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THEY AREN'T JUNE CLEAVER: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS

by

LAUREN FANNIN

Under the Direction of Jonathan Gayles

ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to understand black women's perspectives on stay-at-home mothering and examine the ways in which Mocha Moms, Inc. provides support. Twelve African American mothers from three chapters of Mocha Moms, Inc. were interviewed and data were analyzed and coded for themes. Findings indicate that participants did not aspire to stay home with their children. Additionally, participants reject stereotypical ideas of at-home mothering. They also see themselves as the primary educators of their children. Finally, they do not feel respected in the black community or in society.

INDEX WORDS: Black women, Motherhood, Stay-at-home moms, Mocha Moms, Mommy Wars, Black Feminist Thought

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by

LAUREN FANNIN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

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THEY AREN'T JUNE CLEAVER: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STAY-AT-HOME MOTHERS

by

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May 2013

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family: Desmond, I absolutely could not have done this without your love, support, advice, and motivation. I love you. Morgan and Jaylen, your humor, intelligence, and unconditional love give me my greatest joy. Mommy loves you!

This work is also dedicated to my mother Shirley Merriweather, whose support and inspiration has been invaluable to me; Priscilla Terry, Birdie Anderson, Annie Daugherty, Emily Merriweather, Hattie Tiggs, and Minna Jones, my ancestral mothers; and my sisters Stephanie Merriweather and Andrea Henderson, whose mothering inspired my own.

Finally, this work is dedicated to all mothers, who work hard and sacrifice every day for their children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to my thesis committee. Dr. Jonathan Gayles, thank you for your guidance, support, and dedication, which made this research possible. I could not have asked for a better chair! Dr. Sarita Davis, your mentorship and motivation have been instrumental in my success. Thank you for the love and sisterhood. Dr. Makungu Akinyela, your tough love and guidance have made me better. Thank you. I would also like to express my gratitude to the African American Studies Department and chair Dr. Akinyele Umoja. The department will always be my second home and I will never forget the love and support you have given me.

To Chloe, Cynthia, Grace, and Tiara, my fellow cohort members: You got me through many hard days and nights. Your support and camaraderie motivated me to do my best work. I appreciate you. Celeste and Tiana, thank you for always, always being there for me. To my friends and family: Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me.

Last but not least, thank you to the women of Mocha Moms, Inc. for welcoming me into your space and allowing me to tell your stories!

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PROLOGUE

I was 24 years old, enjoying my first year of marriage, in school trying to finish my bachelor's degree, and working part-time at Bank of America when I found out I was pregnant with my first child. We were happy and excited when we found out, assuming it would be smooth sailing. I did not realize then how much my life would change.

I became so sick during my first trimester that I had to withdraw from school and take a leave of absence from my job. I was essentially bed-ridden for two months, suffering from vertigo, nausea, and vomiting. It was a big change for me, getting up every morning and having nowhere to go and nothing to do. I had been working since I was 15 and had planned to work indefinitely, even after having children. Yet there I was, home alone while my husband and the rest of the sensible world were at work.

I returned to work once I started feeling better and put in a request for my six week maternity leave. My husband and I looked at daycare facilities in our area, crunched the numbers, and slowly came to the realization that it would not be cost-effective for me to return to work. It was at that moment that we decided I would be a stay-at-home mom.

Stay-at-home mom. What did that mean? For me, it simply meant the baby would stay home with me rather than go to daycare, and that is exactly what happened when Morgan was born. It was natural. I felt like I was doing exactly what I was supposed to be doing. Still, I felt strange. Nobody made me feel bad about not working. My husband was supportive. Yet I still felt like nobody really understood me. And frankly, I was a little lonely.

I sought support online and stumbled across Babycenter, an online forum for moms and moms-to-be. All but a handful of the regular posters on my particular board were white. Some of

the white women were working mothers, and others were stay-at-home moms. The two other black mothers on the board both worked.

Things went well for a while. I had an outlet. When Morgan was sleeping, I would get online to discuss breastfeeding, organic babyfood, slings, and carseats. I made friends. Then things got heated. People debated. Petty arguments ensued. People quit the board. People got banned from posting. It was bedlam. The Mommy Wars[1] were real.

Then I found the board for Parents of Color.

I was home. It just felt...right. There were a few Hispanic moms and one or two white moms with biracial children, but the vast majority of the posters were black women. The topics we discussed were so much more meaningful. It felt like the conversations were tailored for me, a black mother. At the time, I could not articulate what that meant for me but in hindsight, I know that the support was grounded in my own lived experiences and those of the other black women. We discussed everything from breastfeeding rates in the black community to the merits of keeping little girls' hair natural. We started a book club and read classics like *The Miseducation of the Negro* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Some of the mothers worked, and some were stay-at-home moms. Some were married, some were single. But all were supported.

My son Jaylen was born three years later and I once again sought out support from the black moms on the Parents of Color board. I began to think about my future and my goals and decided to finish my bachelor's degree. Soon after, I entered graduate school, pursuing a master's degree in African American Studies. I was asked about my research interests and I

[1] The Mommy Wars is the discourse on who, between stay-at-home moms and working moms, is the better mother (Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick, & Harvey, 2008).

thought about my life. I thought about my experiences as a mother and those of the black mothers I had encountered online. I also thought about the barrage of media attacks on black women that seemed to occur often.

Why can't successful black women find a man? Why are black women the least married group of all? Are black women the least attractive women of all races? What's up with black women's hair? Are their standards too high? It was incredibly disheartening to see and hear these messages given all the black women I had met who were diverse, unique, and most of all, *content*. Who was telling their stories? And who was taking the media to task for their laser focus on black women's perceived pathologies?

As a student of African American Studies and as a black feminist, I saw an opportunity to present a different narrative. I also saw a chance to critique the way in which black women's stories are told. By whose standards are black women being measured? Are they taking into account black women's unique history in America? What are the experiences of black women who do not conform to popular stereotypes? I realized that my own story, and those of black women like me who stayed home with their children, had not yet been told.

When I told my advisor what I wanted to do, he suggested that I look into Mocha Moms, Inc., a support group for women of color who stay at home with their children. I looked up the organization and the idea for my thesis was born.

This research is very personal to me, and I hope it makes a contribution to the discourse on African American women, gender, and family studies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the background of the research problem, as well as the significance and nature of the study. The purpose of the study and problem statement are also addressed. The research question and theory used in the study are discussed. Finally, this chapter provides definitions of key terms.

Background

Of the 5.6 million stay-at-home moms in America in 2009, only 5% were black (Kreider & Elliot, 2010). These women have been virtually invisible, save a few blog postings and news articles about how black women are much less likely to stay at home with their children than are white women (Brevis, 2012; Richards, 2012; Young, 2012). It is noteworthy that black stay-at-home moms did not come into media focus until April of 2012, when Democratic pundit Hilary Rosen declared that Ann Romney, stay-at-home mom and wife of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, had never worked a day in her life.

Rosen's comment ignited a firestorm in the media and on mom-centered websites such as CafeMom, iVillage, and Babycenter. It was there that white mothers engaged in the "mommy wars", or the discourse on who, between stay-at-home moms and working moms, is the better mother (Zimmerman, Aberle, Krafchick, & Harvey, 2008). Black women's voices, however, were conspicuously absent from the debate.

The media picked up on this absence and in April 2012, Kuae Mattox, the national president of Mocha Moms, Inc., was interviewed by the popular African American centered

website The Grio. When asked about the debate, Mattox said "we don't see the mommy wars as our wars – we have friends, mothers and aunts who all worked. It would be hypocritical of us to disparage people who worked and to tell people what to do – you have to decide what's best for you and your family" (Richards, 2012).

Mattox's statement encapsulated several important points. First, she alluded to the fact that black women have a unique relationship with the labor force. Second, she argued that black women are not invested in white women's discourse on paid vs. unpaid work. Finally, Mattox invoked black women's social and kinship networks and the sense of community and collectivity therein. Each of these ideas is central to this study and will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Mocha Moms, Inc. was founded in 1997 in Prince Georges County, Maryland[2] as a support group for women of color who had made the decision to leave the workforce in order to spend more time with their children. Today, Mocha Moms boasts over 100 chapters throughout the United States (Mocha Moms, 2013). Although many of the members of the organization are stay-at-home moms, the group also supports moms who have gone back to work, either full or part-time.

Why has so little attention been paid to black stay-at-home moms? Even in the articles cited above, there was less focus on their lives and experiences than on the reasons they existed in smaller numbers than their white counterparts. There is no shortage of attention paid to black women; they have been the subject of intense scrutiny in recent years, particularly in the media. However, the interest is limited to issues like their level of attractiveness, inability to get or keep

[2] Prince Georges County, Maryland is an affluent, predominately African American area.

a man, exceedingly high standards, rates of sexually transmitted diseases, their weight, the number of children they have and with whom they have them, and even the way they wear their hair.

As an African American woman, I was well aware of this preoccupation and was perplexed by what seemed to be an obsession with black women's pathology, rather than our stories. As a student of African American Studies, I saw an opportunity to critically engage the discourse on black women. As a black woman who had stayed at home with her children, I saw an opportunity to discuss a population which has been virtually ignored in the media and in research: black stay-at-home mothers.

Joe Feagin discusses white Americans' fascination with African Americans. He says "The intense white preoccupation with black Americans in recent decades not only underscores the pervasive anti-black stereotypes, ideas, and images of the dominant frame but also reveals deep racial emotions and inclinations." (Feagin, 2010, p. 100) This idea can be extrapolated to the focus on black women's perceived pathologies.

Historically, the dominant frame for womanhood has been of the docile, submissive, innocent, beautiful middle to upper-middle class white woman (Welter, 1966). This frame excluded all women of color, as well as working class white women. For black women in particular, a different frame emerged via what Patricia Hill Collins identifies as "controlling images", or stereotypical symbols and imagery through which elite groups exercise power by manipulating society's ideas about black women (2000, p. 69).

Collins argues that these images serve to normalize social injustices like racism, sexism, and economic inequality. Additionally, controlling images relegate black women to the position

of the outsider, and “African American women's status as outsiders becomes the point from which other groups define their normality” (2000, p. 70). In the context of motherhood, the image of “normality” has typically been that of a married, middle class white woman with children (Adams, 1995). Black women with children, then, inhabit an outsider status where the experience of white motherhood becomes the standard by which they are judged.

There are several predominant stereotypes about black women, some of which have important implications for black mothers. The Mammy is asexual and is never the object of lust or desire (Collins, 2000). She is considered unattractive by European beauty standards, and is generally portrayed with dark skin and a full figure, wearing a scarf on her head and a big smile on her face. Her primary concerns are for the needs of others and she functions as a workhorse, laboring for hours for little to no personal or financial reward (West, 1995). The mammy image is born out of the institution of slavery and it “preserved the convenient script of the happy, docile, Black female servant” (Stephens & Phillips, 2003, p. 9). However, Mammy is only loyal and submissive to the white family. No mention is made of her devotion to her own family (Collins, 2000).

Unlike asexual Mammy, Jezebel is hypersexualized, manipulative, seductive black woman with no self-control (Collins, 2000). This is an image that is commonly seen in hip-hop music videos. These women typically have the same look; short and tight clothing which reveals much of their breasts and buttocks, long straight hair, and high heels are the standard uniform. Additionally, these women are generally dancing seductively while the featured artist raps or sings in front of them. Jezebel is projected onto televisions screens throughout the United States and much of the world, imprinting an indelible image of black women on the minds of millions of viewers.

The Black Matriarch is the other side of the Mammy coin. While the mammy is a good mother (to the white master's children), the black matriarch is a terrible mother to her own children. She controls and dominates her family, and if she has a male partner, she emasculates him at every turn (Collins, 2000).

The Welfare Mother is an extension of the black matriarch, but economic class adds an additional dimension to the stereotype. The welfare mother is economically disadvantaged and relies on government social programs to make provisions for her family (Collins, 2000). She is lazy and incapable of raising productive citizens, and her progeny are destined to become burdens on society (Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

The Sapphire was developed in the mid twentieth century, and she represented the angry, nagging, emasculating black wife (West, 1995). Sapphires are typically loud and verbally aggressive, engaging in behavior that is typically seen as masculine (Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004).

Collins identifies a final controlling image in the Black Lady. She argues that the Black Lady is a more modern mammy who did everything "right"; she went to school, earned her degree, started a career, and achieved professional success. The problem with the black lady is that she competes with men and drives them away, and is therefore unable to be successful in her personal life (Collins, 2000).

These stereotypical images of black women are pervasive and popular and, as Emerson argues, the images are one-dimensional, ensuring that "black women are not represented in their full range of being" (Emerson, 2002, p. 123). Black stay-at-home mothers, and black mothers in

general, are obscured because their experiences do not fit within the narrow parameters of the stereotypes.

Ella Bell argues that myths and stereotypes about black women are allowed to flourish because there have been so few biographical accounts written about the lives of modern-day black women (Bell, 2004, p. 151). Our experiences are incredibly rich and diverse, yet the media and popular culture continue to use the same stereotypes to tell our stories.

Consider the attention paid to black women's marital status. ABC Nightline produced a series in 2010 called "Why Can't a Successful Black Woman Find a Man?" (Johnson, 2010), which aired on national television. The producers seemed to capitalize off of the image of the Black Lady, giving credence to the stereotype and perpetuating the idea that even positive attributes, such as drive and professional success, can be pathological for black women.

Black women's reproductive habits also became a topic of national conversation when the media reported that 72% of black children are born out of wedlock (Burton, 2010; Ravitz, 2009; Washington, 2010). In a discourse reminiscent of that which followed the release of the Moynihan report (1965), black women were seen as a source of pathology and national concern and the Black Matriarch was blamed for the downfall of the black family.

The examples used here provide evidence of the predominance of the stereotypes about black women in the United States. Not only do they provide a very limited view, but they also obscure the actual lives and experiences of black women who embody them. The black stay-at-mom, who has devoted most of her time to her family, cannot exist within these narrow parameters.

As noted before, only 5% of the stay-at-home mothers in America are black, which makes them somewhat rare. Additionally, literature on this group is scarce. Who are these women? What factors influence them to leave the workforce and stay home with their children? How do they feel about what they do? Do they feel supported by the black community? By society? This study endeavored to give these women the opportunity to tell their stories.

Problem Statement

There are several prolific stereotypes and scripts for black women, but there is a dearth of information about the experiences of black women who exist outside of them. Jezebel, Sapphire, Mammy, the Black Lady, the Black Matriarch and their various pathologies have been documented in both the media and in research, but black stay-at-home mothers are absent from the discourse. As such, there is a lack of representation of the full range of black women's experiences, which may have implications for black women who act outside of stereotypes and expectations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors which influenced black stay-at-home moms to leave the workforce and stay home with their children. The study also endeavored to examine the ways in which black stay-at-home mothers perceive themselves and feel they are perceived by others, and to understand the role of social support networks in their lives. Participants were solicited from three chapters of Mocha Moms, Inc. and via word of mouth. A total of twelve black current and former stay-at-home moms participated in semi-structured one-on-one interviews. They were asked questions about the circumstances surrounding their decision to stop working. They were also asked to talk about what staying at home means to

them. Additionally, they were asked to discuss their perceptions about how they are viewed by others and to explain why they needed support. Their answers to these questions provided information about influences on their decision, how they are perceived, and the role Mocha Moms plays in their lives.

Significance of the Study

African American families have been historically underrepresented in academic study (Coker, Huang, & Kashubeck-West, 2009), and the research that has been done has been comparative in nature, using white Americans as the standard by which black families were judged (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Findings generally found problems or disadvantages (Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk, & Sasser, 2008). Additionally, research on black women has typically failed to accurately represent the totality of black women's experiences (Allen, 2000). Moreover, there is virtually no literature on black stay-at-home mothers. This study is important because it contributes to the body of literature on the African American family and African American women. The findings of the study will fill important gaps in research on black women's lives, particularly those of black mothers who do not work outside of the home.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative methodology provides the most suitable research method for this study on understanding the experiences and perceptions of black stay-at-home mothers who are members of Mocha Moms, Inc. A qualitative approach to inquiry employs a collection of data in a natural setting, which reflects care and concern for the participants in the study. Moreover, data analysis helps the researcher establish themes, which leads to an accurate reflection of the voices of the

participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). In this study, one-on-one interviews allowed the participants to use their own voices to tell their stories and provide answers to the research questions.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What factors influence black stay-at-home moms' decision to leave the workforce and not go back to work?
2. What are black stay-at-home moms' perceptions of their roles?
3. What are their perceptions of the way they are viewed by others?
4. What kind of support do they receive from Mocha Moms, Inc.?

Perception was of great importance to the study. Given the prevalence of stereotypes about black women, the research questions were developed in order to understand the way the participants in the study view themselves and their roles within the family. Additionally, the study sought to understand the participants' perceptions of how they are viewed by the black community and society as a whole. The study did not define or provide parameters for the term "black community"; rather, participants were encouraged to answer based on their own definition and understanding of the term.

