

Dr. Sistahprener: A Narrative Inquiry on the Experiences of African American Female

Entrepreneurs with PhDs

By

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## Abstract

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to thoroughly examine the lived experiences of African American female entrepreneurs with PhDs. Ten women were chosen for this study, and they candidly shared their academic and entrepreneurial experiences, challenges, and definitions of success. Critical race feminism was the theoretical lens used in this study. This narrative study consisted of in-depth semi structured interviews. The findings revealed that African American women have distinct definitions of success. Among the research participants, five salient themes emerged from the data. These themes include: (a) family, (b) early emphasis on education, (c) faith, (d) meaningful mentorship experiences, and (e) entrepreneurial spirit. Business success was defined as helping others and customer satisfaction, having personal fulfillment, and achieving monetary gain. In addition, the intersection of race and gender has been shown to play a major part in their experiences. This study revealed that Black women entrepreneurs with PhDs have a unique definition of business success and are directly and indirectly impacted by the intersection of race and gender. Despite their academic credentials, personal and professional success, and socioeconomic status, these Dr. Sistaphrenuers are not immune to the tinge of racial and gender bias. These women carved their own path and created and defined success on their own terms.

## Dedication

Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." This dissertation is also dedicated to every Black woman whose shoulder I lean on. I am rooting for you. I celebrate you. I would not be here without you. I also want to dedicate this research to my maternal grandfather, Roger Williams. I wish that you were here to see this moment. I also want to dedicate this work to my late uncle, Herman Williams, who was unable to complete his dissertation. We are both finally #PhiniseD. I thank God for this moment.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Since 1997, there has been a significant increase in the number of businesses founded by African American women (Mendoza, 2015). African American women are starting businesses faster than all other ethnic group (C. A. Smith, 2005). In addition to rapid business development, African American women are also the fastest-growing group of college attendees, far exceeding their male counterparts in degree attainment (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). The number of African American women pursuing graduate degrees has also increased as a result. However, African American women are also the fastest failing group of entrepreneurs and tend to make the least amount of money while hiring the fewest number of employees (American Express, 2019). Within academia, African American women acquire the most debt during college matriculation. While other races have seen significant increases in pay with college degree attainment, income potential may decrease for African American women with graduate degrees (Lean In, n.d.). Aware that their income potential may be capped in traditional career pathways, some African American female doctorate degree holders have decided to opt-out of academic positions and corporate careers in order to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. Entrepreneurship can provide a pathway to unlimited income potential and growth that some Black women in academia are in need of in order to compete in the global economy.

Pursuing higher education and starting a new business both come with their own set of challenges. The intersection of race and gender provides a unique experience for African American women and women of African descent that deserves further exploration and analysis. The goal of this research was to examine the lived experiences of African American women who have PhDs and who are entrepreneurs. These women have found success through entrepreneurship and have created coaching and consulting businesses. This

phenomenon sparked my interest, and it was my hope to better understand how they see themselves as African American women entrepreneurs and how they define success on their own terms. I was interested in exploring how their educational experiences and the intersection of race and gender have impacted their entrepreneurial practices and experiences. I also carefully examined how the participants experience and define success.

Like most industries and experiences in life, higher education and entrepreneurial business are often examined through a normative White male homogenic gaze (Calás et al., 2009; Reid & Curry, 2019; Walker, 2009). This epistemological perspective often ignores the experiences of marginalized people. The viewpoints of Black women are often silenced in education research (Rollock, 2007). I aimed to explore the experiences of African American women who have successfully completed accredited doctoral programs who currently own coaching and/or consulting businesses.

In the traditional sense, business success is directly correlated to financial gains and capital wins (Calás et al., 2009). The goal of a business is to make a profit. The traditional definition is inherently capitalist and pro-free enterprise. However, according to past research, Black women are leveraging entrepreneurship as a mechanism for community growth and development (C. A. Smith, 2005). The purpose of entrepreneurship is much bigger than just making money for African American women. Education has been seen historically as a pathway to social and economic mobility (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). The participants in this research have leveraged their book smarts in a way that has allowed them to become more entrepreneurial.

In this study, I took a narrative inquiry methodological approach (see Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Riessman, 2008). The analysis of these experiences was conducted through a critical race feminist (CRF) epistemology lens (Carter, 2012; Wing, 2000). I wanted to better understand the relationship between racial identity and business success

among this group of women. I aimed to center the intersection of race and gender in the lives of Black women entrepreneurs. As more African American women continue the pursuit of higher education and entrepreneurship, additional information about their experience, triumphs, and challenges are needed in order to better support this group. I aimed to share and highlight the stories in the experiences of African American women who are PhD recipients who have decided to go into entrepreneurship.

### **My Research Why**

I decided to pursue this line of inquiry because I am her, and she is me. Two months prior to starting my doctoral studies, I had the “bright idea” of starting an online coaching business. After spending 3 years in Kazakhstan, I used social media as a tool to stay connected to my friends and family members while living abroad. This later sparked my interest in business, and I decided that I wanted to create a location independent business that allowed me to pursue my academic aspirations while also making money and helping people. Both tasks proved to be equally difficult in their own right. I personally sought to find my fit in the academy and in industry. Academic circles partially supported me through my academic journey but could not attend to my entrepreneurial needs and desires, while business-oriented communities never fully provided guidance on how to navigate my academic pursuits. At times I often felt isolated, confused, ashamed, and alone. I frequently thought about quitting both endeavors because life would have just been easier if I just would have decided to remain at my job. My income would have been predictable. It was not until I found a community of African American women who understood and accepted both facets of me that I fully understood that both sides of me were possible, acceptable, and a valid way of living. I thought that I was a unicorn until I found a flock of fellow unicorns who have supported me along this journey. My feelings of being fractured waned, and I was beginning to feel whole again. I am currently virtually connected to a network of African American

women who have higher educational and entrepreneurial interests. They get it, and it was my desire to translate these often-hidden experiences into a robust research project that would be a valuable resource for future researchers and entrepreneurs. It was my hope that fellow Black women would feel a sense of encouragement and hope. I desire to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurial scholars.

My personal insecurity and anxiety have given birth to this under researched line of inquiry. I hoped to learn how to better navigate these two identities that I have often tried to separate, and now the two have coupled for what I believe will be a powerful and informative study. As more African American women enter the academy and entrepreneurship respectively, more research on this group is needed overall.

### **Problem Statement**

The lived experiences of Black women often go under researched (Smith, 1976; Spates, 2012) There is a lack of information in the academy surrounding the success of Black women entrepreneurs and Black women in education. A greater look at their challenges and successes is a dire need. While there is an abundance of information about the experiences of women and Black people in the academy and in business, the intersection of race and gender must also be thoroughly examined. In this research, I aimed to shed light on the experiences of Black women and their experiences as business leaders who have doctoral degrees.

### **Purpose of the Study /Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of self-identified African American female entrepreneurs who have successfully completed doctoral programs and are working as coaches and consultants. I was interested in better understanding their challenges as well as understanding how they successfully navigate the entrepreneurial landscape. I sought to better understand how the intersection of race and gender impact their daily lives. I was also interested in learning how their formal education played a role in

helping them launch coaching and consulting businesses. As a researcher and entrepreneur, I was interested in unpacking the clues of success for Black women in business. It was my hope that I would be able to use clues and create a framework for better understanding the lived experiences of Black women.

### **Overview of Methodology**

For this project, I interviewed 10 African American women with PhDs who self-identify as entrepreneurs. I used a narrative inquiry approach and conducted semi structured interviews in order to capture the stories of Black women in the academy (see Galletta, 2013). Further, I used critical race theory (CRT; see Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) and Black feminist thought (Collins, 2002). In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I share more in-depth about the research design and methodology. The findings of these interviews are discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I share my research findings and provide additional recommendations that support Black women entrepreneurs.

### **Significance of the Study**

Many scholars have written about insufficient research specifically focusing on the educational experiences and lived experiences of Black women (Gibbs Grey & Williams-Farrier, 2017; Rollock, 2007). There is a gap in the knowledge base about Black women, and I aimed to support filling in this gap. In this study, I provided a more in-depth narrative-based analysis directly from the lived experiences of African American female entrepreneurs. I went beyond the business startup statistics and dove deeper into examining business growth, longevity, and sustainability. As African American female business startup creation continues to surpass all other gender and racial groups, it will be imperative to provide resources and data that align with supporting this group's growth and success.

