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"I Have a God That Sits High and Looks Down Low": Police Violence, Grief, and the Black Maternal Experience

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"I Have a God That Sits High and Looks Down Low":
Police Violence, Grief, and the Black Maternal Experience

by

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ABSTRACT

Despite the recent exposure that police violence in America has received, of the related research that has been conducted, very little of it discusses the grief experience of victims' families. The most significant insight given to that experience lies in the interviews of those family members that typically take place shortly after the tragedy. However, once the cameras and news stations leave, these families and communities must grapple with tremendous loss, oftentimes with limited support. Given that police violence impacts Black and people of color (POC) significantly more than their White counterparts, the aim of this research was to explore the Black grief experience, particularly of victims' mothers. Using an intersectional lens, which considered how race and gender influences grief experiences, this research sought to center the Black maternal experience surrounding grief when impacted by police violence.

Using thematic analysis, three primary themes were identified to help give insight as to how these mothers grieve and what impacts their healing processes. Five Black American mothers participated in 60–90-minute interviews describing their children's violent encounters with police, preparatory measures they may have been taking to protect them from police harm, and their experiences or interests in advocacy work after the incident with their child. Some police encounters were fatal, and some involved serious physical and psychological injury. Mothers expressed intense feelings of grief, regardless of the severity of the incident and the time that had since passed. While mothers had distinct ways of coping, there were also some commonalities of their grief experiences, namely the desire for systemic change and accountability of officers, and the desire for no other mothers and families to join their 'involuntary club', as some have

colloquially described their unfortunate experience. Given the increase and

hypervisibility of police violence in recent years, better understanding the complex

process of grief experienced by these mothers and their families has important research

and clinical implications.

Keywords: advocacy; Black mothers; grief, police violence; the "Talk"

DEDICATION

To my village: I cannot express how thankful I am for your support during this process. This could not have been possible without your continued love and support.

To my thesis advisor, Dr. Anderson: From the bottom of my heart, thank you for the time, patience, and insight you have given me the past 2 years. You have helped me become a more cautious, curious, and intentional researcher and I cannot imagine a more suitable advisor to complete this project with. Thank you.

To my graceful, resilient research participants: I cannot imagine the bravery and courage it takes to wake up every day, having been so intimately impacted by something like this. Words cannot express the admiration and gratefulness I have for y'all entrusting me with your stories. I hope I have done them both justice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IRB   Institutional Review Board

MAPB   Mothers Against Police Brutality, an advocacy organization based out of

Texas

POC   People of Color

CHAPTER I: Introduction

Despite the varied lives that Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, and Michael Brown all lived, one of the common denominators they all shared was their Blackness. In addition to their shared racial identity, coverage through the media also demonstrated the familial support and networks with friends that characterized their lives. It seemed apparent that each of these individuals were loved and cared for through the outpouring of community support. After their deaths, their families and the communities they belonged to joined the long list of those that have been intimately impacted by police violence. According to statistical data gathered by Mapping Police Violence (MPV, 2022), an organization dedicated to publishing data regarding police violence across the country, in 2021 alone, police killed more than 1,000 people across the country. This number shows the steady increase in police-related deaths over the last decade. Of the numerous cases of harm and death caused by police over the years, only a fraction of these incidents has garnered national attention. The lack of coverage for so many victims and their families highlight an unfortunately common experience for Black people and other racially marginalized groups. There is a clear national focus on police violence that has sparked an uptick in activism surrounding violent encounters. Unfortunately, however, too many cases, but more importantly families, are lost in the statistics. For the cases that do receive national coverage and spark protests, there are times when public cries for justice grow larger than actually caring for those most intimately affected by the violence. After the cameras leave, after the protests stop, and while the families that have been impacted by the events are left to grieve, the news and

wider public move on to another occurrence, and the cycle continues. It often seems that social movements use these incidents as a way to create larger-than-life, almost nonhuman, martyrs that have been slain in order to further the movement against police brutality, and less so to support the families of these victims. Due to the small number of organizations and communities that continue the work past the protests, the argument that this is done at the expense of the families could very well be made. Families of the victims of police violence oftentimes relive the trauma of these incidents publicly due to details of the incident being made public and going 'viral' through social media posts, requests for interviews, and sometimes even a level of hypervisibility. This process of grieving publicly can seem exploitative and insensitive to the experiences of these families.

Due to the increase in gun related incidents in the United States (U.S.), research involving gun violence has increased tremendously over the past several years, particularly in exploring how families grieve when impacted by gun violence (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Rahbar et al., 2019; Rajan et al., 2019). Although gun violence itself is studied prolifically in regard to grief research, experiences of grief among Black families and communities in particular is scant, especially when it involves losing a child at the hands of police (McNeil, 2017; Williams, 2016; Wilson, 2022). This research sought to fill current gaps and amplify the voices of Black mothers impacted by police violence either through the death of a child or severe injury. Through the use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with these mothers about their experiences, the study sheds light on the complex process of grief that is exacerbated by the multifaceted phenomenon of racialized policing in the U.S.

This research would not have been possible without a partnership with Mothers Against Police Brutality (MAPB), an advocacy organization based in Dallas, Texas. MAPB is dedicated to supporting mothers who have been personally affected by police violence to highlight the experiences of these mothers. The hope for this research is that it not only adds to the discourse regarding police violence, but more importantly, will provide impacted Black mothers and families with necessary resources to facilitate healing.

CHAPTER II: Literature Review

The rise of police violence against civilians has been broadcasted over the past decade in an almost inescapable way thanks to the rise of social media and 24-hour news cycles. This oversaturation has proved to be somewhat damaging, in a way that has created a sort of tolerance for these events (Anderson et al., 2022; Hirschfield & Simon, 2010), and overall threat to Black mental health (Alang et al., 2022; Bor et al., 2021; McLeod et al., 2022) Despite police violence not being a new phenomenon, it has changed wildly since Rodney King unfortunately became a household name after the video of police beating him was popularized in the 90s. With the invention of the smartphone, civilians have been given a multitude of ways to broadcast these injustices, leading to police violence going viral (Alexander, 1994). Since the 2010s, several police brutality cases have become national news headlines, bringing the issue of excessive force and discrimination front and center for most Americans (Obasogie & Newman, 2019).

Statistically speaking, police in the U.S. kill more people than police in any other country, with higher rates of victims in Black and people of color (POC) communities than in White ones (Edwards et al., 2019). Prior research has shown that the main factors in police decision-making regarding intervention techniques, use of force, and even targets, relies heavily on age, gender, and race, with POC and Black men being more at risk than women (Edwards et al., 2019). When compared to other demographic groups, Black men and boys face the highest risk of being killed at the hands of police. An estimated one in 1,000 Black men and boys will be killed by police in their lifetime

(Edwards et al., 2019) making police violence an experience that most intimately impacts the Black community and more specifically the Black family.

Considering this troublesome reality, it is logical that Black parents tend to engage in more intentional work on educating their children about the potential dangers of police encounters than their White counterparts. Despite these known realities impacting Black families, research that focuses specifically on parental experiences around racialized and complex grief, especially for mothers, is limited.

