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Black Moms and "White Motherhood Society": African-American Middle-Class Mothers' Perspectives on Work, Family and Identity

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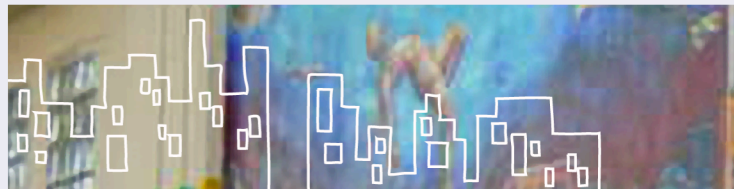
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African-American middle-class mothers have historically been structurally, culturally, and economically excluded from the practices related to hegemonic frameworks of mothering and parenting that have been described and critiqued by family and work life scholars. Collectively these frameworks make three theoretical assumptions: 1) mothers are principally responsible for raising children, 2) working outside of the home conflicts with being a mother and 3) middle-class mothers share beliefs about how to best raise children. Based on interviews with sixty African-American middle-class mothers, I highlight how the experience of mothering is influenced by racially situated identities, ideologies and practices. My findings challenge the view of motherhood as an exclusive endeavor and highlight that working is intrinsically linked to what it means to be a mother in the African-American community. These beliefs about mothering are also accompanied by psychological and tangible supports including encouragement from family to work and the availability of childcare from relatives. Finally, African-American middle-class mothers have additional race-based parenting concerns that relate to developing their children's racial comfort, racial identity, and acumen in interracial and intra-racial social interactions. Overall, these findings suggest that African-American middle-class mothers recognize what I call an "integrated mothering" ideology. This ideology assumes that 1) childcare is a mother-centered, but community-supported activity, 2) working is a duty of motherhood and 3) considerations of race and racism should be consistently present in determining how to best raise children.

Black Moms and "White Motherhood Society":

African-American Middle-Class Mothers' Perspectives on

Work, Family and Identity

The main thing about being a black mom that is probably important to say is not

feeling included in white motherhood society.

--Christine, an African American middle class mother

When Christine talks about "white motherhood society," she is referencing an ideology that is widespread in society and also in family and work-life scholarship. Three theoretical assumptions dominate this scholarship in discussions regarding the relationship between parenting, family and work. The first assumption is the widespread acceptance of the intensive mothering ideology that is tied most closely to the work of Sharon Hays (1999). This ideology assumes that mothers are principally responsible for raising their children and they should be intimately involved with every aspect of their children's development (Hays 1999). The second theoretical assumption is that a mother's decisions about work and family can be captured in a competing spheres framework (Blair-Loy 2003). According to the logic of competing spheres, those mothers who allot more time to work are viewed as having a stronger "work devotion" and those who allot more time to family are viewed as having a stronger "family devotion." The third theoretical assumption is that middle-class parents, and specifically mothers, parent their children using a using a common approach - concerted cultivation (Lareau 2003). Concerted

cultivation emphasizes 1) encouraging children's logical reasoning, 2) developing children's intellectual and physical skills through organized enrichment activities and 3) viewing educational and other institutions in society from an entitlements and service oriented perspective (Lareau 2003). Furthermore, in this conceptualization of parenting, socioeconomic class status trumps racial/ethnic identity in its influence on how children are parented.

These three theoretical assumptions related to motherhood, work/family balance and parenting were derived from research that has primarily focused on the beliefs and experiences of white middle-class mothers and their families. However, African-American middle-class mothers have historically been structurally, culturally, and economically excluded from embracing the practices related to these theories to which these assumptions are connected. Further, this exclusion has had both theoretical and empirical implications for what it means for African-American middle-class mothers to be good mothers, for how mothers approach work and family decisions, and for how mothers approach parenting their children. Thus, I argue that the assumptions related to intensive mothering, competing spheres and concerted cultivation do not adequately capture the cultural prerogatives for all women, and particularly for African-American middle-class mothers.

In this paper, using in-depth interviews with sixty African-American middle-class mothers, I challenge existing family and work-life scholarship by demonstrating how motherhood and parenting practices are not just shaped by class status but are equally shaped by racially situated identities, ideologies and cultural orientations. My findings challenge the assertion that contemporary U.S. mothers are primarily influenced by the intensive mothering ideology's view of what it means to be a good mother (Hays 1999). These findings also challenge the competing spheres paradigm that frames mothers' choices related to work and

family as a zero sum game, such that time allotted to one sphere is a sign of diminished devotion to the other sphere. In addition, I argue that while middle-class parents share common characteristics in certain ways that they approach parenting their children, African-American middle-class mothers' approach to parenting is also shaped by distinct race and class-based concerns that require additional strategies to foster both a middle-class and an African-American identity within their children. Taken together, my findings suggest that African-American middle-class mothers are influenced by a different approach to mothering and parenting that I call the "integrated mothering ideology".

I use the term ideology to capture the ideal and taken-for-granted practices related to motherhood and parenting that are shared by African-American middle-class mothers while simultaneously acknowledging that these practices may not be reflected in the lived experience of all African-American middle-class mothers. The integrated mothering ideology assumes that 1) childcare is a mother-centered, but extended-family and community-supported activity, 2) working outside of the home is a duty of motherhood and 3) considerations of race and racism should be consistently present when making parenting decisions in the efforts to develop their children's racial comfort, racial identity, and acumen in interracial and intra-racial interactions. In this paper, I focus primarily on the third component of the integrated mothering ideology that examines how race impacts parenting decisions, and I include a more limited discussion of the first two components. Specifically, my findings suggest that working is intrinsically linked to what it means to be a good mother in the African-American community. In addition, African-American middle-class mothers have both emotional and tangible supports to work outside of the home including encouragement from family and the availability of childcare from relatives. I also describe how in response to historical and current experiences of racism and segregation

within American society, African-American middle-class mothers have created symbolic and real boundaries intra-racially and between themselves and white mothers to preserve and construct a racially conscious experience of motherhood and address the race specific concerns that frame their approaches to parenting their children.

Literature Review

Variously referred to as the "standard North American family" (Smith 1993), the "cult of domesticity" (Williams 2001), "the family devotion schema" (Blair-Loy 2003), and "intensive mothering" (Hays 1999), dominant frameworks of motherhood have three core tenets in common.   First, these frameworks of traditional motherhood view mothers as principally responsible for raising their children. Second, these frameworks consider working outside of the home as conflicting with being a good mother (Blair-Loy 2003, Hays 1999). Third, scholars have also suggested that middle-class mothers share similar concerns, motivations and strategies when parenting their children. Within this body of scholarship, mothers are implicitly assumed to be white, middle or upper-middle class, stay-at-home mothers who are married within a heterosexual framework in which a man is the principal financial provider (Smith 1993, Hays 1999). This existing scholarship has highlighted the power these hegemonic frameworks of motherhood have had in influencing the beliefs, practices and experiences of mothers in the family, the workplace and other institutions within society. Nonetheless, this scholarship has neglected the variations among mothers in the United States and failed to investigate if these frameworks of motherhood are widely shared across racial and class divisions. This scholarship has also failed to incorporate an intersectional analysis of how class and race shape decisions related to family and work.

