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Changes in interpersonal relationships have marked the COVID-19 pandemic. Previous research on the consequences of COVID-19 for families has primarily investigated the broad topics of family well-being and caregiving, leaving more distinct connections, like mother-daughter relationships, unexamined. Even less research has been conducted to investigate the pandemic experiences of Black families. The following thesis uses narrative data from 18 to 25 year-old Black female college students to comprehend the state of their relationships with their mothers before and after the onset of COVID-19. Thematic analysis was utilized to decipher relevant patterns and themes concerning mother-daughter relationships. Results indicated that daughters perceived their mothers as embodying strength and resilience before the pandemic as a shield to protect themselves. However, after the pandemic, participants reported vulnerability in their mothers, which created a new level of closeness in their relationships and increased mental health for mothers and daughters. Data also suggested that although participants faced challenges when COVID sent them back to their family homes, many were able to reconnect with their mothers and increase their relationship quality. Findings suggest that Black mother-daughter relationships largely benefitted from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mothers and daughters showed one another support and compassion after the start of the pandemic, abandoning societal expectations of strength and independence to elevate their relationships to new heights during unprecedented times.

STRONG BLACK MOTHER: GENERATIONAL TRANSFER OF RESILIENCE

by

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Approved by

Dr. Ting Wang
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my great aunt, Sandra Allen, the first Black woman to help me know myself.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Jasmine S. Gibbs has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I. LITERATURE REVIEW

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created unusual circumstances for humankind. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the impact of the pandemic on already marginalized communities. Furthermore, due to their double-minority status, the experiences of Black American women during the pandemic represent unique conditions that require examination. Specifically, the following thesis investigates Black mother-daughter relationships before and after the COVID-19 pandemic by analyzing qualitative data from Black women in emerging adulthood.

1.1 Strong Black Woman

Harmful stereotypes of Black women based on inaccurate representations of their race and gender have been prevalent since slavery. Collins (2000) describes controlling images in her seminal work, *Black Feminist Thought*, as stereotypes assigned to subordinate groups who do not have the authority to define their own experience. Hegemonic entities use controlling images to justify racism, sexism, and other forms of mistreatment (Collins, 2000). Controlling images are put in place to portray injustice as an unavoidable consequence of living in a marginalized body, therefore normalizing it. Dominant groups leverage harmful stereotypes about marginalized communities to maintain power and control (Collins, 2000). She contends that government agencies and social structures often validate these damaging narratives by associating Blackness with social problems (i.e., The War on Drugs, HIV/AIDS, and teen pregnancy). Among the first controlling images placed onto Black women were the mammy- the submissive and asexual mother figure; the jezebel- the hypersexual whore; the matriarch- the emasculating and hyperindependent mother, and the welfare queen- the lazy, breeding mother who takes advantage of government assistance programs (Collins, 2000; Kalinowski et al., 2022; Lafontant, 2009).

These confining depictions of Black womanhood were, and still are, utilized to reinforce their subordinate status and to remove them from the privileges of traditional femininity, another practice rooted in slavery.

Traditional femininity has been established to privilege the experiences of white women, incorporating assumptions of purity, dependence on men, beauty and thinness, motherhood, and nurturing behaviors (Davis et al., 2018; Hill, 2002). However, due to slavery and continued racism and oppression, Black women have not been afforded the luxury of traditional femininity (Hill, 2002). For example, during slavery, Black women often performed the same labor as men and have since maintained the familial role of matriarch, as Black households are female led at disproportionate rates (Collins, 2000). Societal circumstances require Black women to embody conflicting male and female gender roles, creating the unique gender performance of the Strong Black Woman, the product of limiting stereotypes and coping mechanisms.

The 'Strong Black Woman' (SBW) is a racialized and gendered performance that Black women utilize daily to navigate their unique realities as double minorities. As Abrams et al. (2014) point out, "SBW are birthed out of necessity" (pp. 505). Black women resist justification of their oppression, which can sometimes look like the internalization of stereotypes, like strength, for perceived protection (Collins, 2000). The SBW, or Superwoman, has been characterized as hyper-independent, resilient, invulnerable, determined to succeed (even with little resources), religious or spiritual, a caregiver, and a staunch supporter of her community (Abrams et al., 2014; Woods-Giscombé, 2010). The SBW role requires Black women to take on more responsibilities than other groups and resist displaying characteristics perceived as weak, adopting the persona of an invincible superwoman (Abrams et al., 2014). Black women's

appearance of strength and accomplishments under challenging circumstances are seen by many as evidence that societal barriers faced by Black folks are not *that* bad and contribute to the justification of mistreatment (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009).

