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The Experience of Black Mothers Preparing their Black Sons for Race-Related Risks

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Yamilka Torres

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

The Experience of Black Mothers Preparing their Black Sons for Race-Related Risks

by

Yamilka Torres

MA, Walden University, 2022

MA, Springfield College, 2018

BS, Central Connecticut State University, 2016

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

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Abstract

Despite progress in addressing racism in the United States, its effects remain deeply entrenched, particularly for Black families. Research on Black parenting shows that parents adapt their strategies to protect children from criminalization, discussing violence, providing safety within the home, and limiting exposure to unsafe environments while also managing their own stress. Yet limited attention has been given to how Black mothers prepare their sons for race-related risks within the modern sociopolitical climate shaped by the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore how Black mothers prepare their Black sons for race-related risks. Carter's race-based traumatic stress and Harrell's racism-related stress conceptualizations constitute the conceptual framework for this study. Data for this study were collected through semistructured interviews with ten mothers recruited through community organizations and social media. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data of this study. The findings revealed that Black mothers transform fear into purposeful action by teaching resilience, fostering racial pride, maintaining open communication, and embedding historical and cultural awareness into everyday parenting. Through these efforts, they not only prepare their sons to survive systemic racism but also nurture self-worth, dignity, and empowerment, often relying on collective community networks to reinforce safety, belonging, and hope. The findings can inform mental health practitioners and program developers seeking to design culturally relevant support systems that promote resilience among Black families, thereby contributing to positive social change through greater understanding, empathy, and equity within society.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to every young Black and Brown boy marked by the weight of injustice before even taking their first breath—scarred not by their actions, but by the color of their skin.

To my sons, Jayden and Jordan Gist: Always remember that your brilliance, strength, and potential have no limits. Your skin color is not a barrier but a symbol of resilience, pride, and power. You are meant to thrive.

To my daughter, J'lanie Delgado: Keep adjusting your crown as needed. You are royalty. Trust that the rest will fall into place.

To all the Black and Brown children worldwide: Keep soaring beyond the limits others try to set for you. You are not the exception; you are the standard.

Acknowledgments

Jose Delgado, I thank you for every word of wisdom and phrase ending with “Yes, you can.” This degree is a combination of my efforts and your daily support. Dr. Susana Verdinelli, you have been the glue to my dissertation; this was all possible because you believed in me. Thank you for all the words of encouragement.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Question	6
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Nature of the Study	7
Definitions.....	8
Assumptions.....	9
Scope and Delimitations	10
Limitations	12
Significance.....	12
Summary.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review	15
Literature Search Strategy.....	15
Conceptual Framework.....	16
Prior Application of the Race-Based Stress Conceptualizations	17
Relevance of Race-Based Stress to the Current Research	18
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts.....	20
Racism.....	20

Impact of Racism	25
Black Lives Matter Movement	30
Parenting Children of Color	31
Summary and Conclusions	38
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	40
Research Design and Rationale	40
Role of the Researcher	41
Methodology	43
Participants.....	43
Participant Selection Logic	44
Instrumentation	45
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	46
Data Analysis Plan	46
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	48
Credibility	48
Transferability	49
Dependability	49
Confirmability	50
Ethical Procedures	50
Summary	51
Chapter 4: Results	53
Setting	53

Demographics	55
Data Collection	55
Data Analysis	56
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	58
Credibility	59
Transferability	59
Dependability	60
Confirmability	61
Results.....	61
Theme 1: Emotional Labor and Fear in Motherhood	62
Theme 2: Teaching Through Experience and Building Racial Pride	65
Theme 3. Conversations About Racism, Discrimination, and “The Talk”	68
Theme 4: History and Safety in Navigating Racism	71
Theme 5: Community and Collective Responsibility in Ensuring Safety	73
Summary	75
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	78
Interpretation of the Findings.....	79
Theme 1: Emotional Labor and Fear in Motherhood	79
Theme 2: Teaching Through Experience and Building Racial Pride	80
Theme 3: Conversations About Racism, Discrimination, and “The Talk”	83
Theme 4: History and Safety in Navigating Racism	84
Theme 5: Community and Collective Responsibility in Ensuring Safety	87

Conceptual Framework.....	89
Limitations of the Study.....	91
Recommendations.....	92
Implications.....	93
Conclusion	95
References.....	97
Appendix: Interview Guide.....	110

List of Tables

Table 1. Participants' Demographics 55

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Black Americans have continued to face daily experiences of racism and violence, with significant racial disparities in the use of force by law enforcement officers (Davis et al., 2018). Compared to White Americans, they have been more frequently subjected to police violence, including profiling, threats, and harassment (Davis et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2020). Black Americans represented 27% of deaths resulting from police actions (Mapping Police Violence, 2020). High-profile cases such as the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor further highlight the persistence of unjust police violence. Beyond law enforcement encounters, racial incidents targeting Black Americans by civilians have also been documented in public spaces such as shopping malls, supermarkets, gas stations, parks, and colleges (Pittman, 2020). This pervasive and persistent racism serves as a significant stressor with wide-ranging impacts on the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of Black Americans (Pieterse et al., 2012). One specific area affected by this ongoing racism and violence is parenting practices, particularly for parents of young teenagers (Joe et al., 2019).

The #BlackLivesMatter movement brought renewed attention to the persistent racism faced by Black individuals in U.S. society, underscoring the critical role of mothers in protecting and preparing their sons for race-related risks. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Black mothers prepared their adolescent sons to navigate the challenges of racism and discrimination. The target population consisted of Black mothers residing in urban areas who were raising Black adolescent sons. This specific focus was chosen because Black male youth are disproportionately subjected to

police surveillance, profiling, and community violence (Jackson et al., 2020). Findings from this study were intended to inform mental health practitioners, enabling them to provide more culturally responsive support and develop programs that addressed systemic racism while promoting the safety and well-being of Black boys.

This chapter discusses the background, problem statement, purpose, and significance of the study. It also outlines the research questions, nature of the study, theoretical framework, and definitions of key terms. In addition, the chapter describes the study's assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations, establishing the foundation for the research inquiry.

Background

Racial disparities in the use of force by officers are part of the daily experiences of racism and violence faced by Black Americans (Davis et al., 2018). Highlighting this unjust violence are the high-profile deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others. In addition, incidents of racism against Black Americans by civilians have been recorded in various public spaces such as shopping malls, supermarkets, gas stations, parks, and colleges (Pittman, 2020). This pervasive racism affects the well-being of Black Americans in multiple ways (Pieterse et al., 2012). One such impact is on the parenting practices of those raising young teenagers (Joe et al., 2019).

The concept of racial socialization has been used to describe the strategies Black parents employed to prepare their children to interact within a discriminatory society (Evans et al., 2012; Peters, 2002). Family is a key promoter of positive youth development, underscoring the role of racial socialization in shaping resilience and

positive outcomes. Evans et al. (2012) described multiple dimensions of racial socialization, including cultural socialization, which instill a sense of racial pride and heritage, and preparation for bias, which equip children with coping mechanisms to manage racism. Similarly, Howard et al. (2013) examined how 15 parents of African American boys, aged 3–8, approached socialization practices to support their sons' racial and gender identity development as well as their socioemotional well-being. They identified three main themes in racial socialization: building racial pride, acknowledging diversity, and incorporating spirituality or religion. Parents emphasized the importance of teaching African American history and culture, exposing their sons to successful African American role models, and fostering environments that affirmed their racial identity. In terms of gender socialization, three major themes emerged: the importance of positive male role models, the development of strength and leadership traits, and the encouragement of traditional masculine activities. The authors highlighted the intricate balance that parents strove to maintain between nurturing a strong racial identity and promoting traditional masculine virtues, while also noting the potential conflicts that arose between these dual socialization goals.

Racial socialization plays a major role in parenting Black children. Another related line of research addressed raising and parenting Black children in the context of oppressive racial disparities. This body of research revolved around parenting strategies. For example, research on Black parents indicated that they adjusted their parenting strategies to prevent their children from being criminalized by the police or mainstream institutions (Elliott & Reid, 2019). Protective strategies include encouraging individual

responsibility, monitoring, and involving children in organized activities. Mothers emphasized the importance of making good choices to avoid negative consequences, with less affluent mothers stressing the long-term impact of poor decisions due to limited resources. Monitoring strategies vary significantly, with wealthier mothers relying on technology and lower-income mothers relying on physical presence. Organized activities are seen as a way to keep teens safe and occupied, though access to such activities was often constrained by socioeconomic status (Elliott & Aseltine, 2013).

Another protective strategy relates to educating children to identify and befriend those who are capable of defending them or de-escalating potentially violent situations. By fostering relationships with reliable and protective peers, parents aim to create a support network for their children, ensuring they have allies who could provide safety and assistance in hostile environments. This strategy helps children navigate and survive the threats present in violent neighborhoods by leveraging the strength and solidarity of trusted friends (Chan Tack & Small, 2017).

Being a parent raising a child in this environment creates major stress for parents. A study on 19 mothers raising boys in the context of community and state violence described a constant fear and anxiety for their sons' safety, feeling as though every incident of violence against young African American men could easily happen to their own children (Joe et al., 2019). This fear manifested physically, with many mothers experiencing symptoms such as tightness in the chest and loss of sleep. Their parenting behaviors were characterized by hypervigilance and overprotectiveness, as they strived to insulate their sons from potential harm. Additionally, the mothers often masked their

emotions to protect their children, which led to a sense of empathic isolation as they received little support or understanding from those outside their immediate community. Despite these challenges, the mothers also demonstrated remarkable resilience and strength.

Problem Statement

Various research had delved into the challenges of raising and parenting Black children amidst oppressive racial disparities. One area of focus centered on the strategies Black parents used to prevent their children from being criminalized by the police or mainstream institutions (Elliott & Reid, 2019). These strategies included discussing violence and risks with their children, sheltering them from exposure to violence within or near the home (Elliott & Aseltine, 2013), and limiting interactions with people or peers outside their community (Chan Tack & Small, 2017). Another significant concept was racial socialization, which involved preparing Black children to navigate a discriminatory society (Evans et al., 2012; Peters, 2002).

Additionally, studies have examined how at-risk Black mothers, including single, adolescent, pregnant, or low-income mothers, manage the stress of parenting in difficult contexts (e.g., Elliott et al., 2015; Elliott & Bowen, 2018; Premkumar et al., 2017). Finally, Joe et al. (2019) explored the lived experiences of 19 African American mothers raising boys in the context of community and state violence, especially under the scrutiny of media exposure and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The mothers expressed constant fear and anxiety for their sons' safety, exhibited hypervigilance and overprotectiveness in their parenting, and demonstrated remarkable resilience and

strength despite the overwhelming challenges. However, despite this research, less is known about how Black mothers prepare their Black sons for race-related risks in the newer context of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Black mothers prepared their Black sons for race-related risks. The target population consisted of Black mothers who parented adolescent sons and resided in urban areas. The children's gender and age group were specifically selected due to the disproportionate exposure of Black males to police and community violence (Jackson et al., 2020).

Research Question

The following research question guides this study: How do Black mothers located in urban areas prepare their Black adolescent sons for race-related risks?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Carter's (2007) race-based traumatic stress model and Harrell's (2000) conceptualization of racism-related stress. These authors identified that race-based stress emerged from the dynamics of racism that were perceived to exceed individual or collective resources and threatened the well-being of individuals or groups. Harrell identified six types of racism-based stress: (a) racism linked to specific life experiences or time-limited life events, (b) vicarious racism related to the observation and reporting of other people's experiences of racism, (c) daily racist micro stressors such as subtle exclusions or slights, (d) chronic-contextual stress related to systemic and institutional racism, (e) collective cultural or sociopolitical experiences of

racism, and (f) transgenerational transmission permeated by historical events. Each reporting race-based stress might have experienced more than one form of racism, which could overlap with other types of stressors such as sexism or heterosexism, among others (Jones et al., 2020).

The use of Carter's (2007) race-based traumatic stress and Harrell's (2000) racism-related stress conceptualizations highlighted the complexity of mothers' experiences with race-based stress, emphasizing the need for them to prepare their children for race-related risks. As the goal of this study was to shed light on how mothers prepared their sons for race-related stress, this conceptual framework helped in understanding how experiences of racism might have influenced their parenting conversations and decisions. A substantial body of research has used Carter and Harrell's conceptualizations as a lens to examine the types of stress that individuals experienced as a result of racism (Pieterse et al., 2012).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative, and a basic qualitative research methodology was employed to address the research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Percy et al., 2015). The basic qualitative approach is used to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved (Caelli et al., 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Percy et al., 2015). This research design was appropriate for the study because it was descriptive, interpretive, and reflective. The basic qualitative design was well-suited to explore mothers' experiences, as it involved the interpretation of subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and reflections on their

interactions with the external world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Percy et al., 2015).

Ten mothers raising their sons were selected for semistructured interviews to gather rich, detailed data for this study. Participants were recruited through online forums and listservs, using social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Permission was also requested to leave flyers for the study at community organizations such as the YMCA and Boys & Girls Club. Interviews were conducted either in person at local public libraries or remotely via Zoom, a web-based video conferencing platform.

Definitions

Black Lives Matter (BLM): BLM is an organization created in 2014 following the death of Trayvon Martin (Primbs et al., 2024).

Maternal anxiety: Maternal anxiety refers to anxiety traits in mothers who overprotected their children to reduce their own stress (Turner et al., 2003).

Parenting: Parenting encompasses a combination of practices related to caring for a child. This area was subjective, as what constituted parenting for one adult might not have been the same for another. Delvecchio et al. (2020) defined parenting as specific attitudes that shaped a child's behavior, including providing healthcare, mental care, physical care, as well as social and financial support.

Racial profiling: Racial profiling refers to the discriminatory practice whereby law enforcement officers or private security personnel targeted individuals for suspicion of crime based on the individual's race, ethnicity, or national origin (Engel & Cohen, 2014).

Racism: Racism is defined as any discrimination directed toward a particular

group of people. It was recognized as a public crisis, with efforts underway to reduce racial inequalities (Mendez et al., 2021).

Assumptions

While assumptions are inherently subjective, it was presumed that racism was a sensitive subject for those who had experienced it. It was also assumed that most, if not all, racist experiences were negative or perceived as negative. I took a stance of empathy while maintaining an unbiased position. It was anticipated that this subject might not be tolerated well by some participants; however, it provided an opportunity for them to explore and share their stories. It is important to note that during these disclosures, the study was designed to protect participants and their narratives, ensuring that everyone understood the purpose of the research was to illuminate lived experiences.

In choosing qualitative research, the philosophical assumptions considered were ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Ontology refers to the personal and subjective nature of participants' realities. Each participant functioned individually, and their narratives were unique, though many of the stories contained elements of sadness or struggle. Within this study, the ontological assumption was that stories about racial experiences would include components of negativity given the context of racism and discrimination.

Epistemology reflects the understanding that the researcher entered the study with prior assumptions. The researcher's role is to use their voice through writing to represent the stories shared during interviews. Care was taken to ensure that the narratives were

captured faithfully and conveyed as they were expressed by participants, without distortion or reinterpretation

Axiology refers to the role of values and validity within the study. I acknowledge that biases are an important consideration and took deliberate steps to minimize their presence throughout the research process. Efforts were made to approach participants' narratives with empathy and respect while maintaining a neutral stance to ensure that participants' voices were prioritized over my assumptions.

Methodology refers to the specific strategies and procedures employed in the study. Semistructured interview questions were utilized to provide a guiding framework while allowing flexibility for participants to share their experiences in depth. Only participants who met the study's inclusion criteria were selected, as they were uniquely positioned to provide relevant insights and share their lived experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black mothers prepared their Black sons for race-related risks. Participants in this study were required to (a) self-identify as Black or African American, (b) be mothers of Black male children aged 12–18 years old, and (c) reside in a city or urban area. It was anticipated that having participants with similar general traits would allow for a more interpretive study. Limiting the participants' demographics helped maintain consistency and ensured a more linear body of information for analysis.

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Carter's (2007) race-based traumatic stress and Harrell's (2000) racism-related stress conceptualizations. Initially,

conflict theory was also considered due to its relevance to racism and oppressed communities. According to Campbell (2021), conflict theory posits that dominant groups benefit at the expense of others and that radical change is necessary to reduce the power of these dominant groups.

Conflict theorists argue that social institutions benefit dominant groups such as whites, men, heterosexuals, and the able-bodied, at the expense of marginalized groups. The broader goal of conflict theory is to end all forms of oppression by radically reorganizing social institutions. It operates on the premise that activists and social leaders should continue to fight oppression, as it persisted. However, conflict theory was not selected because race-based traumatic stress theory was more closely aligned with the research focus. While both theories could have been applicable, the race-based traumatic stress theory directly addressed race-based stress-related experiences. Furthermore, because race-based experiences were a central focus of this study, the chosen theory provided greater clarity.

The transferability of the findings from this study is somewhat limited due to its descriptive qualitative design. This research used a small, homogenous sample of participants from a single local area, making it uncertain whether the results could be applied to other locations or practices. The sample size was deliberately small and focused, chosen for its potential to provide detailed and contextually rich descriptions. While the study focused on a specific and narrowly defined sample, the comprehensive descriptions still offered some potential for comparisons to similar populations and contexts, serving as a foundation for future, more targeted research.

Limitations

A potential challenge for this research was the difficulty in recruiting participants. The sensitive and painful nature of their experiences with racism might have made individuals reluctant to share their stories, impacting their willingness to participate. Additionally, the specific requirements of this study also posed a limitation. All participants were required to come from urban areas and to meet certain demographic criteria, which further restricted the pool of eligible participants. This narrow focus limited the diversity of perspectives and experiences that could be explored in the research, potentially affecting the transferability of the findings.

Significance

The #BlackLivesMatter movement underscores the persistent and pervasive racism that deeply affected the lives of Black individuals in U.S. society. In this challenging context, Black mothers have the significant responsibility of protecting their sons from the dangers of systemic racism. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how these women experienced racism and how these experiences shaped their roles and responsibilities as mothers. Understanding the strategies Black mothers used to navigate these roles was instrumental for mental health practitioners, enabling them to engage with Black mothers in a more compassionate and supportive manner.

Systemic racism imposes substantial pressures on Black mothers, a burden that is often overlooked in clinical practice. The results of this study had the potential to promote resilience among Black mothers by highlighting culturally relevant coping and healing strategies in the face of race-related stressors. By gaining a deeper understanding

of how mothers prepared their sons to confront race-related risks, this research informed the development of targeted programs aimed at addressing racism and protecting young Black boys.

Moreover, this study contributes to positive social change by uncovering themes that enhanced the mainstream population's understanding of racism and its connections to other forms of inequality. By exploring how Black mothers engaged in conversations with their sons about race, the study helped identify racial biases and facilitated education on systemic racism. This can lead to more effective and empathetic support systems for Black families, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the pervasive racism and violence faced by Black Americans, particularly in the form of police violence and civilian racial incidents in public spaces. Notable cases such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor exemplified these injustices, emphasizing the daily stressors that impacted Black individuals' well-being. This chapter introduced the study's focus on how Black mothers prepared their sons for race-related risks, especially in urban areas where police and community violence were prevalent. The chapter covered the study's background, problem statement, purpose, significance, research question, theoretical framework, and key term definitions, as well as its assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations.

Racial socialization is a key concept in understanding how Black parents prepared their children to navigate a discriminatory society. It involves imparting a sense of racial pride, coping mechanisms for bias, and fostering socioemotional well-being through

cultural education and positive role models. Research on parenting strategies has revealed that Black parents, particularly mothers, employ various protective measures to shield their children from the criminalization and violence of systemic racism. These strategies include encouraging responsibility, monitoring activities, and fostering supportive peer relationships. Such practices are done to create a safe and nurturing environment for their children, despite the external threats posed by racism.

The study's qualitative nature was used to explore the lived experiences of Black mothers raising adolescent sons amidst systemic racism. Utilizing Carter's race-based traumatic stress and Harrell's racism-related stress conceptualizations, the research aimed to understand how racism influenced parenting conversations and decisions. The study's findings inform mental health practitioners and program developers, promoting resilience and culturally relevant coping strategies. By shedding light on the unique challenges faced by Black mothers, the research contributes to a broader understanding of racism's impact and supported the development of more empathetic and effective support systems for Black families, fostering positive social change. Chapter 2 discusses the existing supporting literature and expands on the theoretical framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The United States has made significant advances toward ending racism; however, its impact continues to be profound for some groups. Racism remains a pervasive stressor that affected the well-being of Black families in various ways (Pieterse et al., 2012). One significant area where racism and violence impacted Black Americans is in the parenting of young teenagers (Joe et al., 2019). Parents of Black adolescents often experience fear for their children's safety and adjust their parenting strategies to prevent their children from being criminalized by the police or mainstream institutions (Elliott & Reid, 2019). The concept of racial socialization describes how Black parents prepared their children to interact in a discriminatory society (Evans et al., 2012; Peters, 2002). While research has explored parents' strategies to raise and prepare their children for racism and injustice, less was known about how Black mothers prepared their sons for race-related risks in the context of the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Joe et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Black mothers prepared their sons for race-related risks. The research targeted Black mothers who parented Black adolescent sons and lived in urban areas. The focus on gender and age was due to the specific police and community violence directed toward Black males (Jackson et al., 2020). This chapter describes the literature search strategy used to examine the current literature on this topic, the theoretical framework and background for this study, and provides specific literature related to the study's focus.

Literature Search Strategy

The search engines that I used for my literature search included sources that

supported the identified topic of study. I used different databases to complete this search, including PsycARTICLES, PsychINFO, EBSCO, SAGE, and Google Scholar connected to the Walden Library. I also used the National Center for Biotechnology Information, known as NCBI. These search engines allowed me to adjust the search parameters to tailor the results to suit the research needs. I found it easier to date the articles within the last ten years; however, I came across older articles that I incorporated despite the possibility of being considered outdated. Below are the keywords used during the study. I found it easier to leave out some words and get creative in the search line to obtain articles that fit my research. Additionally, as I wrote this piece, I went back to the library and used the keywords in different ways, which offered more articles that coincided with the study. Keywords used included *stress-based trauma theory, racism, parenting, Black Lives Matter, racial trauma, statistics on racism, emotional distress, racial stigmas, parenting children of color, and African American communities.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on Carter's (2007) race-based traumatic stress and Harrell's (2000) racism-related stress conceptualizations. These authors identified that race-based stress emerge from the dynamics of racism, which are perceived to exceed individual or collective resources and threaten the well-being of individuals or groups. Race-based traumatic stress is defined as a direct result of negative racial experiences (Mays et al., 2007). Heard-Garris et al. (2018) stated that experiences of racism are among the most studied race-based stressors and had been linked to increased mental health challenges, particularly within Black communities. Parenting

young teenagers in this context of racialized violence creates fear and uncertainty. These doubts and persistent fear contribute to race-based trauma and parenting stress (Joe et al., 2019).

Harrell (2000) identified six types of racism-based stress: (a) racism linked to specific life experiences or time-limited life events, (b) vicarious racism related to the observation and reporting of other people's experiences of racism, (c) daily racist micro-stressors, such as subtle exclusions or slights, (d) chronic-contextual stress related to systemic and institutional racism, (e) collective cultural or sociopolitical experiences of racism, and (f) transgenerational transmission permeated by historical events. Each participant reporting race-based stress might have experienced more than one form of racism, which could overlap with other stressors, such as sexism or heterosexism, among others (Jones et al., 2020). Furthermore, Harrell defined racism-related stress as a transaction among groups, in which these interactions ultimately threatened the well-being of individuals.

Prior Application of the Race-Based Stress Conceptualizations

Race-based stress has been used in prior studies to explain the trauma individuals might experience as a result of encountering racism. Recently, there has been movement in political and research contexts to apply this theory to explain behavior. For example, Polanco-Roman et al. (2016) used the theory to examine the connection between racial discrimination and dissociation, noting that their study was among the first to support this relationship. Their findings also provided additional support for Carter's (2007) original theory that racial discrimination can lead to trauma and negative reactions to traumatic

experiences. The existing literature focused primarily on Black families. Anglin et al. (2015) indicated that Black individuals are more likely to report negative racial experiences. Polanco-Roman et al. highlighted the importance of understanding coping strategies when facing such experiences, noting that the introduction of effective coping mechanisms could influence an individual's response to racial stressors.

Relevance of Race-Based Stress to the Current Research

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in Carter's (2007) race-based traumatic stress and Harrell's (2000) racism-related stress conceptualizations, which are particularly relevant to the purpose of this research—exploring how Black mothers prepare their sons for race-related risks. These frameworks are useful for several reasons. First, Carter's and Harrell's theories offer a nuanced understanding of the psychological and emotional consequences of racism, particularly how race-based stress and racism-related stressors influence mental health outcomes. By recognizing that race-based traumatic stress emerges from both direct negative racial experiences and the broader structures of systemic racism, this framework provides a lens through which to examine how such stressors uniquely affect Black adolescent males. This perspective is essential for analyzing the parenting strategies Black mothers employ to mitigate the harmful effects of racism on their sons' development, safety, and well-being.

Additionally, Harrell's (2000) identification of six types of racism-based stress provides a comprehensive framework for examining the complex and overlapping stressors that Black families encounter. This multidimensional approach allowed the study to capture a wide range of lived experiences and coping strategies, which is critical

for understanding the broader context in which Black mothers prepare their sons for race-related risks. Furthermore, the linkage established in Carter's (2007) and Harrell's frameworks between racial discrimination and negative psychological outcomes—such as trauma, dissociation, and heightened mental health challenges—reinforces the importance of exploring both immediate and long-term effects of racism on Black youth. By grounding this study in these conceptualizations, the research was positioned to investigate how Black mothers' preparation strategies address these potential risks and contribute to fostering resilience, psychological well-being, and a stronger sense of identity in their sons.

Finally, the study's focus on urban areas, where systemic and community violence against Black males was particularly pervasive, underscored the relevance of this conceptual framework. Carter's (2007) and Harrell's (2000) theories provided a critical lens for understanding how such environments intensified race-based stress and shaped the strategies that Black mothers employed to protect and prepare their sons. Together, these conceptualizations offered a robust theoretical foundation by enabling a nuanced exploration of both the immediate and long-term effects of racism on Black adolescent males. Grounding the study in this framework allowed for the examination of protective parenting strategies that not only mitigated psychological risks but also fostered resilience, identity development, and well-being. Thus, this framework positioned the study to contribute meaningful insights into coping mechanisms and resilience-building practices within Black families living under the weight of systemic racism.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Various topics of interest converged in this study. The literature review section is organized into three major sections. First, the topic of racism is explored, including types of racism, the impact of racism, and racial trauma. This foundational understanding of racism is crucial for contextualizing the experiences of Black families and the specific stressors they faced. Next, the #BlackLivesMatter movement is described. This section delves into the movement's origins, its significance in raising awareness about racial injustices, and its influence on public discourse and policy. Understanding this movement provides essential context for the social and political environment in which Black mothers were preparing their sons. Finally, the topic of parenting children of color is developed. This section examines the unique challenges and strategies associated with raising Black children in a society where they faced systemic racism and racialized violence. It highlights the protective and preparatory practices that Black parents employed to safeguard their children's well-being and foster resilience in the face of adversity. By integrating these topics, the literature review provides a comprehensive backdrop for the study, elucidating the complex interplay between racism, social movements, and parenting practices. This context is necessary for understanding how Black mothers navigated and counteracted race-related risks for their sons.

Racism

Racism has been defined in many ways and from different perspectives. It remains prevalent and continues to threaten communities. Racism has been recognized as a public crisis, with efforts aimed at decreasing racial inequalities (Mendez et al., 2021).

These inequalities have led to the segregation of communities, particularly affecting lower-income and Black families (Mendez et al., 2021). Additionally, Bryant-Davis (2007) defined racism as the psychological response to perceived and real racial stress. While the perception of racism could be subjective, for this study, it was defined as a sense of inferiority or devaluation imposed by one organized social group onto another (Williams et al., 2019). Grosfoguel (2016) further strengthened the concept by depicting it as a power structure characterized by superior and inferior roles based on race.

Highlighting that racism can have multiple definitions is important. Gee and Ford (2011) that racism has many layers. For example, ethnic racism suggests one group has more ability than another simply because of their ethnic origin. Gee and Ford also noted that bodily racism creates a belief that Black communities are more violent, threatening, and physically dominant. Moreover, cultural racism negatively impacts communities, defining it as the perception that Black culture is inferior (Gee & Ford, 2011). All the definitions of racism negatively target the Black community. In addition, Hicken et al. (2018) noted that cultural racism can also manifest through language, symbols, and imagery, often instilled within institutions, leading to the establishment of racist norms.

When discussing racism, it is imperative to address the adverse statistics related to the topic, as they provide a grasp of the relationship between racism and its impacts. Statistics on racism varied widely, especially within the United States. Anderson and Stevenson (2019) reported that as many as 90% of racist incidents occurred within African American communities. Further, COVID-19 deaths highlight disparities due to racism. Reyes (2020) noted that Blacks were dying at a rate over 50% higher than Whites

and 25% higher than Latinos. Gregory (2020) also reported that Black lives were affected by COVID-19 at 2.5 times the rate of non-Black lives. While several factors may have influenced these statistics, it was crucial to note that health outcomes were significantly impacted within Black communities. The lack of resources increased the inability of these communities to receive necessary care.

Similarly, there have been notable health disparities in African American communities. Overall, the risks of heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure, and diabetes are higher within these communities (Carratala & Maxwell, 2020). This disparity has been linked to the lack of health insurance for many African Americans, who often have to choose between basic necessities and paying for health insurance premiums. The Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare) was created to address this issue, offering those below the poverty level access to coverage. Threshold access to health care insurance and, subsequently, more equitable treatment.