Despite the presentation of the nuclear family as the dominant and normative family form for contemporary society, other scholars have noted that extended family networks continue to play a key role in helping many families manage work and family obligations, particularly among racial/ethnic minorities (Sarkisian, Gerena and Gerstel 2007; Lee and Aytac 1998). Scholars have identified the presence of extended family networks within the African-American community that assist mothers with childcare and in managing the demands of work and family (Stack 1974, Collins 2000). Lynet Uttal's (1999) research also demonstrates that African Americans are more likely to prefer kin- extended and immediate family members- to care for their children and that white mothers do not have this same preference, instead preferring to use paid childcare providers for their children. Research has also demonstrated that grandparents are increasingly taking on the role of primary caregiver for their grandchildren. Indeed, in recent years, more than one in ten grandparents have become the primary caregiver for a grandchild for six months or more and many for much longer periods (Fuller-Thomson, Minkler and Driver 1997). In addition, while the nuclear family form has been presented as an adaptation to advanced modern society, research suggests that during the industrial revolution, families that continued to utilize extended family networks fared better than their nuclear family counterparts (Sennett 1970). Thus, while African Americans and a variety of ethnic and racial groups are described as deviating from the ideal nuclear family form, these groups' preferences for extended family formations are widespread and are potentially better suited for managing the work and family challenges prevalent in modern society.

Scholars such as Garey (1999), Kessler-Harris (2003) and Coontz (2000) have also described how the work and family divide that is presented in the literature has been challenged empirically. For example, Anita Garey describes the ways in which women's participation in the

family and in the workplace are interconnected and interwoven such that some women have been able to retain or achieve an identity in the public sphere and maintain an identity in the private sphere (1999). Scholars have also described the reality that poor, working and, even, middle-class white mothers have, indeed, engaged in paid work both inside and outside of the home (Garey 1999, Steedman 1987, Coontz 2000). However, these scholars maintain that these mothers continue to be influenced by dominant frameworks of motherhood and parenting when evaluating and making choices about family and work, even when their actions do not conform to these frameworks' ideal practices (Hays 1999, Blair-Loy 2003). Thus, while some mothers have been able to maintain a presence within the public and private spheres of work and family, they have largely been construed as conflicted in their choice to do so. In addition, while these mothers are described as examples of women who are presently in both spheres, they are also are assumed to be participating in the public sphere of the workplace primarily as a consequence of economic necessity, rather than for other motivations.

Scholars examining race, class and gender within the context of the family have argued that while these frameworks of mothering and parenting may have indeed been internalized as the hegemonic ideal by the majority of white mothers, mothers from other racial, ethnic and class backgrounds have never been encouraged to embrace these frameworks and instead have actively created and reproduced different beliefs and practices related to motherhood. These communities of mothers forged ideals of motherhood that reflected their own experiences. These ideals were based on community-based views of what was culturally relevant and reflected the needs of their own lived experiences (Segura 1994, Landry 2003, Collins 2000). Denise Segura (1994) has most directly challenged the assumption of the widespread acceptance of the framework of the intensive mothering ideology and the related paradigm of competing spheres.

In Segura's research, she suggests that Chicana mothers accept the "American based" intensive mothering ideology and as a result experienced internal conflict when they worked outside of the home. By contrast, she found that Mexican immigrant mothers accept a Mexican based ideology of motherhood that prioritizes maternal employment and thus did not experience internal conflict when working, but instead experienced conflict when they were stay-at-home mothers. Segura suggests that these different orientations to motherhood are shaped by the differences in cultural contexts, U.S. versus Mexico. In addition, Segura implicitly makes an argument about assimilation into dominant frameworks of motherhood, and specifically the intensive mothering ideology. Thus, through exposure to the cultural context of the U.S., Chicana women have come to accept dominant frameworks of motherhood while Mexican immigrant women have been more greatly impacted by the cultural context of Mexico and its framework of motherhood. I suggest that within the United States the cultural context around these dominant frameworks of motherhood is not as uniform as Segura assumes. Indeed, the U.S. cultural context has historic and contemporary divisions based on intersections of racial, cultural, economic and political identity. Thus in order to fully understand the experiences and outlook of American middle-class mothers, we must consider how they are differently shaped by racial, ethnic and class identity.

Family and work life scholarship largely assumes that middle-class families, regardless of race, share a common outlook regarding what is best for their children and share a common approach to parenting children and cultivating middle-class status (Kaufman 2005, Lareau 2003). Most notably, in *Unequal Childhoods*, through in-depth interviews and observations of a small but socio-economically diverse group of African-American and White families, Annette Lareau (2003) concludes that socioeconomic class is more important in determining parenting practices

than is racial identity. She argues that both African-American and White middle-class parents utilize concerted cultivation when raising their children. This approach to parenting emphasizes cultivating logical reasoning in children, exposing children to organized intellectual and physical enrichment activities and encouraging children to view educational institutions from the perspective of what services they can provide and what services they are entitled to receive. While Lareau (2003) acknowledges that African-American middle-class parents employ additional strategies beyond those employed by white middle-class parents, she downplays how middle-class parenting strategies differ across race and the different motivations and concerns that influence African-American middle-class parents' approaches to parenting. Thus, in her analysis, transporting children to a church choir or a violin lesson or an athletic league in their middle-class neighborhood or to one across town in a more economically diverse community serves the same functional purposes. As I will show in this paper, African-American middle-class mothers' choices have different meaning and goals for their children. As a consequence these mothers are very likely to look outside of their neighborhood for their children's activities because of concerns and objectives related to racial identity. Also, while Lareau acknowledges our society is characterized by social divisions and economic stratification, she largely assumes that once individuals acquire certain markers of middle-class status such as a college education or homeownership, their life trajectories are predominantly defined by those markers. In addition, Lareau assumes that middle-class status is accompanied by a shared set of values, economic support, cultural opportunities and advantages (2003). Elsewhere, scholars have demonstrated that these markers of middle-class status are not accompanied by the same material benefits or security across racial groupings (Shapiro and Oliver 1997, Pattillo-McCoy 1999)