The study was also important because I examined the experiences of Black women through a critical feminist framework (see Wing, 2000). Dominant feminist and race-based



epistemologies do not fully unpack the unique juxtaposition of race and gender for Black women (Bernal, 2002). My work can provide a voice for the often voiceless. I aimed to provide additional solutions on how to better serve women entrepreneurs.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study. The goal of these research questions was to better understand the experiences and highlight Black women.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the lived experiences of African American female entrepreneurs with PhDs?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do African American female entrepreneurs with PhD define business success?

### **Researcher Assumptions**

As a Black woman entrepreneur, I believe that I have deep knowledge and understanding of Black women and especially Black women who have pursued higher education and graduate level degrees. I am also this woman in my journey of graduate school and working on my business; I found more women who were also resonating with this duality. I was also very aware that I was also co-creator in this experience, and I am also having my own narrative and story created through this research.

### **Definitions of Key Terminology**

In this section, I explain the key terms used throughout this dissertation.

*African Americans/Black*: I used Black and African American to identify the race of the women in this research study. These terms are a social construct that is used to identify people of African ancestry that live in the United States (Andreasen, 2000). For the purpose of this study, Black and African American are interchangeable.

*Business*: A commercial enterprise established for the purpose of exchanging capital gains.

*Coach:* According to the International Coaching Federation (2019), a coach is a person who asks other individuals questions and mentors their clients to achieve their goals. The coaching industry is currently unregulated, and anyone can become a coach by essentially saying they are one. This business model is popular in the online space due to its low barrier to entry.

*Critical race feminism:* A branch of CRT that focuses on simultaneously analyzing race and gender (Wing, 2000). This was the theoretical framework used in this dissertation study.

*Entrepreneur:* For this research project, an entrepreneur is a person who owns and operates a business. This business can be virtual or a traditional brick and mortar business. They are compensated for providing goods and services for customers or clients. In exchange for this service, they are paid.

*Intersectionality:* A term Collins (2002) shared that denotes the multiplicative experience based on race, gender, and class often experienced by Black women.

*Narrative inquiry:* A methodology that privileges storytelling and sharing human experiences through story (Riessman, 2008).

*Success:* For the purpose of this research, success is business success. I looked to my research participants to create this definition of success on their own terms. Success is traditionally seen as personal rewards, accomplishments, and gratification.

## **My Role in the Research**

In the fourth grade, my teacher, Dr. Nelson, assigned me a book report that would change the trajectory of my life. He invited me to research Madam CJ Walker, the first American self-made millionaire female. It was also in the fourth grade where I was introduced to the concept of being a PhD, and over 20 years later I found myself as both a doctoral candidate and an entrepreneur. I started my business 2 months before I started my

doctoral program, and I always say that this was not my brightest idea and through that process of trying to understand who I was as a Black woman, a scholar, and an entrepreneur, I found it quite challenging to attempt to navigate both worlds in my own skin. As I needed refuge and support, I found women who look like me who also understood my academic interest as well as my entrepreneurial interest. These women led me down this academic path. I am studying this duality of being both entrepreneurial and scholarly. These women allowed me to understand that both could coexist simultaneously and yet powerfully. I am fully aware as I conducted this research, I was also a researcher, and I will be able to bring a unique insight to the work that is displayed.

### ***The Entrepreneur***

From an entrepreneurial standpoint, I was very interested in seeing how my research participants are committed to being financially and physically successful. Part of being an entrepreneur is understanding that you must make money and follow the steps of hegemonic capitalism. I was very curious to see how the women in my study adopt or reject the tenets of capitalism as far as it comes to creating a successful business endeavor. Outside of the ivory tower, I am very committed to creating generational wealth for Black families and then tapping into strategies that create wealth for generations to come.

### ***The Graduate Student***

As a graduate student and doctoral candidate, I was very interested in seeing how my research participants navigated their way through graduate school. Listening to their stories could provide insight into how to create more successful Black women with PhDs. Historically, only 2% of the United States population actually has a doctoral degree (OECD, 2019). The number of African American women with a PhD is increasing. However, the increase in degree attainment has only slightly contributed to more Black female faculty members. Dominant college campuses have a small number of Black female faculty members

(McKoy, 2016). Black women are underrepresented in tenure track positions and experience myriad challenges, including isolation, tokenism, and microaggression (McKoy, 2016; Moore, 2017). I was interested in how the women in my study successfully navigated the ivory tower. I also remember not fitting in because of my entrepreneurial interest, and it was important for me to find a community of women who understood my struggles and challenges.

### ***A Black Woman***

Being an entrepreneur and a doctoral candidate are not relaxed feats by themselves. Being a Black woman adds an additional layer that is intersectional and multiplicative in nature, which further complicates already complicated experiences. I fully acknowledge that as a Black woman, I see the world differently. My experiences are unique. I am not just racialized; I am also a gendered person. These multiplicative experiences are constant and occur simultaneously, and there is no way of knowing where one identity ends and where one begins. Historically, Black women have been underpaid, ignored and neglected, and disrespected (Banks & Banks, 2009; Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; The Melanin Project, 2021). My personal position provides me with collective knowledge that allowed me to better understand my research participants because we engaged through this experience together. The research participants and I have much in common, and I was curious about the level of similarities and differences that were brought to the table. I wanted to speak to women who were equally passionate about education as they were about entrepreneurship. Given the lack of research on Black women in the United States, it was imperative to contribute to the knowledge base and provide additional life experiences and information that centers on Black women.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five parts. In this first chapter, I introduce my research topic and research questions. Chapter 2 is the literature review, where I examine the history of African American women in education and entrepreneurship in this country. The research explains the need for more information and more academic research literature on the experiences of Black women. In Chapter 2, I also explain the theoretical framework, CRF, and why it is an ideal theoretical framework for examining the experiences of Black women. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodology and identifies narrative as the tool for telling the stories of Black women. The details of this qualitative, narrative inquiry research study are thoroughly explained in this chapter as well. Chapter 4 is where the research findings are introduced. The 10 research participants shared their narratives. Using narrative inquiry methods, I outline common themes across these 10 narratives. In Chapter 5, I interpret the data using a CRF framework. I also offer conclusions and explain opportunities for future research and future studies to further support Black women in business.

## Chapter 2

### Introduction

Cooper (1892) shared an experience of traveling to the South by train and stopping at a small train rest stop. Cooper stated, “I see two dingy little rooms with ‘for ladies’ swing over one and “for colored people” over the other; while wondering under which head, I come...” (p. 95). Cooper pondered about which restroom was the most suitable and did not come to a definitive decision. Over a century later, Black women around the country ponder about which sign they fall under. The intersection of race and gender places African American women in a perplexing position. Gendered theories or race-based epistemologies do not fully account for them. This juxtaposition requires a simultaneous analysis that explains both states of being.

Since Cooper’s rest stop dilemma, Black women have made major educational strides. However, African American women continue to face a myriad of challenges. African American women are the fastest-growing group of college attendees and are the most educated population in the United States (Katz, 2020). Black women are making major inroads in education, entrepreneurship, and politics. Statistically compared to Black men, Black women are making inroads in degree attainment and business creation (Katz, 2020). Black women’s involvement in entrepreneurship has grown by 322% from 1997 to 2015 (Haimerl, 2015). However, these successes cannot overshadow the challenges that Black women in America face. Black women receive lower wages and have lower college completion rates compared to their White female counterparts (Katz, 2020). The lives and educational experiences of African American women often go under researched in discussions of race, where the lives of Black males are privileged and in gendered discussions where White women are centered.

## **Overview**

In this chapter, I explore the educational and entrepreneurial histories of Black women. I examine how scholars have explained their lives in the research literature. There currently is limited information on the simultaneous experiences of both educated and entrepreneurial Black women. I identify the gaps in the literature and explain the need for a more intersectional CRF approach to studying the lives of Black women. This literature review is broken into three parts including: (a) the history of Black women in entrepreneurship, (b) the history of Black women in education; and (c) how CRT and intersectional theory have been used to describe Black women in research.

