Motherhood and Work: Women Combining Work and Childcare as a Patriarchal Response

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ABSTRACT

Employers have begun to strategize ways to accommodate families as they navigate work-family balance, and scholars have found that various policies contribute to how employees perceive and manage work-family balance. However, research in this area largely centers on White workspaces and experiences for policy recommendations, leaving out those experiences specific to people of color and their workspaces. The practices and experiences of people of color in managing work-family balance are mostly absent from policy development for the institutions of work. I argue that Black women, who are the largest group of growing entrepreneurs in the US, have valuable experiences that contribute to a better understanding of how families of color navigate and understand their parenting and work responsibilities. In this paper, I describe racialized child-rearing techniques used by Black mothers to maintain work-family balance. Drawing on two years of participant observation, ethnography, and unstructured interviews in a Black, women-owned and operated business, I find that Black women adopt collective racialized conceptualizations of motherhood and responsibilities, that center competing ideological frames of motherhood. Mothers value their Black children's success in education, yet understand institutions of education as hostile sites for their children. Women aspire to work outside of the home to secure self-actualization, yet understand their roles as mothers through a patriarchal lens that places more responsibilities of parenting and childcare on mothers than fathers. This patriarchal

understanding of parenting responsibilities adopted by mothers is used to negotiate their responsibilities between work and family, and it shapes their strategies for managing parenting and work. In practice, women adopt queer parenting strategies to achieve the combination of work and family by relying on communal networks, not including their male partners, for support in child-friendly work spaces. Women develop collective conceptualizations of motherhood and its responsibilities while maintaining facets of self-identity in Black spaces.

Keywords: Parenting, motherhood, work-family balance, child-friendly, patriarchal, queer parenting, other mothering, family networks

WHO IS MISSING FROM WORK-FAMILY BALANCE POLICIES?

In seeking to understand how work-family balance is understood and achieved in the U.S., I center the narratives and experiences of Black women. I ask: How do Black women conceptualize motherhood and responsibilities associated with the identity? How do Black women achieve work-family balance? Research discusses various policies and practices that will benefit families in the workplace, however, few studies center Black families and workspaces to understand how and why particular decisions are made regarding work and family. I use data from two years of ethnographic data collection in a child-friendly work location, owned and operated by Black women. Data from participant observation, ethnography, and unstructured interviews capture women's interactions with children in the workspace and how they enact and perceive motherhood responsibilities. I find that women execute work-family balance through conceptualizations of motherhood that include communal aspects of childcare between women in a child-friendly working environment. Together, women's conceptualization of motherhood and their reliance on patriarchal understandings of parenting responsibilities shape their strategies for managing parenting and work. In contrast, women use queer parenting strategies to achieve the combination of work and family by relying on communal

networks outside of traditional family arrangements for support in child-friendly workspaces.

Black mothers in this study prioritize their children and themselves, while creating working environments that enable women to blend their responsibilities as parents with their aspirations to work outside the home. These strategies can place more pressure on women and mothers to create this blend and less need for fathers to do the same. I provide an empirical example of how Black women navigate work and family by relying on both patriarchal and queer concepts around parenting. This research adds to the body of existing literature on diverse parenting practices.

Sociopolitical contexts have greatly influenced societies' collective understanding of what it means to successfully parent and work. Although the complexities of families are continuing to transform the ways we think about parenting and responsibilities, mothers remain the primary caregivers for young children. Family policies disproportionally affect them despite the steady increase of women in the job market. Women's robust presence in the workforce and continued presence as the primary caregivers in the home make them a unique case for understanding work-family balance. Additionally, Black women's historical presence in the workforce, and their provision of childcare for White children, make them a unique case for understanding the intersectional complexities that exist when we consider identities.

While attitudes support the combination of mothers working and childrearing, there has been a decline in caring for children at work over the three decades from the late fifties to the early nineties, pre-COVID (Rindfuss 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly disrupted conceptual understandings and decisions to work and parent in combination. As the world opens back up and folks return to their physical workspaces or work from home, the importance of childcare and work-family balance are uniquely resurfacing.

Childcare reform continues to gain national attention. It is essential to analyze the current policies that impact working families as they navigate work-family balance. A mismatch in

work-family policies often leaves parents with unfavorable policies that do not support them as they manage family and work life. For example, policies often fail to consider the significant increase in women in the workforce with small kids and the elderly to care for; as well as an egalitarian setup of families that introduces the need for men to support childcare as well (Waldfogel 2019). Scholars have found that women created and used more flexibility in their work schedules soon after the birth of a child, reducing the need for their male partners to do so (Hynes 2005). The work-family life balance is far more straining on women than men. Therefore, we need equitable options for both men and women to choose work and home opportunities for self-actualization (O'Connor 2005). While more egalitarian households may place constraints on fathers, these households introduce opportunities for women to relieve the restrictions of housework and lack of leisure time, and open opportunities, while introducing complexities in the lives of fathers as equal parents (Steddelman-Steffen & Oehrli 2017). Additionally, predominantly heteronormative family-leave policies omit queer couples from parenting conversations altogether (Cahill & Meyer 2003).

Social class also plays a role in the experiences of mothers navigating work-family balance; working-class and single mothers' experiences remain starkly different from high-earning and partnered mothers. High-paying and executive-level positions offer women more flexibility at work. In Women Who Opt Out, Jones finds that highly educated women with top-earning partners can opt out of the workforce, while in stark contrast, involuntary part-time workers are seeking more hours. They find that inflexible, unpredictable work hours increase the strain between work and family (Jones 2012).

Women in high-paying positions have many advantages compared to those working in low-paying positions. A bank may offers a range of benefits for working mothers that allow them the ability to prioritize both work and family without strain, including flexible and part-time work hours in upper-level positions.

Such companies may offer childcare facilities, assistance funds, time off for adoption plus assistance, lactation rooms, and so on. In contrast, women working as janitorial staff, may not have the same flexibility, even working for a company prides itself on its ability to maintain women. These benefits are usually extended to women in high-paying positions while assisting them with work-family balance through its various policies.