Social support was also of importance. All but one of the participants in the study are current or former members of Mocha Moms, Inc. This is a culture sharing group which has its own activities. The participants spend extended amounts of time together, and the questions about social support will provide an understanding of the benefits of membership in the organization, as well as what that support means to their lives.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, I employed Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical framework. The central aim of Black feminist theory is to resist oppression in all forms, as well as the ideas that perpetuate it (Collins, 2000, p. 22). In 1981, the Combahee River Collective produced what is considered a foundational text for Black Feminist Thought. In it, the group explained their black feminist ideology:

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. (p. 210).

The Collective's orientation to Black feminism was political in nature, but they also firmly believed that "the personal is political." (p. 213) Additionally, they believed Black feminism was integral to the understanding of black women because "no one before has ever examined the multilayered texture of Black women's lives." (p. 214)

There are several major features of Black feminist theory which are germane to this study:

1. *Black Feminist Thought employs the idea of intersectionality* (Simien, 2007, p. 424). The idea of interlocking systems of oppression is not new. Double Jeopardy, or "having low status on two different dimensions of stratification" (Brinkerhoff, White, Ortega, & Weitz, 2007, p. 193), has been discussed in the field of sociology for several decades, particularly in race and gender studies. However, black feminist theory is unique in that it

examines the multiple identities of black women, specifically, and the ways in which various mechanisms, such as race, class, and gender interact and intersect in their lives (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991).

2. *Black Feminist Thought addresses the issue of gender inequality within the black community.* Black feminists recognize that patriarchy permeates black male-female relationships and is perpetuated through gender role attitudes and expectations. As such, black feminism challenges patriarchy, which in turn benefits the entire community (Simien, 2007, pp. 424-425).
3. *It recognizes that a sense of belonging and consciousness arises from black women's daily experiences.* Black women's shared experiences with interlocking mechanisms of oppression foster a sense of collectivity (Simien, 2007, p. 425).
4. *It recognizes the importance of Black women's self-definition and self-valuation.* Black women should challenge the process by which externally-developed stereotypes and images are created and create their own definitions and values grounded in their own lived experiences (Collins, 1986, pp. s16-s17).
5. *It argues that production of knowledge about black women should be conducted by black women.* Black feminist though privileges black women in the production of ideas and knowledge about black women's lives and experiences because black women have a very particular standpoint (Reynolds, 2001).

Additionally, "centering on Black women's experiences produces not only new knowledge but new ways of thinking about such knowledge." (2000, p. 44) This study centered the lives and experiences of a group of black women in order to introduce new ways of thinking about black womanhood, black motherhood, and black families. By allowing the participants to

tell their own stories about their decision to leave the work force, this study privileged the participants' standpoint in the production of knowledge about their lives.

Definitions

Nuclear Family- The nuclear family consists of two biological parents and their children (Bengtson, 2001). Employment status is not a factor.

Stay-at-home mom- The United States Census Bureau defines stay-at-home mothers as those who have a husband who was active in the labor force during the previous year, while she was out of the labor force during the same year to care for the home and family (Census Bureau, 2009).

Traditional family model- The traditional family is one in which the husband works and the wife stays at home (Collins, 2000, p. 48)

Assumptions and Biases

My assumptions and biases are a result of my experiences, observations, and personal experience with the research topic. I assumed the participants in the study would be candid and honest about their experiences because they want their stories told. I believe my personal experience with being a stay-at-home mother gave me an increased level of passion, and I believe it gave me insight into the participants' lives that I would not have had otherwise.

I approached this research from a pluralist perspective. I do not argue that the nuclear and/or traditional family model is superior to any other types of families, although I do acknowledge that the nuclear and/or traditional family may *fare* better than other types of

families simply because they are given advantages via various government and corporate policies (Collins, 2000, p. 49).

Although it was not possible for me to completely eliminate all of my biases and assumptions, I sought to minimize them by exercising reflexivity throughout the research process.

Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations

This study utilized a population consisting of black women with children, most of whom were married or formerly married. All of the participants were current or former stay-at-home mothers. Although there are no official financial parameters for the category of "middle class", I categorize the participants in the study as middle class because they are all college educated and reside in areas with high median incomes relative to other predominately African American areas of the country.

For the purposes of this research, it was important for me to choose participants who were members of the Mocha Moms organization. Further, participants needed to have partners or family members who were able to sustain the household financially while they made the conscious decision to exit the labor force. As such, the findings of this study cannot be used to generalize all black mothers, stay-at-home mothers, or families in the United States.

Summary

This chapter introduced the proposed study, including the background and significance of the research. This chapter also included discussion of the research questions, as well as definitions of key terms. Finally, the assumptions and biases, scope, limitations and delimitations

were addressed. The next chapter includes a review of the literature on black families, black women's labor force participation, and gender roles.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors which influence black women's choice to stay at home with their children, to examine the ways in which black stay-at-home mothers perceive themselves and feel they are perceived by others, and to understand the role of social support networks in their lives. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What factors influence black stay-at-home moms' decision to leave the workforce and not go back to work?
2. What are black stay-at-home moms' perceptions of their roles?
3. What are their perceptions of the way they are viewed by others?
4. What kind of support do they receive from Mocha Moms, Inc.?

The literature presented in this chapter engages a variety of disciplines, including Sociology, Psychology, and History. Several databases were used to gather information, such as JSTOR, PsychINFO, EBSCO, and Science Direct. The literature is presented in four sections. The first section orients this study within the body of literature on the black family. The second section discusses black women's roles as wives and mothers. The third section details black women's history of labor force participation. The last section discusses the role of social support networks.

Research on the Black Family

Most research on marriage and family has historically focused on white Americans (Anderson, Brownstone, & Leslie, 1991; Bird & Ross, 1993; Jones, 1991; Zimmerman, 2008).

Furthermore, research on motherhood typically centered the experiences of middle class white women with children (Adams, 1995). A few notable exceptions to this research trend are the writings of black sociologists W.E.B. Dubois and E. Franklin Frazier. Their seminal works discussed the black family in great detail and paved the way for future sociological research on African Americans.

Dubois' writings contextualized the "negro problem," bringing into focus the ways in which the institution of American slavery created the problems faced by black Americans at that time (1898). He also discussed the importance of the educational and social advancement of people of African descent (1904). Moreover, Dubois warned against the dangers of stereotyping and reporting on the lives of black Americans without first critically analyzing the data that has been observed. The credentials, honesty, and expertise of the observer were also of equal importance to the study of black people. He said:

> We continually judge the whole from the part we are familiar with; we continually assume the material we have at hand to be typical; we reverently receive a column of figures without asking who collected them, how they were arranged, how far they are valid and what chances of error they contain; we receive the testimony of men without asking whether they were trained or ignorant, careful or careless, truthful or given to exaggeration, and, above all, whether they are giving facts or opinions. (1898, pp. 13-14)

Dubois went on to discuss the problematic nature of researchers' tendency to examine black Americans from only one point of view. He argued that the study of blacks was primarily focused on how their existence affected whites. Although he wrote the article over a century ago, his point is still salient, particularly with regard to the study of the black family.

E. Franklin Frazier succeeded Dubois. He work wrote a series of papers on the black American family, discussing its condition during slavery (1939), the way black families lived in the United States, where they went to church, which organizations they belonged to (1929), and their changing social status post-slavery (1931). Additionally, Frazier examined the black family structure, particularly the growing issue of out-of-wedlock births, which were seen as a problem (1932). He also discussed the black family income (Frazier & Bernert, 1946) and the black middle class (Franklin, 1957).

Although much of Frazier's work focused on the nature of the black family and community, he, like Dubois, also analyzed the way researchers approached the study of race and black Americans. In his 1947 publication on sociological theory, Frazier critiqued the fathers of sociology and the development of race theory. His main critique was that these race theories were developed at a time when blacks were seen as inferior and incapable of integration into American life. Frazier suggested the development of a new sociological theory on race which would "discard all the rationalizations of race prejudice" (p. 271). In other words, the study of race and black Americans could not be predicated on assumptions about black inferiority to whiteness.

Consistent with his views on developing a new framework, Frazier would go on to focus his critique directly on the study of the black family. In his 1950 essay, he said the following:

> In discussing the problems of Negro children resulting from family disorganization, it is necessary to make clear at the beginning what is meant by family disorganization. Viewed from the standpoint of its institutional character, the family may be regarded as disorganized when it does not conform to socially accepted norms of family life. But if we also view the family as an organized social group or cooperating unit with which the

> various members are identified and this identification is recognized by the community, then family disorganization may be defined differently...In many sections of the rural South, especially in the plantation area, there are Negro families which do not conform to the institutional pattern of the American family. But it would be a mistake to label them as disorganized since they are stable groups and carry on the functions of the family. (p. 270)

Frazier subsequently argued that the most important problem of family disorganization in the black community was economic hardship, which he asserted was directly related to existence of black female-headed households. Frazier estimated that approximately one-fifth of all black children were dependent solely on their mothers for support, and "until Negro males assume a larger responsibility for the support of Negro families, Negro children will continue to suffer because of insufficient family incomes. Moreover, they will continue to leave school at an early age and assume partial responsibility for the support of their families" (1950, p. 272).

According to Robert Staples, "the field of family sociology has a biased value orientation that is reflected in the emphasis on middle-class norms as the barometer of what is regarded as a desirable family structure and behavior" (1971, pp. 199-120). Frazier's assertion that dysfunction in the black families was largely attributed to female headed homes belied his appeal to sociologists to evaluate them on their own merits and upheld the biased value orientation in the field at that time.

The infamous Moynihan report, released in 1965, built on Frazier's ideas. Moynihan argued that the black family during and after enslavement was broken, with black women, particularly those from less affluent backgrounds, acting as emasculating matriarchs who would not allow black men to head the household (Moynihan, 1965).

As discussed earlier, most existing research on the black family used the same methodology. The deficit model, which focuses on the ways in which the black family fails to measure up to the nuclear family model, was the preferred framework for most researchers (Conner & White, 2006; Hatchett, Holmes, Duran, & Davis, 2000; Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk, & Sasser, 2008). These scholars discussed such topics as naming patterns (Barker, 1939), marriage and the "brokenness" of black families (Edwards, 1963), upper class blacks who had assimilated to the values and standards of general (white) American society (Johnson, 1937), the problem of black immorality (Myrdal & Bok, 1944), the cultural disorganization of black youth (Walsh, 1946), and the contribution of family structure to juvenile delinquency (Cavan, 1959). Lee Rainwater, a Moynihan defender, argued that poor black Americans were caught in a "tangle of pathology" and needed drastic intervention from white society in order to function properly (1966).

There were several major weaknesses of the deficit model. First, it was based on the idea that the white nuclear family model was the standard to which every other family should aspire. Second, it did not allow researchers to question whether or not African Americans had the desire to structure their families that way. Finally, the deficit model did not take into account the social and structural forces that prevented African Americans from attaining the nuclear structure.

In spite of the ubiquitous usage of the deficit model, Moynihan's findings were widely criticized and challenged. Some scholars even credit Moynihan's report with causing a shift in the methodology in research on the black family (Furstenberg, 2007). After 1965, there was a surge in the amount of research on the subject, and the findings of those studies identified positive aspects of the black community and black families (Staples & Mirandé, 1980; Royce & Turner, 1980).

Researchers argued that black families during and after enslavement were intact (Blassingame, 1972; Gutman, 1976), as well as highly resilient and adaptive (Hill, 1971), with strong kinship bonds and high achievement orientation (Bell-Tolliver, Burgess, & Brock, 2009). Furthermore, the black matriarchy outlined in Moynihan's report was found to be a myth (Carper, 1966; Hyman & Reed, 1969; Josephson, 1969). In short, the black family was not pathological; rather, it had simply adjusted to the socio-political environment in which it lived (Staples, 1969).

This new approach to black family research is the strength-based model (Fine, Schwebel, & James-Myers, 1987; Staples, 1971), wherein black families are evaluated independently of the white family and cultural deviations from the norm are appreciated (Littlejohn-Blake & Darling, 1993).

One of the major weaknesses of the strength-based approach was the singular focus on appreciating deviations from the accepted norm; the narrow scope could possibly obscure some of the very real problems within the African American community.

In 1971, Charles Valentine suggested the use of a bicultural model for the study of African Americans. Biculturation is the idea that racial or ethnic minorities in America "are simultaneously enculturated and socialized in two different ways of life, a contemporary form of their traditional...lifeways and mainstream Euro-American culture" (1971, p. 141). Rather than focusing on the ways in which African Americans fail to live up to white norms and ideals, or completely disregarding them altogether, the bicultural model acknowledges that African Americans may choose to accept certain white American cultural ideals and reject others, while simultaneously accepting and rejecting certain African American cultural ideals.

This study explores the perceptions of black women who have chosen to stay at home with their children. Most of the participants in the study have families that fit the nuclear family model, and it is important to recognize that they exercised their own agency in choosing to accept the ideal. However, it is also important to understand the ways in which they have redefined and reshaped the ideal in accordance with their socialization as African American women. For this reason, the bicultural model is most suitable for this research.

Black Women, Marriage, and Motherhood

In the early 19th century, European settlers in the "New World" popularized the idea of the "cult of true womanhood" or "cult of domesticity", wherein women, middle and upper-middle class white women in particular, were relegated to the home. It was seen as their sphere of influence, where they kept their husbands and children happy through cooking, cleaning, Bible study, innocence, beauty, and training their children to be good Americans (Welter, 1966).

The cult of true womanhood was very much tied to the idea of Manifest Destiny, or the idea that Europeans in the "New World" had a divine right to take over any land in their sight. While the men fought battles to procure land belonging to indigenous peoples, their women were to fight battles in the domestic sphere, protecting the last bastion of civilization: their progeny and their homes (Caughfield, 2005, p. 4). The idea was further cemented during the Industrial Revolution when, for the first time, work and home were segmented into separate domains and men went away to work in urban cities while wives stayed behind (Landry, 2000).

The feminine ideal was based in patriarchy, a system in which men maintain power and authority over women primarily through the sexual division of labor (Glenn, 1985, p. 97). It was an ideal that was unattainable for the vast majority of African American women, as the institution of slavery was in effect at that time and black women worked right alongside their

male counterparts. Black women also performed domestic tasks in their quarters but, as Angela Davis noted, “the alleged benefits of the ideology of femininity did not accrue to [them]” (Davis, 1971, p. 87). Black women were not afforded the protection or adoration that the ideology of femininity promised (Bell, 2004), as they were regularly subjected to violence and sexual violations at the hands of white masters.

Black men were unable to fully participate in the system of patriarchy and male privilege because the unquestioned ruler and authority over the black family was the slave master, not the black man. Further, the idea of being a breadwinner or “providing for the family” was elusive because the slave master was the conduit through which all of the family’s provisions flowed (Davis, 1971, p. 88).

It would seem, then, that black men and women were essentially rendered equal through the institution of slavery (Davis, 1971), in spite of conventional ideas about women’s inherent incapability to perform the same tasks as men (Allen, 1869, p. cxcvi). Because of this forced equality, neither gender was able to fully inhabit the social constructions of gender, masculinity, and femininity, nor were they able to perform the tasks assigned therein (Davis, 1971). What, then, did unpaid domestic work in the home represent for black women?

Both Angela Davis (1971) and Jacqueline Jones (2010) discuss the “irony” of black women’s domestic work in their own homes. Rather than reinforcing their subservient, inferior position as women, as the ideology of femininity was wont to do, domestic work may have represented autonomy and agency. According to Jones, “in defiance of their owners' tendencies to ignore gender differences in making work assignments in the fields, the slaves whenever possible adhered to a strict division of labor within their own households and communities” (Jones, 1982, p. 237).

The typical division of household work was as follows: women were responsible for most tasks related to childcare, as well as cooking, tending to fires, sewing and making clothes, and cleaning. Men performed tasks such as collecting firewood, making furniture, making animal traps, and hunting (Jones, 1982, p. 253). Moreover, evidence indicates that the more freedom enslaved families had to create their own divisions of labor, the more distinct the divisions became (p. 254). This suggests that the choices black families made were complex.

Because of the constraints of slavery and the subsequent system of racial hierarchy in the United States, African American wives and mothers were socialized to be concerned not only with the needs of their families, but also with the needs of the community. For example, in the period after slavery ended, Black women were encouraged to get their education in order to elevate the black race. This was yet another way that black men and women were considered equal, as curricula for black men and women were similar. For white women in that time period, however, education was focused solely on domestic skills and literacy, the latter for the purpose of reading and teaching Biblical scripture (Perkins, 1983).