## **Literature Review of Female Founders**

For the past 20 years, African American women's entrepreneurial activity has grown by 300% (Mendoza, 2015). There are over 13 million women owned businesses in the United States (American Express, 2019). These businesses generated 1.9 trillion dollars and are responsible for employing nearly 9.4 million workers. The majority of these businesses fall into the service-based industry. During 2014–2019, female founders dominated the utilities, construction, arts and entertainment, information, and services industries. This represented remarkable growth; In 2012, nearly 90% of women-owned businesses had zero employees. Despite this growth, most women-owned businesses continue to operate as solo entrepreneurs (American Express, 2019).

A report commissioned by the National Women's Business Council and the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office and presented by Walker's Legacy Foundation identified some of the opportunities and challenges for Black women entrepreneurs (National Women's Business Council, 2016). The report detailed that women are actively opting to go into entrepreneurship due to the discrimination and barriers that prevent career advancement in the corporate space. Family, financial stability, and overall interest in entrepreneurship

have also motivated these women to start businesses. In addition, Black women shared a greater interest in community uplift and development through their entrepreneurial endeavors (Walker's Legacy, 2016)

Examples of Black women's shared interest in community development through entrepreneurship have gone viral on social media. Courtney Adeleye, founder of the Mane Choice hair care brand, partnered with Mav Beauty Brands to launch a 30 million-dollar initiative called the Generational Advantage Fund, which aims to provide funding and mentorship for Black female founders (Blanco, 2019). Pinky Cole, the founder of the Slutty Vegan, an Atlanta-based vegan restaurant, paid off the tuition balance of 30 Clark Atlanta University students (Sparks, 2018). Raynell "Supa Cent" Steward, founder of the Crayon Case Cosmetics, went viral in 2018 for making over 1 million dollars in 90 minutes. A couple of weeks after accomplishing this feat, "Supa Cent" broke the Guinness World Record for the largest toy giveaway within 1 hour. She partnered with fellow African American female entrepreneurs and gave over 5,000 toys and gifts during the Christmas holiday to local children at the New Orleans Mercedes-Benz Superdome (Atwell, 2019).

Although there have been glowing reports of Black women excelling in business, the majority of Black businesses and female founders experience myriad challenges that threaten the livelihood of these enterprises. Gender bias, lack of capital, access to networks, and family and children dynamics are significant challenges for women entrepreneurs (American Express, 2019). For Black female founders, race, gender, and socioeconomic status present additional bottlenecks and impacts on social networks and financial capital that must be further explored (Walker's Legacy Foundation, 2021). The United States Patent and Trademark Office sent a report to the United States Congress highlighting the lack of available public data on entrepreneurial activities and patent acquisition of underrepresented groups, women, minorities, and veterans (American Express, 2019). In 2016, only 12% of



patent applicants were women despite the massive increase of women founders (American Express, 2019). As a result, fewer women founders receive patents for their inventions and even fewer are African American (American Express, 2019).

One of the biggest overarching challenges to businesses, in general, is access to capital. The intersection of race and gender makes this feat even more challenging. In 2018, of the 130 billion dollars of available venture capital dollars, only 2.88 billion of those dollars, or 2.2%, went to female founders (Hinchliffe, 2019). An even smaller fraction went to Black women founders. Historically, Black women have had less access to financial resources and often self-fund their ventures. International speaker, powerhouse, and founder of *Motivating the Masses*, Lisa Nichols frequently shares her story of saving money from every paycheck to fund her dream of starting a business (2020).

Nielson (2016) asserted that “male angel investors tend to choose entrepreneurs who look like a startup CEO – someone who is typically male” (p. 5). This reality has contributed to the fact that women receive less funding than men. When race is added into the equation, Black women receive even less funding. In 2016, the Walker Legacy Foundation highlighted research conducted by the Diana Project, which found that venture capitalist firms with female partners were more likely to invest in companies with female founders (Brush et al., 2018).

Walker’s Legacy (2016) hosted three events in major cities across the United States to identify Black women’s challenges in business. These breakout sessions exposed many concerns female founders faced, including access to capital, fear of failure, lack of mentorship, discrimination, and challenges with hiring the right people. In efforts to combat these challenges, The Walker Legacy Foundation (2019) suggested that Black women entrepreneurs seek opportunities to diversify their network, develop relationships with existing successful Black women in business, and look for alternative funding methods such

as crowdfunding. Their report also recommends increasing the number of Black women investors, increasing access to information and resources for Black women in business, providing more significant funding and mentoring opportunities (Walker's Legacy Foundation, 2021). Black female founders need mentorship that explicitly understands the needs, nuisances, and experiences of the African American female experience.

In addition to the previously mentioned recommendations, Walker's Legacy (2016) asserted that support should be provided to Black female founders on the collegiate level. The report suggested that expanding opportunities for students at historically Black colleges and universities and expanding and creating a diverse university level entrepreneurial curriculum could provide additional opportunities and resources. The report ended with the call for more qualitative and in-depth research on Black women founders (Walker's Legacy Foundation, 2021).

Musu-Gillette et al.'s (2017) study revealed that 27% of women surveyed believed that their gender has made it harder to succeed in life compared to only 7% of men. Forty percent of African American participants believed that race has made it harder to succeed while only 5% of White participants shared that sentiment (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). In addition to perceptions of success, the intersection of race and gender uniquely impact earnings for Black women. Despite academic advancements, the hourly wages for African American and Hispanic women with bachelor's degrees or higher only earn 63% of what White males with comparable educational backgrounds make (Temple & Tucker, 2017). Educated Black and Hispanic men and educated White and Asian women earn about 80% of what educated White men earn whereas Black women earn 65% of what White men make (Patten, 2016). Gaps in wages continue to persist even with the increased number of college enrollment and degree attainment.

## **The Educational Experiences of Black Women**

African American women have actively engaged in higher educational pursuits for over a century (Gregory, 2001). According to the Survey of Earned Doctorates conducted by the OECD (2019), in 2018, 46% percent of doctoral degrees conferred were earned by women. Three percent of all degrees conferred were to Black women. Over 50% of Black women with doctorate degrees intend to pursue academic careers while only 43% of all doctorate recipients seek positions in the academy (OECD, 2019). While Gregory's research suggested that the number of African American women with doctoral degrees pursuing the professoriate was on the decline, most recent data reveal that the majority of African American women are still seeking jobs within the academy.

Walkington (2017) examined the experiences of Black women faculty over the course of 20 years and revealed that workplace discrimination, negative stereotypes, lack of access to resources, and lack of culturally competent mentors remain a constant barrier for Black female faculty. Black faculty report experiences of microaggressions and experience being asked to participate in diversity initiatives solely based on race (Pittman, 2012). Challenges such as racism, sexism, isolation, and discrimination have led Black women to seek careers outside of higher education (Gregory, 2001). A percentage of these women are choosing entrepreneurship and leveraging their formal education as a launchpad for business success.

According to Musu-Gillette et al. (2017), African American women are the fastest growing number of college attendees and degree recipients. Within a 2-year span, the enrollment of African American women into college increased by 67% (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). These glowing statistics mask subtle nuances and intersectional challenges that women of color experience daily in their quest for higher education. Although African American women are more likely to receive college degrees compared to African American

men, they also run a greater risk of living in poverty and accepting low paying jobs (Crenshaw, 1991; Walker's Legacy, 2016).

In education research, the issues that plague Black women often go under researched (Henry, 1998; Rollock, 2007). In discussions of gender, White middle class women are privileged, while in discussions of race, Black males are centered, which has, in turn, created a conundrum upon which Black women have to choose between their oppressions (Coles & Pasek, 2020; Dill & Zambrana, 2009). This consistent lack of focus on the educational experiences of Black women in college presents a void in the literature and causes the issues of Black women to be invisible. Black women sit at the unique juxtaposition of race and gender, which research must account for. This intersection produces uniquely lived educational experiences for Black women (Hannon et al., 2016).