On-site childcare is expensive and often not an option. While reforms and increases in early-intervention childcare programs' budgets have improved, access to childcare remains unattainable for many women of color (WOC) who are both working and often providing childcare. Access to subsidies is often limited as well. Recommendations for capping childcare costs to match a percentage of family income would illuminate the dilemma for women who are choosing between working jobs that only cover the costs of childcare or staying at home.

How are Black mothers negotiating work-family balance? I provide an empirical case of how Black mothers enact work-family balance and conceptualize motherhood and the responsibilities associated with the identity. In this article, I show how Black mothers practice work-family balance through shared responsibilities of motherhood among women, deploying racialized parenting strategies that protect and prepare Black children for racial hostility.

I use data from two years of ethnographic research in a hair-braiding salon to demonstrate a case of Black women working in child-friendly working environments. Black women practice work-family balance through the established community. Women in the salon share responsibilities for childcare. The women understand their parenting role as mothers to be primarily responsible for children's care and development. They define motherhood responsibilities centering on Black children's success in dominant U.S. institutions, such as schools. Mothers emphasize the importance of children's education in the workplace by providing them with academic tasks to pass the time. These find-

ings are significant because they provide an empirical case for how Black women enact work-family balance, define motherhood, and enact their associated responsibilities in a Black-owned and operated space.

Women define motherhood as centering on Black children's success in U.S. institutions by emphasizing their children's educational experiences; they also recognize institutions of education as hostile to children of color (Ray 2022). The mothers seek to protect their children from inevitable circumstances of racism, sexism, nationalism, and other forms of hostility their children will encounter while at school; they seek to prepare their children for these experiences.

They practice work-family balance by communally sharing duties of childcare in the workplace. By blending the workspace with childcare, women can achieve self-actualization and maintain their perceived responsibilities. Together, women's conceptualization of motherhood and their reliance on patriarchial understandings of parenting responsibilities shape their strategies for managing parenting and work. They also use queer parenting strategies: relying on communal networks outside of their partners for support in child-friendly work spaces. Mothers value working outside of the home; much of their childrearing is racialized due to their frequent encounters with institutional racism.

THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS ON MOTHERHOOD AND WORK

The Intersectional Complexities of Parenting Policy at Work

Historically, with much of the caring duties covered by women of color, many White women had the privilege to seek educational and other professional and civic opportunities freely. While White women were achieving self-actualization, Black women's devalued identity as a means of labor was sealed, with minimal regard for their responsibilities as mothers and wives. Addition-

ally, Black women are the fastest-growing of entrepreneurs in the U.S. (American Express 2018, Hamilton 2021). However, White workspaces privilege Whiteness and people of color often perform "racial tasks" to alleviate some of the difficulties associated with being a person of color in a White space; these survival mechanisms sustain racial hierarchies of primarily White organizations (Wingfield & Alston 2014).

Scholars have noted a cultural deficit in work-family research outside of Anglo and European-focused cultures (Shokley et al. 2017). The utilization of family work policies are highly racialized and gendered. There are advantages for fathers who take advantage of family leave, and benefits can extend to the entire household. When fathers in heterosexual relationships experience transitions to parenthood similar to mothers, they come to think about and enact parenting in more similar ways to their partner (Rehel 2014). In her study of 85 semi-structured interviews with fathers and mothers in three cities, Rehel (2014) found that fathers who took paternity leave developed parenting strategies similar to their partners. She finds that the shift from managerial helper to co-parenting creates opportunities for gender-equitable divisions of labor for hetero couples in regard to parenting. Generally, misperceptions of the stigma associated with the utilization of benefits from family policies often leave benefits underused by employees and increase work-family conflict (Mandeville et al. 2016).

While there is extensive research in the areas of work-family balance, satisfaction in family-friendly policies is difficult to attain as researchers have found that even when some families benefit, others reported low satisfaction (Saltzstein et al. 2001). Negative perceptions of work-family balance are linked to long work hours, having to work extra hours, and unpredictable working hours (Baxter & Chester 2011). While scholars have shown that family support policies such as flexible work hours, take-home work, and family leave improve efforts at work-family balance and job satisfaction, these policies are gendered and leave

women disadvantaged (Breaugh & Frye 2008, Frye & Breaugh 2004, Goni-Legas 2016, Manour & Trembley 2016).

Policies are still behind in considering the intersectional complexities of families. Researchers have found that family-friendly policies and practices have a direct correlation to work-family balance in Europe and Hong Kong (Chou & Cheung 2013, Ronda et al. 2016). Additionally, queer families remain vulnerable to exclusion from parenting conversations due to a sociocultural invisibility (Reed 2018). Additionally, without considering the racialized aspects of work-family balance, policies fail to understand Black women's experiences.

Black Mothers' Patriarchal Framing of Queer Parenting Practices

Black women have been socialized to push the limits of capacity to better align with an idea of "strength" that blurs the lines between over-extension and productivity. The Strong Black Women trope or narrative has been explored by scholars extensively, who find that strong Black womanhood is a truthful but harmful narrative (Scott 2017). Black women are socialized to respect and enact the ideologies of strong Black womanhood from an early age (Scott 2017). This socialization begins in the family and is often passed along from other Black women.

As a result of their adoption of the identity and concepts of strong Black womanhood, women are lacking in areas of self-care in the process. Black women take on as much as they can handle, and then more; they feel that they are equipped to do so based on mythologies from slavery that dehumanized Blacks. While Black women are doing it, the myth holds true that they are, in fact, women that are strong, the need for self-care is clear, and Scott suggests a manifesto for Black women's self-care is necessary and calls for self-care as a new mandate for strength.

The pressures of strength for Black women extend to mothers and add adequacy to the equation. In her study examining Black middle-class mothers and their careers, Barnes (2015) found that Black mothers work toward identities of respectability to provide

real perspectives of Black women and Black families contrary to stereotypes, as a way to protect themselves and their families. The pressure of being a perfect mother, wife, and daughter rests heavily on Black women, who are heavily scrutinized if they do not add up. In combination, the pressures of strength and adequacy for Black mothers can be unattainable for women managing careers and the responsibilities of motherhood.