Moreover, incarceration rates illustrate racism in Black communities. Reyes (2020) reported that over 2.2 million people were incarcerated across the United States, and Black males were 5.8 times more likely than White males to be incarcerated, while Black females were 1.8 times more likely to be incarcerated than White females. Carson and Kluckow (2023) stated that the imprisonment rate for 2022 negatively impacted Black individuals, with 1,186 per 100,000 residents being incarcerated. While overall imprisonment numbers decreased over the last decade, the incarceration rate for Black people remained disproportionately high. For Black parents and children, this posed significant issues, as higher incarceration rates meant less parental involvement.

Additionally, it was noted that Black physicians earned about 35% less than White physicians.

The data collection and recruitment in this study were conducted in the state of Connecticut. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), approximately 121,000 people lived in Hartford, CT, with roughly 70% being non-White and 37% of African or Black descent. This was important because most cases of racism involved those of Black descent. These statistics highlighted the systemic nature of racism and its widespread effects on health, economic status, and incarceration rates within Black communities. Addressing these disparities was crucial for fostering equity and improving the overall well-being of marginalized populations.

Systemic Racism

Systemic racism was a deeply rooted issue that shaped life chances and outcomes based on racial categories. It was intertwined with societal structures, institutional practices, individual mental models, and daily interactions. This type of racism could operate consciously or unconsciously, often going unnoticed by those who sustained it. The systemic nature of this bias created a cohesive system of racial division and discrimination that affected multiple generations, influencing areas such as housing, education, wealth, health, and legal treatment, thereby reinforcing and perpetuating racial inequalities (Banaji et al., 2021).

To elucidate the concept of systemic racism, Payton et al., (2022) conducted a study on Black professors and their experiences in academia. Their research revealed that Black professors were significantly underrepresented compared to their peers of other

racism. A clearer example of systemic racism involves minority segregation and redlining. Terry Gross (2017) explained how federal housing policies in the United States contributed to racial segregation. Richard Rothstein, the author of *The Color of Law*, stated that these policies were not just discriminatory practices by private citizens but were organized and enforced by the government. In 1933, to address the housing shortage during the Great Depression, the federal government started programs aimed at increasing and segregating America's housing stock. These policies mainly benefited white, middle-class families, leaving African Americans and other people of color confined to urban housing projects.

The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), established in 1934, played a crucial role by refusing to insure mortgages in and near African American neighborhoods, a practice known as "redlining." Simultaneously, the FHA subsidized builders who created whites-only subdivisions, explicitly excluding African Americans from these new suburban developments. These segregationist policies had long-lasting effects, contributing to persistent inequality and limited economic mobility for African American families. Rothstein emphasized that if the U.S. wanted to achieve greater equality and reduce racial tensions, it had to address and dismantle these historical patterns of segregation.

Another form of systemic racism was racial profiling, which was defined as suspecting someone of a crime solely based on their racial or ethnic background. For decades, racial profiling led to many unfortunate situations where individuals were harmed just for being minorities. Williams et al. (2022) noted that racism was not only

experienced directly but could also be felt through family members or vicariously, impacting people across generations. The next section would delve into the power of racial trauma and its effects across generations.

Impact of Racism

Racism permeates all aspects of life, affecting health, economic status, and living conditions, while also creating widespread stigmas for both victims and perpetrators. It makes individuals many times more likely to have had an abortion, with a higher proportion occurring within the context of worsening social and economic inequalities. These biases not only harm those directly affected but also reinforce damaging stereotypes and prejudices within society.

One way racism affects its victims is through documented police killings of unarmed Black individuals. For example, Bor et al., (2018) found that infants died at more than twice the rate of White infants, with infant mortality rates also higher for Black Americans. Their quasi-experimental study combined data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System with newly compiled data on police killings from the 12+-Police Violence database, covering the years 2013 to 2015. They found that each additional police killing of an unarmed Black American was associated with a 0.14-day increase in poor mental health days among Black American respondents in the same state over the following three months, contributing to an estimated 55 million excess poor mental health days per year.

This mental health impact was not seen among white respondents or in reactions to police killings of armed Black Americans or unarmed white Americans. The study

emphasizes the significant public health burden of police violence on the mental health of Black Americans, highlighting the need for interventions to reduce such killings and support impacted communities.

Additionally, Eichelberger et al., (2016) highlighted that race affected more aspects of life than one might have thought. These authors presented stark statistics highlighting the severe disparities faced by Black women in reproductive health. For instance, Black women experienced over 50% more unintended pregnancies compared to White women (64% vs. 38% in 2011) and were nearly four times more likely to undergo abortions, with a higher proportion occurring in the second trimester (10.6% vs. 7.9%). Maternal mortality rates were alarmingly higher for Black women, who were more than three times as likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than their White and Hispanic counterparts, accounting for 35.5% of pregnancy-related deaths despite only making up 14.6% of live births. Furthermore, Black infants died at more than twice the rate of White infants, with infant mortality rates of 11.4 per 1000 live births compared to 5.2 per 1000 for White infants. In the realm of assisted reproductive technologies, Black women faced significant challenges and lower success rates. They underwent a mere 4.6% of IVF cycles compared to 85.4% for White women, and even with equal access, they had lower live birth rates (18.7% vs. 26.3%) and higher miscarriage rates (20.4% vs. 13.2%). Additionally, Black women were disproportionately affected by gynecologic cancers, with a 55% higher death rate from endometrial cancer and significantly lower odds of receiving surgery and chemotherapy. These disparities underscored the systemic racism

embedded within healthcare institutions and highlighted the urgent need for evidence-based interventions to achieve racial equity in women's health outcomes.

Impact of Racism on Mental Health

Mental health was one major area in which individuals were affected by racism. Williams et al., (2018) provided a comprehensive review of the various ways racism and race-related stressors impacted mental health among marginalized racial and ethnic populations. The article underscored that racism extended beyond individual acts of discrimination to include structural and cultural mechanisms deeply embedded in society. It identified multiple pathways through which racism affected mental health, including direct discrimination, the anticipation of discrimination, and the broader social contexts that exacerbated stress.

These authors highlighted significant statistics to illustrate these impacts. For example, a national survey found that 69% of American adults reported experiencing at least one instance of discrimination, with 61% experiencing everyday discrimination. Specifically, 35% of African Americans and Native Americans, 25% of Latinos, 22% of Asians, and 18% of Whites reported unfair treatment in job hiring. Additionally, 34% of American Indians, 23% of Blacks, 19% of Hispanics, and 11% of Asians and non-Hispanic Whites experienced everyday discrimination almost daily or weekly.

Moreover, William et al. (2018) highlighted that Black Americans faced higher rates of severe mental health issues when they experienced mental illness compared to Whites. For instance, although African Americans and Caribbean Blacks had lower current and lifetime rates of major depression than Whites, their depressive episodes

tended to be more severe, chronic, and debilitating. The review also addressed the importance of protective factors like social support and coping mechanisms, suggesting that these could mitigate some of the adverse effects of racism.

Zapolski et al., (2019) conducted a study that demonstrated a strong association between racism and negative mental health outcomes, particularly among African Americans. This research aligned with previous studies that explored the detrimental effects of racism on mental health. The article highlighted a significant link between experiences of racism and the increased consumption of alcohol as a coping mechanism. These findings underscored the profound impact that racism could have on mental health and behavioral outcomes, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address these issues.

Racial Trauma and Intergenerational Trauma

The concept of racial trauma underscored the impact of racism on mental health. Racial trauma was defined as “a traumatic response to a race-related experience which could include prejudice, discrimination, and/or violence” (Williams et al., 2018). According to Williams et al., (2018), racial trauma was closely linked to adverse mental health outcomes, particularly for individuals of color. Those who reported racism or discriminatory acts often faced higher health concerns. There was a correlation between increased incidences of hypertension, asthma, breast cancer, and all-cause mortality with racial trauma (Williams et al., 2018).

Williams et al., (2022) referenced the American Psychiatric Association to define the stress response stimulated by racism. These changes could lead to post-traumatic

stress disorder. In other words, the emotional and physical pain a person experienced as a response to racism constituted racial trauma. Additionally, it was important to note that direct experiences were not the only triggers of racial trauma; witnessing or experiencing trauma vicariously could also have the same effect (Williams et al., 2018). Unfortunately, as a society, we had not conducted enough research to fully understand the pathological connections to race-based trauma. This lack of research represented a potential area for further study to uncover more examples of the effects of racial trauma.

Another pervasive impact of racism was identified as intergenerational trauma. It was defined as the psychological effects that impacted generations beyond the initially affected individuals (Cooper et al., 2015). This phenomenon could be seen as a never-ending cycle of continuous oppression "handed down" to subsequent family members. Cooper et al. suggested that negative racial experiences could significantly influence the messages parents conveyed to their children.

In relation to this study, intergenerational trauma meant that a person who had experienced racism might pass those negative perceptions and thoughts down to their children. This could pertain to anything from a specific person, place, or situation. For example, if someone had had a negative experience in a particular store, they might have avoided that store to prevent potential negative feelings. This concept highlighted the complex nature of intergenerational trauma and its impact on parenting decisions, underlining the need for a nuanced understanding of how past experiences shape future behaviors and attitudes within families.

While trauma could have been perceived as a mode of protection, others might

have seen it as an obstacle to progress. Finding a positive outlook in life could have been challenging, but it would have been essential to ensure that the past actions of others did not dictate our future. Mosley et al., (2021) conducted a study in which participants reported that coping with racial trauma was difficult but was often managed by ignoring racial slurs. They also mentioned that avoiding interactions with White individuals was a coping strategy (Mosley et al., 2021). Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of advocating for rights and raising awareness about the effects of racism. Increasing awareness about the impacts of racism and correcting the inaccuracies of stigmas were crucial steps in fostering a more inclusive and understanding society.

Black Lives Matter Movement

In today's world, driven by technology, social media, and the pervasive use of mobile devices, it was important to note how those technological advances had created a powerful bridge to expose acts of racism. While there was indeed an overuse of phones, that usage had facilitated unprecedented exposure. This exposure had, in turn, galvanized political movements such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Hillstrom (2018) noted the evolution of the #BlackLivesMatter movement as a significant force in highlighting the oppression and social injustices faced by many Black individuals.

Names like Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and Breonna Taylor evoked strong emotions for many. While only a few names were mentioned here, countless Black lives were impacted by death and violence, particularly due to police brutality, daily. The #BlackLivesMatter movement, which was founded in 2014 after the death of Trayvon Martin (Kreiger et al., 2012), became

synonymous with statements such as “I can’t breathe” and “hands up,” words that were tragically uttered by several young Black men before dying at the hands of a White person.

Eichelberger et al., (2016) further defined the #BlackLivesMatter movement as a safe avenue for expressing the constant inequalities experienced by African Americans. Through the #BlackLivesMatter movement, non-Black individuals were able to demonstrate their support by placing signs on lawns, cars, places of employment, and more. The #BlackLivesMatter movement created a space for inclusion, turned differences into similarities, and opened doors for positive change.

In recent years, there have been varied reactions to the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Some argue that it has had adverse effects on the Black community, while others believe it has provided crucial avenues for allies to express their support. For parents, especially mothers, the movement reveals the harsh realities of being Black in America and fosters a broader understanding and empathy from the wider society. This visibility and solidarity are essential in the ongoing fight for equality and justice.

Parenting Children of Color

Parenting was defined as the primary means of education and preparation for a child, shaping how they faced the world and its demands. Society recognized parenting as one of the most significant roles a person could hold, requiring love, nurturing, patience, and acceptance (Breiner et al., 2016). Children of color were at a higher risk of experiencing racism at an early age, which could be challenging for parents to navigate (Chan Tack & Small, 2017). Learning how to address these difficult questions effectively

was crucial. Parents had to continuously educate their children to become their best versions, and handling racism was no different. Given the statistics presented earlier, it was evident how challenging it could be to raise children of color. The preconceived notions about people of color posed a painful reality for many.

Parenting a child of color is often more challenging as societal risks disproportionately affect this population. Understanding the differences in raising minority children and the distress they experience, particularly during their teenage years, is crucial. Parents must consider racial factors in their decision-making (Evans et al., 2012; Chan Tack & Small, 2017). For example, attending a predominantly White school may feel burdensome for a non-white child, potentially leading to feelings of alienation and negative behaviors, which could perpetuate into troubling statistics. This misrepresentation is often based on color rather than abilities.

Cross et al., (2018) conducted a study examining the interplay between trauma exposure, PTSD, and parenting within a community sample of low-income, predominantly African American mothers and children. The study aimed to explore the prevalence and interrelationships among maternal trauma, PTSD symptoms, and parenting challenges, as well as their impact on child trauma and PTSD. The study recruited 112 mother-child dyads, involving children aged 8-12 years, from urban, low-income settings. High rates of trauma exposure and PTSD symptoms were found among both mothers and children. The research revealed significant correlations between maternal trauma and PTSD with increased child abuse potential and parental distress. However, neither maternal trauma nor PTSD predicted dysfunctional parent-child

interactions or perceptions of child difficulty. The study emphasized the need for integrated interventions that address trauma and PTSD in both parents and children to mitigate intergenerational transmission of trauma-related mental health issues.

There was a negative relationship between well-being and the consequences of racism. Research showed that there was a strong negative correlation between the experience of discrimination and reports of well-being. Compared to their White counterparts, Black mothers felt increasingly susceptible to decreased overall well-being due to increased racism stress (Ajrouch et al., 2010; Schmitt et al., 2014). In a recent study, Black mothers described their feelings about their children's safety and well-being as "fearful and anxiety-inducing." Most mothers feared the unknown, while others specifically feared police brutality. This fear was raw and genuine, felt by many mothers striving to raise successful men. This fear could directly affect parenting styles, causing some mothers to become hypervigilant and overprotective, micromanaging their children's schedules in an effort to keep them safe (Joe et al., 2019).

The impact of systemic racism and the ongoing challenges faced by Black families underscored the importance of understanding and addressing these issues within the context of parenting. Movements like #BlackLivesMatter highlighted these systemic injustices and advocated for change, offering a platform for raising awareness and fostering solidarity (Eichelberger et al., 2016; Hillstrom, 2018).

Strategies to Prepare Children for Race-Related Risks

Children will be ready for the expected racism if they are prepared for what may happen (Scottham & Smalls, 2009). The more parents have experienced the more they

can share with their children in the hopes of preparing them for the future (Scottham & Smalls, 2009). Awareness is key in promoting adaptation and readiness (Richardson et al., 2019).

There were several components to parenting, and one of them was safety. In Connecticut, around age 16, a child was both ready and eligible to obtain a driver's license. The conversations about what to do if pulled over varied significantly depending on race. Racial socialization referred to the strategies Black parents used to prepare their children for navigating a discriminatory society (Evans et al., 2012; Peters, 2002). Family played a vital role in fostering positive youth development, and racial socialization greatly influenced these outcomes.

Evans et al., (2012) outlined dimensions of racial socialization, including cultural socialization, which promoted racial pride and heritage, and preparation for bias, which equipped children with coping strategies against racism. Howard et al., (2013) examined how 15 parents of African American boys aged 3-8 implemented these practices to support their sons' racial and gender identity development and socioemotional health. They identified three main themes: fostering racial pride, recognizing diversity, and integrating spirituality or religion. Parents stressed teaching African American history and culture, exposing their sons to successful African American role models, and creating supportive environments. In gender socialization, the themes included the importance of positive male role models, nurturing strength and leadership qualities, and encouraging traditional masculine activities. The authors observed the careful balance parents tried to maintain between cultivating a strong racial identity and promoting traditional masculine

virtues, often facing potential conflicts between these objectives.

Another research focus on raising Black children in the context of racial disparities highlighted how Black parents adjusted their strategies to protect their children from being criminalized by the police or mainstream institutions (Elliott & Reid, 2019). Protective strategies involved encouraging individual responsibility, monitoring, and involving children in organized activities. Mothers stressed the importance of making good choices to avoid negative consequences, with less affluent mothers emphasizing the long-term impact of poor decisions due to limited resources. Monitoring methods varied, with wealthier mothers using technology and lower-income mothers relying on physical presence. Organized activities were seen as a means to keep teens safe and engaged, though access was often limited by socio-economic status (Elliott & Aseltine, 2013). Additionally, educating children to identify and befriend those capable of defending them or de-escalating potentially violent situations was another protective strategy. By fostering relationships with reliable and protective peers, parents aimed to create a support network, ensuring their children had allies to provide safety and assistance in hostile environments, thus helping them navigate and survive threats in violent neighborhoods through the strength and solidarity of trusted friends (Chan Tack & Small, 2017).

"The Talk" is a term used within Black communities when preparing a child for encounters with law enforcement. This conversation offers guidance on how to behave during police interactions, discussing risks, causes, effects, and appropriate responses. It provides children with a framework for distinguishing right from wrong from the police

perspective. Anderson et al., (2022) explored the phenomenon of "the Talk," a vital part of racial socialization that Black parents in America have with their children. This conversation aims to teach Black youth how to safely navigate interactions with police officers and other authority figures amid increased racialized violence. The study, based on qualitative observations, involves 45 Black American parents and their school-aged children. The findings show that parents try to balance sharing knowledge to protect their children without creating fear or distrust of all law enforcement officers.

In this study, Anderson et al., (2022) identified six primary themes in these conversations: directives that addressed safety, a desire to be involved, attending to the child's thoughts and emotions, acknowledging a climate of racial violence, resistance, and attempts to reassure that "not all cops are bad." The study placed these parental practices within broader sociocultural contexts, emphasizing the influence of systemic racism and the unique challenges Black families faced. The authors argued that understanding and supporting these socialization practices were essential for developing interventions and educational programs aimed at improving the well-being of Black children and their families.

Wang et al., (2020) performed a detailed meta-analysis to examine the relationship between parental ethnic-racial socialization and the psychosocial and behavioral adjustment of children of color. This study combined results from 102 studies, covering 803 effect sizes and involving 27,221 participants. The researchers aimed to determine how ethnic-racial socialization practices influenced youth outcomes and to explore how these relationships varied based on different factors.

Ethnic-racial socialization referred to the transmission of values, beliefs, and information about ethnicity and race from parents to their children. It was considered a vital cultural asset for youth of color, as it helped instill ethnic-racial pride, informed them about potential challenges they might face, and equipped them with coping skills to navigate a racially stratified society. The study found that overall, ethnic-racial socialization was positively associated with self-perceptions, interpersonal relationship quality, and internalizing behavior, but had no significant association with externalizing behavior.

Wang et al., (2020) found that preparation for bias, a subtype of ethnic-racial socialization, involves parents discussing and preparing their children for experiences with racism and discrimination. This practice had mixed effects on psychosocial outcomes: it showed a small positive relationship with interpersonal relationship quality, suggesting that it helps children build better social connections by equipping them with coping skills for social interactions. However, preparation for bias was also associated with small increases in both internalizing behaviors, like anxiety and depression, and externalizing behaviors, such as aggression and behavioral issues. These findings highlight that while preparation for bias can provide essential tools for navigating discrimination, it can also contribute to increased stress and behavioral challenges, underscoring the need for supportive environments to mitigate potential negative impacts.

In sum, this section highlighted parents' strategies to prepare children for race-related risks and why these strategies were crucial in helping them navigate a society where they might have faced discrimination. Scottham and Smalls (2009) emphasized the

importance of parents sharing their experiences to prepare their children for potential racism, which could have enhanced awareness and adaptation (Richardson et al., 2019). Racial socialization, as described by Evans et al. (2012) and Peters (2002), involved strategies like fostering racial pride, preparing for bias, and promoting cultural heritage. Howard et al. (2013) identified themes such as building racial pride and incorporating spirituality among African American parents to support their sons' identity development. Additionally, research by Elliott and Reid (2019) and Elliott and Aseltine (2013) highlighted how Black parents adjusted their strategies to protect their children from criminalization, stressing good decision-making and creating supportive peer networks (Chan Tack & Small, 2017). "The Talk," explored by Anderson et al., (2022), provided crucial guidance on police interactions. Wang et al., (2020) found that preparation for bias, a form of ethnic-racial socialization, helped children build coping skills but also increased stress. These findings underscore the need to explore how Black mothers prepare their sons for race-related risks to ensure their safety and well-being in a racially stratified society.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter described the literature review related to the impact of racism on Black families in the United States, emphasizing its significant stressor effect, particularly in the parenting of Black adolescents (Joe et al., 2019; Pieterse et al., 2012). It explored how parents, especially mothers, adjusted their strategies to prevent their children from being criminalized by police and mainstream institutions, utilizing the concept of racial socialization to prepare them for a discriminatory society (Elliott &

Reid, 2019; Evans et al., 2012; Peters, 2002). Despite extensive research on these strategies, the chapter highlighted a gap in understanding how Black mothers prepared their sons for race-related risks in the context of the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Joe et al., 2019).

The chapter also detailed the literature search strategy, which utilized multiple databases and various keywords, including stress-based trauma theory, racism, parenting, Black Lives Matter, racial trauma, and more, ensuring a comprehensive review of relevant literature. This method provided a robust collection of sources to support the study's focus.

Finally, the chapter outlined the conceptual framework based on Carter's (2007) race-based traumatic stress and Harrell's (2000) racism-related stress theories. These frameworks described how race-based stress and trauma emerged from perceived racism and its systemic impact on mental health. Harrell's six types of racism-based stress provided a multi-dimensional lens to examine the varied and overlapping stressors that Black families faced. This theoretical foundation was essential for investigating how Black mothers prepared their sons for race-related risks, considering the profound impact of these stressors on their well-being. The following chapter presented the methodology that was used to address the research question.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Black mothers prepared their Black sons for race-related risks. By conducting this study, I anticipated learning that there were additional stressors for mothers who were raising young Black children. This chapter provides a detailed overview of the research objectives and justification, a discussion on the researcher's role and potential biases, a thorough description of the methodology and trustworthiness concerns.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question that guided this research was: How did Black mothers located in urban areas prepare their Black adolescent sons for race-related risks? Numerous studies have explored the complexities of raising Black children in the face of pervasive racial inequalities. One area of focus was the methods Black parents employed to shield their children from criminalization by police and mainstream institutions (Elliott & Reid, 2019). These methods include discussing potential violence and risks, shielding children from violence in or near their homes (Elliott & Aseltine, 2013), and restricting interactions with individuals outside their community (Chan Tack & Small, 2017). Another key area is racial socialization, which involves preparing Black children to navigate a prejudiced society (Evans et al., 2012; Peters, 2002). Additionally, research investigated how at-risk Black mothers, including those who were single, adolescent, pregnant, or low-income, coped with the stress of parenting in challenging environments (Elliott et al., 2015; Elliott & Bowen, 2018; Premkumar et al., 2017). However, despite this body of research, there was still a gap in understanding how Black mothers prepared

their sons for race-related risks.

Given that the goal of this project was to yield detailed and comprehensive accounts of Black mothers preparing their sons for race-related risks, a basic qualitative approach (Caelli et al., 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Percy et al., 2015) was selected. A quantitative research design was not chosen because there was no pre-established theoretical framework or set of variables to understand how Black mothers prepared their children for race-related risks. Quantitative methodology is limited in its ability to capture the rich, complex, and nuanced experiences of individuals (Queirós et al., 2017), making it less suitable for this exploratory research. Instead, a qualitative design was appropriate to provide a more multi-layered and comprehensive overview of this phenomenon, particularly given the lack of existing research in this area. As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) highlighted, qualitative research is better suited for examining the meanings behind complex social issues. This study aimed to avoid a narrow focus and instead explore the unique meanings and perceptions of Black mothers preparing their sons for race-related risks in the evolving context of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Role of the Researcher

As the primary researcher for this study, I was responsible for designing this qualitative research, securing approval from the institutional review board (IRB), identifying and screening potential participants, analyzing the data, and presenting the findings in a final report. My role in conducting the interviews involved active listening, allowing participants to convey their experiences and perspectives, effectively bringing me into their world (Patton, 2001). In qualitative research, the researcher plays a

participatory role, engaging directly with participants in their natural environment to collect and analyze data, thereby serving as the main instrument of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

As the only researcher in this qualitative study, I served as the main tool for data collection, making sure all participants were fully informed about the study's expectations and have their questions answered thoroughly. The role of the observer is essential, as it guides the study's progress and guarantees the authenticity of the information gathered. During data collection, I will take detailed notes and carefully verify my recordings to improve the integrity of the information collected. After conducting the interviews, I reviewed all the data with each participant to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of their stories.

Building rapport with participants was essential; I focused on making them feel heard and valued, emphasizing the importance of their contributions to the study. This approach not only fostered a trusting relationship but also ensured that their narratives were represented faithfully and respectfully. By prioritizing participant comfort and story integrity, this study aimed to provide a rich, comprehensive understanding of how Black mothers prepared their sons for race-related risks.

As the primary instrument in this research study, it was crucial to examine my potential biases. Acknowledging and assessing personal positionality was vital for identifying and mitigating researcher bias (Patton, 2001). I clarified how my potential biases might have influenced the study's development and outlined the elements that contributed to its trustworthiness. My personal background as a mother of young Black

children afforded me the experience and understanding of what parenting children of color might have brought. Furthermore, my professional background, specifically dealing with this population, provided me with experience in handling adverse situations, such as racism. While I had knowledge in both areas, to remain aware of my biases, I planned on using a journal as an outlet for my reactions and feelings. To minimize the influence of my biases on the study, I maintained a journal to document my thoughts and reactions. Additionally, I wrote memos to articulate my reflections and remained open to feedback and supervision from my chair. This practice helped ensure the integrity of the research.

I offered participants a 20-dollar gift card to a local food shop. Studies have demonstrated that incentives could be used as a tool to recruit more participants (Abdelazeem, 2022). In addition, these incentives increase recruitment and retention, particularly in minority groups (Abdelazeem, 2022). However, to address potential ethical concerns, I offered the incentives after the interview was completed, framing them as a thank you rather than a bribe. Given the sensitivity of some of the experiences, it was important that participants felt appreciated.

Methodology

Participants

The population chosen for this research was African American mothers who were raising young Black adolescents. Participants in this study should: (a) self-identified as Black or African American, (b) were mothers of Black male children aged 12-18 years old, and (c) lived in a city or urban area. I used purposeful, criterion, and snowball sampling. Creswell (2009) identified criterion sampling as selecting individuals who had

experienced or were experiencing a certain phenomenon. In this case, purposeful sampling was beneficial as it involved selecting pre-defined participants (Patton, 2001). Furthermore, snowball sampling was also used. Snowball sampling was a technique used to recruit participants through referrals made by initial subjects. It began with a small number of initial participants who met the study criteria. These initial subjects then identified other potential participants who also fit the criteria, leading to a chain referral process that helped me to gather a larger sample size.

Participant Selection Logic

Ten mothers raising their sons were selected for semistructured interviews to gather rich, detailed data for this study. Saturation, a key criterion in qualitative research, determined when to stop data collection or analysis. It was considered an essential methodological element in qualitative studies (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation was achieved when enough information had been gathered to replicate the study, and when all possible codes and analyses had been thoroughly explored. According to Guest et al. (2012), a sample size of 12 participants is suitable for studies using semistructured interview guides, as most coding variations occurred within the first twelve interviews. Based on this information, I aimed to recruit 10 participants for my study, anticipating that this number would be sufficient to reach saturation. For this study, I recruited participants through forums and listservs online, using social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. I also requested permission to leave flyers for the study at community organizations such as YMCA or Boys and Girls Club.

Instrumentation

To ensure that comprehensive information was gathered from each participant, interviews were scheduled to last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Given the sensitivity of discussing race-related experiences, which could evoke emotional responses, it was crucial to allocate sufficient time for thorough data collection to meet the study's objectives. Prior to conducting each interview, I gathered preliminary information through questions based on the research study and interview guide. Initially, I asked demographic questions to gain a detailed understanding of the participants and their backgrounds. This approach also helped establish trust and rapport, encouraging open and honest communication throughout the interview. Following these, semi-structured questions from an interview guide were used to explore the topic (Appendix).

The questions that formed the interview guide and the formatting of the interview were developed to explore how Black mothers prepared their Black sons for race-related risks. The interview guide was shaped by the theoretical framework and the information gathered from peer-reviewed literature review sources (Elliott et al., 2015; Elliott & Bowen, 2018; Jackson et al., 2020; Joe et al., 2019; Premkumar et al., 2017). While I had prepared a set of initial questions, the semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in creating follow-up questions during the conversation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants had the option to select being interviewed in person or via Zoom. To ensure a smooth process, several measures were implemented: no more than two interviews were conducted per day, with a minimum of two hours between each interview. Additionally, I reviewed the information immediately after each session, and interviews were scheduled

on alternate days. I also sought consent to record the interviews to ensure clarity and completeness of the collected information. Participants were encouraged to fully discuss each subject during the interview.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

First, I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with the study. Following approval, I initiated the recruitment process. Participants were recruited through online forums and listservs, as well as social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. I sought collaboration with the YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs to post flyers of this study on their bulletin boards. Interested individuals responded via email, text message, or phone.

Initial recruitment efforts yielded insufficient participants, so I extended outreach to additional social organizations that catered to Black women to generate more interest. Once contacted, I screened potential participants using demographic criteria questions provided on the flyer. Those who met the criteria received a consent form via email prior to the interview. Participants confirmed their consent by replying to the email.

After identifying an initial group of ten qualified participants, I arranged individual interviews, either in person or via Zoom. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes to an hour. After the interview, participants were encouraged to share the flyer with others who met the study's criteria. Once I completed at least ten interviews, I sent thank-you emails to all participants for their involvement in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

I used thematic analysis to interpret the collected data, following the six-phase

process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This structured approach ensured a thorough and systematic analysis. The first step in this process was familiarity. As the researcher, it was crucial to immerse myself in the data by repeatedly reading through it. This phase helped me understand the depth and nuances of the information collected. Through repeated reading, initial coding began, allowing me to start identifying potential themes. Once I was thoroughly familiar with the data, the next phase was generating initial codes. This involved systematically organizing the data into meaningful groups. By the end of this stage, I had a general list of initial codes that highlighted key elements within the data. This organized approach laid the groundwork for deeper analysis.

After generating initial codes, the next step was searching for themes. In that stage, I analyzed the codes to find broader patterns and themes. Visual tools like tables, graphs, and color schemes were especially helpful, as they made it easier to identify and organize themes. Once potential themes were identified, the reviewing themes phase began. This involved carefully evaluating the themes to ensure they were well-developed and distinct. Some themes needed more refinement, while others might have been merged. This phase had two levels. Level one involved rereading the themes to spot inconsistencies or gaps. If a theme lacked enough information, I decided whether to revise it, combine it with another theme, or discard it. Level two involved re-evaluating the entire data set to ensure all themes fit together cohesively, creating a complete picture.

Once the themes were reviewed and refined, the next phase was defining and naming themes. In that step, I consolidated the information and assigned distinct names

to each theme. This process helped in clearly articulating the themes and connecting them to the overall data, creating a coherent narrative. The final phase was producing the report. That step involved compiling all the analyzed data into a comprehensive report. The selected themes were used to present the findings in a clear and structured manner, ensuring that the story conveyed was complete and insightful. Completing these phases cohesively was essential for presenting a thorough and trustworthy narrative. It was important to acknowledge that not all evidence might have aligned with the established codes or themes. Therefore, documenting any negative data was crucial for maintaining the credibility of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness was crucial for producing quality research. Four key criteria—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—were essential for establishing the internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity of the study (Korstjens & Moser 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). I adhered to these principles to ensure the robustness of my research.

Credibility

Credibility was paramount for establishing trustworthiness, as it related to how accurately the findings reflected reality (Korstjens & Moser 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). To achieve credibility, I employed several strategies. First, I conducted in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour, which allowed for the collection of comprehensive details to thoroughly address the research question and any follow-up questions. Additionally, I invested substantial time in all

aspects of the study to gather relevant data and develop a profound understanding of the information, a process known as prolonged engagement. I also examined data that did not support the emerging themes to understand any contradictory information, a technique referred to as negative case analysis. Regular consultations with my chair helped me discuss the data and my responses during data collection and analysis, thereby ensuring thorough debriefing.

Transferability

Transferability referred to the extent to which the findings could be applied to other contexts or situations (Korstjens & Moser 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Although qualitative research often involved smaller populations, it was possible to demonstrate that the results were applicable to other settings. It was my responsibility to provide sufficient contextual information for transferability. To achieve this, I provided detailed descriptions of the context and significance of the participants involved, ensuring that readers had a clear understanding of the setting. Through thorough coding and analysis of the data, I facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the findings. Furthermore, by using in vivo descriptions, such as vignettes or direct quotes, I captured the participants' voices, thereby enhancing the richness and applicability of the results. This approach ensured that readers had enough information to determine the applicability and transferability of the results.

Dependability

Dependability pertained to the consistency and stability of the research methods and procedures (Korstjens & Moser 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). To

ensure dependability in my study, I provided a detailed description of the research design and implementation, outlined how data would be collected in the field, and reflected on the overall research process. Maintaining field notes, interview records, and a journal created an audit trail, helping me track the research process and ensure the dependability of the findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research addressed the need for objectivity, ensuring that the findings were based on the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's biases (Korstjens & Moser 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). To enhance confirmability, I acknowledged my own predispositions and biases, ensuring they did not influence the study's outcomes. Using an audit trail, I documented the research process step-by-step, including decisions made and procedures followed, which provided transparency. Notes taken throughout the study detailed any changes, additions, and explanations of chosen materials or resources, further supporting this transparency. My chair reviewed the audit trail to help identify any biases or personal feelings that could have interfered with the findings. By adhering to these criteria, I aimed to produce a study that was credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable, thereby ensuring its overall trustworthiness.

Ethical Procedures

Numerous ethical measures were put in place to ensure that no harm was caused during the research process. To uphold ethical integrity, participants received a thorough consent form that clearly outlined the research process and explained how their

experiences and the study's outcomes would be utilized. The informed consent detailed the research process, the study's purpose, the expected duration of the interview, and the methods to be used. Before scheduling interviews, participants had ample time to review the consent form, ask questions, and confirm their understanding.

During interviews, I was attentive to any signs of stress or intense emotions. If such emotions arose, I would either redirect the interview or allow participants to pause or discontinue as needed. Ensuring confidentiality was a priority; therefore, the collected information, including interviews, was only shared with the dissertation committee and was de-identified to protect participants' identity and personal information. Physical records, such as field notes, audiotapes, and transcripts, were securely stored in a locked cabinet, while electronic files were protected with passwords. Transcriptions were coded to de-identify participants, and any identifying details were removed or generalized. At the conclusion of the study, participants received a summary of the results via email. Five years after the study's completion, interview transcripts and raw data were securely destroyed.

Summary

This chapter introduced the methods and procedures for the qualitative study that explored how Black mothers prepared their sons for race-related risks. The study aimed to uncover additional stressors these mothers faced and provided detailed insights into their strategies and experiences. It examined the unique ways Black mothers navigated the complexities of raising Black male children in a society fraught with racial inequalities.

Employing a basic qualitative approach, the study sought to capture the rich and unique experiences of these mothers through semi-structured interviews with ten participants. African American mothers of Black male adolescents aged 12–18 who lived in urban areas were recruited using purposive, criterion, and snowball sampling methods. Interviews, which lasted 45 minutes to one hour, were conducted in person or via Zoom, with measures in place to ensure a smooth process, such as limiting interviews to two per day and scheduling them on alternate days. The next chapter presents the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Black mothers prepare their Black sons for race-related risks. Participants for this study were 10 Black mothers who parent Black adolescent sons and live in an urban area. The selection of children's gender and age group was based on the prevalence of police and community violence directed toward Black males (Jackson et al., 2020). The study examined the complex challenges these mothers encounter, encompassing financial constraints, parenting-related stressors, and the broader responsibility of preparing their children to navigate societal structures shaped by systemic racism. The following research question guided this study: How do Black mothers located in urban areas prepare their Black adolescent sons for race-related risks?

This chapter outlines the interview contexts, participant characteristics, procedures for data collection, and the methods used for data analysis. It further details the process by which themes and topics emerged from the analysis. In addition, it addresses issues of trustworthiness and presents the study's findings. The chapter closes with a summary highlighting the main points.

Setting

Ten participants, all of whom self-identified as African American/Black mothers of male children between the ages of 12 and 18, were recruited and interviewed for this study. The recruitment process, however, presented a number of challenges. Many individuals who initially expressed interest in participating ultimately did not meet the eligibility criteria. This was most often due to not carefully reviewing the demographic

requirements, particularly the criterion of parenting male children within the specified age range. In several cases, individuals were raising daughters rather than sons, which rendered them ineligible.

Recruitment was further complicated by the timing of data collection, which coincided with the holiday season. The offer of a gift card incentive also appeared to influence interest in participation. For instance, one prospective participant requested a different type of gift card, while several others asked to receive the interview questions via email rather than engage in a live interview. These requests were respectfully declined in order to maintain consistency and rigor in the data collection process. Consistent with the recruitment plan, participants initially contacted me via email or text message. In response, I sent each of them the consent form, recruitment flyer, and demographic questions, then awaited their reply. Once they had reviewed the documents, participants reached back out to schedule their interviews.

Despite these efforts, the original recruitment plan yielded only a limited number of participants. After approximately 1 month, I expanded recruitment by posting the flyer on my social media accounts. Several colleagues assisted by sharing the post, which led to the successful recruitment of four additional participants. Interviews were conducted both in person and virtually through Zoom, depending on participant preference and availability. A few individuals were ultimately denied participation because they insisted on submitting their responses in writing, which was inconsistent with the established methodology. Upon completion of their interviews, all participants received a \$20.00 gift card redeemable at a locally Black-owned business as a token of appreciation for their

time and contributions.

Demographics

All 10 participants interviewed identified as Black American females. Participant 4 (P4) identified her ethnicity as Black/Puerto Rican (PR), and participant 5 (P5) as Black/White. All participants reported their child's ethnicity was Black. As indicated during the recruitment process, all participants resided in the state of Connecticut. Marital status varied, with participants reporting being married ($n = 7$) or single ($n = 3$). Participants ranged in age from 30 to 50 years. Participants also reported a varied number of children. Table 1 presents additional participant information.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Ethnicity	Age	# of Children	Child Gender	Marital Status	Custody	Income
P1	Black	40	2	M,M	Single	Single Parent	Over \$90K
P2	Black	36	2	M,F	Married	NA	Over \$90K
P3	Black	40	2	M,M	Single	Single Parent	\$60K-\$75K
P4	Black/PR	40	2	M,M	Married	NA	Over \$90K
P5	Black/White	42	3	M,M,F	Single	Single Parent	\$60K-\$75K
P6	Black	32	2	M,F	Married	Shared custody	Under \$25K
P7	Black	35	3	M,M,F	Married	Shared Custody	Under \$25K
P8	Black	35	2	M,F	Married	NA	Under \$25K
P9	Black	37	4	M,M,M,F	Married	NA	Between \$75-\$90K
P10	Black	41	1	M	Married	NA	Over \$90K

Data Collection

All participants were given the opportunity to review the interview questions, the

consent form, and the recruitment flyer before providing informed consent. They were offered the choice of completing the interview either via Zoom or in person. Of the 10 participants, four opted for face-to-face interviews, and the remaining six completed their interviews online. Consent was obtained either through a signed form during the in-person meetings or via email, with participants explicitly stating, “I consent.” Participants were informed that interviews would last no longer than 45 minutes. Actual interview durations ranged from 15 to 40 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the exception of one, which could not be recorded due to internet connectivity issues.

All participants responded to the same set of semistructured interview questions, as outlined in the appendix. While a consistent interview guide was used to ensure alignment with the central research question, participants’ responses were subjective and reflected their unique lived experiences. The interviews focused on mothers’ personal encounters with racism and how these experiences were translated into intentional teaching moments for their adolescent sons. Each question was carefully designed to elicit narratives that highlighted the strategies, emotions, and reflections mothers used in preparing their sons for race-related risks.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used in this study because it centers on subjective experiences, which are essential to understanding the emotional labor and cultural strategies involved in parenting Black boys. In addition, this method allows for nuance so that each parent’s story is honored while still identifying broader social patterns. It provides a way to explore the intersection of race, place, and parenting, showing how

systemic issues are reflected in day-to-day decisions.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, this study employed an inductive approach to allow themes to emerge directly from participant narratives. This method was particularly valuable for capturing the nuanced and context-specific experiences of Black parents raising sons in urban areas. Rather than imposing predetermined categories, the inductive approach allowed themes such as fear of systemic injustice, proactive racial education, and the role of community to emerge organically from the data. This method ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the lived realities of participants and centered voices that are often marginalized in dominant parenting research. By avoiding the constraints of preexisting theories or assumptions, the inductive process provided a more authentic understanding of how Black parents navigate raising young men in urban contexts, experiences shaped by deeply personal and complex encounters with race, identity, and structural inequity.

As stated previously, thematic analysis was employed, and their recommended procedures were followed to analyze the data. After each interview was recorded, I reviewed it and saved it to a private file. Each file was labeled P1–P10 and then transcribed from the audio. At the end of each transcript, I recorded my reflections about the interview. This practice added a reflective and educational component to the research. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, I repeatedly read the transcripts to examine similarities and discrepancies thoroughly. I then combined the data and reviewed it for patterns that could result in themes.

In the second phase, initial codes were generated manually by systematically

identifying data features relevant to the research question, such as protective parenting strategies, racial socialization, fear of police encounters, and community support networks. In the third phase, related codes were grouped to develop preliminary themes that captured shared meanings across participants. For example, codes relating to “preparing sons for bias” and “having ‘the talk’” were grouped under an emerging theme of communication and navigating racism without internalizing it.

The next phase involved reviewing and refining the thematic structure to ensure coherence both within individual themes and across the entire dataset. This process was essential to verify that the themes accurately reflected participants’ experiences on both individual and collective levels. Following this, each theme was clearly defined and named, with careful attention to its scope, boundaries, and internal consistency. As these final phases progressed, the overall cohesion of the findings began to emerge. Key insights were then synthesized and organized thematically to present the study’s findings.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), refers to the strategies researchers use to strengthen a qualitative study’s credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These strategies are designed to increase confidence in the accuracy and integrity of the findings while minimizing the influence of bias or methodological flaws. To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, I engaged in practices consistent with Lincoln and Guba’s recommendations, including regular memo writing, maintaining a reflexive journal, and conducting peer debriefings with my dissertation chair and colleagues throughout the analytic process. These

strategies supported transparency, reduced bias, and ensured that the findings authentically represented participants' perspectives. The following sections detail the specific strategies employed to uphold credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in this study.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of this research, I adhered to established qualitative research guidelines and recommendations. I conducted interviews with 10 participants, using motivational interviewing and positive engagement strategies to promote open dialogue. Although I aimed for each interview to last approximately 45 minutes, some were shorter. The 45-minute benchmark was intended to provide participants with sufficient time to discuss their experiences in depth.

Credibility was further supported through strategies identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I engaged in peer debriefing and regular consultation with my chair, which provided opportunities to review perspectives, procedures, and analytic decisions. This feedback process strengthened confidence in the findings and enhanced the quality of the information gathered. A peer debriefing was conducted midway through the research, allowing for the exchange of ideas and thought processes that enriched the study. In addition, prolonged engagement with participants during the interviews and the use of reflective notes supported the credibility of the analysis by ensuring that the findings remained closely connected to participants' lived experiences.

Transferability

To support the transferability of this study, I provided direct quotations and

illustrative examples from the stories participants shared. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is strengthened through thick description, which allows readers to determine the applicability of findings to other contexts. In line with this principle, I incorporated participants' detailed narratives and direct quotations to capture the depth and richness of their experiences. Providing detailed descriptions of participants enhances transferability, as these quotations not only add depth to the narratives but also highlight the diversity of perspectives within a shared phenomenon.

Dependability

To maximize the dependability of this research, both an audit trail and an external review were employed, consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework for trustworthiness. For the external review, I regularly shared findings and analytic decisions with my dissertation chair, who provided critical feedback and assisted in refining the data analysis process, thereby strengthening the credibility of the study. The audit trail included detailed documentation such as interview notes, personal reflections, and the data analysis protocol, supporting confirmability by providing a transparent account of the analytic process. After each interview, I took reflective notes to evaluate participant responses and to consider ways to enhance the interview process for subsequent participants. This iterative approach fostered continuous improvement and transparency in data collection. Additionally, I incorporated breaks and periods of regrouping throughout the analysis phase to maintain focus, minimize bias, and ensure thorough engagement with the data, further enhancing both credibility and dependability.

Confirmability

Maintaining awareness of my thoughts and biases was always front and center. Although this was a challenging task, I documented and recorded my feelings and reflections throughout the interviews, which allowed me to revisit them and reflect further. Debriefing with my peer and chair provided opportunities to clarify doubts and enhance reflexivity. Self-awareness was key during the interview process, and I also processed my feelings with friends to help deconstruct potential biases. Informal conversations with friends further supported this process, offering additional opportunities to reflect on my experiences and examine emerging biases. This ongoing self-awareness was essential to conducting ethical and credible qualitative interviews.

Results

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed five overarching themes that capture the complex strategies, emotions, and resources Black mothers employ as they prepare their adolescent sons to navigate race-related risks. These themes reflect not only the profound emotional labor and vigilance embedded in motherhood but also the intentional practices of teaching, communication, historical grounding, and community reliance that mothers described across their narratives. Together, the themes illustrate how mothers balanced fear and resilience, caution and pride, personal responsibility and collective support in the daily task of raising Black boys within racially inequitable contexts.

The five themes that emerged were (a) emotional labor and fear in motherhood, which highlights the pervasive anxiety and emotional regulation involved in protecting

sons from racial harm; (b) teaching through experience and building racial pride, which shows how mothers used education, lived experience, cultural traditions, and faith to empower and affirm their children's identities; (c) conversations about racism, discrimination, and "the talk," which emphasizes the central role of communication and culturally specific dialogues in preparing sons for racially charged encounters, particularly with law enforcement; (d) history and safety in navigating racism, which reflects how mothers fused historical consciousness with explicit safety planning to equip their sons with both awareness and resilience; and (e) community and collective responsibility in ensuring safety, which underscores the role of family, community networks, cultural practices, and institutional contexts in shaping safety for young Black boys. These themes, along with their related subthemes, provide a comprehensive picture of how Black mothers engage in protective, educational, and culturally grounded practices to ensure both the survival and flourishing of their sons.

Theme 1: Emotional Labor and Fear in Motherhood

A central theme evident across all interviews was the profound emotional labor and fear that mothers experienced in raising Black adolescent sons in urban contexts. Emotion was not incidental; it was a thread woven consistently through every participant narrative. Among the most prominent emotions expressed was fear, particularly regarding how sons' physical appearance including their skin tone, height, and stature could become potential triggers for racial profiling, discrimination, or even physical harm. An essential aspect of this emotional labor was the intentional cultivation of emotional intelligence, both in themselves and in their sons, as a means of navigating the fears and

uncertainties of raising Black boys in racially hostile contexts. Mothers recognized that survival required more than compliance or awareness; it demanded the ability to regulate emotions, interpret others' behaviors, and respond strategically to potentially threatening situations. As P6 emphasized, "Teaching them emotional intelligence is survival—it's not optional for us." This statement reflects how mothers viewed emotional intelligence not as an abstract skill, but as a critical form of protection and resilience.

By modeling emotional regulation, mothers taught their sons how to manage fear without becoming immobilized by it. They emphasized the importance of composure in encounters with authority figures, self-awareness in social situations, and empathy in navigating interpersonal relationships. Emotional intelligence was thus framed as both a shield and a tool: it helped sons preserve their dignity in the face of discrimination and empowered them to respond with discernment rather than internalizing feelings of inferiority. In this way, emotional intelligence became a vital extension of maternal emotional labor, allowing mothers to transform their fears into actionable strategies for resilience and survival.

Mothers often described living in a state of heightened vigilance, carrying a persistent anxiety about whether their sons would be safe while engaging in everyday activities. Even routine situations, such as going to school, attending social events, or driving, were perceived as laden with potential risk. As one participant explained: "Yes, mostly because of their sizes and past experiences. We can't pretend fear isn't there. I tell my children it's okay to feel it, but we must learn how to move through it" (P1). This statement reflects the tension between acknowledging fear and teaching resilience.

The language of fear, with words like scared, nervous, and afraid, surfaced repeatedly across the transcripts. For some mothers, fear crystallized around the possibility that their sons might never return home safely. P2 voiced this worry with striking clarity: "...the fear that I have of raising a black boy in the inner city." She added: "My greatest fear was that my sons might not return home safely." To mitigate these anxieties, she stressed the importance of instilling structure and awareness, explaining that she tries to "drill the importance" of making it home each night. This emphasis on routines underscores how fear translated into concrete parenting strategies aimed at protecting sons.

Another participant echoed the theme of vigilance in her day-to-day parenting: "let me know where you are, or let someone know, or things like that, because you never know what may happen" (P3). These rules and reminders illustrate how maternal fear often manifests as constant monitoring and heightened supervision. The emotional toll of this vigilance was also repeatedly described. Mothers expressed that their parenting required not only physical oversight but also continuous emotional regulation, balancing their own fears while managing their children's emotions. P4 highlighted this dual responsibility: "My biggest job is making sure my kids know their feelings are valid, even when the world tries to silence them." Here, maternal fear becomes intertwined with emotional labor, as mothers validate their sons' experiences while also carrying their own burdens of worry and trauma.

The interviews further revealed that this work extends beyond moments of crisis, becoming a persistent psychosocial strain. Mothers described absorbing their children's

pain, reframing negative experiences, and constantly scanning for potential threats. This aligns with the notion of emotional labor: the invisible, ongoing effort to manage feelings both one's own and others' within unequal social structures. While fear was pervasive, it was not the only emotional dimension of motherhood that emerged. Mothers also expressed pride and cautious optimism for their children's futures. Some spoke with hope about their sons' potential to thrive despite systemic challenges. One participant reflected that part of her responsibility was to balance fear with encouragement, ensuring her sons remained ambitious and resilient: "Most times, I get scared, especially when he's out there alone, but I strongly believe he's strong enough, and I'm training him to be strong...to prepare him for this very scary world" (P2). This sentiment reveals the delicate balance between preparing sons for racialized risks and nurturing their confidence and dreams.

Together, these accounts show that raising Black adolescent sons involves far more than everyday parental concern. It requires mothers to constantly navigate the intersection of fear, vigilance, hope, and resilience. The emotional burden is profound: mothers must anticipate racial risks, prepare their children to face them, and simultaneously maintain their sons' self-esteem and sense of belonging. In doing so, they take on extraordinary emotional labor, reflecting both the resilience of Black mothers and the systemic injustices that necessitate such vigilance.

Theme 2: Teaching Through Experience and Building Racial Pride

Another theme that was generated across the interviews was the way mothers used education, cultural pride, and their own lived experiences to prepare their sons for

race-related risks. Rather than relying solely on warnings or restrictions, participants described parenting as a process of empowerment through knowledge and identity affirmation. They drew on history, personal narratives, cultural traditions, and faith to build resilience in their children while fostering a strong sense of pride in being Black.

Subtheme 2.1. Education as Empowerment

Education was consistently described as one of the most effective tools for preparing sons to navigate racialized realities. Mothers used both formal and informal educational resources, including films, newspapers, historical accounts, Black history teachings, and current events, as strategies to raise awareness and promote resilience. P2 explained,

Oh, through education, through education, movies, books...my grandparents lived through a lot. They had newspaper clippings and articles of the L.A. riots and all the other things that occurred. I was able to show this to my children and be like, hey, look, this is history.

P5 stated:

Yes, I think it's important to talk about not necessarily things that will happen but how history presents itself today. So many things are the way they are now because of the sacrifices people made back then. I talk about segregation, MLK, and slavery, along with speeches and Black History Month. I teach them history. I teach them about current events. And then through those situations, they're able to make choices based upon that.

Similarly, P7 emphasized, "I'm very big on teaching them history. I teach them about

current events. And then through those situations, they're able to make choices based upon that.”

These accounts reveal how education functioned as empowerment, giving children intellectual tools to interpret discrimination, contextualize injustice, and recognize resilience in their ancestry. Education was not just about academics, but about survival, dignity, and agency in the face of racism.

Subtheme 2.2. Lived and Cultural Resources as Teaching Tools

In addition to formal education, mothers frequently relied on their own lived experiences of racism, as well as cultural and spiritual resources, to prepare their sons. These stories and practices were framed as teaching tools: ways to show children how to cope with discrimination, affirm their identities, and remain grounded in pride despite systemic barriers.

Mothers described narrating incidents of discrimination to model resilience. P6, for instance, recounted being humiliated in a store and then using the experience to teach her children that they should “never feel less of themselves, no matter the circumstance.” P8 reflected similarly, “For me, since I’ve already had experiences of what happened and how I handled it, I teach my son to be confident in his identity and to handle situations where he might be treated unfairly.” These accounts demonstrate how personal memories of trauma were reframed into survival lessons for the next generation.

Faith and culture were also central resources. Mothers often blended lessons about racism with affirmations rooted in spirituality and heritage. P7 explained,

First of all, I have to let him know that racism, or whatever issue he’s going to

face, is always going to come up. I have to build up his faith for him to be able to believe in himself and stand up for himself...And then also, I use history and religion, the Bible, to talk to him.

This weaving of lived experiences, cultural traditions, and spiritual practices shows how mothers drew on the full spectrum of their identities and histories to prepare their sons. Teaching resilience was not limited to warnings about racism, it included affirmations of worth, grounding in heritage, and emotional tools to survive and thrive.

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate how mothers combined education, lived experience, cultural identity, and spirituality to prepare their sons for the realities of racism. Education became a tool for empowerment, while lived and cultural resources became teaching tools for survival and pride. Through these strategies, mothers not only prepared their sons for discriminatory encounters but also built a foundation of dignity, resilience, and confidence. This theme illustrates how Black mothers intentionally constructed resilience through knowledge and identity, counteracting systemic racism with narratives of empowerment.

Theme 3. Conversations About Racism, Discrimination, and “The Talk”

A major theme across all interviews was the centrality of communication in how mothers prepared their sons to navigate racism. Communication was defined by participants as the exchange of ideas, words, and feelings that allowed them to address racially charged situations directly while fostering resilience and awareness. These dialogues took multiple forms, ranging from everyday conversations about racism to transparent sharing of personal experiences to culturally specific safety planning known

as ‘the talk.’ Together, these conversations were described as both protective and empowering, functioning as a primary tool of survival in racially hostile contexts.

Mothers consistently reported ongoing conversations with their sons about race, racism, and unfair treatment. These exchanges often occurred in response to real-life events or questions raised by the children themselves. Such dialogues provided a safe space to validate feelings while also teaching practical ways to recognize and interpret racial dynamics. These discussions frequently moved beyond validation to practical preparation. Mothers provided concrete advice on how to recognize racism, interpret microaggressions, and maintain composure in challenging situations. For example, P8 recalled,

When my oldest son was about nine, I said, hey, there’s gonna be a time where you’re going to be faced with the police, and this is what I need you to do to come home safely...this is how he needs to behave and this is what needs to come out of it.

These conversations combined foresight with survival planning, underscoring how preparation for racist encounters began early in their sons’ lives.

Participants also described the tension between transparency and protection. Some mothers chose to share their personal experiences of racism in order to provide lessons and model resilience. Others deliberately withheld details to avoid preconditioning their children to fear or despair. P7 noted that although she valued solid communication with her children, she refrained from telling her own stories to prevent “preconditioning them to negative situations.” Similarly, P9 highlighted her choice to focus on hope and

problem-solving rather than trauma when speaking with her son. This dynamic revealed the complexity of maternal communication, as mothers balanced honesty with a protective instinct.

Subtheme 3.1. “The Talk” as Safety Planning

All participants described engaging in a culturally specific set of conversations known as ‘the talk, a rite of passage in many Black families. This conversation focused on preparing sons for potential interactions with law enforcement by teaching strategies for de-escalation, compliance, and survival. Mothers provided explicit instructions such as “keep your hands in sight,” “don’t move too fast,” or “call me immediately if stopped.”

For example, P5 explained: “I’ve had that talk with him more than once. I always tell him, ‘If the police pull you over, don’t move too fast. Don’t talk back. Just get home. That’s all I want—you home.’” Similarly, P2 described her approach,

I don’t want to instill fear into these ideas, these choice steps, or actions. I don’t want to scare him with them. I try my best to give him advice and actual transparency. Open conversations go a long way for us here. That is the best way for us and it is working thus far. I don’t instill fear; I instill respect.

While the specific wording varied, the underlying purpose of ‘the talk’ was consistent: to protect children from harm and ensure their safe return home. Mothers noted that these conversations often deepened and became more explicit as children matured, reflecting both the growing risks their sons faced and the urgency of ensuring survival.

Through everyday dialogues, preparation for encounters, transparency versus protection, and the culturally specific rite of ‘the talk,’ Black mothers positioned communication as their primary strategy for preparing their sons to navigate racism. These conversations were not casual exchanges but deliberate acts of survival planning, rooted in both fear and love. They validated feelings, transmitted cultural history, and taught compliance strategies in potentially life-threatening encounters. Communication thus emerged as both a protective mechanism and a profound emotional labor, encapsulating the resilience, vigilance, and care at the heart of Black motherhood.

Theme 4: History and Safety in Navigating Racism

A defining concern across all interviews was how to prepare Black adolescent sons for survival in a world that too often perceives them as threats. Mothers spoke not only of immediate safety, ensuring their sons returned home alive and unharmed, but also of the long-term project of resilience, rooted in history, culture, and emotional intelligence. Safety and history were intertwined, both functioning as tools of survival and empowerment. Mothers lived with persistent fear, heightened by the reality of racial profiling, wrongful accusations, and community violence. P5 voiced this anxiety bluntly,

I do. Statistically, Black boys are at risk for this. Number one in that category for being racially profiled. It does come with a lot of fear when I send them to school or bus stop, I am very fearful of their safety. I also can't control every person he encounters, so there is fear and anxiety.

To address these fears, mothers engaged in explicit safety planning. These strategies included rehearsing scenarios, teaching sons to remain calm, keep their hands

visible, and comply with authority in dangerous situations. Yet participants were intentional about not letting fear dominate their children's worldviews. P4 expressed this balance, "I don't want them to assume race is everything."

This tension, between vigilance and hope, was sustained by historical consciousness. Every mother in the study referenced the legacy of slavery and systemic racism as part of her parenting framework. History was not abstract; it was lived, embodied, and passed down. P2 described showing her children intergenerational artifacts:

My grandparents...they had newspaper clippings and articles of, like, the L.A. riots and all the other things that occurred in life to where I was able to show this to my children and be like, hey, look, this is, um, this is what happened...this is history.

For others, connecting past injustices to current events was a way of contextualizing sons' lived realities. P6 reflected, "I teach them about current events. And then through those situations, they're able to make choices based upon that." Similarly, P9 emphasized the importance of weaving history into everyday teaching, "Yes, okay. I'm very big on teaching them history. I teach them about current events. And then through those situations, they're able to make choices based upon that."

While some emphasized that racism has evolved from overt forms of violence and segregation to more covert structural inequalities, others pointed out that, despite surface-level progress, many aspects of racial oppression have remained deeply embedded and unchanged. History within the Black community was highlighted as an important tool for

preparing children. By teaching about segregation, slavery, civil rights struggles, and ongoing forms of injustice, mothers prepared their sons to recognize that racism was not a personal failure but part of systemic oppression. At the same time, they emphasized the sacrifices and achievements of Black leaders and communities, cultivating pride and hope alongside vigilance.

Together, these accounts demonstrate how safety and history were fused into a single survival strategy. Mothers protected their sons by preparing them for everyday risks while grounding them in the resilience of their ancestors. Safety became more than physical protection; it encompassed emotional and cultural resilience, fortified by historical consciousness. In this way, Black mothers transformed fear into knowledge and vigilance into empowerment, equipping the next generation to survive and thrive in a society marked by enduring racial inequities.

Theme 5: Community and Collective Responsibility in Ensuring Safety

Safety emerged as one of the most urgent and emotionally charged concerns across all interviews, shaping nearly every aspect of how Black mothers parent their sons. For these mothers, safety was not only about physical protection but also encompassed emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions. Raising Black boys in environments shaped by systemic racism, community violence, and institutional bias meant living with constant vigilance. Mothers often described the profound emotional labor of shielding their children while simultaneously coping with their own fear, anxiety, and stress.

Yet, mothers emphasized that safety could not be achieved in isolation. Raising Black sons was framed as a collective responsibility sustained by families, churches,

neighborhoods, and broader community networks. The idea that “it takes a village” was invoked repeatedly, underscoring that community members shared in the responsibility of preparing boys to navigate racialized realities. P10 highlighted the importance of broader networks in providing role models and affirmations of belonging, while P5 described how cultural events and traditions reinforced her children’s pride and identity. These community resources served as protective factors, reminding sons that they were not alone but part of a larger collective invested in their survival and flourishing.

Safety, therefore, became intertwined with advocacy and cultural continuity. Mothers noted that extended family members and church leaders often reinforced lessons about vigilance, respect, and situational awareness. P3 illustrated this tension between fear and preparation,

So, I can only tell him about the fear that I have of raising a Black boy in the city and what that looks like. And you know what my fears are, my hopes and my dreams are for him, not only the fears, but, you know, he needs to be aware of his surroundings.

These conversations were both protective and empowering, embedding safety planning within a collective ethos of care. At the same time, participants expressed frustration with institutional shortcomings that left their sons especially vulnerable. Schools often lacked meaningful diversity programs, and police officers frequently lacked adequate training to avoid racial profiling. These failures placed disproportionate responsibility on mothers and community networks to protect Black boys from systemic threats. As P4 explained, while she taught her children to remain vigilant, she did not

want them to “assume race is everything,” reflecting the emotional tightrope of preparing sons without overwhelming them with fear.

Historical and cultural memory were also interwoven into this theme, positioning safety as not just immediate but generational. Mothers connected stories of slavery, segregation, and civil rights struggles with current realities of police brutality and racial profiling. P2’s use of newspaper clippings from the L.A. riots illustrated how cultural memory was passed down not only within families but also through broader communities. In this way, safety was framed as part of a larger continuum of resistance and resilience, where history provided both warnings and sources of strength.

Ultimately, community, collective responsibility, and safety formed a single, interdependent theme. Safety was the immediate goal, ensuring Black sons returned home each day alive and unharmed, but it was reinforced by community networks, cultural pride, and advocacy. For these mothers, protecting their children was not a solitary act but a community-sustained project, one deeply rooted in history, collective resilience, and a determination to resist systemic oppression.

Summary

This qualitative study explored how Black mothers in urban areas prepare their adolescent sons for race-related risks. Through in-depth interviews, the research revealed intentional parenting strategies grounded in historical awareness, cultural pride, and direct communication. The findings of this study demonstrate that Black motherhood in urban contexts is characterized by extraordinary emotional labor and vigilance. As shown in theme 1, emotional labor and fear in motherhood, mothers consistently described

living with persistent fear for their sons' safety, rooted in the realities of racial profiling, misrecognition, and community violence. This fear was not passive; it translated into proactive monitoring, emotional regulation, and daily practices designed to protect children while affirming their feelings. Mothers balanced anxiety with pride and cautious optimism, ensuring that their sons were prepared for racialized risks without losing confidence in themselves or their futures.

Building on this foundation of vigilance, mothers turned to teaching, communication, and cultural grounding as central tools of preparation. Theme 2, teaching through experience and building racial pride, illustrated how education, lived experiences, cultural traditions, and spirituality were mobilized to affirm identity and instill resilience. Theme 3, conversations about racism, discrimination, and "the talk," showed that communication was the cornerstone of these efforts. Mothers engaged their sons in ongoing dialogues, balancing transparency with protection, while also engaging in the culturally specific rite of "the talk" to prepare them for interactions with law enforcement. These practices reveal how maternal teaching extended beyond academics into survival, dignity, and empowerment.

Finally, mothers situated their parenting within broader historical and communal contexts. Theme 4, history and safety in navigating racism, highlighted how safety planning was fused with historical consciousness, providing sons with both practical strategies and cultural grounding. Theme 5, community and collective responsibility in ensuring safety, emphasized that protecting Black sons extended beyond individual parenting and required collective action. Safety was framed as not only physical but also

emotional, psychological, and cultural, shaped by systemic racism, community violence, and institutional bias. Mothers described the emotional labor of vigilance while relying on extended families, churches, and community networks to reinforce resilience and pride. Historical and cultural memory, such as stories of segregation or civil rights struggles, were woven into safety lessons. This collective framework underscored that survival and flourishing depended on both community support and advocacy. The next chapter will present an interpretation of the findings, discuss their significance and limitations, and outline recommendations, implications for positive social change, and the study's conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the ways in which Black mothers prepare their adolescent sons to face race-related risks in society. The study involved 10 Black mothers residing in urban settings who were raising Black male adolescents. This focus on gender and age was intentional, reflecting the disproportionate exposure of Black boys to community violence and encounters with law enforcement (Jackson et al., 2020). The investigation highlighted the multifaceted challenges these mothers confront, including economic pressures, parenting demands, and the broader responsibility of equipping their children to navigate systemic racism and its impact on daily life.

The findings of this study revealed that Black mothers raising adolescent sons in urban contexts engage in a multifaceted process of preparation that blends emotional labor, cultural pride, communication, and safety planning. Central to their parenting was the pervasive fear of racial profiling and violence, which shaped daily routines and vigilance. Mothers used education, lived experiences, history, and faith to build resilience and affirm racial identity, while open dialogues, including the culturally specific “talk” about police encounters, served as vital strategies for survival. Historical consciousness and community networks further grounded their practices, highlighting both the individual and collective dimensions of preparing sons to navigate systemic racism while fostering confidence, resilience, and hope. Chapter 5 offers an interpretation and discussion of the study’s findings, acknowledges its limitations, provides recommendations for future research, explores implications for positive social change,

and concludes the study.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from this research reveal and expand upon the ongoing misconceptions that parents of Black children endure. It provides valuable insight into the unique struggles each parent faces. Additionally, the study highlights the strength and determination of mothers striving to keep their children safe, embodying the sacrifices they make to protect their families.

Theme 1: Emotional Labor and Fear in Motherhood

The finding that Black mothers experience profound emotional labor and persistent fear in raising their sons aligns with and extends a well-established body of research on racial socialization. Hughes et al. (2006) identified preparation for bias and cultural socialization as central strategies parents use to equip children for racialized contexts, noting that such practices are highly salient in African American families. The mothers in this study echoed this emphasis but added a sharper dimension: the necessity of cultivating emotional intelligence as a survival skill. For them, teaching composure, empathy, and emotional regulation was not merely developmental but a protective response to racialized violence. This builds on Anderson and Stevenson's (2019) *RECAST* model, which theorizes that racial socialization can buffer the traumatic effects of discriminatory racial encounters when paired with coping self-efficacy.

The mothers' insistence that "teaching them emotional intelligence is survival—it's not optional" (P6) exemplifies how emotional regulation becomes a racialized coping strategy that goes beyond compliance and extends into psychological resilience.

Furthermore, the daily vigilance described by mothers in this study mirrors findings that African American youth frequently encounter both subtle and overt racial discrimination, which has well-documented effects on stress, anxiety, and diminished well-being (English et al., 2020; Neblett et al., 2006). Mothers' heightened monitoring of their sons' whereabouts (e.g., "let me know where you are...because you never know what may happen") directly reflects the anticipatory stress linked to constant exposure to discrimination and racial profiling.

This anticipatory stress is consistent with research documenting that families often engage in racial socialization reactively, after discriminatory events occur (Lee et al., 2020), but this study adds nuance by showing that mothers also engage proactively, embedding vigilance and emotional management into everyday routines. Importantly, the findings extend the literature by showing how emotional labor is not only about transmitting knowledge of racial barriers but also about managing a dual emotional load: mothers regulate their own fear while simultaneously validating and guiding their sons' emotions. This confirms Anderson and Stevenson's argument that racial socialization is a bidirectional and process-oriented practice rather than a one-time transmission of knowledge. By reframing fear into structured practices and emotional strategies, mothers transform their own anxieties into actionable lessons, thereby reinforcing both survival and resilience.

Theme 2: Teaching Through Experience and Building Racial Pride

Education emerged as a powerful theme throughout the interviews, serving as both a tool for survival and a strategy for empowerment. For Black mothers raising

young Black men, education extended beyond academic achievement to include critical consciousness, cultural identity, and awareness of systemic inequities. Mothers described education as a form of resistance, equipping their sons with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate a society in which Black boys are often criminalized, misunderstood, or undervalued.

Participants emphasized the importance of instilling a deep understanding of both formal and informal education. Formal education was viewed as a pathway to opportunity and upward mobility, while informal education, rooted in history, identity, and lived experiences, was seen as essential for helping their sons make sense of the racialized world around them. Although formal education could open doors, informal education provided the interpretive tools necessary to survive and resist the realities their sons would inevitably face. This approach reflects culturally responsive education frameworks, which center students' lived experiences and affirm their cultural identities (Gay, 2018). In addition, Warren and Coles (2020) emphasized that education grounded in racial awareness enhances not only academic success but also socio-emotional development for Black youth facing systemic barriers.

Several mothers underscored the importance of teaching lessons about Black history, pride, and resilience, content often absent from mainstream curricula. They saw themselves as their sons' first teachers, responsible for building self-worth and nurturing a critical lens through which to interpret society. This practice aligns with research on ethnic-racial socialization, which shows that cultural pride reinforcement fosters positive racial identity and helps buffer against the negative effects of discrimination (Hughes et

al., 2006).

Mothers also expressed a desire for their sons to become academically successful and socially aware, capable of advocating for themselves and others in the face of injustice. By promoting both scholastic achievement and racial literacy, they positioned their children to thrive, not merely survive, within systems that have historically marginalized them. This dual emphasis resonates with Carter's (2007) race-based traumatic stress theory, which highlights how repeated exposure to racism can cause psychological harm and emotional injury. By equipping their sons with the tools to critically analyze and name racism, mothers sought to reduce the internalization of racial trauma while fostering clarity, self-worth, and agency.

Similarly, Ladson-Billings (2021) emphasized that culturally relevant pedagogy is critical in enabling Black children to resist systemic oppression through education. Anderson et al. (2022) likewise noted that Black parents frequently use racial-ethnic socialization strategies to prepare their children not only for academic settings but also for racialized social interactions. These mothers' combined emphasis on academic excellence and critical consciousness reflects a transformative parenting approach rooted in both resistance and hope.

By assuming this educational role within the home, mothers sought to fill gaps left by formal schooling and ensure their children possessed both historical knowledge and the confidence to navigate racially challenging contexts. Throughout this process, mothers stressed the importance of maintaining communication that was transparent, clear, and effective, thereby ensuring their sons' understanding and readiness to face the

realities of racism.

Theme 3: Conversations About Racism, Discrimination, and “The Talk”

Effective communication emerged as a vital theme in the interviews, particularly in preparing Black children, especially sons, for racially charged encounters. For Black mothers, communication is more than dialogue; it is an intentional tool used to guide, protect, and educate their children about how to navigate a society where racism is both persistent and, at times, life-threatening. Through open and transparent conversations, families were able to engage in vulnerable exchanges that fostered emotional growth, mutual understanding, and resilience.

Participants described communication as both strategic and emotionally sensitive. These conversations, commonly referred to as “the talk,” are deeply rooted in racial socialization and designed to prepare children for potential encounters with bias, profiling, or police violence (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Through calm, clear, and culturally attuned communication, mothers sought to instill awareness and self-control in their sons, helping them respond in ways that prioritize safety while preserving dignity.

Sullivan et al. (2021) noted that Black parents’ heightened worries compared to White parents may explain their greater likelihood of engaging in such conversations. Research consistently supports the role of racially socialized communication as a critical protective factor. According to Hughes et al. (2006), Black parents frequently use racial socialization practices that emphasize cultural pride, awareness of discrimination, and coping strategies for racism. These practices, often embedded in everyday dialogue, contribute to stronger psychological and behavioral outcomes for Black youth. Moreover,

Anderson and Stevenson (2019) found that communication styles combining emotional coaching with cultural messaging better equip children to regulate their responses to racial stressors.

In this study, mothers described their efforts to remain calm and factual when discussing racially sensitive topics, even when their own emotions were heightened. They emphasized preparing their sons without instilling fear or hopelessness. This approach reflects a careful balance between emotional honesty and developmental sensitivity, aimed at equipping children with resilience rather than despair. Similarly, Hughes et al. (2006) concluded that frequent and intentional communication around race within the home promotes positive identity formation and equips children with tools to cope with discrimination. Ultimately, communication within the home plays a central role in racial coping strategies and identity development. Though often difficult, these conversations serve as lifelines for Black youth, enabling them to navigate a racially charged world with clarity, self-awareness, and strength.

Theme 4: History and Safety in Navigating Racism

History emerged as a central theme in the narratives of Black mothers raising young Black men. Participants often reflected on how historical and generational patterns of racism, oppression, and resistance informed their parenting strategies. For many, the past was not distant or abstract; it was ever-present, shaping their understanding of the risks their sons faced and guiding how they communicated the realities of navigating a racially charged society. Stevenson (2014) underscores that culturally relevant approaches to racial socialization that incorporate historical context can promote both

racial pride and psychological resilience in Black youth.

This historical awareness extended beyond landmark events such as slavery, segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement. Many mothers also referenced more recent and emotionally charged developments, including the rise of the BLM movement, which emerged in response to ongoing violence and systemic injustices faced by Black individuals, particularly at the hands of law enforcement. The BLM movement has become a significant point of reference for many Black families in framing conversations about racial justice and safety (Edwards-Bianchi et al., 2025). However, participants in this study expressed varied perspectives: while some mothers viewed movements like BLM as valuable for providing language and context to discuss contemporary racial issues, others felt such movements had limited influence on their parenting, citing the fleeting nature of public attention and the persistence of systemic inequities.

Teaching their sons about Black excellence, cultural resilience, and resistance movements was regarded as just as important as preparing them for potential dangers. Anderson and Stevenson (2019) highlight that historical knowledge can inspire a sense of purpose and pride in young Black people, countering narratives of victimhood and inferiority. This dual function of history, as both a warning and a source of strength, illustrates how mothers sought to foster critical consciousness in their sons.

By embedding history into everyday conversations, Black mothers transformed the past into a practical guide for the present. This theme demonstrates how parenting in Black communities often involves intentional engagement with history, not only as a legacy of struggle but as a roadmap for survival, empowerment, and self-worth.

Participants also described the deliberate efforts Black mothers make to teach their sons how to navigate racism without internalizing its harmful effects. Mothers spoke about the emotional tightrope of preparing their children to recognize and respond to racism while simultaneously preserving their self-worth, cultural pride, and mental well-being. This delicate balance reflects a core component of racial socialization: cultivating awareness without fostering hopelessness or internalized inferiority. Hughes et al. (2006) and Anderson and Stevenson (2019) note that messages emphasizing cultural pride and resilience, alongside preparation for bias, are linked to healthier psychological outcomes and stronger racial identity among Black youth.

This aligns with findings by Neblett et al. (2019), who highlight that adaptive racial socialization messages help youth develop racial pride and resilience while mitigating internalized racism. Similarly, Hughes et al. (2006) emphasize that effective racial socialization involves acknowledging the realities of discrimination while fostering positive racial identity and coping skills, thereby protecting mental health. These parenting strategies are critical in promoting psychological well-being and empowering Black youth to resist the detrimental psychological impacts of racism.

Mothers in this study expressed deep concern about how repeated exposure to racism, whether through personal experiences, school-based bias, media portrayals, or systemic inequities, could lead their sons to question their value. One mother explained, “I have to teach him what’s out there without letting him think that it defines who he is.” These protective strategies align with research showing that Black parents often engage in racial socialization practices to prepare their children for bias while fostering resilience

and positive self-identity (Hughes et al., 2006; Neblett et al., 2012).

Many mothers also acknowledged the psychological toll that constant vigilance can take on their children. In response, they incorporated emotional intelligence into their parenting, teaching their sons to name their emotions, seek safe outlets, and resist self-blame in the face of discrimination. This reflects an intentional effort to disrupt cycles of internalized oppression and promote psychological safety. Dunbar et al. (2017) support this by noting that Black parents frequently emphasize emotional regulation and coping skills as part of racial socialization, which can mitigate the negative psychological effects of discrimination.

This theme demonstrates that Black mothers are not only preparing their sons to survive racism but also to understand it in ways that empower rather than diminish them. By fostering both awareness and resilience, these mothers actively disrupt the transmission of racial trauma and promote self-love, dignity, and critical consciousness. Prior research has similarly shown that parental racial socialization can buffer the psychological impact of discrimination while fostering positive racial identity (Anderson & Stevenson., 2019).

Theme 5: Community and Collective Responsibility in Ensuring Safety

Safety emerged as one of the most emotionally charged and universally shared themes among participants. For Black mothers raising young Black men, the concept of safety extended far beyond the physical; it encompassed psychological, emotional, and social dimensions shaped by a historical legacy of racial violence and contemporary systemic threats, as well as their own personal negative experiences. Gaylord-Harden et

al. (2018) report that research echoes these findings, showing that Black parents frequently frame safety not only in terms of avoiding physical harm but also in preserving their children's mental health.

This concern shaped how participants approached nearly every aspect of parenting. From the clothes their sons wore to the tone of voice they used in public, to how they responded during interactions with law enforcement, safety functioned as a guiding principle. One participant expressed particular fear about the size of her 15-year-old son, noting how his appearance could be misinterpreted as threatening. Mothers described the need to teach their sons how to "move carefully" in the world, especially when navigating predominantly White or heavily policed spaces. These lessons were conveyed through direct, intentional conversations rooted in both personal experience and communal knowledge.

This approach aligns with findings by Anderson et al. (2022), who describe how Black mothers engage in protective racial socialization practices aimed at reducing their children's exposure to racialized violence. Similarly, Hughes et al. (2006) note that parents often tailor their socialization messages to prepare children for the realities of racial bias and systemic threats. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2011) highlight the psychological burden known as racial battle fatigue, which necessitates such precautionary parenting strategies to help Black boys manage stressors related to race and safety.

Research further underscores the urgency of these concerns. According to Goff et al. (2014), Black boys are often perceived as older and less innocent than their White

peers, increasing the likelihood of harsh treatment by authority figures. This societal perception contributes to an environment in which Black youth must constantly regulate their behavior to avoid being seen as a threat.

Importantly, safety was not just about avoidance or fear; it was also about empowerment. Mothers spoke of helping their sons develop situational awareness, confidence, and the ability to advocate for themselves when appropriate. This emphasis aligns with Anderson and Stevenson's (2019) findings that racial socialization processes, when coupled with emotional regulation, can improve the coping skills and emotional health of Black youth in the face of racialized threats.

Finally, the theme of safety carried a profound emotional burden for the mothers themselves. Many expressed the stress of having to maintain composure while navigating their fears, knowing that their sons depended on them for guidance and stability. This emotional labor, though exhausting, was embraced as an act of love, resistance, and protection.

Conceptual Framework

As previously stated, the conceptual framework of this study was based on Carter's (2007) race-based traumatic stress and Harrell's (2000) racism-related stress conceptualizations. These scholars identified race-based stress as emerging from experiences of racism that are perceived to exceed individual or collective coping resources, thereby threatening the well-being of individuals or groups. Their theories provide critical lenses for understanding the experiences of Black mothers and the strategies they employ to protect and prepare their sons in the face of systemic racial

oppression.

Carter (2007) conceptualized race-based traumatic stress as the emotional injury experienced by individuals of color as a result of encounters with racism, whether overt or subtle. Unlike general trauma models, which center primarily on physical threat or life-threatening danger, Carter's framework highlights the cumulative psychological toll of racial discrimination, which may manifest as anxiety, depression, anger, shame, or intrusive thoughts. According to this theory, stress reactions occur when an act of racism is perceived as violating an individual's sense of safety, dignity, or humanity. Racism thus functions as a chronic traumatic stressor, producing symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), though these reactions are often unrecognized or minimized within dominant societal narratives.

Similarly, Harrell (2000) proposed a multidimensional model of racism-related stress, identifying racism as a distinct and persistent source of psychological distress in the lives of people of color. This framework underscores that racism is not experienced solely at the interpersonal level but is also embedded in systemic and historical processes. Harrell emphasized that emotional responses to racism, including fear, anger, helplessness, and exhaustion, are legitimate psychological reactions that require acknowledgment and coping strategies. Importantly, she noted that racism-related stress can negatively affect cognitive functioning, physical health, and identity development over time.

Taken together, these frameworks validate the psychological impact of racism as a legitimate form of trauma and chronic stress. They provide a foundation for

understanding how Black mothers internalize, resist, and respond to racialized threats, not only for themselves but also in the ways they prepare their children to do the same. Saleem et al. (2020) also identified racism as both a source of race-based traumatic stress and a chronic stressor with intergenerational effects, underscoring the necessity of culturally grounded coping strategies.

Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Black mothers preparing their sons for race-related risks, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and limited to ten participants, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Black mothers. Small qualitative samples are common in exploratory research but require cautious interpretation of results (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Additionally, participants were primarily recruited from a specific geographic area, which may have shaped the cultural and social contexts reflected in their narratives.

Second, the study focused exclusively on the perspectives of mothers, without incorporating the voices of the young Black men themselves or other significant caregivers such as fathers, grandparents, or community members. This limits the understanding of how the parenting strategies are received, interpreted, and applied by the sons. Prior research highlights the importance of including multiple family and community perspectives when examining racial socialization, as children's interpretations and outcomes can differ from parental intentions (Neblett et al., 2010).

Finally, the data relied on self-reported experiences, which are subject to recall

bias and social desirability bias. Participants may have selectively recalled or presented their experiences in ways that portray themselves positively or align with perceived expectations. Future research should consider triangulating self-reports with additional data sources, such as observational methods or reports from children and other caregivers, to enhance validity (Stenfors et al., 2019).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerge to guide future research aimed at deepening understanding and supporting Black mothers and their sons as they navigate the complexities of racialized experiences. Future studies should include a larger and more diverse sample of Black mothers across different geographic regions, socioeconomic statuses, and family structures. This would allow for examination of how contextual factors influence parenting strategies, racial socialization, and coping mechanisms.

While this study focused on mothers' experiences, exploring the perspectives of young Black men themselves would provide a more holistic understanding of how these parenting strategies impact identity formation, emotional well-being, and responses to racism. Given the importance of emotional intelligence in processing fear and racial stress, longitudinal research could also track how Black youths' emotional regulation and coping skills develop over time and how parental socialization influences these trajectories. Further research should explore the roles of Black fathers, extended family members, and community mentors in supporting Black boys through racialized challenges, comparing and contrasting these influences with maternal approaches.

Future studies might also investigate how contemporary social movements, such as Black Lives Matter, influence Black parents' racial socialization practices, sense of empowerment, and community engagement, including potential differences in perceptions of their lasting impact. Research could focus on developing and evaluating culturally responsive intervention programs aimed at supporting Black parents in fostering resilience, emotional intelligence, and effective communication strategies to mitigate the psychological effects of racism on their children.

Finally, as social media continues to shape racial narratives, future research could examine how digital media consumption influences racial socialization processes and the strategies Black mothers use to prepare their sons to critically engage with online spaces. With the rapid rise of online platforms as sources of news, cultural identity, and peer interaction, it is important to understand both the risks and opportunities they present. Studies might explore how mothers navigate harmful online content such as stereotypes, racialized violence, and misinformation, while also highlighting how they leverage digital spaces for empowerment, education, and community-building. Such work could illuminate new dimensions of racial socialization in the digital era and provide insight into how families adapt traditional practices to a constantly evolving media landscape.

Implications

The findings of this study hold important implications for researchers, practitioners, educators, and policymakers working to support Black families and communities. For researchers, this study highlights the complex and nuanced ways Black mothers engage in racial socialization and emotional coaching to prepare their sons for a

racially charged society. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, incorporating multiple family voices and longitudinal perspectives to better understand the long-term effects of these parenting strategies on youth development and well-being.

Mental health professionals, social workers, and educators must recognize the emotional labor and resilience embedded in Black mothers' parenting approaches. Culturally sensitive interventions that support emotional intelligence, communication skills, and racial identity development can reinforce family strengths and promote healthier coping mechanisms among Black youth facing racial stress. These efforts contribute to positive social change by reducing the psychological toll of racism while fostering resilience and well-being in future generations.

Educational institutions should incorporate culturally relevant anti-racist curricula that affirm Black students' identities and histories. Collaborations between schools and families can empower Black youth by aligning educational messages with the racial socialization practices occurring at home.

Policy efforts must also address systemic inequities that perpetuate racial discrimination and violence, including reforming law enforcement practices and ensuring equitable access to resources. Policies that support Black families, such as funding for community programs and parenting support, can help alleviate some of the burdens Black mothers face in safeguarding their children's safety and well-being.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of viewing Black mothers not only as protectors but also as agents of empowerment who actively equip their sons with the tools to survive and thrive despite systemic barriers. Supporting these mothers through

research-informed policies and practices is critical to fostering resilient, healthy Black communities.

Conclusion

At the heart of this study are the voices of Black mothers, resilient, wise, and determined, who courageously shared their stories and strategies. Their insights reflect not only the pain of navigating racism but also the hope, love, and strength that drive them to protect and empower their sons. These narratives remind us that the personal is profoundly political, and that parenting in the context of racial injustice is both an act of resistance and of care.

Racism remains a pervasive and deeply impactful force, particularly for those who live under its weight. Documenting and amplifying the lived experiences of Black families is not only powerful but essential. This research underscores the reality that despite progress, significant work remains in addressing the racism experienced by marginalized communities. For Black parents, especially mothers raising sons, the challenges of parenting are compounded by the persistent burden of systemic injustice.

Although some may claim that racism has diminished over time, the daily experiences of families navigating racialized barriers often reveal a more painful and complex truth. This disconnect underscores the urgent need for continued advocacy, education, and meaningful policy change. This study seeks to contribute to a growing body of scholarship and dialogue that centers Black voices while advancing strategic and sustained transformation within both policy and practice.

Listening to these stories is not enough; they must inform how we educate,

legislate, and advocate. The voices of these mothers call on researchers, educators, community members, and policymakers to do more, to listen more deeply, and to act more boldly. Their narratives are not just personal accounts but collective calls to action, demanding meaningful change and a long-term commitment to dismantling racial injustice.

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Appendix: Interview Guide

Demographic Questions

1. Your ethnic-self-identification
2. Your age
3. Number of children you have
4. Ages of your children
5. Ethnic self-identification of your children
6. Gender of your children
7. Marital status
8. Shared custody/single parent
9. Which of the following best describes your personal income?
 - i) Less than \$25,000
 - ii) \$25,001-\$45,000
 - iii) \$45,001-\$60,000
 - iv) \$60,001-\$75,000
 - v) \$75,001-\$90,000
 - vi) Over \$90,000

Research Question and Interview Questions

RQ1: How do Black mothers living in urban areas prepare their Black adolescent sons for race-related risks?

1. Tell me about your family and how many live at home.
2. Can you describe the conversations you have with your son about race and racism?

3. How do you address the topic of police interactions with your son?
4. What specific strategies do you use to prepare your son for potential discrimination or racial bias?
5. How do you incorporate your own experiences with racism into your parenting?
 - a. Probes: Tell me how you identify racism.
 - b. Can you share a racist experience you had and how you handled it?
6. Can you share an example of a time when you had to guide your son through a racially charged situation?
7. Do you have any fears regarding parenting or raising Black youth?
8. What support could help you and your child in preparation for race-related risks?
9. How do you foster a sense of racial pride and heritage in your son?
10. What role do community and cultural events play in your approach to parenting?
11. How do you balance preparing your son for racial challenges while also encouraging him to pursue his goals and dreams?
12. In what ways do you think the #BlackLivesMatter movement has influenced your parenting practices?
13. How do you support your son's emotional and mental well-being in the context of racial stressors?
14. What challenges have you faced in trying to protect your son from racial risks, and how have you overcome them?
15. How do you involve other family members or friends in preparing your son for race-related risks?

16. What resources or support systems have been most helpful to you in this process?
17. How do you ensure that your son understands the importance of making safe and responsible choices?
18. How do you talk to your son about the historical context of racism and its impact on his life today?