Being a member of the middle class is assumed to come with certain advantages including access to better school systems, occupational and residential opportunities, and neighborhoods characterized by less crime. Numerous scholars have highlighted that despite the expansion of the African-American middle class, its members and their families face economic, social, residential and educational opportunities that are substantively different from whites (Landry 2003, Pattillo-McCoy 1999, Lacy 2007, Feagin and Sikes 1994). In addition, although the Civil Rights movement accomplished notable legal gains, members of the African-American middle-class continue to face varying degrees of discrimination in lending, housing (Roscigno, Karafin and Tester 2009; Massey, Gross and Shibuya 1994) and occupational opportunities (Pager 2003). Based on the historical legacy of *de facto* and *de jure* discrimination in the United States, African-American families possess far less wealth than their white counterparts (Shapiro and Oliver 1997; Taylor, Fry, and Kochhar 2011). In addition, members of the African-American middle class are often the first in their families to attain that status. As result, these families typically do not have parents with accumulated wealth who can help them buy into better neighborhoods than they would be unable to afford on their own (Shapiro and Oliver 1997, Conley 1999). In fact, members of the African-American middle-class are often asked for financial assistance from their parents and relatives rather than receiving such assistance (Heflin and Pattillo forthcoming). As a consequence of how the public educational system is structured, children of the African-American middle class are often presented with schools that are poorly funded, lack adequate infrastructure, and are characterized by lower levels of student achievement. In addition, these children are more likely to grow up in neighborhoods that have higher levels of crime and that do not have the same level of community services as their white middle-class peers (Shapiro and Oliver 1997). Thus, being African American diminishes the

privileges that accompany middle-class status and reduces the resources present in the everyday lives of families to enact the intensive child-raising practices that Lareau (2003) and other scholars (Hays 1999) treat as normative middle-class patterns.

In addition to macro-structural differences, scholars have demonstrated that African-American parents view preparing their children for the race-related challenges they will likely face during their lives as a key parenting duty (Tatum 1999, Feagin and Sikes 1994). These challenges differ if their children are raised in mixed-socioeconomic African-American neighborhoods, middle-class African-American neighborhoods, or predominately white neighborhoods. Middle-class mothers living in poor communities highlight the challenges they face in ensuring their children stay on a path that will enable them to retain their middle-class status instead of following a less desirable path of downward mobility (Anderson 2000). This fear of downward mobility is reasonable; recent statistics from the Pew Foundation indicate that fifty percent of African-American children that are raised in African-American middle-class families experience downward mobility, as compared to sixteen percent of white children that are raised in white middle-class families (Sharkey 2009). In addition, as I will show in this paper, African-American middle-class parents highlight the need to develop strategies for dealing with, and teaching, their children to overcome both the overt and subtle racism they will encounter at school and in other areas of their lives.

While much of the scholarship on parenting neglects African-American middle-class mothers, the scholarship that does exist stresses that African-American middle-class mothers parent their children within social contexts that are shaped by different resources and concerns than white middle-class families at both the macro and micro level (Pattillo-McCoy 1999, Tatum 1999). Understanding these differences in concerns and access to resources sheds light on the

challenges African-American middle-class families face in reproducing middle-class status for the next generation. Building on this existing research, in this paper I seek to answer three questions. First, how do African-American middle-class mothers approach family, work and parenting? Second, what explains their distinctive strategies? Third, how does the case of African-American middle-class mothers help to illuminate the range of mothering and parenting ideals and practices and the consequences, both positive and negative, of not conforming to those ideals and practices?

Research Methods

For this paper I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with sixty working and stay-at-home African-American middle-class mothers and several leaders of African-American mothers' groups in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through these interviews I examined the ideologies of motherhood that influence African-American middle-class mothers' day-to-day decisions about family and work. Specifically I interviewed these mothers about their paths to motherhood, the sorts of support they have in their lives as mothers, their decisions related to working and how they conceptualize their responsibilities as mothers. These interviews were one to two and half hours in length and were completed between June 2009 and December 2010. Prior to being interviewed, each participant was asked to fill out a Demographic Information Sheet that included questions about their marital status, education, individual and household income and family composition. Also included were questions about the marital status, education and racial identity of the participants' parents.

Middle-class status was determined through a combination of educational attainment and total family income. Mothers had a minimum of a two-year college education and a total family

income ranging from $50,000 to $300,000. The majority of participants had total family incomes ranging from $100,000 to $175,000. In the San Francisco Bay Area, median home prices during this time frame ranged from a low of $475,000 in the first quarter of 2009 to a high of $575,000 in 2010. While the income range is high by national standards, if we take seriously the notion of potential homeownership as a significant marker of middle-class status, those at the upper end of this income range would be among the few in the San Francisco Bay Area that could easily attain that marker of middle-class status.

To recruit a range of mothers with different educational and income levels, I used a modified snowball sample, and I contacted mainstream and African-American professional organizations and women's and mothers' organizations. I contacted churches, hair salons, community colleges and local unions and sororities. I also posted announcements about the research on listservs catering to parents, mothers and African-American mothers. All mothers in my sample had a least one child under the age of ten and their employment status included working full-time, part-time or staying at home. The mothers had an average of two children and the ages of the women ranged from twenty-five to forty-five. The majority of participants had earned a college degree or greater. Several respondents had only attended some college, either earning an associate's degree or leaving a four-year program without conferral of a degree. Two thirds of the participants were currently married and the remaining participants were divorced, never married or widowed.

Based on the limited existing research on African-American middle-class mothers and my goal to revise existing theories related to middle-class motherhood and parenting, I chose semi-structured interviews as my data collection method. While this research cannot be generalized to all African-American middle-class mothers, it begins to uncover both the

consistencies and the variations in the ways these mothers think about and make decisions related to being mothers. By using semi-structured interviews I was able to maintain a consistent set of questions and topics with each mother while also allowing some flexibility for each mother to explore topics of her choosing. These data enabled me to uncover an alternative set of assumptions related to mothering and parenting that influence African- American middle-class mothers' decisions. These interviews allowed me to begin to uncover the categories of importance that shape African-American middle-class mothers' work and family decisions and ascertain where those categories of importance converge or diverge from those shared by white middle-class mothers. In particular, these interviews revealed how African-American middle-class mothers sought to construct and preserve specific versions of motherhood that were shaped by cultural expectations of what it means to be a good African-American middle-class mother.

As an interviewer I shared certain traits with my participants. I am an African-American woman and I am also middle class. Some of these characteristics were more immediately visible than others. These shared background characteristics facilitated building rapport and provided an environment in which people seemed willing to share intimate details of their lives. At the same time these shared background characteristics necessitated that I remain vigilant in not taking for granted that I understood a participant's meanings. For example, an interviewee might say, "Well you know how they treat us." I responded with some variation of "I think I know what you mean but could you explain just so I'm sure/not making any assumptions." In this way I tried to continue building rapport but also resisted making assumptions about shared understanding.

Unlike questions about race, gender and motherhood, class differences were more challenging to discuss. While many mothers easily revealed their opinions about African-

Americans who were from lower and higher socioeconomic class backgrounds, others exhibited initial discomfort when class differences were the topic of discussion. This discomfort manifested itself in changes in body language, long pauses between comments, or attempts to reframe the question. In general, I attempted to put people at ease by saying some version of, "I realize talking about class can sometimes feel uncomfortable. I'd really appreciate hearing your thoughts." More often than not simply verbally recognizing that discomfort enabled participants to move on from it and share their thoughts more freely.