<B>Strong Black Women and Respectability

Black mothers adopt patriarchal systems in negotiating their roles between family and work (Barnes 2015). Mothers from Barnes's study embraced a patriarchal system that did not work in their favor as a way to place value on the survival of the family and their image in the community (Barnes, 2015, 182). Black career women in this study choose to stay at home or modify their careers to ensure the stability of their families and privilege their marriage. Varying characteristics of families can result in either conflict or integration for mothers (Dow 2019). Mothers who work outside the home and are operating in gendered spheres that include the cult of domesticity often fall into conflict. In contrast, mothers who are operating in an egalitarian household and have support from kin or other networks experience integration (Steddelman-Steffen & Oehrli 2017). These mothers' combination of work-family and parenting is developed from cultural expectations, inside and outside of the home, and they are supported by economic, social, and structural circumstances. These framings often rely on a patriarchal system that privileges two-parent households and men's paid labor and careers over women's paid and free labor and careers. This patriarchal framing often leaves Black working mothers to strategize on ways that they can accomplish all things in combination.

Sociologists have broadened the definition of family to encompass families in a variety of forms. It is only right, then, to also queer our definition of parents and parenting. "Family responsibilities, including financial and emotional support, elder and child caretaking, and other household duties are frequently

shared throughout support networks that may involve extended family and friends' participation in a variety of familial roles" (Cahill et al. 2003). Queer families, families of color, and immigrant families have relied on a variety of network supports in parenting and childrearing (Wilhelmus 1998, Mays et al. 1998, Cahill et al. 2003). Queer parenting structures include a spectrum of family formations outside of heteronormative, nuclear family structures that rest on patriarchal understandings. This spectrum of family structures includes caring for children who live in another home, single parenting, adopted parenting, foster parenting, and same-sex parents.

Black women have been queering motherhood in the United States by necessity. While working outside of the home can incite feelings of self-actualization and allow mothers to be creative beyond their parenting responsibilities, they are often left managing the tasks of childcare and work in combination without support. Mothers in heterosexual relationships are devoted to the responsibilities of childcare in ways that do not match their male partners. Single mothers are also managing these responsibilities in full. McClain (2019) offers compelling stories about Black mothers' adversity to demonstrate various ways in which Black motherhood remains a political position in this era. Community is often the response to adversity. "Other mother" is a communal aspect of mothering in which blood mothers receive assistance from the community; this has been central to the institution of Black motherhood (Hill Collins 1987, 2005; Story 2014). African American mothers do not see working as a decreased devotion to their families but instead as an expectation of motherhood (McClain 2019).

Black mothers' experiences are unique also, as they must regularly navigate issues of race and racism for themselves and their children in the institutions they frequent. Black mothers additionally encounter covert racism daily.

ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGY

I use two years of ethnographic research in a hair-braiding salon located in a Western U.S. city to describe how Black mothers conceptualize their identities as mothers and enact work-family balance in a child-friendly workspace. I observed hundreds of mothers in their workplace and customers as they received their hair styling services. The braiders employed in the salon were primarily from West African countries, while the primary customer base were Black/ African American women. Women shared their values and priorities as mothers and regularly practiced child-rearing within the salon space, where children were often present. In what follows, I use pseudonyms for the research location and all participants discussed.

The salon is one of five operating businesses within a strip mall located in the city. The African-owned and operated business is run by a young Senegalese couple, Mimi and her husband, Ammad. Their employees are purposefully all women from various African countries. Some of the women have recently arrived in the U.S. and are newly employed in the salon, while others have been in the U.S. and worked at the salon for several years. However, ALL braiders are experts in the craft of braiding and learned the craft as children in Africa. The salon serves a primarily Black customer base. Scholars continue to discuss the complexities that exist within the African diaspora and the ways in which their experiences differ across context and within various institutions, especially in the U.S. (Jenkins 2019, Watts-Smith 2014, Waters 1999). For this project, I focus on Black women and distinguish the racial identities of West African immigrants from Black/ African Americans. This is not to disregard the complexities that exist within the African diaspora, but to highlight it as a necessary distinction. West African immigrant women were self-identified while other Black women were categorized as Black or African American when the distinction was unclear or not discussed. This project includes experiences of braiders employed in the salon from varying African countries and the Black American

women they provided services for. Braiders ranged in age from 21 to 55, while clients' ages ranged from 2 years old to those in their later 80s.

When I initiated my research in the salon, I began generally by learning the names of braiders and introducing myself to each one, taking the time to learn the varying personalities and skills each braider brought to the space. I felt that building a rapport was an essential part of my research process and experience. I learned the styling routines for the variety of styles offered in the salon, including which braiders specialized in which styles. As I learned the normal day-to-day operations of the salon, I began helping in any way that I could. I started with sweeping up hair throughout the day, taking out the garbage, greeting customers as they entered the salon, and even making food runs. I quickly graduated from being able to assist customers by answering questions about pricing and styling timeframes to answering phone calls and texts from customers, scheduling, confirming, and canceling appointments. Mimi, the owner of the salon, was so pleased with my reception-like duties that she even placed me in a managerial position on two separate occasions while she visited Africa.

Because of these roles, I had opportunities to engage with braiders and customers regularly. I scheduled and confirmed appointments and was often there to greet customers when they arrived for their appointments. Conversations between customers and braiders were not constant across the duration of the styling process (averaging 5 hours per customer), but often consisted of meaningful dialogue including politics, racism, and, of course, motherhood.

