersectionality provides an inclusive framework for viewing the convergence of hierarchies of social identities (e.g., race, gender, and class) concerning power and oppression (Cooper, 2017; Crenshaw, 1989).

3. Literature Review

1) Historical Overview of Feminism

Though it began in the mid-nineteenth century as an outgrowth of the anti-slavery movement, the "first wave" (i.e., period of activism) of U.S. feminism primarily focused on advocating for the rights of middle-class White women (Collins, 2000; Hooks, 1984; Sharlach, 2009). The prominent theme of the feminist movement was how the gendered division of labor had resulted in the oppression of women who are housewives and mothers. In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Costa and James (1971) noted the following:

> The woman has been isolated in the home, forced to carry out work that is considered unskilled, the work of giving birth to, raising, disciplining, and servicing the worker for production. Her role in the cycle of production remained invisible because only the product of her labor, the laborer, was visible. (as cited in Davis, 1981: p. 134)

"Motherhood and mothering in relation to patriarchal ideals is a position of victimhood because motherhood as an institution under patriarchy oppresses mothers," wrote Fongang (2015) in her analysis of motherhood (p. 87).

During the first wave, a notable major win was the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which granted women the right to vote; yet, it took more than four decades before Black women could partake of this constitutional right without fear of reprisal. This distinction between White and Black women's access to the vote exemplifies how racial equality took a backseat to gender parity. Collins (2009) noted that "White women's inability to acknowledge how racism privileges them reflects the relationship that they have to White male power" (p. 177). While not all White feminists were oblivious to their privileges, historically, the suppression of Black women's thoughts has been influential in feminist theory (Collins, 2009).

The Civil Rights movement was already underway when the "second wave" of feminism began in the United States. This period of protest and activism lasted for two decades (the 1960s-1970s) and was characterized by a push for gender equality and justice in all aspects of American life. Like the previous wave,

second-wave feminism's focus on the concerns of middle-class White women created a contentious relationship between White feminists and feminists of other races and classes (Roth, 2004). However, while White feminists were theorizing about the ways in which sex excluded them from full participation in society, Black feminists, such as Alice Walker (1981), Angela Davis (1981), and bell Hooks (1984), were defining feminism in ways that accounted for their double marginalization (Roth, 2004). "Although Black feminism varied in its organizational form and ideology …it was nonetheless characterized by a consistent examination of interlocking oppressions," noted Roth (2004: p. 12).

Black women were calling out the sexism in the Civil Rights movement and the racism in the feminist movement. Furthermore, not all feminists agreed on the origins of women's oppression or what it means to be liberated. Roberts (1997) noted that White women's liberation through reproductive freedoms was in stark contrast to the experiences of women of color; thus, during the second wave of feminism, while White feminists were advocating for reproductive rights (e.g., access to contraceptives), Black women were fighting for reproductive justice (e.g., an end to being subjected to forced sterilizations). Feminists of various races and classes agreed that there needed to be equality in all spheres of life, including working outside the home.

Working Women

In the 1960s, the great-granddaughters of the first wave of feminism now found themselves contending with employment discrimination. Thus, they advocated for "equal pay for equal work" and applauded the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (Avery, 2003). They also were supporters of an amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited employers from discriminating based on sex (Hersch & Shinall, 2015). However, despite these measures and other legislative wins, including expanded childcare services, women still faced many barriers to entering the workplace, such as job advertisements that segregated vacant positions by sex (Hersch & Shinall, 2015). In addition, once on the job, women were placed in lower-status roles and were paid lower wages than men due to the prevailing belief that women's work is low-skilled (Hartmann, 1976), whereas because men are perceived to be the most valuable workers, they held the majority of leadership positions and were paid the highest wages (Bleiweis et al., 2021).

Women comprise two-thirds of the United States low-wage workforce (National Women's Law Center, 2018). According to Blau and Kahn (2016), over-representing one gender in a particular occupation accounts for more than half of the difference between men's and women's wages. While there has been some progress in closing the gender wage gap, there is still much more to be done for wage parity. For example, in 1973, for every $1 paid to men, women were paid 57 cents; in 2020, women were paid 83 cents for every $1 paid to men (Glynn & Boesch, 2022; Jones, 2021). Moreover, because working men typically are less burdened by caregiving responsibilities than working women, it is easier for them to ascend to leadership positions in the workplace (Bleiweis et

al., 2021).

Like men, women work to provide for themselves and their families; yet, unlike men, because women bear and primarily rear children, their participation in working outside of the home has been fraught with friction (Hartmann, 1976). "Birth is not just the 're/production' of a child, but also the act of 're/producing' a mother, and in so doing transitioning a woman, physically and emotionally, into motherhood," stated Frazier (2015: p. 149). Collins (2009) asserted, "The traditional family ideal assigns mothers full responsibility for children and evaluates their performance based on their ability to procure the benefits of a nuclear family household" (p. 197). The experience of motherhood can create a role strain for working women, as their roles as workers, friends, and wives, for example, can conflict with their roles as mothers. Striving to be a good mother causes quite a conundrum for working mothers since being primarily devoted to their dependent children contrasts with being especially committed to their work (Collins, 2009; Correll et al., 2007).

Motherhood negatively impacts women's wages, occupational status, and labor force participation (Abendroth et al., 2014; England et al., 2016; Kahn et al., 2014). In the workplace, women are penalized for being mothers. Compared to non-mothers and men, working mothers are likelier to receive lower salaries and less likely to be hired or promoted (Correll et al., 2007). In a study of 84 men and 108 women, researchers found that mothers were six times less likely than childless women to be hired. In addition, childless women were eight times more likely to be promoted than working mothers (Correll et al., 2007). On average, women's post-birth earnings are 40% less than their pre-birth earnings (The Economist, 2019). This motherhood penalty is a crucial driver of the gender wage gap, exacerbating the leadership representation gap.

2) Historical Context for Black Women's Oppression and Resistance

For centuries in the United States, White and male characteristics were requisites for leadership. When the United States was founded on the premise that only White, land-owning men could vote, it created a unilateral and hierarchical caste system that relied on institutions to uphold the status quo of ensuring that only White men were able to lead. Thus, the dominant ideology during this era was that Black women were the antithesis of leadership. As Black women were excluded from leadership positions in conventional institutions, White men's thoughts and priorities were elevated (Collins, 1998; Higginbotham, 1989; Morton, 1991). Yet, because women and people of color have continued to resist and advocate for full participation in all aspects of society, this discriminatory practice of hoarding power has begun to be disrupted in recent history. In situating Black mothers' present-day experiences with leadership, it is essential to understand the historical context of the exploitation of their labor and the devaluation of their motherhood identity.

Exploitation of Black Women's Labor

Black women's oppression originated from the transatlantic slave trade, fol-

lowed by centuries of exploitative and unpaid work. Kelley (2017) asserted that European slave traders and colonizers sought to "eliminate the culture and consciousness while preserving the [Black] body for labor" (pp. 268-289). Black women's forced introduction to working outside of the home accounts for historically having higher labor force participation than other women (Goldin, 1977). For much of American history, slavery was the main and most lucrative staple of the United States, meaning the exploitation of Black women's labor helped build the national economy (Collins, 2009). Dunbar-Ortiz (2021) noted, "The slave colonies created and codified a thoroughly racial capitalist slavery… building the wealth of the nation on enslaved African labor and the land violently wrenched from the Native peoples" (p. 57). Under the legal institution of American slavery, neither womanhood, matrimony, nor motherhood could protect Black women from physical abuse or hard labor (Banks, 2020). This explains why seventeen years after emancipation, 73.3% of single Black women and 35.4% of married Black women were in the labor market (albeit segregated into low-wage domestic and service jobs) compared to 23.8% of single White women and 7.3% of married White women (Goldin, 1977).

According to Jones (1985), "If work is any activity that leads either directly or indirectly to the production of marketable goods, then slave women did nothing *but* work" (p. 14, emphasis in original). Stevenson (2021) noted how African women were equated with men, thus "erasing these women's public claim to feminine equality with other women" (pp. 18-19). Black working women embodied the "assumed distinctions between work and family so central to the definitions of masculinity and femininity," asserted Collins (2009: p. 316). Davis (1981) proclaimed, "The unorthodox feminine qualities of assertiveness and self-reliance—for which Black women have been frequently praised but more often rebuked—are reflections of their labor and struggles outside the home" (p. 133). In an essay titled "Black Women's Labor," Stevenson (2021) stated, "These enhanced labor assignments, in turn, damaged women's health, prenatal care, and the amount of attention that they could give their dependent kin" (p. 19).

Devaluation of Black Motherhood

Black women have always had to negotiate the inherent tensions between mothering and working due to the United States profoundly rooted and sinister history of devaluing Black mothers (Collins, 2005). Black enslaved mothers were considered to be breeders for the benefit of the slaveholders, not mothers to their children. As a result, Black mothers "had great difficulty maintaining families and family privacy in public spheres that granted them no citizenship rights," noted Collins (2009: p. 55). Not only did slavery lead to the disruption of the Black family structure, generational trauma, the criminalization of Blackness, and the feminization of poverty, but it also is the genesis of equating Black mothers' worth with their ability to produce. "It was a womanhood synonymous with market productivity, not motherhood," noted Stevenson (2021: p. 19). Jones (1985) asserted,

As Blacks, slave women were exploited for their skills and physical strength in the production of staple crops; as women, they performed a reproductive function vital to individual slaveholders' financial interests and the inherently expansive system of slavery in general. (p. 12)

According to Collins (2009), "African-American women's experiences as mothers have been shaped by the dominant group's efforts to harness Black women's sexuality and fertility to a system of capitalist exploitation" (p. 57). Black, enslaved women's bodies did not belong to them; by extension, neither did their children. For 244 years, Black people were traumatized, terrorized, and treated like chattel, but one of the greatest afflictions was the separation of Black mothers from their children. In attempting to defend their families, Black mothers "could not always prevent their children from being sold, but by refusing to work or threatening to kill their children if such sales took place, they made it less likely," stated Ellison (1983: p. 57). When Black mothers worked, the whereabouts and care of their children were often out of their control. While there is a near universality in parents desiring to protect their children, Black mothers' inability to exert control over their children resulted in many parenting from a position of fear. "The visionary pragmatism of many U.S. Black mothers may grow from the nature of work women have done to ensure Black children's survival," explained Collins (2009: p. 199).

Methods of Resistance

"She who passively accepted her lot as a slave was the exception rather than the rule," posited Davis (1981: p. 20). Ellison (1983) asserted, "Over two centuries, Black women undermined slavery with stubborn inventiveness and a confident sense of outrage at the absurdity of the idea that they would gladly suffer the indignities of the servile state" (pp. 56-57). While leading the Underground Railroad movement is among the most notable ways Black women in bondage resisted enslavement and all of its related forms of oppression, there are myriad other ways Black women fought.

Some forms of resistance included committing suicide, threatening and at times practicing infanticide, running away, plotting and leading insurrections, teaching their children survival skills, keeping their families together, maiming mistresses, fighting off slaveholders' rape attempts, participating in revolts and rebellions, breaking valuable equipment, committing arson, and teaching themselves to read (Camp, 2005; Davis, 1981; Harrison, 2009). Arguably, one of the Black women's most important acts of resistance during slavery was forging "powerful bonds of love and affection that slave-owners could not break," noted Ellison (1983: p. 57).

3) Navigating Present-Day Intersectional Oppressions

Though distinct forms of discrimination manifest differently, racism, sexism, and classism are risk factors for poor life outcomes (Crenshaw, 1989; Yearby, 2018). Moreover, their impacts are compounded when a person experiences these

oppressions simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989). This is the reality for Black working women because they embody the intersections of marginality (Crenshaw, 1989). In her seminal writing on intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) described how the either/or false dichotomy between racial discrimination and gender discrimination produces a multiplicity of burdens for Black women because of the "intersectional aspects of their subordination" (p. 148). Put differently, Black women's marginalization and exclusion in the workplace are intimately connected to their position on the hierarchical axes of privilege, oppression, and domination (Cooper, 2017). Therefore, as Crenshaw (1989) asserted, it is critical to ensure that Black women are not erased in any analysis of the seemingly mutually exclusive categories of racial and gender discrimination.

Black Working Women

Since arriving on U.S. shores, Black women have worked, often assuming the responsibilities of family providers. One cannot conceptualize Black women's relationship with work without considering the wide range of work. Work for Black women can be "economically exploitative, physically demanding, and intellectually deadening, or empowering and creative," asserted Collins (2009: p. 54). In noting the historical antecedents of today's tensions with work, Collins (2009) stated, "Under U.S. capitalism, slavery also established the racial division of labor whereby African-Americans were relegated to dirty, manual, nonintellectual jobs" (p. 56). Collins (2009) further explained how Black women's paid work in both corporate jobs and domestic service jobs (e.g., dishwashers, dry-cleaning assistants, cooks, and healthcare aides), as well as their unpaid work in their homes, can be quite taxing, both physically and mentally.

As previously stated, Black women have consistently had higher labor force participation rates among women. For example in 2019, 60.5% of Black women were in the labor force compared with 56.8% of White women (Roux, 2021). However, it is important to note that Black women also have greater representation in the labor force than Black men. There were 10.8 million Black female workers in 2018, representing 53% of the Black labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Black women's labor force participation rate decreased (58.8%); however, Black women's participation still surpassed that of all other women (56.2%; Roux, 2021). During this time, women of color, mothers, and low-wage workers lost jobs at significantly higher rates than other groups (Schaller, 2021). Regarding the latter, Black women's earnings are one indication of the compounding effects that race and gender have on wages and overall economic well-being.

In 2020, Black women earned 64 cents for every $1 earned by White men (Bleiweis et al., 2021). This means that Black women would need to work seven extra months to match the earnings of their White male co-workers. Though Black women have worked longer and under harsher conditions than other women in the United States (Roos, 2010), most scholarship on women and work centers on the experiences of White women. According to Davis (1981), there is

a distinct difference between Black and White women's relationship with industrial capitalism:

> [Black women] have largely escaped the psychological damage industrial capitalism inflicted on White middle-class housewives, whose alleged virtues were feminine weakness and wifely submissiveness. Black women could hardly strive for weakness; they had to become strong, for their families and communities needed their strength to survive. (p. 132)

Collins (2009) noted, "Framed through the prism of an imagined traditional family ideal ...Black women become less 'feminine,' because they work outside the home, work for pay and thus compete with men, and their work takes them away from their children" (pp. 53-54).

Black Women and Leadership

Black women's long history of working outside the home does not translate to high representation in leadership positions (Lloyd et al., 2021). Although Black women request to be promoted at the same rate as men, a recent national survey by McKinsey consultants revealed that for every 100 men promoted to manager, 58 Black women are promoted (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Similarly, for every 100 men hired into a management role, 64 Black women are hired (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Institutional barriers prohibit Black women from ascending from the bottom rung of the job ladder into management, which widens the leadership representation gap.

Institutional Barriers

> Everything I know about leadership, I learned via the family, the community, and the nonprofit sector. And, everything that has ever made me question whether or not I wanted to continue on this path has also grown out of some troubling experiences I've had in this sector—from micro- to macroaggressions—and most of those assaults on the dignity have gone largely unchecked. (Lee, 2020: p. 2)

The above sentiment shared by a Black female nonprofit executive is also familiar to many Black women in the for-profit sector. For example, the McKinsey researchers who surveyed more than 65,000 employees representing 423 corporations asserted, "By almost any measure, Black women are facing disproportionately high barriers in the workplace" (McKinsey & Company, 2021: para 2). In fact, there are several institutional barriers that Black working women in both the for- and non-profit sectors face. These include lack of support from managers, being assigned undervalued tasks, contending with negative stereotypes about Black women, stereotype threat, experiencing microaggressions, being both invisible and hyper-visible, and the lack of flexible workplace policies.

The McKinsey researchers of the aforementioned study found that Black women tend to receive less encouragement, advocacy, and support from managers than White women (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Managers are less likely to

showcase the work of Black women, to give them opportunities to manage people or projects or to advocate for them to take on stretch projects. This results in Black women having fewer opportunities to build or showcase skills beyond their job duties (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Additionally, in comparison to non-Black women, Black women seldom report that their managers proactively check in with them, share feedback with them after they have delegated a task or project, help them to navigate organizational politics, interact with senior leaders, or sponsor them, all of which are often crucial for career advancement (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Less than 25% of Black women surveyed feel they have the sponsorship they need to advance in their careers, which results in them being excluded from meaningful conversations about organizational priorities and strategy (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

In an article titled "For women and minorities to get ahead, managers must assign work fairly," Williams and Malthaup (2018) noted that some assignments are glamorous (e.g., promotion worthy). In contrast, others are "office housework" (e.g., necessary but undervalued), and there is an expectation that the latter be done by women, especially women of color (Williams & Malthaup, 2018). Office housework, or what Collins (2009) refers to as "corporate mammy work" (p. 54), includes administrative work that keeps things moving forward (e.g., taking notes and scheduling meetings), serving on internal committees, and completing tasks that are not tied to revenue goals (Williams & Malthaup, 2018).

"U.S. Black women still do a remarkable share of the emotional nurturing and cleaning up after other people, often for lower pay," asserted Collins (2009: p. 45). Doing office housework negatively reinforces the power dynamics that place Black women in lower positions; and, thus, it can impair Black women's ability to get promoted (Williams & Malthaup, 2018); yet, if Black women refuse to do the corporate mammy work, then they risk being labeled "aggressive" or "angry" and are subsequently penalized (Williams & Malthaup, 2018).

"Angry Black woman" is a stereotype that has followed Black women since emancipation. In the United States, "the enslaved African woman became the basis for the definition of our society's *Other*" (Christian, 1985, emphasis in original, as cited in Collins, 2009: p. 77). According to Collins (2009), "The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (p. 79).

Similar to how Black men began to be stereotyped as being lazy after slavery was abolished, "to justify Black women's oppression, Black women are often stereotypically portrayed as mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas" (Collins, 2009: p. 76). In addition to creating formidable roadblocks to career advancement, dominant stereotypes of Black women continue to remind Black women that they do not fit within the mainstream culture.

Stereotype threat is the belief that anything we do that fits the stereotype of

one of our identities could be taken as confirming it (Steele, 2010). Steele et al. (2002) noted how the effects of stereotype threat are felt by individuals who belong to groups that are stigmatized and oppressed based on their social identities. Research shows that when people are reminded of the ways in which they might be negatively stereotyped, it results in anxiety, self-consciousness, reduced confidence, increased self-criticism, and impaired performance (Steele et al., 2002), all of which may make it difficult for Black women to ascend to leadership positions in their workplaces.

To deflect the threat of potentially being reduced to racial, gendered stereotypes, Black women may code-switch at work. Though it is emotionally taxing, code-switching—changing one's behavior, speech, or appearance to enhance others' comfort in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities—has long been a strategy for Black people's survival (McCluney et al., 2019).

Women of color in the workplace are commonly at the receiving end of microaggressions, the daily slights, snubs, or insults, which communicate combative, belittling, or negative messages aimed at people who belong to oppressed groups (Sue et al., 2009). Lee (2020) asserted, "Make no mistake, if you are ignoring the leadership of Black women in the nonprofit sector, or actively working to undermine that leadership, you are causing personal, psychological, economic, and social harm to Black women" (p. 2).