Black mothers strongly believed in educating themselves and their children (McCluskey, 1989, p. 116). Maria Stewart admonished the “daughters of Africa” to band together to build schools for the purpose of educating themselves (Stewart, 1995), exhorting them to “possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted” (p. 29). Likewise, Anna Julia Cooper expressed the idea that black women should be at the forefront of change in the community. Cooper said “the woman of today finds herself in the presence of responsibilities which ramify through the profoundest and most varied interests of her country and race...all departments in the new era are to be hers” (1995, pp. 48-49).

In the book *The Industrial History of the Negro Race of the United States*, the authors echoed the sentiment that the black race needs to be educated, specifying that both black men and women must learn and teach. For example, they said "the Negro of this country must learn the economics of home life, character and virtue, thrift and industry and skill in labor" (Jackson & Davis, 1908, p. 79). They then go on to say that the black race needs "thoroughly trained men and women to teach the masses how to think" (p. 79).

The authors also discussed black women's roles outside of the home in an appreciative manner, saying "the race needs wives who stay at home, being supported by their husbands, and then they can spend time in the training of their children" (1908, p. 129). Consider the following passage on the importance of the black mother's role in her home:

> [The Negro woman] must give the children their first education. When she teaches her young child to talk she is training him in language; when she teaches him to count, she is giving him first lessons in mathematics; when she tells him the names and habits of domestic animals, she is teaching him zoology; when she teaches the use of the hands and the feet, she is teaching physiology …since the stream can rise no higher than its source, so the mother must play an important part in the progress of the race. (1908, pp. 127-128).

These writings illustrated the duality of the role black women played both in and outside of the home. For these wives and mothers, their devotion to their families and the work they did within the home was balanced with the work they performed outside of the home and in the community. However, the idea of true womanhood and its narrow definition of femininity was still espoused by middle class black women, often members of black women's social clubs

(Boris, 1989). Most black women were not in the position to fully emulate that ideal of womanhood due to economic realities (Harley, 1990).

In her study of middle class black ideals of womanhood, Shirley Carlson discusses what she calls the “Black Victoria”, or the African American version of the ideal of womanhood. The Black Victoria was virtuous, modest, and attractive, taking as much care of her home as she did her appearance. Additionally, she was socially involved, attending teas and lunches, as well as various church functions (Carlson, 1992, pp. 61-62). However, the Black Victoria diverged from the white ideal in that she was well educated, racially conscious, confident, and outspoken, all traits which were valued and supported in her community (1992, p. 62).

Rigid gender ideals about black wives were also espoused by middle class black men, who disseminated their thoughts via church pulpits, bylaws of black organizations, and newspaper articles (Horton, 1986, p. 55). Black husbands and wives had clear, defined roles; men were protectors, providers, and leaders, and women were nurturers who were to gently guide their husbands, taking care not to nag (1986, pp. 55-56).

White activist Betty Friedan was one of the most vocal critics of the idea of true womanhood and the demands men placed on women. Friedan authored the groundbreaking novel *The Feminine Mystique*, which asked the question “Is this all?” She challenged the idea that (white) suburban women had found true fulfillment through their concern with and devotion to their husbands, their children, and their homes. She also discussed the quiet desperation these (white) suburban housewives felt, feeling trapped and upset but never understanding why (Friedan, 1963).

Although *Mystique* was credited for starting a revolution among (white) women, it was missing a valuable racial component which would have made it relevant for all women, not just

married, upper middle class white women. Friedan, like many critics of the cult of domesticity (Sanchez-Eppler, 1992; Lerner, 1969; Welter, 1966), did not consider black wives and mothers and their perceptions of domestic and paid work. bell hooks critiqued these writers and discussed the reasons black women did not necessarily feel oppressed by domesticity the way white women did:

> Had black women voiced their views on motherhood, it would not have been named a serious obstacle to our freedom as women. Racism, availability of jobs, lack of skills or education and a number of other issues would have been at the top of the list – but not motherhood. Black women would not have said motherhood prevented us from entering the world of paid work because we have always worked. (1984, p. 133)

In essence, black women had a different orientation to motherhood and the feminine ideal than did white women. While middle class black women may have embraced the ideal in some ways, they redefined it to suit themselves and the needs of their families and communities.

Black women, irrespective of class, strongly believe in training up a child and instilling the values of "honesty, happiness, obedience to parents, and a good education" (Kamii & Radin, 1967, p. 306). Additionally, Black mothers generally feel that they have unique challenges that their white counterparts do not have (Crowley & Curenton, 2011), such as preparing their children for the realities of racial prejudice and discrimination (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2008).

Doing well in school and being respectful and obedient are also important values that they feel must be imparted in their children (Hill & Sprague, 1999). Teaching their children about their history and instilling racial pride are also important responsibilities for black women (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2009). Additionally, black parents place greater importance on

self-sufficiency and independence than do parents of other races (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002).

In spite of these cultural values, black mothers, particularly those from less affluent backgrounds, often face judgment of their parenting skills and are seen as inferior to white mothers (Sawyer, 1999; Hunter, King, & Boburka, 2008.) However, a study of black mothers in the United States found that the majority of them reported being very satisfied with their roles as mothers and with their relationships with their children (Ball, 1984).

These findings underscore the need for a research that acknowledges the unique and peculiar history of black women and the ways in which they define their roles as wives and mothers.

The Roots of Black Women's Labor Force Participation

Black women were forced to work from the moment they set foot on the shores of the New World. However, according to Eleanor Smith, the legacy of work did not begin in America. Rather, African women on the continent participated in farming tasks alongside the men. Furthermore, African women took to the marketplace to make deals and sell wares. When they were forced to come to the New World, Smith argues that these women brought with them their skills and abilities (1985).

As slavery was imposed on them, African women began to use their talents to perform various tasks in a diverse array of venues; women farmed, cultivated tobacco, prepared meals, acted as midwives during childbirth, created homeopathic remedies for diseases, and worked in industry doing mining, foundry work, and wool milling (Stephenson, 2007). Most free African women worked in a domestic capacity as seamstresses and washerwomen (Campbell, Miers, & Miller, 2005; Smith, 1985).

White women began to enter the workforce in 1830, at which time black female factory workers were often displaced. However, black women still found ways to work, often educating themselves and acting as teachers in their communities (Smith, 1985, p. 346). In 1890, approximately 976,000 black women were employed. Thirty-eight percent worked in agriculture, 31% worked as servants, 16% as washerwomen, and 3% in manufacturing jobs. By 1900, 41% of all black women worked while only 16% of all white women worked (Smith, 1985, p. 347).

The 1920s were marked by a period of massive migration by blacks to the North. Most black men took factory jobs, but most working black women were still relegated to the domestic sphere, which included cleaning the homes of white families (Moses, 1985). For those who did enter the industry, race and gender discrimination made for poor working conditions. Black women made the lowest salaries and worked in the dirtiest areas. Despite these conditions, black women, unlike white women, tended to remain employed even after marrying and starting families (1985). In the 1940s, during World War II, black men and women saw an employment boon as shipyards and ammunition factories needed more workers. Once the war ended and white men returned, however, black men and women lost their jobs (Sundstrom, 1992). Labor force participation for black men declined more sharply than that of black women (Sundstrom, 2001).

By the 1960s, labor force participation for black and white women, particularly married women, rose sharply (Fosu, 1995). For both black and white women, participation increased by 25% from the decade before. However, white wives' rates were still 10% lower than those of black wives, 29.6% to 40.8%, respectively (1995, p. 45).

In 1980, the participation rate for white wives was 49% and the rate for black wives was 59%. By 1988, those rates had risen to 55% and 65.1%, respectively (1995, p. 45). In the 1990s,

black women actually had slightly lower labor force participation rates than white women for the first time in history (Browne, 1997), but by 2004, the gap had closed almost completely, with white women's rates at 74% and black women's rates at 75% (Chinhui & Potter, 2006). The researchers posited that this gap closed due to married white women, who had previously been involved in more traditional marital arrangements, making the decision to work outside the home.

In spite of the similar labor force participation rates between black and white women in 2004, the gap persisted among married women with young children. By 2005, 65% of black mothers and 58% of white mothers were employed outside of the home (Cohany, & Sok, 2007). This means almost half of white mothers of small children remained in the home, while only 35% of black mothers of small children remained at home. These findings are consistent with previous research which found that black women have more favorable attitudes towards returning to work after childbirth than do their white counterparts (Bridges & Etaugh, 1994; Granrose & Cunningham, 1988). One study found that black women exited the labor force at higher rates than white women, but the reasons were due to layoffs and cycles in seasonal employment, not due to pregnancy or childbirth (Reid, 2002). However, research also indicates that black women re-enter the workforce at a faster rate than both white and Hispanic women (Hiromi & Rachel, 2002; Yoon & Waite, 1994).

When discussing the decision to work outside the home, it is important to acknowledge that for black families, the decision is complicated and based on several different factors. Financial difficulties often necessitated that black women continue to work outside of the home (Hunter, 2001). This trend continued throughout history, as black wives have felt the need to supplement their husbands' incomes in order to maintain a certain standard of living for their

families (Bell, 1990). Furthermore, black women value independence and autonomy (Buzzanell, Waymer, Paz Tagle, & Liu, 2007), and the gender role ideology of the black family supports multiple role performance among black wives and mothers (Reynolds, 2001). Finally, the findings of a 2008 study of black and white women suggest that black women may not see staying at home as an option. When asked about work and family options, the white participants discussed making the decision between working outside of the home and staying home with their children, while all but two of the black participants did not discuss decision making at all. Rather, working outside of the home was considered a given in their lives (Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008).

Research has indicated that black women who engage in multiple role performance, such as fulfilling responsibilities in their families, careers, and communities, receive optimal mental health benefits, which then lead to physical health benefits (Black, Murry, Cutrona, & Chen, 2009; Thomas, 1990). Additionally, black women who are employed report higher family-life satisfaction (Broman, 1991) and have lower mortality rates than black women who are employed (Rose et al., 2002).

Where, then, do black stay-at-home mothers fit? What we know about stay-at-home mothering can only be gleaned from studies that engaged white female participants. These studies produced findings that are not necessarily consistent with the attitudes and expectations of black families.

For example, a 1995 study by Ganong and Coleman found that most Americans expect women to stay at home and take care of their children. This idea does not apply to most black Americans, as they typically expect and socialize black women to go to college, then enter the workforce, regardless of whether or not they have children (Giele, 2008). Other studies found

that participants held negative views about working mothers and stay-at-home fathers because the two groups did not fit into the stereotypical ideal of the traditional parent (Ades, 2004; Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005).

Study participants also rated stay-at-home mothers higher than working mothers on measures of quality of care of their children (Sphancer, Melick, Sayre, & Spivey, 2006). Additionally, fathers were expected to be the primary breadwinner (Riggs, 1997).

Data from a 2000 study of stay-at-home mothers yielded several pertinent themes (Zimmerman, 2000). First, the researcher found that stay-at-home mothers reported higher levels tiredness than did their working counterparts. Second, the majority reported high marital satisfaction. Third, most felt that society did not value their role. Fourth, their decisions to stay at home were influenced by religion and their families. Lastly, most expressed the desire to stay at home long-term.

The sample populations for these studies were primarily white American, so these findings cannot be generalized to all ethnic groups, and certainly not to black Americans. Dade and Sloan (2000) argue that it is important to establish norms in the black community before making comparisons to white Americans. Additionally, they recommend that researchers and social scientists must use the African American perspective as a basis for any theoretical findings. This study builds upon these foundational ideas by first differentiating between African American and white American attitudes towards work and labor force participation, then centering black women's perspectives.

Social Support

Research suggests that social support moderates the effects of stress (Cobb, 1976), providing a buffer against various ailments, including illness and anxiety (Schwarzer, & Leppin,

1991). Social support for parents moderates the effects of stress on the quality of parenting provided (DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008). For example, a study of divorced mothers found that higher levels of confidant support were associated with better parenting (DeGarmo & Forgatch, 1997). Additionally, some studies have found that the combined effects of spousal support and social support from family and friends are associated with higher levels of affection and sensitive care in mothers towards their children (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar, 2005; Belsky, 1990).

For black women with children, support systems are vitally important to their success as parents (Jenkins, 2005), with African American mothers being more likely to receive support from family members than white mothers (Hill, 1999), particularly when their children are sick and in need of care (Benin & Keith, 1995). This kinship support is a common characteristic among African American families, and creates a buffering affect against the pain and stress caused by racial discrimination (St. Jean & Feagin, 1998). Research also indicates that women with strong and extensive support networks are more likely to be employed full-time outside of the home (Jennifer, Jennifer, & Elisa Jayne, 1999).

There are racial differences in the nature of kinship support; black families were found to be more likely to provide hands-on support, such as transportation and child care, while white families were more likely to provide financial support (Hofferth, 1984; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). There are also disparities in the type of support given within black families. A 1994 study found that 80% of a sample of black mothers reported receiving emotional support from their families, but only 20% of the sample reported receiving financial assistance (Jayakody, Chatters, & Taylor, 1993).

Support for black mothers can also exist outside of family and kinship networks. A previous study on members of Mocha Moms, Inc. found that the organization was a great source of social support, giving the members a space where they could de-stress, network with one another, and commiserate about any challenges they faced as mothers of color. Additionally, Mocha Moms gave them the opportunity to have their children socialize with other black children (Crowley & Curenton, 2011).

This study of members of Mocha Moms, Inc. fills a gap in the research on social support networks for black mothers.

Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the literature on the black family, black womanhood, black women's labor force participation, and social support. The next chapter presents the methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The general purpose of this study was to understand the factors which influence black women's choice to stay at home with their children, to examine the ways in which black stay-at-home mothers perceive themselves and feel they are perceived by others, and to understand the role of social support networks in their lives. This chapter addresses the characteristics of the chosen qualitative research design for this study, and discusses why it was the most appropriate design. Second, this chapter provides a discussion of the sample selection criteria. Next, this chapter includes a discussion of the chosen data collection strategies. The method of data analysis is also discussed in this chapter. Finally, this chapter addresses reliability, validity, researcher bias, and assumptions.

The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What factors influence black stay-at-home moms' decision to leave the workforce and not go back to work?
2. What are black stay-at-home moms' perceptions of their roles?
3. What are their perceptions of the way they are viewed by others?
4. What kind of support do they receive from Mocha Moms, Inc.?

Design of the Study

There is an abundance of research on the black family which focuses primarily on problems or disadvantages. For example, single motherhood and declining marriage rates are common topics. I was unable to find current literature on black motherhood which did not focus

on pathology. Additionally, I was not able to find literature on black stay-at-home mothers. Most of the literature on mothers and employment that is cited in this study utilizes quantitative data and only provides statistics on black mothers in the labor force.

Qualitative methodology provides the most suitable research method for this study on understanding the experiences and perceptions of black stay-at-home mothers who are members of Mocha Moms, Inc. According to Creswell, a qualitative approach to inquiry employs a collection of data in a natural setting, which is sensitive to the participants in the study. Furthermore, data analysis establishes patterns and themes, which then leads to a report which accurately represents the voices of the participants and augments the literature (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

Creswell, along with several other researchers (Eisner, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 1990) cites several common characteristics of qualitative research:

1. Natural setting is the source of all data collected; emphasis on the field
2. Researcher is the key instrument of data collection
3. Words and/or images serve as the data collected by the researcher
4. Data is analyzed inductively
5. Participants' perspectives are centered
6. The use of expressive language
7. Human behaviors and beliefs are oriented within the broader socio-political and historical contexts
8. Holistic perspective on observed phenomena

This study employed several of the characteristics. I was the key instrument of data collection, and the participants' words served as the data I collected. Further, the participants'

perspectives were central to the study and I allowed their responses to guide the flow of the data collection process. This study also acknowledges that the participants' behaviors and beliefs are firmly grounded in their socio-historical context as black women in America.

As a black woman who is married with children, and as a mother who left the labor force in order to stay at home with her children, I have had very similar experiences to those of the target sample population. As such, I have a vested interest in ensuring that these stories are told. Further, as a researcher of color, I recognize the importance of utilizing a research method that will enable me to observe the population in the context of their social support network. It is also important for me to allow black women to tell their stories in their own words.

Population, Sampling and Data Collection Procedures and Rationale

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), purposeful and theoretical sampling is used in qualitative research in order to obtain information from participants who are most knowledgeable about the central research topic and are able to provide data that answers the research questions that guide the study.

As such, all of the participants who were recruited for the study were black current or former stay-at-home moms. The majority of the participants who were recruited for the study were members of Mocha Moms, Inc. Members of Mocha Moms were be solicited because they have the experience of staying home with their children and of receiving social support from an organization.