White middle class women and girls have dominated gender discourse by being the main subject of research (Evans-Winters, 2005). Researchers tend to essentialize the female education experience and lack a clear understanding of the lives and experiences of the "super invisible" (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007). Race is not the only identity factor contributing to the discrimination that Black women face (Evans, 2008). Smith (1976) asserted that there is more research about Black people and women than there is exclusively about Black women. Black women hold membership in "two oppressed castes" (Smith, 1976, p. 4). Many scholars who research Black girls and women in education begin their assessment with the lack of research on this demographic (Berkey et al., 2000; Henry, 1998; Rollock, 2007). Thomas and Jackson (2007) and Hanson et al. (2000) suggested that more data are needed on the intersectionality of race and gender disparities in education.

Black women have a greater likelihood of living in poverty, coupled with decreased career opportunities and lower wage earnings of their lifetime (Lean In, n.d.). Women are attending college at higher rates than men but still facing discrimination and isolation

(Hannon et al., 2016; Stewart, 2015). They are not afforded the gender privilege of Black men nor the race privilege of White women. They are faring well statistically while experiencing a combination of racial and gender prejudice. A research emphasis has not been placed on the educational experiences of Black women (Domingue, 2015). Chavous and Cogburn (2007) advocated for increased awareness of the experiences of Black women in education. More research is most definitely needed on the experiences of African American women across disciplines and academic fields of inquiry.

### **Bridging the Gap**

There is a gap in the literature when it comes to researching the interests and experiences of Black women. There is also limited information when it comes to Black women entrepreneurs and Black women in the academy as a collective group. Cheryl A. Smith (2000) interviewed 19 women of African descent who participated in the New York State Business program. All participants held some form of college education, and two had a doctorate degree while six earned master's degrees (C. A. Smith, 2000). All of the women interviewed attributed some of their success to receiving formal and informal education. The women also defined success for themselves, and their definitions transcended beyond just wealth accumulation. They viewed their businesses as an opportunity to uplift the community, gain freedom, and obtain better work life balance and self-satisfaction (C. A. Smith, 2000). Traditional examples of business success, such as making a profit, were also important to the research participants, but it was not their primary focus in business. Walker (2009) asserted that great attention must be paid to the experiences of Black entrepreneurs. Carsrud and Brannback (2011) declared that for over a century, African American entrepreneurship was ignored. The goal of this research was to provide additional information that supports the entrepreneurial endeavors of academic African American women.

Margot Dorfman, CEO of the US Women's Chamber of Commerce, revealed to Fortune Magazine:

We attribute the growth in women-owned firms to the lack of fair pay, fair promotion, and family-friendly policies found in corporate America. Women of color, when you look at the statistics, are impacted more significantly by all of the negative factors that women face. It's not surprising that they have chosen to invest in themselves.

(UrbanGeekz Staff, 2015 p. 1)

Black women in corporate and in the academy are forging a path for themselves, and entrepreneurship is the vehicle of choice (Jones-Deeweaver, 2017). Brown (2006) published a review of the most influential Black women in business, and the majority of the women had undergraduate and graduate degrees. Only two of the women listed did not attend college. Increased access to higher education has provided Black women with the confidence to start their businesses (Jeffries & Robinson, 2011). Advancements in technology and industry diversification have also increased business growth (Jeffries & Robinson, 2011). Merlino (2011) asserted that over time women have had an increase in confidence, which has directly and positively impacted their ability to provide products and services. Walker 's Legacy (2016) noted that higher education provides Black women with "meaningful credentials" and access to broaden their social networks. These affordances can provide additional pathways to success for Black female entrepreneurs.

Jones-Deweever (2017) recounted a desire to leave a position as the executive director of a national organization and enter into full-time entrepreneurship. Questions of "how" and self-doubt slightly hindered the leap until the time came to pursue their dream. This leap ultimately led to the launch of two successful businesses. Jones-Deweever highlighted a commitment to learning and dedication to doing what they love. More stories

are needed to better understand the experiences and challenges that Black women face when starting businesses.

## **Theoretical Framing Constructs**

### ***CRT***

Prior to examining CRF, it was important to adequately understand the theories that informed it. CRT presents an opportunity to center the permanence of race in American society and its impact on the marginalized lives of people of color. CRT was founded in the mid-1970s by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The two grew frustrated with the lack of legal progress made in race reform post-1960s. Past ways of achieving legal strides were producing minimal results and the civil rights reforms of the previous decade were being rolled back (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Bell and Freeman sought to establish a new way of understanding the permanence of race to explain racial injustice in the American legal system (Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003). CRT provided an in-depth legal lens for explaining the impact of race on society.

CRT stems from critical legal studies (CLS), which stem from critical theory. Crotty (2020) noted that critical inquiry calls into question established norms and dominant ideology. Critical researchers are charged with challenging traditionally accepted ways of thinking and normative social and power structures in order to push an agenda that strives toward social justice. This line of inquiry shines a light on power structures and systems of oppression. Critical theorists work toward liberation and equality for oppressed people. CLS challenge the recreation of hegemonic social, legal, and political structures in United States jurisprudence (Alexander-Floyd, 2010). CLS state that laws disproportionately benefit the people and systems who enact the laws. These laws maintain the status quo while wealth and power are used as tools to oppress disadvantaged communities (Legal Information Institute,

2021). CLS challenge traditional and dominant legal theories. CLS aim to shed light on social justice issues in legal studies.

However, critical race scholars believed that CLS are inadequate for explaining the impact of the presence of race in legal theory. Although CLS is rooted in social justice and centering the lives of the legally oppressed, they fail to explicitly explain how the presence of race and racism impact American jurisprudence. Inspired by its predecessors, CRT aims to provide a framework for understanding modern day manifestations of racism in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Delgado and Stefancic asserted CRT is a collective of activists and scholars who seek to change and transform the relationship between race, power, and racism in the United States.

The CRT framework is grounded in five foundational tenets upon which scholars base their work. The first tenet is often considered the most radical by CRT critics: racism is a normal part of American life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Racism is not atypical or unusual but an unfortunate component of the American social order. Racism is a permanent fixture of American policies and institutions, and it impacts everything from living accommodations to educational outcomes to politics (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2011; Lean In, 2019; Lorde, 2007; Williams, 1991). Due to its permanence and omnipresence, racial injustice is often considered normal and not an anomaly.

The second tenet of CRT asserts that race is a social construct. CRT asserts that based on science, race is not real; however, it is a social construct that is used to perpetuate White supremacy. According to the Human Genome Project, there are no biological differences among races, which further concurs that race is used as more of a social structure than a biological reality (Genome, 2021.). This social structure further perpetuates and aids White privilege and White supremacy. Race creates the framework for otherness and differences based on skin color. These differences are further amplified through public policy, schooling



and educational outcomes, the criminal justice system, housing, and economic development. These constructs create the foundation for inequality and inequitable outcomes.

The third tenet of CRT describes how scholars and activists involved in racialized work are committed to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). They strive to see that the life experiences of people of color are catered to and centered. Bell (1980) also added to this tenet by incorporating the notion of interest convergence, which contends that concessions will be made for people of color if there is a direct benefit for dominant culture. Interest convergence is concerned with supporting the status quo of White supremacy while opening the door slightly for people of color. Rights are granted to people of color once it is in the best interest of White people. If the policy, experience, or practice tends to benefit the marginalized population more, then the progress will curtail. Ladson-Billings (1998) further explained that policies such as affirmative action were established to support people of color in education and in the labor market. However, the expansion of affirmative action policies provided more opportunities for White women by expanding access to greater educational and career opportunities (Massie, 2016).