Whether intentional or unintentional, because Black women are doubly oppressed by their race and gender, they typically experience more microaggressions than non-Black women (McKinsey & Company, 2020). For example, Black women leaders are more likely to have their judgment questioned and to be asked to prove that they are experts in their domain. Forty percent of Black women surveyed reported having their competence questioned compared to 30% of Asian women, 28% of White women, 28% of Latinas, and 14% of men (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Experiencing microaggressions on a regular basis can lead to burnout and apathy toward one's job (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

In describing the invisibility of housework, Ehrenreich and English (1975) explained, "No one notices it until it isn't done—we notice the unmade bed, not the scrubbed and polished floor" (as cited in Davis, 1981: p. 128). This invisibility could easily describe the predicament of Black women, especially those among the first, the few, or the "Onlys" (Purushothaman, 2021) at work—being the sole Black person or one of a few Black people. Fifty-four percent of Black women say they are often Onlys in rooms at work (McKinsey & Company, 2020). According to McKinsey and Company's (2020) research, women who are Onlys are more likely to experience microaggressions.

"Double Onlys" is a more accurate and fitting term for Black women, because they may be the only Black person and the only woman in a room (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Black women Double Onlys may also feel hyper-visible and are often exhausted from the weight of being considered both a representative of

their race and their gender and the knowledge that their successes or failures will reflect on their entire racial, gendered group (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Black women Double Onlys reported being always on guard because they feel closely scrutinized and under increased pressure to perform (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

The United States is the only developed nation without a formalized policy that guarantees workers paid time off when they become new parents (Burtle & Bezruchka, 2016). Beyond the lack of large-scale parental leave policies for working parents in the United States, many workplaces, including for- and non-profit organizations, have anti-mother policies or practices. For example, they lack adequate stress-reducing supports, such as flexible work–life policies (e.g., the ability to work remotely) and subsidized childcare (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Moreover, mothers of young children have a more difficult experience when they are the Onlys or Double Onlys since they do not have the support of co-workers who would understand and possibly could help them when they struggle to balance working and parenting (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Thus, being an Only or Double Only working mother often results in significantly more burnout than childless women. Furthermore, these women may experience increased fears of being judged negatively (e.g., viewed as not being ready for leadership) if they were to ask for more flexibility (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Negotiating Identity

Working mothers often have to negotiate their identity as workers with their identity as mothers. The former is quite simplistic, whereas the latter is much more complex. Being a mother cannot be simplified to the act of giving birth, nor is there a requirement that one give birth to be a mother (Laney et al., 2013). Instead, being a mother means both identifying with the status of being a mother in conjunction with engaging in the practice of mothering (Laney et al., 2013). Motherhood—the state in which a woman performs parental duties to children who may or may not be her biological offspring (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)—is an identity, an experience, and an institution (McMahon, 1995).

As an identity, motherhood is a salient gendered role in which women evaluate the extent to which their agency, physical appearance, and relationships have changed since becoming a mother and, as a result, modify how they see themselves (Nicolson, 1999; Steinberg, 2005). Furthermore, the development of a motherhood identity requires that women internalize ideals about how they believe they ought to mother and reconcile those with their reality of motherhood (Choi et al., 2005; Shelton & Johnson, 2006).

Motherhood is a subjective experience. In other words, no two women experience motherhood precisely the same. Fongang (2015) noted, "Motherhood as an experience (mothering) is a position of power and agency for most [Black] mothers, whereas motherhood as an institution under patriarchy oppresses women" (p. 88). Copeland (1992) asserted, "Motherhood in any patriarchal society…

is an institution in which women are defined and given value" (p. 101). Within the institution of motherhood, there are racial and social hierarchies. For example, the archetypal "good" mother is a White, middle-class woman who is self-sacrificial and overly endowed with unconditional love (Collins, 2009).

Black Mother Stereotypes and Expectations

In a society that routinely depicts Black women as stereotypical "good" mothers (e.g., the faithful, obedient domestic servant aka "mammy") on one end of the mothering spectrum, and "bad" mothers (e.g., welfare queen or matriarch) on the other end, Black women must self-define and continuously negotiate what it means to be a Black mother (Collins, 2009: p. 80). Collins (2009) explained, "Just as the mammy represents the 'good' Black mother, the matriarch symbolizes the 'bad' Black mother," as the latter was accused of failing her children by spending too much time working outside of the home (p. 83).

According to Collins (2009), "The controlling images of the mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother and the practices they justify are designed to oppress" (p. 191). At times, due to cultural expectations of what it means to be a good mother, the motherhood institution can feel oppressive. Collins (2009) stated the following:

> Some women view motherhood as a truly burdensome condition that stifles their creativity, exploits their labor, and makes them partners in their own oppression. Others see motherhood as providing a base for self-actualization, status in the Black community, and a catalyst for social activism. These alleged contradictions can exist side by side in African-American communities and families and even within individual women. (p. 191)

This is further complicated because to be the ideal mother that is often portrayed by society, there is an expectation that women only have positive feelings about motherhood (Hare-Mustin & Broderick, 1979; Marshall, 1991). Moreover, Crump (2015) asserted that many women resist the heteronormative gender expectation that motherhood is a natural and desirable status.

Mothering While Black

Although Black mothers are not a monolith, mothering while Black often means embodying the tensions between joy and sorrow, freedom and oppression, triumph and trauma, and resilience and vulnerability. "Raising children is a joyous, painful, fulfilling, and often nebulous undertaking. However, mothering while under the oppressive double layers of race and gender is another task in itself," stated Doaks (2015: p. 121). Black mothers teach their children survival skills by providing critical tools to navigate societal barriers (i.e., critical race parenting).

DePouw and Matias (2016) noted how communities of color have long recognized the need to instill in their children a critical understanding of institutional racism and the strategies and identities essential to well-being, security, and resilience. According to Fongang (2015), "The collective plight of both mother and

children define and shape the fight for agency in a system that oppresses them" (p. 92).

Black Motherhood Identity

Black motherhood identity is the affirmation that a Black woman's worth is not defined by the negative attributes often associated with the coalescing of race, gender, class, and motherhood status. To the contrary, the aforementioned typically oppressive markers of identity can be positive attributes, sources of joy, and shapers of effective leadership. Black working women are leaders, not despite being mothers, but because they are Black mothers. That is, the Black motherhood identity is leadership personified.

Black mothers lead efforts to empower their families. This strategic leadership is part and parcel of what it means to be a Black motherleader. McClain (2019) noted, "Black mothers have centuries of experience trying to build and support family and support our children in a place that's often inhospitable" (p. 3). Scott (1985) asserted that mothers could either foster their children's oppression by teaching them to believe they are inferior or they can instill in them tools for resisting oppression (as cited in Collins, 2009: p. 57).

Black Working Mothers

Black mothers have the highest labor force participation rates of all other mothers (Roux, 2021). In 2020, 76% of Black mothers were in the labor force, compared with 71.3% of White mothers, 62.8% of Hispanic mothers, and 64.3% of Asian mothers (Roux, 2021). Black mothers often do not have paid caregiver or housekeeping help, making it easier for some mothers to work outside their homes. In fact, this lack of support in balancing mothering and working is also a legacy of American slavery. Black enslaved women were forced to labor on the slave plantations and either mother simultaneously (e.g., wrap their babies on their backs and lay their toddlers in the fields) or forgo mothering altogether (Branch, 2011; Roos, 2010).

Due to the exploitation of their ancestors' labor, Black mothers typically do not have generational wealth or other forms of safety nets that would enable them to support their families without working. In other words, being a stay-at-home mom often is out of reach for Black mothers. Collins (2009) posited, "By denying enslaved African women marriage, citizenship, and even humanity, slavery provided no social context for issues of privatized motherhood as a stay-at-home occupation" (p. 56). That is, Black mothers must work. Davis (1981) noted, "Like their White working-class sisters, who also carry the double burden of working for a living and servicing husbands and children, Black women have needed relief from this oppressive predicament for a long, long time" (p. 133).

It is important to note that many Black mothers want to work beyond necessity. Collins (2009) claimed that Black women reject the dominant narrative that working outside of the home is "in opposition to and incompatible with motherhood" (p. 199). In 2019, 65.9% of Black mothers with children under the age

of 18 were the sole, equal, or primary earners in their households compared to 39.3% of Hispanic mothers, 36.4% of White, non-Hispanic mothers, and 31.2% of Asian mothers (U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 2020).

Redefining Motherhood

There is a desire for Black women to define motherhood in a way that makes sense for Black mothers, focusing the discussion on Black women's production of knowledge (Simmons, 2021). Furthermore, in defiance of the historical devaluation of Black women as mothers to their own children, Black women seek to undo the harm perpetuated by the demonization of Black motherhood and redefine what it means to be a Black mother. As previously stated, within the Black community, there is a more expansive definition of motherhood. It is not uncommon for othermothers—sisters, cousins, aunts, or grandmothers—to care for one another's children. However, these "women-centered networks of community-based care" are not indicative of Black fathers' powerlessness but rather the centrality of Black mothers (Collins, 2009: p. 193).

The reliance on extended networks to support childcare duties is another contemporary mothering practice whose origins precede and include the institution of American slavery. While toiling on the cotton and tobacco fields or in the homes of the slaveholders, if they did not have their children with them, Black women left their children in the care of elderly enslaved women (Schwartz, 2010). According to Hooks (1984), community-based childcare "is revolutionary in this society because it takes place in opposition to the idea that parents, especially mothers, should be the only child rearers" (p. 144).

Asserting Inherent Value

While the dominant narrative is that Blackness is a racialized social caste in which people with the most melanin in their skin are deemed the least worthy, and womanhood is a hierarchical gendered identity with Black women at the bottom (Welang, 2018), Black mothers push back against these narratives by asserting that their race, gender, class, and motherhood status are valuable assets that positively inform how they live and lead (Yosso, 2005). In other words, Black mothers recognize that they are wealthy due to belonging to communities that are "valuable sources of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts" (Yosso, 2005: p. 69). Furthermore, Collins (1986) asserted that Black women's self-definition and self-valuation, ability to navigate the interlocking nature of oppression, and understanding of Black culture have enabled them to make "creative use of their marginality" (p. S14).