Assuming the role of SBW comes with consequences. In 2007, Beauboeuf-Lafontant interrogated connections between showing strength and depression among Black women. Previously, depression had been considered a "woman's issue," but research neglected to include Black women in their study (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007). Beauboeuf-Lafontant maintained that other factors, such as race, socioeconomic status, and immigration status, are essential in conceptualizing depression in women. She concluded that depression in Black women could result from normalizing struggle. Woods-Giscombé's 2010 article contributes to this narrative, describing the stress-related health behaviors of emotional eating, smoking, and dysfunctional sleep that can accompany the embodiment of the Superwoman Schema. In 2014, Abrams et al. interviewed Black women aged 18-91. They found physical and mental health implications associated with upholding the heavy SBW script, including stress, obesity, neglecting self-care, avoidance, silencing emotions, emotional eating, and depression. Later, Davis et al. (2018) assessed the connection between the SBW script and stress in college-age, or emerging adult, Black women. The team's regression analysis found that taking on the role of SBW, which includes traditional and non-traditional forms of femininity, had less favorable outcomes on stress than traditional femininity. More recently, White (2022) surveyed Black college-age women, finding that endorsing the SBW script was associated with psychological distress and self-reported suicidal behaviors. However, when participants exhibited resilience, a pillar of the SBW schema, psychological stress and suicidal behaviors decreased.

The SBW schema is imposed on Black women by society and their mothers, grandmothers, and other female role models. Woods-Giscombé (2010) cites historical factors, personal histories of abuse and disappointment, spiritual values, and lessons from foremothers as contextual factors that contribute to the formation of the Superwoman. The Superwoman/ SBW identity is passed down because of its perceived benefits. Woods-Giscombé (2010) describes these perceived benefits as upholding the Black family and preserving the Black community. Black women also endorse the SBW and Superwoman roles in an attempt to shield themselves from racism and sexism. As a result, Black women explicitly and implicitly teach their daughters to be strong and independent to protect them, inadvertently continuing the cycle of controlling images. Abrams et al. (2014) note participants referencing mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, and aunts teaching them what strength looked like, which was heavily related to independence from men. One 22-year-old participant described her desire to emulate SBW in her life (Abrams et al., 2014). However, participants in Beauboeuf-Lafontant's 2007 study described "breakdowns" (39) occurring among the SBW they admired, highlighting the negative implications of unwavering displays of strength.

1.2 Strong Black Mother

Black family dynamics do not mirror that of the traditional American family. Although they incorporate American and African American principles, due to slavery, Black families have been defined by mothers and their children, undermining the family's patriarchal conceptualizations (Hill, 2002). Hill (2001) asserts that Black folks participate in their children's socialization, contrary to the generalizations of Black parents as inadequate or lazy guardians.

Therefore, Black mothers play an essential role in child rearing and their children's ethnic-racial socialization due to their higher levels of communication and time spent with children (Brown et In al., 2010; Reynolds et al., 2017). However, Hill (2001) says that the socialization received by Black children heavily correlates to societal forces and inequality. She continues that Black families teach their children how to cope with racism, but attention must be brought to the differences in socialization based on the gender of the child. According to Hill, male children receive warnings about racial barriers during socialization, while girls are instilled with greater racial pride. She also notes that Black daughters are often held to a higher standard, while sons are met with more understanding and compassion. Black family racial socialization also differs by gender in time spent socializing children. For example, in their 2010 assessment of gendered racial socialization in Black families, Brown et al. found that girls reported receiving more ethnic and racial socialization from parents than boys. Brown et al. claim this could be due to girls noticing socialization more or parents perceiving daughters as more receptive to these messages. Specifically, mothers spend more time socializing their daughters than sons (Reynolds et al., 2017).