CRT's fourth tenet asserts that epistemological knowledge shared by people of color is valid information and a legitimate source of knowledge and knowledge construction (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). This tenet challenges dominant epistemological beliefs and allows the stories and the life experiences of people of color to be validated and valued. This tenet critiques colorblindness and objectivity and asserts that society and the legal system are inherently biased toward people of color. Colorblind and race-neutral policies disproportionately target and mistreat people of color. CRT challenges dominant theories of meritocracy and neutrality and criticizes this discourse for promoting the self-interests of the dominant culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). This tenet emphasizes the use of counter stories as legitimate sources of knowledge for people who live on the margins (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2000). Dominant epistemological methods center on established ways of understanding and contributing to furthering White supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). CRT leverages counter stories and narratives, as a way of centering racialized knowledge as a valid source of information, which scholars make use of counter stories and narratives in their research (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

CRT privileges storytelling as a mechanism to spread the ideas and thoughts of people who often live within the margins. The experiences of people of color are a legitimate knowledge source for understanding their perception of the world. Storytelling is paramount in CRT. CRT centers the knowledge of people of color and brings their stories to the forefront. Some critics of CRT believe the use of storytelling is unreliable, leads to spreading untruths, and can be inherently narcissistic (Farber & Sherry, 1993; Litowitz, 2009). Delgado and Stefancic (2000) noted that dominant society tells stories, but their stories are automatically considered absolute truth. These stories are normalized, viewed as mainstream, and often exclude the experiences of Black people (Verjee, 2012). For example, counter stories aim to provide a viewpoint that goes against dominant ideology (Matsuda, 1995). Crenshaw (1988) added that CRT aims to criticize liberalism and notions of meritocracy, colorblindness, and neutrality.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) noted that counter-storytelling serves a four-fold purpose. They serve to build community, challenge traditional systems of understanding, provide a look at people living on the margins of society, and can create richness through the use of storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The authors also noted that counter stories represent real-life experiences and are not intended to be fictional.

CRT is interdisciplinary in nature. It draws from a number of fields that include but are not limited to education, social science, law, history, and ethnic studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). This allows critical race theorists to leverage a multitude of traditions to

explain the lived experiences of people of color. CRT has been used in a number of disciplines and lends itself well to the field of education. CRT also can include sex, gender, culture, and class analysis too.

Critics argue that CRT has excluded the voices of women and has been male-dominated (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Black women can experience a multitude of oppressions simultaneously, which require a framework that not only explains their experiences as racialized beings but also how gender and class impact their experiences. These experiences are different for Black men and White women. An intersectional approach for explaining the educational experiences of Black women supports them by not allowing them to forfeit any parts of their identity.

CRT is an integral theory for understanding the complexities of race and racism in education; however, it does little to acknowledge the intersections of race and gender. By privileging race, Black women are forced to position their race over their gender and in a sense, fragment their lived experiences. They are forced to figure out which identity to accept. CRF is an alternative to CRT that allows researchers to explain the livelihood, existence, and experiences of Black women on predominantly White campuses. It allows for intersectional experiences to be accounted for holistically. Race and gender are equally privileged and theorized.

### **An Intersectional Approach for Understanding Race and Gender**

Truth (1851) problematized existing as both Black and a woman. Truth noted personal experiences to account for treatment received as a Black body and woman in America. Truth explored religious humanity of the predominantly White female convention attendees. Truth stated,

Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I could have ploughed and

planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man- when I could get it- and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne 13 children and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (p.1)

Truth's speech is an early example of a Black woman attempting to validate and explain the juxtaposition of being Black and female. Truth shared a story of being treated like a man because of the nature of being an enslaved woman while also attempting to relate to the women in the convention by sharing womanhood through motherhood. Over 160 years later, and this debate among women of color still reigns. Theories of race and gender have not adequately explained their experiences within the margins. A call for an intersectional approach to understand the personhood of Black women is necessary. These experiences cannot be fully explained solely by race-based theories or feminist epistemologies. An intersectional approach is imperative in order to fully grasp the multidimensional capacity of lives and educational experiences of Black women.

Crenshaw (1991), coined the term intersectionality and argued that “intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (p. 209). Crenshaw (1991) problematized the use of analyzing race and gender exclusively. Intersectionality explains the way that race and gender interact and legal jurisprudence. Looking through one lens can distort the experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw (1991) challenged the notion of a single axis. Intersectionality aims to articulate the often-ignored intersection of race and gender for Black women in education. This theory aims to shed light on Black women's experiences in education. Intersectionality is important when studying Black women because it attempts to provide a theory for the unique condition of Black women who are often ignored and erased from feminist and anti-racist theories (Nash, 2008).

According to Parker and Lynn (2002), Crenshaw's scholarship sought to accomplish four goals. The first point was to provide the groundwork for critiquing Whiteness and examining its impact on American society. The next was to center gendered issues and bring forth a public debate. The third was to provide redress for marginalized women and create a way for Black female scholars to examine their own conditions in an interdisciplinary way. Crenshaw sought to create an intersectional space for women of color. Black women are often ignored, and Crenshaw's framework creates the platform for better understanding even though it does not curtail discrimination and challenging experiences (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Hancock (2007) noted intersectional research and feminism are not interchangeable. There is a dearth in education research and a lack of theories that can fully explain the experience of African American women in higher education. According to Wing (2000), "Mainstream feminism has paid insufficient attention to the central role of White supremacy's subordination of women of color" (p. 7). Intersectional frameworks attempt to theorize issues and the lives of Black women while creating a needed bridge for understanding the simultaneous inner workings of being a racialized and gendered being. Intersectionality complicates race and gender binaries (Nash, 2008). Black women's stories are centered without being essentialized. Intersectionality also aims to explain racial oppression and gender oppression simultaneously. Race and gender are not additive states of being. They are experienced in tandem.

Intersectionality provides a reconciliation to research and work that has excluded marginalized people. Intersectionality is a response to essentialism and exclusion of women of color from feminist and anti-racist theories (Nash, 2008). "Intersectionality can consider the differences between Black women, producing a potentially uncomfortable disunity that allows for a richer and more robust conception of identity" (Nash, 2008, p. 12).

Intersectionality is political. This politicized personhood continues to impact Black women across the country. Intersectional theorists aim to put Black women at the forefront.

### **Not “Our” Feminism: How Feminist Research Excludes Black Women**

Feminist theory was designed to invoke political action and protection for women (McCall, 2005). In addition, feminist research is often underrepresented in higher education research, which contributes to a lack of gendered understandings in policy and practice (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) asserted that the umbrella of feminism is not sufficient enough to explain the lived experiences of Black women. Traditional feminism focuses primarily on the perspective of White middle-class women. These experiences are assumed to be an essential “women’s experience” or “women’s perspective.” The experiences of Black women are not homogeneous (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Hull et al. (1982) wrote about the lack of Black women’s perspectives in feminist research. They also noted that most people did not even notice women of color were missing from feminist research:

This invisibility, which goes beyond anything that either Black men or White women experience and tell about in their writing, is one reason it is so difficult for me to know where to start. It seems overwhelming to break such a massive silence. Even more numbing, however, is the realization that so many of the women who will read this have not yet noticed us missing either from their reading matter, their politics, or their lives. (p. 158)

Hull et al. (1982) noted the commitment of Black feminism to the liberation of Black women. Crenshaw (1989) urged feminists to include the perspectives of non-White women. Race should be included in feminist analysis. Crenshaw also urged race scholars to examine gender and patriarchy.

Harris (2000) noted White feminist essentialism has fragmented and obstructed the realities and ignored the realities of Black women; there is an ideal of being an essential feminist, and the removal of race from feminism successfully removes Black women from the conversation and often requires them to fragment their lives. Harris (2000) criticized feminist theorist, Catherine MacKinnon, as she used White womanhood as a synonym for woman and the symbolic figurehead of feminism. By default, feminism excludes Black women and does not represent all women (2000). It also makes White women synonymous with the word woman.

Carroll (1982) presented a dynamic explanation of the juxtaposition for Black women by stating that Black women neither share the race or gender of White men and as a result, they share no parallel with the dominant group in society. This also contributes to their invisibility and oppression because this is a White male-dominated society. This condition becomes very apparent on campuses and spaces where Black women are minoritized.

Feminists have historically been known for not including non-White voices in the center of the movement. White middle-class women have been the focus of feminist theory; however, they do not account for the realities of Black women. Therefore, Black women have actively sought out their own spaces to be themselves (Rousseau, 2013). Some Black female scholars have rejected the notion of “feminism” because of its historic exclusion of Black women. The history of Black women in America is undergirded in White male patriarchy, which has made their experiences different from the oppression that White women experience. The term “womanist” was first used by Walker (1983). “Womanists” are defined as Black feminists illuminated as distinctively different from mainstream White feminism essays (Collins, 1996). The distinct strand of feminism gives voice to often ignored Black women. Womanism is in direct conflict with White feminism (Collins, 1996).

## **Black Feminist Thought**

Founding scholar of Black feminist thought (BFT), Collins (1990) provided a context for understanding the lives and conditions of African American women. Through BFT, knowledge construction for Black women is exclusive of the dominant theories and narratives. Collins (1990) provided a critical lens for assessing the social construction of Black womanhood. BFT was birthed out of exclusion from feminist movements in education (Banks & Banks, 2009). BFT is shaped by Black women. Black women's experiences are unique and vary at the intersections. Their stories are not like White women or Black men. Black women are diverse and are impacted by multiple identities.

BFT provides an opportunity for African American women to have a theory or standpoint that adequately explains and articulates their lived experiences (Collins, 1990). BFT also provides a voice for Black women. Ladson-Billings (2008) shared experience and the sentiment of many colleagues who were interested in researching Black people and their own cultural affinity groups. Their colleagues received pushback from their departments and campuses for having a too-narrow focus or what Ladson-Billings referred to as being "too Black" (p. 36). Work that focuses on Black women is often seen as going against the grain because it is not openly expected to conform to White dominant institutional norms.

Black women possess "specialized knowledge" that informs how they see the world and provide the standpoint for them (Collins, 1990, p. 22). Black women's experiences are uniquely different, which causes them to have a different viewpoint. Black women intellectuals are integral and central to BFT. Black women can use their position as an outsider to find strength.

Andersen and Collins (2001) viewed race, class, and gender as "systems of power upon which social groups are impacted and constructed" (p. 1). Due to this power structure, dominant groups and knowledge produced from these groups are omnipresent in the social



and educational structures of life. These intersections shape experiences and how people see their world and their lives in it. The collective goal of Black feminist work is to challenge these oppressive systems that contribute to perpetuating negative images of people of color (Collins, 2010). The role of this work is to not only challenge the dominant discourse but to also transform it.

Black male feminists Moore and Pipkin (2016) asserted that the collective Black struggle has forgotten about Black women in exchange to focus on the racial uplifting of Black men. They used the analogy of a burning house and stated that the collective illogically fights to save the Black man while "leaving all who are left behind to be consumed by the fires of structural violence" (p. 31). The proverbial house is on fire and Black women also need saving. Liberation for Black people will not come from a single axis focus. Moore and Pipkin also noted that Black feminist framework is the pathway to joint liberation by stating, "This work is a matter of life and death for the collective Black men, women, and children. When one of us is pursued by death, we all are" (p. 35).

Andersen and Collins (2001) also noted they were not looking to victimize Black women, but desired to look at these systems of power and how they impact everyone. They stated, "We remind students that race, class, and gender have affected the experiences of all individuals and groups" (p. 4). However, some groups, according to their own admission, have had a more hyper-awareness of the experiences at these intersections. These relationships between race, class, and gender are simultaneous and a system that produces meaning. Howard-Hamilton (2003) suggested CRT and BFT are two theoretical frameworks that adequately present the opportunity to research Black women. However, CRF includes the component of both of these theories, which truly create a theory that supports and acknowledges the collegiate experiences of Black women.

## **Black Women As Creators of Knowledge**

Black feminist traditions attempt to remedy the exclusion of Black women's intellectual agency from the academy; White feminist movements and racialized discourse often ignore Black women and keeps them out as subordinate outsiders (Collins, 1990). Black women are the carriers of knowledge, and their viewpoint on life and the world is impacted by their race and gender identity. This places Black women in a unique place on the margins of society where their existence is often under researched and ignored. Black feminism centers on Black women as sources of knowledge and provides an alternative perspective to dominant ideology. Because of Black women's categorization in American society, it is imperative to use a theoretical lens that can be both critical of their gender subordination and their racialized existence.

Hull et al. (1982) recounted the story of Milla Granson, a slave woman in Kentucky, who learned how to read from her master's children and secretly began a midnight school to teach enslaved children how to read and write. This sharing of knowledge was considered dangerous and a threat to the established power dynamic. The history education of Black people in America has always carried political implications in the United States (Woodson, 2006). Black women have fought to be seen as legitimate holders and sharers of knowledge. Leonardo (2009) argued that in the midst of White supremacy, people of color have collected "alternative (unofficial) knowledge" in order to maintain humanity and cope with the reality of the world. For people of color, this connection to community and the understanding of discourse learned in social settings (i.e., church, home, and school) have provided the context for an alternative narrative formation that impacted racial identity consciousness (Leonardo, 2009). The development of "voice" allows Black women to define themselves as a response to their representation by dominant culture (Collins, 1990, 1996).

Collins (1990) discussed the exclusion of Black women from mainstream education discourse. Collins (1990) noted that Black women hold membership into two groups and when those groups are discussed, Black men are the focal point for race and White women are the focal point for feminism, which excludes the realities and experiences of Black women. Black women have created their own knowledge to explain and examine their experiences and conditions in the world. Black feminists seek to empower Black women. BFT explains that Black women have been victimized because of the intersection of their race, gender, and class. However, they are also heroines in challenging their own oppression. This is not to victimize Black women nor minimize their oppression because they are active agents in shifting the dialogue around their oppression and challenging systems in making their realities better and striving towards more of a social justice stance. Black women are activists and advocates for issues that impact their lives.

### **Critical Race Feminism: A Theory for Understanding Black Women**

There is a great need for more scholarship in the field of education that looks at the educational experiences of African American women. Feminist epistemologies tend to be concerned with the education of middle-class White girls and women and raced-based epistemologies tend to be consumed with the educational barriers negatively affecting Black men. Gendered and racialized epistemologies have focused on White women and Black men, and new paradigms are needed to adequately theorize and center Black women (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

CRF is an opportunity to leverage a legal theory that can be used in education and in entrepreneurship to explain the experiences of Black women. According to Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010), “Critical race feminism in education offers the most nuanced and straightforward framework for contending with the social, economic, political and educational problems confronting Black female students inside and outside of schools” (p.

23). CRF is becoming more popular as a theory to explain the experiences of Black women in education research (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). This framework provides a promising opportunity to move away from essentializing the experiences of Black women.

Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006) asserted, "theory gives us a set of glasses to help us see the world differently-glasses we can put on and take off" (p. 550). A critical intersectional framework lends itself well to sharing the experiences of Black women who are often marginalized and silenced in education research. Wing (2000) stated that CRF attempts to address "those who are both women and members of today's racial/ethnic minorities, as well as disproportionately poor" (p. 1). Critical race feminism has also been used to theorize inequality, race, gender, and power structures in education (Carter, 2012). This lens can also help researchers better understand the lives and schooling experiences of Black girls and women. CRF can be applied to education in order to center the lives and educational experiences of Black women. CRF stems from CLS, feminist studies, and CRT (Carter, 2012; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Wing, 2000). CRF is an amalgamation of CRT and feminist ideology used to explain the disempowerment of women of color from a racial and gendered viewpoint (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

CRF has been used to explain the impact of racism on Black girl teenagers in school. (Joseph et al., 2016). Brown and William-White (2010) used CRF as the framework for examining their own experiences as Black faculty members of teacher education programs at PWIs. Their autoethnographic study revealed the nuanced challenges and experiences of racialized and gendered beings navigating their way through two teacher education departments at their respective institutions.

Patton and Ward (2016) drew upon CRF as the differences between media coverage of missing young White women and missing Black undergraduate women. These two scholars noted that due to nature of racism and gender bias, the media tends to center the

disappearances of Black women whereas the disappearance of White women because mainstream news. Inherently, CRF is a framework disrupting chronic invisibility (Patton & Ward, 2016)

CRF is contextual and informs how a subject can be impacted by multiple oppressions at the same time. CRF has been used to analyze education reform, legal jurisprudence, other aspects of education and policy studies. CRF will not be a cure for all oppression that women of color face in life and business; however, it is an opportunity for a further examination of their experience from a lens that allows viewing African American women in the center is the focal point of the research practice and policies (Hyttén, 2015). CRF helps women of color find their voice and be able to speak out on issues that pertain to them and impact them. CRF shines a light on Black women whose stories and experiences are often missing from the dominant culture. These experiences go beyond just being Black or just being a woman (Hull et al., 1982). It is important to distinguish Black feminist epistemologies from mainstream feminism. CRF is a branch of CRT that intentionally and simultaneously centers the intersection of race and gender. CRF accounts for a more multiplicative theoretical analysis that feminist and CRT does not fully account for.

Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) asserted that CRF aims to provide a critical lens to examine the lives of women of color. CRF assumes the lives of Black women are different from the lives of Black men and White women (Carter, 2012). CRF acknowledges the simultaneous intersecting identities, which may cause Black women to experience several forms of discrimination because of male dominance and racial prejudice (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). CRF is interdisciplinary and concurrently examines race and gender. CRF is anti-essentialist and acknowledges the differences of gender and race identity (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). These tenets lend themselves well to the higher education experience. Due to CRF's intrinsic interdisciplinary nature, this theory also pairs well with the study of

Black women entrepreneurs. Berry (2010) asserted the CRF is more interdisciplinary because it is informed by the work of scholars who are outside of the legal field.

Collins (2002) noted the increasing importance of Black feminist epistemologies in education. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) acknowledged the usefulness of CRF in education. CRF can be applied to analyze the stories of African American women in business. Black women have historically been marginalized and oppressed in educational and entrepreneurial settings. CRF makes room for differences and in fact, sets an expectation that Black women will produce a series of different stories that will not be in alignment with traditionally centered dominant discourse. CRF also considers all their intersecting identities simultaneously. These differences are accounted for in an effort to un-essentialize stories of Black women. CRF also acknowledges that Black women are not a monolith (Berry, 2010). The experience of being consistent is indeed raced, classed, and gendered multidimensional.

Secondly, CRF aims to celebrate and center the lives of Black women often left in the margins. The intricateness of this intersection requires a unique framework that fully takes into consideration their full personhood. Banks and Banks (2009) asserted that Black women must do “additional labor,” due to their status as raced, gendered, and class beings (p. 141). CRF is a theoretical framework constructed to make sense of the world for marginalized women of color who are often ignored, under researched and under resourced by the dominant society. CRF centers on the power relationship between forms of oppression (Verjee, 2012). CRF aims to bring intersectional experiences to the forefront of research and aims to shed light on often marginalized women of color. It gives them a voice and provides space for growth and empowerment.

CRF is “resistance jurisprudence” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 5) and values and privileges storytelling. Harris (2000) talked about the notion of gender essentialism, which increases the false notion of a one size fits all feminist jurisprudence that does not actively

engage or talk about women of color. Harris (2000) challenged MacKinnon's dominance theory because it only describes White women while CRF is multiplicative. The Black experience cannot be essentialized (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Black women experience multiple oppressions, which are not additive. Race is a filter upon which people of color see the world. White people do not necessarily have the same filter (Grillo & Wildman, 1991). Black women perceive life based on multiple consciousnesses (Grillo & Wildman, 1991).

Andersen and Collins (2001) asserted that race, class, and gender matter in American society because there is a value system placed on certain lives versus others. The distribution of resources, wealth opportunities, and quality of life have been provided to some of these power structures. As society continues to become more diverse, it is becoming increasingly important to understand inequality. Andersen and Collins (2001) viewed race, class, and gender as "systems of power" upon which social groups are impacted and constructed (p. 1). Due to this power structure, dominant groups and knowledge produced from these groups are omnipresent in the social and educational structures of life. These intersections shape experiences and how people see their world and their lives in it. The collective goal of Black feminist work is to challenge oppressive systems that contribute to perpetuating negative images of Black women. The role of this work is to not only challenge the dominant discourse but to also transform and dismantle it.

### **Critical Feminist Theory in Education**

A greater emphasis on the intersection of gender and race as it corresponds to education is needed to fully understand the numerous variables that contribute to academic success and stress in African American girls. Intersectionality can be applied to education in order to center the lives and educational experiences of Black women. Having Black women share their experience stories is a political act because "narratives do political work"

(Riessman, 2008, p. 8). Giving voice to voiceless populations is taking a stance to disrupt the dominant culture.

It is also important to note intersectionality does not claim that Black women have identical experiences (Banks & Banks, 2009). Certain identity markers may become more explicit and the obvious cause of oppression in an instance, while in other cases, another oppression may be more apparent (Banks & Banks, 2009). Parker and Lynn (2002) noted Crenshaw's work aimed to combat the role and authority of Whiteness in law, center issues impacting women and gender roles, highlight the marginalization of Black women, and asserted that work should have a community focused on creating a space for women of color.

DeVault (1999) asserted feminist research serves a dual purpose of shifting the focal point from men to women while also seeking out research methods that support and value the contributions of women. However, these aims do not explicitly state the impact of race on women. It assumes the only challenge for women is gender inequality. There is a major disconnect where Black women become fragmented and ignored in traditional feminist perspectives. Their livelihood must be accounted for in gender frameworks too. CRF attempts to resolve this challenge. CRF explicitly accounts for class and integrates this with racism and sexism. These multiple identities intersect in a unique way for Black women unlike the experience of a Black man and a White woman. The disconnect between White feminism and racialized constructs is the context upon which Black feminist research is built (King, 1988).

### **Summary**

CRF is gaining momentum and popularity in education research (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). It is an ideal theory for understanding the lived experiences of women of color when race-based theories and gender-based theories do not fit. CRF provides a premium opportunity for analyzing the intersection of class, race, and gender with a social



justice underpinning. Like its parent branches of feminist theory, CRT, and CLS, CRF is concerned with not only researching multiplicative oppressions but also combating and actively challenging racism and sexism, and classism. CRF aims to center on often ignored women of color but moves them from the margins of society and into the center spotlight. This theory aims to understand and identify women of color on their own terms. CRF provides an explanation for their lived experiences that do not fit into the normative White male-dominated patriarchy. CRF provides an in-depth explanation of the lived experiences of Black women from preschool to death.

The intersections of race and gender impact Black women uniquely and CRF provides a framework for better understanding this intersection. CRF values the stories of Black women and centers Black women as viable knowledge constructors. This research will contribute to the knowledge base by further highlighting the challenges and successes of Black women. Although the focus of this study was to conceptualize CRF in a Black American female context, CRF has implications for all women of color and women whose race and gender directly impact their lived experiences in countries around the world. This is humanistic and activist-centric work (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011).

CRF is just a starting point, but more must be done to not only theorize marginalized lives but to also transform these same lives in practice. CRF is a theoretical framework that also makes sense of the world from a woman of color standpoint. CRF values diversity (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). It gives Black women a voice in research and provides a space for growth and empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

The lived experiences of Black individuals in the United States are unique from other minoritized groups and this experience must be researched and examined through a lens that adequately explains their set of unique experiences. The experiences of Black women in

education and entrepreneurship have gone under researched. Although this group is making strides in both arenas their lives, stories continue to go untold. African American women continue to face massive challenges due to discrimination racism and sexism that often impact their lives simultaneously. It is imperative to research Black women in their lives and experiences while also using a theoretical framework that lends itself well to the multi-dimensional experience that Black women have every single day. Feminist frameworks do not go far enough to explain how race impacts Black women and race-centric frameworks are inadequate because they privilege race while insufficiently acknowledging the impact of gender on minoritized women. Intersectional epistemologies attempt to address these issues and theorize the lives of Black women in a way that bridges the gaps between racial, cultural, and gendered understandings of being. Intersectionality aims to provide a legal framework that explains Black women's lives and discrimination. Intersectionality can be applied to education in order to center the lives and educational experiences of Black women. This multi-consciousness experience that Black women endure daily must be researched and explained in frameworks that acknowledge their wholeness. CRF looks at Black women in a holistic way that compartmentalizes their being. Each part of being a Black woman can be accounted for simultaneously.

This literature review highlights the experiences of Black women in entrepreneurship and in education, but it does not explain their experiences in the simultaneous duality. More research must be done on how the education of Black women intersects with their entrepreneurial experiences. The aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences of African American women with PhDs and add to the knowledge base.

### Chapter 3

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs with PhDs. In this chapter, I explain the research design and methods used to craft this study. I chose to conduct a narrative inquiry study because narrative research provides a powerful opportunity for Black women to share their own stories, thoughts, and ideas using their own voices (see Collier, 2019; Ferdinand, 2018). Ten black women were selected as research participants. They met the research criteria and agreed to be interviewed. Interviews are one of the most common forms of narrative research (Riessman, 2008). These interviews brought forth valuable information that will contribute to better understanding the lived experiences of Black women.

In this chapter, I first explain the importance of narrative inquiry. I highlight the importance of Black women sharing their stories and being the creators of knowledge. Then I outline the research project, provide additional information about the research participants, and data collection. I end this chapter with possible risks and suggestions for future inquiry.

#### **Exploring Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry provides a unique opportunity to highlight the lived experiences and voices of individuals that are often under researched. This shines a poignant light on lives that are far too often left on the margins of society (Crenshaw, 1991). This intentional shining was the foundation for examining the entrepreneurial practices of Black women. Clandinin (2013) emphasized that one's view of the world is socially constructed and informed by personal past stories, historical upbringing, and cultural understandings of how the world lived in is perceived. Narrative inquiry fundamentally supports that "we live storied lives on storied landscapes" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 216). Personal experiences are built on stories told over time, both personal stories and the stories from the community. My role as a researcher

was to not only take a story at face value but to construct meaning that could be applied to the larger context of education and entrepreneurial research.

When doing research of this nature, credibility and validity are important to maintaining the dignity of research. Narrative inquiry is less concerned with the “truth” as it is with understanding and providing context for valid lived experiences. Riessman (1993) argued that narratives are constructed around events and experiences. Two people can see the same exact incident, but their understanding of the world will impact how they react and respond to the same occurrence. Riessman (1993) argued that narratives, “do not merely describe what someone does in the world, but what the world does to that someone” (p. 22). Narrative provides an opportunity for sense-making of the world lived in (Bell, 2002).

Nolan et al. (2018) highlighted four significant elements of narrative inquiry: The narrative approach is used to: (a) understand life experiences, (b) illuminate temporal experiences, (c) evaluate hidden knowledge, and (d) provide a holistic approach to understanding the human experience. Greater emphasis is placed on studying individual experiences rather than collective experiences. It is through understanding individual experiences that we as researchers can actually learn more about communities as a whole, especially minoritized communities that often do not see themselves represented in mainstream stories.

Bleakley (2005) noted that using narrative inquiry attempts to assist researchers with not only creating research about people but to research “with” people. The co-construction of knowledge contributes an additional layer of information and depth to research that is often not realized with more quantitative approaches (Bleakley, 2005). One makes sense about the world based on past experience, cultural assertions, and beliefs. It is with this lens that individuals see the world and how they understand current information and knowledge. Stories begin to have new meaning when new information or data are presented (Bell, 2002).

This narrative approach can be used to combat elite discourse that is traditionally privileged in the academy and provides an opportunity for traditionally marginalized people to have a voice in academia (Bell, 2002).

Narrative methods require the researcher to have a relationship with research participants because they are co-constructing knowledge together. The researcher is just as involved as the research participants because the stories can be turned into knowledge shared by the participants, but once this knowledge is transcribed and analyzed it begins to take on a new meaning provided by the researcher. Narrative inquiry provides a window into individuals' lives and will provide the researcher the opportunity to holistically explore the complexity and nuances of life occurrences (Bell, 2002).

### **Storytelling in Narrative Inquiry**

Storytelling is a major component of narrative inquiry, and it has been used in education research and pedagogical practice (Huber et al., 2013). Stories have been in use as a pedagogical practice for sharing information throughout the learning experience (Coulter et al., 2007). Storytelling is becoming a more popular and accepted research method. However, narrative inquiry goes beyond just telling stories. This methodological practice aims to analyze the stories being told and provides a process for reflection on the assumptions made from the stories told. This process also aims to reveal perspectives beyond the surface level of the stories being told. This process also examines how meaning is attached to these stories. Conscious and unconscious stories are being told which provide a platform for lived experiences (Bell, 2002).

### **Portraiture as a form of Narrative Inquiry**

Lightfoot (1986) coined the term portraiture, a specific form of narrative inquiry by stating:

So the portraitist is active in selecting the themes that will be used to tell the story, strategic in deciding on points of focus and emphasis, and creative in defining the sequence and rhythm of the narrative. What gets left out is often as important as what gets included... (p. 10)

The researcher or portraitist chooses the themes to highlight in the research and storytelling process. Portraiture thoughtfully acknowledges that there are multiple stories available for knowledge construction, and the portraitist has the power to discuss which stories get told and which ones do not (Lightfoot, 2005). The researcher and research participants play an integral role in knowledge construction, which is heavily reliant on their own storied lives. Portraiture places a greater emphasis on the researcher's lens on life. Storytelling shines a light on the life of not only the research participant but also the researcher. The themes highlighted in research and stories told are based on how the researcher interprets the world. As a researcher, I intentionally and continuously reflected on my contribution to this narrative. This constant personal reflection created a more robust inquiry project.

### **The Role of Counter-Narratives**

In a system that often does not account for the stories of women of color, narratives have been an outlet for stories that often go unshared in education research. Narratives are a tool for social justice in CRT (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Counter-narratives illuminate nondominant stories (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). The experiences of Black women are not the same, and counter-narratives provide an opportunity to de-essentialize and share stories that are often untold (Berry, 2010). CRF theory also uses storytelling and counter-narratives. Brown and William-White (2010) adopted CRF as a theory to explain their experiences as Black women professors pursuing careers as teacher educators at two predominantly White institutions (PWIs). The researchers used CRF to write an auto-ethnographic narrative to explain their experiences. They used CRF as a framework to

explain their lived experiences as faculty in the Midwest and West Coast of the United States. They used real-life experience in the foreground for CRF work within the context of the teacher education department. They used counter-stories to explain their experiences in their respective departments. CRF can be used to explain the experiences of Black female faculty members. Women of color have used storytelling to share their experiences in education (Duncan, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2008).

The dominant culture has historically used narratives to explain the world and the hierarchy of people in it. Andrews (2002) asserted that “master narratives” offer people a way of identifying what is assumed as a normative experience” (p. 1). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted, “White, middle-class American males serve as the standard against which other groups are compared” (p. 199). CRF is a theoretical framework that provides an opportunity for explaining the lives of Black women outside of a domain context. CRF goes beyond the White male narrative (Chakrabarty et al., 2012). Counter stories “are told from the perspective of a marginalized person, someone whose culture, belief system, and identity(ies) are different from the normative (Andrews, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These stories aim to shift dominant epistemological beliefs. These stories build community and a new understanding that stands in tandem with dominant culture (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Parker and Lynn (2002) questioned the traditional epistemological canon because of its consistently shutting out minority groups in the academy.

Master narratives, “reflect the social history of that group, race, culture, society, or civilization; that is, no epistemology is context-free” (Espino, 2012 p. 37). According to Delgado Bernal (2002), “Eurocentric epistemologies disregard experiential knowledge as an aspect of truth while race-gender epistemologies view experiential knowledge as an asset in research” (p. 37). Williams (1991) suggested that narrative has the power to reveal racism and perceptions of race in a White male context.

Litowitz (2009) criticized the use of counter-story and narrative in CRT by noting that lawyers must be able to look at past stories and question the policy and arguments. Stories humanize subjects and counter stories seek to include outsiders (Litowitz, 2009). However, in the context of education, stories provide a valuable context and platform for humanizing and understanding people of color whose stories do not often get shared (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Counter-narratives provide a platform for the often silenced (Chakrabarty et al., 2012). Delpit (1988) contended that “one of the tragedies of education is the way in which the dialogue of people of color has been silenced” (p. 58). Some of these stories have been shared by Black women through the creation of their own media, literature, dance, poetry, and other forms of artistic expression (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

### **Black Women Telling Their Own Stories**

Black women possess “specialized knowledge,” that informs how they see the world and provide the standpoint for them (Collins, 1990, p. 22). Black women's experiences are uniquely different, which in turn provides an alternative viewpoint from traditionally dominant perspectives. