Fall 1-5-2024

Merging Black Feminist Ecologies and Psychology: Black Women Resisting the Psychological Costs of Environmental Racism

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This dissertation, MERGING BLACK FEMINIST ECOLOGIES AND PSYCHOLOGY:
BLACK WOMEN RESISTING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL
RACISM, by SHOLA SHODIYA-ZEUMAULT was prepared under the direction of the
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MERGING BLACK FEMINIST ECOLOGIES AND PSYCHOLOGY: BLACK

WOMEN RESISTING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

by

shola shodiya-zeumault

Under the Direction of Dr. Cirleen DeBlaere

ABSTRACT

Environmental racism, or the disproportionate burden of environmental toxins in racially marginalized communities (Chavis, 1994), has been associated with poor mental health and wellbeing (e.g., Power et al., 2015). Though recent evidence has demonstrated that Black Americans are exposed to environmental toxins at higher rates than other racial groups (Mikati, 2018; Pinto de Moura & Reichmuth, 2019), the specific challenges that environmental racism pose specifically for Black women are understudied. Historically, Black American women have strategized and labored to bring about environmental equity and justice in their communities, and to facilitate social change (Collins, 2009; Simpson, 2011). However, inquiries into the impact of their resistance to environmental racism on their mental health are largely absent within psychological literature, as are examinations of the psychological costs and benefits of such resistance. To address this deficit in the literature, and grounded in both Black Feminist and Black Feminist Ecological frameworks, the present study seeks to examine Black women's perspectives on the ramifications of their resistance to environmental racism in their communities on their mental health and wellbeing, as well as that of their family and community members.

INDEX WORDS: Structural racism, environmental racism, mental health, wellbeing

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SISTING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Counseling Psychology

in

Counseling and Psychological Services

in

the College of Education & Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation, first and foremost, is for the community of Black women- known and un-known- who inspire me to write about hope, love, liberation, and resistance.

To my partner Andre, for believing that I can do anything and supporting me in everything. To my little one on the way, thank you for teaching me about self-compassion and letting go of perfectionism. To my academic partner Michelle, you remind me to prioritize authenticity and integrity in all that I do and to be accountable for what I write- thank you. To my ancestors from Abeokuta, you have paved the way for me to continue in the legacy of resistance, feminism, and justice and I am proud to belong. And to my family, thank you for always championing me. I am who I am because of who you are.

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CHAPTER 1

"WE WERE LOVING WARRIORS!": A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF BLACK WOMEN'S

RESISTANCE WITHIN PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

Both interpersonal and structural forms of racist and sexist discrimination have been well documented as significant predictors of poor mental health and diminished wellbeing with persons and communities marginalized by racial and gender oppression (Moradi & Subich, 2003). Interpersonal racism (i.e., racist incidents, microaggressions), for example, has consistently been associated with deleterious mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, suicidal ideation; Paradies et al., 2015). Structural racism has been associated with declines in mental health among African American adults and families, including higher reported levels of depression (environmental racism; $\beta = .305$, $p < .001$; Bevc et al., 2005) and chronic stress (police racial bias; Miller & Vittrup, 2020). Similarly, recent experiences with sexist discrimination have been associated with general psychological distress (with a primarily White sample of women college students; $r = .27$, $p < .01$; Landry & Mercurio, 2009). Structural forms of gender discrimination, such as widespread gender inequities in wages and salaries that favor cisgender men, have been associated with higher levels of major depression disorder and generalized anxiety disorder in women (OR: 2.43 and 4.11, respectively; Platt et al., 2016). Indeed, the links between racist and sexist discrimination to diminished mental health have been well-documented in psychological literature. However, these investigations have been broadly critiqued for their lack of disaggregation of the data and findings. This failure to disaggregate research findings often leads to inaccurate conclusions about the experiences of racially marginalized (i.e., Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Southeast Asian) persons and women, as well as those who lie at the intersections (e.g.,

Black women) or margins (e.g., Black transgender women) of these identities (Sharpe, 2019).

For individuals who hold one or more marginalized identities, the consequences of these inter-

secting forms of oppression on their experiences are often rendered invisible (Purdie-Vaughns &

Eibach, 2008). The current study specifically seeks to address this gap as it pertains to Black

women in the United States (US).

Discrimination Research with Black Women

Black women (i.e., any person identifying as a woman and whose heritage connects to

the African Diaspora; Gordon & Anderson, 1999) are one such social group whose experiences

with discrimination as both *Black* and *woman* have not simply been the sum of their marginaliza-

tion, but the result of the intersections of their marginalization (Crenshaw, 1991). Indeed, the

construct of *gendered racism* (Essed, 1991) is one that captures both the unique social location of

Black womanhood as well as experiences of marginalization that occur at the intersection of rac-

ist and sexist oppression. Gendered racism acknowledges "...the fact that racisms and genderisms

are rooted in specific histories designating separate as well as mutually interwoven formations of

race, ethnicity, and gender" (Essed, 2001). The construct articulates the ways in which Black

women's experiences of racism are uniquely different from those of Black men, and experiences

of sexism are largely disparate from those of White women and other racially marginalized

women. When examined in psychology, Black women's experiences with gendered racism have

been associated with general psychological distress ($r = -.32$, $p < .01$; Lewis et al., 2017), trau-

matic stress symptoms ($r = .43$, $p < .001$; Moody & Lewis, 2019), and anxiety ($r = .35$, $p < .001$;

Wright & Lewis, 2020). Literature related to Black women's experiences of gendered racism has

certainly advanced psychological science by elucidating our understanding of the complex measurement of their intersectional experiences of oppression. Such advancement has enabled psychological researchers of identity-based oppression to disaggregate quantitative data related to discrimination such that the nuances of Black women's experiences are not obfuscated by findings most pertinent to the discrimination experiences of Black men or non-Black women.

Collective Action and Resistance

Despite these advancements, few psychological investigations to date focus on Black women's resistance to interpersonal and structural discrimination and its potential to mitigate the link between oppression and mental health outcomes. One form of resistance, collective action (i.e., social action, critical sociopolitical action, activism) seems to be the most widely studied construct in psychology. Collective action has been broadly defined as efforts to transform systems and communities to be more equitable and just (Anyiwo et al., 2020). The construct generally refers to forms of civic engagement (e.g., voting, attending a demonstration or protest, campaigning/running for political office, etc.) in which individuals or communities engage to ameliorate their lived experiences of inequity and injustice. Primarily investigated within social psychology[1], these contributions have been critical to understanding how a collective group's socialization, critical consciousness, and experiences with discrimination informs their motivations to

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[1]Using the search term "collective action" within all psychological literature, a Web of Science search indicated Social Psychology to have the greatest number of articles (n=472) out of 1,086 related to collective action. 346 articles were found with Multidisciplinary Psychology, and 145 articles were located within Applied Psychology.

engage in social action, as well as the personal and collective outcomes of such action. For example, collective action engagement has been directly associated with greater coping and meaning in life, and indirectly related to post-traumatic growth with sexual assault survivors (Strauss & Szymanski, 2020). Among racial and ethnically marginalized persons, engagement in social or political activism has been found to foster critical agency (DeAngelo et al., 2016) and to facilitate healing from oppression (Hope & Spencer, 2017), formation of community networks and bonds (Ortega-Williams et al., 2018), and reduced psychological distress (DeBlaere et al., 2013).

Despite these findings however, a review of 1,086 articles related to collective action identified in psychological literature (see endnote 1) in the US indicated that only two articles investigated the construct and its potential outcomes specifically with Black and/or African American adult women (Rapp et al., 2010; Wingfield, 2019). Rapp and colleagues conducted a qualitative investigation of the process and outcomes Black women's online protest of sexual violence against women of color in their communities and identified the process of collective action to be both painful and rewarding, as women reported disappointment with a lack of support as well as an increased sense of agency, self-efficacy, and pride. Taking a more expansive approach to framing collective action with Black women, Wingfield synthesized the ways in which Black women alter their social contexts (i.e., work, politics, media) to be more equitable for themselves and other marginalized groups through activism and leadership. Given the potential for collective action engagement to have some positive impacts on Black women's wellbeing based on the identified studies and prior literature with other marginalized groups, it is critically

important to study the specific implications that collective action may have on Black women's psychological functioning and wellbeing, and on transformation within their communities.

Despite the important contribution of both identified articles, the minimal number of investigations of collective action specifically with Black women represents a serious deficit in psychological literature. And as a result, our understanding of Black women's collective action and its potential benefits are severely limited within the field of psychology. As posited by Collins (2009), Black women's resistance is as complex and intersectional as the "matrix of domination," or the structural inequities that cause their oppression. According to Collins (2009), "If power as domination is organized and operates via intersecting oppressions, then resistance must show comparable complexity" (p. 218). As such, Black women's civic engagement and sociopolitical action is likely to be inclusive of ways of being and actions that extend beyond traditional notions of what is considered to be "collective action". More specifically, their unique resistance to oppression, as well as the mental health outcomes of such resistance, have been overlooked by a lack of identity-specific inquiry.

Black Feminist Theory

The assertion that Black women's resistance to oppression may extend beyond commonly studied collective action efforts is consistent with Black Feminist thought. Sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins (2009) writes that Black Feminist thought is the rich tradition of intellectual wisdom intertwined with social justice that is both inheritable from, and inherent to Black women in the U.S. Black Feminist thought argues that the very social location formed at the crossroads of intersecting forms of subjugation (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homo-

phobia, transphobia) is also responsible for the myriad ways that Black women resist these oppressions – both to the benefit of their own wellbeing and that of others. Alongside Lorde (1984), hooks (2015), and others, Collins (2009) argues that Black women's resistance then, is the product of carving out space for themselves and others to demand the right to thrive in a nation that pushes them to the margins of society. It is here in these margins that U.S. Black women create sites for radical change and resistance that transforms communities and produces justice. Simpson (2011) posits that this particular creation of sites of resistance can be referred to as *calculated identity positioning*. Simpson suggests that in reclaiming their rights to freedom from oppression, Black women use their distinct social locations to increase their personal and communal agency through political strategy, community action, othermothering, and other forms of resistance that are often overlooked in notions of collective action inherent to White, Western thought. As such, Black women have played a critical role in social change movements in the U.S. such as the Civil Rights movement (Barnett, 1993), struggle for women's rights (Combahee River Collective, 1982), and struggle for Black liberation (Combahee River Collective, 1982), and yet, the role of their resistance in their personal and community mental health has been a discussion largely absent from psychological literature. This is the case despite psychology's (specifically, counseling and community psychology) involvement in, and study of advocacy and social justice. Investigations into the resistance efforts of U.S. Black women may be critically necessary to broaden our understanding of collective action (i.e., what can be considered as action taken to transform a community) and its role in the mental health of marginalized persons and communities.

PURPOSE

Despite contemporary and historical evidence of Black women's critical involvement in social change movements, psychological literature regarding their specific resistance to oppression and subsequent mental health outcomes is scant. The purpose of this paper was to identify and review all articles within psychological literature related to Black women's resistance and to summarize the existing body of work. Specifically, my goals were to (a) identify articles pertaining to Black women's resistance and summarize both characteristics of each article, and definitions of resistance; (b) identify and summarize dimensions of resistance and specific corresponding strategies; (c) identify outcomes of resistance; and finally, (d) assess the degree to which these outcomes are related to mental health and wellbeing. This review focused on peer-reviewed empirical psychological research in order to accurately assess the field of psychology with regard to its current understanding of the impact of Black women's involvement in social and political change. As such, dissertations and conceptual papers were omitted from the review.

The fields of social, community, developmental, and counseling psychology have largely undertaken the task of investigating both the cognitive processes and social impacts of resistance (i.e., collective action, activism, sociopolitical action, civic engagement, etc.) in both dominant and marginalized communities (Hope et al., 2020; Mosley et al., 2020). However, specific to this line of inquiry is the rare investigation of the impact of resistance on mental health outcomes. Previous literature has focused on the role of resistance on academic, career, and developmental outcomes, primarily with racially, ethnically, and gender diverse adolescents, young adults, and

college students. As such, I believed it was important to review the current psychological literature pertaining to a unique marginalized group – Black and African American adult women – and their efforts to resist both interpersonal and systemic oppression.

METHOD

Data and Procedure

Location of articles. For the current study, I used the *PsycINFO* database to conduct a keyword search of all empirical journal articles using combinations of the following search terms: "Black or African American or African-American", "women or woman or female", "resistance", and "collective action or activism or social change". Of the 264 original articles identified through the search (from 1972 to 2019), 165 were removed from further consideration based on title and 42 articles were removed after reviewing the abstract (see Figure 1.1). An additional 34 were removed following a full-text article review due to: lack of relevance ($n = 3$); lack of disaggregated data specific to Black women in the U.S. ($n = 15$); children and/or adolescents included in the sample ($n = 7$); focus on critical consciousness without social/critical action ($n = 3$); and finally, collection of data from Black women living outside of the U.S. ($n = 6$). This process was conducted by the primary researcher and resulted in 23 articles for review ranging in publication date from 1983 to 2018.

Coding Team. The coding team consisted of three fourth-year graduate students in an APA accredited counseling psychology doctoral program with research and clinical interests related to the study of racism and factors that mitigate the mental health and academic conse-

quences of various forms of race-related stress. One team member identified as a Black American and Nigerian cisgender woman (Coder One, first author), one as a White Latina, cisgender woman of Cuban and Argentinian descent (Coder Two), and the third team member identified as a White cisgender woman (Coder Three). The average age of the team was 29 years (range from 27 to 32 years of age). Coding team members identified as heterosexual ($n = 2$) and bisexual ($n = 1$), and all identified as sexual and gender minority allies. All team members identified as able-bodied. Prior to coding the data, the coders engaged in a discussion of reflexivity to examine their positionalities regarding the topics of inquiry, and to acknowledge the potential for our social positions to result in distorted interpretations of the data. Acknowledging that both knowledge and perspective are shaped by unique contexts and experiences (Valentine, 2002), we discussed our social identities, biases, experiences with discrimination, and areas of privilege that may have influenced both our interpretation and coding of the data (Jorgenson, 2011). We determined that given our experiences, biases, and social positions, we may be inclined to over-identify acts of resistance as emergent from the text, specifically given our social positions as minoritized individuals who both endorse and engage in various forms of activism.

Research methodology and data analysis. A qualitative content analysis was used to analyze all methods and results sections. Content analysis has been recommended as an appropriate methodology for examining a construct or phenomenon within a discipline or area where a dearth of information or knowledge pertinent to that phenomenon exists (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Content analysis has also been deemed an effective methodology for analyzing open-ended responses, which are generally characteristic of qualitative inquiries, as well as open-response

questions in quantitative studies (Elo et al., 2014). Additionally, content analysis was used to examine and identify themes among all activist activities extracted from quantitative studies at the item level. This enabled us to examine themes among specific resistance strategies identified in both the qualitative and quantitative data. Given the limited number of studies within psychology examining collective action and sociopolitical engagement with Black women, as well as the largely qualitative nature of existing studies, content analysis provided an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of an understudied construct (i.e., Black women's resistance) within psychological literature, its impact on mental health, and its implications for wellbeing.

Overall, the purpose of the content analysis was to identify patterns between meaning units (e.g., themes, constructs), and condense similar meaning units into broader constructs or categories in order to contribute insight, knowledge, and recommendations where these are limited in the literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Given that the identified articles utilized quantitative and qualitative analyses, the articles were first divided by methodology. Consistent with procedures outlined by Elo and Kyngäs (2008), data taken from the qualitative articles were then analyzed using a three-step process: preparation, organizing, and reporting. During the preparation phase, the coding team first determined that definitions, specific resistance strategies, outcomes related to resistance, and forms of oppression targeted by resistance efforts would be the units of analysis. Afterward, team members read each article thoroughly and took detailed notes. For quantitative articles, the same process was used but was streamlined due to a reduced need to develop codes from the data.

During the organization phase, all team members independently coded data retrieved from the methods and results sections of both the qualitative and quantitative articles, extracting

themes from the written content. After independently coding, two of the three team members (i.e., Coders One and Two) met to discuss the thematic codes that were constructed during independent open coding. Where there were discrepancies in codes between the two coders, the third member (Coder Three) was asked to share their codes and the codes were discussed until consensus was reached (Hill, 2012). Using credibility to establish trustworthiness, the third coder was used to triangulate thematic findings, allowing for greater confidence in the research process as well as a challenge to worldviews and assumptions that may have biased the results (Morrow, 2007). The themes were then combined to form higher order themes, or constructs. A total of 37 constructs were initially identified and then further combined to form higher order themes. Constructs were combined until team members agreed that the constructs were parsimonious, and the data were well-saturated, meaning that review of the articles produced no new constructs or themes (Elo et al., 2014). This process resulted in a final set of ten dimensions of resistance (see Table 1.2, Chapter 1). To verify saturation, original data were then recoded using the codebook of final dimensions.

RESULTS

Characteristics of the Articles

Of the 23 identified articles, 73.9% ($n = 17$) utilized qualitative methodologies (e.g., in-depth interviews, archival research, focus groups) and 26.1% ($n = 6$) used quantitative methodologies. Participants were cisgender and transgender women who racially identified as either Black or African American. In terms of age and life stage of the study samples represented in the arti-

cles, participants ranged in age from 18 and 70 years at the time of their engagement with strategies of resistance. Most studies represented data from Black/African American women in the community ($n = 22$; 95.7%); one study recruited Black/African American women college students from a university participant pool ($n = 1$; 4.3%). Most articles focused solely on the experiences of Black/African American women ($n = 15$; 65.2%), whereas four articles (17.4%) investigated the resistance efforts of both Black and White cisgender women. An additional four articles examined resistance among Black cisgender women and Black cisgender men (17.4%). These latter eight articles were retained for analysis because the comparative nature of the research questions translated to the presentation of disaggregated results for Black women consistent with my inquiry.

The 23 articles were also reviewed for forms of oppression targeted by participants' resistance (see Table 2, Chapter 1). Consistent with Black women's experiences as individuals subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, the identified forms of oppression often overlapped within a single article, such that strategies of resistance were complex and targeted toward intersecting forms of oppression. For the purposes of this paper, I identified that the most commonly discussed singular forms of oppression were structural/institutional racism (e.g., negative racial climate in academic or work settings, segregation, environmental racism via urban planning; $n = 17$), and structural forms of sexism (e.g., women's rights, lower pay wages for women; $n = 6$). Strategies of resistance targeting interpersonal racism (i.e., microaggressions, $n = 5$), homophobia ($n = 2$), economic inequity/classism ($n = 3$), and transphobia ($n = 1$) were also identified. I also assessed for one intersectional form of interpersonal and structural oppression – gendered racism (e.g., maternal health disparities, violence against Black women, hegemonic

beauty standards; $n = 13$). Finally, definitions of resistance (i.e., collective action, activism, etc.) were identified from (1) the author's description, (2) the participants' reported understanding of their participation, or (3) deductions from text by the coders (see Table 1, Chapter 1).

Dimensions of Resistance

Ten dimensions of resistance, as well as specific strategies corresponding with each dimension, were identified from the methods and results sections of the articles found in the *Psyc*INFO search (see Table 2, Chapter 1). The first dimension of resistance was *sociopolitical action* and represented public forms of action or protest against injustice. Sociopolitical action was identified in twelve articles. Authors and participants discussed Black women's decisions to resist oppression by joining or organizing marches, boycotts, or demonstrations, primarily in protest of racial injustice (e.g., police brutality) and gendered racism (e.g., violence against Black women). In older cohorts, Black women often reflected on their participation in the Civil Rights movement, which included resistance to segregated education and Jim Crow laws. Through *civic engagement*, Black women contributed to grassroots change in the Black community related to racial injustice, gender inequities, and economic inequality. Also discussed in twelve of the identified articles, Black women organized and volunteered to improve women's rights, civil rights, and the rights of other marginalized communities. Brooks (2016) outlined one Black woman's decision to use her site of employment to help LGBT and Black families purchase homes that had previously been denied to them due to redlining and residential housing discrimination. Others organized unions (e.g., the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in Eastern Arkansas; Williams, 2004) to push for equality in pay wages and labor for women tobacco farmers. Others became involved in local, state, and national politics by caucusing for the needs of the Black community

(Hall & Fine, 2005), campaigning and holding public office, and attending council meetings to address concerns about public school education, public housing, and racial justice in their community.

   Critical consciousness, discussed in eleven of the identified articles, refers to the ways in which Black women facilitate critical awareness of their own and others' sociopolitical positions. With regard to racism, gendered racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, the participants in the identified articles challenged and educated both in- and out-group members. These women pushed their students, family members, colleagues, and strangers to become aware of oppressive systems and structures and through modeling and active encouragement, guiding them toward their own strategies of critical action and resistance. Identified in eight articles, *building community and coalition* was frequently discussed alongside critical consciousness. This dimension represents the ways in which Black women build networks of community for safety and connection and to stand in solidarity with other marginalized persons and groups. Fostering and staying in community emerged as a strategy for staying connected to and grounded in the needs of Black and other marginalized communities despite a pull to assimilate to the needs and values of the dominant culture (Rodriguez & Ward, 2018).

   As "loving warriors" (Ramsey, 2012), Black women stood in as proxy mothers and caregivers for children, young activists, and Civil Rights leaders. In Irons (1998) and Loder (2005), participants recalled activist mothering, or othermothering, as some of their most important engagement with social justice work. Activist mothering, represented in six of the identified articles, involved feeding and housing students recently released from jail after they were arrested for demonstrating or boycotting; these students were often far from home and feared putting their

families at risk for retaliation following their acts of civil protests. Black women organized food donation drives for incarcerated students and provided meals to civil rights workers and attorneys. Two women opened a rehabilitation home for previously incarcerated Black women, providing them with shelter, employment, and job skills- all necessary protections to avoid the consequences of unjust laws that recriminalize Black people for their inability to attain work and housing after release from prison (Brooks, 2016).

Review of the six identified articles indicated that Black women played an essential role in facilitating desegregated education for the Black community through local and large-scale *advocacy for equitable education*. In addition to pushing for quality, integrated education for Black children, they established and worked in educational programs specifically for Black children and developed community programs to alleviate poverty and racial discrimination in education. Irons (1998) discussed Black women educators' strategies for organizing against segregated education and inadequate professional preparation and development for younger Black educators. Through local community organizing, Black women educators sued school boards for denying Black children the right to enroll in White schools following the enactment of integration laws, and for unequal salaries between Black and White educators. These women attained post-undergraduate education to ensure their own preparation for integrated education and created pathways for other women to do the same. Their efforts led to the integration of primary education institutions, advanced education for other Black women, and in changing the culture of segregation throughout the U.S. South. Black women *challenge oppression with confrontation* and are radical disruptors to systems and institutions that are unjust. Six of the identified articles outlined ways in which participants spoke out against both interpersonal and structural oppression, and

rejected racial and gendered stereotypes, assumptions, and microaggressions. The participants spoke out against injustice not only directed toward them, but also against injustice directed toward others. This confrontation was especially apparent in classrooms, teaching institutions, and in the workplace, where Black women consistently advocated for children, other teachers, and colleagues' experiences of interpersonal degradation or institutional oppression. For example, Black mothers insisted on their lawful right to take breaks at work for breastfeeding purposes (Spencer et al., 2014) and Black teachers challenged White teachers who labeled Black students with racist stereotypes (Ramsey, 2012).

Visual resistance or visibility reflects the ways in which Black women pushed, challenged, and demanded that others accept their identity and their chosen expressions of that identity. Visual resistance emerged as a thematic dimension in four of the identified articles. For example, Hall and Fine (2005) discussed the ways in which two Black, queer women defied assumptions about what it meant to be Black, woman, and lesbian in the 1940s. The participants spoke of the interpersonal and structural racism they experienced as Black people, but also of the homophobia, transphobia, and sexism they experienced within the Black community. By "playing with gender" and intentionally pushing against the gender binary through dress/appearance and language, these women created space to thrive on the margins of society without sacrificing their sense of self or determination to resist subjugation. Other articles discussed ways in which Black women challenged hegemonic beauty standards by intentionally wearing natural hairstyles and asserting physical expressions of both womanhood and activism rooted in Blackness. Through visibility, they challenged the notion that expressions of Black womanhood are inferior to White womanhood.

Similar to activist mothering, through *financial support,* Black women made it possible for young, Black activists to persist in their efforts to transform unjust systems. Financial support was identified in four articles. By hosting bake sales, fish fries, and other fundraisers, Black women raised money to build and support colleges, night schools, day care facilities, and Civil Rights movement actions. Where economic inequality prevented Black communities from fair and equitable education, access to recreation and leisure, or social services (e.g., childcare), these women used their influence and social networks to garner community support. Finally, review of two articles demonstrated the ways in which Black women fight for equity, inclusion, and their wellbeing by *resisting internalized oppression* and refusing to accept an inferior quality of life. They set educational and career goals that spanned beyond gendered racial proscriptions deemed possible for them. Additionally, they relied on other Black women in the community to support and affirm them, which enabled them to reject notions of inferiority based on prejudice.

Outcomes related to Resistance

To assess the degree to which the psychological literature examines the personal and collective mental health impact of Black women's resistance, and examined outcomes within these studies, the same coding strategy used to determine dimensions of resistance was followed. Outcomes related to resistance strategies were ultimately condensed into nine constructs (see Table 1.4). Of the six articles using quantitative methodologies, only one directly assessed outcomes of resistance (i.e., Lee, 2004). The remaining quantitative articles examined predictors of resistance ($n = 2$; e.g., sociopolitical beliefs and political self-efficacy on civic engagement; Leath & Chavous, 2017) or intragroup differences in engagement with resistance ($n = 3$; e.g., differences in volunteerism and activism rates between Black and White women, Farmer & Piotrkowski,

2009). Regarding the 17 qualitative articles, use of grounded theory and phenomenological meth-odologies allowed researchers to capture outcomes of resistance as participants discussed them naturally; we did not deduce any direct inquiries into the participants' outcomes of their sociopo-litical engagement. However, these articles provided rich examples of the wellbeing, health, community, career, and educational outcomes of their critical action against oppression (see Ta-ble 3, Chapter 1). Finally, of the 23 articles analyzed, only one (Lee, 2004) reported an associa-tion between resistance and traditional mental health outcomes (i.e., psychological health). How-ever, some articles ($n = 6$) discussed participants' personal gains, which have been examined as aspects of wellbeing in prior literature (life satisfaction, personal satisfaction, and locus of con-trol, Lee, 2004; self-efficacy, Spencer et al., 2014; meaning in life, Stewart et al., 1998; political efficacy, Williams, 2004).

DISCUSSION

The discipline of psychology has emerged as a leader in its study of racial and gender op-pression, intersectionality, and social justice (Fouad et al., 2005). Specifically, some community-focused areas of psychology have prioritized investigating the ways in which interpersonal and structural discrimination negatively affect mental health and wellbeing among marginalized groups (García-Ramírez et al., 2014; Hartung & Blustein, 2011; Martín-Baró, 1996; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Some scholars have centered this work on the experiences of Black women, contributing valuable theories that have propelled the field forward with regard to the relation-ships between intersecting forms of oppression and mental health disparities (Essed, 1991;

Greene, 2000; Lewis, 2015). Recently however, there has been a call to center the voices of marginalized groups by diverging from a deficit framework of investigating the link between oppression and mental health, and toward a strengths-based framework that assumes, acknowledges, and investigates marginalized persons' resistance to oppression (Patton & Museus, 2019). Indeed, literature in line with this call has examined resistance (e.g., collective action, sociopolitical action) with racially marginalized persons and found these constructs to be associated with positive mental health outcomes (DeBlaere et al., 2014). However, this literature has primarily focused on resistance with either diverse groups of racially marginalized persons, racially diverse women, or Black people, lacking specific attention to the ways in which Black women's identities and experiences lead to unique strategies to push back against oppression, transform unjust systems, and repair communities affected by injustice. As such, the primary goal of this study was to acknowledge the historical and contemporary resistance of Black women through an analysis of existing psychological literature in order to initiate a research program that investigates the impact of this resistance on their mental health. Specifically, I sought to summarize the current psychological literature with regard to this topic (see Table 1.1), articulate gaps, and make recommendations for future investigations.

The first objective of my study was to identify definitions and specific strategies of resistance that Black women employ to combat the deleterious consequences of oppression. My study identified ten categories of resistance (see Table 1.2), with several spanning beyond notions of collective action and sociopolitical engagement typically examined in psychological literature. For example, activist mothering (i.e., othermothering) emerged as one dimension of crit-

ical action that is often not acknowledged as a form of activism. Indeed, feeding Civil Rights activists, providing shelter and accommodations, and mentoring young people has been deemed "woman's work" and peripheral to the movement of activist work. However, Naples (1992) argues that activist mothering is not only central to critical action but is consistent with the ways in which Black women have used strategies of caring as an assault on oppressive institutions. Collins (2009) also notes that a primary dimension of Black women's activism is to utilize spheres of influence to undermine oppressive social structures. While this may not be considered direct action to some, historically, such work has weathered anti-Black racism and sexism within institutions by ensuring Black survival and contributing to the group's persistence and morale (Stack, 1974). Similar emergent resistance strategies that have historically been ignored as sites of activism include interpersonal confrontation as a means of challenging oppression, advocating for personal and communal health (e.g., educating other Black women about the benefits of breastfeeding; Spencer et al., 2014), supporting Black children in the classroom, fundraising, and sharing knowledge of domestic skills with the outcome of boosting the Black economy. In a capitalist society focused on productivity, aggression, or vocality as veritable forms of activism, these "silent" forms of activism can be overlooked (Naples, 1992). Again however, such resistance is consistent with Black women's intentions to undermine oppressive systems by engineering the support that their communities need.

Another study goal was to identify the outcomes of resistance reported in the current psychological literature and to assess the degree to which mental health has been examined as an outcome (see Table 1.3). The identified outcomes were connection and community (e.g., sustained connection with others), meaning and purpose (e.g., felt impact of resistance), health and

wellbeing (e.g., improved physical and psychological health), career growth and satisfaction (e.g., upward career mobility), collective identity formation (e.g., affirmation in identity as a Black woman), community transformation (e.g., organizational and institutional change), empowerment and self-efficacy (e.g., greater self-efficacy), and political efficacy (e.g., greater collective action engagement within the community). Though mental health was directly assessed in only one study (i.e., psychological health; Lee, 2004), several studies (i.e., Garrin & Marcketti, 2018; Spencer et al., 2014; Stewart et al., 1998; Williams, 2004) either assessed or discussed the effect that resistance had on the wellbeing of its participants. In Williams (2004), African American women reported a greater sense of political efficacy, discussing that their social activism and intentionality in imbuing Black children with knowledge about the precipitants for the Civil Rights movement caused them to feel that their actions had a tangible impact on the welfare of their community. Their activism, that began as novel ideas for service within their churches and schools, led to the formation of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, leadership roles in the NAACP, and an afterschool program (i.e., Freedom School) whose model remains a haven for Black children throughout the nation. Of critical importance for this study, their activism transformed them from "unknown and unconfident" citizens to social justice leaders and change agents (Higginbotham, 1994, p. 17; Williams, 2004).

Indeed, outcomes (i.e., political efficacy, self-efficacy, meaning/purpose, collective identity formation) identified in this content analysis have been examined as wellbeing variables in previous empirical studies. For example, political efficacy reported as a result of social activism has been associated with lower levels of helplessness and psychological distress among African American male adolescents (Zimmerman et al., 1999), and with higher levels of psychological

and social well-being among young adults in Hong Kong (Chan et al, 2020). Still others, healing and strengthened relationships have invaluable impacts on individual and collective wellness. Mahali (2017) discusses the impact of critical awareness and community organizing on the collective identity formation of Black women in South Africa, and their observations that such formation has a profound positive impact on both self-determination and pride among the women engaged in resistance. Consistent with this prior literature then, the relationship between resistance, mental health, and wellbeing deserves specific attention and examination with Black women in the U.S. As demonstrated through this review, the individual and collective benefits of Black women's resistance are likely to be evidenced.

Finally, of notable mention for this paper is the observation of forms of oppression targeted by participants' resistance. For the purposes of this paper, and apart from my assessment of resistance to gendered racism, singular forms of oppression were deduced and parsed from the text and recorded for reporting. Though this enabled me to determine which forms of oppression may be understudied within psychological literature (e.g., environmental racism was examined in a single study [Rodriguez & Ward, 2018], and thus warrants further attention), neither experiences of discrimination nor strategies of resistance are targeted to singular forms of oppression within Black women's activism. Instead, various forms of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, capitalism, homophobia, transphobia, ability discrimination, etc.) work together in interlocking systems of domination to uphold and validate one another (Crenshaw, 1991). Such is the lived experience of Black women, and in reality, their resistance is directed toward the dismantling of all oppression simultaneously. This was most apparent in Hall & Fine (2005), as participants discussed the ways that their strategies of "playing with gender" combatted the homophobia and

transphobia specific to the Black community, and challenged the gendered, racial, and sexualized expectations of what was deemed permissible for Black women at that time. Additionally, throughout the identified articles, it was often a "coming into" critical awareness of the interconnectedness of discrimination that led participants to engage in resistance. Consistent with Black Feminist thought, Black women's social location on the margins of various identity constructs positions them to be advocates for all marginalized people. It is for this reason that attending to and learning from their specific strategies of resistance may be the key to liberation for all.

Study Limitations

Study findings should be considered in light of a number of important limitations. First, the content analysis only included published papers identified in the *Psyc*Info database. Though the strategy aligned with my goal of accessing only peer-reviewed psychological literature, the present findings are biased to the extent to which they exclude unpublished investigations of Black women's resistance and scholarly work from other disciplines. I realize that this is an important limitation and that the fields of sociology, public health, and legal studies have contributed significantly to knowledge concerning Black women's historic role as leaders of social change. However, much of this literature is not concerned with mental health as an outcome of resistance, so I felt that including these examinations was beyond the scope of the primary research questions. In addition, the coding decisions reflect the knowledge, biases, and interpretations of the coding team. As such, another group of coders may observe dimensions, specific categories, and outcomes of resistance that vary from those reported in this study; such a limitation is always present in qualitative content analysis.

Future Directions

Overall, this review demonstrates that associations between resistance and wellbeing are indeed present, but when measured against the breadth of discrimination research, inquiries into the mental health and wellbeing consequences of critical action specific to Black women are scant and in need of continued exploration. This dearth is the primary gap that emerged from this content analysis. As such, the primary recommendation is for psychological literature to center the experiences of Black women when examining collective action and other constructs of resistance. Such investigations will expand our understanding of social action to include sites of resistance that may be currently overlooked (e.g., activist mothering, silent activism, etc.). As historical leaders of social change, Black women have much to contribute to the conversation regarding the shape and form of collective action (Collins, 2009). An additional emergent gap in psychological literature is the lack of studies examining the impact of Black women's resistance on their personal mental health, as well as that of their families and communities. A second recommendation then, is a distinct focus on the ways in which Black women are engaging activism, advocacy, and other forms of agency to push back against the deleterious mental health consequences of oppression. Further, given Black women's motivations and commitments to transforming unjust systems both for themselves and their communities, as well as the evidence of community transformation as a result of their action, it stands to reason that their families and communities may benefit from improved psychological health, political and self-efficacy, and locus of control. A final recommendation is for the field of psychology to take an interdisciplinary approach to studying Black women's collective action engagement, and resistance more broadly. Studies originating from sociology, public health, and legal scholars have contributed

significantly to knowledge concerning Black women's efforts in social change movements, and such knowledge must be integrated into psychological inquiries. The rich, intersectional study of Black women's lives and experiences mandates an interdisciplinary approach to inquiry and interpretation.

CONCLUSION

This content analysis provides an overview of psychological literature related to Black women's resistance to oppression, through active engagement in their communities, workplaces, and other spheres of influence. Specifically, this analysis summarized the ways in which Black women become act as change agents, modifying their environments in deliberate attempts to ameliorate the consequences of individual, interpersonal, and structural oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, gendered racism, ableism). Currently, discrimination research with Black women is primarily conducted from a pathological perspective (Spates, 2012; Washington, 2006), focusing on various ways that Black women experience mental health declines or cope with distress following incidents of interpersonal oppression (e.g., microaggressions). It is hoped that this analysis can serve as inspiration to broaden the scope of psychological research with Black women to include a focus on the ways in which their choices to actively resist oppression may also have an impact on their mental health.

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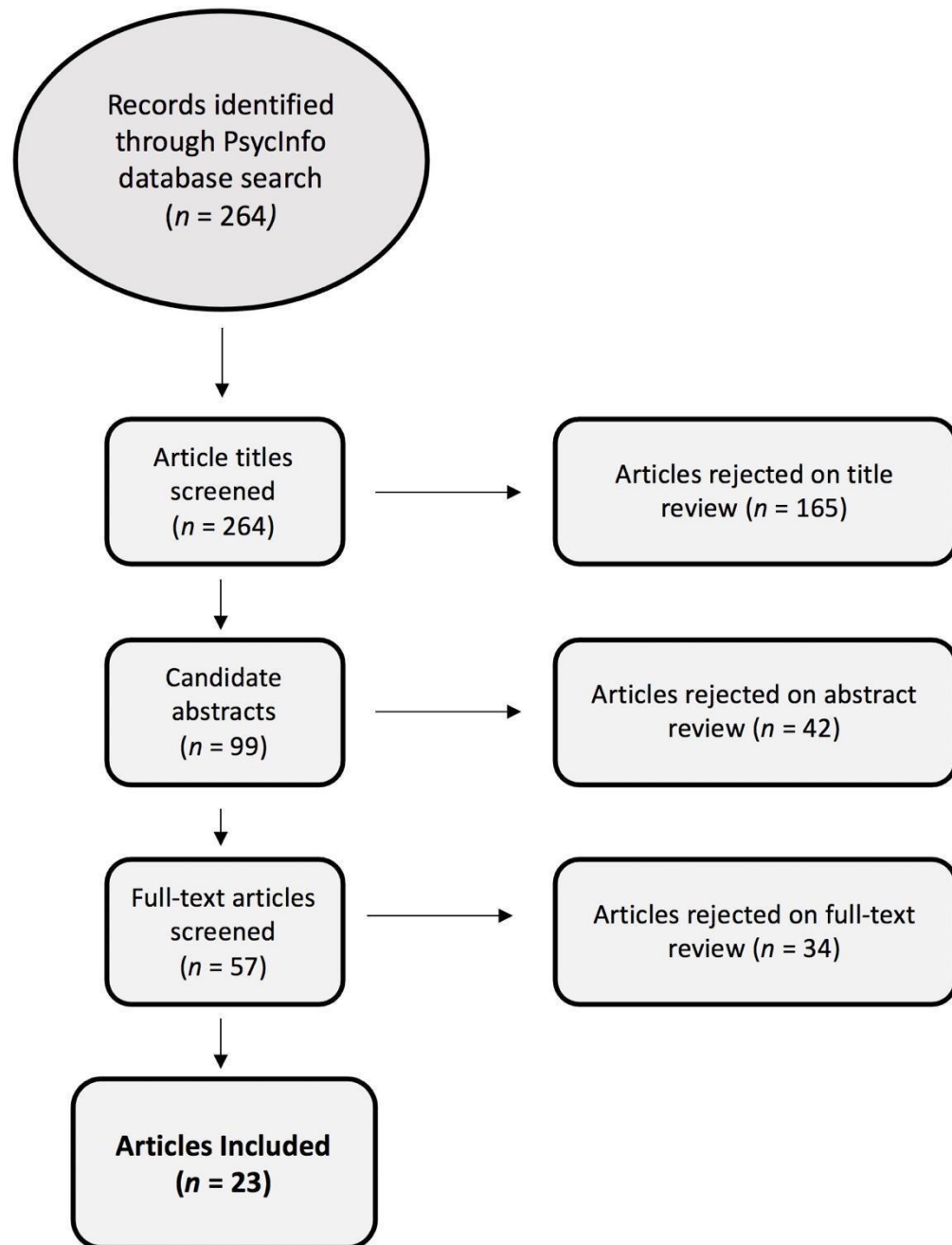
Figure 1.1 *Selection of Articles following PsycInfo Database Search*

Table 1.1. Summary of Articles and Definitions of Resistance

Publication	Methodology	Sample	Participants' Direct Definition of Resistance	Authors' Definition of Resistance or Coder Deductions
Rodriguez & Ward, 2018	Qualitative	2 Black women community activists	-	Grassroots activism, mobilization, community activism
Brooks, 2016	Qualitative	23 LGBT-Identified Black women	-	Positive marginality, identity management, visibility
Lee, 2004	Quantitative	105 middle-aged Black women	-	Social activism
Garrin & Marcketti, 2018	Qualitative	7 Black women	-	Activism, visual resistance/visibility, consciousness for liberation (critical consciousness)
Rapp et al., 2010	Qualitative	189 blog posts written by Black women	-	Activism, protest, collective action
Irons, 1998	Qualitative	8 Black women (13 participants total; 5 White women)	-	High-risk activism, activist mothering and "women's work"
Hall & Fine, 2005	Qualitative	2 Black lesbian older women	-	Activism, resistance, positive marginality, visibility
Williams, 2004	Qualitative	13 African American women civil rights participants (16 participants total; 3 African American men)	-	Social activism, movement, collective action

Peterson, 2009	Qualitative	4 Black women labeled with disabilities	-	Acts of resistance as a result of increased critical consciousness
Leath & Chavous, 2017	Quantitative	266 Black and African American women college students (322 participants total; 96 Black and African American men)	-	Civic engagement behaviors, activism (i.e., Behaviors and actions that individuals take to improve the lives of others and influence the future of their communities; Adler, 2005, p. 242).
Mele, 2000	Qualitative	16 Black women	-	Political activism, Activist mothering, Community activism (i.e., "…a long process of interaction between 'personal experience and the social and political contexts that shape experience'" p. 70; Gilkes, 1994, p. 238).
Loder, 2005	Qualitative	5 African American older women	Community othermothering	Social change
Spencer et al., 2014	Qualitative		Activism	Breastfeeding activism
Farmer & Piotrkowski, 2009	Quantitative	2225 African American women	-	Civic engagement, Activism
Ramsey, 2012	Qualitative	2 African American women teachers	-	Caring activism (i.e., "…caring as a key force for social activism, and…caring not in private but in public terms as advocates for students", p. 245).

Gilkes, 1983	Qualitative	25 Black women	-	"Going up for the oppressed" (i.e., gaining critical consciousness and engaging in action that benefits the community through a person's career)
Taylor, 2004	Qualitative	21 African American women	-	Quiet activism (i.e., private/personal acts of resistance), Hands-on activism (community activism)
Loder-Jackson, 2012	Qualitative	10 Black women from the US South	-	Silent activism (i.e., silent support, silent protest, undermining oppressive institutions), Visibility
White, 2006	Quantitative	50 African American self-identified feminist women (100 participants total; 50 African American self-identified feminist men)	-	Feminist activism
Stewart et al., 1998	Quantitative	68 African American women (107 participants total in Study 1; 39 White women)	-	Student political participation, Midlife political participation, Activism
Bialeschki & Walbert, 1998	Qualitative	150 African American women tobacco farm workers (300 participants total; 150 White women workers)	-	Social change, Community building, Union activism/ Organizing

Cole & Stewart, 1996	Quantitative	64 African American and White women	-	Political activism, Student activism, Community activism, Adult political participation
White, 2001	Qualitative	59 African American women and African American men	-	Activism, Anti-rape education, Political consciousness with distinct focus on action

Table 1.2. Dimensions and Strategies of Resistance, including corresponding Number of Articles

Dimension	Strategies of Resistance
Sociopolitical Action (*n* = 12)	▪ Attending political meetings or rallies ▪ Marching or demonstrating in protest of racial injustice, police brutality, feminist issues, segregation ▪ Boycotting ▪ Participating in political activity that could lead to arrest ▪ Participating in a discussion about a social, feminist, or political issue ▪ Signing a petition ▪ Writing a letter to an editor of a magazine or newspaper ▪ Writing a nonfiction article, essay, pamphlet, or book ▪ Using the creative arts (e.g., visual arts, poetry, fiction, theatre, music, etc.) to convey a political message to the public ▪ Online activism and protest
Civic Engagement (*n* = 12)	▪ Serving as a member or supported a national feminist organization ▪ Using employment as a space for feminist activism ▪ Conducting professional research on a feminist topic ▪ Volunteering for feminist organization or collective ▪ Helping LGBT and Black families purchase homes that were previously denied to them due to residential housing discrimination (e.g., redlining) ▪ Developing and hosting events supporting both the Black and LGBT community for Black history month ▪ Organizing the Southern Tenant Farmers Union to advocate for Black workers (Williams, 2004) ▪ Acting in union leadership positions; recruiting and raising awareness for the union movement ▪ Using songs, prayers, and the church to organize unions; utilizing church space to organize recreational and activist activities ▪ Creating neighborhood centers and halls to provide services to members of Black community (e.g., employment, legal, mental health, family, homemaker, and health services; voter registration) ▪ Canvassing votes for issues related to improving racism and sexism; supporting political candidates ▪ Working to increase voter registration in the Black community through registration drives ▪ Participating in the electoral process ▪ Attending and organizing SNCC conferences

- Organizing grassroots organization to identify environmental discrimination in communities of color related to transportation infrastructure (Rodriguez & Ward, 2018)
- Engaging in community service to establish and maintain connections between cities, local universities, and Black communities nearby
- Founding and leading organizations and associations (e.g., National Black Nurses Association, HIV + AIDS community-based organization)
- Opening a Freedom School for children- using space to organize and promote boycotts, demonstrations, and voter registration drives
- Creating branch of National Urban League to help Black people adjust to urban living after moving from the US South
- Taking leadership roles in NAACP, ATA, and other state and local branches of movement orgs

Critical Conscious-ness (*n* = 11)	- Keeping informed about politics - Joining a consciousness-raising group (e.g., seeking out other Black women for community conversations that facilitate critical or political consciousness) - Reading books, taking classes, watching media to develop activist and political identities - Learning about the history of one's people - Informing others about feminist issues in business environments and academic institutions - Challenging and educating in-group members about misogynoir (i.e., sanctioned physical and emotional violence against Black women; compelling Black women to view/accept racism and most important form of oppression), homophobia and transphobia, and dismissal of the unique needs, stressors, and experiences of Black women - Informing significant others (e.g., family members, close friends, relatives) about feminist parenting techniques and feminist issues and practices - Acknowledging and urging others to acknowledge the ways that racism operates differently for Black women - Educating the Black community (e.g., strangers, friends, family, religious communities) about LGBT POC, mostly in public settings - Demanding others attend to the ways in which organizations fighting for racial justice often exclude Black women - Creating anti-rape education for the Black community - Challenging the NAACP and other racial justice groups to support Black women victims, and publicly admonishing these groups for their lack of response to violence against Black women - Dispelling and rejecting ableist messaging from friends and family members - Helping other African American women with breastfeeding and educating them on health outcomes; promoting breastfeeding publicly - Educating the Black community about LGBT issues - Challenging + educating in-group members (i.e., Black men) about misogynoir - Educating in-group members (strangers, friends + family, religious institutions insisting on direct exclusion and/or intentional denial of LGBQ identity) about LGBT POC, mostly in public settings - Creating online awareness campaigns to educate others about specific instances of violence against Black women, using emails, letters, phone calls, blogs, and mainstream media - Providing education to Black children in the community by working for/with Head Start - Using domestic skills to teach low-income women how to use self-projects to generate income and boost the Black economy

- ▪ Using classroom dialogue to develop students' awareness of the impact of racism (i.e., segregated education) on their learning and development)
- ▪ Teaching the first African American history course offered in a public school in the South (1936; Williams, 2004)
- ▪ Motivating young people to engage in collective action
- ▪ Providing students with intellectual understanding of the Civil Rights movement (i.e., teaching students' methods of thinking about the structure of the US, how to make choices and decisions, allowing them the opportunity to respond and raise questions about their socio-political standing in the US in order to fortify them against racism; Loder-Jackson, 2012)
- ▪ Cultivating activist identities within students in classrooms
- ▪ Teaching students about the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) within classrooms, as well as the rationale behind the CRM and the rationale behind their own involvement with the CRM
- ▪ Educating students about segregationist laws
- ▪ Teaching students about democracy and facilitating their ability to distinguish between just and unjust laws
- ▪ Debunking the myth of black inferiority through historical education

Community + Coalition Building (*n* = 8)	▪ Creating safe spaces for Black lesbians to live in community
	▪ Facilitating increased access to mother-to-mother support for breast-feeding
	▪ Standing in solidarity and community with other marginalized individuals and groups (e.g., via social media, physical support)
	▪ Building/forming a network of support and friendship amongst coworkers in the textile community, specifically when White employers did not offer opportunities for community-building or recreational experiences alongside White employees (Bialeschki & Walbert, 1998)
	▪ Moral support and silent protest (e.g., affirming friends and colleagues who openly challenge oppression)
	▪ Internet activism/Social Media activism
	▪ Advocating for improved and empowering health service (e.g., seeking out health care professionals that advocate for breastfeeding)
	▪ Organizing seminars with community workers to understand social events and literature affecting the Black community
	▪ Earning advanced degrees in order to apply skills and knowledge gained to address social issues affecting the Black community
	▪ Using education, familiarity with the labor market, and class advantages to advance the interests of/serve the Black community
	▪ Intergenerational bridge-building
Activist Mothering + Othermothering (*n* = 6)	▪ Offering and initiating services to previously incarcerated Black women (i.e., providing rehabilitation home, mailing address, job skills, etc.) as action against unjust criminal justice system
	▪ Taking care of Black children in the community
	▪ Attending meetings regarding public school education for Black children- protesting school closings
	▪ Using domestic skills to teach low-income groups how to use DIY projects to generate 80-income + boost Black economy
	▪ Housing students released from jail following their arrest during Civil Rights protests
	▪ Feeding civil rights workers, attorneys, and other activists
	▪ Teachers refusing to report student absences during The Children's March
	▪ Protecting students from expulsion for racist reasons; advocating against institutional racism in schools
	▪ Acting as a conduit (i.e., organizing a donation drive for items given by community members) and providing food, orange juice, supplements, and other donated items to incarcerated individuals
	▪ Using Womanist educational theories and caring activism to mediate racial conflicts between Black + White students and nurture a supportive environment for Black students in recently integrated schools

	▪ "Planting Seeds" – Sharing with women experiencing intimate partner violence and creating pathways for them to leave unhealthy relationships
Advocacy for Equitable Education ($n = 6$)	▪ Enrolling and graduating from advanced education programs from which Black women were severely underrepresented
	▪ Organizing against segregated education and inadequate professional preparation and development for Black educators (e.g., at Little Rock Central High)
	▪ Teaching in Head Start programs for Black children
	▪ Establishing an afterschool program (e.g., Freedom School) for Black children
	▪ Organizing Volunteer Teachers Corps to provide free preschool education and fundamental reading skills to Black children from low-income families
	▪ Establishing a mentoring program in the Birmingham community for Black males + Recruiting Black men in the city to serve as mentors
	▪ Establishing Black-centered services at universities (e.g., Black studies library, Black Studies department)
	▪ Challenging university officials to hire more Black professors and to demanding more funding for Black Studies programs and projects
	▪ Creating affirming spaces in classrooms for Black students, through Black history memorabilia- connecting Black students with their ancestors
	▪ Stopping teachers from using corporal punishment on Black children, especially White teachers
	▪ Establishing partnerships between nonprofit organizations, schools, and individuals across the city, state, country, and world
	▪ Suing school boards for discriminatory practices (e.g., unequal teaching salary and denying Black children the right to enroll in any school following adoption of the Freedom of Choice plan)
	▪ Refusing to accommodate White parents' requests to move their children out of classrooms with Black teachers
	▪ Post-undergraduate education to adapt to new teaching pedagogies suitable for integrated education
	▪ Refusing to adhere to cultural dictates of segregation- defying employers' rules or challenging authority
	▪ Attending workshops on desegregation
	▪ Calling superiors to demand that school officials follow through with integration mandates and create supportive environment for Black students
	▪ Integrating PTA officers' positions

Challenging oppression with confrontation ($n = 6$)	▪ Rejecting racial and gendered stereotypes, assumptions, and microaggressions (e.g., Black women and breastfeeding, stereotypes about the Black community and poor folks)
	▪ Advocating for rights with employment supervisors (e.g., right to take breaks to breastfeed/pump)
	▪ Standing up for oneself/speaking out against interpersonally racist incidents
	▪ "Democratizing" professional and agency relationships by questioning and confronting White institutions (Gilkes, 1983)
	▪ Rejecting labels of intellectual disability or special education; Demanding equitable education and challenging teachers who "dumbed down" education
	▪ Advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion in spaces of employment
	▪ Teachers confronting White students celebrating/glorifying Confederate history
	▪ Public criticizing university professors whose interests served as a detriment to the Black community
	▪ Standing up against interpersonal opposition to breastfeeding from family members and others, educating them
Visual Resistance/ Visibility ($n = 4$)	▪ Wearing natural hair to challenge White hegemonic beauty standards
	▪ "Coming out" as a political choice
	▪ Marching in protest of racial injustice + police brutality, while highlighting LGBT visibility (attending march wearing rainbow T-shirts)
	▪ Transgressive politics- violating the norms for which women in Southern states participate in activism (e.g., Mele, 2000)
	▪ "Playing with gender" through clothing and other visible means
	▪ Intentional physical expressions of both womanhood and activism rooted in Blackness (e.g., clothing, pictures on classroom walls)
	▪ Challenging/demanding that others accept their identity and expressions of identity
	▪ Black queer folx defying heteronormativity through open expression; asking others to defy these norms with them

Financial Support ($n = 4$)	▪ Giving resources (e.g., money, food, clothing) to friends or classmates in need
	▪ Organizing state and local church auxiliary organizations and women's clubs to raise funds
	▪ Raising money to build and support colleges, night schools, day care facilities, and other social welfare services/community aid
	▪ Hosting fundraisers (e.g., bake sales, fish fries) to support civil rights movement actions
	▪ Holding fish fry fundraisers and asking churches for donations to pay for Black student's education/ fund underserved schools
	▪ Raising funds from corporations to create African American cultural centers and museums
	▪ Financially supporting political candidates
Resisting Internalized Oppression ($n = 2$)	▪ Rejecting erroneous assumptions of oneself/identity based on prejudice (i.e., racism, sexism, gendered racism)
	▪ Pursuing career aspirations that challenges what others thought others thought possible of them
	▪ Setting and attaining educational and career goals without letting racial or gender barriers interfere

Table 1.3. Articles by Dimension

Dimension	Corresponding Articles
Sociopolitical Action (*n* = 12)	▪ Brooks, 2016 ▪ Farmer & Piotrkowski, 2009 ▪ Leath & Chavous, 2017 ▪ Lee, 2004 ▪ Mele, 2016 ▪ Rapp et al., 2010 ▪ Rodriguez & Ward, 2018 ▪ Williams, 2004
Civic Engagement (*n* = 12)	▪ Brooks, 2016 ▪ Farmer & Piotrkowski, 2009 ▪ Hall & Fine, 2005 ▪ Irons, 1998 ▪ Lee, 2004 ▪ Ramsey, 2011 ▪ Rodriguez & Ward, 2018 ▪ Taylor, 2004
Critical Consciousness (*n* = 11)	▪ Brooks, 2016 ▪ Gilkes, 1983 ▪ Iron, 1998 ▪ Rodriguez & Ward, 2018 ▪ Garrin & Marcketti, 2017 ▪ Loder-Jackson, 2012 ▪ Spencer et al., 2015 ▪ Taylor, 2004
Community + Coalition Building (*n* = 8)	▪ Brooks, 2016 ▪ Gilkes, 1983 ▪ Hall & Fine, 2005 ▪ Loder-Jackson, 2012 ▪ Rodriguez & Ward, 2018 ▪ Spencer et al., 2015

Activist Mothering + Othermothering (*n* = 6)	▪	Brooks, 2016
	▪	Irons, 1998
	▪	Loder, 2005
	▪	Loder-Jackson, 2012
	▪	Ramsey, 2011
	▪	Taylor, 2004
Advocacy for Equitable Education (*n* = 6)	▪	Brooks, 2016
	▪	Gilkes, 1983
	▪	Irons, 1998
	▪	Loder-Jackson, 2012
	▪	Peterson, 2009
	▪	Ramsey, 2011
Challenging oppression with confrontation (*n* = 6)	▪	Gilkes, 1983
	▪	Hall & Fine, 2005
	▪	Loder-Jackson, 2012
	▪	Peterson, 2009
	▪	Ramsey, 2011
	▪	Spencer et al., 2015
Visual Resistance/ Visibility (*n* = 4)	▪	Brooks, 2016
	▪	Garrin & Marcketti, 2017
	▪	Hall & Fine, 2005
Financial Support (*n* = 4)	▪	Lee, 2004
	▪	Leath & Chavous, 2017
	▪	Ramsey, 2011
Resisting Internalized Oppression (*n* = 2)	▪	Hall & Fine, 2005
	▪	Peterson, 2009

Table 1.4. Outcomes Related to Resistance

Category	Specific Examples
Connection + Community (*n* = 5)	▪ Sustained connection with others ▪ Connection to other African American women and mothers ▪ Feeling affirmed in their natural beauty as Black women ▪ Strengthened bonds with one's own children ▪ Community connections between the local university and the Black community; collaboration between Black and non-Black communities
Community Transformation (*n* = 5)	▪ Improved public education system for Black children, adolescents, and young adults ▪ Race relation issues seriously addressed by White persons in the community ▪ Constructed community centers ▪ Greater resources for Black and poor communities ▪ Greater level of critical consciousness in the Black community ▪ Organizational change
Empowerment + Self-Efficacy (*n* = 3)	▪ Greater sense of empowerment in caring for one's body and health, and over mothering ▪ Financial empowerment ▪ Sense of accomplishment ▪ Greater self-efficacy; Greater locus of control
Career Growth + Satisfaction (*n* = 2)	▪ Occupational attainment; Upward career mobility
Meaning + Purpose (*n* = 1)	▪ Felt impact/ meaningfulness of movement participation throughout one's life
Health + Wellbeing (*n* = 1)	▪ Improved health and social services for residents of Black South ▪ Improved health for mother and children as a result of breastfeeding activism ▪ Psychological Health ▪ Life satisfaction, personal satisfaction

Collective Identity Formation ($n = 1$)	▪ Formation of a collective identity around what it means to be a Black woman ▪ Feeling affirmed by, and sense of belonging with other Black women
Political Efficacy ($n = 1$)	▪ Increased sense of political efficacy ▪ Greater collective action engagement from others in the community as a result of organizing/unionizing

CHAPTER 2

MERGING BLACK FEMINIST ECOLOGIES AND PSYCHOLOGY: BLACK WOMEN

RESISTING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Black women in the United States (US) continue to experience disproportionate rates of poor health compared to other women living in the US (Chinn et al., 2020). For example, despite steady improvements in medicine and healthcare, maternal, infant, and pregnancy-related mortality rates are significantly higher for Black women than all other US women (Health, 2017; Hoyert & Miniño, 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Additionally, Black women are routinely diagnosed with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and anemia at rates disproportionately high to their representation in the larger US population (Benjamin et al., 2019; Chinn et al., 2020; Kirtane & Lee, 2017). Regarding mental health, recent National Health Interview survey data found that non-Hispanic Black adults were more likely to report feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, or that "everything is an effort", compared to adults of other racial groups (CDC, 2019). For Black women specifically, rates of reported psychological distress are almost twice as high as those reported by Black men (CDC, 2019).

Physical and mental health disparities that overburden Black women reflect structural inequities experienced throughout their lifespan (Chinn et al., 2020). Anti-Black racism and gender hierarchies that privilege cisgender men leave Black girls and women at particular risk for both interpersonal and systemic violence, and subsequent deleterious health outcomes. Further, the intersections of these multiple forms of oppression present unique challenges for Black women

that are different from the oppression experienced by Black men and non-Black women (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, Black girls- from childhood through adolescence- experience frequent, and at times, disproportionately higher rates of silencing and stereotyping (Epstein et al., 2017; Fordham, 1993)**,** peer sexual harassment and sexual objectification (e.g., Sagrestano et al., 2019), out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Kelly, 2018), and other forms of discipline (Blake et al., 2011**;** Parks et al., 2016) compared to non-Black girls and at times, Black boys. As they age, Black women are disadvantaged by racial disparities in employment and wages (Fisher & Houseworth, 2017), education (Baker et al., 2018; Posselt et al., 2012), housing (e.g., Charles, 2001; Williams & Collins, 2001), legal justice (Crenshaw, 1991), physical health (e.g., premature morbidity and mortality; Lu et al., 2019), and healthcare (Silliman et al., 2016), in addition to stress and trauma (e.g., Moody & Lewis, 2019). Overall, these studies indicate that Black women experience unique forms of oppression and that these experiences are associated with observed mental and physical health disparities.

Black Women's Mental Health and Environmental Racism

Indeed, psychological research has well documented the negative impact of oppression on mental health outcomes with Black women. For example, Mekawi and colleagues (2021) found that racial discrimination predicted symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder among Black women, and exacerbated the association between interpersonal trauma and traumatic stress. Similarly, a longitudinal investigation of the effect of everyday discrimination on Black women's mental health found a causal association between everyday incidents of discrimination and depression (Schulz et al., 2006). Although the investigations that demonstrate a consistent

link between discrimination and poor mental health among Black women continue to be important, this work has primarily focused on individual-level or interpersonal forms of oppression (e.g., racist or sexist incidents, gendered racial microaggressions, intimate partner violence). Scholars have noted the need to also examine structural manifestations of oppression (e.g., Bailey et al., 2021). Some recent psychological research has investigated relationships between mental health outcomes and various forms of structural oppression, such as poor neighborhood and housing conditions and neighborhood disinvestment (Redwood et al., 2010), unequal access to healthcare (Fedina et al., 2020; Perez et al., 2020), and familial incarceration (Patterson et al., 2020). These scholarly contributions are critical and timely, as they have urged the field of psychology to acknowledge the systemic and institutionalized roots of oppression that both support and facilitate interpersonal discrimination and ultimately contribute to declines in mental health.

One such systemic and institutionalized form of oppression that has been found to contribute to declines in mental health is environmental injustice stemming from environmental racism (ER). ER has been defined as "…racial discrimination in environmental policymaking and enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the presence of life-threatening poisons and pollutants for communities of color, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the environmental movement" (Chavis, 1994, p. 7). Though not included in Chavis's definition, environmental racism also includes the unintentional siting and placement of environmental hazards and chemical plants in communities of color as well (Bullard et al., 2007). Environmental racism is apparent in the disproportionate placement of environmental hazards in racially marginalized communities. For instance, racially marginalized individuals and families are more likely to live

near and experience the harmful health consequences of hazardous facilities (Mikati et al., 2018).

Such proximity is not inadvertent. Geomapping and investigations into protective policies and

regulations have identified intentional racial bias in the siting of chemical plants. These investi-

gations have also demonstrated associations between the presence of environmental hazards and

racial segregation, redlining, and racial discrimination in zoning and corporate laws (General Ac-

counting Office, 1983; Pastor et al., 2001). Corporations, both historically and at present, have

scouted land for their industrial plants in low-income, racially marginalized neighborhoods be-

cause of the minimal legislative protections available to these communities compared to White,

wealthier communities (Bullard & Johnson, 2002). Research has also demonstrated that even af-

ter controlling for socioeconomic status, racial category and racial segregation remain significant

predictors of neighborhood exposure to environmental toxins (e.g., Bravo et al., 2016; Ringquist,

2005). Specifically, race continues to be a *stronger* predictor of environmental injustice than in-

dicators of socioeconomic status, such as income and education (United Church of Christ, 2007).

For example, dangerous particulate matter associated with asthma, cancer, respiratory illness,

and heart disease, have been found to be significantly higher in racially marginalized communi-

ties, particularly burdening Black, non-White Latinx, and Southeast Asian families (Bravo et al.,

2016).

Currently, about 6.5 million Black Americans live in areas characterized by dangerously high rates of air pollution (i.e., areas with high levels of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$)[2] particle concentration; Pinto de Moura & Reichmuth, 2019), often leading to serious physical health outcomes as well as stress and anxiety (Power et al., 2015). Further, a recent study found that Black Americans are burdened with health disparities due to environmental hazards at a rate 1.54 times higher than the overall population (Mikati, 2018). Indeed, a wide range of environmental injustices that stem from environmental racism have been associated with negative mental health consequences with Black Americans. For example, racial segregation and neighborhood poverty as a result of redlining and community disinvestment have been found to increase rates of psychological distress for Black, but not White residents (Do et al., 2019). For Black women specifically, greater exposure to nitrous oxide- a form of air pollution- has been associated with greater incidence of hypertension (Coogan et al., 2017), and greater levels of exposure to fine particulate matter has been associated with greater levels of anhedonia (i.e., inability to feel pleasure or positive affect) among Black pregnant women (Sheffield et al., 2018).

Despite the toll that ER has had on the health of racially marginalized persons and communities, the specific challenges that it poses for Black women are currently understudied. Additionally, though poor physical health has been well-documented as an outcome of environmental injustice in public health (e.g., Fuller et al., 2013), impacts of ER on mental health are rare

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[2] $PM_{2.5}$ pollution refers to fine particulate matter that can penetrate deep into the lungs. Such particulate matter is associated with asthma, lung disease, heart disease, low birth weights, and high blood pressure (e.g., Bravo et al., 2016).

within psychological literature. Indeed, a recent literature search within the *Psyc*Info database conducted on July 10, 2020 identified only one study related to environmental racism or injustice and mental health specifically with Black Americans (i.e., Redwood et al., 2010). Further, a specific search of all articles published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* identified 10 studies examining associations between environmental factors and mental health, but none of these studies addressed racial or ethnic disparities in exposure to the identified factors. The *Journal of Environmental Psychology* was specifically chosen for its focus on both the mental health consequences and correlates of environmentalism and engagement with the environment, as well as investigations into the cognitive motivations for humans' engagement with the environment. In addition, *the Web of Science* database was reviewed in August 2020 to identify articles related to both the environment and psychology. In addition to articles identified in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology,* this search produced relevant literature published within the *Journal of Community of Psychology.* However, though the search findings indicated that the area of community psychology has conducted some investigations of environmental injustice, only four of these articles examined mental health as an outcome, and only three examined mental health disparities across racial groups. Two of these identified articles specifically examined both the mental health outcome of racial disparities in exposure to environmental hazards within their research questions (i.e., English et al., 2014; Woo et al., 2020). Studies related to environmental justice or ER were not identified in other psychological journals. As such, the field of psychology may need to adapt an interdisciplinary approach and look to other fields to develop a comprehensive understanding of the systemic factors that impact Black women's mental health.

Given the limitations in psychological literature, turning to public health and sociological scholarship is specifically helpful in understanding the potential mental health impacts of environmental injustice among Black women. Scholars in these fields have identified racially marginalized communities and women as the groups who carry the greatest burden of exposure to toxic environmental factors, and to be at greatest risk of subsequent negative health outcomes. For example, environmental hazards have been associated with poor cardiovascular health indicators (Fuller et al., 2013) and early declines in kidney function (Reilly et al., 2018) among Black Americans. Similarly, in their review article discussing the invisibility of women as victims of environmentally hazardous practices and policy, Lynch (2016) summarizes public health literature linking environmental toxins (i.e., air pollution, heavy metal poisoning, lead exposure, improper e-waste recycling, etc.) to low pregnancy and infant birth weights (Xu et al., 2011), increased incidence of breast cancer (e.g., Wei et al., 2012), and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Schikowski et al., 2005). Given that environmental hazards have been found to disproportionately disadvantage both racially marginalized persons and women, it follows that as members of both social groups, Black women may be at unique risk of subsequent health challenges.

Black Women, Environmental Justice, and Black Feminist Ecological Thought

Despite limited investigations into the specific health impacts of ER affecting them, Black women are aware and active in the fight against ER in vulnerable communities (Gomez, 2011). Given their legacy as activists at the forefront of justice movements in the US (Collins, 1990), it is not surprising that Black women have been leaders of both grassroots and large-scale resistance to ER (e.g., Gomez et al., 2011; Rainey & Johnson, 2009). Early accounts of their resistance have documented the ways in which Black women alter or utilize their environments to

improve the health of their families and communities and did so long before the establishment of a formalized environmental justice movement in the 1960s (Bullard, 1994). For example, Taylor (2016) discussed Harriet Tubman's strong connection to the environment as a pathway through which she brought hundreds of enslaved Africans to freedom via the Underground Railroad. Her intimate knowledge of moss (as passed down by her ancestors) and her care for the earth facilitated her process of mapping and navigation that guided her and others to liberation. In the early twentieth century, women like Lugenia Burns Hope worked tirelessly to improve both the living conditions and physical health of Atlanta's Black population- bringing about changes in sanitation, outdoor lighting, access to clean water, and recreational areas (Rouse, 1989). Similarly, organized into the Salisbury Colored Women's Civic League, Black women petitioned and fought to secure better sanitation services (i.e., garbage pickup, privies, sewer lines) in their North Carolina neighborhoods in 1913, to improve the health of Black residents (Gilmore, 1996, p. 168-175).

Black women's environmental action continued into the formal environmental justice movement and beyond, as Black women today continue to organize against environmental degradation. Acknowledging their contemporary work in the environmental justice movement, Simpson (2011) posited that Black women engage in *calculated identity positioning* to increase their sense of agency and engage in activism related to environmental justice. Specifically, their social locations at the intersection of Blackness and womanhood compel them to become agents of resistance to their marginalization. Similarly, Gomez and colleagues (2011) examined factors contributing to Black women's motivations to engage in activism following sixteen toxic spills at

a General Motors Plant, which led to the community's exposure to poisonous chemicals and metals in three Atlanta, Georgia neighborhoods. Gomez et al. found these women to be motivated by desires to resist racism, to exercise their religious and spiritual values for justice, and to honor their families' requests and legacies of involvement in social issues. As discussed by both Simpson and Gomez et al., these Black women activists acknowledged the history of other Black women in their families, communities, and collective memories who fought against interpersonal and structural oppression and modeled resistance through the lens of Black womanhood.

Despite the legacy of Black women's participation in the environmental justice movement however, they continue to be omitted from environmental justice narratives (Rainey & Johnson, 2009). As both a response and challenge to this imposed invisibility, Frazier (2020) constructed the emergent area of Black Feminist Ecological Thought to challenge ways in which Black women's resistance has been silenced in discourses related to environmental justice, ecology, and sustainability. Black Feminist Ecological Thought as a theoretical framework aims to make visible the work that Black women have engaged to bring about environmental and ecological justice in their communities since the start of their enslavement, and to facilitate liberatory relationships between humans and their environment. According to Frazier, "Black Feminist Ecological Thought also reminds us that Black women are not, and have never been, passive victims of environmental degradation" (2020). Instead, Black Feminist Ecology posits that Black women have engaged creative ways to protect and restore natural environments from the ecological consequences of capitalism, industrialization, and white supremacy. Most pertinent to this study, they have consistently employed strategies to protect themselves, their families, and their

communities from the consequences of environmental injustice, not as an afterthought, but as necessity (e.g., Krauss, 2009). And yet, as was the case during the Civil Rights and Women's Rights movements, Black women's relentless resistance to environmental oppression and their concerted efforts to bring about communal change have been obfuscated by the very oppressive forces to which they direct their resistance- racism, sexism, and the intersection of the two (Rainey & Johnson, 2009).

THE PRESENT STUDY

Akin to the limited scholarship on the mental health impacts of ER on Black women, research that both acknowledges and examines their resistance to ER is also scant. Given the limited number and scope of investigations of Black women's resistance to environmental injustice within psychological literature, the present study situates itself within the context of Black Feminist Ecological thought and seeks to bridge current public health, ecological, and psychological scholarship. Consistent with the framework of Black Feminist Ecological Thought and given the evidence of their historical engagement with environmental action (Rainey & Johnson, 2009), I presume the presence of activism and resistance to ER among Black women and move beyond this presumption to investigating the mental health impact of such resistance. Additionally, the present study extends the work of Gomez et al. (2011) and Simpson (2011) by exploring beyond the question of *what* motivates resistance, to *how* Black women engage resistance to ER, and how this resistance influences, and potentially impacts their own mental health and wellbeing, as well as the mental health and wellbeing of their families and communities. Most importantly, the

present study seeks to make an important contribution by centering the experiences and perspectives of Black women engaged in environmental activism in *psychological* scholarship. Specifically, this project aims to answer the following questions: 1) What are Black women's perspectives on ER and its effects on their mental health, and the mental health of their family and community members? 2) What are the strategies Black women engage to resist environmental injustice through environmental justice work in their communities? and finally, 3) What is the influence of these strategies on their mental health and wellbeing, and their observations of any changes to the mental health of their family and community members?

METHOD

Methodology

Black Feminist Theory, as the epistemological framework undergirding Black Feminist Ecological thought, validates Black women's production of knowledge stemming from their lived experience and that of their ancestors (see Figure 2.1; Clemons, 2019; Collins, 2009). Thus, Black Feminist Theory assumes Black women's expertise regarding their experiences and their construction of meaning from those experiences. Consistent with this theory is the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) for qualitative inquiries, a commonly used analytic strategy that enables researchers to understand how participants both perceive and make meaning out of their personal and social experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Because IPA presupposes that individuals are active agents in the construction of their personal and social world, it is complementary to my use of both Black Feminist and Black Feminist Ecological thought as the

grounding theories of my research. As such, data collection and analysis in this study will be guided by IPA.

Participants and Procedure

Smith and Osborn (2003) recommend that novice qualitative researchers aim to interview between five and eight participants to avoid being overwhelmed by the amount of data, such that they lose focus on the inquiry or compromise the integrity of the research process as defined by IPA. As such, I conducted 90-minute semi-structured interviews with six self-identified Black women engaged in grassroots environmental justice activism in an urban city or community within the US. I conducted and audio-recorded each interview via Zoom. In addition to their engagement in grassroots environmental activism in an urban area as a condition for eligibility, participants also needed to live within 15 miles of their activist work. I initially proposed to recruit from only three specific cities (Atlanta, GA, Wilmington, CA, and Richmond, CA) and required participants to both live and work within these cities because I desired homogeneity in the sample with regard to the sense of felt responsibility to the community. These three cities were identified for recruitment because they house neighborhoods or zones currently deemed as environmental justice communities, or communities that have been identified as "overburdened" with environmental hazards and subsequent health risks compared to the overall population (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2017). Additionally, each of the identified cities has at least one neighborhood or community that is predominantly Black (i.e., more than 70% of the population identify as Black or African American). However, challenges with timely recruitment and participants' geographic relocations due to the COVID-19 pandemic prompted me to alter my recruitment strategy.

I revised my recruitment such that participants were eligible if they engaged in grassroots environmental justice work in *any* urban city or community that is known to be an environmental justice community with at least one predominantly Black neighborhood affected by its proximity to environmental hazards. Though environmental justice communities share the identified similarities, they also vary with regard to culture, geography, and experiences of environmental racism. As such, the variability among the communities represented can be viewed as an asset to this initial exploration of the ways in which the environmental activists' perspectives are both convergent and unique.

To reach a purposeful sample of participants from the identified areas (Morrow, 2005), I sent emails to professional and personal networks and environmental justice organizations that work alongside community members in identified environmental justice communities. After receiving both committee and IRB approval, I also posted recruitment flyers on two social media sites- Twitter and Instagram- to advertise the study. The IRB-approved recruitment letter, consent form, and recruitment flyers are appended in the respective order. Finally, I used snowball sampling to identify new participants by asking participants in the study to recommend other eligible respondents. Where snowball sampling was used, potential respondents were provided with my contact information to indicate interest in participation. Interested potential participants were instructed to contact me directly via phone or email. Ultimately, four participants responded directly to advertisements sent to environmental justice organizations and personal/professional networks, and two participants were identified through snowball sampling. The recruitment letter used is attached as Appendix A.

Regarding the full eligibility criteria, individuals were eligible to participate in the study if they: (a) were 18 years of age or older, (b) self-identified as a woman of African descent, (c) spoke and understood English fluently, (d) were engaged in paid or unpaid service addressing an environmental issue, and (e) lived within 15 minutes of the community in which they engage in environmental service, to accommodate participants with residential and social connections to a community that they may not be able to live in due to affordability or relocation during the COVID-19 pandemic. I treated all participants in accordance with APA guidelines and ethics, and did not commence interviews until I received approval from the Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University. Prior to the interviews, I informed all participants about the goals of the study through verbal and written communication. I communicated that the purpose of the study was to meet the following goals: (a) to explore how Black women perceive the impact of ER on their personal, familial, and communal mental health and wellbeing; (b) to learn the strategies that Black women use to resist ER in their communities; and, (c) to explore how Black women perceive the impact of their resistance to ER on their mental health and wellbeing, as well as the mental health and wellbeing of their families and communities.

I conducted all interviews individually, and all participants were compensated $50 after completion of their interview. I conducted interviews during January and February 2022 and provided participants with a wide range of choice with regard to available days and times (e.g., daytime hours, nights, weekends). I also informed participants that they would have full access to their interview (i.e., transcript), the results of the study, and any resources and/or materials that are made as a result of the study's findings. Prior to the data collection process, I piloted the in-

terview protocol with a Black woman psychologist familiar with qualitative research, clinical interviewing, and Black Feminist epistemology, in order to determine if the interview questions were appropriate and effective in eliciting responses from participants, specifically with regard to the inquiry into the mental health effects of resistance. I then conducted the interview again with two Black women engaged in environmental activism, in order to gain perspective unique to Black women environmental activists. The responses of these women were not included in the data analysis (Mosley et al., 2020). Finally, I integrated feedback and suggestions from both the Black woman psychologist and the two Black women environmental activists into the initial interview protocol, which resulted in several modifications. This final interview protocol was then used with the study participants (see Table 2.1), and all interviews were completed prior to data analysis (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Interviewer's Background, Experiences, and Biases

Because I conducted all of the interviews, I used critical self-reflexivity throughout the research process. Critical self-reflexivity acknowledges the researcher's position and motivations as having propensity to influence all stages of the research process and as such, helps the researcher to both reflect upon and measure their subjectivity with regard to interactions with the participants (Primeau, 2003). As the researcher and interviewer, my identities as a cisgender Black woman in a doctoral program who also engages in environmental activism influenced the research process. My influence was likely most prominent on the interview schedule and the analytic strategy, as I both determined the research questions and interview questions, and derived meaning and connections both within and between the participants' narratives. During both the interview and coding processes, I filtered the participants' experiences and stories through the

subjectivity created by my own experiences as a person with multiple marginalized identities, a Black woman whose family has experienced the consequences of environmental racism, and a Black woman with previous and current engagement in spaces of environmental activism.

To both acknowledge and reduce this influence, I attempted to buffer the ways in which my perspective could overshadow the narratives and voices of the participants through several strategies. First, I began each interview by discussing the purpose of the study with the participants, and by emphasizing the participants' expertise in their own experiences as Black women, as members of their communities, and as resistors to ER in their unique social and geographic contexts. I also engaged in critical self-reflexivity by keeping a journal throughout the research process, in which I responded to specific prompts and explicitly named my biases and assumptions (Ortlipp, 2008). Additionally, I engaged in reflexivity interviews at multiple points throughout the research process (i.e., prior to conducting interviews, after three interviews are conducted, prior to coding and interpretation of data), in order to elucidate biases, preconceptions, and expectations of which I was not acutely aware.

A researcher not connected to this study, who identifies as a Latina woman, facilitated each interview. She also video-recorded each interview and took notes related to biases that emerged, as well as similarities and differences that I noted between myself and the participants. She facilitated a deeper investigation of my biases and investigations by asking specific questions to illuminate any areas reflective of a lack of self-awareness. Throughout the interviews, I reflected on both emotional stress and physical health difficulties that my family has suffered as a result of living in close proximity to environmental toxins (i.e., factories built within residential communities that produce smokestacks of noxious gas). I also reflected on my own resistance to

environmental racism, and used these reflections to both deepen my awareness of biases and sub-jectivities to reduce the degree to which I layered them onto the participants' narratives during the processes of listening, coding, and analyzing.

ANALYSIS PLAN

Consistent with guidelines for IPA outlined by Smith and Osborn (2003), I transcribed and coded all interviews to ensure familiarity with the data. Though IPA does not specify a mini-mum number of coders, the approach's emphasis on the researcher attaining a high level of inti-macy with the data suggests the appropriateness of the primary researcher acting as sole coder. Thus, regarding the coding process, I openly coded the first transcript, using the left margin to comment on language, similarities, and discrepancies in each participant's narrative. I grouped initial notes into emergent themes, and then listed these themes in a separate document. After listing the themes in the separate document, I grouped together similar themes until a final, parsi-monious master list of themes was identified and then assigned a color-coding scheme to each. I then coded the remaining five transcripts based on the themes that emerged from the first tran-script, integrating themes congruent with those identified in the first transcript and creating new themes that emerged (Smith et al., 1999). After coding all transcripts, I updated the master list of themes to reflect new themes and modifications. Finally, I compared all emergent themes against specific quotes from the interviewees and checked the themes against the text with the interview transcripts until the themes were distinct and completely representative of the text within all of

the transcripts. This process ensured that any additional review of the text did not lead to new insights or understandings about the data. A descriptive flowchart outlining this process is displayed in Figure 2.2.

To aid in trustworthiness and validity of the data, I intended to send my codebook and all transcripts to an external auditor. However, I received permission from my committee to remove this step after considering that an external audit may result in themes that were not congruent with the values and experiences of Black women environmental activists. Consistent with feminist research practices (Jorgenson, 2011), I sent the final list of themes to the interview participants alongside their individual interview transcripts to ensure their agreement with the interpretation of the data and allow a final opportunity for feedback (i.e., member-checking). Participants were given options for how they could review themes and provide feedback, such as via phone or video call, email, or postal mail. Because the process required an additional thirty minutes of time, I compensated participants an additional $25 after completion of this meeting. Participants' feedback during this process took precedence with regard to the interpretation of data. It is noteworthy to mention that the member-checking process is not proscribed in the IPA process (Smith & Osborn, 2003). However, returning the final themes to the participants is consistent with my own value for community-engaged research as well as the Black Feminist principles of honoring the embodied knowledge and lived experiences of all individuals as critical knowledge (Collins, 2009; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). All of the participants agreed with the themes I derived from the interviews and as such, no changes were made to these after the member-checking process.

RESULTS

The current study sought to explore the impact of Black women's resistance to ER on their personal mental health and wellbeing and their observations of changes to the mental and wellbeing of their family and community members (see Table 2.1 for interview protocol). I interviewed six self-identified Black women between the ages of 26 and 31 years with varying ethnic identities. Each participant was asked to self-identify by answering the prompt, "How would you describe your identity?". Two participants reported currently living and serving as environmental activists in the greater metropolitan area of Atlanta, Georgia. Of these participants, one (P3) identified as a "27-year old Nigerian" engaged in unpaid community organizing around environmental issues through a local grassroots organization founded by four Black women, including herself. The second participant (P4) living in the Atlanta area identified as a "29-year old Black woman" who works for a larger organization committed to environmental activism through policy and community organizing. Though her organization as a whole is not focused on environmental justice (i.e., racial disparities in environmental exposure and health burdens), her work within the organization specifically focuses on environmental justice concerns that impact Black community members. Two participants reported currently living and working in Northern California- specifically, the San Francisco Bay Area. P2 identified as a "27-year old Black cis-woman" who lives in North Oakland but serves the communities of East Oakland and Richmond through her work at a local environmental agency. Her environmental activism involves community organizing, city and land use planning, and environmental policy. P5 identified as a "32-year old woman" living in North Oakland and serving the communities of San Francisco, East Palo Alto, and Honolulu, HI. P5 works for a climate justice organization specifically in the areas of

climate equity and policy, working to improve underserved communities devastated by environmental hazards and climate crises through racial justice efforts. P6 identified as a "31-year old Black, cisgender queer woman" who engages in environmental activism in Southern California. She lives in East Long Beach- a known environmental justice community- and works in the areas of community organizing and policy serving communities along the 710 freeway corridor that span from Long Beach to East Los Angeles. Finally, P1 identified as a "26-year old, female-identifying, queer, British-Nigerian, activist, land use planner, and artist". She currently lives in Salem, Oregon serving a predominantly Black neighborhood in West Eugene, Oregon in addition to other communities across Salem and Eugene through her job as a land use planner. She also volunteers as a community organizer, tackling environmental and racial justice issues in both Oregon and in Georgia- where she lived prior to moving to Oregon for graduate school. Demographic information reported here is listed in Table 2.2 and is organized by participants' codes.

Additional results related to the research questions are also provided in a sequence of tables. Related to the first research question (i.e., What are Black women's perspectives on the ways in which ER affects their mental health and wellbeing, and the mental health and wellbeing of their family and community members?), Table 2.3 outlines participants' observations of ER in their communities. Regarding the second research question (i.e., What are the strategies that Black women engage to resist ER in their communities?), Table 2.4 lists the specific resistance strategies that they reported using to combat environmental harms. The following section represents the third and primary research question and discusses the emergent themes (see Table 2.5), which reflect the processes through which the participants' resistance to ER influences their

mental health and wellbeing, as well as the specific consequences of their resistance on their personal, familial, and communal mental health and wellbeing. Space within the text of this manuscript was reserved for description of these themes and their elucidation of both the process of engaging in environmental activism and its influence on mental health and wellbeing. Finally, the participants' definitions of resistance are listed in Table 2.6 and their reflections on their knowledge concerning the legacy of Black women's resistance to oppression is listed in Table 2.7.

As summarized in Table 2.5, the four major themes constructed from the data are related to the processes through which Black women resist ER in their communities. The themes address both the complex ways through which Black women navigate identity and community in their work, as well as how their resistance to ER both jeopardizes and contributes to their personal wellbeing and their communities' wellbeing. The four major themes include: (1) catalysts to the process of becoming an environmental activist; (2) spanning beyond defined boundaries to resist environmental degradation; (3) the nonlinear pathways between environmental activism and wellbeing; and, (4) intentional community as critical for persistence in environmental activism. Subthemes were also derived from the first theme and include both (a) *identity formation* as a Black woman/femme environmental activist, and (b) *gendered racial socialization* (Chisolm & Greene, 2008) *and critical consciousness* (Freire, 2000) as precipitants to resistance efforts. Each of the major themes and subthemes reflect shared narratives between the participants (e.g., themes had to be referenced by more than three participants), and emerged as central to the ways

in which the participants understand themselves as Black women and as Black women environmental activists, as well as their understanding of the meaning and consequences of their resistance work.

Catalysts to the Process of Becoming a Resistor of Environmental Racism

Two subthemes emerged from the major theme of events and processes that the participants discussed as essential to their transition to becoming and identifying as a Black woman environmental activist. These themes relate to the first research question on Black women's perceptions of ER in their communities, and specifically to the ways in which their experiences as a Black woman influence their feelings about ER and their subsequent activism (see Table 2.1 for Interview Protocol).

Identity Formation as a Black Woman Environmental Activist

All six participants referred to moments throughout their lifetime that facilitated their process of becoming a resistor of ER within their communities. Five of the six participants discussed the formation of their identities as Black women environmental activists as an ongoing process that began in childhood but continues through their current resistance work as they engage in self-reflection. Each participant described their resistance work as deeply connected to their identities as Black women, and their identities as inseparable from the ways that they engage their resistance work, their colleagues, and their community members.

As children, participants reflected on being drawn to both nature and stewardship of people and the earth in ways that their peers did not. For example, P1 discussed thriving in the out-

door/nature school in which her parents began her education, and as she grew older, finding solace and calm in outdoor spaces during moments of stress. P5 reflected on trips to the ocean with her family, noting that while others simply enjoyed the beach, she kept herself busy by walking the shore looking to rescue ocean animals from future entrapment by plastic wrappers and trash. Several participants shared feeling as though others did not expect this curiosity and care for the natural world from them, particularly as Black girl children. Because they were made to feel "different", these moments helped them to dream beyond prescribed roles for Black girls and women and served as catalysts to their future identification as environmentalists.

As adults, participants discussed the formation of their identities as ongoing processes that shift according to social and environmental contexts as well as life circumstances. Consistent with identity shifting noted in prior research with Black American women (Jones et al., 2021), the participants discussed ways in which aspects of their identity become more or less salient in particular environmental activist spaces and among friends, family, and other social communities. For example, when asked to describe her identity, P2 shared that she identifies as a "Black ciswoman" out of acknowledgment and respect for gender expansive (i.e., transgender and nonbinary) individuals that are forced to proclaim their gender identities as they navigate transphobia and transmisogyny. P4 identified as "Black" but noted the roles of colorism and racial ambiguity in her racial identification in certain settings- particularly at work. She shared:

> *"And so yeah, it's just relevant because it's like, I don't know that people notice it, because it's like I never get complimented if I'm wearing a black hairstyle- anything that makes me appear to be more black, but then I wear something that makes me appear to be less black and more exotic, you know, in another way, it's like, 'Oh, you look great!' Like is that internalized whiteness coming out in everybody?...And you know, it's a couple White men in particular that I work with closely, they're always making comments about my hair and I just want to set them aside and be like 'One is like, you should*

never do that, specifically not to a Black woman'…and like I just remember I was going to the Capitol one time and him being like 'Finally, you're showing up like professionally', because I had a straight, Eurocentric hairstyle. So he was insinuating that my natural hair, made me less, like you know make people less capable of taking me seriously….So you know, there's a lot of colorism that goes on in Georgia of course and in the world, and you know I identify as Black but I recognize that again that's not how I'm always perceived. And I do a lot of racial equity training and perception matters more than actual truth".

Being "taken seriously" or conforming to dominant White culture in environmental spaces was noted numerous times by several participants as they discussed ways in which their knowledge and commitment to environmental activism is often challenged by White peers and colleagues. Others noted that the seeming invisibility of POC in prominent environmental activist spaces initially made it difficult for them to see themselves in environmental careers. Exposure to mainstream environmentalist spaces during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood (e.g., National Geographic, Greenpeace, National Audubon Society, etc.) caused these participants to question the possibility of existing and defining themselves as Black women environmental activists, as these spaces are most often dominated by White cisgender men and women.

The invisibility and exclusion of Black women from mainstream environmentalism led each participant to deviate from the charted educational and career paths typical of most environmentalists. P6 shared that she initially wanted to enter the field of psychology, but was discouraged by the field's excessive focus on individuals and its glaring failure to acknowledge the role of systemic oppression in mental health and wellbeing. P5 entered law school with the intention of becoming a museum lawyer- what she thought would be the perfect way to merge her passions for history, culture, and the law. However, a study abroad trip to Cape Town, South Africa

and elective courses in international environmental law and comparative constitutions illuminated the possibility of a legal career that merged human rights and environmental law. Her narrative highlighted chance opportunities and connections with professors that resulted in an internship working alongside an administrator at the Environmental Protection Agency- a Black woman who embodied passion, joy, and commitment to environmental justice in her work. It was this opportunity to see herself in her boss, in the fullness of her Blackness and womanhood, that cemented P5's decision to join the environmental sector. P1 and P3 discussed their decisions to major in, and begin careers in natural science disciplines. P1 shared that though she enjoyed her work, she felt dissatisfied and unfulfilled. Perhaps most importantly, she noted the loneliness of fieldwork and the lack of opportunities to engage with people. Given the importance of collectivism within the Black community, her loneliness propelled her into the environmental justice space:

> *"And like, going through undergrad, that looked like wanting to be a conservation biologist type person and like, like more of a natural scientist and like being out in the field. And then I had some experience doing that. And then I realized that one, like my social skills were suffering. Like I was just a super shy, introverted person and like, I don't think it's going to help me develop professionally if the only person I'm talking to is these plants or these test tubes. You know, I was kind of stuck in the lab and it wasn't, I just feel like I had the potential to do more and be impacting people and I think I realized that like maybe the issue isn't just the lack of research but that it's not being communicated to policymakers or like there just seems to be this gap in the research that's happening. Because we know the planet is burning, we know these communities are being disproportionately impacted, but our policies aren't really addressing that effectively. And so that's when I was like, I'm going to have this social sciences policy element to my environmental work."*

For several of the participants, the experience of marginalization itself- both in the society of the US and more specifically as Black girls and women with interests in environmentalism- is exactly what enables them to recognize the gap between scientific knowledge and social action. Where others in their work and academic spaces have struggled to identify racist practices within environmental policy, city planning, and other environmental spaces, the participants' experiences as individuals with multiple marginalized identities may have primed them to see marginalization more clearly and to carve out unique and inclusive spaces and solutions to environmental problems. With regard to identity, the participants are aware that their environmental activism is deeply connected to their identities, their own narratives and those of their ancestors, and who they now see themselves to be as resistors.

Gendered Racial Socialization and Critical Consciousness
Similar to identity formation, *gendered racial socialization and critical consciousness* emerged as both precipitants to, and ongoing aspects of resistance work. Discussed by all six participants, gendered racial socialization and critical consciousness as an emergent subtheme refers to the ongoing process of learning about one's identity as a Black woman and unlearning internalized racism, misogynoir (i.e., anti-Black racist misogyny unique to Black women's experiences; Bailey & Trudy, 2018), and other forms of oppression (Chisholm & Greene, 2008; Freire, 2000). This subtheme also refers to the process of critically analyzing the impact of colonization and gendered racism on one's life experiences, the experiences of their community members, and their resistance to ER.

Like identity formation, the process of gendered racial socialization as a Black woman began in childhood for the participants through discussions with their parents and attendance at

community events and organizations that celebrated both their Blackness and their womanhood.

Critical consciousness, or the process by which people from marginalized communities come to recognize and act against oppression, coexists alongside gendered racial socialization. Participants learned to critically analyze social structures, inequity, and systems of oppression as they constructed meaning around their identities as Black women (Freire, 2000). Specifically, several participants noted that their understanding of themselves, their place in the world, and their connection to environmentalism became layered and complex as they began to make distinctions between their city's predominantly White neighborhoods and the neighborhoods in which they were raised. For example, P3 noted that it was not until middle school that she began to notice that there was a "White" side of the town she lived, as she felt completely engrossed in her own predominantly Black, working-class neighborhood. She shared that as soon as she noticed the segregation of her town, she also began to make distinctions between the quality of the neighborhoods. She reflected on the first moments when she noticed that the quality of the streets and sidewalks were better in the White neighborhood, whereas the streets and sidewalks in her neighborhood were less clean and ostensibly less "walkable".

Though participants remembered "noticing" as children, adolescence and young adulthood also created opportunities for them to see environmental issues through the lenses of colonization and systemic racism. These critical analyses developed as they experienced racist and sexist discrimination as they grew older, as well as through knowledge about systemic oppression that they gained in both academic and organizing spaces. Several participants indicated that as a result of critically analyzing their environment, they came to realize that identifying as a Black woman made their choice to take action against ER feel urgent. The process of their

growth into Black women unearthed genuine desires to see health equity enacted in their communities, and prompted them to begin asking fundamental questions about the nature of suffering and change, specifically related to the experiences of marginalized communities.

Fundamental questions about suffering within marginalized communities also served as catalysts for both identification as environmental activists and deep engagement with other environmental activists pursuing environmental justice as a means of racial and social justice. For the participants, resistance to environmental degradation in their communities also initiated a new process of becoming- becoming not just an environmental activist, but a Black woman environmental activist pursuing justice for Black people in ways that were not being done by mainstream and White-led environmental groups. Five of the six participants shared that this process of becoming a Black woman environmental activist required, and continues to require self-reflection, self-awareness, and movement toward healing from internalized oppression. They asserted that without "knowing oneself", organizing and activism can stem from a place of unhealed trauma, which can have negative consequences for the activist herself (e.g., burnout, exploitation) but also for the communities that they work alongside. As such, self-reflection becomes not only a part of resistance work and the process of becoming, but critically necessary for effective resistance. Additionally, the willingness to work through internalized misogynoir and experiences of racist and sexist discrimination frees up emotional and psychological space for the participants to thrive in their resistance work. It is through these processes of self-reflection, self-awareness, setting boundaries, and deconstructing internalized oppression that these Black women environmental activists also began to see themselves as part of the legacy of Black

women's resistance to oppression more broadly, as they describe resistance as a central part of what it means to be a Black woman.

Spanning Beyond Defined Boundaries to Resist Environmental Degradation

Discussed by all of the six participants, the participants' narratives elucidated the ways in which the Black women environmental activists span beyond spatial, temporal, and hegemonic boundaries to envision unique sites of resistance to environmental activism. The activists dismiss boundaries defined by systems of oppression, as they push others to notice and dismantle multiple intersecting systems of oppression related to environmental degradation in their communities and create unique sites of resistance that address issues unacknowledged by White-led environmental organizations. Several participants discussed the ways in which their own identities and experiences as Black women spill beyond the boundaries of who and what others expect them to be. For example, in reference to the ways that her British Nigerian heritage and experiences outside of the US have shaped her resistance work and her perspectives on environmental justice in the US, P1 shared:

> *"I just am very like resistant to a like U.S-centric like worldview, or Eurocentric worldview, because yeah because I know like my identity lies, or like spills outside of that like boundary, or crosses that boundary. And maybe whereas like- And I like and I try my best not to be like separatist, and like, but I have to highlight how like, there is a Black Indigenous perspective as well in this conversation where sometimes that is missed, because of the 300- 400, 500 years of slavery. And so now when we talk about marginalized groups in America, it's like Black Americans and Indians, or indigenous people, but like sometimes the identities that don't fit into either of those, just don't really get captured, which happens to be me and my perspective, sometimes."*

Others discussed how being Black in predominantly White-led environmental spaces, working-class among middle-class and wealthy environmentalists, or a woman among racially

diverse men in policy spaces enables them to have perspective, curiosities, and solutions to which their colleagues in those spaces do not have access. As such, it seems that as the participants' identities spills beyond boundaries, so do their perspectives and their abilities to engender environmental solutions. Specifically, both the marginality of Black womanhood and the diversity of experiences as Black women enables them to make connections between multiple systems of oppression in their activism (e.g., racism, sexism, ableism, capitalist accumulation, etc.), and to work towards solutions that address the ills of each system simultaneously.

Another noteworthy aspect within this theme was participants' discussions of spanning beyond both spatial and temporal boundaries within their resistance work. All six participants connected environmental degradations happening in Black communities in the US to environmental degradation happening across the globe- in Nigeria, South Africa, Costa Rica, and several other colonized/settler nations. Similarly, several participants made connections between environmental harms occurring today and those have happened in the past. For example, P1 noted revitalization and gentrification projects occurring across the US that are pushing lower-income, POC outside of their homes and neighborhoods- where oftentimes, generations of their families have lived and thrived. She noted Grove Park in West Atlanta as one example of a park being brought into a community under the guise of beautifying the existing community, only to result in significant increases in real estate and cultural domination that pushes Black residents out to make the space "more hospitable" for wealthier, White residents. P1 likened this common gentrification practice to the development of the United States National Park system, during which Indigenous communities were pushed out of their homes and neighborhoods after arbitrary bound-

ary lines were drawn to establish a specific region as a "park". Others noted the connection between their current environmental activism and the resistance work of Black people whose environmental work is often made invisible (e.g., P3's reference to Harriet Tubman and George Washington Carver).

For the six Black women environmental activists, their understandings of the construct of resistance itself spans beyond the boundaries of academic definitions and more earnestly reflects the lived experiences of both the activists themselves and the communities they work alongside. Consistent with prior literature examining Black women activists' perspectives on resistance (shodiya-zeumault et al., 2022), when asked how they would define "resistance", participants steered clear from academic limitations of "sociopolitical action" or "activism". As listed in Table 2.6, the participants discussed resistance as both intentional and unintentional choices to defy the status quo in order to "stand up" or "speak up" for justice and truth. Several participants noted the absence of boundaries between moments when they are resisting and moments when they are not. Rather, resistance is integrated in their understanding of who they are. As P1 stated, "…if you're a being that society has deemed as deviating from the norm, then you're naturally going to be at odds with everything".

For these women, to exist as Black women environmental activists in itself is resistance. As such, the participants utilize their social resources, community connections, and life experiences to create their own sites of resistance against ER (e.g., exclusion from environmentalist spaces, exclusion from environmental policymaking) to form Black Feminist ecologies that maintain these sites of resistance. These ecologies are visible in the blogs that they create to highlight the journeys of Black women environmentalists to combat the narrative that Black

women do not care about the environment (P5 and P3; Jones, 1998); in the businesses that they create to make productive and just use of land in Black neighborhoods (e.g., P3 turning parking lots in regenerative gardens); and in their refusal to be intimidated in policy spaces where they are often the only Black woman advocating for working-class POC (P1 and P6).

Nonlinear Pathways between Environmental Activism and Wellbeing

Emergent from the participants' narratives, as Black women engage resistance to environmental activism to remedy the physical health, economic, and social effects of environmental degradation in their communities, they experience a complex interplay between distress and improvements in their physical and psychological wellbeing. Thus, the connections between engagement in resistance to ER and wellbeing emerge as nonlinear. As discussed by five of the six participants, both increased knowledge and increased action affect wellbeing but for varying reasons. Toxicity, exploitation, and experiences of exclusion and discrimination in environmental activist spaces compromise Black women's wellbeing. Alternately, the consequences of resistance has immense benefits for the activists' psychological and spiritual wellbeing, and that of their community members.

Participants reported being fueled to both pursue and continue their engagement in resistance work as they made connections between environmental degradation and racism in their communities and the physical health of their family and community members. All of the participants identified living in proximity to environmental hazards and toxic pollution as a child, adolescent, or young adult, and not deriving meaning from the common instances of asthma and cancer among their family and community members. Their process of becoming an environmental activist and/or engaging organizing around ER brought heightened awareness of these illnesses and

prompted them to draw connections between disease and proximity to environmental degradation in their communities. Several participants discussed personal struggles with their physical health as a result of ER, or discussed significant worries about family members and loved ones. These participants discussed these cognitive connections, personal experiences, and worries about loved ones as fuel for both their engagement in environmental activism and declines in their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

In addition to worry, stress, and anxiety about family and community members as a result of ER, participants discussed resistance work itself as harmful to their emotional wellbeing in several ways. Toxicity in either White-led or exploitative work environments in the environmental sector, experiencing exploitation and tokenization as one of few (or the only) POC in environmental spaces, and/or discrimination and exclusion were discussed by many of the participants. Participants shared:

> *"And excluding people of color from leadership, I think, I mean just the local like environmental movement here is very like white-led. The groups are historically white-led. And just like me being a person of color in this space, it's been a very like extractive past year or so with people calling on me to like give a talk or give a presentation or, you know, come be on this committee, come speak at this event. And like me wanting to, like say yes, because like no one else is doing it, but then like that resulting in extreme burnout. Yeah, my mental health was not the best. My like biophysical health was not the best. And so, yeah, that was a thing too, just kind of like, not, not having a lot of black people specifically in the environmental movement and then as a result of that, the ones that are, were stretched pretty then and have limited capacity and are very much like tokenized, as well, I think."* (P1)

> *"And I'm a Black woman, I'm soft spoken, I can be timid, you know. I embody the impact of white supremacy culture on a black woman I feel in a lot of ways. And I moved from DC to the Bay, as a full-ass lawyer and had to- like I took internships, I had to con-*

stantly prove myself. And I was very undervalued. And I struggled, I lived in so many different places, I didn't have stability because I wanted to be a part of and do environmental work." (P5)

"Early on in my work just, I would oftentimes find myself being the only Black woman speaking from a policy perspective that centers EJ. So it was a big challenge at the beginning, I don't, I don't think about it too much now, just because I've been doing this for so long. I'm just like, I'm going to be wherever I need to be and that's just what it is at this point but yeah, it definitely was, was an eye opener." (P6)

Overall, participants reported frustration, anger, sadness, helplessness, fear, worry, and anxiety as emotions that they have had to navigate throughout their resistance work. Additionally, some participants reported drinking alcohol excessively or overeating at some point during their resistance work to cope with the stress they experienced. Others shared experiencing loneliness and isolation, or feeling distracted or drained which leaves them unable to connect with their loved ones in ways in which they would like to do so. Though participants noted feeling overwhelmed by constantly gaining new information about environmental problems, they indicated that the primary reasons for experiencing difficult emotions and stress is not the resistance work itself, but again, the pain and injustice that comes from toxic, discriminatory, and exploitative spaces.

Regarding the consequences of resistance itself on the Black women environmental activists' wellbeing, all of the participants discussed the personal and communal benefits of resistance work as a primary reason that they have persisted in their career/volunteer efforts and in their resistance work more broadly. The women noted that resistance work brings about an immense sense of accomplishment, and that engagement in environmental justice provides opportunities to change hegemonic narratives about who belongs in environmental spaces, who cares about the

environment, who acts towards justice and importantly, who is impacted most by environmental

harms. For example, P4 shared about her observations of changes within community members:

"Yeah, what stands out to me is whether it was organizing on transit in Clayton County, and that particular issue, it was like the community had given up on itself, and in a lot of ways you know there wasn't like that, a lot of positivity in the community. It was like the public meetings were kind of poorly attended and people would kind of come- I thought what was interesting is no matter where we went somebody was upset about the fact that there was no transit. It didn't matter what the meeting was about, but it was just like a small handful of people that would keep speaking up about it. And so we started organizing in the community. And we started, you know, validating people like yeah, you should be upset about this transit problem- like it's unjust, like you should absolutely be upset about it, and here's a path forward, here's a way that you can get your transit back right, which was very unique to Clayton County. So by the end of that effort, like the meetings were packed, and I say that all the meetings, anything that had Clayton County Commission, Clayton County anything, it was just packed to the max. And showing people their power and agency, like that was just the best thing I could be a part of. And, you know, we don't have to sit down and take this stuff right? Like this goes back to just the core of EJ- communities have accepted that this is just what it is. I just have to accept living next to this pollution. I just have to accept, having some sub-par water, but you don't. But you don't. And the difference with organizing, is they see that. And once they get- once we got the transit issue solved, like we got them expanded, they formed this group called Organized Clayton, and they still meet, and they still be sending text messages and action alerts and that did not exist prior to that, right?"

Similarly, P6 shared:

"Yeah! That's one of the things that has really brought me a lot of joy is just seeing people go through like a similar awakening that I had. It's like when you learn about an issue that directly impacts you and it can seem like very scary and overwhelming but then you, you realize that you have agency and power to change you know that decision or that issue. And then learning the different ways that you can do that, and then actually like doing that! So I've seen a lot of people and supported a lot of people doing that and just seeing them like blossom into, you know, not even just like civically engaged people, but like I've seen literally seen people go from like not wanting to talk to people, very shy to being like these extroverts that are, you know, want to be in everybody's business and want to know everything and I was just like, 'wow', like this is the power of organizing and community support and community love so yeah there's definitely been one of the

things that I have enjoyed witnessing a lot, is just watching people, you know get aware and like, find their own power and see that, and recognize that they have a voice and you know, even if it went unrecognized, like you know there's people that are around that see them, and so that that that awakening has been, it's been nice to watch and I've definitely seen it a lot over the years."

Additionally, and often with teary eyes, the participants shared the ways in which their resistance work has created and continues to create more capacity for courage, strength and advocacy. They remarked on ways that they have changed and grown stronger as a result of their resistance efforts, as well as ways that their family and friends have noticed and benefitted from their changes. Several participants shared that their family members or intimate partners have expressed pride in their growth, as their resistance work has often brought about visible personal change (i.e., more confidence, more tenacity, greater ability to set boundaries in both personal and professional life). Resistance to ER seems to provide a stronger sense of meaning and purpose. Critical to persistence in the work, resistance builds a sense of self and collective efficacy, which promotes hope that is needed to combat helplessness.

Intentional Community as Critical for Persistence in Environmental Activism

The final theme that emerged from the data refers to the consequences of having, and not having, supportive community throughout one's work of resisting ER. Five of the six participants discussed supportive community as critically necessary for sustainability in resistance efforts. As indicated by language used throughout the interview, the Black women environmental activists recognize the resilience and resistance of others, particularly in the communities in which they advocate, and they find opportunities to amplify and highlight what they observe in others. However, as they champion others, they thrive best in their resistance work when their

support and encouragement is reciprocated. The participants acknowledged the difficulty of resistance work and all noted that effective resistance that leads to positive outcomes can only be accomplished in community with others. However, unsupportive community members or colleagues whose values do not align with the spirit of environmental justice or with the values of the activists is experienced as more detrimental than working alone.

As such, each of the five participants talked about defining and choosing supportive community as a process. In some instances, "supportive community" is described in reference to the communities in which the activists are engaging environmental justice (e.g., city/town, identified environmental justice community). Most times however, "supportive community" refers to a group or collective of individuals with shared values around justice that may be engaged in environmental activism or simply providing encouragement and support to the activist in her life and in her resistance work. For example, when asked to describe her community, P5 shared:

> *"I think my strongest community are folks who are from different parts of the country but living in the Bay Area, who are working on environmental justice and environmental equity, either at the community level or policy level. And then I have a group of friends and coworkers that are in Honolulu that I, I think I resonate with really deeply. And then, my family, that's in Texas, and which I feel also close to".*

Similarly, P1 noted:

> *"I would describe my community as varied and intersectional. I have my community here in my co-op who all I guess prescribe to values around communal living. But then I also have kind of like, just my friends that live elsewhere but are still part of my community that are just generally supportive of my work. So yeah, just very supportive, fun-loving and just very about feminists, and just like asserting your rights as a beautiful woman of Color."*

P2 shared:

> *"I'm definitely, like when I even talk to people about this type of work, I tend to talk about the Black community, especially seeing like, what we experienced as Black folks in the United States or in other like colonial settler nations isn't unique to what region or state or city we're in. It's a very fairly consistent experience and so for me when I think about community I think about being part of the larger Black community or the African diaspora, but specifically more the African American diaspora".*

Similar to identity, the process of defining community can also be circumstantial and contextual, as it varies depending on the spaces that that participants embody at any given time. In every space however, community is chosen and defined with intentionality and always reflects the participants' personal and salient identities, values, and goals. When community is discussed in reference to the city or neighborhood in which the activists are engaging in resistance work, they discuss the ways in which organizing and building relationships with these community members is the foundation of their deep engagement with environmental justice work. Academic and/or cognitive interests in environmental justice are made real and tangible in community spaces, as interest and empathy is channeled into action and action is deepened through relationships built on accountability and commitment. Finally, each participant discussed the ways in which they rely on their communities for healing and for restoration from the difficulties of activist work. Participants shared that on weekend days, they choose to be in communion with themselves, nature, and others, moving slowly through the days and finding rest as a soothing balm to the stress that organizing, policy work, and acquiring knowledge can bring.

DISCUSSION

Black women's labor has been central to social and political movements both within the US and internationally. Black women and femmes have initiated social action and persisted through the challenges of organizing, often out of necessity, survival, and care for their families and communities (hooks, 1990). As noted by the participants in this study, the legacy of Black women's resistance to oppression is a memory that many Black women carry in their collective consciousness. Black women are often socialized to carry with them both the cognitive and embodied knowledge of resistance and the imperative to utilize their resources to bring about equity and justice. The participants in this study acknowledged that while there are few visible Black women in environmental justice activist spaces, their resistance Is not an anomaly. The participants understand themselves to be part of the legacy of Black women's resistance and as such, see resistance as a critical aspect of their identity and their ancestry.

Black women's resistance has been documented and described in psychological literature. Missing from this literature however, are Black women's own definitions and constructs of resistance as defined by their lived experience, as well as the role of their resistance in their mental health and wellbeing and more specifically, the role of resistance to *environmental racism* in personal and communal mental health and wellbeing. As such, the current study sought to extend psychological literature by investigating the ways in which knowledge of ER influences Black women's wellbeing, the strategies they use to resist ER in their communities, and the consequential impact of their resistance on their personal wellbeing, as well as that of their family and community members. Though these points of exploration were the focus of the study, what emerged from the data were not only responses to the research inquiries but also a series of processes

through which Black women understand themselves to be resistors. Interestingly, the data revealed that it is this process of becoming, understanding, and defining oneself as someone who resists that contributes to Black women's wellbeing- not just the knowledge of ER nor the act of resistance itself.

As discovered through the participants' narratives, the processes of identity formation, gendered racial socialization and critical consciousness, and carving out sites of resistance lead to increases in confidence, self-efficacy, sense of agency, joy, the ability to set personal and professional boundaries, and the courage to persist in resistance to ER. Most importantly, and arguably most consequential for long-term engagement in environmental activism, is the finding that the participants' gain a great sense of hope through their resistance work and in relationship with environmental justice communities. Each participant discussed the ways in which this increase in hope is critical to combatting the helplessness that may come through knowledge of environmental racism, or other forms of oppression, alone. This finding is consistent with previous literature related to radical healing from oppression that suggests that engendering radical hope is central to one's ability to navigate, resist, and find liberation within oppressive systems and structures (French et al., 2020).

In addition to outlining both the challenges and benefits of their resistance work on their personal mental health and wellbeing, the participants readily named their perceptions of how resistance work is beneficial for their communities' wellbeing. Community members working alongside the participants in environmental activist spaces are also emboldened by resistance work as their own confidence and sense of agency increases. Learning and utilizing tools to affect social and environmental change (e.g., through townhall meetings, lobbying for policy

changes, canvassing, etc.) brings a sense of power in spaces where feelings of powerlessness, marginalization, and exclusion produce a sense of helplessness and detachment. All six participants in this study discussed ways in which they witnessed community members change after winning small environmental victories; these changes came in the form of reduced stress and amplified wellbeing through increases in hope, self-efficacy, and collective efficacy. Notably, the participants did not name any direct benefits or changes in family members' wellbeing, despite noticing ways in which family members made different individual-level choices toward environmental sustainability as a result of the participants' encouragement. One participant discussed the emotional burden and psychological distress that the lack of affordable housing caused for her mother, but did not discuss any changes to her mother's wellbeing as a result of her resistance to ER in the community.

Two reasons for noticing changes in community members' wellbeing but not the wellbeing of family members may be related to the age and life stages of the participants as well as the need to set boundaries to create distance between resistance work and personal life. First, the ages of the participants interviewed ranged from 26 to 32 years. Only one participant identified as a primary caregiver for children, and other participants did not report having children or dependents. When asked, two participants indicated living with a spouse/intimate partner and the remaining four participants did not report living with a significant other. Only one participant indicated currently living with their parents. It may be the case that the similarity in life stages (i.e., the majority of participants did not have children or dependents) influenced the degree to which the participants would be acutely aware of, and share responsibility for the mental health and

wellbeing of the individuals that live with them. For example, if a greater number of the participants indicated living with parents or providing care for a child, they would likely be more attuned to whether proximity to stressful environmental hazards are indeed contributing to acute distress for their loved ones.

Another hypothesis regarding the lack of discussion related to family members' mental health and wellbeing is the participants' expressed need to separate their work/professional/volunteer life from their personal life in order to prevent feeling overwhelmed or consistently burdened. Given that environmental harm and inequities are ubiquitous, participants notice the impacts of environmental racism everywhere. Creating boundaries about when environmental inequities are discussed (i.e., "only at work") seemed to serve as a coping strategy for several of the participants. As such, inquiring into the connection between family members' mental wellbeing and their proximity to environmental harms may be avoided to mitigate stress. Alternatively, the impact of the inequitable distribution of environmental hazards on family members' physical health (e.g., cancer, asthma, high blood pressure) cannot be easily compartmentalized as such, was discussed frequently by participants. One additional consideration is the similarity between the participants' residential community and the communities in which they serve as activists. Lower rates of prevalence of environmental hazards in one's residential community or physical distance from work may contribute to compartmentalization between work and home life, fewer concerns about family members who may be less affected by environmental toxins, or the ability to find temporary distractions from concerns about environmental degradation.

Of final interest to this study are the ways in which the construct of community emerged as important component of resistance work. Though participants defined community in varied

ways, almost all of the participants discussed the critical need for a support system in order to persist in resistance to ER. Notably, the only participant that did not directly discuss the imperative of having supportive community was the participant engaging in unpaid, volunteer work as resistance. It may be the case that supportive community is embedded into her volunteer work, as she organizes alongside a community of POC (predominantly Black women) who share similar values and motivations to resist ER and who she considers to be her friends. Without an experience of engaging resistance work in the absence of supportive community, this theme may not have been salient to her at this time.

Overall and consistent with both Black Feminist Thought and Black Feminist Ecological Thought, the Black women environmental activists in this study demonstrate the ways in which Black women engage social and political action specifically from the margins of society and at times, their own communities. For example, in this study, the participants discussed the ways that being on the margins of social hierarchies as Black women, the margins of what is stereotypically expected of Black girls and women (e.g., outdoor and environmental spaces as "not what Black people do"; Finney, 2014), and the margins of environmentalist spaces uniquely positions them to advocate and affect change for their communities. Moreover, as posited in Black Feminist Ecological Thought, the participants carve out unique sites of resistance to ER in their work and create opportunities for other women of Color to find pathways into environmentalist work. Though it is evident that these women engage in resistance work regardless of the challenges that such resistance brings to their mental health and wellbeing, there are emotional, spiritual, and collective benefits of resistance that seem to offset the challenges. The Black women

environmental activists in this study did not tend to think of their wellbeing in terms of symptomology and disorder (e.g., depression and anxiety), but instead reported ways that their relationships changed as a result of the stress they experienced- their relationships to family and friends, colleagues, and to themselves. Alternatively, they readily named indicators of wellbeing reported in psychological literature as significant outcomes of their resistance and observations of others' resistance (shodiya-zeumault et al., 2022). As such, it is likely the case that wellbeing is a more appropriate term for the influence that resistance has on Black women's emotional and spiritual health.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although this study's findings contribute to our understanding of the influence of Black American women's resistance to systemic oppression on their psychological, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, there are important limitations to consider in light of these findings. Specifically, variability in participants' ages, degree of engagement, and generalizability of the findings must be considered. First, because participants in the study ranged in age from 26 to 32, the perspectives of Black women environmental activists whose ages fall outside of this narrow range may not reflected within the findings. As a result, most of the participants have been engaged in resistance work in environmental spaces for less than a decade. A broader age range may have highlighted differences in experiences in environmental activist spaces over time, and provided greater insight into the processes of identifying as a Black woman environmental activist and navigating activist spaces over the lifespan. Additionally, activists who were busier at the time of my recruitment may not have had the time or capacity to respond to the flyer and subsequently

participate in the research. As a result, the study may not have captured the experiences of some deeply engaged Black women environmental activists.

Participants were also fairly homogenous with regard to education, as all participants reported completing an undergraduate degree and four participants reported completing or being currently enrolled in a masters-level or professional (i.e., juris doctor) degree program. Given that higher education indicates a degree of privilege and affords both social and financial status and access not universally granted, the findings may not represent the experiences and perspectives of Black women environmental activists from a lower socioeconomic position compared to those interviewed. Further, future studies should focus on gathering a sample that represents a greater range of diversity with regard to unpaid grassroots environmental justice work, as a great proportion of environmental justice work is done by women of Color who are not compensated for their labor.

Though the homogeneity in the sample with regard to age and education are limitations with regard to generalizability of the findings, the study did capture greater diversity in perspective afforded through occupational differences (i.e., both paid and unpaid resistance work; varying sectors of environmentalism) and regional (i.e., participants living and working in several US geographic regions). For example, Atlanta, GA is a large metropolitan city in the Southeast, located about five hours from the nearest ocean and continuing to navigate the social, political, and environmental consequences of both American slavery and the Jim Crow South. West Eugene, Oregon is a smaller neighborhood with a rich and complex Black history, located within the small college town of Eugene. Alternatively, both Long Beach and Richmond are urban cities in

California with proximity to the ocean (within a 15-minute drive) and to larger metropolitan cities (i.e., Los Angeles and San Francisco, respectively). Though Long Beach and Richmond are both port cities with a historical presence of Black and Latinx individuals, the distinct cultures of Northern and Southern California influence the landscape of environmental injustice and likely, the ways in which communities perceive and are affected by such injustice.

Future studies should focus on gathering a sample with a greater degree of diversity overall, but with specific attention to age, education, and disability status. Additionally, outside of age, demographic information was only assessed through a single, qualitative question that asked, "How do you identify". Some aspects of identity such as ability status and gender identity were also captured if participants shared them. This qualitative question enabled the researcher to assess the identities that were salient to each participant at the time of the interview and in light in of the study's purpose. However, future studies may also consider asking participants to complete a demographics survey that captures a wider range of identity, or directly inquiring about such identities.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Environmental degradation and exposure to environmental toxins are significant predictors of stress and unfortunately, most prevalent in Black residential communities (Bravo et al., 2016; Redwood et al., 2010). Currently, clinical assessment models are moving toward initial assessment intakes that consider the roles of discrimination and sociopolitical circumstances in mental health. Such models should also include an assessment of experiences of systemic oppression among clients. Specifically relevant to this study, mental health clinicians should assess

for exposure to environmental hazards and clients' perceptions on identity-based disparities in exposure that may indicate discrimination or systemic oppression, as well as stress or anxiety related such exposure.

The findings of the exploration conducted in this study suggest that there are tangible psychological and social benefits of resistance to environmental racism, and that these benefits extend not only to the person engaging resistance but to community members who are gathered towards the common goal of improving the community's environmental conditions. As discussed, the most prominent and important benefit of resistance to environmental racism for the Black women in this study was hope. Hope was derived from participants' belief that their agency and action could produce tangible improvements, and most importantly, that their engagement in activism could change their own orientation to systemic oppression through environmental racism. Specifically, participants moved away from feelings of helplessness and towards courage, deep self-reflection, empowerment and boldness, and a stronger collective identity as Black women. As such, mental health clinicians may consider promoting resistance as a tool for women of Color, and specifically Black women, who may be experiencing stress related to climate change, exposure to environmental toxins, or other environmental hazards, who feel helpless or unaware of avenues for change. Promotion of resistance, or activism, is consistent with strengths-based tools for improving wellbeing and with radical approaches to healing from systemic oppression (e.g., Mosley et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

Overall, this study contributes to psychological literature by exploring the role of resistance to a specific, understudied form of systemic oppression- environmental racism- on the mental health wellbeing of Black women who are actively resisting this form of oppression in their communities through organizing, policy work, and civic engagement. Additionally, we sought to understand the influence of these women's resistance on the mental health and wellbeing of their family and community members, who often serve as an inspiration for the women's engagement and persistence in their resistance work. Additionally, concerning the construct of resistance, the findings extend current literature on Black women's resistance by inquiring into the processes through which Black women engage resistance. The findings revealed several processes through which Black women come to understand themselves as environmental activists, defying stereotypes, deconstructing internalized oppression, and engaging both critical reflection and action in order to both participate and persist in resistance work. Most importantly, the findings indicate that though Black women environmental activists experience both psychological distress and discrimination throughout their resistance work, their wellbeing is bolstered by the joy, empowerment, agency, confidence, and hope that both resistance and engagement in supportive community offer. These women also serve as a witness to radical hope among their community members as well, and their observations fuel their persistence and their passion for environmental activism. As such, the findings from the study can be used as a foundation for continued exploration into the psychological, emotional, and spiritual benefits of resistance to oppression among Black American women, and for the inclusion of environmental racism as an important contributor to racial stress among other forms of systemic oppression.

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Table 2.1. Interview Protocol.

Research Question	Interview Question

1. What are Black women's perceptions on environmental racism and/or environmental injustice in their communities?	▪ [Define *environmental racism*]. Can you tell me in what ways, if any, do you see any of these forms of environmental racism in [*your community*]?
	   o What environmental injustices have you observed in [*your community*]?
	   o What else?
	
	▪ Can you tell me a story of how you came to know about [these environmental issues] in your community (i.e., where you work, live, spend time)?
	   o *Prompts based on geographical context:*
	      ▪ *Have these issues ever come up?*
	      ▪ *Do you know anyone affected?*
	
	▪ How have your experiences as a Black woman influenced your feelings/concerns about [these issues]?

2. What are the strategies that Black women engage to resist environmental injustice in their communities?	▪ As you know, this project is about understanding the ways that Black women resist, or take action against environmental racism or injustice in their communities. Can you tell me, when you think about [resistance], how would you define it? o *Where do you see resistance in your work?* ▪ Can you tell me more about your work (*specific strategies*) to improve the environment in your community? ▪ Can you tell me a story of how you got involved in this work?

| 3. What are Black women's perceptions on the ways in which environmental racism affects their mental health and wellbeing, and the mental health and wellbeing of their family and community members?

What is the influence of these strategies on their mental health and wellbeing, and their observations of any changes to the mental health of their family and community members? | ▪ How have [*these environmental injustices*] affected your overall wellbeing?
   o What has been the impact of your knowledge of environmental injustice on your wellbeing?
   o What have you noticed about your emotional wellbeing or your mental health after you learned/while you are learning about these injustices, or engaged in the work?
      ▪ When you think about environmental injustice, do you notice anything in your body?
      Tapping into other ways they are experiencing stress (spiritually, somatically, cognitively)
      ▪ What do you find yourself thinking about? How do you find yourself reacting when you think about these issues? About your work?

▪ Tell me about any changes you have seen in your wellbeing and in your life since you started this work, if any.
   o *joy/sadness, hope, despair*
   o *Sleep*
   o *Eating*
   o *Restlessness, thoughts* |

Table 2.2. Participants' Demographic Information

Partici-pant Code	Age	Ethnic-Identification	Communities Served	Job Sector	Paid or Unpaid Activism
P1	26	British-Nigerian	Salem and West Eugene, OR	Land Use Planning	Both
P2	27	African American	East Oakland and Richmond, CA	Community Organiz-ing, City Planning, Land Use Planning, Policy	Paid
P3	27	Nigerian	Metro Atlanta, GA	Community Organiz-ing	Unpaid
P4	29	African American	Metro Atlanta, All of GA	Community Organiz-ing, Policy	Paid
P5	32	African American	East Palo Alto and San Fran-cisco, CA; Hon-olulu, HI	Climate Equity, Pol-icy	Paid
P6	31	African American	Long Beach through East Los Angeles (710 Corridor), CA	Community Organiz-ing, Policy	Paid

Table 2.3. Participants' Observations of Environmental Racism in their Communities

Participant Response Theme	Participant Responses
▪ *Racial discrimination in environmental policymaking*	▪ Rapid rehousing not prioritized for Black homeless people ▪ Toxic facilities concentrated in POC communities ▪ Public health equity not considered in environmental policy until the end of the policymaking process ▪ Lack of dissemination of important information regarding environmental issues to the public ▪ Inequitable policymaking at the state and legislative levels ▪ *POC community members have inequitable access to environmental policy documents- not in lay terms. Results in different priorities for POC in organizing spaces*
▪ *Racial discrimination in enforcement of environmental laws*	▪ Corruption and negligence on part of governments, affects primarily POC and poor people ○ City officials often paid to keep toxic facilities in place ("dirty money) ▪ Disparate responses to toxicity in neighborhoods governed by race and wealth ▪ Air quality agencies quicker to respond to complaints from wealthier and/or White neighborhoods
▪ *Presence of toxic waste facilities and life-threatening poisons in communities of color*	▪ Toxins/pollutants from industrial land use in residential areas ▪ Toxic facilities sited in lower-income, predominantly Black/Latinx neighborhoods ("low-resistance neighborhoods) ▪ Dangerous jobs with toxic waste get pushed to low-income POC ▪ Toxic waste and air pollution in most affordable neighborhoods to live ▪ Folks are gaslit when they complain about toxins ▪ Heavy metal production in urban cities, affects air quality ▪ When sites are moved, they are relocated to neighborhoods where primarily Black and Brown people live (low-resistance neighborhoods) ▪ Toxic wastewater

	▪ Black people primarily living next to dirty power-generating infrastructure and transportation emissions ▪ live (low-resistance neighborhoods) ▪ *People having to heat their homes in ways that promote disease (e.g., gas stoves) because of energy waste and inability to afford heat*
▪ *Exclusion of People of Color from leadership in the environmental movement, or from environmental decisions that affect their communities*	▪ Community members ignored/dismissed by politicians and city officials with regard to environmental complaints ▪ Dismissive leaders focused on capital accumulation ▪ Politicians and local leaders making decisions that reflect the priorities of wealthy constituents at the expense of marginalized communities ▪ Government is resistant to advocacy from poor people and POC regarding removal of toxic facilities ▪ White environmental advocates not invested in sustainability/equity for black communities ▪ Process of advocating for environmental reform is exclusionary; Organizers don't consider the needs of working class or marginalized people (when meetings are scheduled, need for childcare, language and jargon is a barrier for entry/understanding, accessibility needs not considered, no language translators) ▪ Exclusion of POC from decision making at local or state level ▪ POC excluded from environmental leadership unless they start the organization
▪ *Others*	▪ Racialized disinvestment from communities of Color ▪ Gentrification ▪ Communities of Color and poor folks marginalized and displaced by "revitalization plans" ▪ Homelessness and encampments ▪ Air quality for homeless/houseless people ▪ Discrimination in housing and lending; Redlining ▪ Lack of support for POC in predatory real estate markets ▪ Food deserts ▪ Cost of gas is higher in lower income neighborhoods ▪ POC overburdened with cost of utilities and basic services

- Disparate rates of walkability- white, wealthier communities are made to be walked and/or walkable vs. lack of sidewalks, safe streets in low-income and POC communities
- Inequitable labor practices that overburden POC and poor people with exposure to toxins, viruses, COVID-19, etc.
- Poor labors conditions in warehouses (place of employment, primarily POC)
- Juxtaposition of development and "revitalization" next to "destitution"- lack of investment in neighborhood/people
- Heat islands, concrete islands, fewer trees in poorer, POC neighborhoods
- Issues of safety
- Poor city infrastructure
- Inequitable living conditions between black and white neighborhoods
- Climate gentrification

Table 2.4. Participants' Strategies of Resistance to ER

Interview Question	Participant Responses
Where do you see resistance in your work (i.e., strategies of resistance)?	▪ Organizing ▪ Public testimony ▪ Making policy recommendations ▪ Support for other organizers and movements ▪ Gathering friends, family, community members- organizing them toward social action (I) ▪ Educating friends and family ▪ Advocating for others ▪ Influencing others' actions intentionally ▪ Volunteering with Black-owned community farms ▪ Helping Black families grow and cultivate their own food- land cultivated to produce food specifically for Black and Brown folks ▪ Regenerating land (e.g., turning empty lots in Atlanta into thriving gardens) ▪ Informing/educating oneself and others on environmental issues ▪ Initiating and facilitating honest and direct dialogue ▪ Building trust and bridges with community members ▪ Addressing your own biases ▪ Mutual aid ▪ *Engaging others with intentional, thoughtful, decolonized leadership*

Table 2.5. Constructed Themes Related to Black Women's Resistance to Environmental Racism

Theme/Sub-theme	Definition	Example Quotes
Catalysts to the process of becoming a resistor of environmental racism	Events and aspects of life and identity that catalyze resistance to environmental racism.	"...I grew up knowing that climate change was a thing and that like caring about the planet we lived on was a thing we should be concerned about" (P4). "Yeah, it's been like a steady climb, I guess. So, when I was a kid, I was very interested in recycling, and I would always like cut the, you know, the soda can things. Yeah. And I just thought it was very important, and make sure you don't harm the fish, and when I would go to the beach, I would be like looking for it, or outside I would be looking for trash. *Laughs.* So there's something there, which is so random" (P5).
Identity Formation as Black Woman/Femme Environmental Activist	*The ongoing process of becoming, and understanding oneself as a Black woman/femme environmental activist.*	"I identify as Black but I recognize that again, that's not how I'm always perceived. And I do a lot of racial equity training and perception matters more than actual truth. So you know if you, it doesn't matter if I'm, you know, all my lineage says I'm West African. What matters is that people think I'm not and that's how they treat me" (P4). "It's a big part of my life. It's how I see the world and how I see myself and my ability to make a difference" (P5). "And so my, my work has been to, like, activate myself and not continue to feel numb, where, which I, I know is a part of my experience. So, for me, it should be like, wake up like, this is crazy, like get up, you know, this is, this is like unacceptable" (P5).

Gendered Racial Socialization and Critical Consciousness	*The ongoing process of learning about one's identity as a Black woman and unlearning internalized racism and misogyny. Additionally, the process of critically analyzing the impact of colonization, gendered racism on one's life experiences and resistance to environmental racism.*	"I just kind of learned to look out for other Black folks. I learned like you speak to your black elders, even if white folks or other folks don't talk to you, you at least speak to, you know, other blacks. If there's a way you can help another black person, you do" (P2). "I would say I've seen it like in my community- I never realized until I was in middle school that there was a white side of Powder Springs. And I noticed that the neighborhoods were a lot- like Powder Springs as a whole people, we think of it, they think it's like a white neighborhood, like very white like Cobb. But I noticed there's a difference in the quality of even the streets, there's a difference in walkability, just the quality of things when you go from one side that's like more People of Color to another side that's more white" (P3).
Spanning beyond defined boundaries to resist environmental degradation	*Crossing spatial, temporal, and hegemonic boundaries to envision new sites of resistance to environmental activism, and critically analyze multiple forms of oppression related to environmental degradation.*	"This isn't just about stopping climate change. This is about rebuilding this, the future" (P4). "The thing that I have realized, is how valuable my ideas are, I wasn't as aware that I was good at that. I didn't know I was really good at framing things. I didn't know I was really good at helping people learn and understand things. And so I think the next iteration of my work is going to be- I don't know what shape is going to take yet but it's called- it's funny you brought up the watermelon shoes. It's going to be called watermelon slices. Um, and it's kind of my offering is that I see and have felt, and all of us have how undervalued Black ideas are, and how taken for granted they've been. And so I want to share stories that get at that and help us see, how something so- some ideas are so beautiful, so smart, so revolutionary worth seeing, and what could it look like if we tried to pursue those and value those ideas" (P5).

Nonlinear pathways between environmental activism and wellbeing	*The nonlinear connections between engagement in resistance to environmental racism and emotional and spiritual wellbeing, as well as the indicators of both distress and wellbeing.*	"And I'm a Black woman, I'm soft spoken, I can be timid, you know. I embody the impact of white supremacy culture on a black woman I feel in a lot of ways. And I moved from DC to the Bay, as a full-ass lawyer and had to- like I took internships, I had to constantly prove myself. And I was very undervalued. And I struggled, I lived in so many different places, I didn't have stability because I wanted to be a part of and do environmental work" (P5). "It's been tough as I feel like every day, I'm learning something more awful is happening someplace in the world that you know, is directly connected to what I do" (P6). "...one of the things that I have enjoyed witnessing a lot, is just watching people, you know get aware and like, find their own power and see that, and recognize that they have a voice and you know, even if it went unrecognized, like you know there's people that around that see them, and so that awakening has been nice to watch and I've definitely seen it a lot over the years" (P6). "…I think, I mean just the local like environmental movement here is very white-led. The groups are historically white-led and just like me being a person of color in this space, it's been a very like extractive past year or so with people calling on me to like give a talk or give a presentation or, you know, come be on this committee, come speak at this event. And like me wanting to, like say yes, because like no one else is doing it, but then that resulting in extreme burnout" (P1).
Intentional community as critical for persistence in environmental activism	*The impacts of having, and not having, supportive community throughout one's work of resisting environmental racism.*	"And so, yeah, that was a thing too, just kind of like, not having a lot of black people specifically in the environmental movement and then as a result of that, the ones that are, were pretty stretched then and have limited capacity and are very much like tokenized, as well I think…the social implications of not having a strong sense of community as well, I think it stunts

our ability to organize effectively against environ-mental harms, too" (P1).

"Yeah, I remember a conversation with my- one of my friends, last year. She was like, 'I really hope that you and yeah- in our conversation she was just like, 'You're doing such a good job' and I was like, 'Am I though, or am I part of the problem?' You know, just being so hard on myself. And she was like, 'One day I really hope you can be like in a place where you feel like you're singing, singing choir with other voices that are harmonizing, and maybe they're not the same voices as yours but you're signing the same song and it sounds really beautiful to you'. And, she kind of just validated me and helped me feel like, you'll get through it" (P5).

Subthemes are italicized.

Table 2.6. Participants' Definitions of Resistance

Interview Question	Participant Responses
How would you define resistance?	▪ Intentional and unintentional ▪ Being able to withstand or be resilient against adversity ▪ Fighting to be able to experience love, joy, and happiness despite oppression ▪ Small organizing actions that may never be seen or acknowledged- Small stories that build momentum but will never be told ▪ Fighting and pushing back in different ways ▪ Disruption ▪ Truth-telling ▪ Being an upstander ▪ Choosing to rest, prioritizing sleep, choosing to not be overworked ▪ Caring for yourself and your community ▪ Not allowing anyone to take away your narrative ▪ Seeing yourself as part of the community – not apart from or above it ▪ "Going rogue" ▪ Empowering the community/collective ▪ Standing against hegemonic ways of being ▪ Going against the status quo ▪ Setting personal and professional boundaries ▪ Letting things go ▪ Showing up, speaking up, letting go of fear ▪ Confronting deep fears ▪ Naming white supremacy culture and how it shows up in both your personal and professional life/organizing spaces ▪ Being honest and direct ▪ Valuing skills that are not hegemonically valued (e.g., lived experience, community partnerships) ▪ Bringing awareness to an issue that is not widely taught or discussed ▪ Teaching that environmental justice is racial justice ▪ Voting ▪ How you spend your money ▪ *Starting a business*

Table 2.7. Participants' Knowledge about the Legacy of Black Women's Resistance to Oppression

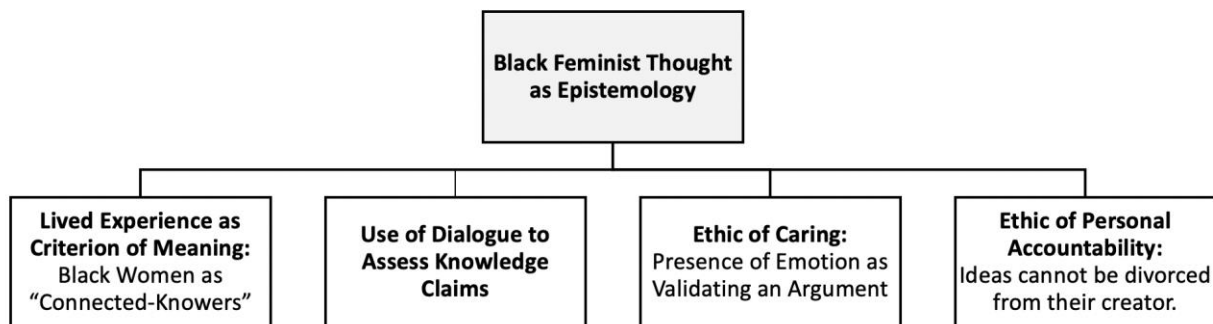| Interview Question	Participant Responses
What do you know about the legacy of Black women/femme's resistance?	▪ Black women/femmes engage resistance through caretaking and nurturance ▪ Black women/femmes resist by choosing love and softness despite oppression and opposition ▪ Black women/femme's narratives of resistance are often "watered down"; narratives are not told in totality ▪ Black women/femmes are often marginalized from recognition ▪ Experience of being undervalued as part of Black women/femmes' resistance stories ▪ Social actions are usually led by women of color, queer folks, and femmes; women have always been the changemakers but men are given status and acknowledgment ▪ Often forced to choose between "Black or woman" in resistance movements (e.g., Civil Rights, Feminist movements) ▪ Black women/femmes take on emotional labor and trauma to help others ▪ Black women/femmes pave the way for other Black women/femmes to resist oppression ▪ *The legacy of Black women's resistance is core to many Black womens' identities/understanding of themselves*

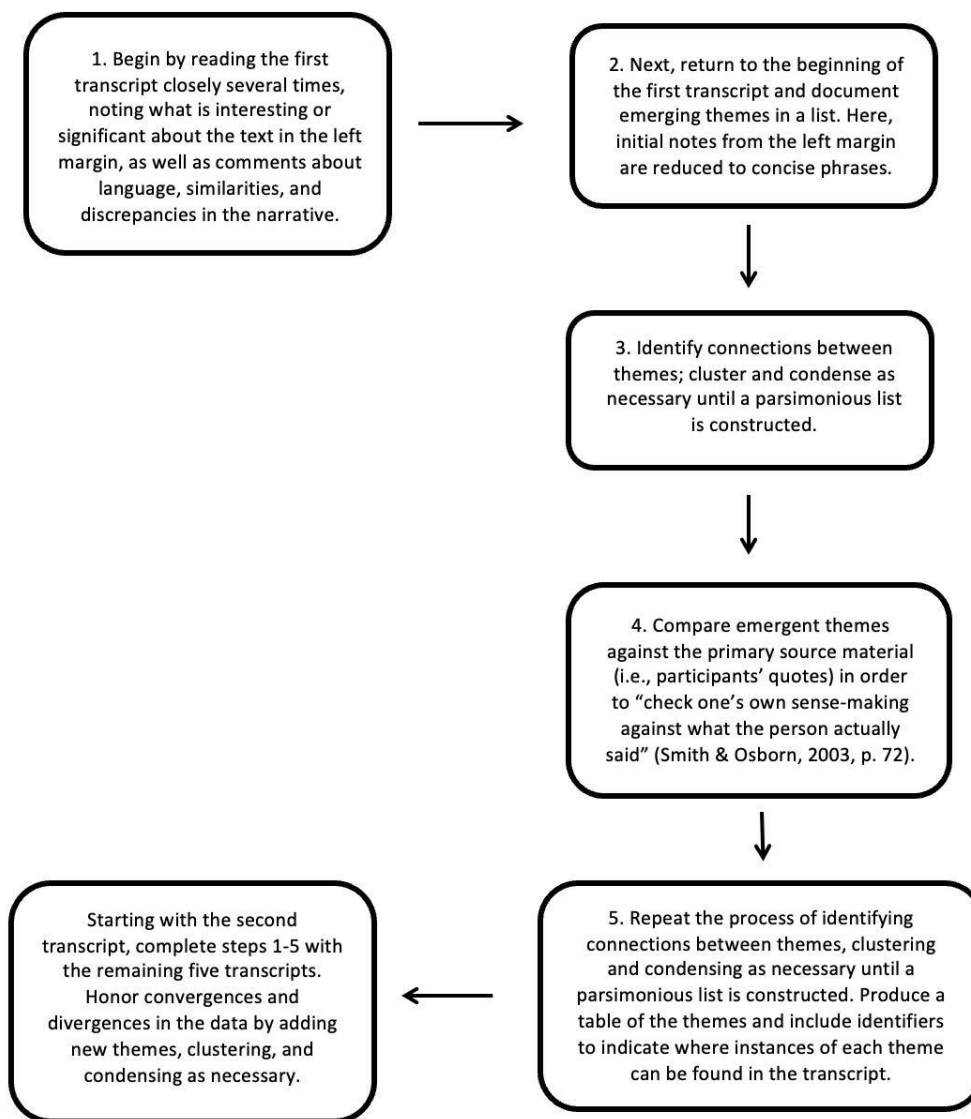**Figure 2.1** *Diagram of Black Feminist Epistemology*

1. Begin by reading the first transcript closely several times, noting what is interesting or significant about the text in the left margin, as well as comments about language, similarities, and discrepancies in the narrative.

2. Next, return to the beginning of the first transcript and document emerging themes in a list. Here, initial notes from the left margin are reduced to concise phrases.

3. Identify connections between themes; cluster and condense as necessary until a parsimonious list is constructed.

4. Compare emergent themes against the primary source material (i.e., participants' quotes) in order to "check one's own sense-making against what the person actually said" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 72).

Starting with the second transcript, complete steps 1-5 with the remaining five transcripts. Honor convergences and divergences in the data by adding new themes, clustering, and condensing as necessary.

5. Repeat the process of identifying connections between themes, clustering and condensing as necessary until a parsimonious list is constructed. Produce a table of the themes and include identifiers to indicate where instances of each theme can be found in the transcript.

Figure 2.2 *Flowchart of IPA Data Analysis Process*

APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB-Approved Sample Recruitment Letter

My name is shola shodiya-zeumault and I am a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at Georgia State University. I am recruiting co-creators for a research project related to Black women's experiences with environmental racism in their communities. I am hoping to speak with six Black women doing grassroots environmental activism to understand how this activism impacts their wellbeing.

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be:

- 18 years of age, or older
- A person who identifies as a Black (e.g., African American, Caribbean, Nigerian, Afro-Latina, etc.) woman
- Speak and understand English fluently,
- Participating in any form of grassroots environmental activism in an urban city/community where you have lived (within 15 mile radius) for at least one year during your adult life (you don't have to be living in that city at the moment)

If you agree to participate, I will ask to interview you for about 90 minutes via Zoom- a video conferencing platform similar to FaceTime or Skype. I will ask you questions about your perceptions of environmental injustice happening in your community, your current activism, and your wellbeing. For your participation, I will compensate you with $50 following the interview.

After the interviews are completed, I will write up what you shared and will ask that you provide me with feedback on what I wrote. This process will require about 30 minutes of your time and can be done via Zoom, email, phone call, or postal mail. For participation in this part of the research, I will pay an additional $25. Finally, I hope to share this process and the outcome with the activists that I interview. Because of this, I will also give you the written form of your stories, as well as any resources that we create together to share with your community and your agency.

If you are interested, or if you would like to know more, please feel free to contact me:

Email: *blackwomxnsresistance@gmail.com*
Phone: 562-257-8900

Thank you for your consideration,

shola shodiya-zeumault

Appendix B.
IRB-Approved Consent Form

Georgia State University
Department of Counseling and Psychological Services
Informed Consent

shola shodiya-zeumault, MS; Cirleen DeBlaere, PhD

Title: Black Women's Resistance to Environmental Racism

Request to Participate

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is being conducted through Georgia State University.

The primary researchers in charge of this study are shola shodiya-zeumault and Dr. Cirleen DeBlaere. While the study will be run by them, other qualified persons may also assist them.

Research studies only include people who choose to take part. Please read this information sheet carefully and take your time making your decision. This information sheet explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you agree to be in the study.

Background and Purpose

The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you identify as a Black and/or African American woman living in the United States, and 18 years of age or older. You are also currently engaged in environmental activism in or near (within 15 miles) of an urban city/community where you have lived for at least one year of your adult life. You do not need to be living in this community now.

We are interested in understanding Black women's intentional action against environmental injustice in their community, and the ways that this action affects their wellbeing. You will be one of six women in the study. This study will help mental health professionals understand how to support the mental health and wellbeing of Black women engaged in community organizing and/or activism.

Procedures

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take about 90 minutes. The interview will take place via Zoom- a video conferencing platform similar to Facetime or Skype. Interview questions will be related to your perceptions of environmental injustice happening in your community, your current activism, and your wellbeing. For your participation, you will be compensated with $50 following the interview.

After the interviews are completed, we will write up what you shared and will ask that you provide feedback. The feedback process will require about 30 minutes of your time and can be done via Zoom, email, phone call, or postal mail. For participation in this part of the research, you will be paid an additional $25. Finally, we hope to share this process and the outcome with activists that are interviewed. Because of this, you will also be given the written form of your stories, as well as any resources that we create together to share with your community.

Risks

You may experience some discomfort while answering some interview questions, specifically related to injustice in your community and how the injustice has affected you and your loved ones. Risk is deemed to be low because you can stop participation at any time. Please think carefully about whether you would like to take part in this study at this time. There are no other known risks to you if you choose to take part in this study.

Benefits and Compensation

You will be compensated up to $75 for participation in this study. You may also gain insight into changes in your life and wellbeing that have come from your engagement in environmental action. In addition, other people may benefit in the future from the information that comes from this study.

Confidentiality

All interviews will be video-recorded and stored on an encrypted, password-protected external hard drive that can only be accessed by the researchers. All information that you share, including your name and any identifying information about your work, will be kept confidential.

Contacts for Questions about the Study

You should contact shola shodiya-zeumault or Cirleen DeBlaere if you have questions about the study, or if any problems come up. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Their contact information is listed below.

shola shodiya-zeumault
562-257-8900
sshodiyazeumault1@student.gsu.edu

Dr. Cirleen DeBlaere
404-413-8170
cdeblaere@gsu.edu

<u>Voluntary Participation</u>

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. You are also free to skip any question.

You have read this Consent Form. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling shola shodiya-zeumault or Dr. Cirleen DeBlaere at the contact information listed above.
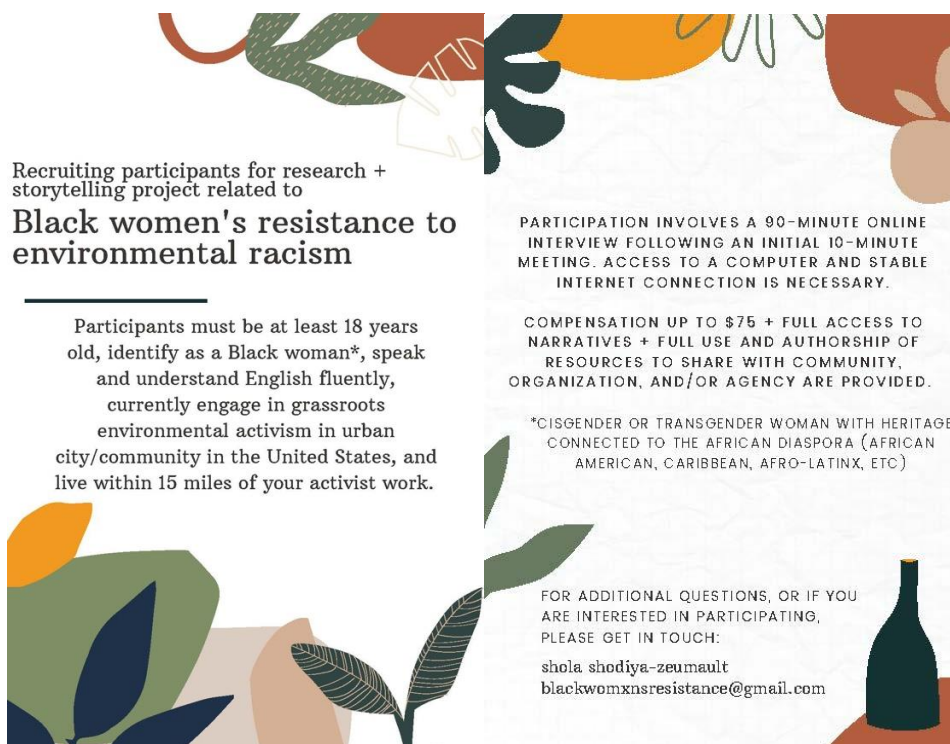
If you agree to take part in this study, please sign below.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Appendix C.

IRB-Approved Recruitment Flyer

Recruiting participants for research + storytelling project related to

Black women's resistance to environmental racism

Participants must be at least 18 years old, identify as a Black woman*, speak and understand English fluently, currently engage in grassroots environmental activism in urban city/community in the United States, and live within 15 miles of your activist work.

PARTICIPATION INVOLVES A 90-MINUTE ONLINE INTERVIEW FOLLOWING AN INITIAL 10-MINUTE MEETING. ACCESS TO A COMPUTER AND STABLE INTERNET CONNECTION IS NECESSARY.

COMPENSATION UP TO $75 + FULL ACCESS TO NARRATIVES + FULL USE AND AUTHORSHIP OF RESOURCES TO SHARE WITH COMMUNITY, ORGANIZATION, AND/OR AGENCY ARE PROVIDED.

*CISGENDER OR TRANSGENDER WOMAN WITH HERITAGE CONNECTED TO THE AFRICAN DIASPORA (AFRICAN AMERICAN, CARIBBEAN, AFRO-LATINX, ETC)

FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS, OR IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH:

shola shodiya-zeumault
blackwomxnsresistance@gmail.com