My insider-outsider identity was unique in my research experience. As an Afro Latinx woman I relied on my Blackness as an insider status. I had concerns early on about my Blackness being challenged by other Black women, something that I had experienced from my past. To my pleasant surprise (with the exception of one or two isolated incidents), I was perceived as a Black woman in the salon in the eyes of customers and braiders. Where

I became an outsider was my nationality. While braiders did not emphasize my mixed-race appearance, they did emphasize my American identity. Braiders often referred to me as American, and this took some getting used to. One of the most compelling and advantageous aspects of my identity that led to the most meaningful conversations and insider status within the salon was my being a mother. While I was welcomed early on by the salon owner and received well by the braiders in the salon, once I mentioned that I was a mother, and shared photos of my family, many of the relationships that I had made changed drastically for the better and became increasingly intimate as we shared stories of motherhood.

I spent two years conducting research and analyzing the data. To begin, I visited the salon on weekdays in between my graduate courses on Monday through Thursday and from 9-4 on Fridays. I spent more time in the salon when my class schedule was in recess for breaks between semesters. During spring break, summer, and winter break, I visited the salon Monday-Friday from 9 am to 4 pm. While the salon was a child-friendly space for both customers and braiders employed in the salon, I did not bring my child to the salon and relied on paid childcare while I conducted my research. My son did accompany me on a few shorter and isolated visits to the salon.

I spoke with the women in the salon using unstructured interviews in the form of a relaxed conversation. I did not record our conversations, but I did take notes on my phone and small notepads throughout the day. Each night when I returned home, I transcribed my phone and notepad notes into detailed field notes. My field notes include dialogue from conversations I had with women as well as some conversations they had amon one another. I documented how they came to define and practice motherhood, as well as the consistency of how children were incorporated into the salon space. I use this data to describe how Black women conceptualize Black motherhood and enact work-family balance. I analyzed my data by using grounded theory. I began by taking

my detailed field notes and hand-coding my documents weekly. Then, I used coded field notes to develop reoccurring themes in the data and develop biweekly thematic memos. I used my thematic memos to determine the most salient themes to discuss in this research project.

While I have conducted this research to the best of my abilities, my process is not without flaws, and this project possesses several methodological limitations. These include few one-on-one interviews, as most conversations were between multiple women. Due to the long hours spent in the salon by both customers and braiders, who spent an average of five hours from start to completion on styles, I conducted interviews in the salon as braiders worked and customers received their hairstyles or waited for their turn. Therefore, this resulted in a lack of privacy for most conversations, which could have impacted women's responses. An additional limitation is the limited data on fathers' and mens' conceptualization of their roles in parenting and responsibility (Johnson & Young 2016). "Current literature limits our knowledge of the full range of Black fathering practices and experiences; and second, reclaims and repurposes 'cultural analysis,' not to pathologize 'what's wrong with Black families and fathers,' but to shed much needed light on the ways in which Black fathers themselves process and make meaning of their roles and realities" (Johnson & Young 2016). Because the space was dominated by women, most of my data captures mothers and their experiences and perspectives with parenting, therefore I have little framing around men's contributions and perspectives in this data. Lastly, while the natural flow of the conversations used for this study is an advantage, because I did not use a tape recorder, dialogues are based on my notes and the best recall of conversations, so are approximations rather than exact word-for-word dialogue. I do, however, include reflexive and sensory dialogue within my field notes to assist with recalling the specific details I seek to share.

FINDINGS

> I know that it has not been easy as I have tried to navigate the challenges of juggling my career and motherhood. And I fully admit that I did not always get the balance right. But I hope that you can see that with hard work, determination, and love, it can be done.
>
> —Hon. Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson

In the opening statements at her Supreme Court confirmation hearing, the Honorable Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson addressed the nation by beginning where many women begin, with her family. While she thanked her family for their support in a heartfelt message, she also touched on the difficulties of managing career and parenthood and reminded families across the country of the sacrifice that happens when women juggle their professional careers and identities as mothers. My study provides an empirical case of how Black mothers understand their parenting responsibilities and practice balance between work, family, and self-actualization. I found that mothers understand and enact their responsibilities as mothers in response to systems of oppression. In response to a patriarchal system of oppression that places less value and more strain on mothers, Black mothers prioritized their own self-actualization through decisions to work outside of the home, even when it is challenging. Partnered and unpartnered women's conceptualizations of motherhood were centered on patriarchal foundations that resulted in an imbalance in caregiving responsibilities that left them most responsible for managing childcare. In response to understandings of the role of the mother as primary, these working mothers adopted queer parenting strategies of blending work and mothering. Lastly, mothers recognized education as a hostile institution for children of color (Ray 2022) and while mothers prepared their children academically they also prepared them for encounters with racism.

VALUE IN SELF-ACTUALIZATION: HOW GOOD MOTHERS WORK AND CARE FOR CHILDREN

Women in this study value work as a critical responsibility of motherhood and self-actualization. Mimi, a tall Senegalese woman in her early thirties, and the salon owner, shared her preference for work outside the home rather than staying at home with children. While she recognizes that there are women who have this desire, she knows that work is something in life that fulfills her.

> I…just cannot stay at home all day and care for da children only. No, I cannot do it. I am da type to go to work, because I enjoy to be away from home and to go to work. I need to do dat for me.

While daycare costs made Mimi's decision to work outside of the home a more challenging decision, her decision remained. She explained that even if the cost was just as much as she was earning, she would rather put all of her earnings towards daycare costs than stay home and not work. I informed Mimi that she and I shared this desire to work and less willingness to stay home.

Mimi values working outside of the home as something she needs to be happy. She recognizes that while she is a mother, she has aspirations outside of that part of her identity that are not fulfilled if she does not work. She finds that work is something that she enjoys doing and is a large part of her happiness. Knowing this about herself, she works to combine the two crucial aspects of her life. After five years and building up a relatively large clientele, Mimi transitioned from taking appointments in her home to opening her own salon in Las Vegas. Mimi spends most of her time at the salon, and as a mother, this is hard at times because she has less time with her children. She feels guilty for this but loves what she does. Mimi told me that she spends so much time at work that she feels guilty for the time she misses with her children. She admitted to "spoiling" her daughter when they have alone time, but she doesn't mind because it helps her to feel less guilty.

While mothers value their own self-actualization, they rely on patriarchal understandings of parenting and motherhood, and perceive that most childcare responsibilities are theirs to manage as mothers. In response, mothers negotiate their work and leave bearing in mind their childcare responsibilities.