Twelve women who met the following criteria were interviewed for the study:

1) Identified as black (ethnicity was not a factor)
2) Had at least one child who lives in the home

3) Stayed at home with their children either full or part-time

The first wave of interview participants was solicited via contact with a metro Atlanta Mocha Moms chapter president. We corresponded via e-mail in January of 2012 and I was invited to a support meeting. At the meeting, I obtained contact information from all interested parties. I contacted them via email, then via telephone. After speaking with the interested parties via telephone, I created a list of those who would be willing to participate in one on one interviews. Two members were subsequently interviewed. The first participant suggested that we do the interview over lunch at Atlanta Bread Company. This idea proved popular with other participants so eleven of the interviews took place in either Atlanta Bread Company or Panera Bread cafes.

The second wave of interview participants was solicited via contact with a second metro Atlanta Mocha Moms chapter. One participant expressed interest and was interviewed. The president then invited me to a support meeting, at which time I conducted one interview and scheduled another. The last interview was conducted the following week.

The third wave of interview participants was solicited via a gatekeeper who put me in contact with the president of a Maryland chapter of Mocha Moms. I travelled to the area and interviewed six participants over a two-day period.

The final interview participant was not a member of Mocha Moms and was solicited via word of mouth. I met with her in her home and conducted the interview there.

The findings of this study are not intended to be generalizable to an entire population. Rather, the purpose of the in-depth interviews was to understand the lived experiences of the

participants in the study, and to find common themes. Additionally, the study did not test a hypothesis and therefore did not rely on a large sample (Dworkin, 2012).

Procedures

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with twelve participants in Atlanta and Maryland. Each interview was audio recorded. I chose interviews for my data collection method because they "provide in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic" (Turner, 2010, p. 754).

Basic demographic information was collected prior to the interview via a pre-screening form. Information such as age, race, education level, household income, and number of children was collected. Interview data were collected using an interview guide consisting of generalized open-ended questions. Each participant was asked the same general questions, but the open-ended nature of the questions allowed them to elaborate and fully express their thoughts and feelings (Turner, 2010).

The questions in the interview protocol were first tested in a pilot study, which was conducted in March of 2012. According to van Teijlingen and Hundley, "one of the advantages of conducting a pilot study is that it might give advance warning about where the main research project could fail, where research protocols may not be followed, or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated" (van Teijlingen,& Hundley, 2001, p. 1). I employed this method in order to determine which interview questions would provide the best and most consistent data in order to answer the research questions which guide the study.

Three members of an Atlanta area chapter of Mocha Moms, Inc. participated in one-on-one interviews. The pilot protocol consisted of 25 questions. The interviews were audio

recorded, then transcribed, analyzed, and coded for emerging themes. Using these themes as a guide, I created a more in-depth protocol.

The interview questions focused on participants' experiences as stay-at-home moms and as members of Mocha Moms. Particular attention was paid to the participants' perceptions of their roles as stay-at-home mothers and of the way they feel they are viewed by the black community and society at large. Although the questions served as a guide for the interview, participants were encouraged to speak freely and elaborate.

Interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim and uploaded to Dedoose, an online research analysis tool. In Vivo coding was used for first cycle coding in order to honor the culture and language of this group of women by using their words to understand their perspectives (Saldana, 2009, p. 74). Focused coding was utilized for second cycle coding in order to further analyze the data and develop themes. Focused coding was selected because it enables the researcher to use their constructed codes in order to compare other participants' data for transferability (Saldana, 2009, p. 158).

Validity

It is important for the researcher to address validity in qualitative inquiry, as this will ensure that the reader is getting an accurate representation of the data (Creswell, 2007, p. 202). In order to ensure validity, I sent copies of the transcripts to some participants in order to clarify certain points and ensure that their ideas were articulated properly. This step was taken to ensure that the data accurately represented their thoughts and feelings. I have clarified my biases and assumptions so that the reader understands my orientation to the data and the ways in which that may impact the inquiry (Creswell, 2007, p. 208).

Finlay asserts that reflexive analysis must be applied during the research process in order to acknowledge the ways in which the researcher's interpretation and understanding of the data are imposed during each stage of research (Finlay, 2002, p. 536). My biases were documented in the introduction at the beginning of this document. This section included my previous personal experience with the subject matter, my prejudices, assumptions, and any other ideas I held which may have shaped the way I approached the study and interpreted the data. Furthermore, I wrote down all personal thoughts and feelings I had during the research process. These notes were kept separate from the interview data. Reflecting on this information helped illuminate biases that were not apparent to me at the outset of the research process.

Summary

This chapter included a discussion on the design of the study, which consisted of the population, sampling and data collection procedures and rationale. Analysis of the data and validity were also addressed. The next chapter includes the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors which influence black women's choice to stay at home with their children, to examine the ways in which black stay-at-home mothers perceive themselves and feel they are perceived by others, and to understand the role of social support networks in their lives. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What factors influence black stay-at-home moms' decision to leave the workforce and not go back to work?
2. What are black stay-at-home moms' perceptions of their roles?
3. What are their perceptions of the way they are viewed by others?
4. What kind of support do they receive from Mocha Moms, Inc.?

This study utilized a qualitative design and was conducted between March 2012 and February 2013. During this time black women were recruited from Mocha Moms, Inc. I solicited participants via emails to various Mocha Moms chapters. I was subsequently contacted by officers of interested chapters and invited to call or meet with interested current or former members. One participant who was not a member of Mocha Moms was solicited via word of mouth.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted in Georgia and Maryland. Eleven interviews took place at restaurants and one interview took place in the participants' home. I had initially planned to conduct interviews at the participants' homes, but when I contacted Michelle, the first mother I interviewed, she suggested that we sit down and talk over lunch. This

arrangement proved to be very popular among the remaining participants. Ten more interviews took place at either Atlanta Bread Company or Panera Bread. My interview with Lisa took place in her home due to transportation concerns. Several of the participants brought their children along to the interviews.

Each participant filled out a consent form and demographic sheet. All interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. A total of 12 participants were interviewed for the study. All 12 interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

This chapter has four sections. The first presents individual profiles of participants. Pseudonyms were used in order to keep their true identities confidential. The second section presents data from the individual interviews to support the categories and properties. The third section presents observation data. The final section provides a summary of the chapter.

The Participants

Twelve black mothers from two states participated in this study. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 50 years. Nine participants were married, one was divorced, one was widowed, and one was never married. All identified as black/African American. Every participant was college educated; two participants attended college but did not finish. The rest had obtained Bachelor's degrees or higher.

The average age of the participants was 38. The participants have been married for an average of 12 years. All indicated that their mothers worked when they were younger. All twelve participants breastfed their children, and the average duration of the breastfeeding was one year. None of the participants live in apartments; all live in either houses or townhouses. Table 4.1 contains demographic information for each participant.

Table 4.1 Interview Participants

Name	Age	Education	Prior Occupation	Household Income/yr	Husband's Occupation	# Children
Michelle	39	Some College	Electrician	Under $30,000	N/A	3
Debra	37	Bachelor's	N/A	N/A	Marketing	3
Janelle	48	Bachelor's	QA specialist	Over $100,000	Software Engineer	1
Kim	34	Bachelor's	N/A	Over $100,000	Supply Quality Engineer	3
Nicole	45	JD	Lawyer	Over $100,000	Doctor	3
Monica	50	Bachelor's	Management	N/A	Law Enforcement	3
Maya	29	Master's	IT Constultant	Over $100,000	N/A	2
Lisa	22	Some College	Receptionist	N/A	N/A	1
Yolanda	43	Master's	Educator	Over $100,000	Consultant	2
Evelyn	47	Bachelor's	Journalist	Over $100,000	Attorney	2
Renee	44	Bachelor's	Software Developer	Over $100,000	Video Editor	2
Tasha	34	Bachelor's	N/A	$75,000 to $100,000	Engineer	1

Below is a detailed description of the individual interview participants.

Michelle. Michelle is a 39 year old divorced single mom of three boys, ages 17, 13, and 5. Michelle attended college but did not complete it. She has been married twice. She and her second husband, who held a bachelor's degree, made "good money" doing electrical work, but she decided to stop working mostly for health reasons. She enjoys staying home with her boys and does not miss working every day. After the divorce, Michelle began to work part-time and currently makes less than $30,000 per year. She has been a member of Mocha Moms for three years.

Debra. Debra is 37 years old. She has been married to her husband for ten years. Debra has a bachelor's degree and her husband attended college but did not finish. Her husband works in marketing. They have a son and two daughters, ages three, five, and eight, respectively. Debra has been a Mocha Mom for approximately seven years.

Janelle. Janelle is a 48 year old mom of a six year old son. She has been married to her husband for 9 years. Both Janelle and her husband hold bachelor's degrees, and the latter earns over $100,000 a year as a software engineer. Janelle worked as a Quality Assurance Specialist for 16 years before being laid off. She decided not to go back to work when her son was born. She has been a Mocha Mom for six years.

Kim. Kim is 34 years old. She's been married to her husband, an engineer, for 10 years. The couple has three daughters, ages 11, 9, and 6. Both Kim and her husband have bachelor's degrees. Kim's husband earns over $100,000 at his job. Kim has been a Mocha Mom for six years.

Nicole. Nicole is 45 years old. She and her husband have been married for 22 years. They have a son and two daughters, ages 19, 12, and 8, respectively. Both Nicole and her husband have advanced degrees; Nicole holds a JD and works part-time as an attorney while her husband works as a physician. Their combined household income exceeds $100,000 per year. Nicole has been a Mocha Mom for over 10 years.

Monica. Monica is a 50 year old mom to two sons and a daughter. Her children are 29, 25, and 8 years old. Monica has been married for 26 years. Monica has a bachelor's degree and worked in management for ten years before deciding to stay at home. Her husband works in law

enforcement. Monica was a member of Mocha Moms for 8 years. She is not currently active in the organization.

Maya. Maya is a 29 year old mom of two daughters, ages 2 and 4. Maya was married for three years before her husband passed away. She has a master's degree and earns over $100,000 working as a consultant. Maya was a member of Mocha Moms for a year but is no longer active.

Lisa. Lisa is a 22 year old mom to a one year old daughter. Lisa has never been married but has support from her family and the family of her daughter's father. Lisa attended college but did not finish. She worked as a nurse receptionist for a family practice before being laid off. She lives with her mother and now stays at home with her daughter full-time. Lisa has never been a member of Mocha Moms.

Yolanda. Yolanda is 43 years old. She has been married for 11 years. Both Yolanda and her husband hold master's degrees. The latter earns over $100,000 per year working as a consultant. Prior to leaving the workforce, Yolanda worked as an educator for 14 years. The couple has two sons, ages 7 and 9. Yolanda has been a Mocha Mom for 7 years.

Evelyn. Evelyn is 37 years old and has been married for 13 years. She holds a bachelor's degree. Her husband has a JD and earns over $100,000 a year as a practicing attorney. The couple has a daughter and a son, ages 6 and 9. Prior to staying at home with her children, Evelyn worked as a journalist for six years. She has been a Mocha Mom for six years.

Renee. Renee is a 44 year old mother of a son and daughter, ages 9 and 6. She has been married for 9 years. Both Renee and her husband have bachelor's degrees; the latter earns over $100,000 a year working as an editor for a news station. Renee worked for 13 years as a software developer before staying at home with her children. She has been a Mocha Mom for 8 years.

Tasha. Tasha is 34 years old. She has been married for 8 years. She and her husband have bachelor's degrees. Tasha's husband earns between $75,000 and $100,000 per year as an engineer. They have a two year old daughter together. Tasha has been a member of Mocha Moms for a little over a year.

Overview of the Properties and Categories

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors which influence black women's choice to stay at home with their children, to examine the ways in which black stay-at-home mothers perceive themselves and feel they are perceived by others, and to understand the role of social support networks in their lives.

Data analysis revealed several themes and subthemes. Concerning influences on their decision to first leave the workforce and then to stay at home indefinitely, two themes emerged. Participants' did not aspire to stay at home with their children. However, once they were home, they felt satisfied and happy with their decisions.

Influences

In order to understand the factors that influenced participants' initial choice to leave the workforce and their decision to stay at home indefinitely, I asked a number of questions regarding the process by which they decided to stay at home, their husband's role in the decision making process, and their level of happiness with their decision. Participants' responses centered around two distinct themes: Participants did not Aspire to Stay Home and Participants Expressed Satisfaction and Happiness with their Decision.

Table 4.2 Properties and Categories

Research Questions	Properties and Categories
What factors influence black stay-at-home moms' decision to 1) leave the workforce and 2) not return to work?	Participants did not aspire to stay home • Left Work for Practical Reasons Satisfaction and Happiness
What are black stay-at-home moms' perceptions of their roles?	Rejected Stereotypes (not June Cleaver) Educators
What are their perceptions of the way they are viewed by others?	Not Respected Invisible/Rare A Luxury/Something Others Do
What role does social support, via Mocha Moms, play in the lives of black stay-at-home moms?	Support is a Need • Someone to relate to • Family/Friends Far away Mocha Moms is Beneficial • Mental/Emotional Support • Networks/Resources

"My company sort of went under"

Most participants indicated that they exited the workforce due to practical reasons. Only two participants, Evelyn and Tasha, reported wanting to stay at home prior to having children. The remaining participants expressed that they had not thought about staying home until the children were born, and their responses indicated that they had practical reasons for leaving their jobs. Comments from Janelle, a 48-year-old former Quality Assurance Specialist, aptly reflect participants' pragmatic decision making:

> At the time that I was still working, they were going through layoffs at my particular job, and I was pretty much burned out at that job anyway, and I was thinking about doing a career change, so I was actually happy when I got laid off, like finally. And um, after that I just collected my package you know, and just enjoyed my retirement. And then I went back to work um, for my church as the secretary for a while just to have something to do, and then when I got pregnant, my husband was like well, you know if you don't wanna go back to work, that's fine and I'm like ok.

Lisa, a 22 year old former nurse receptionist, also reported losing her job and subsequently deciding to stay at home with her daughter. She said:

> Well, I lost my job because the doctor felt like I kept taking off any time [my daughter] had a medical reason but she has asthma. And so once I lost my job, 10 days later, I lost the daycare. But I'm actually kind of glad that we're at home together, getting more time with her.

Like Lisa, Evelyn, a former journalist, discussed her decision to stay at home in the context of job loss. As noted previously, Evelyn reported having the desire to stay at home prior to having children. However, she said:

> I was working as a journalist at the time that I got pregnant, and specifically working for a smaller company because they allowed their contractor -- they allowed people to, if they did have babies to go and become a contractor, and then you could just work from home, so for me, it was good, because I would still be able to work and then earn money, but I wouldn't have to leave the house, so... now that I'm not working at home, because

> my company sort of went under that I had been working for. They sort of fell apart... I was in a field that is like slowly dying. Newspapers are dying...

Other participants cited physical or mental distress as influences in their decision making process.

> I left the workforce when I thought I was pregnant and that was it. I actually had miscarried the year before and so I felt like a lot of it was due to the stress from working and I loved my job but it was stressful and so I felt like I didn't want to take any chances. We were just going to lay low and it turned out to be a very good decision because I had a rough pregnancy, so -- but wonderful delivery and it was good. I have never ever regretted that decision, it's one of the best I've made. (Tasha)

For Yolanda, physical distress from pregnancy and emotional stress from the death of her father served as the impetuses behind her decision to leave the workforce:

> When I got pregnant with our second child, right before -- actually, when I found out I was pregnant, I ended up -- I had hyperemesis[3], so I had a challenging pregnancy. I ended up in the hospital and the day of my -- that I got checked out of the hospital, my father died. And I think for me that was like a real reflection, because he was very focused on family, and you know the priority for him was you always put family first, and so when that happened, we really went very introspective about where our priorities were.

[3] Hyperemesis is a medical condition that occurs during pregnancy. It is characterized by severe nausea, vomiting, and weight loss.

Monica decided to stay at home in order to keep a close watch on her teenaged daughter, who had begun to get into trouble. She was being called to the school on a regular basis and decided it would be better for everyone if she devoted her time to her daughter. She stated:

> What happened was at that time, our daughter, who was 16 at the time was in high...and I always tell people it's more important to be aware of what your kids are doing when they're in high school than it is when they're little...And because she was at that age and the peer pressure was getting to her, so she was doing thing she wasn't supposed to be doing and everything, and my husband was in law enforcement, where it was to the point, she knew what she was doing, but the pressure always came on me. You know, because he was at work, I was the one always being called to come up to the school. So it finally came to a decision where I said, we both are working on this together as parents, but it's affecting me more than him. And so I need to do something

Finally, Debra reported being influenced by financial factors, saying "I wasn't making any money anyway in the work force, so it was like, I don't have anything to lose. I mean, I was working, but it wasn't substantial enough that it was going to put me in -- oh, gosh, in a financial strain." Evelyn also mentioned finances in a subsequent conversation, saying "...you know, in some places, in some situations, staying at home may financially just make sense, because at some point, you are working to pay for daycare."