Cultural Wealth

The cultural wealth framework acknowledges the assets that are in socially oppressed groups, particularly those within communities of color. A subset of critical race theory, a theoretical framework used to examine how race as a social construct impacts structures, practices, and discourses, cultural wealth is counter to the deficit-based lens that is typically applied to communities of color (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) noted that "various forms of capital

nurtured through cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital" (p. 69). Black motherleaders' cultural knowledge was passed down from their foremothers, who taught them how to negotiate the meanings of motherhood and leadership.

4) Leading from the Margins

Black working women are both marginalized in feminist theory, which centers on White women and in antiracist politics, which focuses on Black men (Crenshaw, 1989). In discussing the power of marginality, Hooks (1990) said that "it nourishes one's capacity to resist… and offers to one the possibility… to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (pp. 149-150). Black motherleaders are deft at leading from the margins by leveraging their race, gender, class, and maternal identities to bring about transformative change in anti-Black, anti-woman, and anti-mother institutions. In the workplace, Black women have utilized "both an oppositional stance to resist marginalization and brave spaces to ensure professional and personal success" (Mullings et al., 2020: p. 92).

With centuries of intergenerational resilience modeled by their ancestors, Black motherleaders learned how to stay grounded through the chaos and thrive in oppressive environments. By asserting the value of their lived experiences, Black mothers lead, organize, and advocate for inclusive policies and practices in their communities and workplaces. Black mothers' resilient leadership, which is characterized by the ability to transcend and persevere despite adversity (Christman & McClellan, 2012), was honed because Black mothers have had to lead through crises and within anti-Black, anti-woman, and anti-mother institutions. As a result of the self-awareness that comes from recovering from setbacks and trauma, Black mothers reimagine leadership in their own images.

Black Feminist Leadership

Having long been included in the organizational structures of Black civil society, Black feminist leaders courageously and unapologetically pushed back against the male-dominated ethos that permeated most of these institutions (Collins, 2009). "It is in these forums that Black women are able to exercise influence and power in their lives, whereas they often face inaccessibility to mainstream institutions of power," noted Craddock (2015: p. 39). Likewise, Rosser-Mims (2010) asserted that compared to their male counterparts, historically, Black women have had to acquire power and leadership in nontraditional ways.

Thus, the advent of Black feminist leadership in the United States represents a history of Black women's struggle to be liberated from oppression while simultaneously working to lift the Black community out of racial, economic, and educational subjugation (Hanson, 2003; Rogers, 2005; Rosser-Mims, 2010). This motherwork is central to Black women's involvement in community activism and social justice movements and accounts for why Black mothers are often referred to as motherleaders (Collins, 1991). Smith Spears (2015) noted how Black women strive to "balance the demands of one identity that calls for an allegiance

to community and heritage with the demands of the other which advocates for one's individuality" (p. 110).

Black feminist leadership is inclusive, collective, transformative, situational, and contextual (McLane-Davidson, 2016). Collins (2009) claimed that as activists, Black women's style of leadership "reflects a belief that teaching people how to be self-reliant fosters more empowerment than teaching them how to follow" (p. 235). According to Collins (2009), as leaders, Black women focus on "how power can be structured and shaped in organizational settings, and how organizations would look if people were to be fully empowered within them" and, therefore, "reject models of authority based on unjust hierarchies" (p. 234). Black feminist leadership centers on Black women's resistance to subjugation.

Activist Mothering

If workplace duties are the first shift for all workers, and caregiving and household duties are the second shift for working mothers (Hochschild, 2012), then community organizing is a third shift for Black working mothers (Banks, 2020). Despite facing multiple forms of oppression, Black women became community activists. Mullings et al. (2020) noted that "Black women strive to cultivate safer communities under subjugating contexts, work to promote empowerment among Black women and attempt to improve social conditions for all" (p. 93). Black women's community work, which included the creation of cooperatives and other organizations to provide for the community, what the government did not, was labor, albeit unpaid (Banks, 2020).

Economist Dr. Nina Banks (2020) argued that "the community is an important site where racialized women perform unpaid, nonmarket collective work to improve the welfare of community members and address community needs not met by the public and private sectors" (p. 343). According to Banks (2020), Black women have historically engaged in grassroots community organizing, championing equality in all aspects of American life, including access to affordable housing, nutritious foods, and healthy environments.

Collins (2009) noted, "While efforts on behalf of Black children often may catalyze their actions, working on behalf of the community means addressing the multifaceted issues within it" (p. 208). McDonald (1997) asserted that Black motherleaders' activism in their communities is "born from a conscious, collective need to resist racist and sexist oppression, [and] is one passed down for many generations by their Black activist foremothers" (p. 774).

Community Othermothering

Black women's leadership style reflects how they mother—purposefully and protectively. For many Black women, being a good mother means engaging in social activism as community othermothers (Collins, 2009). In other words, in addition to addressing the needs of their children, a good mother is a woman who is active in her community. Collins (2009) contended that "Community othermothers model a very different value system, one whereby ethics of caring and personal accountability move communities forward" (p. 207). Collins (2009) explained, "Historically, this notion of Black women as community othermoth-

ers for all Black children often allowed African-American women to treat biologically unrelated children as if they were members of their own families" (p. 205). Some notable community othermothers are Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Mamie Till.

In 1826, with her infant daughter in tow, Isabella Baumfree escaped to freedom. Two years later, she went to court to recover her son, becoming the first Black woman to win such a case against a White man (Truth, 1850). Isabella became an outspoken advocate for abolition and women's rights and changed her name to Sojourner Truth, one of her first acts of self-definition and (re)negotiation of identity. Sojourner, an early proponent of an intersectional analysis of womanhood (Gines, 2011), proclaimed in her infamous "Ain't I A Woman" speech (Minister, 2012) that, unlike White women, Black women cannot separate their race from their gender. In doing so, she became among the first Black feminists to counter the dialectical agendas of Black male abolitionists and White middle-class women feminists. Collins (1998) stated, "Her actions demonstrate the power of deconstruction—namely, exposing a concept as ideological or culturally constructed rather than as natural or a simple reflection of reality" (as cited in Collins, 2009: p. 18).

Educator, investigative journalist, anti-lynching crusader, and Black feminist Ida B. Wells was an early leader in the Civil Rights movement. In 1909, Ida co-founded the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP; Wells, 1970/2020). She dedicated her life to fighting for freedom and equality, especially for Black women, and unapologetically called out White women for ignoring racism in the feminist movement (Brown, 2020). This led to her being ostracized by White suffragists; however, undeterred, Ida founded what may have been the first Black women's suffrage group, Chicago's Alpha Suffrage Club (Brown, 2020). Ida's challenge to White feminism's lack of an intersectional framework embodies Black feminist thought (Collins, 2009; Gines, 2011). Her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*, was published posthumously in 1970, and Ida was also posthumously awarded a Pulitzer for her anti-lynching reporting (Silkey, 2020).

Mamie Till was the mother of Emmett Till, who was kidnapped and lynched while visiting family in Mississippi on August 28, 1955 (Anderson, 2015). She bravely insisted that there be an open casket viewing of her 14-year-old son's bruised, battered, and tortured body. Determined to keep her son's memory at the forefront of America's conscience, she went on a speaking tour with the NAACP and galvanized the nation to reckon with racial terror. Her activism, which arguably started the Civil Rights Movement, indicates motherhood's power (Anderson, 2015). Collins (2009) asserted that motherhood "can catalyze Black women to take actions that they otherwise might not have considered" (p. 210). Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Mamie Till are not exceptional Black women as much as they are epitomes of Black womanhood (Davis, 1981).

Methodology

Narrative inquiry, which utilizes collecting data directly from research participants, was most appropriate for the study; therefore, narrative inquiry, a form of exploration in which the researcher requests that the participants share stories (i.e., narratives) about their lives, as the primary form of data collection, was used (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022; Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) noted that in studying the lives of individuals, the researcher might collect stories about the participants, and, in turn, the researcher forms a collaborative narrative by chronologically retelling the story, combining views from the individual's life with those of the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

"People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience," noted Connelly and Clandinin (1990: p. 2). Clandinin (2006) asserted that when researchers begin narrative inquiry relationships, they start having ongoing negotiations, including negotiating relationships, research purposes, and transitions. Therefore, whenever salient parts of Black women's intersecting identities are the focus of analysis, they should be able to weigh in and feel seen, validated, and affirmed. Recognizing that Black women are the authors of their stories, the researchers centered them in the storytelling.

The power and privilege to hear and retell a person's story and the importance of negotiating entry and exit from their lives was not taken lightly by the researchers. This is especially true for the study in that the research participants were Black women who historically have had unflattering (i.e., stereotypical) stories made up about them. Hooks (1989) declared, "Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story" (p. 43). Telling stories or narratives is a central part of the oral tradition that is endemic to Black culture, especially since Black people were prohibited from reading and writing for a long time. In asserting the importance of the narrative, Amoah (1997) stated the following:

> Narrative inquiries allow traditionally marginalized and disempowered groups like women and people of color to reclaim their voices. In addition, by laying claim to personal Narrative (i.e., telling one's own story), oppressed people can create their own sphere of theorized existence and thus remove themselves from the marginalized position to which the dominant society has relegated them. (p. 85)

The for- and non-profit sectors are experiencing a racial, gendered leadership gap. Black women are sorely underrepresented in leadership roles in both industries (Adetimirin, 2008; Smith et al., 2018). In 2018, Black women constituted 12.7% of the U.S. population, representing only 2.2% of the Fortune 500 board of directors and 1.3% of senior management and executive roles of S&P

500 firms (Smith et al., 2018). In addition, only four Black women have been chief executive officers (CEO) in the Fortune 500's 76-year history (Hinchliffe, 2021).