"GIRL, I TOOK ALL THE LEAVE"

Gina's customer (all names have been changed to pseudonyms) is a new customer and young mother from LA. She told me that she worked at the post office and just recently went back to work now that her daughter was seven months old: "Girl, I took every kind of leave I could, postpartum and everything I could qualify for, it was just too hard to leave her, it's not enough time." Here she was referring to maternity leave. I shared with her that when I had my son, I was active-duty military and was granted six weeks of maternity leave. Returning to work and having to take my six-week-old infant to a daycare was an emotionally straining process for me. Avery, a veteran braider in the salon and mother of two in her fifties chimed in. "It is a mother's responsibility to ensure that her job is a job that allows her to take care of her children, that is part of being a good mother," she said. Other mothers in the salon nodded their heads in agreement. In the moment, I did not feel inadequate as a mother, but wondered if I was perceived to be so because of my inability to care for my child based on my career choice. I couldn't help but think that this is, likely, the tactics of most mothers in determining work. However, should this responsibility rest on mothers or employers, to ensure that all parents can work who have children to care for as well?

Working mothers value their work but believe it is their responsibility to ensure that their work does not interfere with their ability to mother successfully. These examples demonstrate how working mothers prioritize work for self-actualization but prioritize their perceived childcare responsibilities over work. They see it as their responsibility to seek employment that values their motherhood and responsibilities as mothers.

Working in a child-friendly space is one of the critical techniques that these women use to achieve work-family balance. The child-friendly work environment assists braiders and customers alike. Mothers feel comfortable bringing their children to the salon, and caring for them is normalized within the space.

IN RESPONSE TO PATRIARCHAL PARENTING SCHEMAS

Mimi, the salon owner, is a married woman. She and her husband Ahmad have two children and have been discussing having another child. We share family photos, and she begins to untangle some of the challenging things that women think of when they think about having a baby.

While she desires to have another baby, a few concerns emerge, like the pregnancy experience and body image concerns after birth. A prevalent concern and frequent topic of discussion was of course childcare; however, Mimi seemed to have been developing a plan. She shares that she would have to figure out childcare for her baby when she decides to return to the salon, because she cannot rely on her husband to help her manage. She had developed a plan for how she will manage caring for her new baby and working in the salon.

"My husband, he does not do da care for small babies, no mm mm," she shakes her head and waves her finger. "But you know what, it is so easy for me, Nickie, because you see, I can just bring my baby here. I can have him on my back or chest." She pats her chest, indicating where her new baby would rest. You remember when you first came here to my shop? How you saw me with that baby wrapped around me like dis. Mmmhmmm. Just like you saw me the first day you met me. So easy," she said with confidence.

In response to a patriarchal understanding of motherhood roles and responsibilities, mothers strategize by combining work with childcare in unique ways that support their aspirations to work outside of the home and meet their expectations for what it

means to be a good mother. The salon space makes this possible for both braiders and customers alike. A child-friendly workspace creates the opportunity for this blend for the mothers working in the salon.

Child-Friendly Workspaces

It is election day 2018, and it is all that is on my mind. I pull up, and see Mimi pull up at the same time. I wait for her by the door and see that she has five children with her, her two children, and her best friend Joleen's (a nurse) and Adeana's (a veteran braider in the salon) three children. "Today is no school, so I have to babysit," she says jokingly. I greet the children, and at least one of them is happy to see me. It is early in the morning, so I imagine they aren't excited about having to wake up early and come to the salon on a non-school day. The children enter the shop and make themselves comfortable throughout the shop, some in the empty chairs and others in the waiting area. Before sitting, they go around and hug each braider, as their mother asks. Malik is treating it as a chore.

Before the first customer arrives, the children are directed to the break room and hair storage room. This room is a small area near the salon entrance. It has a couch large enough for all the children to sit comfortably, a small television, table, and microwave. The walls are covered with rows of packs of synthetic hair. There are various shades of browns, blondes, reds, and even some brighter colors like pink and blue. The textures and lengths also varied. While most of the hair was long and stretched, textured hair used for braids and twists, some of the packs of hair included shorter, kinkier and curlier textures for crochet styles. Adeana's children are 11 and 7. They will be entering fifth and second grade when summer is over. The children have American accents, but they tell me they would like to learn French because they do not know how to speak French yet, even though their mother does. I noticed that the children understand French because their mother speaks French to them often in the salon, but they respond in English.

The children share with me their new Duolingo app that they are using to learn French. They talk to me about school and friends. For lunch, Mimi brings a pizza into the shop for the children, and they heat it in the microwave and eat it before I leave. The children had snacks, books, and their electronic devices packed in their bookbags to keep them entertained. Spongebob is on the breakroom TV at low volume but is mostly background noise as each child is deeply immersed in the apps on their iPads.

They share their favorites apps with me. Kaleb likes sports while Debra likes cooking games. They both enjoy the geometry app and the language learning app. Being in the salon is no big deal to the children, who are well-behaved and patient, understanding that they will spend the day in the salon. They play quietly in the breakroom and come out to do small tasks to help in the salon. Francis (a thirteen-year-old girl enrolled in a local honors high school) took out the trash, Malik mopped the floor, and Betty retrieved several packs of hair for braiders throughout the day. When it is almost time for the other three children to leave, Mimi calls them over and gives them $5 each for their help in the salon: "Malik, you don't work here, ok, that's just for you, ok," she laughs. "If I pay him, he will think he works here, and he will keep mopping, and I won't be able to get him to stop!" We all laugh. The kids all say goodbye.

Because of the incorporation of children into the space, childrearing is common in the space and mothers have expectations for their children to maintain good behavior. One afternoon, Joleen visited the salon briefly with her children. She had just visited a retail store in the shopping center and wanted to stop by to briefly say hello. She greets Mimi and the other braiders and shows them a new pair of sandals she just purchased. As they work their way towards the door, she turns to her son, a seven-year-old in first grade. "Did you say goodbye?" Joleen says to Malik. He was at the door leaving, but comes back into the shop, strolling and covering his face. "Yeeeesss," he whines "I diiiiiid." He sobs. Joleen gives him a look, and he walks over to Carine.