Through these interviews, three key tenets of the integrated mothering framework emerged. The African-American middle-class mothers in my sample articulated a different set of assumptions about the experiences of idealized motherhood that informed their choices about work and family. I will discuss these assumptions in more detail after providing some historical context about the African-American community in the San Francisco Bay Area.

In Search of the Black Middle Class

To provide some social and historical context for the African-American mothers and families in my research, I will both describe some characteristics of the African-American population in the San Francisco Bay Area as well as place this research in context with existing research on the African-American middle class. Landmark studies of the African-American middle class have often focused on providing a broad outline of the overall contours of the African-American middle class or have focused on geographic areas in the United States where African Americans have had a longstanding presence and have grown in size to a critical mass (Pattillo-McCoy 1999, Lacy 2007, Frazier 1962, Landry 2003). In the San Francisco Bay Area,

the African-American community has never been large, and it has had a shorter historical presence, relative to some other areas of the country. For example, African Americans comprised only a small proportion of the population until the 1950s when San Francisco became one of the central locations for war-related jobs. At that time the African-American population in San Francisco expanded in size from approximately 4,850 in 1940 to approximately 43,000 in 1950, reaching its peak in the 1970s at around 88,000 (Report of the San Francisco Mayor's Task Force on African American Out-Migration 2009). Since that time the African-American population in San Francisco has declined to such a degree that in 2005 Mayor Gavin Newsom created a task force to examine the problem of African-American out-migration from San Francisco. Many of those departing have been middle-income earning African Americans leaving the city for neighborhoods in the East Bay and migrating to places outside California (Report of the San Francisco Mayor's Task Force 2009). This decline in the African-American population has taken place throughout the entire Bay Area. Based on findings from a recent study conducted by the Urban Strategies Council, Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo and Marin counties have each experienced a decline in their African-American populations (Williams, Spiker, Budi and Skahen 2010). According to 2010 census data, the number of African Americans in Berkeley and Oakland, both cities in Alameda County, has decreased by 20% and 25%, respectively, since the prior census.

Given the history of the African-American middle class in the Bay Area and the increasing out-migration of African-American residents to outlying suburbs and other regions, it is not surprising that accessing these families and communities did not come easily to the mothers I interviewed, even though they almost uniformly noted a desire to be connected with other African-American middle-class families. Mothers who were unable to create connections

with similarly situated African-American mothers expressed a sense of isolation. Because many African-American mothers did not have ready access to other African-American middle-class mothers and families they described the additional work they put into finding like-minded mothers and children with whom they and their children could socialize. I will revisit this concern related to race specific community building later in the paper.

Integrated Mothering

Through analyzing the data from my interviews I have identified an alternative framework of mothering, which I call the "integrated mothering ideology." This ideology is framed by different assumptions related to childcare, work and family and parenting than those discussed in the work-life scholarship discussed above (See Table One below). In the integrated mothering ideology, childcare may be mother focused, but it is an extended-family and community-supported activity. While childrearing typically remains a significant duty of mothers, the responsibility for caring for children is shared with and supported by spouses, extended family and community. While the dominant themes in family and work life scholarship frame working mothers within a competing spheres framework, the integrated mothering ideology views working outside of the home as a normal and natural part of being a mother and views it as a duty of mothers. Finally, for mothers who share the integrated mothering ideology, considerations of race *and* class are consistently present in parenting decisions. While many mothers engage in what Annette Lareau (2003) has identified as concerted cultivation, their motivations for doing so are shaped by race and class concerns. Also, these mothers use additional strategies to address race specific concerns related to fostering

their children's racial comfort and identity and their proficiency in interacting with people from diverse race and class backgrounds.

	Dominant Frameworks	Integrated Mothering Ideology
Childcare	Mother is the Primary or Exclusive Caregiver.	Mother Focused but Extended Family and Community Supported.
Work and Family	Paid Employment Conflicts with Being a Mother.	Paid Employment is a Duty of Mothers.
Parenting	Concerted Cultivation	Race Conscious Middle-class Parenting

Table One: A Comparison of Ideologies of Motherhood

Extended-Family and Community-Supported Childrearing

Many of the mothers I interviewed viewed caring for their children as a mother-centered activity that was supported by spouses, extended family and community members. This orientation was reflected in how mothers approached choosing childcare and in their decisions about routine, occasional or emergency childcare providers. Fathers also often played a key part in addressing and balancing family and work responsibilities. Indeed, some fathers became stay-at-home dads and took on the primary childcare responsibilities. In addition, the mothers I interviewed who worked in demanding careers commonly enlisted their own mothers or their spouse's or boyfriend's mothers to care for their children while they were young. For Sharon, Nora and Brandy[1], all married working mothers, the solution to managing a demanding career and young children was that their mothers took on the responsibility of being their primary childcare provider. Indeed, grandmothers and other female relatives often temporarily moved in with mothers increasing their availability. Occasionally grandmothers moved from out of state and across the country to care for their grandchildren for months or years. The mothers I interviewed suggested that these offers to provide free or low cost childcare were readily made

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

by grandmothers. By choosing grandmothers to care for their children, these mothers had a high level of comfort in returning to work and resuming demanding schedules.

This preference for, and reliance upon, kin-care is consistent with research conducted by Lynet Uttal that highlights that African-American mothers have voiced a preference for grandmothers or other family members to fulfill their childcare needs while white mothers preferred to use paid childcare arrangements instead of these kin-care arrangements (1999). African-American mothers' preference for kin-care is both related to the extended family networks that these mothers have access to and value, and it is based upon a desire to provide care-giving environments for their children that are free from racial discrimination (Uttal and Tuominen 1999), which I will discuss in more detail in the racially consciousness parenting portion of the paper. Furthermore, while research has demonstrated that kin-care is decreasing in use among lower income African-American mothers, these networks of care have actually been retained and have increased in their strength and utilization among middle and upper-middle-class African-American mothers (Brewster and Padavic 2002). Thus, while one might assume the use of kin-care is connected to a mother's access to material resources and options, or lack thereof, Brewster and Padavic's research suggests that African-American middle-class mothers prefer kin care and that non-material motivations may partially explain this preference (2002).