The nonprofit sector consists of organizations devoted to serving communities, primarily people of color, in need of resources and support, yet most of these organizations are also led by White individuals (Adetimirin, 2008; De Vita et al., 2009; Ostrower, 2007). According to Thomas-Breitfeld and Kunreuther (2017), for the last 15 years, the percentage of people of color in top executive roles (e.g., executive director or CEO) at nonprofit organizations has remained under 20%. This is despite the United States' population becoming more diverse.

In noting the need for the nonprofit sector to value the leadership acumen of Black women, Branche and Ford (2022) stated, "With the retirement of baby boomers, the nonprofit sector will lose 75% of its leaders soon, and nonprofits must consider the next chapter in leadership" (p. 69). Because both sectors lack racial-gendered diversity in leadership roles, Black women who have advanced in their careers in for- and non-profit organizations can provide rich information regarding how they were able to do so. For these reasons, the for- and non-profit sectors were selected as the research setting. The research participants were Black women who are leaders in their households (i.e., in their roles as mothers) and in their roles as for- and non-profit organizational leaders. Their roles as mothers, workers, and leaders made them best suited to provide answers to the research questions.

The fundamental delimitation for both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group interview was the purposeful small sample size—12 participants who self-identified as a Black person, as a woman, as a mother, and as a leader. That is, by design, the scope for qualitative studies is narrow, and because a theoretical construct that centers on Black women—Black feminist theory—framed the study, the target population was intentionally limited to Black motherleaders. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the researchers did not attempt to make generalizations about the lived experiences of the study participants. In other words, Black motherleaders are not a monolith—each story told was that individual participant's truth.

As discussed, the data sources (Table 1) were information gleaned from one-on-one interviews and a focus group. In soliciting volunteers to participate in the study, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, what would be done with the data (e.g., USC requires that researchers store data collected for at least three years), how their information would be protected; and the positionality of the researcher, including the inherent power dynamics between researcher and participant. Pseudonyms are used in place of real names to keep participants' information confidential.

As previously noted, since purposeful sampling is a key criterion in qualitative analysis, the participants in the focus group were all Black motherleaders. The

Table 1. Data sources.

Research questions	Focus group	Interviews
How do Black motherleaders perceive the influence of their intersectional identities on their careers and leadership experiences?	X	X
How do systems oppress Black motherleaders?	X	X
What practices do Black motherleaders employ to navigate oppressive systems?	X	X

Source: Dr. Adiyah Aisha Ali, University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education, May 2023.

study participants self-identified as Black persons, women, mothers, and leaders (i.e., overseeing people, projects, or a budget) in the for- or non-profit sector. The researchers convened a focus group of three Black motherleaders who were recruited from LinkedIn, Facebook, and a non-profit community development organization. The women were diverse regarding their number of children, whether or not they were living with a partner, job sector, and role.

The focus group convening took place via Zoom. The discussion was recorded and transcribed, and hand-written notes were made as well. In the email containing the link to the Zoom meeting, participants received the Information Sheet, which explained the purpose of the study, what would be done with the data collected, and how participants' information would be used and protected. Sixty minutes for the focus group discussion was allotted.

Maxwell (2013) asserted, "Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people to gain that understanding" (p. 101). As such, to understand how Black motherleaders perceive their career and leadership experiences, the focus group protocol consisted of five peer-reviewed questions about the complexity of Black motherhood identity. During the focus group discussion, the pursuit of other topics of interest naturally arose during the conversation, so long as they were relevant to the study.

Research interviews are descriptive and non-judgmental opportunities to identify systematic patterns. Open-ended interviewing enabled participants to share and explain how they have experienced oppression and allowed the researchers to collect these individual stories and examine them as a collective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researchers conducted one-on-one interviews with nine Black motherleaders. Like the focus group participants, the interviewees self-identified as Black people, women, mothers, and leaders (i.e., overseeing people, projects, or a budget) in their for- or non-profit organization. These women were also recruited from LinkedIn, Facebook, and the same non-profit community development organization from which the researchers recruited the focus group participants (Table 2). Because all of the interviews took place online, participation was not limited by one's geographical location.

Table 2. Participant overview.

Participant pseudonym	Job sector	Job title	Living with partner	Number of children
Leah	Non-profit	Professor	Yes	4
Janae	Nonprofit	Deputy secretary	Yes	1
Bianca	Non-profit	Founder/CEO	Yes	5
Mae	Non-profit	Senior director	No	2
Halle	Non-profit	Chief operating officer	No	1
Laila	Non-profit	Director of development	Yes	3
Wanda	Non-profit	Senior development officer	Yes	2
Wilma	For-profit	Founder/CEO	No	1
Unique	For-profit	Chief executive officer	Yes	3
Caroline	For-profit	Founder/CEO	No	1
Tracy	For-profit	Founder/principal consultant	Yes	2
Gina	For-profit	Outpatient clinician	Yes	3

Source: Dr. Adiyah Aisha Ali, University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education, May 2023.

To mitigate ethical concerns (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 1990), convenience sampling was not relied on, for it is not very credible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After downloading the transcript of the recorded focus group discussion, data cleansing occurred, entailing fixing typos and punctuation, swiping out study participants' names for pseudonyms, and anonymizing other identifying information. Next, the engagement of line-by-line open coding of the transcripts occurred, and a comparison of the emergent themes to those elicited from the transcripts of the one-on-one interviews was conducted.

There are several techniques that the researchers could have used to enhance the likelihood that the data and findings are plausible, believable, and accurate (i.e., credibility), and they apply to other situations (i.e., trustworthiness; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Three strategies for the study were employed: triangulation, collecting verbatim data, and member-checking responses.

Triangulation refers to using multiple data-collection methodologies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Verbal data was obtained by recording and transcribing the Zoom interviews and taking notes by hand. Member checking entailed verifying with the interviewees that the content of the data was accurate and was conducted during the discussions by saying things like, "What I think I heard you say… is related to your motherhood status".

Also considered, but not ultimately pursued, was collecting observational data by participating in a social organization for Black mothers and a membership

group for women of color leaders. As Patton (2015) noted, "Experiencing the program as an insider accentuates the participant part of participant observation. At the same time, the inquirer remains aware of being an outsider" (p. 338).

4. Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1: Fear-Based Mothering Influences Black Mothers' Leadership Practices

One of the "residual impacts of generations of slavery" (DeGruy, 2018) is fear-based mothering, a standard feature of the Black motherhood identity. Because enslaved Black mothers were unable to exert control over the lives of their own children, generations of Black mothers post-emancipation continue to grapple with how to parent Black children in a world that is at best unloving and at worst violent towards Black people. Since anti-Blackness does not discriminate based on age, Black mothers worry about both the psychological well-being and the physical safety of their Black children.

Black children are more likely to be perceived as "less innocent" (Morris, 2016) and, therefore, more culpable for their behaviors than their non-Black peers. This "adultification" of Black children (Morris, 2016) has led to Black children being at risk of harm or death when doing mundane things like playing with a toy or even simply going to the store to buy candy. Thus, to stave off a potentially horrid future that may be harmful to their children, many Black mothers parent from a position of fear.

Unique, a mother of three, described fear-based mothering as "constantly trying to reinforce survival skills", and Leah, a mother of four, noted that given today's racial climate, she feels "a little bit more pressure" to make sure she gets it right, believing that her children's lives are dependent upon her tenacity. The "it" that Leah is trying to get right is the reinforcement of survival skills that Unique mentioned.

Sometimes this reinforcement manifests as "the talk" that Black parents have with their children, particularly boys, about the ways they should and should not interact with law enforcement and other people of authority. Other times it looks like advising their children on how to speak, dress, and behave when in predominantly White spaces. For example, common instructions include the following: Do not use African American Vernacular English; do not wear ball caps or hoodies; and, as Janae noted, "Do not embarrass me in front of these [White] people." At all times, this reinforcement is very strategic and an example of the motherwork that Black mothers do for the sake of their children's safety.

Despite all of her efforts, Leah knows that she has to eventually let go of the idea that she is in control and instead let God bring her peace. Thus, when she feels overwhelmed by the reality of not truly having control over her children's safety, she leans on her faith. Leah shared the following:

I think prayer and talking to God has helped because I don't have the future in my hands. I can't be with my kids 24/7. So, I do pray a lot and rely on my spiritual beliefs to help me have a little bit of peace and calm in knowing that they are being watched over.

Regardless of one's religion, for Black mothers, relying on one's faith or "spiritual beliefs" meant resigning to the fact that they do not believe that they have control. This deeply rooted sense of wanting to have control is a direct reaction to anti-Blackness. And, while having faith is not a salve, it did bring many Black mothers like Leah "a little bit of peace and calm" because faith allowed them to believe that an external force had control.

When Black mothers lean into their faith, they have come to terms with the limitations of their mother role. That is, they cannot watch over their children at all times, as Leah noted. So, when their children are in their company, they remind them of their greatness, inundate them with love, and try to prepare them for a world that may be less kind to them. When their children are out of sight, Black mothers worry and pray and focus on what is in their control—their roles as leaders. The Black motherleaders in the study were well aware of their ability to have some control over how their colleagues—particularly those with oppressed identities—experience the workplace. They described being cognizantly aware of the responsibility that comes with their leadership role, intentionally making themselves accessible to colleagues, and coaching, supporting, and advocating for marginalized staff. That is, the lack of control in one domain (i.e., safety of their children) led to them exerting more control in another domain (i.e., wellbeing of their colleagues).

To be clear, fear-based mothering does not mean that the mother-child relationship is devoid of love. On the contrary, because Black mothers are fearful that anti-Black violence may befall their children, they engage in motherwork, as described by Collins (1991, 2009), and make a lot of decisions—out of love—to protect their children. Examples of these major decisions include what careers to pursue, where to raise their children, and how to parent their children.

Black mothers are fearful that their daughters will be assaulted and battered like Dajerria Becton, a young Black girl who was slammed to the ground by a Texas police officer at a pool party (Phillips, 2017). Black mothers are afraid that their sons will be murdered, like Jordan Davis, a young Black boy whose only "offense" was playing his music at a volume that was displeasing to a White man (Walsh, 2014). Yet, Black mothers do not have the privilege of simply worrying. They also must take action.

Laila, a mother of three, described being a Black mother as "trying to nurture and do typical mom stuff alongside the background of systemic racism and misogyny—misogynoir". What Laila was articulating is critical race parenting, described by DePouw and Matias (2016) as the work done by parents of color to foster pride regarding their race and culture in their children while simultaneously teaching them the tenets of racism and strategies of resistance. One ex-

ample of Laila's motherwork to her girls was helping them unlearn, in an age-appropriate way, the whitewashed version of one of America's "founding fathers". Laila described this incident as follows:

> George Washington was being painted as a great national hero. They were told that he was kind to his slaves. When they came home, I had to help them unlearn that. We did our own research, put together some bullet points, and made a video. We presented this to their teacher.

In essence, Laila's girls were receiving two educations, one from school and the other from their mother. To be a Black mother requires engaging in additional work because helping their children unlearn information that is not only incorrect but also harmful requires a lot of love, patience, and labor. Seven of the study participants expressed the additional labor they are required to do as they navigated the challenges of parenting children in a racist society.

Finding 2: Black Motherleaders Constantly Have to Prove Themselves

Though not unanimously expressed, another theme amongst many of the study participants was constantly having to prove themselves at work, as McKinsey and Company (2020) described, because assumptions rooted in anti-Blackness are made about their skills and abilities despite their expertise and credentials. For example, Caroline, CEO of a mental health company, was aware that she must navigate intersectional oppressions due to her racial identity. Caroline stated, "People believe that you should not [lead] them, and you don't know what you know because you're Black."

If people believe that Black people "should not [lead] them", their racism shows. If people believe that because someone is Black, they "don't know what [they] know", their racism is on full display. Anti-Black racism is causing Black women to have both the legitimacy of their leadership and the validity of their expertise called into question over and over again. Because Black motherleaders embody a trifecta of oppressive identities—being Black, being a woman, and being a mother—they constantly have to prove themselves.

Halle agreed that she also is often asked to prove herself. She stated, "Every day. All day. Somebody questions a call I make." As COO of a nonprofit, Halle is required to make a lot of calls, so to constantly have them questioned is not only exhausting but also very frustrating. Halle told her colleagues that when she makes a decision and they question it or feel the need to verify it with a White colleague, then what they are doing is considered a microaggression.

It is not surprising that microaggressions, described by Sue et al. (2009) as the slights, snubs, or insults that communicate combative, belittling, or negative messages, were the means by which Halle was asked to prove herself since Black women tend to experience more microaggressions than other women on account of the double oppressions associated with their racial and gender identities (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Halle recalled the following conversation that she had with one colleague:

I would like for you to examine why you feel like you need to go around me because you don't feel like you need to go around the other leadership in this organization. …The only difference that I can see, it's because I'm Black.

Halle's bravery in calling out her colleague for his insistence on "go[ing] around" her, a passive-aggressive way of questioning the legitimacy of her leadership, cannot be understated. Directly naming the behavior that was causing her discomfort took the onus of having to once again prove herself off of Halle and placed it at the feet of her colleague to contend with. In essence, Halle's naming of her truth in a direct way was an example of her resistance.

Janae, deputy secretary at a state agency, is well aware of when certain situations require that she code-switch, as it is a way of proving to others that she has what it takes to get the job done. "I usually will do my work speech: 'At the close of quarter three, we have to make sure we have these deliverables.' And then I will say it in plain language," Janae stated. Code-switching enables Janae to get the outcome that she wants, but it comes at a cost—Janae's authenticity. While code-switching may be something that one can turn on and off, Black mother-leaders do not feel like they have a choice. To be viewed as a leader, Black women must show up in a particular way. Constantly proving themselves, switching codes, and combatting dominant stereotypes is exhausting.

Parker and Ogilvie (1996) contend that "it is because of their ability to code switch and successfully navigate between corporate and diverse cultures" that Black women are innovative, creative, and have sophisticated adaptive skills, which benefits all organizations (as cited in Sims & Carter, 2019: p. 100). Black women's bi-culturalism is an asset, making Black motherleaders highly adaptable and resilient leaders. Bi-cultural describes people who traverse two cultures—the dominant White culture and their historical cultural or racially minoritized identity (Sims & Carter, 2019). Martinez and Welton (2015) asserted that "biculturalism has its roots in Black American sociologist and civil rights activist, W.E.B. Du Bois' term 'double consciousness' that was used to describe the 'two-ness' African Americans in the 19th century felt in being both American and African American" (p. 126).

Finding 3: Being a Mother Shapes Black Women's Leadership Styles

Since being brought to what would become the United States in the early 17th century, Black mothers have navigated the "two-ness" that Du Bois (1968) spoke of and mastered survival. With very few resources, Black mothers orchestrated rebellions, birthed children, and supported their families. This history of adapting to their given circumstances and leading out of necessity—and with a scarcity of resources—explains Black mothers' knack for leadership. Furthermore, what makes Black mothers effective leaders is that they are empathetic (Blumenfeld, 2020); they see greatness in others; they leverage their cultural wealth while also considering various perspectives (Yosso, 2005); and they center diversity,

equity, and inclusion in their leadership practices (Dowell & Jackson, 2020). Black women's leadership style mirrors their mothering style, making them assets to their organizations.

Empathy Is a Superpower

Black motherleaders' ability to empathize—understand the experiences, emotions, and motivations of others to meet their needs and preferences (Anaissie et al., 2020)—is an under-appreciated yet exceedingly powerful attribute and skill. Wanda, a senior development officer, recognized the power of being empathetic. Wanda stated, "I feel like there's so much that we can see and feel and observe that is just missed. And, I think that makes us great bosses, teammates, and leaders."

Wanda acknowledged that as a Black mother, she has an inherent gift that enables her to "see and feel and observe", which benefits those she works with. To feel seen is a prerequisite for feeling included, which is another reason that Black motherleaders are great at leading DEI initiatives. As empaths, Black mothers feel when something is amiss and are adamant about taking the correct action. As leaders, Black mothers observe their colleagues, enabling them to understand their strengths and individual needs, and then provide support to help them succeed at their jobs.

In describing the similarities between her mothering style and leadership style, Bianca, founder and CEO of a nonprofit and mother of five, named empathy as one of her attributes. She stated the following:

> I learned how to lead in the school system, which is already set up in a mothering-like framework. …There's a lot of care. There's a lot of patience. …It informs my parenting. The empathy, the listening, and the patience. That is all the same.

As Bianca noted, "the empathy, the listening, and the patience" that was present at work, in her role as an educator, was also present in her home life and as a mother. Empathy is a superpower for Black motherleaders, and they leverage it effectively.

Leveraging What They Know While Considering What Others Know

Acquiring information about how the world works via direct, first-hand experience and engaging in perspective-taking—seeing situations from alternative points of view—helps people expand their moral compass, make inclusive decisions, and lead more effectively. Black motherleaders do both, leveraging their cultural knowledge and leaning into their lived experience while simultaneously seeking out the knowledge and perspectives of others.

Black motherleaders' knowledge of their familial connection to ancestors that resisted oppression and exhibited resilience when faced with adversity—Christman and McClellan (2012) refer to this as "resilient leadership"—strengthens their resolve when challenged in their personal and professional lives. Unique, a mother of three, asserted that before becoming mothers themselves, Black women

can be certain that they are leadership material because they have gained knowledge from watching, listening to, and studying their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. As Yosso (2005) noted, the worthiness of people of color is not tied to economic wealth or the lack thereof but rather to cultural knowledge and connections.

Halle, a mother of a toddler, believes that being a Black mother makes her an effective leader because it gives her a new and useful perspective that benefits the people with whom she works. Halle stated, "It gives me depth. So, I understand now when somebody says they can't come to work because their child is sick. …Before I accepted it. But now I understand it." Halle's mention of previously accepting that an employee had to take time off to care for a sick child versus now having a greater understanding of what that means speaks to a perspective shift.

Most employers must offer their employees sick leave to care for themselves or a loved one, but this does not mean that employees are comfortable with taking it. This could be due to taking time off being culturally frowned upon. Now, beyond simply accepting it, Halle is supportive of her employees taking time off to care for their loved ones. This, in turn, is likely to help boost employees' morale. Halle further explained that being a Black mother has also caused an identity shift, as she now sees that her Black motherhood identity is a core part of how she self-defines and engages in sense-making as she navigates the workplace and the world.

Centering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Leadership Practices

Black motherleaders' intersectional identities account for their being especially attuned to oppression and empathetic towards the oppressed, which are requisites for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. As deputy secretary of DEI at a state agency, Janae's day-to-day professional responsibilities are focused on improving how employees experience the workplace. She described her leadership style as "very intentional, especially in the interpersonal". This means she is purposeful in demonstrating inclusivity in her interactions with colleagues.

Janae explained that in recognizing that institutional racism and oppression, more generally, is a system, she is intentional about trying to find out what employees need so that they do not run up against barriers when navigating these systems. Janae stated the following:

> I've got members of my team who are across the gamut in terms of personality, identity, disability status, and how they process information. I don't need them to all be the same. …It would perpetuate a kind of oppression if I required that of them.

To treat diverse employees like a monolith would "perpetuate a kind of oppression" because it would support the narrative that White, cis, able-bodied, neurotypical men are the norm and people who are different in "personality,

identity, disability status, and how they process information" are deviants. Janae rejected this dominant narrative by centering diversity, equity, and inclusion in her leadership practices.

In describing her efforts to make her workplace more equitable and inclusive, Mae, senior director at a nonprofit organization, shared that she and her colleagues were creating an advisory board for a new community initiative. When speaking to her colleague who was leading this effort, Mae questioned her about the racial composition of the advisory group. For example, Mae asked, "Do we have representation in this group? Is there Black representation? Is there Hispanic representation?"

By asking about whether there was racial diversity, Mae was forcing her colleague to account for why White advisory group members would be the norm. In other words, why wouldn't a diverse group be the norm for any initiative spearheaded by a nonprofit organization, especially one that serves communities of color? Oftentimes, asking pointed questions is the way that Black motherleaders ensure that DEI is a must-have rather than a nice-to-have in their workplaces.

Finding 4: Black Motherleaders Have Little Support

Unsurprisingly, one common theme amongst Black motherleaders is a lack of support. Whether partnered or single, each of the 12 study participants expressed a need for more support in both parenting and leadership. The types of desired support include financial, organizational, and physical. Organizational support refers to employers demonstrating that they value employees' work contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2016). Physical support entails the partners of Black mothers doing more child-rearing, housework, and overall household management to alleviate these responsibilities often bestowed upon mothers.

Why Paying Black Women Their Worth Matters

Black motherleaders need more financial support. Bleiweis et al. (2021) reported that in 2020, Black women earned 64 cents for every $1 earned by White men. Eighty percent of these women are the breadwinners for their families (Glynn, 2019), meaning their families' economic security and well-being depend on them being paid equitably. Mothers must have financial resources to outsource help, whether childcare, house cleaning, cooking, laundry, or other supportive services.

Unique, mother to three adult children, reflected on the fact that her own mother had very little financial resources and had to work several jobs to support her four children. There is no doubt that the racial and gendered division of labor accounted for the low earnings of Unique's mother and other Black mothers. Unique noted that the difference between Black mothers and mothers of other races is that because Black communities are under-resourced—an effect of accumulated discrimination and inequality, as reported by McIntosh et al. (2020)—Black mothers have less support overall.

Single Mothering Is Harder

Caroline, a single mother of one child, stated, "I think that people have an expectation of me to always be strong and figure things out. So, even when I am in need of help, and I ask for help, I think the help is very limited." The expectation "to always be strong" is another example of a dominant stereotype that hurts Black women. If people believe that Black women will "figure things out", they will be less inclined to offer support. Sometimes, Caroline's parents help out with her son, but on a very limited basis. "They're kind of the ones [grandparents] that are like, 'You had your child. You got to raise him.' …So, it's not a lot of support," she explained. Just as some mothers push back on the notion that to be considered a "good" mother, one must be self-sacrificial (Collins, 2009), some grandparents also reject the idea that to be considered a "good" grandparent means that they should happily be on board to babysit their grandchildren frequently.

Wilma, a mother of a young college student, credited her community for providing her the support she needed in raising her two sons as a single mother. "There is definitely a community here where we raise each other's children. So, my choice of where to live has mediated some of the things that I think I would worry more about if I wasn't here," she stated. Having a community of parents who had eyes on her sons when Wilma was unable enabled her to grant her children more autonomy, such as playing outside with other neighborhood children or walking unescorted to the community park. Without that community, as a single mother, Wilma would have had to keep tighter reins on her children.

Being Both Invisible and Hyper-Visible Is Exhausting

Black motherleaders have little organizational support. Leah, a community college professor, expressed the need for organizations to demonstrate that they want Black motherleaders to be successful by investing in ways to support them. She said, "I think as a leader, it can be a lonely place, and that's really unfortunate, especially for women, and probably for Black women, maybe even more so." This accounts for why she believes there is a need for more organizational support "in the way of mentors and people you can confide in without feeling like you can't be totally honest and open and transparent".

Leah's desire to confide in a mentor "without feeling like you can't be totally honest" was shared by eight study participants. Like Leah, they felt both invisible and hyper-visible. They expressed a desire to have access to a confidant because they need someone that they can trust, who will not judge them, question their competence, or contest their leadership. The loneliness—invisibility—that Leah spoke of is quite familiar to Black motherleaders who work in organizations that lack diversity. Black mothers in leadership positions who are hyper-visible—they are the only representative of their race and the only representative of their gender—are at greater risk of burnout, as reported by McKinsey and Company (2021), and thus require even more support from their organizations. Being the

only or among a few Black women in an organization is considered an environmental microaggression (Holder et al., 2015).

Black motherleaders are hyper-aware of what it means to be deemed a representative of all Black people. That is, if they mess up, it would negatively affect the chances for there to be other Black women—other Black mothers—in leadership positions. Thus, Black motherleaders could benefit from organizations investing in them via mentorship or other mechanisms of support that will allow them to be "totally honest and open and transparent".

Wanda, a senior development officer at a nonprofit organization, said that she wished that organizations were more visibly supportive of working mothers so that she could see more Black women modeling how to balance their professional careers and motherhood responsibilities. "I think of the women who are coming up behind me. I want them to see a woman who is thriving and succeeding but will tell you very clearly that my children and my family come first," stated Wanda. Wanda wants to be the visible leader seen as "thriving and successful," but as she mentioned, she will not sacrifice her family. This means that positive visibility is not without its challenges since it may require putting in long hours, which results in fewer hours spent with one's family.

The Laborious Nature of Childcare and Housework

Black motherleaders need more physical (i.e., hands-on) support from their partners. Unique, who has been married for over 30 years, stated, "Many times Black women—even though we might be married—have dual roles, playing the role of a mom and of a dad." Unique often felt that her husband was not as invested in childrearing or housework as she was because he does not consider them his responsibility. The dual roles that Unique played were likely not something she imagined she had to take on when she and her husband had their three children. As such, the labor comes not only in having to perform or do the labor but the added burden of the labor being unplanned and unexpected.

Prior to going into business for herself, Tracy, a mother of two, often had to decline work events because they conflicted with her "second shift" duties—managing and organizing the household to keep things running smoothly. Tracy explained, "We [mothers] have to go home and pick up our children and get them ready to transition after school or daycare; get dinner going; and yes, we have partners that support us, but we're the ones organizing stuff." Though unbeknownst to her at the time, Tracy's use of "second shift" was in reference to sociologist Arlie Hochschild's (1989) research on the uneven (and unpaid) domestic labor (e.g., housework and childcare) that working mothers routinely perform at home.

Unsurprisingly, White mothers were the primary focus of the mothers studied in *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (Hochschild, 1989), even though, as Roos (2010) noted, Black mothers have been in the workforce longer than all other mothers. However, scholars like Roos (2010) would likely maintain that it is okay that Black mothers were excluded from Hoch-

schild's analysis because her analysis does not appear to apply to Black mothers. That is, for Black mothers, there is no "second shift," labor at work and labor at home are the same. In other words, there is no distinction between Black mothers' leadership in their workplaces and their leadership in their homes.

Black mothers experience one "single shift" (i.e., 24 hours/day), which causes them to redefine what it means to be a Black mother and reimagine what it means to be a Black leader at work. The "single shift" encompasses their Black motherhood identity, and this re-imagination of what it means to be a working Black mother informs their Black feminist leadership, the latter of which Hanson (2003), Rogers (2005), Rosser-Mims (2010), and Collins (2009) characterize as resisting oppression (by engaging in motherwork) and empowering others.

This "single shift" is not without sacrifice. Black motherleaders sacrifice health and themselves. Being "on" all of the time causes both mental and physical stress. And, it is nearly impossible for Black Mothers to be equally "good" mothers and "good" leaders due to limited time and their attention being pulled in opposite directions. This was the cause of the mom's guilt expressed by Mae, mother of two because climbing the career ladder came at the expense of spending time with her children.

A Seemingly Elusive Work-Life Balance

Black motherleaders also feel pressured to maintain a healthy work-life balance, even though the idea of attaining a work-life balance is unrealistic. What Black motherleaders need is more support and flexibility. Anti-mother policies and practices are devoid of flexibility, such as those that do not grant mothers the option to work from home on occasion or to work remotely full-time.

Because very few employers have pro-mother policies and practices, many mothers like Unique seek out employment in places where it is easier to work around their children's schedules. Prior to creating her business, unique was an elementary school teacher and principal. Part of the reason that she chose the field of education was that her work schedule would be in sync with her children's schedules, which meant that she could spend more time with them. Yet, Unique still felt pressure to get the right balance between her home life and her work life. She stated, "It's not been easy trying to juggle marriage, children, and my profession."

While attaining a work-life balance conducive to their roles as leaders and mothers may seem elusive, when Black motherleaders report to women of color and women who are mothers, they tend to feel more supported in their pursuit of a healthy equilibrium. For example, when Wanda, a senior development officer, was pregnant with her first child, she recalled feeling supported because her supervisor was a woman of color. In reflecting on her former supervisor, Wanda said, "She was so protective of what it meant to be a mother and what that time would mean for me."

Being "protective of what it meant to be a mother" is an excellent summary of what Black motherleaders need—for others to see their motherhood status as

something of value and worthy of protection. This includes providing them with the space, resources, and support to care for their needs and the needs of their children. Wanda further explained that her supervisor created an atmosphere in which Wanda did not have to justify what she needed to balance motherhood and work successfully. If Wanda had to return home during the workday to check on her baby, who was being cared for by a nanny, or needed to come into the office late, she was given the flexibility to do so, and she was not questioned about whether or not she would be able to do her job successfully.

Recommendations

The following practice recommendations are for organizational leaders. Based upon the extensive review of extant literature and intersectional qualitative analysis of the lived experiences of the study participants, it is recommended that for- and non-profit organizations take the following actions to increase the representation of Black mothers in leadership positions and support them once they are there:

Recommendation 1: Eradicate Systemic Oppression in the Workplace

The murder of George Floyd was a wakeup call for some, and a reminder to others, that Black people are facing two pandemics—COVID-19 and anti-Black racism—and they are both deadly. The researchers believe that the latter is deadlier, because at least with COVID-19, there is a protocol for minimizing your chances of being infected (e.g., wash your hands, wear a mask, practice social/physical distancing); however, with anti-Black racism, there is nothing that Black people can do to stay safe or alive. Systemic oppression is killing Black people—it is a public health crisis. The for- and non-profit sectors are facing an existential calamity. Organizational leaders must address systemic oppression with the same fervor that they put towards helping their employees navigate COVID-19-related challenges.

Systemic oppression, the intentional disadvantaging of groups of people based on their identity while advantaging members of the dominant group, exists at the level of institutions and across interconnected and reinforcing structures such as education and health (National Equity Project, n.d.). The only way for Black mothers to thrive in the workplace is for organizational leaders to eradicate all forms of systemic oppression.

Black mothers are underrepresented in leadership positions because they face several systemic oppressions due to their intersectional identities. Black mother-leaders, like other employees with oppressed identities, have to navigate workplaces that were created to serve the needs and interests of cis-gender, wealthy (i.e., land-owning), and able-bodied White men who, for a very long time, were considered ideal leaders. Collins (1998), Higginbotham (1989), and Morton (1991) contended that this accounts for why the thoughts and priorities of White men have been elevated in traditional institutions.

Navigating institutions that were not built with them in mind creates barriers to leadership for Black mothers. Because anti-Black, anti-woman, and anti-mother

systems, structures, policies, and practices are prevalent in workplaces, the Black motherleaders in the study found themselves having to constantly prove themselves. For-profit and non-profit organizations must be intentional and strategic about eradicating systemic oppression. This requires identifying, interrogating, and dismantling barriers to equity and inclusion for Black mothers and all employees with oppressed identities.

Organizations that lack diversity in their leadership ranks often are quick to invest in a robust recruitment strategy that targets individuals of specific demographics; however, this is the wrong approach. Organizations should first prioritize focusing on addressing systemic oppression within their workplaces, because systemic oppression creates a culture that would be harmful or even toxic to new hires with oppressed identities. To root out and eradicate systemic oppression, for- and non-profit organizational leaders must evaluate their workplace systems, structures, policies, and practices using an anti-oppression, equity, and inclusion (AEI) lens.

An AEI lens is a strategic tool that organizational leaders can and should use to identify, interrogate, and dismantle barriers to inclusion and equitable outcomes (Nelson & Brooks, 2015). Applying an AEI lens requires that organizations thoroughly examine policies and practices that may harm some people while privileging others and actively seek to prevent racial injustice. It entails examining decision-making processes and equitably allocating resources. Finally, it means that organizational leaders acknowledge the context in which their institution exists: a society defined by inequalities of race, gender, class, and more.

When organizations are using an AEI lens, they are taking care not to *other* employees, which Esposito and Evans-Winters (2022) described as decentering the cultural experiences, values, and beliefs of people of color in favor of Western Eurocentric male-centered knowledge claims and productions. That is, to other is to further marginalize employees from underrepresented and oppressed groups, including Black motherleaders.

Organizational leaders who want to demonstrate that they are serious about making their workplaces more anti-oppressive, equitable, and inclusive must apply an AEI lens to all aspects of their organization, including operations, programs, services, processes, and products. More specifically, for- and non-profit organizational leaders should apply an AEI lens to their recruitment and hiring processes, examine their salary compensation plans, and create and develop pro-Black, pro-woman, and pro-mother policies and programs.

Black mothers will not be the sole beneficiaries of the application of an AEI lens in organizations. Every employee will benefit from the discontinuance of processes or products that perpetuate racist structures, reinforce stereotypes, and exploit suffering and the furtherance of fostering a safe and welcoming environment, inclusive decision-making, and the equitable allocation of resources (Powell et al., 2019).

Recommendation 2: Compensate Black Women for Their DEI Work

The study participants confirmed what the literature review revealed: Black women spend a significant amount of time leading efforts to make their workplaces more diverse, equitable, and inclusive (Dowell & Jackson, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2021). The work to advance DEI in the workplace is time-consuming and emotionally draining labor that benefits organizations as it improves organizational culture and employees' experiences in the workplace (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Black women should be compensated for this additional labor.

There are various ways that Black women engage in DEI work in their workplaces, including serving on DEI committees, leading employee resource groups, organizing and speaking on DEI panels, spearheading efforts to conduct pay equity studies, and counseling executive leadership on issues concerning belonging. Yet, Black women's efforts often go unacknowledged.

The Black motherleaders in the study noted that in addition to the efforts mentioned earlier to advance DEI, they also raise the alarm when initiatives are not inclusive, informally mentor staff of color, make space for staff of various identities to show up authentically and succeed in the workplace; lean on their lived experiences to empathize with and help staff who are on the margins access the supports they need to succeed; and build community within their workplaces so that staff with oppressed identities feel seen and safe. Only one of the 12 study participants is paid for her DEI efforts, and this is because her specific job is focused on advancing DEI.

By compensating Black women, for- and non-profit organizations can formally recognize the additional value that Black women bring to their workplaces. Organizations benefit from Black women centering DEI in their leadership practices. Additionally, Black women are skilled at navigating, interrogating, and dismantling oppressive structures and systems, which makes them particularly effective in their diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts (Cyr, 2021; Ross, 2014; Sarid, 2021).

Moreover, compensating Black mothers for the DEI work would be an opportunity for corporate and non-profit organizations to demonstrate that they do not want to repeat history (e.g., the slave era) by benefiting from Black women's free labor, and they are not paying lip service to the pledges they made, during the so-called "racial reckoning" of 2020, to make their workplaces more diverse, equitable, and inclusive (Kerber et al., 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2021). Beyond providing pay raises to Black women who engage in DEI work, organizations should also formally recognize Black mothers' efforts by noting it in their performance reviews to count towards opportunities to be promoted, receive a bonus, or a salary increase. That is, steps to make one's workplace more diverse, equitable, and inclusive should be considered worthy of accolades, top priority, highly valuable, and greatly appreciated. Thus, organizations should pay Black women their worth.

Recommendation 3: Create Mentorship Programs for Black Mothers

The Black motherleaders who participated in the study indicated that they need more support from their organizations, and they specifically noted that providing mentorship opportunities is one way their organizations can invest in their success. In addition, Black mothers seeking leadership opportunities and those currently serving in a leadership role would benefit from being mentored by Black women leaders.

Beyond sharing their experiences and providing advice, mentors with shared racial and gendered identities can support Black mothers on their leadership journeys by serving as confidants (Nicholson, 2021), which was something desired by several of the Black motherleaders in the study. Eby et al. (2010) characterized mentoring as a relationship between a junior colleague and a more experienced, senior colleague focusing on the professional advancement and personal growth of the mentee, the junior colleague being mentored. Vargas et al. (2021) contended that because mentors are presumed to have more experience and greater expertise than mentees, it creates an inherent relationship of unequal power.

Due to the low representation of Black women in the higher ranks of many fields, including the for- and non-profit industries, Black motherleaders are often mentored by someone of a different race, typically someone who is White (Thorne et al., 2021). Thus, a cross-racial mentorship relationship further exacerbates the unequal power dynamic referenced above. Contrarily, if the mentors and mentees share a racial identity and a gender identity, then this could help to facilitate a better connection because neither the mentor nor the mentee would be concerned with the other person lacking understanding as it pertains to their racial gendered experiences and cultural perspectives.

Furthermore, because mentors provide both professional and socioemotional support, mentorship contributes to positive career outcomes for mentees (Thorne et al., 2021). With its focus on supporting professional development, serving as a sounding board, and sharing insights, a same-race, same-gender mentoring relationship can help close the racial-gendered gap in nonprofit and corporate leadership (Bruce, 2021). Thus, for- and non-profit organizations should create mentorship programs for Black mothers who are emerging and existing leaders.

Every nonprofit or corporation that purports to value and prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging should allocate a percentage of its annual budget to developing and maintaining its emerging and existing leader mentorship program. The mentors who participate in the program would be recruited from all industries and the nonprofit or corporation that "houses" them would pay them for their services. By investing in mentorship for Black mothers, organizations would provide the support they need to succeed personally and professionally. However, they will also be making an institutional investment since the Black motherleaders will have the support needed to excel at their jobs. While these recommendations are for organizations—organizational leaders must do the work to break down barriers to equity and right the systems that have wronged

people with oppressed identities—this entire body of work is for Black mother-leaders, an acknowledgment that they are seen and valued.

5. Conclusion

This study was important because although their adaptive and resilient leadership styles make them effective leaders, there is a dearth of Black mothers in leadership positions. By leveraging Black motherleaders' lived and learned experiences, for- and non-profit organizations can help close the leadership representation gap. That is, the for- and non-profit organizations that are struggling to make their workplaces more anti-oppressive, equitable, and inclusive could benefit from the leadership of Black mothers. It is worth noting that there was no real difference between the leadership experiences of Black motherleaders working in for-profit organizations and Black motherleaders working in non-profit organizations.

This study identified some of the barriers Black mother leaders face, including having to navigate intersectional oppressions in the workplace and having little support from their partners and organizations. However, it also uplifted the experiences and practices that make Black mothers effective leaders. It is important to note that this study did not place the blame on Black mothers for the barriers they face, for "the issues [Black] women leaders encounter are not of their making, and they alone cannot end these negative experiences" (Sims & Carter, 2019: p. 108). Thus, for- and non-profit organizations must work to eradicate systemic oppression, including anti-Blackness, racial-gendered bias, dominant stereotypes, gendered expectations, and other obstacles to inclusion. This study demonstrated that by listening to Black women, valuing their lived experiences and leadership styles, and supporting their leadership practices, organizations can make their workplaces great places for all employees, especially those with oppressed identities.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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