A Need for an Intersectional Lens

Although there is a growing body of literature that details the stress and coping skills of Black women, without specifying motherhood (Bacchus, 2008, Everett et al., 2010; Mason et al., 2009), extant research has neglected to consider the intersections of mothering and grief. The lack of research regarding this critical aspect of mothering for so many is striking, considering that regardless of family structure, Black women and mothers are viewed as the primary emotional laborers of the household (McAdoo, 2007) while Black fathers served as more as providers and protectors from the outside world. As the primary emotional laborers, Black mothers heavily influence the process of racial socialization for Black children, which refers to the ways in which parents/caregivers transmit messages about cultural values, practices, and identity to their children (Hughes et al., 2006). This process of informing Black children about their racial identity and culture impacts not only how they view themselves, but also how they view the world around them (Hughes, 2003; Lesane-Brown 2006; Miller; 1999). The implications mean that Black women will most likely take on the role of child rearing, and in terms of police violence, this means preparing children with the necessary skills for interactions with law

enforcement, engaging in conversations that inform them of what it means to be Black in a racialized world (Hughes & Foust, 2009; Turner, 2020).

"The Talk", or the conversation that many Black parents find themselves having with their children about how to behave during interactions with police officers (Cintron et al., 2018, Fine & Del Toro, 2022) is an excellent example of one of the more commonly used preparatory measures utilized by Black parents. The methods that Black mothers use to prepare their children for interactions with law enforcement vary, but usually have a common objective – ensuring the safety of their child. Historically, a common attribute of racial socialization approaches has encouraged children to respond to those in the dominant group with meekness and submissiveness because parents understood that a child mastering the ability to take on such a persona could literally make the difference between life and death. Anderson and Stevenson (2019) discuss this, differentiating two approaches that have been prevalent amongst Black families -- the legacy and literacy approaches. The legacy approach is essentially a historical one, in which parents use historical events and their own experiences, make meaning of them, and use those to inform their children of their racialized identity (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). The legacy approach is also where we often hear the old adages commonly ascribed to Blackness (e.g., "working twice as hard to be half as good as White people") (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). The literacy approach, however, emphasizes the child's ability to be 'literate' in terms of discriminatory racial encounters (DREs), which essentially means how well the child can 'read'/interpret DREs without internalization (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Regardless of methods employed by parents, the goal of

"the Talk" seems to be based on surviving the encounter - even if these conversations are achieved using different methods.

"The Talk" is the modern-day metaphorical lifting of "the Veil" coined by du Bois (1903) in which Black children learn to see their own vulnerabilities and the ways in which societal perceptions of who they are change their day-to-day experience, especially in terms of police interaction. Although police violence impacts Black/POC individuals regardless of gender, it is important to note the lack of intersectionality within these conversations, as well as research, regarding police violence, and even in "the Talk" (Gonzalez, 2019). In recent years, conversations regarding survival have started to become more gendered as research suggests that the gendered perspective of crime (i.e., viewing Black men as social deviants and criminals more so than Black women (Coles & Pasek, 2020), is directly correlated with the rise of violent encounters experienced by Black men over the years. "The Talk" also lacks a necessary element of intersectionality that harms Black women due to the gendered nature of crime as well (i.e., crime and police encounters are more associated with Black men), which has led to conversations inadvertently ignoring the experiences of Black women in a way that harms more than helps (Gonzalez, 2019; 2022). Although police violence disproportionately impacts black men (Edwards et al., 2019) it's still an experience that impacts Black women, thus there is a need for precatory measures to be taken regardless of gender (Gonzalez, 2019).

Existing literature has attempted to adequately explore the stress associated with rearing and racially socializing Black children in a society that deems them threatening and predatory, but it is scant (Anderson et.al, 2022). While research has given us an idea of how Black mothers raise their children, as well as how they prepare to send them off

into the world, very little tells us of how this impacts them. Even fewer studies have explored how these moms come to terms with police interactions that end negatively, specifically, most focus on Black mothers' reactions to gun violence in general (Bailey et al., 2013; Hannays-King et al., 2015; Wilson, 2022). Through conversations with Black mothers who have been intimately affected by police violence, this research will help to illuminate this experience.

Most scholarly research regarding motherhood and the potential stressors associated with caretaking almost solely focus on gender with very little nuance regarding how race and access to resources (i.e., schooling, job access, etc.) impacts parenting styles (Brunson & Miller, 2006; Bowleg et al., 2019; Waldron, 2020). Additionally, most research regarding police violence tends to focus on racial disparities and until more recently, have failed to discuss disparities in violence amongst gender (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Jacobs, 2017; Ritchie, 2017). Despite Black children being at an increased risk of being harmed or dying at the hands of police, very little research exists around Black parenthood (Anderson et al., 2022; Jones & Neblett Jr., 2018; McLoyd, 1990; Manning, 2021) that explicitly centers Black motherhood and how they cope with stress unless it is in relation to their children (Bernard & Bernard, 1998; Everet et al., 2016, Hall, 2018). The lack of intersectionality in conversations regarding motherhood or police violence excludes Black mothers from conversations about an experience that has impacted them at an increased rate (Harris et al., 2019; Rogers, 2015).

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is undergirded by three theories, including intersectionality, and the meaning making and continuing bonds grief theories. Intersectionality, as introduced by

Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, was a groundbreaking theory that stated that Black women were systematically being denied their voices on issues that impacted them in regard to race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw draws upon three significant cases to illustrate this point, all of which display what she refers to as 'single axis analysis' in which one identity of Black women is effectively ignored despite discrimination effecting both - i.e. looking solely at one identity (like Blackness) during a case ignores how other identities (like womanhood) were also discriminated against, or vice versa (Crenshaw, 1989). This idea, that discrimination can lie at the intersection of multiple identities for some, such as womanhood and race as Crenshaw proved, has been expanded over the years to include other identities, such as sexuality or socioeconomic status as well (Parent et al., 2013, Settles & Buchanan, 2014). But at the heart of intersectional research is the recognition that identities impact our experiences in ways that aren't always so clear cut. An intersectional lens on race and gender heavily informs the content of this research.

Meaning-making theory of grief is comprised of two concepts; construction of meaning and making "sense" of the death. Meaning reconstruction refers to an individual's search for meaning after the death of a loved one (Neimeyer & Springer, 2010). Meaning reconstruction draws upon previous psychological research proposed by Viktor Frankl that states that man's primary source of motivation is his search for meaning, based on his own experience living in a concentration camp (Frankl, 1985). From this, grief theorists suggest that one of the ways we grieve is by 'making sense' of the loss, and by reconstructing the death of a loved one in our minds. This study draws upon the growing body of meaning reconstruction research regarding the parental experience. As Neimeyer and Springer (2009) suggest, parents have a difficult time

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creating meaning after the death of their child which can create significant hardship such as a resilience to loss, and other disabling symptoms. There are some similarities between non-Black parents and Black parents and how they find meaning in the death of a child; for instance, turning to religion (Mattis, J.S., 2002). Overall, research has shown that parents who can construct meaning for the death of their child fare better than those who don't and can experience a 'less intense' form of grief (Neimeyer & Springer, 2009).

The continuing bonds theory of grief posits that despite one member of the relationship dying, the relationship, although changed because of the death, can continue and even impact levels of adjustment after bereavement (Root & Exline, 2011). Grief researchers have found that the strength and effect of these bonds can be impacted by attachment styles, how intense the grief is, and the manner in which the person has died, and that all three of these areas can impact whether the behavior is maladaptive or helps facilitate grieving (Stroebe & Schut, 2005).

These three theories help examine what the grief experience looks like for Black mothers after their children have been injured or killed by police, but still lack in developing an accurate depiction.

The Present Study

Research that explores the experiences of Black mothers impacted by police violence is incredibly scant in extant literature, especially as it relates to how Black mothers cope with loss. Black mothers are often left out of important conversations about coping, which is problematic considering issues that specifically plague them due to their shared identities of womanhood and Blackness. Although police brutality impacts Black and POC families at increased rates compared to White families (Edwards et al., 2019),

most research seeking to explore police violence also neglects an intersectional frame and discusses the issue as a universal experience as opposed to examining the unique role of gender as it relates to both being a victim of police violence, depicting it as if it impacts Black men and women similarly or at similar rates (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Jacobs, 2017; Ritchie, 2017). By not discussing the unique role of gender or mothering on police violence and coping, Black women are often erased from the overall conversation of policing and racialized violence as it becomes conflated with Black men rather than acknowledging the significance of intersectional identities as it relates to this topic.

Furthermore, foundational grief research tends to take a non-gendered and non-racialized approach, and often conceptualizes grief as a universal experience with few exceptions rather than recognizing how identities (e.g., racial identity, sexuality, relationship status, age, etc.) can impact the grieving process. Parental grief is discussed in a similar way, despite some researchers realizing Black, POC and White parents navigate the world in a different manner (Bartz & Levine, 1978; Durant, O'Bryant, Pennebaker, 1975; Hill & Sprague, 1999). In current literature, the parental grief experience lacks the necessary nuance to fully explain the grief experienced by those with varying social identities that impact their day-to-day lives, especially when their identities (e.g., being Black and being male) and bias towards those identities are often believed to be associated with their deaths in the first place.

The present study aims to fill some of the gaps in the current literature regarding the grief experience and coping skills of Black mothers impacted by police violence. The overarching research question of this study was, "What is the experience of Black mothers whose children have been harmed or killed by police?".

CHAPTER III: Methods

Participants

The research sample included five Black-American mothers ranging between the ages of 45 and 67-years-old. Of these mothers, all but one resided in the Southern region of the U.S., the remaining resided in the Northeastern region of the country. The highest level of education amongst the mothers was an associates degree, with the exception of one mother who had earned a master's degree. Three of the five mothers were married, one was divorced, and one mother reported being single.

Procedure

After receiving approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the principal investigator (P.I.) conducted web searches to identify organizations that worked directly with mothers who have been impacted by police violence. After establishing a list of organizations, contact was made in order to explain the objectives of the study, and to schedule a meeting to discuss a potential research partnership. One of the organizations identified and contacted was Mothers Against Police Brutality (MAPB) and is based in Dallas, Texas. MAPB works with mothers across the country to provide support during their healing processes, and to equip them to engage in advocacy work within their respective cities. After agreeing to the partnership, MAPB contacted a group of mothers within their organization known as Legacy Fellows and made them aware of the research study. The Legacy Fellows were a group of 11 mothers who have participated in impactful activism within each of their communities. Three of the Legacy Fellows expressed interest in the study and completed participation.

The remaining participants of the study were gathered through purposeful

sampling. Purposeful sampling is defined as the purposeful selection of relatively smaller

sample sizes based on similar criterium (Patton, 2002). In this case, all participants that

were contacted are mothers to children who have been personally impacted by police

brutality. Participants were identified through news articles covering the incident and

from there, contacted via social media explaining the research and gauging their interest

in participating in research. This method of sampling accounts for two participants of this

study.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, the P.I. transcribed them verbatim, and each

participant and child were given pseudonyms. Data were then uploaded to a secure,

password-protected cloud-based software that only the P.I. and thesis advisor could

access. Data were analyzed utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis

approach. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research analysis method in which the

researcher identifies patterns and themes within their raw data through a structured six-

step process. The six-step process of analysis involves the following: 1) familiarizing

oneself with the data by transcription and re-reading it if necessary, 2) generating initial

codes systematically across the data set, sorting relevant data in appropriate codes (this

yielded 202 initial codes), 3) searching for preliminary themes within the data set based

on the previously established codes, 4) reviewing themes to ensure they properly explain

codes and generating a thematic map, 5) creation of clear definitions and names for each

theme that tell the entire story (this yielded the 3 themes presented in the results section),

6) producing the final report by selecting items from the data set that answer the research

question and producing a scholarly report of the data. Of the 161 initial codes established in the data set, 50 were identified as miscellaneous codes and thus not included in analysis. These codes can be found in the Appendices.

Thematic analysis was chosen due to the qualitative nature of the research and but also out of the assumption that because of the shared experience of losing a child, mothers may bring out similar emotions or patterns in their responses. The data then could be utilized to paint a bigger picture of the experience of Black mothers who have lost children or had them injured by police.

Materials

All participants completed a consent form and demographics survey prior to participating in the semi-structured interview with the P.I.. An interview protocol containing 16 questions over 4 categories (background, general perceptions of police, emotional experience, and advocacy) was developed and used during the interviews. Interview questions were informed by the undergirding theories and relevant extant literature related to the topic. All materials referenced are included in the Appendices.

Data were collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Participants were asked the same questions in order to gauge their interests and experiences with advocacy, the details surrounding the event that involved their child and police, and their overall grief experience. An example of questions from the interview protocol includes the following:

- As _____ was growing up, did you have conversations with them (or your other children) about how they should respond when interacting with police? If so, what did those conversations look like?

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- When you think about your grieving process, do you feel as though you were allowed to fully grieve? Why or why not?

- Violence against Black people at the hands of police has been at the forefront of the media and characterized nationwide conversations in recent years. What impact has this exposure of police brutality had on you personally?

- What is the ultimate change you hope to see as it relates to Black people and policing in our society?

Researcher Positionality

Including a positionality statement in qualitative research provides an opportunity for the researcher to openly explain their relationship to the research. This common practice is also useful for contextualizing research findings and implications (Holmes, 2020). As a Black woman socialized in the Southern region of the U.S. for most of her life, the P.I. recognizes that her own experiences with race, gender, and policing influenced the process of the research. The P.I. acknowledges how her social identities, as well as her shared identity of being both Black and a woman, could have influenced the level of comfortability and sense of safety with participants. The P.I. also acknowledges how her lived experiences impacted the ways that data were analyzed and interpreted.

CHAPTER IV: Results

As a result of the analysis process, three primary themes were developed using the thematic analysis approach as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The primary themes that adequately depict the experience Black mothers whose children have been killed or severely injured by police are as follows: (a) a choice to live (b) the never-ending fight, and (c) engagement with "the Talk". These themes are presented in order of frequency in the data.