While family members were often active participants in providing childcare, if providers were not relatives, the mothers in my sample often began their search for childcare by accessing members of their family, religious and social networks who had knowledge about childcare providers. Robinne, in describing how she selected her childcare provider, said, "I'd known her for 17 years. She was a member of my church. And while I was pregnant she became a licensed daycare provider and some of the other members from my mother's group had her look after

their children" (2009). Robinne had a longstanding relationship with her childcare provider. She knew her from interactions at her church and in her community. This description of the relationship between childcare providers and parents and their ongoing participation in each others' social worlds stands in contrast to what is typically described in the literature, as at least initially, as a more arms-length relationship. Similarly, Alana described how she found her childcare provider through family connections. She said, "My mom's friend's daughter who is also my friend, told me about it. Her son was going there at the time" (2010). For Alana, like other mothers, finding non-kin childcare providers often occurred through accessing family and community based networks. Finding childcare providers through these networks provided mothers with a level of comfort about who would be caring for their children in their absence. These same networks also enabled these mothers to maintain a high level of oversight of their childcare provider. Thus for many of African-American middle-class mothers I interviewed, caring for children was successfully accomplished with the support and assistance of spouses, family and community members. Each of these sites of non-maternal parenting was valued and routinely utilized to support mothers' activities inside and outside of the home.

Working – A Duty of Motherhood

The assumption that African-American middle-class mothers should work outside of the home is strongly entrenched within the African-American community. Among the African-American middle-class mothers I interviewed, there was a prevailing and widely shared assumption that the duties of being a mother included working outside of the home. As children, the mothers I interviewed were encouraged by their parents to be economically self-reliant as adult women and thus they viewed contributing financially to their households as a

nonnegotiable requirement of motherhood. For example, Nia, in describing why she always felt she would be a working mother, said, "I don't think I even knew anybody that stayed home, so that, I didn't have that as a framework. I didn't see any women that stayed at home with children. You know, especially ones that had an education. And I knew that I would be college educated" (2009). For Nia, the idea that she would not work seemed almost unfathomable to her, particularly after investing her time and energy into earning a college degree. Her ideal vision of motherhood included balancing work and raising children.

Brandy, describing what her parent's expectations were for her as an adult, said, "They wanted me to be independent, they wanted me to be smart about the way I lived my life. And I remember my mom telling me something about always relying on yourself so you can do what you want to do in your life, so I definitely took that to heart" (2009). Brandy saw being a working mother as the ideal because it meant that she would be independent, and those values were instilled in her throughout her life through messages from both her parents. Similarly, Christine's belief that mothers should be engaged in paid employment also came from messages she received from her mother. Christine, describing her mother's thoughts about financial independence, said, "She taught us to never depend on anybody else and always be able to take care of yourself and this is kind of how I am now" (2010). Christine viewed self-reliance as a non-negotiable value in her life.

Finally, Robinne identified a long-standing belief that she would not be a stay-at-home mother. She said, "I never had a desire to be a stay-at-home mom. I always knew that I would be a working mother. And, I really resisted that idea that a good mother should want to be at home with their children" (2009). Robinne identified that she was well aware of the fact that some people believed mothers should not work outside of the home but she explicitly rejected

those beliefs about motherhood and embraced a different set of ideals. Based on Robinne's life experiences, good mothers did not have to stay at home and could, in fact, have demanding and fulfilling careers outside of the home while simultaneously raising children.

By and large, it is taken for granted that African-American mothers will work outside of the home. This assumption was emphasized in an interview I had with Hana, a working mother of three. Hana described how she received conflicting messages about what was expected of her when she reached adulthood and became a mother. While identifying as African American, Hana was the child of an African-American father and a white mother who each had contrasting views of what Hana's adult life should look like. Hana's father wanted her to have a career that she enjoyed and that could support her as an adult; by contrast, Hana's mother believed that she would grow up and meet a man that she would marry, who would then financially support her. As Hana got older she began visiting her African-American grandmother who lived in the South. When her grandmother asked her about her goals she began describing the path her mother described and her grandmother cut her off and told her outright, "You are not white, and you have to be able to support yourself. You are a black woman, not a white woman" (2009). This quote illustrates the different ways white women versus African-American women view the place of work in their lives after they become mothers. For African-American middle-class mothers, employment is considered to be an essential component of being an independent and self-sufficient mother. It also shows that African-American women are presented with different ideals of how and when to combine work and mothering and these ideals are explicitly tied to race.

For each of the mothers described above, working and being a mother went hand in hand. Being economically self-sufficient was tied to what it meant to be a responsible adult

woman. The mothers I interviewed were also encouraged to be economically independent from the men in their lives. To be sure, each of these mothers experienced challenges in managing the demands of work and family. These mothers experienced stress when juggling the demands of work and home, but they largely viewed being a working mother as a normal and natural option rather than some remarkable accomplishment that would create turmoil and generate harsh compromises in their lives. These mothers rarely talked about experiencing internal conflict about their decision to engage in paid employment. While the job of being a mother was challenging they viewed working outside of the home as a part of doing that job, rather than as an additional burden they had to manage. In addition, for working mothers, the integrated mothering ideology was consistent with the choices they were making in their day-to-day lives.

But not all mothers worked outside of the home. Some African-American middle-class mothers have diverged from the default path of engaging in paid employment outside of the home and have decided to be stay-at-home mothers. While the decision to be a stay-at-home mother could be conceived of as a sign of economic progress in the African-American middle class that has afforded women options previously foreclosed to them, many of the stay-at-home mothers that I interviewed reported feeling resistance from family and stigma from the broader African-American and mainstream community for making that choice. In fact, in the late 90s, an organization for African-American stay-at-home mothers was founded called African-American Mothers United,[2] which had the specific goal of connecting stay-at-home African-American mothers with each other and helping them feel "good about their choices" related to work and family. This organization was specifically concerned with providing support to African-American mothers who made the choice to reduce their commitment to paid work in favor of focusing on raising their *own* children. This emphasis on raising one's own children refers back

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[2] Name of organization changed.

to a history of African-American mothers working as domestics and nannies in white middle-class families. Since the creation of African-American Mothers United the organization has grown in size and has expanded to over 100 chapters nation-wide. Each chapter must be comprised of at least five mothers and according to organizational guidelines, no more that 20% of the membership can be employed full-time. The organization describes how its existence is essential:

> Because historically, mothers of color, particularly African-American mothers, have not had the opportunity to devote the majority of their time to caring for their *own* families. African-American Mothers United serves as an advocate for those mothers and encourages the spirit of community activism within its membership… While many of our members have eliminated employment altogether, others work part-time, flex-time, night shifts, have home-based businesses, consult or freelance from home, or have chosen alternative, less demanding career paths so that they are more available to their families. Our goal is to support the decisions made by our members. *(emphasis added)*

The goals of this organization are to recognize and valorize the history of African-American mothers as members of the workforce, to offset the prevailing expectation that African-American mothers will work outside of the home, and to connect stay-at-home mothers of color to each other so they will feel supported in their decision and connected to a community of like minded mothers. This organization was also founded based upon the explicit recognition that for African-American mothers there were different assumptions about how they would manage work and family. In addition, while the decision to work may often be based on economic need, African-American Mothers United highlights that African-American mothers often lack the community support for their decisions to stay at home as well.

The stay-at-home mothers I interviewed echoed the need for support that an organization like African-American Mothers United sought to provide to it members. Indeed, a majority of the stay-at-home mothers that I interviewed were active members of African-American stay-at-home mothers' organizations like African-American Mothers United. These mothers described the resistance they faced when they made the decision to not work outside of the home or to

reduce their commitments to paid work. They also highlighted how linking up with other stay-at-home African-American middle-class mothers valorized their choice when it might not be as supported by spouses and family members. For these mothers, joining a mainstream mothers' group was not sufficient, they sought out a racially specific mothers' group that would have greater understanding of the race related issues they and they children would face. Sarah, a mother of two, who worked approximately fifteen hours a week, described the support she received from joining an African-American stay-at-home mothers' support group. She said,

> What we all share in common is trying to maximize the time we spend with our children. Even the career women stay at home for 8 months and they try to maximize their time with their children. It definitely is important to me because I definitely know a lot of women who are more career women and who don't have kids and I don't know a lot of people who think being a stay-at-home mom is a good thing to be. I think a lot people think- what are you doing all day? They don't realize you are busting your ass all day. Taking care of a child is work that is why they are called childcare workers- because it is work. For me, for my self-esteem, it has been important to be connected to other women who believe that is an important thing. It is okay. And in fact it is important to be with your child (2009).

Many of the mothers I interviewed who chose to stay at home with their children for extended periods of time felt pressure to return to work. This pressure came in frequent comments from relatives pondering what they did during the day or direct questions about when they might return to work or go back to school. These mothers believed that by staying at home they were going against the tide of what is considered normal behavior for African-American mothers. At face value, their decision to stay at home suggests that some African-American mothers have internalized dominant frameworks of mothering and, having access to the required material resources, are enacting those practices. However their choices to stay at home are more complex and often couched in concerns related to monitoring their children's treatment in predominately white settings and ensuring that their sons and daughters stay on the right academic paths and life trajectories.

Racially Conscious Parenting

While African-American mothers exhibited many of the strategies associated with concerted cultivation, their motivations for using certain strategies were often complex and they also often employed additional parenting strategies that were focused on addressing the race-related issues their children would likely encounter. Many mothers also described a feeling of a racial divide between African-American and white mothers in part based on having different concerns related to raising middle-class children who were also African American. Christine, a married working mother of one son, described that she began to feel more "black" after becoming a mother. Summarizing what many mothers said in other words, Christine said, "The main thing about being a black mom that is probably important to say is not feeling included in white motherhood society. Um, it feels like when I go to the playground there is the 'them' and there is the 'us'" (2010). Christine also saw distinctions in how white mothers and African-American mothers approached parenting:

> I just think that there are ways of mothering that are different between white people and black people. Among white women there is just too much talking, too much processing... And the black moms just tend to more, I mean we set firm boundaries for our kids maybe even more so than the white moms, but in terms of behavior there is more freedom for their kids to do their own things or be themselves. The white moms seem to micromanage their child and to be more pushy, in kind of structured ways (2010).

Thus for Christine there were both external divisions between white and African-American mothers created by distances and silences she experienced at playgrounds and classes she attended with her children and an internal division created by distinctions in how she believed African-American and white mothers approach parenting their children. While African-American mothers might be stricter about some boundaries such as how adults are spoken to, Christine believed that, by-and-large, African-American parents were more relaxed in their parenting style.

The mothers I interviewed described three race-related concerns that were continually considered in their decision-making related to how they parented their children. Mothers sought to ensure their children's racial comfort by placing them in environments where they would be unlikely to experience racial discrimination from whites, African Americans or other racial groups. Mothers sought to ensure their children developed the appropriate racial (and class) consciousness by working to construct communities of peers and like-minded mothers. Mothers also worked to ensure that their children felt comfortable and at ease in their interactions both interracially and intra-racially.

Ensuring Racial Comfort

Through a discussion of what Meera, a stay-at-home mother of two, called different categories of importance that African-American and white mothers used in decision making about their children, she described her own desire to create a racially comfortable environment for her children in both their educational and residential environments. Meera said,

> I attended [a white moms' group]. I would just sit there and feel like their world was completely different. There were a lot of things that they wouldn't talk about. It was a class issue or a race issue. I feel like a lot of the moms were rich. Like they were staying at home AND they had nannies….I wouldn't want to get super personal with that group whereas with the other black moms' groups we could talk about anything. From sex to you know anything you know like what is going on now, and the differences in our bodies, um money, and education. We talked a lot about education and preschools and stuff and sometimes both. The white moms' group- I called it the white moms' group because it was mostly white moms. Sometimes that group would have different priorities when it came to education. Talking about places that I would never send my kids. Or neighborhoods I would never live in. Um. Like Montclair or places like Piedmont. And I would think, I am not going to send my children through a school in Piedmont that is all white or something. And so there wasn't a lot of relating there (2009).

In this quote Meera shows that the racial comfort of her children was a key category of importance that she considered in her parenting decisions and this was a category of importance that she did not believe was explicitly shared by the white mothers she encountered in this "white" mothers' group. Piedmont and Montclair are both middle to upper middle-class predominately white neighborhoods with public schools that have better resources and higher

academic performance. It would not be unreasonable to think that any middle-class mother would be eager to have her children attend a public school in this neighborhood in order to further cement their children as members of the middle class. However, Meera was less than enthusiastic about the prospect of her child attending a school in one of these neighborhoods and this was a sentiment shared by many mothers in my sample. These African-American middle-class mothers wanted what they felt would be best for their children. The fact that their children would be one of few African-American students in a predominately white school setting out-weighed the school's record for high academic achievement. Instead these mothers sought out schools with a balance of academic achievement and racial and class diversity. This endeavor often required that they make compromises in each category. Meera's quote also underscores that when deciding on housing, the racial composition of a given neighborhood was an important factor. The underlying motivation for these decisions was a desire to ensure a certain level of racial comfort for themselves and, more importantly, their children. Thus mothers carefully researched schools to determine the racial diversity of the student body, teachers and administrations, and they also investigated the racial diversity of prospective neighborhoods.