"Now I have a lot more energy"

The participants overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with their decision to stay at home with their children and cited various factors which reinforced their decision. This idea was most apparent in comments such as Janelle's, who said "It's always some laundry or something

wrong as far as the house, so I imagine if I did have to work 10, 12 hours a day...the house would be a total pigsty." She then went on to discuss her son, saying:

> My child has...I would just say a special need, and I would not have been able to get him the, the resources and the help that he needs to thrive if I had been working. Well, look at it this way....I would have done what I had to do if I had been working but it would have been much, much more difficult, and much much more stressful...So the fact that I was able to stay home with him and concentrate fully on him and give him what he needs, that's benefitted him greatly.

Lisa, the one participant who is currently looking for employment, also expressed satisfaction with her choice, saying:

> My mom, she feels like it was actually kind of a good thing for right now because usually when I used to come home from work, I was tired and I would feed her and be ready to go to bed. Now I have a lot more energy, I'm more patient with her because my patience wasn't where it should be.

Evelyn also made reference to mental health, saying "I think I'm less stressed now than when I was working." When asked if she is happier now than when she was working, Kim said "I would say now, because when I was working I was so stressed out. I was very stressed out when I was at work -- when I worked." Yolanda also referenced happiness when she stated:

> I'm a perfectionist, so when I worked, I put all of my energy in that, and I put energy into my family, but that left very little for me, so my happiness wasn't even defined in the mix. If I could work as good and the children are okay, and my husband is okay then I'm

fine. But now that I am home, I find that I'm less stressed about things, much more flexible, and that makes me happy.

The participants' responses indicated that their decisions were influenced by practical factors, rather than a preconceived desire to stay at home. In other words, they did not have previous aspirations to stay at home. Once they were home, their satisfaction and happiness with their decisions reinforced for them that they had made the right choice and precluded them from returning to the workforce.

Perceptions of Themselves

In order to understand the participants' perceptions of themselves and their roles, I asked questions regarding the way they define stay-at-home mothering, their everyday experiences with at home mothering, and how they feel their role is beneficial to their families. Participants' responses centered around two distinct themes: the Participants Rejected Stereotypes about Black Stay-at-Home Moms, and They View Themselves as Educators.

We aren't June Cleaver

When discussing what the term "stay-at-home mom" means to them, the participants were not particularly invested in any rigid definition, and only one mentioned a male partner. I did not mention the definition of stay-at-home mom as defined by the Census Bureau[4] because I did not want to influence participants' answers. However, Nicole made a direct reference to the Census Bureau's definition in her response. She said:

[4] The United States Census Bureau defines stay-at-home mothers as those who have a husband who was in the labor force all 52 weeks last year, while she was out of the labor force during the same 52 weeks to care for the home and family (Census Bureau, 2009).

> We don't define staying at home as staying at home. It's self-defined. I define myself as an at-home mom even though the census bureau would never say I'm an at-home mom, because I drew a paycheck. But I consider myself an at-home mom, because I've made sacrifices and changes to my career in order to take time for my family.

Kim also defined the term for herself, saying "I think that's a mom who spends a majority of her time home taking care of her family."

Other participants expressed similar sentiments. Debra was hesitant to apply an exclusive label. She allowed for the possibility that a stay-at-home mom could also work, saying:

> I define it as raising children in a non-traditional way, less daycare, less childcare and more in an in-home, nurturing environment. So it doesn't mean exclusively I stay at home and don't work and don't do other things.

Similarly, Tasha discussed the idea of stay-at-home moms working part-time or having home-based businesses. She responded:

> It's a mother who has made the decision to spend time with their children full-time throughout the day. Not necessarily meaning that you don't work. There are moms...that do have part-time jobs or home-based businesses or home-based employment. I still think that you can be considered a stay-at-home mom doing those things.

Maya, who works at home one day per week, sees time with family as a key component of stay-at-home mothering. She stated:

> You can have a mom who stays at home, works with their kids. A mom who stays at home, shuffles off their kids and does side jobs, works, whether it's consulting or

> whatever. Has another business. It doesn't necessarily mean that they cook, clean and all that greatness, at least not in my opinion. It's a shared responsibility but as a whole, I think it's just that opportunity to spend more time with your family and being able to partake or participate more, in my case, for your kids' lives or the things that they're involved in.

Evelyn defined the term "stay-at-home mom" as "a mother who stays at home with her kids whether she, you know, works at home and does it or just is at home and stays with her children."

Monica had the most rigid definition of all of the participants. She was the only person to make a husband or lack of paycheck specific criteria for being a stay-at-home mom. She defined the term as "mothers that are not on anyone's payroll, but they're doing things to really manage the home, taking care of the children, taking care of the husband, taking care of whatever needs to be done at home."

Renee and Kim expressed reluctance to even identify with the term "stay-at-home mom." Kim said "even though I'm a stay-home mom, I think the term home-based mom is more accurate now, because I do things outside the home also." Renee stated:

> Stay-at-home mom. Actually I don't know anybody who is that, and I find it confusing. I very rarely use it except when I'm communicating just quickly to people who are not familiar with the job. I often use the term at-home mom just that my workplace is in the home, that's kind of what it means to me, and around the home.

Renee then went on to discuss the reason she was hesitant to identify with the term:

> Within our community, when you hear that term stay-at-home mom, and that probably is why most of us don't want to claim that, because of the association, the June Cleaver kind of association, which we absolutely aren't.

Lisa defined the term as "staying at home, handling the responsibilities in the home, taking care of the child and just -- that's about it." Although Lisa fits her own definition of what a stay-at-home mom is, she did not include herself when discussing stay-at-home moms, saying "I do commend those moms and they should be given much more credit." When I asked her if she considered herself one of "those moms", she said "I never really thought about it, but I mean, I am a stay-at-home mom now."

"I was an educational nazi"

When discussing their everyday experiences with stay-at-home mothering, the participants unanimously expressed concern for their children's education. I initially did not have specific questions about education in the interview protocol, but the theme emerged quickly in the participants' responses to the following prompt: "Describe for me a typical weekday." As such, I added a prompt that was specifically about education in subsequent interviews.

The responses indicated that participants perceived themselves to be the primary educators of their children. For the moms of young children, much of their day was spent teaching in some capacity. Renee felt very strongly about teaching her son to read early, stating:

> It was my purpose to make sure that they knew how to read before they were in kindergarten and do as much as I could to give them that kind of foundation... when you come into kindergarten, the stuff that they do, it's like if you can read, then you can just go faster, go further and if you can't, then you immediately are on a kind of track where

> you’re going to be behind some people. However, they don’t tell you that you need to read... if my kids are going to be in public school, in order to get them on a certain track, let me start them reading...

Kim, like Renee, discussed her role as an educator to her daughter, who has not started school yet. She stated:

> I was an educational Nazi with my first child. And then her teachers were like, you know you can back off a little bit. It's just Pre-K. It was like okay, but she knows her name. She can write her name. She can write her phone number, her address. This is going into Pre-K. This is four years old. So you know I worked with her just to make sure she had everything that she needed so there were work books and there were drills, and it's like slow down. So with my second child I didn't go as hard. And with my third child I didn't have to go as hard, because she is just like -- she's so bright, but we still practice, you know?

When discussing a typical weekday for her, Tasha described the activities she does with her preschool-aged daughter:

> I'm trying to homeschool my daughter so we do a lot of things that are, you could say education-based. We spend a lot of time at the library; she loves the library so we do several activities there. Mainly because it's convenient, it's free, it's also a process where she's able to see a lot of the same children at the same program that are about the same age. They have things that are geared towards kids her age, which is two years, and it also helps kind of add to my pseudo-curriculum of the home preschooling thing so we're able to do things, like on Tuesdays, there's Spanish hour at the library...And then also just the

> culture of the library, I grew up being around books all the time so that's something that I want her to experience as well. Music appreciation; she's had this love for music since she was a small infant and so we'll do things at home. Both her father and I play some form of instruments and so we do things at home, drums, keyboards, her recorder she loves.

Lisa, whose daughter recently turned one, also alluded to education in her response, saying "It's almost as much as having a day job. You have to get up early still. You basically – you have to entertain your child, you still have to almost have a curriculum for them." Later in her interview, Lisa talked about a disagreement she had with a friend of hers, and her story provided some explanation for her desire for a curriculum for her daughter. She said:

> One of my best friends, she felt, you know, a child doesn't really start learning until the age of one, where I felt no, they're learning from the time they come. So I mean, she – now her daughter is learning stuff because she's already one but I mean, we've clashed over that before. But at the end of the day, that's her child, I have my child.

I asked Lisa to elaborate on why education was so important to her personally, and she responded:

> Even though she's only one, education comes first. I'm really big on education... being African-American, we're a stereotype that is like, very uneducated, people doubt us as far as education comes, they don't see us as being able to pick up a book and writing. It's a lot of stuff, but education is very important. My mom got on us about education.

Maya, who works outside of the home four days per week, talked about why it was important to her to do educational activities when she is home with her daughters:

> To make sure that they're ahead of the curve, to make sure that they understand the next level. I'm always a forward, I look ahead, I'm not – yes, perform at your level, but I need you to be at least a half a step ahead of whatever that expectation is. So at home, to be able to reinforce that for myself, one, helps me with how they learn. Two, helps me figure out what they needed supplemental assistance on and I mean, just in general, it shows growth and progress. I just – I don't believe in the school system raising your child. They're just there, in my opinion, to help. A lot of it starts at home. Otherwise to me, you don't have that foundation or somebody working with you, you kind of just fall by whatever's going on in school and that may be subpar, that may be excellent.

Like Lisa, Maya referenced her minority status in her discussion of why education is so important to her:

> I never want my children below. I mean, nobody does, right? You always want your child to succeed. But especially, one, being a woman, that's already a strike. And then being a minority, that's another strike. So I want them to be able to know that hey, you're on top of your stuff, you know what you need to know.

Monica, who previously homeschooled her son, talked about finding educational activities that did not cost money:

> I'm big at not spending money on things, so I always found a lot of things that was going on that was free as far as museums or activities that would go on different places. We went there, he'd like it even more, so I would try to look up more stuff and I'm still like that now.

She went on to discuss what her days were like when her son was at home fulltime:

> My typical day for a school day was busy. It was a day of learning. Every day. And it would probably go from 8:00 to about 2:00 for the day, and we would stop for lunch, go outside, and we'd either take a walk around the neighborhood, or we would go to the park and play, so we did nature stuff also. I also taught him Spanish, so he was the first one to be accepted at his school that knew any Spanish at all, so I was happy about that.

Monica also shared with me that she had started a homeschool summer club for moms whose children weren't in camp during summer vacation. She plans educational activities for all of the children in the club. She described it as follows:

> Maybe on one day we're going to do just an art project, one of the moms loves to do art, so she'll do that and plan it and everything, and then we'll go to the park, have all the kids do that, or we'll go to a bank, see and learn everything about money, how the tellers take care of it, but how people go to the bank, deposit or withdraw. So we do that every year, so mainly like from March all the way to May I'll plan it...I'll have everything lined up. And we don't pay a penny for nothing.

Janelle, whose son is in school, expressed that she and her husband give her son extra educational activities on the days his school does not send homework home. She stated:

> What I do is, and this is where my husband came in; he would, he went out and bought all these, you know books you can get for supplemental education that you buy at the Schoolbox, like that have kids exercises and stuff like that. He bought all this stuff so there are days when my son doesn't have homework, what I will do is, I will get out one of those books and we'll go in and just do some worksheets and things like that. And then

> he loves science so I bought him some little science kits with experiments, you know. We'll do that.

For Yolanda, being physically present in her son's school is important. She described her days of homeschooling one son and then going to volunteer at her second son's school:

> I try to build in at least one or two field trips a week, because I wanted to have more hands on experience for him, and because of his learning style, he needs to be out and about and engaged with his learning, so that's what we do. And then, you know, towards the end of the day my youngest son, who is in school gets out at 3:40, so we're either go over and pick him up or at 4:30 his bus arrives, so we'll pick him up from the bus stop, but more recently, typically, I volunteer at my youngest son's school two to three days a week in their after school programs, so at about 3:30 we go over to my youngest son's school and we're there until about 5:30.

Renee discussed her personal feelings on parental involvement in the educational process:

> I think as they get older and you realize that okay, now the school system, whatever, whether it's public or private, is in control of – the influence that they have over their education and their future, you can't help but realize how important it is to be involved in that... There's so many ways that kids can slip through the cracks that unless you take an active role, you're leaving that up to somebody else. It was absolutely true that in terms of the parents have to be present in school, once they get to be school-aged, particularly in public schools and I would say private schools too. You know, with any kind of institutional school aside from home-school, the role – your child does do better when

> your parents take a very active role, visibly an active role. I mean, that's just been proven in all kinds of studies and over and over.

Like Lisa and Maya, Renee displayed racial awareness in her comments about education. She stated:

> And within our community, as achievements – as other cultures achieve more and there's this like whole achievement gap, it's just more important that we are there, parents, as parents in schools... It's like we're taught to go to school and get a job and so that's what we excel at, but then when you look at how well our schools and how well our kids are performing and how...when I first became a mother and I learned about the drop-out rates in our schools, it was like unbelievable. Black males dropping out, it was like who – how did this get to be this? I mean, the percentages were just crazy. I don't know what they are now but still, they still aren't where they should be. And it was like, who would allow something like that, where are – the people who should care most are parents and where are they? Why aren't they there? Are we not paying attention? How can we get to that point?

Debra indicated that she spends time at her daughters' school because "teachers are less likely to pull something with my kids, because they know I'm always at the school", while Kim simply enjoys spending time there. She said "I like being there for my kids. I like being, you know the room mom or the PTA chair mom, or -- I like being at the school, being in their classrooms." Nicole, who works part-time as an attorney, also spends time at her son's school. She stated "I'm also a room parent, so every week I'm in that school doing something, whether I'm helping in the science lab and the art class, something."

The participants' responses revealed two major themes. The respondents rejected stereotypes about what a stay-at-home mom is and did not see themselves as being members of an exclusive group with pre-defined parameters. Rather, their perception of themselves was largely self-defined. Additionally, the participants perceived themselves as educators of their children. This idea was peppered throughout their interviews and was central to the way they perceived their roles.

Perceived by Others

In order to examine the way participants felt they were perceived by others, I asked them questions regarding the way they feel stay-at-home mothering is viewed in the black community, the way black stay-at-home mothers are viewed by the black community, and the way black stay-at-home mothers are viewed by society. I stressed to the participants that there was no right or wrong answer; rather, I was looking for their opinions and perceptions. Participants' responses centered around three distinct themes: Lack of Respect, Invisibility, and Luxury.

"Just eating bon-bons all day"

Participants overwhelmingly indicated that they did not feel respected within the black community. Debra summed this up succinctly when she said, "I don't think the black community embraces it or respects it at all." Renee echoed Debra's sentiments when she said, "within our community, we don't value the work and most people are ignorant about what it takes to actually parent young children." Kim made a comparison between the black community and other groups:

> I think in certain groups being a stay-at-home mom is a more respected role and it's thought of more so as a -- it's seen more as a benefit to the child, as in, you know, Jenny

> gets to stay home with Bobby and he's doing so well in school now. You can really see the difference.

Nicole discussed her perception in the context of her parents' response to her decision to stay at home:

> My parents were like, 'are you crazy?' My father was like you 'have lost your mind? No reasonable Black woman in America would do what you're doing! You are not reachable. You are insane. Why would you do this? Why would you throw away all that education? Why would you do that? Why would you do that?'...staying at home, making the decision to either stay-at-home or work flex time or part time wasn't a very popular decision to the -- culturally, it's not popular...I'm an attorney, and a lot of degrees, lot of initials after my name and so it's not really a popular decision in my family for me to sort of take that aside and concentrate on a child, just child raising...my father said that anyone can do that. 'Anyone can raise a child. You need to write briefs and do what you're trained to do.'

Yolanda also received pushback from people in her life who could not understand why she would want to stay at home with her children:

> Even when I went back to the school where I taught, they were like 'why are you wasting your talent?' I mean that was the exact words of people, like "you're wasting your talent." I'm like how am I wasting my talent by supporting my own children versus a classroom of 30 children, you know? They didn't see that connection.

Kim's family also had problems with her staying at home and not using her bachelor's degree:

> At first, it was like ‘why are you staying home? You could be doing something better with your -- you could be working’, basically. ‘You know, you could be using that degree that cost you so much money.’ But yeah. They were ambivalent, not outright hostile, but they were not on board.

Evelyn’s comments were more broad; she discussed her perception of society’s views on stay-at-home mothering:

> I mean I think in general the nation has sort of a love hate with stay-at-home moms, sort of like oh we think it's really great to be a mother, but aren't you just kind of being -- why don't you go and work. It's kind of like, it's like they like it in theory, but they don't like it in practice.

She went on to talk about feeling somewhat self-conscious when socializing with other adults who she felt did not value what she does:

> I mean I think the times that you feel probably most self-conscious about being a stay-at-home mom is when you go to places with other adults and they're like “well what do you do?” and you really don't have -- you know, you go like “oh, I'm a mom.” And it's like, “well what is it you do?” They want a better answer than that, because they're -- you know, and that's just it. Because they feel like “well I'm a mom, too”, or “I'm a dad, too, but I'm out working all day.” I do other things, and so they want a better answer.

Renee also talked about what she perceived as a lack of respect for stay-at-home parenting. She believes other people think, “everybody is a mom, you know, and so everybody else can be a mom and do something else, why can’t you?” She then went on to say:

> You can't just say that being a mom, or full-time mom, that kind of can be a little divisive I guess. It's the truth, it is. It's not that – I mean, I guess that may seem divisive – yeah, because no one ever stops being a mom in those eight hours. But yeah, I don't – it just always seems like you have to defend yourself. And I think that it's that idea that being a mom – that there's nothing to it, you know, that you've got to do something else. It's that idea that can – is destructive I think in our community, to put so little emphasis on parenting and what that really takes.

For Yolanda, the perception is that others not only do not value stay-at-home moms, but they also think stay-at-home moms are lazy. She stated:

> Part of it, the majority of my friends, I was the first one to get married. I was the first one to have children. And so they really couldn't relate to what I was doing. And so it was like 'well what are you complaining about?', and 'you've got it easy. You get to stay at home', and – I said no, you're not eating bon-bons all day. And I think that they had that perception is that you watch soap operas and you eat bon-bons, you know?

Other participants shared similar insights. Lisa said, "I feel like, you know, a lot – to me, a lot of people think they're just staying at home because they don't want to work or they're living off of their husband's paycheck." Similarly, Debra feels that people see stay-at-home moms and think "you must be collecting food stamps and government support." Michelle echoed these sentiments:

> It's almost frowned upon, you know, like 'what are you doing at home all day?' And if it's not that then it's they thinking about, 'well what you doing, watchin' TV?' Or you know sometimes it be to the effect that when you at home not doing anything, being lazy,

house dirty, you not cooking, not cleaning [laughter]...you come home you got rollers in your hair.

Debra blamed media stereotypes for the negative perception of stay-at-home mothers; she believes when people think of stay-at-home moms, they think of women "from the 60s with stay-at-home moms, rollers in their hair, having dinner cooked, the house needs to be cleaned. So it's that kind of imagery that we see."

A few of the participants took a defensive stance in their comments. When speaking of her decision to work at home one day per week in order to spend more time with her children, Maya said "it was something that I know that I want and I know that I perform, so it's not like I'm at home drinking coffee and watching TV." Lisa stated "I mean, kids keep you busy. It's not just, 'oh, I'm sitting at home doing nothing.' I'm always busy and then my child is a busy-body." Lastly, Renee further discussed her reservations with the term "stay-at-home mom", saying "Well stay-at-home kind of suggests that you don't do anything, I mean that you stay there, and I think my role is more in parenting." This response suggests that she has a very specific perception of the term and wishes to distance herself from it.

"We don't exist"

When asked how society views black stay-at-home moms, Renee said "We don't exist. I don't think we do in society. Yeah, I would say we don't exist." This response accurately summed up the responses of the other participants who overwhelmingly indicated that they felt invisible.

Tasha echoed Debra's sentiments when she responded "It's probably not even a thought that crosses people's minds." Likewise, Nicole stated:

> They don't view us at all, and to the extent that they think of us as mothers who are not employed, we're welfare mothers...Black, at home moms, who are married with husbands who support us, we don't exist. In society we don't exist at all. Period. Black mothers who are mothers who don't work are welfare moms.

Debra described the reactions she has gotten from white people and her perception of their feelings about her:

> There were some times earlier in my stay-at-home mom days that a lot of us Black moms, stay-at-home moms would go out and white people would just automatically assume that our husbands were basketball players. Like they're just not use to Black moms not working.

Likewise, Tasha expressed concern about what others were thinking about her when she was out with her children:

> I wonder like when I come with my child, do you think I'm her nanny versus her mom when you see me with her at the library, because I'm not at -- you know, these are working hours and I'm not [at work].

Lisa also felt that society often overlooks black stay-at-moms in favor of other types of moms:

> I actually don’t think that society pays attention to those stay-at-home moms and they actually go unnoticed. You see more of the single mom or just both parents need to work to get by for the family and it’s actually not like that with a lot of families.

According to Kim, black stay-at-home moms have an inferior position in relation to their white counterparts. She said, “I just think that we're undervalued. We're not seen as -- we're kind of second class in the stay-at-home mom group, you know?”

Some of the participants also discussed their own feelings about the visibility of black stay-at-home moms. Yolanda said:

> We're invisible. We're invisible, definitely. I think until the presence of Mocha Moms, people didn't even know we existed...You know, unless you grew up in a neighborhood where you saw them, you didn't understand that to be an option. I know going to college, it never dawned on us that this was an option. ... You went to college to get your career, you know, if you met someone and had a husband you were a two income family and you were living the middle class life. And so I think society as a whole, we're completely invisible.

Similarly, Tasha discusses seeing white stay-at-home moms in California and being surprised at the number of black stay-at-home moms she saw when she moved to Maryland:

> ...You know, coming from California, I saw it a lot out there and I was surprised at the level that I see out here for all the ladies. And then you know, and then the more I see Black stay-at-home moms, I'm like oh, okay, like this isn't a -- necessarily an anomaly, whatever they call it.

“You must have a lot of money”

Participants indicated that they felt other people, particularly those in the black community, perceive staying at home to be a luxury, or something that *other* people do. For

example, Tasha said “I feel like that in our community, people feel like that is probably something that they can't afford to do and would like to.” Evelyn made a similar comment when she stated “I don't think it's viewed necessarily that well. I don't want to say that well. I think it's viewed as like a luxury as opposed to something that most parents are able to do.” Other participants made similar statements:

> Initially, it was definitely shunned upon. It was like ‘who do you think you are trying to be like? Them?’... It's more the economics of it that people were shunning. It was like either you're trying to live like someone else or ‘you really are sacrificing that to do this?’ (Yolanda)

> I think that that might be the perception for a lot of people, that Black women work and if you chose not to, it’s because you can afford not to, which means you must have a lot of money. And that’s not the case for most of us at Mocha Moms I would say, and I’m using that term just to describe most at-home moms I know. (Renee)

> I think it's becoming more acceptable but I do believe that there was this notion that, you know, you can't afford to stay at home with your children. You need to have, you know, make that sacrifice. (Tasha)

Renee went on to discuss how some people in her life see her role as a luxury and do not allow her to complain:

> Oh, I think most – they’re confused. I think our community thinks that we have a lot of money and we can just not work, that’s what it is. I think they think that we just are able to not work, that’s kind of how it's viewed...You can’t call your friend necessarily and talk about issues, you know, that – or just your day to day concerns. It seems that you

> cannot complain about anything because you have the luxury of being home doing nothing and so you are not worthy and therefore, you're in a privileged state so there's no need for support.

Tasha also discussed others' perspectives on the financial aspects:

> So something that others could -- they can do that and that's who predominantly we saw doing it, because you can be the stay-at-home mom if your husband has a six figure income and you can afford to be at home no matter how many children you have, you can stay at home with them and you have -- it's a luxury that isn't necessarily considered to be afforded in our community.

She went on to express her feelings on her ability to stay at home:

> I think that, like I said, society, I feel like kind of feels that being a stay-at-home mom is a luxury but there are trade-offs and so for some women, it is a huge sacrifice to be able to stay at home.

Participants' responses indicated that they feel stay-at-home mothering is not valued or respected. They also feel that black stay-at-home moms are invisible to society. Finally, they feel that other people see staying at home as a luxury or something that black women cannot afford to do.

Social Support

In order to understand the role social support plays in the participants' lives, I asked questions regarding the reasons they needed support, the reasons they sought out Mocha Moms,

and the benefits they derive from their membership. Participants' responses centered around two themes: Social Support is a Need and Mocha Moms is Beneficial.

"Even my own husband, as wonderful as he is, couldn't understand what it was like to be at home"

When asked why a stay-at-home mom might seek support, the participants' responses indicated that they felt their experiences were unique and not easily understood by people who were not in the same situation. As such, they needed to be able to relate to someone who is going through the same thing. Janelle communicated this idea when she responded:

> Stay-at-home moms may have different issues or concerns than mothers that work, so if you're expressing your issue or concern to a friend of yours who works every day who has different issues and concerns, she may not be able to relate to it, or just may not consider it as important as you do. She may think ok, you're at home but I have a presentation that has to be done at 6 am or blah blah blah, so she's thinking about other stuff so she may not be able to relate to your issues in the same way that you would want her to.

Renee expressed similar frustration about being unable to relate to her close friend, who had no children:

> Yeah, there were no friends who had any idea what I was talking about. Yeah, one friend was – the friend that was like the godmother, she just didn't get a lot of what moms go through...so that's how Mocha Moms came in, I just need some people who – she's my best friend, you know, so she had no clue. It just really drilled in sometimes only the people who've been through the same situations would ever really get what you're going

> through. I've become a big advocate for support groups no matter what, in all kinds of situations. You can never say never, you just never know what you were doing in a situation and only the people who've been in that situation would know.

Debra discussed her frequent stress and her frustration with the fact that her family did not understand:

> The only thing, and I guess it might just be me, because I'm a huge multitasker and...I try to cram so much stuff in my day, I know that stresses other people out, because they do tell me to slow down, but it causes like me to have mental like -- I'm not going to say breakdowns, but like I just feel overwhelmed sometimes, and you can't explain that feeling to others and outsiders and sometimes I wish my husband, mom, and everybody else could understand I'm tired. I'm stressed out sometimes, you know?

Tasha expressed similar sentiments in her response, where she discussed Mocha Moms and the need to relate to other stay-at-home moms:

> It's a great group of ladies and to have that common bond, just bringing together, I mean, you find out about all the other similarities that you have or you know, the same issues that you deal with at home and knowing that that -- there are other people out there who understand what you -- because you know, I talk to my working friends who are mothers and they don't -- you know, they don't necessarily relate to a lot of issues that I have and they'll say oh, you know, you're at home, like, what do you have to complain about?... Even my own husband, as wonderful as he is, couldn't understand what it was like to be at home with my first child.

Some of the participants lived far away from family and friends and felt alone, leading them to seek support from Mocha Moms. Evelyn stated:

> I'm not from here. I'm from Illinois, so all my family is back in Illinois, and so it's good to have people you can turn to when you don't have family around. Like my husband's family is in Virginia, and even they're not that close. They're like southern Virginia. But it's good when you can say, hey, can you come and can you help me out?

Renee was also living in a town where she had no family:

> We don't have any family here and so that had a lot to do with it. It's a whole lot to do with it. If I was in my hometown, I can say it – if I was in Atlanta, I doubt that I would be – I don't know how I would have ended up in the same position but it was absolutely out of need, necessity.

Tasha reported being in a similar situation, saying "My family, my husband's family, her father's family, both live out of state." Similarly, Michelle stated "I sought out Mocha Moms because what I found once I moved here to Atlanta...I wasn't with my family and my friends anymore." When describing her social circle, Kim also indicated a lack of family nearby when she said "So I have like a few friends that I knew from high school, because I didn't go to high school here. They just happened to be transplants like me, and a college friend who moved here, too, but everybody else is a Mocha Mom." Yolanda summed up her feelings with an example:

> You need, just like with anything else, you need someone to share ideas with. You need validation. You need questions answered that you may not get outside of that environment. Similar to when you're at work, you have your colleagues to bounce ideas off of, get suggestions, get recommendations, people who are in that setting and

> understand what you're going through. It's the same with the stay-at-home mom. This is a new experience for most people who join Mocha Moms. Their either new mothers or this is their first time staying at home. They're not sure of the dynamics, what happens. You also can feel very isolated. Especially if you don't have family in the area. Something as simple as where do I go for a pediatrician. Who recommends -- and you're in a room with 50 women and 25 of them are all saying the same name for a pediatrician, you go okay, maybe that's somebody I need.

Lisa, who has never been a Mocha Mom, and Maya, a former Mocha Mom, both discussed having a network of friends and/or family nearby. Lisa has several friends who are mothers of young children:

> I see them at least one or two times a week...we still just get together as friends and the kids will play together and of course sometimes we share our different views on motherhood. I mean, we just help each other out.

Maya explained why she did not feel the need to continue her Mocha Moms membership:

> I have a huge family so that’s probably part of the reason why I’m okay, that’s in the area for me. And I have a lot of smaller cousins who are my kids’ age. As lonesome as it sounds, that’s kind of what we roll and we go and we do what we do and go play. We have parties. We have parties, I’m not kidding, like every month because there’s somebody having a birthday and so I have that. I don’t have any girlfriends that have children yet, or at least that I would consider close enough for my kids to go play with them. But it’s primarily family for me because I have such a large family and I’m

> fortunate, some people don't, right? And so for me, that's kind of why I'm okay with the way it is.

"You're Not in This Alone"

After discussing the participants' need for social support, we discussed the benefits they feel they receive from their membership in Mocha Moms. Mental and emotional support were very important benefits for most of the participants. Janelle described a Mocha Moms event:

> We have this thing called a sister circle, where we actually meet at a centralized location and it's really along the same lines as a massive group therapy thing where we just kinda talk about issues that are on our minds, on our hearts and just help each other through them. And of course it's always confidential...whatever happens there stays there it doesn't leave the room. But it's, it aims to friendship, fellowship, and bonding for, with the other sisters in the group. That's really beneficial. There's like a personal reward that you know someone really cares about you and is trying to help you through something.

Renee described being unsure about transitioning her son to solid foods. She was able to get information and support from Mocha Moms:

> My son was needing to eat solid foods and I had no clue how to go from the transition of milk to solid foods, you know, just what do I do now? I really had no idea what to do. And so I went to Mocha Moms to figure out, well, you know, how do I know that it's okay to give him that? I was just really, really torn, just like struggling. It sounds like this – like, you should just know. It was sort of like an example of how much I just did not know that seemed like everybody else just knew.

She went on to discuss why she appreciates groups like Mocha Moms:

> I've become a big advocate for support groups no matter what, in all kinds of situations. You can never say never, you just never know what you were doing in a situation and only the people who've been in that situation would know.

Kim described how gratifying it is to receive support and validation for the choices you have made:

> You know, socialization is good for, you know, all parties. It's good for brain development, not just children, but adults as well, so it's good to get out there and have people support the decision that you've made because there are a lot of people that are saying that was the wrong choice. You did not make a good decision. So, you want to be around people that are going to say, you know, that was a great job.

Yolanda described the role Mocha Moms plays in her life:

> It's that, you're not in this alone. You do have other mothers who are going through some of the same challenges, just like if you were a working mom and you had challenges, you had maybe colleagues that you could talk to. This gives you a forum where you can talk to other moms who are understanding what it means to be feeling lonely or feeling that your children consume your life and how do you balance it, and how you really maintain your marriage when you really made your family, but it's more your children your priority, how do you still provide that support to your spouse. I think it's been great because of the lasting friendships that have evolved through that. I mean my children grew up with, I mean at nine years old, his best friend has been a person he's known since he was two.

Similarly, Tasha describes the benefits she derives from the organization:

> We're just very supportive for one another, so you're not just staying at home by yourself feeling like you're going through things alone. You're not, there are other people out there who have the same -- you know, we can get together and have lunch. I can call anyone and go, what are you doing today? Let's chill by the mall and get together with the kids and we just have lunch together. You know, I can talk to an adult, have an adult conversation today, you know? That's something. So it definitely has its benefits.

For Michelle, the close bond she feels with other members is a major benefit. She stated: "right now the security that I get from then and that I do get from the members who are active is a close bond, you know, where everybody is genuine." She went on to describe how she felt after Mocha Moms meetings:

> I feel enlightened, you know. I feel motivated, I feel warmth. That's basically overall, I feel that by the time I leave, I'm like aww, those are my girls. Those are my sisters. I feel good, you know? Mostly it's easy to talk to any of them about anything. But overall, just to be embraced where you're not shunned, you're welcomed, you know...that right there...leaving knowing you've experienced those types of feelings is awesome.

"It Gets You Connected"

Several of the participants indicated that Mocha Moms provides them with a valuable network through which to learn about resources and services that can benefit them and their children. Nicole described some of them:

> You know, so we have to be realistic about things. We've got all kind of networks. Home schooling networks, military moms, divorced network, special needs, kids with special needs, all kinds of stuff.

Yolanda discussed other networks Mocha Moms provides:

> The resources in terms of which schools our children should attend, who to connect with to provide them with additional support and that's why within Mocha Moms you have the work at home moms, they have a network of support within that. You have moms with special needs children who have that support. And I wouldn't say that Mocha Moms is just for stay-at-home moms anymore. We have now moms who've returned back to the workforce but still want that connection and that level of support.