She is surprised. "Hi, baby," she says. "Byyyyyyeee," he cries, "Awwww," she says as she hugs him and looks at Joleen, confused. Joleen shakes her head telling her not to pity or baby him. "Say goodbye," she says. Malik walks over to all of us and says goodbye. She points at me for the last bye he says while sobbing. I stick out my lip, "Aww it's ok, bye bye Malik," I say. Mimi also shakes her head, like Joleen. As Malik walks towards the salon exit with his mother, Mimi teases him, pointing the blowdryer at him and blowing it in his face, goodbye, baby. She teases. "He was in trouble earlier, and now he is crying because he got in trouble again for not saying bye. He is making a big deal over nothing, he is fine. I do not baby kids, you know, it's not good. I am not soft with my kids. Mmmmm." She shakes her head. " My kids, I say something, and they do it because they are scared. I don't have to speak to them. I look at them, and they know. I still listen to my mom even though I am grown, it's respect, and they have to learn."

A medium-framed dark-skinned woman in her late twenties entered the salon with a stroller and a toddler. She parks the stroller and introduces us to her son Joseph, who sits in the stroller right next to her as Adeana begins her style. He is entertained by toys, snacks, and various toddler Youtube videos playing on her phone. After about 20 minutes, Joseph is quietly scolded by his mother. "Now Joseph, we don't do that and you know better, so now you have to go into time out," she says firmly in a low tone. I did not see the infraction; however, there was no protest from Joseph. I watch Joseph rest his head down onto his folded hands as his mother counts "ten, nine, eight…" when she reaches zero Joseph lifts his head. He continues to play his game, this time leaving out the behavior he "knew better" than to do. The client was an incredibly patient woman and seemed to be a great mother. She spoke to Joseph, asking him questions and including him in conversations that were about him. She told Mimi that he is her third son and that she wants a daughter, so they will try again. "What if you have another boy?" Mimi asks, "you gonna

try again after dat?" The woman put her head down and began to smile, "Yes we will, but just one more time after that." The women in the shop all "ooooh" and "aww" at the woman's decision to try for a girl, bearing five children in the process. Joseph becomes a bit restless at around 1 pm, he has been well-behaved for 3 hours now and quite patient, I think this is incredible for a toddler of 21 months. I give Joseph lollipops with the permission of his mother.... Joseph eats three lollipops by the time I leave at 2 pm. "I'm going to give him a pass today," his mother said each time he reached for another one. Childrearing like this is a normal part of the daily operations of the salon.

Children are incorporated as part of the salon space; this allows braiders to work while still caring for their children. Work-family balance is achieved in this space through the incorporation of the braiders' children into the space. This blend also makes the space welcoming for customers who bring their children into the space. This environment makes the blend of motherhood and work one that makes work-family balance attainable. In response to the patriarchal expectations of women as mothers, women balance their work with childcare by creating child-friendly workspaces that make the blend possible. Braiders and their customers provide communal support in childcare duties in this space using unique strategies for parenting that I describe as "queer parenting strategies."

Queer Parenting Strategies as a Response

Working in a child-friendly space is one of the critical techniques that these women use to achieve work-family balance. The child-friendly work environment assists braiders and customers alike through the adoption of queer prarenting strategies such as other-mothering, a communal aspect of mothering where mothers help one another with childcare while sharing space. Feminist scholars have emphasized the diversity that exists in unique forms of caring for children and mothering for women of color across the globe (Bolich 2017, Chamberlain 2013, Wilhelmus 1998, Cahill et al. 2003, Ehrenreich Hoschild 2003, Schmalzbauer 2004) and

encouraged the broadening of our understandings of how women should mother (Hill-Collins 1990). "Black women's experiences as bloodmothers, othermothers, and community othermothers reveal that the mythical norm of heterosexual married couple, nuclear family with a nonworking spouse and a husband earning a 'family wage' is far from being natural, universal and preferred, but instead is deeply embedded in specific race and class formations" (1990, 222–23). Queer parenting practices provide mothers with a broader definition of motherhood that supports their lived experiences and aspirations beyond parenting. The salon space provided mothers with comfort in bringing their children to the salon.

Mimi arrives at the shop at 11:40. She greets all the customers and braiders and hugs the children in the shop. She checks on all customers, making sure each style is adequate, then she begins a style on the new mother. The woman is browned-skinned and looks to be in her early thirties. She is accompanied by her male partner, teenage daughter, and infant son. While the family works to care for the infant in the salon space, they are also supported by braiders in the salon.

The new mother asks Mimi if there is a microwave in the shop. She would like to heat her baby's bottle. The teenage daughter retrieves the bottle and Mimi heats it up in the microwave, passing it back to her teenage daughter. All of the women in the shop are happy to see the newborn baby. The father retrieves the warmed bottle from the teenage daughter and feeds the newborn baby while the mother gets her hair braided. Once the baby is fed, the teenage daughter then brings the baby closer to his mother while she gets her hair braided. The teenage daughter holds the baby while the women in the salon "ooo" and "ahhhh" at the sight of an infant.

While her family is present and assists her, this new mother can bring her newborn into the salon, and can comfortably tend to her while she is styled. The salon owners support her motherly duties and even assist her by heating the infant's bottle. The

salon is always child-friendly, and this environment is beneficial to both customers and braiders, and the normalizing of parental tasks helps achieve the desired work-family balance.

This example demonstrates how mothers can easily incorporate their children within this space without worry, and with confidence in other women's willingness to help and acceptance of children in the salon. This mother's ability to bring her child to her hair appointment, that will last hours, and remain comfortable speaks volumes about the operations of the salon and the family-friendly environment. This atmosphere is where women can flourish at work and as mothers or both. Braiders often had their children in the salon on days when school was out for a holiday or even longer breaks like winter and summer.

EDUCATION AS A HOSTILE INSTITUTION

Academic Preparedness

Mothers shared their passion for and dedication to their children's education with one another in the salon. While scholars have captured the guilt experienced by parents who must spend time away from their children for work or other tasks (Brooks 2015, Borelli et al. 2016, Aarntzen 2021), another significant theme that emerged in my data was how mothers centered and emphasized the importance of preparing their children for educational experiences. As one of the key pillars of socialization and a prominent institution within U.S. society, education is a regular site of racial hostility for Black and immigrant children (Ray 2022). The strategies used for educational preparation indicate that mothers recognized educational institutions as hostile institutions for their children and worked towards preparing them for what they would inevitably encounter. Mothers prepared their children academically, implementing a host of academic tasks within children's daily activities, and demonstrating a desire to assist their children with succeeding in the institution. In addition to academic preparations, mothers also strategize on ways to prepare themselves and their children for encounters with racism at school.

While child-friendly workspaces allow women to blend their perceived responsibilities of both motherhood and work, mothers do rely on daycare services as well. Kim, a Black woman from South Carolina, added to one of the many discussions we had on childcare costs. She shared that her daughter was extremely advanced by the time she went to kindergarten and she credits her advanced performance to her attendance in preschool. Mimi chimed in that her daughter had a similar experience. "So many people told me that I should be home with my children instead of working when my kids were small but you know what, those same people come to me and say oh my goodness Mimi, your daughter, she is so smart, what did you do to train her like dis? An' you know what I tell dem, daycare!" she nods her head towards Kim. While daycare and preschool can assist with the academic preparedness of children, mothers additionally enhance preparedness by including educational tasks and supports for their children.

In conversations centering on motherhood, this customer demonstrates that her commitment to her child's success and education are positive attributes of being a mother and mark a salient portion of her responsibilities as a mother. Despite stereotypes that surround her based on her age and number of children, she does work to reframe perceptions of her to more accurate depictions of her mothering. Mothers working in the salon also demonstrated the importance of their children's education. It was essential to them that their children are successful in their learning. As they became aware of school subjects that their children may be struggling with, mothers ensured that they received extra practice and assistance outside of school.

Bianca, a customer in the salon who was getting her hair styled in dark-brown Senagelese twists to the middle of her back, discussed her frustration with her child entering kindergarten over-prepared from her working with him. "My son has so many problems in school because he is only five but was so far advanced from the other kindergartners from the very start." She was urged

to advance him to first grade. “I don’t regret having taken time to teach him things early, however, now I am worried that he is being punished for it at school.” This mother’s concern for her son’s academic wellbeing is apparent in her early involvement in his academic success. In her efforts to prepare him for school, she even exceeded the required expectations.

One morning I arrived at the salon to find a normally calm and cheerful Mimi in an unfamiliar mood that indicated something was bothering her. I asked if everything was ok and she explained that her son was struggling in math at school and that she did not have the time to assist him since she worked so often. “You know to do da homework, and if he has trouble in anything else den I want dem to help him to study in dat too, you know what I’m saying?”

Adena, another braider, shares that her daughter goes to Mathleads, an after-school program that helps kids with their math skills and gives them extra assignments to sharpen the skill. “You know what, I like that. This way, they can even get ahead too,” Mimi says.

I offer to look up some tutoring options for Mimi as she braids. I asked what services she wants specifically and her budget for paying a tutor. Mimi wants someone to come to do homework with her son for one hour after school, four days per week. I search the internet and call around for pricing. “[Author’s name], you calling for me?” Mimi asks. “Ya,” I say. “ Aww [Author’s name], thank you,” she says. I call Mathleads, but they will only help with math and no other subjects, so this will not be a good fit for Mimi and her son. I find a tutor, Zena, a university student who tutors in all subjects, ages K-college. I arrange tutoring with Zena for Monday -Thursday from 7-8 for both Mimi’s children. Zena can come to the shop or to Mimi’s house, whatever is convenient. She charges $25 per hour but will adjust the price to $30 per hour and tutor both of her children. I talk to Zena on the phone and tell her she will be receiving a call from the mother to confirm.

By scheduling tutoring for their children, mothers show that they are invested in the academic success of their children. They recognize that there is work to be done outside of school to ensure that children grasp the material in effective ways. Mothers working in the salon demonstrate their commitment to their children's education and success through making arrangements for additional supports for their children in the form of tutoring. They hire experts in the subjects in which their children need extra assistance and schedule times for them to receive tutoring after school. These efforts are an example of how mothers prioritize their children's success.

Black mothers have intersectional concerns with their Black children's education. While they want to ensure success, they must also be mindful of the racism that exists within these institutions that are particularly hostile for youth of color (Ray 2022). Black mothers negotiate ways they can prepare and protect their children from these inevitable circumstances. They must have open communication with their children so that they can become aware of these issues as they arise and tend to them accordingly.

The Talk(s): Understanding Education as a Hostile Institution

"The talk" is a conversation that Black parents have with their children to discuss how to engage when encountered by the police (Anderson et al. 2022). While parents have discussed this phenomenon as a necessary conversation that begins early for most Black families, the conversation is often revisited and updated as children grow and learn to navigate these encounters in more age-appropriate ways. In addition, these conversations extend beyond police encounters. Discussions of race and racism occur more broadly as children encounter these societal ills. The Black mothers in my study felt it was their responsibility to intervene in instances of racism where their child needed protection. Therefore, it was crucial to ensure that students have an open and honest communication with their mothers so that they will be made aware of any instances of racism. Mothers prioritize

protecting their children, as well as engaging in an age-appropriate conversation with their child to explain that what they have experienced is wrong.

Avery is a Senegalese woman in her mid-fifties who has been a braider at Mimi's for about five years now. She has three children who have all left home. Two of her children are professionals, one a computer engineer and the other a mining engineer, her third child is in college in New Mexico and is going to school for mining engineering as well. Avery started having children young, having her first child at 15, and her second at 17. Avery told me that communication is vital in parenting and that it is imperative for children to feel that they can communicate openly. She told me a story about her son. When her son was in middle school, a teacher asked students what they aspired to be when they grew up; when her son responded by saying he wanted to be an engineer, the teacher told him that he would be on the street. Avery went to the school and spoke to the principal and told them that her son was no longer allowed to attend the school until the teacher was removed. They refused, and she moved her son to another school.