A Choice to Live

When describing their grief experiences, all participants discussed how it has been negatively and positively shaped by a number of factors both within and outside of their control. Outside influences, such as police misconduct or general maltreatment have exacerbated their grief symptoms, while other outside influences, such as interacting with other impacted families has helped. Inside influences, such as the choice to seek counseling after the death or injury of their child helped some moms while others felt discouraged or misunderstood as they sought counseling. This theme is aptly named "A Choice to Live" based off of the frequency of responses that indicated mothers made a conscious choice to continue their lives after the tragic incident, despite going through such a traumatic event. Mothers actively decided to engage in activism or explore ways they could advocate for their children and others in order to alleviate some of the distress associated with their grief. For instance, Elaine, whose son Bradley was killed by police in 2017 stated:

I had children and I had grandchildren that needed to live. I did not want

them to die inside. So, I got off my mourning bed. And I said, You know

what? I'm gonna show them that their mom did not die with Bradley.

Because I want them to live. I don't want them to think their life stops.

And I got off my mourning bed. There were times when I just wanted to

crawl in my bed in a fetal position and just die. My heart was so broken.

But you know what? I had a son a daughter and grandchildren that was

still living and I got up. I got up.[22]

As this quote, and other participants alluded to, there was a fear of a metaphorical death

that could take place in the face of such tragedy, and it was the acknowledgement of the

existence of other relationships that helped them get off of their "mourning bed", as

Elaine stated here.

Overall, the grief experience of these mothers is an emotional process that

unfortunately binds together women who would otherwise have no connection to one

another. One participant, Maya, whose son was killed in 2019 stated:

My son had a strong Black mother. A strong one. And I think my...if I

wasn't the type of person I am this would've killed me. Anxiety, chest

pains... just... hair loss... everything. From stressing, worrying. I had to

pull myself up, I had to try to find me. I lost me in the shuffle

somewhere...I couldn't grieve. I haven't grieved, but mostly because I have

to be the mom that I'm supposed to be to them. I cannot allow myself to

fall short of parenting them because some police woke up and wanted to

be an enforcer for another police, no.

For these moms, waking up every day is not only an act of resistance, it is necessary. As Maya implies, the roles these mothers inhabit (whether it be primary caretaker, spouse, etc.) unfortunately do not halt with the death of their child. Despite feeling as though their world has turned upside down, they must navigate every day as if it weren't.

One last finding that emerged in the research was the impacts of choosing or not to have "the Talk", or the preparatory conversation that some Black/Brown families have with their children about to how to engage with police and respond during police encounters. Throughout the research, mothers were asked specifically whether or not they engaged in these conversations with their children, why or why not they chose to, and if they did, what they looked like. The similarities among displayed/described grief in mothers who engaged in "the Talk", and vice versa were extremely interesting. Despite both groups experiencing the loss of their child in their own way, by and far, mothers who did not engage in "the Talk" (for a number of reasons) expressed more feelings of negative emotions, like guilt, regret, of shame. This is something that was implied by participants who did not engage, but concisely described by Elaine,

> I regret it. I regret it every day. Because guess what, my child could not trust that officer. he could not him. That officer came, in my opinion, with his mind already made up.

How this impacted their overall grief experience (in terms of exacerbating it, lessening it, etc.) was outside the realm of this study, but those stark similarities were important to note. These things, among others, pose interesting questions as

to the potential psychological strain and impact this may have on interpersonal

relationships, as well as with their own feelings of grief.

The Never-Ending Fight

The Never-Ending Fight not only refers to the literal never-ending battle

these mothers fight against police brutality in order for other moms to not join the

"involuntary club", as some have dubbed these mothers. It also refers to the idea

that some who go through traumatic experiences consider advocacy one of the

ways to cope. Some find strength in the ability to use their voices and various

privileges (e.g., ability to protest/organize, connections to local offices, etc.) to

bring awareness to issues that greatly impact them. Regardless of the valiant

effort displayed by mothers, there are a number of barriers they face when it

comes to advocating for justice for their loved ones. There is an intricate

protective network for police that ensues that negatively impacts the advocacy of

these moms, as described by Alicia, whose son was killed in 2019,

> That is my passion, for qualified immunity to be abolished. I speak on it
>
> every chance I get, because I know that that doctrine is what prevents a lot
>
> of us from getting the justice and accountability that we so deserve.
>
> Because it's a protection document for the police and for these elected
>
> officials from being held reliable and accountable for their actions. Their
>
> negligence, their carelessness, their misconduct. So, they have that to
>
> protect them, even though they know that they're wrong. They're just like
>
> us, they're citizens! They're supposed to be law abiding citizens, you ain't
>
> no better than me. But you know you are protected behind that badge and

that shield, and you use it for your advantage, for false narratives. You know, "I feared for my life" is all you gotta say. Knowing you're lying. Because if you feared for your life, why are you in a law enforcement agency? Why aren't you in another career field? Where you don't have to fear for your life?

This belief that although police should operate on an equal playing field of civilians in terms of justice, but don't, is one that is echoed by mothers across this study. Groundbreaking cases such as Tennessee v. Garner (deadly force may be used if the suspect poses a significant threat to the officer(s) involved), Graham v. Connor (use of force is judged by the circumstances of that force, not the officer's intent - e.g.: threat to officer and suspect resistance of officer), etc. are frequently used by attorneys to absolve police from guilt despite the myriad of evidence that victims may have against them. When mothers and families join this involuntary club, they have to fight years of precedence and a system that does not often punish police.

It seems these mothers rarely experience moments of respite during these ordeals. The idea of fellowship with those who truly "get it" - the physical and mental despair of grief, the never-ending deadlines and court documents to be processed, the unwavering and then abrupt silence of media can help offset some of the negativity of this overwhelming and tedious situation.

I feel numb and it's bittersweet. The sweetness is to know that...to get to know other mothers who are going through or have went through...I won't say have went because they're still going through it. You can talk to me

and ask me questions, but to know this feeling. It's different. You understand what I'm saying? It keeps on happening. And it's so bittersweet. I had to meet these nice women under these type of circumstances. And now we have to go and rally together and be a voice for our children. To keep saying their names and let them know they didn't die in vain. You know?

Maya alludes to this notion that meeting other members of this ever-growing group of impacted women and families whose children were unjustly taken from them is an unfortunate irony. While mothers who have been impacted by police brutality can fellowship and lean on one another for support, the reason they get to do so is tragic and unjust. Maya also points out an interesting conundrum experienced by only a few participants – the idea that talking to someone who has not experienced this trauma can be unhelpful. This was only expressed by one other participant in terms of therapy. Among some, there is a belief that the lack of experience makes them feel unheard and/or misunderstood, something that doesn't occur when speaking with other impacted families/mothers.

Some mothers have found solace in talking with others. One mother expressly stated that speaking with the P.I. and others about her experience has been formative in her overall healing process. But by and large, religion seemed to play an influential role in the healing process for mothers. All participants expressed that God provided a nonjudgmental, ever-present shoulder for them to cast their cares, making the experience a lot more bearable. Brenda expressed this succinctly,

I did some little counseling at work at first, but... it's kinda hard sitting and talking to two White women about this situation. Cause no matter how much empathy, sympathy they can muster up... you'll never be able to experience the Black experience. So, I didn't do that long. But the biggest of my mental and emotional healthiness has been because of the God that I serve and the peace that He continues to give me. I don't know what I would do if I didn't know Him. I just don't. I don't know how people move through this space and don't... I mean, to each its own, but for me I could not imagine not having a place to dump the rage, the anger, the fear, the frustration, the sadness, all of it, all of those things. I can cast my cares, I can say the things, I can get them out. And for those that don't have that outlet, my heart goes out to them. But for me, it's been everything. It has been everything. And having that relationship prior to losing my son has helped me a whole lot, too. Because obviously, this is the worst devastation, but I've had other devastations happen and He continues to show up.

By and large, the positive impacts that religion had on the mother's grief was palpable in every interview. Each mother discussed the immense comfort leaning on religion had fro them, in the midst of other "common" grieving methods that did not help them. Religion seemed to be on the few ways that every mother agreed they could always turn to, without fear of judgment or pressure for the grief to look a certain way. Along with using religion as a way to cast their cares and burdens, mothers also alluded to the fact that God was continuously

intervening in their grief process. As Brende suggested, throughout her grief process God has continued to show up, and just on time, a feeling that was echoed by all mothers. There were several instances and examples as to how they believed God had purposefully intervened to assist them when times were troubling.

Engagement with "the Talk"

Many Black and parents of color are now having what is commonly being referred to as "the Talk", or the preparatory conversation of informing their children about how to handle potential police encounters. Due to increasing levels and exposure of violence against Black children, some Black parents are now finding "the Talk" a requirement of raising their children. There are a multitude of reasons as to why a parent would or would not engage in "the Talk" with their children – things like location, socioeconomic status, or even the parent's exposure to violence could dictate how important a parent believes it is to have the conversation with their children. If parents decide to engage in "the Talk" with their children, the methods of how and what messages are translated through this conversation (i.e., conversations that reinforce the need for children to remain calm and docile, or conversations that empower children to stand up for themselves) may differ, but they tend to centralize around one objective: having their children return home safely.

A mother's choice to engage in "the Talk" with their children or not, and her emotional well-being seemed to play hand in hand with one another. For instance, mothers who chose not to engage in "the Talk" seemed to feel more

feelings of remorse or guilt surrounding their child's death – while mothers who chose to engage in "the Talk" may also share similar feelings, they are more so related to the death itself, not what measures could have been taken prior to the death. Mothers who chose not to engage in "the Talk" expressed feelings of intense guilt for not doing so, such as Elaine:

> And at that time, I think we grew up in and I had my children, and I often beat myself up about this. I feel that I allowed my children to grow up in a make-believe society. A society where the policeman was their friend... But even then, you know, "oh, the police officer is your friend. If you get in trouble if you get lost, you can a police officer." There's as far as our conversations went, as far as informing our children about police. And I don't think, and I feel guilty about this, that I even went even further. This, 'having a sit-down, in-depth conversation about how you should act or react with police officers or interact with police officers in a real-life situation.

This push for more upfront, honest conversations with Black children could ensure an overall peace of mind for parents, but not necessarily the safety of them. While mothers agree that this is integral to their preparation for encounters, nothing fundamentally can change without systematic change by law enforcement agencies. Whether or not mothers choose to engage in "the Talk" with their children is less about how it helps the outcomes, and more about a feeling of intervention. From speaking with these mothers, the ones who did not engage in "the Talk" with their children feel as though it could've mentally helped their

children prepare for the possibility of a negative encounter, rather than teaching them that any encounter with police will always turn out in their best interest. Elaine describes something that other mothers who did not engage in "the Talk" also echo – a need for intentional conversation with children that warn them of the dangers of police interactions. These conversations don't necessarily have to paint all police a negative light, but as Elaine describes they should be honest with children about the risks associated with interacting with police as a Black person. With so much uncertainty surrounding the outcome of a police stop, mothers feel as though it is a disservice to not at least warn their children of these risks.

These three themes (A Choice to Live, The Never-Ending Fight and Engagement with "the Talk") help encapsulate some of the grief experience of these mothers and what they must navigate after the death or harm of their child.

CHAPTER V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the grief experiences of Black mothers who have been significantly and tragically affected by police violence. Current research that details the experience of Black maternal grief is unfortunately scant, especially when it comes to the effects of police violence. Therefore, this research study aimed to highlight the maternal experience, what complicates it, what helps and/or hinders it, and to give a glimpse into what some Black mothers have to face following the death of their child. All participants broadly expressed how difficult and never-ending their grief is, but each had varying levels of adjustment to the death or injury, as well as diverse methods of coping.

A Mother's Exacerbated Grief

In general, while all mothers seemed to agree that systemic change was necessary in order to properly grieve the death of their child, there were a number of ways that their grief was complicated by external influences. Maltreatment, whether by police, government officials, or even the media after the death or injury of their child, seemed to be one of the many arenas that complicated the grieving process for each mom. An overall lack of following 'proper protocol' seemed to make an unfortunate situation even worse. Some mothers described being denied the right to identify or see their child's body until their funeral, to not receiving an official death notification from police, but through social media or another family member. Despite the fact that neither of these actions could

bring their child back to them, breaking the 'social contract', has additional negative impacts on the grief experience. These negative experiences add up and impact mothers' months, or years after the incident has occurred. At some point following the injury or death of their child, each mother expressed the impacts of feeling mistreated, misunderstood, or ignored by law enforcement, even years later. One mother felt as though she was on trial instead of the officer that had taken her child from her. These sentiments illustrate a broader, more complicated issue that these mothers have to face. On top of grieving for their child, they feel obligated to learn to advocate for what they believe they need to start healing, or to move forward legally (e.g., requesting to identify their child). In addition to the stress of losing a child, mothers described responding quickly to request the things that seem 'commonplace' or procedural, otherwise they do not believe they would have gotten them.

"The Talk": Context Matters

As previously discussed, whether or not mothers chose to engage in "the Talk" also tended to complicate the healing process. The factors leading to whether or not families engaged in the "Talk" with their children were sometimes out of their control. By and large, mothers from smaller, rural communities, in which there seemed to be a sense of togetherness among residents tended to engage in "the Talk" less than mothers who lived in more urban and metropolitan areas. This could be for a number of reasons, as mothers in smaller communities tended to have more connections to elected officials and law enforcement (e.g., one mother reported graduating from high school with the former chief of police

in her town) and are generally a little more reliant on their communities to help raise their children. Meanwhile, mothers who are from more urban areas engage in "the Talk" more due to overall exposure to police in their communities, or even their own negative interactions with police. This was an interesting phenomenon that gave more insight into how geographic location could inform racial socialization processes. If mothers feel more comfortable in the areas they live in (i.e., knowing law enforcement members, the lack of negative community encounters in their town in decades, or even raising their children with a strict moral compass of right/wrong) then there is less of a need to have these conversations because the perceived threat is very low. An overall lack of exposure, whether it be firsthand or within the community and overall familiarity seems to play an important role in dictating whether or not these conversations are had, which is extremely important.