Evelyn discussed how Mocha Moms gives valuable information about what is going on in the community:

> One of the best things that Mocha Moms does is it sort of gets you connected with what's available in your area, you know? Because the county actually has as lot of programs. I mean you can do mommy and me gymnastics. You can do mommy and me swimming. You can do all sorts of things, that you know, it would just be hard to find out about if you didn't have someone say hey, why don't you do this, or why don't you try that?... so there were a lot of things going on, and you know, there's a newsletter, so it's really helpful, because it puts your -- I guess it just gives you a lot of information like that. My kids did a program over at NASA, which is for five to eight or nine to twelve year olds, but we heard about that through Mocha Moms. They just have a lot of information. The members are good about posting information, sending out stuff that's helpful and people want to hear.

Janelle described learning about herself through her membership in the organization:

> Actually, when I kinda think about it, mocha moms it not so much helped me learn so much about my child and what to do with him, it actually helped me learn more about

> myself. You know, good and bad, and some things that I can do to um, better myself or to do differently... I got ideas for child rearing, um, discipline, um, time management, self-care, that type of thing.

Tasha brought up the value of having connections to Mocha Moms members in spaces outside of the organization:

> There are some moms here who became teachers and now they're teachers of the other kids in their group. Isn't that neat? So you can say, oh, I know her. And of course, you feel better now because your child is in the hands of someone -- you know, that's one less thing you have to worry about during the day because your child is in someone's hands that you know well enough and that you know will take care of that child. Because even stuff that's going on in the schools now, you don't even know your children are safe at school anymore.

She went on to describe other networks in her chapter:

> We have a coupon exchange so you know, I just gave her some coupons that we can go through and share what you don't need, you know, somebody else needs, but you bring the ones you don't use, somebody else can use those... then we have business owners, we have people, there's one over there who knits and she sells beautiful clothing. And you know, we can support each other in those kind of endeavors and help each other in that way... You know, there are some ladies here who have watched my child for me. We have an unofficial childcare exchange where, you know, you watch my child on this day, I'll watch your child on this day. One of the moms here is an aerobics instructor, now I'm going to her class and I like that I can go to her class because she keeps me accountable.

When I asked Nicole about Mocha Moms being invited to the White House, she told me that the invitation was a result of a connection with a Mocha Mom who worked for the government:

> We were very fortunate to be in touch with a Mocha who was a high level government official with the EPA, who introduced the administrator of the EPA, who is an African-American woman, to Mocha Moms...and so she really was the vehicle, you know. So she would make sure we had a seat -- if anything was happening she was like, oh, don't forget to invite the Mocha Moms. So sort of one thing led to the other. It's not so much that we sought it, per se, it was just really fortuitous. And because we had a message that they were interested in. So like, for instance, the Department of Education. They heard about us, you know, and they came to us. Hey, you know, you're interested in education. We are too. What can you bring to the table? And so we were like oh yeah, we can bring a lot to the table.

In this section, participants discussed the role social support plays in their lives. They indicated that they needed support because it was important to them to have someone to relate to. Additionally, they feel that Mocha Moms benefits them by providing mental and emotional support as well as important networks and resources.

The next chapter provides discussion of the themes presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter includes detailed discussion regarding the general conclusions of the study. Based on the analysis of the data, four general conclusions were drawn from the findings. The conclusions are:

1. The participants in the study generally did not aspire to stay at home their children. However, once they were home, they felt satisfied with their decisions and did not express a desire to re-enter the workforce.

2. The participants rejected popular and stereotypical ideas about stay-at-home mothering; instead, they defined themselves using their own terms.

3. The mothers in the study primarily see themselves as educators of their children.

4. The moms in the study do not feel valued or respected, both inside the black community and in society as a whole. As such, they need social support in order to feel validated.

The participants in the study generally did not aspire to stay at home with their children. However, once they were home, they felt satisfied with their decision and did not express a desire to re-enter the workforce.

According to previous research, educated black women are expected by friends and family to focus on their careers. Additionally, most come from families wherein the mother worked fulltime (Giele, 2008). In this regard, the participants' responses supported those findings.

All of the participants reported that their mothers worked when they were younger, and most indicated that they had not considered staying at home with their children prior to their pregnancies. Rather, participants reported leaving the workforce due to practical reasons such as losing a job or having a difficult pregnancy. These responses corroborated findings from previous research which showed that black women exit the labor force due to factors such as layoffs and cycles in seasonal employment, not due to childbirth (Reid, 2002). For example, Lisa and Janelle discussed losing their jobs:

> I lost my job because the doctor felt like I kept taking off any time [my daughter] had a medical reason but she has asthma. And so once I lost my job, 10 days later, I lost the daycare. But I'm actually kind of glad that we're at home together, getting more time with her. (Lisa)

> At the time that I was still working, they were going through layoffs at my particular job, and I was pretty much burned out at that job anyway, and I was thinking about doing a career change, so I was actually happy when I got laid off, like finally...and then when I got pregnant, my husband was like well, you know if you don't wanna go back to work, that's fine and I'm like ok. (Janelle)

These findings suggest that working outside of the home was the default status for the participants. Although they unanimously expressed happiness with their decision, most of their responses showed that they had not considered staying at home an option prior to actually doing it. In other words, being a stay-at-home mom was not one of their aspirations.

These findings are consistent with a previous study in which the black participants, unlike their white counterparts, considered working outside of the home a given in their lives (Settles,

Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008).The responses in this study are also consistent with Giele's (2008) research which found that white women were more likely than black women to stay home with their children and have mothers who stayed at home when they were younger. However, the findings are inconsistent with previous research which found that most stay-at-home moms' decisions were influenced by family and religion (Zimmerman, 2000). It should be noted that most of the participants in Zimmerman's study were white.

Giele's study also found that black homemakers were generally happier than white homemakers, as their decision to stay home was a conscious choice (2008). Although this study did not include white participants, the black mothers in the study did express a sense of happiness and satisfaction with their decision, which precluded them from returning to the workforce. For example, Yolanda stated:

> I'm a perfectionist, so when I worked, I put all of my energy in that, and I put energy into my family, but that left very little for me, so my happiness wasn't even defined in the mix. If I could work as good and the children are okay, and my husband is okay then I'm fine. But now that I am home, I find that I'm less stressed about things, much more flexible, and that makes me happy.

Evelyn expressed happiness with her newfound flexibility and freedom, something her own mother did not have:

> I'm able to take him places and do things with him that, are things I wish I could have done with my mom as a child but you know she had to work, so...I think I'm kinda you know, kind of giving that to him, that thing I was able to get. I'm giving that to him.

Tasha also referenced flexibility in her comments:

> ...if I was working, I couldn't, you know, take us both out of our work and school or whatever, daycare, and then go over there for a month, so we have the opportunity to do those things and travel and fly... I feel like that's an added advantage because we can just kind of up and go when the need arises, or the want for that matter.

Previous literature indicated that financial difficulties necessitated that black women work outside of the home (Hunter, 2001; Taylor, 1998), often to supplement their husbands' incomes in order to maintain a certain standard of living for their families (Bell, 1990). Patricia Hill Collins argues that the system of American capitalism has been a source of economic oppression and exploitation for black women, who have historically earned less than white men, white women, and black men (1999). The participants' comments suggest that the freedom and flexibility to opt in or out of the labor force at will is attractive to them. It may represent a sense of agency and control over their own time that previous generations of black women did not have.

The black stay-at-home moms in this study rejected popular and stereotypical ideas of what a stay-at-home mother is; instead, they defined the term for themselves.

The Census Bureau's definition of a stay-at-home mom is a woman who has a husband who was in the labor force during the previous year, while she was out of the labor force during the same year to care for the home and family (Census Bureau, 2009). Only one participant, Monica, defined stay-at-home moms this way when she described them as "mothers that are not on anyone's payroll, but they're doing things to really manage the home, taking care of the children, taking care of the husband, taking care of whatever needs to be done at home." The rest of the participants defined their roles differently.

Renee, when describing why black women may not identify with the term “stay-at-home mom”, stated “that probably is why most of us don’t want to claim that, because of the association, the June Cleaver kind of association, which we absolutely aren’t.”

June Cleaver is an iconic television character from the 1950s television show *Leave it to Beaver*. Salzmann discusses the cultural significance of this character:

> It immediately taps into the psyche of anyone familiar with the show. It tells the listener that the mother in this case probably [stays] at home with her children during the day. She [is] a stellar housekeeper. She likely [has] dinner on the table when the family gets home in the evening. Perhaps she [is] nice or understanding to her children. But mostly it tells the listener she [is] an ideal mother. (Salzmann, 2009, p. 1)

What Renee expressed, and the other participants echoed, is that this iconic image of an upper middle class, white, suburban homemaker does not represent black stay-at-home moms. Rather, black stay-at-home moms can stay home fulltime, work part-time outside of the home, or manage home-based businesses. For Maya, homemaking was not necessarily important. She stated “it doesn’t necessarily mean that they cook, clean and all that greatness, at least not in my opinion.” Similarly, Debra and Tasha did not place an emphasis on homemaking:

> I define it as raising children in a non-traditional way, less daycare, less childcare and more in an in-home, nurturing environment. So it doesn't mean exclusively I stay at home and don't work and don't do other things. (Debra)

> It's a mother who has made the decision to spend time with their children full-time throughout the day. Not necessarily meaning that you don't work. There are moms...that

> do have part-time jobs or home-based businesses or home-based employment. I still think that you can be considered a stay-at-home mom doing those things. (Tasha)

The key component for each participant was the focus on time with the children.

This capacity for self-definition is an important aspect of black feminism (Collins, 2001). African American women exist in a space where they have to fight against popular stereotypes about who and what they are. Additionally, they have to contend with a collective American cultural consciousness that tells them exactly what the ideal woman and mother is and outlines all the ways in which black women fail to measure up. Collins said:

> An affirmation of the importance of Black women's self-definition and self-valuation is the first key theme that pervades historical and contemporary statements of Black feminist thought. Self-definition involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood (1986, p. s16)

When a black woman defines herself, she challenges the notion that those who position themselves as authorities on her reality are qualified to do so (1986, p. s17). By defining their roles in their own words, the mothers in this study not only rejected the categorization assigned to them by the Census Bureau, they also challenged the idea that the Census Bureau and American popular culture have the right to determine who gets to call themselves a stay-at-home mom. More, their very existence invalidates popular stereotypes of black women.

Black feminist thought stresses the importance of black women’s’ lived experiences, and recognizes that these experiences are grounded in the black women’s unique history in America.

The June Cleaver archetype was not the reality for most women, but it was particularly unrealistic for black women.

The mothers in the study primarily saw themselves as educators of their children.

Education emerged as a central theme in all twelve interviews, and the responses led me to conclude that the participants saw themselves as educators of their children. This finding reflects previous literature which found that African American parents place a very high priority on learning and educational achievement (Immerwahr, 2000), and that black mothers in particular strongly believed in educating their children (McCluskey, 1989, p. 116). Participants indicated that much of their time with their children is spent teaching in some capacity, as well as engaging them in educational activities such as reading and taking field trips to places like the local museum, zoo, or library.

These activities reflected the ideas expressed in some early twentieth century literature which stated "[The Negro woman] must give the children their first education…since the stream can rise no higher than its source, so the mother must play an important part in the progress of the race" (Jackson & Davis, 1908, pp. 127-128) The participants expressed the desire to be involved in the educational process, even when their children were attending school full-time. Some participants discussed their spending time in the schools, advocating for their children as well as the other children in the class.

Patricia Hill Collins considers this type of work political in nature, describing a study in which black female activists became involved in community work through their role as mothers (Collins, 1986, p. s23). In this way, the participants in the study are performing a sort of activism

that is valuable for members of their family as well as the community. For example, Lisa, Maya, and Renee described the importance of education in a racial and/or gender context:

> Even though [my daughter's] only one, education comes first. I'm really big on education... being African-American, we're a stereotype that is like, very uneducated. People doubt us as far as education comes, they don't see us as being able to pick up a book and writing. It's a lot of stuff, but education is very important. My mom got on us about education. (Lisa)

> I never want my children below. I mean, nobody does, right? You always want your child to succeed. But especially, one, being a woman, that's already a strike. And then being a minority, that's another strike. So I want them to be able to know that hey, you're on top of your stuff, you know what you need to know. (Maya)

> And within our community, as achievements – as other cultures achieve more and there's this like whole achievement gap, it's just more important that we are there, parents, as parents in schools... when I first became a mother and I learned about the drop-out rates in our schools, it was like unbelievable. Black males dropping out, it was like who – how did this get to be this?...And it was like, who would allow something like that, where are – the people who should care most are parents and where are they? Why aren't they there? Are we not paying attention? How can we get to that point? (Renee)

Renee also described the sense of responsibility she feels to advocate for both her children and other children of color:

> I think as an at-home mom, I'm afforded the ability to be more present in the school and also parents have a different reason or a different motivation in being active in schools

> and seeing that children succeed....as a mother of color, an at-home mother of color, I kind of feel like it's my responsibility and this did come through Mocha Moms, my responsibility to be an advocate for all those other mothers that are working, where they can't be in the schools as much as I can. I can be there for their children as a parent eye, just as I would want somebody else to, you know, it's just a different perspective than a teacher.

The participants' responses suggest that they recognize the importance of academic success for their children as well as the black community. Their feelings reflect the historical significance of education to African Americans in this country and the belief that it is the key to success for both the individual and the race. Further, the responses illustrate that the participants are aware of the intersectional nature of oppression, as several of them referenced both race and gender in their comments. To the participants, staying at home means more than simply not working for pay. Staying at home represents work in a different sphere, where their children's achievement is an important goal.

The participants do not feel valued or respected by the black community and they feel invisible in society. As such, they need a social network in order to feel supported and validated.

Previous research indicated that white American respondents rated stay-at-home mothers higher than working mothers on measures of quality of care of their children (Sphancer, Melick, Sayre, & Spivey, 2006). As noted, these findings cannot be generalized to the black community and do not adequately represent the beliefs and perceptions of African Americans. The mothers in the study indicated that they did not feel they were respected or valued within the black

community, so it is likely that a study of black Americans' attitudes towards non-working mothers would produce different findings.

Some participants experienced direct disapproval regarding their choice. Nicole, Yolanda, and Kim heard comments about "throw[ing] away all that education", "wasting your talent" or "not using that degree that cost you so much money." These comments indicate that the people in their lives placed a higher value on their paid work outside the home than their unpaid work in the home with their children.

Other participants indicated that they believed people in the black community saw no value in stay-at home-mothering:

> Within our community, we don't value the work and most people are ignorant about what it takes to actually parent young children. (Renee)

> I think in certain groups being a stay-at-home mom is a more respected role and it's thought of more so as a -- it's seen more as a benefit to the child, as in, you know, Jenny gets to stay home with Bobby and he's doing so well in school now. You can really see the difference. (Kim)

Some participants also indicated that they believe the black community sees stay-at-home mothering as a luxury of which women in other communities are able to take advantage:

> Initially, it was definitely shunned upon. It was like 'who do you think you are trying to be like? Them?'... It's more the economics of it that people were shunning. It was like either you're trying to live like someone else or 'you really are sacrificing that to do this?' (Yolanda)

The idea that staying-at-home is something “they” do reflects the binary perceptions present in African Americans’ interpretation of cultural practices. “They” historically had options that “we” did not have, and those ideas have been internalized to some degree by members of the black community. These ideas sometimes manifest through discussions of what is white and what is black, or what white people do versus what black people do.

> I think it's becoming more acceptable but I do believe that there was this notion that, you know, you can't afford to stay at home with your children. You need to have, you know, make that sacrifice. (Tasha)

Previous research and historical data do indicate that black women have worked outside of the home partly due to financial need (Bell, 1990; Fosu, 1995: Hunter, 2001). This may explain the perception that having and exercising the option to stay home with your children is a luxury for black families. However, many of the participants stated that staying at home required financial sacrifice. For example, Monica stated “it is a sacrifice, and I understand that more now, so it's a sacrifice we're making and we're doing good. I mean I look at it, people are like, ‘you stay at home? And you're able to do this?’” Other participants gave similar responses:

> I’ve chosen to do this, it’s a job. And I do miss some of the luxuries of having a six figure income, my own, you know? But yeah, I think – yeah, it’s a sacrifice and it’s one that once I started doing it, you know, I agreed to it willingly and I still do but there’s a lot of stuff I miss. (Renee)

> There are people who are making sacrifices to stay-at-home, who decide, you know, I don't have to have all these fancy things, and I like to be at home and cut out the

> vacations and cut out these things, and you know, we won't do necessarily a whole summer of summer camps. (Evelyn)

As noted in the literature, African American women have been active participants in the labor force since they were brought to America during enslavement (Smith, 1985). As such, working outside of the home is a normalized part of black women's experiences. When the mothers in this study opted out of the labor force, they acted against the ways in which they were socialized. In this way, exercising their agency subverted and then redefined what black women's culture looks like for them. However, this redefinition is not necessarily accepted or respected by others, as the responses suggest.

The lack of literature pertaining to black stay-at-home moms parallels what the participants articulated in their responses; they feel invisible to white society. For example, Renee succinctly expressed that in society, "we don't exist." Similarly, Tasha said she feels black stay-at-home moms are "probably not even a thought that crosses people's minds." For Nicole, the perception of black stay-at-home moms was either that they are invisible or dependent on the government:

> They don't view us at all, and to the extent that they think of us as mothers who are not employed, we're welfare mothers...Black, at home moms, who are married with husbands who support us, we don't exist. In society we don't exist at all. Period. Black mothers who are mothers who don't work are welfare moms.

Other participants also indicated that they believe both whites and blacks see them as "welfare mothers" or "on assistance". For example, Debra believes people see black stay-at-home moms

and assume "you must be collecting food stamps and government support." Similarly, Renee stated:

> I think if you say to society at-home mothers, it's welfare, you know, I think that's what comes to mind is that it's people who can't go and find anything else to do. I think that's what – because we have been taking care of other people's families and that's just kind of how society sees us so that if we don't have to take care of other people's families, then we must be out working, outside of the home. I'm just going to leave it at that.

The Welfare Mother, as noted in the literature, is a popular stereotype of black mothers which paints them as lazy and incapable of raising productive citizens. The welfare mother depends on the government for financial support and her children are seen as burdens on society (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Participants' responses indicate that they are well aware of the stereotype and the degree to which it affects others' perceptions of their roles.

Implicit in the Welfare Mother stereotype is the idea that there is something inherently wrong with depending on the government for financial support. By comparison, the cult of true womanhood (Welter, 1966) supports the idea that there is nothing wrong with a woman being financially dependent on her husband.

There is an inherent contradiction present in the two ideologies. Patricia Hill Collins argues that it is important for black feminists to "investigate how the intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender foster these contradictions" in order for black women to avoid internalizing their devalued status as workers and mothers (1999, pp. 11-12). In other words, it is important to acknowledge that black mothers who receive help from the government are

devalued and derided not because they receive assistance or support from an outside source, but because they are poor, black, and female.

Most of the participants expressed a strong need to be around people who understand exactly what they are going through as stay-at-home moms. They also felt their friends and family could not relate to their unique challenges and experiences. Janelle's response encapsulated these ideas:

> Stay-at-home moms may have different issues or concerns than mothers that work, so if you're expressing your issue or concern to a friend of yours who works every day who has different issues and concerns, she may not be able to relate to it, or just may not consider it as important as you do. She may think ok, you're at home but I have a presentation that has to be done at 6 am or blah blah blah, so she's thinking about other stuff so she may not be able to relate to your issues in the same way that you would want her to.

Participants' responses indicated that support was one of the main benefits of their membership in Mocha Moms:

> It's good to get out there and have people support the decision that you've made because there are a lot of people that are saying that was the wrong choice. You did not make a good decision. So, you want to be around people that are going to say, you know, that was a great job. (Kim)

> It's that, you're not in this alone. You do have other mothers who are going through some of the same challenges, just like if you were a working mom and you had challenges, you had maybe colleagues that you could talk to. This gives you a forum where you can talk

> to other moms who are understanding what it means to be feeling lonely or feeling that your children consume your life and how do you balance it, and how you really maintain your marriage when you really made your family, but it's more your children your priority, how do you still provide that support to your spouse. I think it's been great because of the lasting friendships that have evolved through that. (Yolanda)

These responses corroborate findings of an earlier comprehensive study of mother's groups which found that members of Mocha Moms join primarily because they are seeking emotional support (Crowley & Weiner, 2010).

Social support has been found to moderate the effects of stress on the quality of parenting provided (DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008). This is important for the participants because they indicated that although they felt less stressed since leaving the workforce, they still experienced stresses related to their roles inside the home. Mocha Moms gives them an outlet for that stress which may in turn improve the quality of their parenting.

The concept of sisterhood is an important part of black women's culture (Collins, 1986), and for the moms in the study, the organizations provide a network of women they can relate to. Participants reported sharing challenges they experience as wives and mothers and receiving advice from the other members. Renee, for example, needed advice for her son:

> My son was needing to eat solid foods and I had no clue how to go from the transition of milk to solid foods, you know, just what do I do now? I really had no idea what to do. And so I went to Mocha Moms to figure out, well, you know, how do I know that it's okay to give him that? I was just really, really torn, just like struggling. It sounds like this – like, you should just know.

Similarly, Yolanda gave the example of needing to find a doctor for her children:

> Something as simple as where do I go for a pediatrician. Who recommends -- and you're in a room with 50 women and 25 of them are all saying the same name for a pediatrician, you go okay, maybe that's somebody I need.

In this way, Mocha Moms has created a safe space for black women who are essentially outsiders within their own communities. In the safe space, they were allowed to ask for help and admit that they did not know it all or have it all together.

The next chapter provides a conclusion, implications of the study, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECCOMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the factors which influence black women's choice to stay at home with their children, to examine the ways in which black stay-at-home mothers perceive themselves and feel they are perceived by others, and to understand the role of social support networks in their lives. The research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What factors influence black stay-at-home moms' decision to leave the workforce and not go back to work?
2. What are black stay-at-home moms' perceptions of their roles?
3. What are their perceptions of the way they are viewed by others?
4. What kind of support do they receive from Mocha Moms, Inc.?

Twelve black current or former stay-at-home moms between the ages of 22 and 50 were recruited for participation in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The data collected from these interviews served as the sole source of data for the study. A qualitative research design was used to explore black stay-at-home moms' decision-making, perceptions of themselves, perceptions of the way they are viewed by others, and the role of social support in their lives. Interview participants were solicited via emails to various Mocha Moms chapters and word of mouth. Data were analyzed using In Vivo and Focused Coding (Saldaña, 2009).

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the data, four general conclusions were drawn from the findings. The conclusions are:

1. The participants in the study generally did not aspire to stay at home their children. However, once they were home, they felt satisfied with their decisions and do not desire to re-enter the workforce.

2. The participants rejected popular and stereotypical ideas about stay-at-home mothering; instead, they defined themselves using their own terms.

3. The mothers in the study primarily see themselves as educators of their children.

4. The black stay-at-home moms in the study do not feel valued or respected, both inside the black community and in society as a whole. As such, they need social support in order to feel validated.

Participants indicated that events such as job loss or physical or mental distress influenced their decisions to leave the workforce. Their responses supported findings from previous research which showed that black women exit the labor force due to factors such as layoffs and cycles in seasonal employment, not due to pregnancy or childbirth (Reid, 2002). Participants also indicated that they were happy with their decisions because they were less tired, less stressed, and had more flexibility. These responses corroborated previous literature which found that black homemakers were generally happier than white homemakers, as their decision to stay home was a conscious choice (Giele, 2008). While there were no white participants in this

study for comparison, the black women in this study did express a sense of happiness and satisfaction with their decision, which precluded them from returning to the workforce.

The participants defined “stay-at-home mom” in several different ways, many of which allowed for stay-at-home moms to work at home or outside of the home. The common theme was increased time with the children. The ability to self-define is an important aspect of black feminism (Collins, 2001), and participants’ responses suggested that they did not accept the stereotypical idea of the white, suburban, upper-middle class June Cleaver type.

Participants indicated that they see themselves primarily as educators of their children. Much of their time at home was spent engaging their children in educational activities. They expressed the importance of education, academic success, and parental involvement in education. These responses support previous literature that indicates that African American parents place a very high priority on learning and educational achievement (Immerwahr, 2000), and that black mothers in particular strongly believed in educating their children (McCluskey, 1989, p. 116).

The black stay-at-home moms in the study do not feel valued or respected by the black community and they feel invisible to white society. Prior research indicates that white American respondents rated stay-at-home mothers higher than working mothers on measures of quality of care of their children (Sphancer, Melick, Sayre, & Spivey, 2006). These findings cannot be generalized to the black community, and the participants’ responses suggest that black respondents may give different ratings than the white participants. The stay-at-home moms in this study received negative messages regarding their decision to stay home. Some of the participants were accused of throwing away their educations, while others believed others perceived staying at home as a luxury that black families cannot afford.

The mothers in the study also indicated that they felt invisible in white society, while others felt society sees them as welfare mothers. The welfare mother is a popular stereotype of black women (Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Participants' responses suggested that they are aware of the stereotype and the degree to which it influences others' perceptions of them.

The lack of support they feel from society, the black community, and for some, family, led them to seek out Mocha Moms for support. Participants reported receiving emotional support from the organization, which was one of the main benefits of their membership.

Implications

This study has implications for the study of black women. Black stay-at-home moms are a wholly understudied group of women. While they do represent a minority of black mothers, their perceptions and experiences can provide understanding of the complexity of black women's choices. It is important to understand why some black women are willing to act outside of their culture, some of which is externally-defined. This study suggests that some black stay-at-home moms adhere to their socialization and only decide to leave the workforce for practical reasons. However, they are generally satisfied with their decision and do not wish to return to the workforce in the same capacity. This knowledge could potentially provide black mothers with another viable choice. Black women's culture does not have to consist only of going to school and working.

This study also has implications for the study of black families. The black family has been studied extensively but two parent families where the mother does not work have not been represented in research. The findings of this study provide a representation about which there is

not much knowledge. This has implications for public policy, as it may be beneficial for companies to provide mothers with more flexible employment options.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been proposed for future research:

1) Conduct a comprehensive study using black women from diverse backgrounds

2) Examine the ways in which social support organizations benefit working mothers

3) Explore the relationship between stay-at-home mothering and school performance

4) Explore the performance of gender among married couples with a stay-at-home mother

Conduct a Comprehensive Study Using Black Women from Diverse Backgrounds

Every participant in the study had at least some college education, and many had advanced degrees. Many participants also had household incomes exceeding $100,000. Most participants were married to men who were able to support them financially. A woman's marital and socioeconomic statuses obviously have an impact on her ability to opt out of the labor force. Therefore, a study using a population of women of different means would likely yield very different results. Additionally, a future study may explore the relationship between class and membership in organizations such as Mocha Moms, Inc.

Examine the ways in which social support organizations benefit working mothers

This study examined the ways in which Mocha Moms benefits black women who stay at home with their children. Participants indicated that they had unique experiences and stressors

which prevented them from receiving emotional support from friends and family. A future study may examine the ways in which a social support organization could benefit working mothers. Although their experiences and stresses may be more common, and thus relatable, they likely still need to commiserate with other working mothers who share their experiences.

Explore the relationship between stay-at-home mothering and academic performance

Every participant in this study indicated that education was very important to them, and they reported spending significant amounts of time teaching their children and/or spending time in their schools. Future research may explore the role this type of parenting plays in the educational process and in the academic achievement of black children.

Explore the performance of gender among married couples with a stay-at-home mother

Research has indicated that black marriages are more egalitarian than those of any other racial group. Participants in this study were not asked about gender role performance. A future study might find differences in the way gender roles are performed in dual income families versus families where the mother stays at home. Future research may also explore how the husbands of stay-at-home mothers feel about the breadwinner role, given the historical inability of black men to fully participate in the system of patriarchy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Georgia State University
Department of African American Studies
Informed Consent

Title: So When Are You Going Back to Work? Understanding the Experiences of Black Stay at Home Wives and Mothers

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jonathan Gayles
Student Investigator: Lauren Fannin

I. Purpose:

You are invited to be a part of a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of ten married Black women who have left the workforce to take care of their homes and/or children fulltime. You are invited to be part of the study because you are a black stay at home wife or mother who has been married for at least 12 months. A total of ten participants will be part of this study. Participation will require 90 minutes of your time.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to be part of the study, you will be asked to meet with the student researcher Lauren Fannin one time. The interview will take place in your home or at private location of your
choice. The interview will be recorded. You will not be compensated for your time.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. You may feel slightly uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer and may stop the interview at any time.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. However, we hope to gain information about black women who have left the workforce in order to stay at home. This information may add to research on the experiences of black women.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any

benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. You will be assigned a number prior to your interview. Your name will not be listed in any of the study records, nor will it be used during the transcription or reporting process. Lauren Fannin and Dr. Jonathan Gayles will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly like the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). The audio recording of your interview will be stored in a locked cabinet until the transcription process. After transcription review, the audio recording will be destroyed. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact persons are Dr. Jonathan Gayles at 404.413.5638, jgayles@gsu.edu, and Lauren Fannin at 404.413.5134, lmerriweather1@student.gsu.edu. Please contact the researchers if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VII . Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded please sign below.

_____ _____

Participant Date

_____ _____

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Guide

Interviewee:

Interviewee Pseudonym _____

I will ask you a few opening questions.

1. How do you define "stay at home mom"? What does the term mean to you?
2. Please describe your typical weekday.

I will now ask questions regarding your decision.

3. How secure were you in your decision to leave the workforce?
4. Please tell me about how you decided to stay at home.
   Prompt: What was your husband's role in the decision-making process?

I will now ask you questions regarding support for your decision.

5. How did your husband feel about your decision to stay at home?
6. In what has he shown his support or disapproval of your decision?
   a. Prompt: can you think of any other ways?
7. How did your family and friends react to your decision to stay at home?
   a. Prompt: In what ways have they shown their support or disapproval of your decision?
   b. Prompt: Can you think of any other ways?
8. In what ways could your friends and family be more supportive of your decision to stay at home?

I will now ask questions regarding gender roles.

9. What do you consider a traditional marriage?
10. How closely does your marriage resemble a traditional marriage?
11. Please describe the financial decision making process in your household.
    a. Prompt: Do you and your husband have equal say in the decisions?
12. Please describe the decision making process for matters such as discipline and schooling.
    a. Prompt: Do you and your husband have equal say in the decisions?
13. How are household chores (such as cooking and cleaning) delegated in your family?

I will now ask questions regarding marital happiness.

14. With regard to your marriage, would you say are happier now or when you were employed? Why?
15. With regard to your marriage, would you say your husband is happier now or when you were employed? Why?

16. Has your staying at home ever been a source of tension in your marriage?
17. How could your experiences staying at home be improved?

I will now ask questions regarding your perceptions of how your role is viewed.

18. How do you feel stay at home mothers are viewed in the black community?

19. How do you think your husband views your role as a stay at home mom?

20. How do you feel you are viewed by your family and friends?

21. How do you feel society views black stay at home moms?

I will now ask you questions about your children.

22. How do your children benefit from you being a stay at home mom?
23. Please discuss your parenting style.
    a. Prompt: Does you being a stay at home mom have any influence on the way you parent your children?

I will now ask you questions regarding Mocha Moms.

24. Why did you seek out Mocha Moms?
    a. Prompt: Why did you choose Mocha Moms over other moms' groups?
25. How does Mocha Moms support you?
26. Why would a stay at home mom need support?
27. Do you think Mocha Moms is welcoming to all types of mothers?
28. Some people may see Mocha Moms as an elitist group, or a group that caters to a particular privileged group of women. How do you feel about that?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix C: Demographic Sheet

Interviewee Number: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this semi-structured interview looking at the lived experiences of black stay at home moms. Again, I want to remind you that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please know that your responses to these questions will be kept confidential and your name will never be reported with any of your answers. I have prepared a prescreening form in order to obtain demographic information. You are not required to answer these questions and may skip any you do not wish to answer.

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply):
    a. _____ Black/African American
    b. _____ Black/non-African American (indicate ethnicity here _____)
    c. _____ Biracial
    d. _____ Hispanic
    e. _____ White
    f. _____ Asian
3. What is your highest level of education? _____
4. How long have you been married? _____
5. What is your total yearly household income? _____
6. What does your husband do for a living? _____
    a. What is his highest level of education?
7. Describe your current residence (check one):
    a. _____ Apartment
    b. _____ House
    c. _____ Townhome/Condominium
8. How long have you lived at your current residence? _____
9. What did you do for a living prior to leaving the workforce? _____
    a. How long were you employed? _____

10. How many children do you have? _____

    a. What are their ages? _____

    b. Please indicate the genders of your children _____

11. Did you breastfeed your child(ren)? _____

    a. If so, please indicate the duration: _____

12. Did your mother work outside the home? _____

13. How long have you been a member of Mocha Moms? _____

14. How did you hear about Mocha Moms? _____

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

My name is Lauren Fannin. I am a graduate student in the department of African American studies at Georgia State University. I am seeking black stay at home moms in Atlanta to participate in my study. The purpose of this study will be to ask questions about the lived experiences of black stay at home moms.

You are invited to take part because you have identified yourself as a black stay at home mom. A total of ten participants will be asked to take part in this study. Participation will require one interview that will last approximately 90 minutes.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me (Lauren Fannin) or lmerriweather1@student.gsu.edu.

There is no financial compensation for participation in this study.