As Black mothers spend more time socializing their daughters, this leads to unique dynamics that promote the transference of SBW qualities. Hill (2002) found that in Black American families, the goal of child-rearing was to create daughters that represent the qualities of both "ladies" and "warriors." Expectations like these prompt Black girls to embody the conflicting SBW qualities of masculinity and femininity from an early age. Hill (2002) also noted an expectation of daughters in Black families to obtain their education and carry out responsibilities for their families and communities, prioritizing strength and success. In addition,

Black mothers and fathers promote confidence and independence in their daughters more than their sons, according to Reynolds et al. (2017). In 2019, Oshin and Milan assessed the difference between Black and Latinx mothers socializing their daughters. They discovered that although Black and Latinx mothers assigned SBW qualities to daughters at the same rate, Black mothers had positive perspectives of these behaviors, referring to them as leadership qualities. Latinx mothers held different opinions about traits associated with the SBW, categorizing them as "externalizing problems" (pp. 179). Johnson and Ross (2022) find that in an effort to protect their daughters and prepare them for adulthood, Black mothers inadvertently groom their daughters into the SBW role. The ongoing reinforcement of the SBW role in young girls continues the cycle of unhealthy coping mechanisms that began in slavery.

The SBW archetype is so normalized for young Black girls that it becomes aspirational. Anyiwo et al. (2022) argue that Black girls may even begin internalizing the role in adolescence, as it marks a time of life characterized by an increased understanding of racial injustice. Furthermore, their participants who received more messages about racial barriers and experienced higher levels of racism were more likely to endorse the SBW as a coping mechanism (Anyiwo et al., 2022). Black girls are taught that being a SBW is essential to their womanhood (Abrams et al., 2014) and begin to emulate these traits as they enter adulthood. Reynolds et al. (2017) argue that racial identity is fundamental during the ages of 18-25 when young adults enter college, face diverse environments, and navigate the adult world independently. They continue that positive relationships with maternal figures have been associated with higher ethnic-racial identity. In surveying Black 18-25-year-olds, Reynolds et al. found that Women who reported more robust relationships with mothers noted higher

ethnicracial socialization and positive ethnic-racial identity. Nurturing from mothers was also connected to ethnic-racial socialization messages being transmitted effectively and ethnic-racial identity formation. It is clear that mothers profoundly impact their daughters' conceptualizations of themselves and their place within society as they matriculate from childhood to adulthood.

1.3 Emerging Adulthood

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett coined the term emerging adulthood in 2000 to describe the evolution from adolescence to adulthood. According to Arnett (2000), it is necessary to distinguish the late teens and early twenties from other periods in one's life because of shifts that occurred in the previous century, such as individuals prioritizing education over marriage, having children, and securing full-time employment; delaying marriage and child-rearing makes for a more transitional period in which young people take more time to explore their identities and do not necessarily identify themselves as adults. Emerging adulthood spans from the ages 18-25 and marks a period of significant life changes, shifts in life direction, and in some cases, obtaining higher education (Arnett, 2000). The emerging adulthood experience varies based on circumstances like living situations and education levels (Arnett, 2000). However, all 18-25year-olds are navigating the responsibilities of adulthood while removing themselves from childhood, making emerging adulthood a unique period in one's life.

When considering emerging adulthood, it is important to acknowledge different intersections of identity. Arnett's initial description of the emerging adult does not account for the experiences of individuals within marginalized groups. For example, Hope et al. (2015) explain that Black Americans are systematically disadvantaged, making the experiences of emerging adulthood: employment, identity exploration, parenthood, and marriage less attainable. In

addition, racial discrimination, including internalized, interpersonal, and systemic, is acknowledged as a determinant of health and well-being among children and young people (Priest et al., 2013). In fact, according to Hope et al. (2015), Black Americans are already facing the physical and psychological effects of racism by their early 20s. Hypervigilance against racism and anticipation of racism cause worry and stress, resulting in an increased risk of depression, suicidal ideation, and hopelessness in Black emerging adults (Hope et al., 2015). In a study of Black emerging adults attending a predominately white university, Volpe et al. (2021) found that social support systems and simply "working harder" were the primary mechanisms to cope with racism. Black people are tasked with navigating the transitional period between 18-25 within the violent context of racism. Hoppe et al. (2015) suggest that racial socialization from the parent or caregiver to the child can help instill a sense of racial pride that will assist them in responding to instances of racism in adulthood.

Although emerging adulthood marks new-found independence, parent-child relationships still play a prominent role. Historically, young adults could financially support themselves immediately after completing their high school careers. However, higher education is needed for many jobs in our contemporary world, resulting in a need for extended family support for things like tuition (Arnett, 2000; Swartz, 2009). In addition, most mothers expect to support their children during their education and while single (Swartz, 2009). The type of support given to 1825-year-old children differs based on racial and class variations. According to Swartz (2009), white families provide more financial support to their adult children than minority families; however, Black and Latinx families, "particularly women," are more likely to provide practical and housing support.

While emerging adults navigate their new circumstances and prioritize peer groups and romantic connections, mutual support still occurs between parent and child (Lindell, 2017). Generally, parent-child communication decreases once children reach emerging adulthood, especially in male children, but this does not necessarily indicate a decline in relationship quality; in fact, emerging adults typically have warmer and more intimate relationships with their parents in emerging adulthood than they did in adolescence (Lindell, 2017; Sumner & Ramirez, 2019). Lindell (2017) notes that parent-child conflict is especially low if parents support youth in middle school and early adolescence and if children leave the family home in emerging adulthood. In their 2019 study, Sumner and Ramirez measured relationship quality among emerging adults and their parents by two indicators: relational closeness and communication satisfaction. Their hierarchical regression analysis indicated that students who did not live with their parents felt higher levels of communication satisfaction with them. The COVID-19 pandemic marked a shift in parent relationships with their emerging adult children. College students who previously enjoyed the freedom of university education and distance from family found themselves back under their parents' roofs, navigating new dynamics.

1.4 COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to the Black community, as they were over twice as likely to die from the virus than white Americans (Selden & Berdahl, 2020). Unfortunately, little research has been conducted to evaluate the Black experience or Black family experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, COVID-19 has been cited as a catalyst for an increase in pre-existing social inequalities faced by Black folks (Laster Pirtle & Wright, 2021; Kalinowski et al., 2022). Kalinowski et al. (2022) highlight Black women's

increased likelihood of being essential workers during the pandemic, causing a high risk for virus exposure and stress. They describe the heightened caregiving burden placed on Black women during the pandemic, adding to the already demanding SBW responsibilities. Kalinowski et al. (2022) call for continued research to uncover the impact of COVID-19 on Black women's stress and overall health. Laster Pirtle & Wright (2021) argue that the pandemic emphasized a need for an intersectional analysis of structural gendered racism to understand further the plight of women of color, including their subordinate positions in the home and workplace.

Emerging adult research has focused on mental health struggles during the pandemic. For example, Kujawa et al. (2020) developed a pandemic stress questionnaire to assess the struggles of emerging adults, finding that Black emerging adult women faced the highest stress levels. In addition, they report that their follow-up questionnaires yielded lower levels of depression and anxiety, although levels were still high. Reported factors contributing to COVID-19-related stress, depression, and anxiety were delayed travel plans, disconnection from friends and family, and financial struggles (Kujawa et al., 2020). In addition, Halliburton et al.'s 2021 article supports the notion that changes to routine and social isolation have adverse mental health effects on emerging adults, noting that their participants experienced symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety along with suicidal ideation in some cases. The COVID-19 pandemic created a significant barrier for emerging adults navigating this transitional period.

Research on family dynamics before and after the pandemic has focused on families with school-age children. Cassinat et al. (2021) find stress and familial chaos in their longitudinal study of families with adolescent children before and after the pandemic. However, they found

no significant change in youth's reports of intimacy with their parents. Family chaos did not impact maternal intimacy, but sons reported more conflict with their fathers (Cassinat et al., 2021). They also found no significant relationship between family chaos and parents' involvement in school. Daks et al. (2020) cite parental flexibility as a determinant of "greater family cohesion, lower family discord, and greater use of constructive parenting strategies" (pp. 16). Conversely, Feinberg et al. (2021) find COVID-19 as a source of a level of family deterioration uncommon in family research. They also find increases in parent and child depression. These studies do not represent the range of familial experiences during the pandemic, prioritizing that of white families while overlooking those affected the most by the pandemic.

CHAPTER II. RESEARCH QUESTION

What was the state of Black mother-daughter relationships before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Black mother-daughter relationships have historically represented a unique intersection of nurturance and strict expectations that require investigation. Emerging adulthood marks a transitional period in which women are often distanced from their mothers but still lean on them for support and guidance; mother-daughter relationships can even be strengthened during this time. Unfortunately, the literature has yet to examine Black mothers' relationships with their emerging adult daughters in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research on family dynamics during the pandemic has presented findings that do not reflect the unique situation of Black women and their college student daughters. The pandemic prompted many shifts in family life, but the outcomes of this specific relationship remain largely unclear. There is a need for an analysis of the family during COVID-19 with respect to varying racial and gender identities.

2.1 Data and Methods

2.1.1 Sample and Collection

The research team, including Dr. Jeannette Wade, Dr. Ramine Alexander, myself, and other research assistants, conducted focus groups from 2019-2020… In initial data collection, primary investigators facilitated in-person focus groups with open-ended questions about SBW characteristics and how they applied to themselves as Gen Z Black women, their eating and exercise habits, and their mental health. Participants were read a list of qualities typically ascribed to the SBW, including (1) perceived strength by nature, (2) must hide emotions, (3) resilience, (4) caregiving, (5) solid mental health, (6) religions, (7) self-love, and (8)

feminine/beauty and asked to discuss these qualities in relation to themselves and their health. In Zoom follow-up focus groups, the priority was to decipher whether the previously discussed matters changed for participants after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and in light of national protests for racial justice following the murder of George Floyd. The Institutional Review Board approved all activities, and participants provided written consent. In addition, women were provided lunch and $25 gift cards to compensate them for their time. All focus groups were recorded and transcribed through Rev.com, then read and revised by the research team to ensure accuracy.

Participants were Black American women ages 18-25 attending a large Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in the southeastern United States. Arnett's (2000) principles of emerging adulthood informed this study to understand the specific experience of racialized womanhood in 18-25-year-olds. Flyer distribution, email blasts, and snowball sampling recruitment techniques were utilized to find focus group participants. Focus groups were chosen as the primary data collection method to provide participants with a safe, open, and collaborative environment, allowing them to tell their stories. In addition, primary investigators reminded participants of the project's goals in each focus group to promote safety and comfort and encouraged them to keep the conversation respectful and confidential. A total of seven focus groups were held, four in the first wave and three in the second. Initial focus groups included twenty-eight participants, each engaging in one focus group, and follow-ups included twelve original participants.

The present study focuses on two latent themes from the initial and follow-up focus groups: mothering and mother-daughter relationships. Participants consistently shared

testimonies about their mothers' strength, eating and exercise habits, and mental health in each focus group. Emerging adulthood is a distinctive time for parent-child relationships (Lindell 2017; Sumner and Ramirez 2019), and COVID-19 provided unfamiliar circumstances, not to mention the disparate impact the Coronavirus had on the Black community (Selden and Berdahl 2020). The following essay explores Black mother-daughter relationships before and after the onset of COVID.

2.2.2 Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's 2006 work on thematic analysis, in addition to Black Feminist Theory and Methods, guided data analysis. I followed Braun and Clarke's recommended six phases for analysis, including familiarization of data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. In addition, I used an inductive approach to allow for data-driven analysis. I coded to identify relevant data features, then began a more in-depth analysis for recurring themes among codes. I used charts and other visual aids to help connect subjects. I then reexamined themes for coherent patterns, considering their validity. Finally, I investigated emergent themes through the dual cultural lens of race and gender (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). I ensured the credibility of my analysis process and results with the help of my committee, a team of experts with experience in qualitative and quantitative analysis. My advisor and I met biweekly to debrief and assess project goals and methodologies. I coded focus group data for patterns concerning mothering and motherhood. Finally, my advisor and I reviewed emerging patterns and them.

CHAPTER III. STATEMENT OF REFLEXIVITY

Before I present my findings, I would like to acknowledge my position. I analyzed the data for themes regarding Black mother-daughter relationships from my lens as an emerging adult Black-white biracial woman. Although I do not have a Black mother, I have been shaped by the Black women in my life, including aunts, trusted mentors, and peers. Therefore, rather than ignoring the personal bias accompanying my research of Black women and mothers, I understand that my position impacts my research questions, data collection, and analysis. Due to the immeasurable impact of my relationships with Black women, I expected to find major influences from Black mothers to their daughters.

As suggested in Lindsay-Dennis's 2015 article on the Black Feminist-Womanist research paradigm, I relied on personal accountability in addition to accountability checks from my committee, all women of color, to enhance credibility in my representations of the Black motherdaughter experience. My committee members' related expertise extended to the areas of family socialization, race and gender, and mental health. I met with my thesis advisor bi-weekly to discuss procedures and emergent themes.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

The following section includes results from pre and post-COVID focus groups. This data will portray mother-daughter relationships from the daughter's perspective. Focus group narratives around mothering presented three significant themes, (1) strength, (2) vulnerability, and (3) independence, each shifting due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.1 Strength Before COVID

4.1.1 Maternal Strength

In discussions of strength, participants repeatedly referred to their mothers as embodying some, if not all, the above-mentioned characteristics. Participants referred to their mothers' strength in their maternal roles, especially if they were single mothers. Daughters openly admired their mothers' perseverance in managing their many challenging roles. For example, a focus group one participant stated, "My mom, she's like that. We've been through a lot as a family, but I feel like she goes through more than I do." A participant from focus group two expressed worry about her mother taking on parenting responsibilities independently. My biggest concern is the Black women. We neglect ourselves a lot. Like other people, because you're so busy, like taking care of everybody else you really don't like... I can say that for my mom, like she's a single mom. And, you know, she has me and my two younger siblings, they're like really young. So obviously, I'm not at the house anymore, but she's always caring for them like around the clock and cooking and cleaning and just being a mom. And she goes to work and it's just like... my mom really be neglecting herself. She, I don't know. She just doesn't do anything for herself. Like everything is like solely based like around her kids.

Many other participants noted their mothers' sacrifices for their families and described their mothers as their household's primary parent and provider. Women repeatedly described their mothers as forgoing their needs to attend to others. One participant described her mother as "holding up the fort for the family," dealing with her problems in addition to those of her children and extended family. This participant also acknowledged her expectation of her mother to be a "superhero." As the topic of Black men arose in the discussion, participants acknowledged role imbalance in Black families. For example, a participant from focus group four described her perception of roles in her childhood home.

> Especially what you said about not being on the same level, I don't want to talk about the Black man, but the Black man is not doing what the Black woman does. And let's just keep it… Let's just be honest. You know, like I grew up with both my parents, but my mom was running the household. I wasn't asking my dad for permission.

4.1.2 Suppressing Emotion

In each focus group, emotional avoidance was mentioned. Participants noted pressure from mothers to maintain control of their emotions, one even recalling a time her mother encouraged her to "grow some balls" when she expressed emotion or sensitivity as a child. A woman in focus group one attested to Black parents' denial of their children's emotions and mental health struggles, a statement other participants agreed with.

> I saw this on Instagram the other day, but it was basically saying that in the Black communities and our families if we go up to a parent and we tell them, 'Oh, I'm depressed,' they won't believe you. That's sad, but it's true.

To avoid causing their parents stress or worry, some daughters opted to keep their mental health struggles to themselves. One participant described her struggles with depression during college and inability to get out of bed for class. Rather than reaching out to her parents, she decided to manage her mental health independently. Other participants supported this notion; a woman from focus group three described feelings of loneliness and like nobody was "on her side" while she struggled to overcome sadness.

Daughters also described mothers as imposing the strength mandate onto themselves. A participant from focus group four remembered her mother apologizing for expressing emotion, even after a significant loss.

> I remember my mom apologized for crying when her dad died. Like, I saw her crying on the steps and I was like 'mom!' and she was like 'I'm so sorry I shouldn't be doing this.' And it's kind of like thinking… Yeah, it's kind of like crazy, right? And I think my mom is very prideful, too, like as a Black woman. She's very private, and we talked about it. And it's not-- pride is like, I think it's like a defense mechanism for her, like a lot of people, including myself.

Despite this participant's shock at her mother's embarrassment concerning her display of emotion, she recognized it as an act of self-preservation that even she was guilty of embodying. This aligns with previous findings which characterize Black women as preferring to only show emotions behind closed doors (Giscombé, 2010).

Results indicated that mothers played a significant role in their daughters' conceptualization of strength, which aligns with Hill's (2002) work on family socialization and Abrams et al.'s (2014) assessment of the transfer of the SBW role. Interestingly, as many

participants spoke of their mothers' strength, it was mainly categorized by her ability to care for people and manage a household. In addition, women spoke of their mothers' strength from an adolescent's lens, sharing childhood stories about their mothers' "superhero" qualities. They also expressed how their mothers sent implicit and explicit messages about strength, from choking back tears after the death of a loved one to harsh warnings to hide emotions. However, the daughters understood their mothers' need to be strong as a symptom of more significant issues, like the division of labor and responsibilities in Black households or mental health. As a result, participants' narratives surrounding their mothers' strength maintained a tone of concern and empathy rather than a desire to embody these characteristics.

4.2 Vulnerability After COVID

4.2.1 Rejecting Strength Mandate

In the second wave of focus groups, a clear theme of vulnerability emerged in the discussion. Multiple participants noted themselves and their mothers as letting go of the imposed strength mandate in addition to perceived less rigid societal expectations in Black women's performance of race and gender. For example, a participant from follow-up focus group three provided the following comment concerning the portrayal of emotions after COVID-19: Just to piggyback off that, I would say patience. I feel like with 2020, now people aren't trying to ... how am I trying to say this? Be on how Black women should be. I feel like now we're just all vulnerable. Now I don't really care to be tough. I don't care to cry in silence. I just burst out crying anywhere, I don't even care. My mom is more vulnerable now. I don't know if it's because I'm older, but she discusses when she's sad, mad, whatever the case may be. It's just not the time

to be ... because we're already quarantined, we're already... we can't go anywhere so it's just like you don't want to suffer in private anymore. You just want to let it go.

This description of open and unashamed emotional displays undermines previous standards of rigidity imposed on to Black women.

4.2.2 Greater Emotional Openness

Other women supported this sentiment, unapologetically reporting their increased openmindedness concerning emotions and honesty between themselves and their mothers due to the challenging times of the pandemic and quarantine. Contrary to the previous one-way concern from mother to daughter, a mutual concern emerged in the second round of focus groups. I absolutely agree. I feel like I've become a lot more vulnerable. Same thing, me and my mom's relationship oddly has gotten a lot more close too. She asks me all the time how I'm feeling, how I'm doing. I think we both did that to each other during quarantine, especially because she was super worried because I was in Greensboro by myself. She was in New York with my grandma taking care of her and my two uncles. It was just a really interesting time. I felt like I could be more honest with her and so I was because I knew she was genuinely worried, and I was worried about her as well.

In the second wave of focus groups, participants underwent a perspective shift.

Participants noted that they and their mothers were more open and vulnerable, willing to display their emotions when/wherever needed. This is a departure from previous literature in which Black women only felt comfortable expressing their emotions behind closed doors or with God (Giscombé, 2010). Results indicate that mother-daughter relationships were positively impacted by participants' increased vulnerability and ability to engage in more open and honest

conversations with their mothers. Daughters may sense a change in relationships with their mothers because they are beginning to view them as adults who can engage in well-rounded conversation about struggles of womanhood from the perspective of another woman rather than a child or adolescent.

4.3 Independence

4.3.1 Away From Home

Independence emerged as a theme in participant narratives in pre and post-COVID focus groups. As college students, participants lived away from their parents and family in dormitory halls or apartments. Participant experiences living on their own varied; some enjoyed this transition, and others faced more apparent challenges. For example, a young woman described her struggles with living independently, stating that the standards of the SBW might not apply to women in the emerging adult group.

I'm 19, I don't know how old everybody else is. I think when you're the age of 19, 18, and those kind of ages, that's the time for you to figure out and make mistakes and fall apart because you're transitioning. I'm only from Ohio, so me being eight hours of my family, that's a hard transition I had to make for myself. I feel like in order to hold me to these standards while I'm 19 and just now making a brand-new life for myself is not fair. I still think I'm a strong, Black woman even though I didn't actually meet all these standards. Although she did not meet the traditional standards for independence, this participant still perceived herself as a SBW, stating that the transitional emerging adulthood ages required more understanding and support.

Other participants spoke more positively of their experiences living away from home, enjoying the ability to make more decisions for themselves. Participants described taking on

some adult responsibilities, such as grocery shopping and creating routines. A participant from focus group two mentioned control of food entering her home. However, challenges concerning budgeting and money management were also mentioned. One student shared that although living independently, she had family support.

> ...what she said, we're expected to be independent. I don't think so because I know without my parents, I would not be here. Or even like, because I'm in my own apartment and he helps pay rent, my father and my mother, help me pay rent and stuff. I don't think they hold me to be independent just yet.

Participants largely rejected notions of independence on their age group, maintaining that assistance from family was still essential during emerging adulthood.

4.3.2 Adolescent Again

After COVID-19, many participants moved back to their family homes. They noted their challenges in adjusting to new circumstances and relearning family dynamics. For example, participants recall squabbles with siblings over food and space. Mothers also contributed to changes in their daughters' routines. For example, Jade, a 24-year-old participant, mentioned being "monitored" by her mother in her academic studies and other limiting rules that accompanied her move back home.

> My mom will come in and she'll be like, ‘Jade, what are you doing?’ I'm like, ‘Oh man, mom saw me. I'm caught.’ Then she'll be like, ‘Where is your grade? Let me see your grades.’ and I'm like, ‘Oh man, this is not it. No.’ So I guess the standards are higher for me here because if she sees a bit of red, a little bit of orange on my Blackboard

(Blackboard is an online grading website) it's a problem. It's just, 'You're not going out the house, you're about to do your work. You're not going anywhere.' So it's definitely different for me here than it was with how the school, and I don't know. That's definitely a factor.

In this case, Jade is describing a loss of independence she experienced resulting from the pandemic sending students back to their family homes. Moving back home meant being back under her mother's watchful eye and facing consequences she did not have when she lived on her own. In Jade's situation, there seems to be a revert to high school student-parent dynamics, as her mother took a hands-on approach to her daughter's education that distance did not previously allow.

4.3.3 Embracing Change

While acknowledging challenges, participants described increased closeness with parents and siblings after moving home due to COVID. Multiple women reported feelings of nostalgia and security during their time back home. Some participants decided to embrace the stillness the pandemic provided.

> Just being grateful for the pandemic because it's really brought me and my family closer. Me and my little sister going off to college, we left home and only our little brother was at home. So now that we're all back in the house and we're all back under the same roof it just brings back those memories of just childhood, when we all lived together and stayed together. So definitely grateful about the pandemic, even though it has paused my life a little bit. It's paused my life, but sometimes we just need a pause. So I am trying to take advantage of that.

In alignment with Arnett's (2000) categorization of emerging adulthood as a transition period, results indicated that students were exploring their new-found independence before the pandemic. However, participants did not necessarily align themselves with the title of an independent adult. Although they lived away from home, some participants still received financial assistance from their parents. Those who received less family support described a struggle to create stability. Participant narratives after the onset of the pandemic describe losing the independence of making their own decisions they enjoyed while in school. However, they could cope with the inconveniences of living at home again by appreciating the time COVID allowed them to grow their relationships with family, specifically their mothers.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

The present study sought to examine Black mother-daughter relationships before and after COVID. Previous literature shows that Black women play pivotal roles in socializing their daughters and preparing them for adulthood (Abrams et al., 2014; Hill, 2002). Emerging adulthood is when young people learn the ropes of adulthood while creating their own identities and, in most cases, still receive support from family (Arnett 2000, 2014). This study adds to the literature by examining Black female emerging adults' perceptions of their relationships with their mothers in the context of a global pandemic.

Emerging adulthood is typically when young people incorporate childhood lessons into their lives. For Black women, this means becoming a version of the SBW they have seen all their lives (Abrams et al., 2014). Participants understood why strength was a requirement for their mothers and grandmothers due to societal factors but did not describe strength as a goal or requirement for themselves. Instead, women spoke at length about the physical and mental consequences of upholding the strength mandate, including the manifestations they saw in their mothers. However, they mainly discussed their mothers' strengths as caregivers and nurturers. In initial focus groups, participants described their mothers as strong role models who sometimes showed weakness when responsibilities became too much. However, after the pandemic, participants began to admire their mothers' other qualities.

Post-COVID, the vulnerability in mother-daughter relationships allowed daughters to grow closer to their mothers and further humanize them outside their familial roles. Participants happily reported their mothers' increased comfortability with expressing emotions, citing it as the cause of their more open, honest, and mutual relationship dynamics. Disruptions caused by the

pandemic could account for increased vulnerability between mothers and daughters. Before lockdowns and quarantines, participants had the opportunity to experience living alone and getting one step closer to adulthood. The challenges presented by COVID-19 allowed students to take a break from striving for adulthood by leaning on their families for support. COVID-19 also allowed daughters to utilize lessons of strength and resilience given to them by their mothers, helping them overcome some of the setbacks the pandemic provided to enjoy the opportunity for connection with family. Daughters returned home with first-hand experiences of womanhood, which allowed them to relate to their mothers' on a deeper and more holistic level. However, mothers' perceptions of their daughters could also contribute to the uptick in their vulnerability. Mothers may have transitioned from seeing their daughters as girls before the pandemic to women after, recognizing them as capable of providing insight and compassion.

COVID-19 may have provided the environment Black mothers and daughters needed to grow closer and expose a layer of vulnerability to one another. Daughters described their mothers as releasing themselves from the pressure to show undying strength, defying SBW expectations. At the same time, the daughters decided to look past daily inconveniences, like moving home and losing some independence, to appreciate their new normal, converging from the emerging adulthood experience. 2020 was a tough time for the Black community, as COVID19 and movements for racial justice dominated daily life. However, results indicate that mothers and daughters leaned on each other for support and care during this time, forgoing limiting societal standards of the SBW and emerging adults to care for themselves and one another unapologetically.

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