On the contrary, mothers from more urban areas known for negative police encounters, or mothers or their spouses who have had negative encounters with police stress the overall importance of having honest conversations as soon as possible in order to adequately prepare their children for encounters with police. These conversations seem to be a staple in urban households because the threat is apparent, and more times than not, hits close to home with other community or family members falling victim to police violence.

While these distinct experiences are worth highlighting, it is critical to note that a parent's decision to or not to engage in "the Talk" should not be misconstrued with assigning or affirming blame or guilt for parents. This decision

has no bearing over whether or not police encounters can turn violent, because the outcome of these events is largely out of civilian control. As one mother pointed out during her interview, police encounters are extremely unpredictable events. Even when parents decide to engage in "the Talk" with their children, there's no guarantee that the tips and directives given in these conversations will help their child avoid death or harm during an interaction with police.

"Strong" Black Mothers & Grief

Almost every participant alluded to the overwhelming pressure they felt to "stop" their grief at some point. Whether this be because of a responsibility they felt they had to others (i.e., family members, children, or even the deceased), or the responsibility to themselves, each mother discussed that while they realized grief was an unending process for them, at some point they could not continue grieving in the ways that they were. They discussed it in a way that felt as though they viewed it as maladaptive, which further aligns with the 'one size fits all' approach that many theorists and popular culture have adopted. At some point, these mothers felt as though grieving in the ways that they did was ineffective for their healing process, and thus, needed to change. There are a number of reasons why people in general view their grief as maladaptive, but it sometimes comes down to what is deemed as a socially appropriate method of handling the situation. For instance, grieving family members could be a cause for concern if they stop taking care of themselves in a way that they 'should be' by not showering, not showing up to work, crying for hours, etc. Even if this is the natural way that the grieving family member has chosen to process their grief, it

seemed that they did not think it was 'socially acceptable' to carry on in such a way, especially not past a certain point of grief.

Pre-dating police violence, the idea that Black people possessed a supernatural level of strength and resilience to physical pain (Woodrow et al., 1972) has informed societal views of Black people, and especially Black women (Hollingshead, 2016; Trawalter & Hoffman, 2015; Williams, 2009;). These differences have been labeled as the culprit for many health disparities such as maternal mortality rates in the US specifically (Lister et al., 2020; McDorman et al., 2021). As it relates to the grieving process of Black mothers specifically, one reason Black mothers specifically may feel this invisible urge to change or stop the ways they grieve could be of the societal perceptions of Black motherhood. Of the multitude of ideas surrounding Black motherhood, one in particular is directly related to the belief that Black women are inherently more tolerant of pain, whether it be physical or mental. It is often referred to as the strong Black mother trope. This trope plays out in a number of ways (e.g., putting your child's needs above your own is viewed as the only or 'right' way to raise your children, rarely showing affection to one's children, and most commonly that you are resilient and never need assistance raising your children) (Wade-Gayles & Sage, 1984; Washington, 1988; Mattingly, 2014; Dow, 2015). If society views you as a Black mother as a) more resilient to pain and trauma, b) capable of doing a myriad of things, like raising children and grieving over others without assistance, two things about this Black maternal experience start to make sense: the sudden lack of media attention and the urge to stop your expressions of grief.

When you take this unwritten social contract of how one should carry themselves in 'normal' and 'abnormal' situations, like grief, paired with other societal perceptions of Black women, it stands to reason why Black mothers specifically change the ways in which they explore their grief. They turn to more socially acceptable options to grieve, like counseling, fellowship with other mothers, turning to religion, even if it 'doesn't help' because these are ways that meet the expectations of a strong Black mother. These expectations of how Black mothers should act can be detrimental to their overall well-being, especially after the experience of trauma because it asserts that they are capable of grieving or handling that trauma alone. Clearly, these mothers' benefit from the comradery and solidarity of grieving with one another and being given the space to express their grief. Tropes such as these rob mothers of the very thing that can help their healing process.

Implications

This research has the potential to add nuance to a number of different fields, including, but not limited to, grief research, racial socialization, as well as add more context to activist and social justice spaces for impacted families. Literature that focuses on the methods Black parents use to inform and help their children shape their racial identity and handle discriminatory encounters is steadily growing; however, research that specifically looks at how Black parents address police encounters and navigate those conversations with their children is much newer (Anderson et al., 2022; Citron et al., 2019; DiAoqui, 2017). This

research could provide more insight into the toll racial socialization work plays on the well-being of Black mothers.

Clinically, practitioners working with mothers or other impacted family members could utilize this research to help inform their practices. While not every mother felt that therapy was an effective coping mechanism for them, some mothers detailed the effectiveness of talking through the incident and their feelings, which mirrors talk therapy. Mothers also stressed experiencing a lack of control over these circumstances in general, so having open dialogue with them during the therapeutic process in terms of what discussions are had and the creation and implementation of their therapeutic plan could help them regain their lost sense of control and positively impact the healing process.

Expanding the Views of Grief

In terms of grief, some of the groundbreaking literature suggests a "one size fits all" approach that doesn't necessarily consider how race and/or gender can impact how a person grieves. There's also little consideration as to how a person can grieve in a situation where the victim had little control (i.e., presumed racialized deaths like police brutality). This study adds to the small sect of grief literature that focuses on the grief experience of Black American women, with the added experience of motherhood and could help direct future studies focused in either area. One of the theoretical frameworks that was used in this study was the continuing bonds theory (Root & Exline, 2011), which centers the belief that the relationship with the deceased can continue in the event of a death of one of the parties. This study adds nuance to this theoretical perspective. Not only do the

relationships with their children 'continue' post death, they also heavily influence their grieving process. For instance, when asked if they ever fully grieved the loss or harm of their child, mothers gave a few reasons as to why they felt they could not, but what was most impactful was that they felt an obligation to their child to not do so. On more than one occasion, mothers alluded to the fact that experiencing such heavy burdens of their grief and the subsequent effects (e.g., loss of appetite, hair loss, etc.) was not what their child would want for them, or the other relationships they had. Despite no longer being present, this push from their children to get up and continue their lives also pushed mothers to halt or grieve differently. This is an experience that could be replicated elsewhere, but of the research that discusses continuing bonds, little to none touches this feeling of obligation experienced by parents.

As illustrated throughout the research, the process of making meaning from one's death is important for the healing process, as it helps the individual 'come to terms' with the loss of a loved one. What isn't discussed as much is what happens when that death occurs in a way that complicates its meaning, and how that can impact the grieving process of that individual. For instance, when a mother prepares their child for encounters with police and tries to equip them with the tools to safely return home after it and they do not, how does this influence the meaning of that death? When a mother instills in her children that all police who take the oath to 'serve and protect' are without racial biases that can harm them and one of those officers kills her child, how does that complicate the meaning of that death? Time and time again, police violence has shown us that you can do

everything 'right', have the conversations with your children, record the incident, take the officer/precinct to court, and still end up being disappointed. After suffering through this with your own child, and then watching the same scenario play out repeatedly, how does this impact one's process of making meaning of the death of their child, not to mention others?