Mothers also sought to ensure the racial comfort of their children by working to create peer groups of other African-American children from like-minded families. Sarah described why striving for racial comfort was so important in her description of a discussion she had in an African-American mothers' group. She said, "One of the things we have talked about in these mothers' groups are some of the challenges that we face and that we believe our children are going to face and how we can prepare them better. So, whether it is I'm the only black girl in the school or someone is wondering why my hair is curly or telling me I look like a monkey because it doesn't straighten like theirs, they are prepared" (2009). These mothers often saw the decision

to join specific mothers' groups as creating a community of African-American middle-class mothers for themselves and African-American middle-class peers to which their children would be exposed to regularly. Christine explained that she wanted her "son to be around black people. We have wonderful neighbors and friends who are white. And I have to say I really wanted this since being pregnant because I really didn't have any other black mother friends who had kids the same age. I really want my son to be around black folks and so yeah, I have gone out of my way to find black mothers to make sure to see them frequently so he has black playmates" (2010). For Christine, finding a community of African-American middle-class mothers and children required a sustained effort. Raising her children with an African-American racial identity could not occur passively. A largely unspoken assumption among the mothers I interviewed was that white middle-class mothers did not have to put the same amount of energy and thought into creating peer groups for their children. In addition, given the increasingly dispersed nature of the African-American middle-class community in the Bay Area, these African-American peer groups had to be consciously constructed and continually fostered. Nora, a mother of two, described the ideal African-American middle-class community that she currently lacked access to as "understanding the complexities of our communities. A black middle class that understands their privilege and despite their accomplishments does not think they are more than other blacks whose life circumstances did not provide them the same opportunities" (2009). For Nora, an ideal African-American middle-class community would appreciate the opportunities that led to their individual accomplishments while simultaneously acknowledging their position of privilege relative to other African Americans who have had fewer opportunities.

In creating these peer groups for their children, mothers were often extremely conscious of the need to provide their children with examples of other African-American children who would share similar experiences and who would be unlikely to challenge their child's racial authenticity. For example, Sarah said:

> I want my daughter to be in circles with people where they are all [achieving academically]. ... I want that for my kids so I am constantly seeking out like-minded individuals, people of color with children the same age. That is a personal goal that by the time they are five or ten they each have five friends- people of color with parents who have similar mindsets… so when they get to that point and they are striking out and need independence that they've got peers that are similar minded…. And when they are being persecuted and they feel like they are being treated unjustly or they feel someone is laughing at them or raising doubts about their beauty or authenticity. They can look around and see others and have strength and confidence (2009).

These mothers saw challenges to their children's racial self-esteem and pride as unavoidable and potentially coming from white peers as well as African-American peers. These mothers also had memories of their own experiences as youth defending their racial authenticity. As a consequence these mothers worked to create peer groups for their children that would mitigate these prospective assaults on their children's sense of racial authenticity and not make them question themselves or feel a need to prove their blackness. Peer groups were of particular importance because mothers hoped they would inoculate their children from feelings of racial self-doubt. Reflected in Sarah's comments above is her desire to have African-American peers for her child, but not just any African-American peers. By referring to "like-minded" peers she expressed a frequent concern voiced by the mothers in my sample regarding issues of social class. Thus mothers often cultivated peer groups for their children based on a combination of race and class identification.

Fostering Racial Identity

Mothers also worked to ensure that their children developed specific versions of African-American middle-class identities[3]. Mother used peer groups to foster these versions of racial identity within their children. One way this goal was accomplished was through evaluating the racial and class orientation of the mothers' groups they decided to join. For these mothers, finding a match to their own version of middle-class values was not always an easy task. In response to this difficulty, a number of mothers started mothers' groups themselves. For example, Karlyn said

> I actually created my own playgroup…. I went to another African-American moms' group but I thought, "Man they are not black mommas like me." It just seemed like they were catering towards moms that were you know stay-at-home moms or you know with biracial kids and you know, and I thought you know that is not me. I am a black mother, and I just wanted to be part of a group where you know I felt comfortable. I mean there were people who were trying to get in stuff like Links and Jack and Jill[4] and I was like, no

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[3] In my dissertation I argue that African-American middle-class mothers conceptualize being middle class and black in three different ways: From Poverty to Privilege, Culturally Based Blackness and Post-Racial Blackness. Mothers who embraced the From Poverty to Privilege orientation to racial identity wanted their children to be fluent in the whole range of African-American culture and community and fluent in cultures of privilege. These mothers were often first-generation middle class. They were raised in families in which they were the first to earn a college degree and thus their middle class status was largely attained through socioeconomic mobility. Mothers who embraced the Culturally Based Blackness orientation to racial identity saw African-American racial identity as largely disentangled from first- hand knowledge of economic struggle. The mothers who shared this Culturally-Based orientation to racial identity were often raised in African-American middle-class families. These mothers also wanted their children to be comfortable in a variety of settings but did not have the same impetus to ensure that their children were comfortable among poor African-American communities. In cultivating an African-American racial identity, these mothers emphasized exposing their children to African-American cultural activities, history and music. Finally mothers who embraced the Post-Racial Blackness orientation to racial identity came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds but shared a common experience of belonging to racially diverse communities. This diversity came from one or more of the following sources: 1) racially diverse families of origins, 2) interracial romantic relationships or marriages; and/or 3) racially diverse peer groups. These mothers often sought to create racially diverse communities for their children that were typically not predominantly African-American or any other racial group. These mothers wanted their children to be free to embark on post-racial lives.

[4] The Links and Jack and Jill are each private social clubs that are seen as serving middle and upper middle-class African Americans:

"The Links, Incorporated is an international, not-for-profit corporation, established in 1946. The membership consists of 12,000 professional women of color in 270 chapters located in 42 states, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. It is one of the nation's oldest and largest volunteer service organizations of extraordinary women who are committed to enriching, sustaining and ensuring the culture and economic survival of African Americans and other persons of African ancestry." (http://www.linksinc.org/about.shtml)

"Jack and Jill of America was founded January 24, 1938 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from a meeting of 20 mothers under the leadership of Marion Stubbs Thomas with the idea of bringing children together in a social and cultural environment… Today, Jack and Jill of America is a nationwide organization with over 225 chapters in seven geographic regions encompassing thirty-five states and the District of Columbia. Membership has grown to over 9,500 mothers and associates, and more than 30,000 family members." (http://national.jackandjillonline.org/AboutUs/tabid/96/Default.aspx)

thank you. Just um I was not interested with parting with any bit of my little bit of money. And I think I did not want to associate with people who defined themselves, and this is just my perception so I could have been wrong, by how much they made or what kind of car that they drove. I think what I wanted was to create something where even if you did not have any money you could bring your kids to these organizations and we would figure out a way for us to connect and figure out a way for us to socialize and so forth. And just I was looking for everyday people because my family represents everyday people.

In this quote, Karlyn specifically refers to the organizations the Links and Jack and Jill. Both of these organizations are long standing social organizations in the African-American middle class that can be joined by invitation only. In general, members must meet income and educational requirements. Despite the historical legacy of these organizations within the African-American middle and upper-middle classes, for some these organizations are associated with elitism that excludes many everyday African Americans. Thus for Karlyn, an economically diverse group of African-American mothers was the kind of community she wanted her children to be exposed to and be enriched by and the kind of racial identity she wanted to instill in her children. African-American mothers who were too interested in material success were not people with whom she wished to socialize.

By contrast, Sharon was seeking a different kind of middle-class African-American community for herself and for her children. She highlighted the challenges she encountered in finding a community of African-American mothers that defied statistics: mothers who like herself were middle-class, married, professionally accomplished, homeowners, and had their children later in life. Sharon sought out mothers who could engage in her middle-class lifestyle and that shared her concerns for ensuring that their children were provided with the best educational and extracurricular opportunities. Sharon described her initial failed attempts to find mothers with similar values by attending classes and other mainstream mothers' groups. Ultimately, Sharon started an African-American stay-at-home mothers' group with a friend who she met online:

> Before I founded that black moms' group it was hard finding black mothers with similar values, particularly in my age group. Before when I went to the crazy class- I call it the crazy class. There was a black young lady mother, a new mother of twins in that class and so I asked her how she was doing …..
> Her two little girls were older than mine and I knew she was kind of lost, I didn't realize how lost until one day I asked her if she wanted to go get a Jamba Juice or something and …it was just like all bad and she didn't know who the father was. She didn't care who the father was and everybody was trying to find out who the father was but she wasn't telling who she thought he was. I asked her … "What are they eating now that they are two?" And she said, "Well she likes HoHos and she likes Ding Dongs." You know it was just kind of like I just couldn't find anyone who shared my values. …I was looking for people who would like come over and have a dinner party and bring the kids and you know we've got a swing set in the back yard. We'll all have a good time but I couldn't find that type of connection and I thought I probably never will because anybody I find with a child my daughter's age will be significantly younger than me.

Sharon wanted her children to be exposed to an African-American community that was primarily, if not, exclusively comprised of relatively privileged members of the African-American middle class. Sharon had been a member of Jack and Jill as a child and planned on providing those sorts of socialization opportunities to her children.

For all the mothers, as they worked to create a community of families that would help cultivate specific racial consciousnesses in their children, sharing a racial background was not enough. Class divisions within the African-American community also shaped the mothers and children that mothers chose to include in their social circle. Thus even after finding an African-American mothers' group, the mothers I interviewed made additional distinctions among these groups as not sharing their middle-class values, being elitist and/or focusing on stay-at-home mothers. Ultimately, Karlyn was seeking out a community of mothers that contained African-American mothers from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. For Karlyn, as the first generation in her family to earn a college degree and attain middle-class status, it was important that her children be successful but she also wanted to ensure that they did not view themselves as better than other African Americans who did not benefit from the same economic advantages and opportunities. By contrast, Sharon highlighted her desire to distance herself and her children from African Americans who were not middle class and who did not share her version of middle-class values. Sharon wished to create a community of African-American mothers who were

educated, financially well off and married. Through their selection of mothers' groups these women sought to foster specific classed versions of racial identity in their children.

Acumen in Interracial Interactions

Mothers also had the goal of raising children who would feel comfortable and at ease interacting with people from a wide range of ethnic and racial background. The mothers that I interviewed emphasized the need to provide their children with a template of the world that was much broader than being African American. This was accomplished by increasing their children's exposure to a wide variety of social, economic, cultural and religious settings. This exposure was not viewed as optional, but instead was viewed as necessary for their children to develop an essential set of skills that would enable them to survive and thrive as adults and be successful in their own lives.

African-American middle-class mothers worked to ensure that their children knew how to conduct themselves in a corporate setting, on the corner when they were approached by a police officer, and when they interacted with African Africans from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In practice this meant choosing extracurricular activities that would provide their children with the ability to acquire acumen in interacting with people in each of these arenas. Mothers recounted their decisions to place the children in particular sports activities so they would gain exposure to African-American authority figures and a range of African-American peers. These same mothers also described signing their children up for classes where they would gain exposure to socio-economically privileged whites and other ethnic or racial groups.

Maja, a married mother of four, described the level of comfort she wanted her kids to achieve by using their high school as an example. She said,

> [T]here is very much a vibe of the white kids from the hills and the black kids from the flatlands. So there are the ghetto black kids and the privileged white kids and I want my kids to be able to hang with both, and, again, I see this as being related to self-esteem, self-confidence, and just humanity. There is something

about being able to recognize the humanity behind all of those different configurations and presentations of self that I think is really important (2009).

For Maja, as well as other mothers, it was important that her children possess a fluency in cultural norms of African American and whites, and this knowledge was closely connected with their children's abilities to retain their middle-class status while simultaneously navigating a social world in which they would, at least initially, be perceived primarily as African American. This training also extended to teaching their children to be attuned to the various ways that they were viewed by mainstream society. For example, African American middle class mothers were concerned with helping the children, and particularly their sons, safely navigate the public world of the streets, busses, ball courts, schools, and parties which could include both race and class diversity. They were also concerned with helping their children protect their safety and self-esteem when interacting with police officers, storeowners, teachers, and school administrators. Thus mothers, to varying degrees, sought to provide their children with the skills to be socially agile in contexts characterized by greater or lesser degrees of economic privilege and racial diversity.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that the frameworks of mothering and parenting that dominate family and work life scholarship are supported by racially situated cultural expectations and practices that have not been fully considered. These frameworks are also supported by specific economic, cultural and social configurations of work, mothering and the family, even though they are assumed to be generalizable to all mothers and their families. My research shows how differences in these configurations matter. I present the integrated mothering framework as one

alternative to these dominant frameworks of motherhood and parenting. This alternative framework assumes that childcare is a mother-centered but community-supported activity, working outside of the home is a duty of mothers, and considerations of race should be consistently present in decisions about how to parent children. The integrated mothering ideology stems from economic, cultural and social configurations prevalent within the African-American community. These configurations include African-American women's longstanding position within the labor market, cultural pushes for women and mothers to be economically self-reliant, and broad traditions of extended family members providing childcare assistance. In addition, ideologies and practices of good parenting are influenced by a need to navigate race-related challenges that are embedded in childrearing decisions.

Specifically my findings provide evidence that, in the African-American middle class, childcare is conceived of as an activity that is focused on the mother but also supported by extended family and community members. Similar to the findings of Denise Segura (1994) and Bart Landry (2003), the women I interviewed viewed working outside of the home as a duty of motherhood. Thus, while these mothers certainly experienced challenges in managing the demands of work and family, they saw working motherhood as the normal and natural choice for themselves. Finally, my findings suggest that African-American middle-class mothers approach parenting in a racially conscious manner. These race-related concerns of African-American parents cannot be conceived of as mere additions to concerns they would otherwise share with other white middle-class parents. Instead these race-related concerns are continually considered in their quotidian parental decision-making. These concerns included providing their children with the ability to navigate interactions with white and African-American middle-class youth and adults. They also involved fostering an acceptance of and a facility at interacting with African-

American youth who are less economically privileged or have more "street-oriented" lifestyles. The experiences of the African-American middle-class mothers I interviewed serve as an empirical challenge to these dominant frameworks of mothering and parenting and a theoretical revision to hegemonic frameworks of motherhood. Indeed, the African-American middle-class mothers in my study are influenced by an alternative framework of motherhood and parenting that produces different preferences for decisions related to family and work life. Based on these findings, I argue for much more attention to cultural specificity in scholarship on motherhood and work-life balance.

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