This was unfortunately not the family's only encounter with racism at school. Avery told me that when her son played football in high school, he was the only Black player, and experienced frequent harassment. The harassment escalated and another player on his team spat in her son's face and told him to "go back to his country with his people." Because she taught her son not to fight, he handled the situation by leaving the practice field and heading into the locker room. When the student entered, he pulled him aside from the other players and told him that his mother pays for his school just like his father pays for his and if he could not leave him alone he and his people will have to come set him straight. The student received a reality check, and they became close friends for the rest of his time at the school. Avery's point was that there is nothing that her son cannot talk to her about, and she is proud of that. "I tell my children, there is no problem

too big, no problem we cannot solve, tell me, and we will do what we need to do." "There is no bad kid; kids are told they are bad, and then they think, what else can I do to please you when I am bad anyways."

"They Don't Think I Will Come Down There but I Do, and I Ask Questions … I Care"

While academics are an essential component that mothers focus on in their efforts to prepare their children for the institution of education, racism is another apparent reality that requires preparation. Racialized perceptions and perjorative narratives about of children of color and their parents can infiltrate the experiences of children at school.

Avery's client sat quietly for a lot of the beginning of our conversation but began to share her experiences as we reached the topic of education and dealing with schools as a parent. Kim, a slender brown-skinned women with a youthful, Forever 21 style, joined the conversation. She told us all that she started having children very young as well. She had her first child at 15 years old and now, at the age of 23, has five children. Because her son is smaller than other children his age and is so smart, he gets picked on, so she is anxious. "They know I work so they don't think I will come down there when there are problems, but I do, and I ask questions, I care about my kids learning. You see, kids should not stop learning when they leave school. It is up to parents to continue to teach children at home, I mean they can't only learn at school, am I right?" she ask rhetorically as the mothers in the salon nodded their heads, pointed at her in agreement, and spoke various verbal confirmations. "Exactly! Okay? Yaasss!" "Whenever there is an incident at that school involving my child, they are going to see my face, that was one thing they had to learn really quickly. Sometimes they would be surprised to see me. Like wow, you actually came to the school, not call but show up. Now, they already know if they call me, they better be ready to see me. Whatever you thought about me, you better be prepared to rethink it."

Kim is aware of how she is perceived by individuals within her son's school and holds firm to her commitment to his success through her involvement in his education. She is assertive and wants the institution to be aware that she is an involved parent, and that her son's education is a priority to her. As a Black mother, assumptions that she does not hold these values and priorities make this process of convincing necessary.

This excerpt is an example of the various ways in which mothers must show up for their children to ensure success. They are aware that while they are working to assist their children in their education and towards prosperity, their children will encounter many barriers, including racism, for which they must prepare them, and protect them from whenever possible. Black mothers are enacting ideal motherhood through the support of their children. They prioritize their success in school by ensuring that they are safe and supported throughout their education, and when children are not, mothers step in. Black mothers describe how they submerged themselves in their children's education and infiltrated when issues arose, and provided their children with strategies for managing these issues as they arise. Many of them thought this to be a mother's necessary duty. As a Black mother, showing dedication and support to children's education is an essential component to successful motherhood, as described by the women. In addition, mothers emphasize the importance of their own self-actualization.

CONCLUSION

Researchers have discussed the difficulties associated with achieving work-family balance. They have few models that demonstrate how people of color balance work and family in tandem. Although Black women have been in the workforce substantially longer than White women and remain one of the larger groups of earners, their experiences with work-family balance are rarely centered. To include Black mothers' experiences as an essential feature of understanding work-family balance in the U.S., I ask

how Black women conceptualize motherhood and responsibilities associated with the identity and how Black mothers achieve work-family balance.

I find that Black mothers define good motherhood by adopting patriarchal understandings of motherhood. Black women value working outside of the home as a critical feature of their self-actualization but emphasize that a good mother ensures that she has a job that recognizes and prioritizes her responsibilities as a mother. Additionally, they prioritize their children's educational preparedness, including both academic preparations and issues of racism. Lastly, mothers adopt queer parenting strategies to manage the combination of work and mothering; in shared Black space, child-friendly work environments provide support for other women when children are present.

These findings indicate that Black women define motherhood as centering on the success of their children's education as well as their happiness. Women can achieve work-family balance in environments that welcome the blend of childcare and work. Black women must work harder to demonstrate their commitment to their children's success due to perjorative narratives surrounding Black motherhood that counter the presumed assumption. Mothers do this through eager involvement in their children's education and addressing their children's experiences with racism as they occur. Mothers additionally value their work as a critical feature of motherhood, so long as it does not interfere with their ability to successfully mother. While child-friendly work environments are not achievable in all working environments and can present safety concerns, this research serves as a case of how Black women are working towards achieving work-family balance.

By including what Black women value in motherhood, we can model work-family policies in ways that accommodate these values. Additionally, with a successful model of how work-family balance is achievable, we can sample this technique and replicate it in spaces that may be able to achieve the same success.

The collective efforts of Black mothers in child rearing demonstrated in my findings are not surprising as scholars have discussed the joint efforts of Black mothers through the concept of "other mothers," a network of mothers that help one another with child-rearing tasks (Hill Collins 1990, Bock 2017). Additionally, scholars have discussed the complexities associated with Black motherhood (Barnes 2015, Dow 2019). Black mothers' ability to achieve work-family balance should not be surprising, as they have had a much longer experience in the workforce and had to manage the role of motherhood as well.

Additionally, as the family becomes more complex, scholars and policymakers should seek to understand how policies can be beneficial for single-parent households, families with elderly or disabled care responsibilities, international families, and queer families, to better understand their practices towards achieving work-family balance.

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