Spaces of Healing

Activism efforts post-grief is not specific to deaths related to police violence, and in recent years with the uptick of police related deaths, school shootings, and other previously novel experiences research has come to explore what drives the families or parents of victims to advocacy. There is not as much formal research on the experience of Black families/mothers following police related death, despite a lot of grassroots and even formal efforts being spearheaded by mothers.

Activism is one of the myriad ways that these moms start to heal. Spaces created by impacted families, such as the Circle of Mothers created by Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon Martin's mother, facilitate places of understanding in a unique way through conferences and different forms of self-care. These spaces show that healing is not confined to a formal space, like a therapist's office, but are just as necessary and important for that healing to take place.

Exploitation of Advocacy

While some spaces fuel healing and a sense of fellowship in grief, this unfortunately does not extend to all advocacy spaces. For instance, some participants rally for staunch legal or departmental changes, such as mandatory

drug testing, ending inside investigations of cases, or "police policing police", while others rally for structural changes within the prison system that disproportionately impact Black/Brown individuals. But regardless of the ways these participants children were unjustly taken from them, one thing they all agree on is ending the exploitative nature of advocacy spaces that appear after such tragedies. While good-natured, these spaces seem to struggle with adequately fighting for mothers in a way that doesn't take advantage of their loss or feelings of grief. Stories of protests being held without family's consent. Stories of victim's names being attached to agendas other than the fight for police brutality. Stories of non-family members co-opting their grief for monetary or social gain. As one participant stated, certain people see these mothers and their grief as the 'land of milk and honey', profiting off their immense grief despite stating they want to help.

Of course, this does not apply to all advocacy spaces, such as MAPB and other grassroots efforts who put the mothers' needs and desires at the forefront of their fight, but the exploitation of grief and vulnerability that comes from joining this involuntary club is something that each participant, and other mothers in their positions, have unfortunately alluded to.

Limitations

As with most research studies, there are limitations within this study. Given the proximity of the P.I. to the research participants both by gender and race, the research participants could have suffered from social desirability bias. Social desirability bias is the belief that participants respond in ways that the

researcher would find favorable, even if these don't accurately depict the feelings of the participant, which could lead to overreporting of specific answers/ideas based on social acceptability or what is 'expected' (Grimm, 2010). Additionally, the P.I. did not offer member checking, or allow participants to read over interview transcripts to validate the information present (Creswell & Miller, 2010). Another limitation of the study is that the P.I. was the sole analyst of the data. The P.I. completed the coding of data, formulated the themes in collaboration with the thesis advisor, and drafted the manuscript. To help mitigate these biases, all information presented was reviewed by both the P.I. and thesis advisor to formulate this manuscript. Moreover, to combat any misconstrued quotes, the P.I. transcribed all interviews verbatim in to order to glean exactly what was said and meant by participants.

Directions for Future Research

Future research regarding the impacts of police violence on the Black community should make a more conscious effort to work in a more intersectional manner, considering the implications that gender, socioeconomic status, and even family composition may inform one's exposure, comfort level, and coping process after an encounter with police. As it currently stands, research and the global public are just now realizing the implications that gender can have on police encounters or dealing with law enforcement, as campaigns such as #SayHerName and the names of more Black women join the long list of those unjustly killed by police, but there is still room to grow. Black women and men

navigate the world differently, despite their shared racial identity which can impact how they navigate police encounters.

Further research could expand to shed light on the Black familial experience of grief, looking at siblings or even fathers to see if there are palpable differences between their own experience as opposed to mothers. This study focused on mothers specifically given the mother-child relationship that starts prior to the birth of the child, but this is not to say that other family members aren't equally impacted by the death of a loved one or unworthy of their own space to grieve. Ultimately, this study could be useful in the development of future studies discussing the grief of those impacted by police violence, whether it be family members, spouses, children, or even communities of the deceased. It is important to acknowledge that the death of someone at the hands of police impacts more than just one party.

Conclusion

This complicated experience of maternal grief is unfortunately becoming more common due to the racial disparities that exist in society related to police violence. The grief of these mothers is incredibly multifaceted, plagued by issues outside of their control that forces them to reckon with a complex legal system that often fails to see them or their children as victims. Even as families attempt to prepare their children for potentially violent encounters, they still lack control over whether the guidance given will actually improve the outcome of the encounter. These unique and unfathomable experiences are in need of further explication, which can be beneficial for practitioners who provide support for

families in the aftermath of such tragedy. Amplifying their stories and

intentionally providing a space for those impacted to talk about their experiences

can be useful for their growth and healing.

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Table 1

Characteristics of Study Sample (N = 5)

	N (%)	M (SD)
Participant age		55.2 (10.1)
Education level		
High school diploma/GED	3 (60)	
Associate's degree	1 (20)	
College (Master's) degree	1 (20)	
Marital status		
Single	1 (20)	
Married	3 (60)	
Divorced	1 (20)	

Table 2

Coding Map of Initial Codes for Mother's Responses

Themes	Initial Codes	
1. Grief experience	1. "It's hell" 2. Loss of oneself 3. Limited support/care from others 4. Maltreatment 5. No defined timeline 6. Never-ending experience 7. Barriers of justice 8. No rest until justice 9. No justice 10. Physical symptoms 11. Bittersweet relationships/emotions 12. Desire for justice 13. Psalms 138:6 14. Upsetting realizations 15. Turn pain into joy 16. No defense of humanity, dehumanization	17. Chosen family, relying on other families/moms 18. Burden of proof 19. Emotional breakdowns 20. Questioning God/religion 21. 'Rushed' to grieve 22. Misunderstanding from others 23. Leaning on other relationships (spouses, children, etc.) 24. 25. Provide an explanation 26. Remain calm 27. Share your personal information 28. Encouraging calm/non-threatening behaviors
2. Activism	1. Exploitation 2. Placated feelings 3. No community support 4. Hypocrisy of organizations geared towards helping **5.** Should have clear, defined goals Not enough sustainable	6. "Actorvists", performative activism 7. Abuse of established campaign goals 8. Recognition of gain from families, etc.

	organizations to help support families	
3. Maltreatment	1. Unfair higher standard placed on civilians 2. Unparalleled levels of access to community 3. Exposure to hostile environment after incident 4. Providing emotional support 5. Extreme violence 6. Preyed on/targeting 7. No justice	8. No accountability for any involved 9. Lack of regard for prior officer infractions 10. Dehumanization (in media/by Law enforcement) 11. Abuse of power
4. Grief experience & The Incident	1. "It's hell" 2. Loss of self 3. Physical symptoms of grief (insomnia, hair loss, exhaustion, etc.) 4. Limited support 5. No defined timeline 6. Slow transition to grief 7. No rest until justice 8. Anchored in God/religion 9. Involuntary Club 10. Drawing strength from other relationships 11. Trauma of bystanders	12. Reliance on 'chosen families' 13. Suspicion of racism 14. Stereotypes about Black children 15. Encouragement to fight harder 16. "Rushed' to grieve 17. Lack of care from others 18. Turning from parent to detective/private investigator 19. Trauma of family members
5. Emotional experience	1. Numb 2. Disgusted 3. Depressed	9. Disbelief 10. Inability to grieve

	4. Regret 5. Stuck 6. Mourning 7. Traumatized 8. Angry	11. Frustrated 12. Disappointed 13. Hopeless 14. Hurt 15. Joy (from fellowship) 16. Guilt **17.** Emptiness
6. "The Talk" & Police Perception	18. Geographic impacts 19. Familial impacts/connections to law enforcement 20. Police are waging a war 21. Conversations are hard to internalize 22. Assumed respect/ 23. Suspicion 24. Aggression from police	25. Distrust from prior encounters 26. Police should be held to higher standard 27. Continued barriers to justice 28. "Police policing the police" 29. Village mentality reinforced

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office *of*
Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF
**SOUTHERN
MISSISSIPPI**

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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident submission on InfoEd IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER:	22-900
PROJECT TITLE:	A Thematic Analysis of the Experience of Black Mothers and Police Violence
SCHOOL/PROGRAM	Psychology
RESEARCHERS:	PI: Klaria Holmes
	Investigators: Holmes, Klaria~Anderson, Leslie~
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION:	Approved
CATEGORY:	Expedited Category
PERIOD OF APPROVAL:	15-Aug-2022 to 14-Aug-2023

Donald Sacco

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background Questions
- Can you tell me about your family, like where you raised your child/children?
- What was it like for you raising them in your neighborhood or community?
- What was _____ like as a child (e.g., personality, interests, hobbies, etc.)?
- How would you describe you and _____'s relationship?

General Perceptions
- As _____ was growing up, did you have conversations with them (or your other children) about how they should respond when interacting with police?
    - If so, what did those conversations look like?
    - How do you think _____ (and/or other children) perceived those conversations?
    - Were there ever any other instances in which you or your family knew about other individuals being a victim to police violence? If so, can you tell me about what happened?
- Prior to _____'s final encounter with police, as far as you know, did _____ have other interactions with them that you felt were concerning? If so, can you tell me what happened and how you all responded?
- Can you tell me about what happened to _____ during her/his final moments with police?

Emotional Experience
- How have you attended to your emotional and mental health needs throughout all of this?
- When you think about your grieving process, do you feel as though you were allowed to fully grieve? Why or why not?
- After losing _____, do you feel like you received excessive attention (e.g., from the media, the community)? If so, how do you feel your experience of receiving so much attention impacted the grieving/healing process?
- Following _____'s death, , in what ways did you feel you supported? Did you ever feel neglected (overlooked, ignored, etc.) by anyone (community members, media, etc.)?
- Violence against Black people at the hands of police has been at the forefront of the media and characterized nationwide conversations in recent years. What impact has this exposure of police brutality had on you personally?

Advocacy
- What are your views on the publicity police violence has gotten?
    - Do you feel as though people have used what has happened to you and your family, or other families with similar experiences, for profit or notoriety? If so, in what ways?
- In my research, I've found that some mothers who have lost children at the hands of police have begun to engage in advocacy work against gun violence and for police reform. Has this also been true for you? If so, how?

- What is the ultimate change you hope to see as it relates to Black people and policing in our society?
- Is there anything related to your experience that I haven't asked you about that you'd like me to know?

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Screener Questions
- What is your age?
- Which city and state are you living in? Were you living there at the time of your child's death??
- What is your highest education level?
  - some high school
  - High school diploma/GED equivalent
  - Associates degree
  - Bachelor's degree
  - Master's Degree
  - PhD/JD or other professional degree
- What is your occupation?
- What is your marital status?
- How many children do you have?

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INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
STANDARD (ONLINE) INFORMED CONSENT

STANDARD (ONLINE) INFORMED CONSENT PROCEDURES
• ***Use of this template is _optional_.*** However, by federal regulations (45 **CFR** 46.116), all consent documentation must address each of the required elements listed below (purpose, procedures, duration, benefits, risks, alternative procedures, confidentiality, whom to contact in case of injury, and a statement that participation is voluntary).   Last Edited May 18th, 2022

Today's date: 5-31-22

PROJECT INFORMATION		
Project Title: A Thematic Analysis of the Experience of Black Mothers and Police Violence		
Protocol Number: 22-899		
Principal Investigator: Klaria Holmes	Phone: (662) 202-6342	Email: w10019988@usm.edu
College: Education and Human Sciences	School and Program: School of Psychology, Psychology	

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION
1. **Purpose:**   a. Existing research literature and media tends to focus primarily on efforts to gain justice and needed police reform, or preemptive steps taken by families to prepare their children for police encounters. But after the cameras, the protestors, and spokespeople leave, it seems that families are left to mourn with limited levels of support. This research project aims to help uplift the voices of Black mothers that are often forgotten once the flood of media attention wanes. As previously mentioned, because of the lack of research regarding the experiences of Black mothers as it relates to this topic, it is my hope that my thesis will help shed more light on the unique plight of Black mothers through qualitative interviews. Conducting qualitative research, and

specifically interviews, will provide a wealth of rich and contextual information related to the lived experiences of mothers.

a. These qualitative interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2007) in order to highlight common themes and patterns throughout the interviews.

2. **Description of Study:**
Participants will meet through Zoom or over the phone regarding their experience losing a child to police violence. These interviews will be video and audio recorded, as well as transcribed following the call. Participants must be Black women with children of any age or gender who've been killed or injured by police. Participants must be able to speak English. Participants must also have reliable internet access for Zoom, or access to a phone for the interview.

3. **Benefits:**
This study will give mothers a non-judgmental, non-exploitative space to process a traumatic situation, which could be beneficial for their healing process. Participants will also be rewarded with a $10 Amazon gift card.

4. **Risks:**
a. The opportunity to somewhat relive a traumatic experience can be triggering, or painful for some mothers. To mitigate this, participants will be provided with telehealth counseling services, as well as reminded of their voluntary participation at the start of the interview. Participants will be reminded that they can end the interview at any time.
i. BetterHelp: (888) 688-9296
i. TalkSpace: (866) 782-5946
i. Faithful Counseling (faith based): 219.714.7147

5. **Confidentiality:**
Participants will be given a pseudonym in the final written report.

6. **Alternative Procedures:**
N/A,

7. **Participant's Assurance:**
This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects

involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, 601-266-5997.

Any questions about this research project should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided above.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I understand that participation in this project is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Unless described above, all personal information will be kept strictly confidential, including my name and other identifying information. All procedures to be followed and their purposes were explained to me. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to me if that information may affect my willingness to continue participation in the project.

(Include the following information only if applicable. Otherwise delete this entire paragraph before submitting for IRB approval:) The University of Southern Mississippi has no mechanism to provide compensation for participants who may incur injuries as a result of participation in research projects. However, efforts will be made to make available the facilities and professional skills at the University. Participants may incur charges as a result of treatment related to research injuries. Information regarding treatment or the absence of treatment has been given above.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
By clicking the box below, I give my consent to participate in this research project. *If you do not wish to participate in this study, please close your browser now.*
☐   Yes, I consent to participate.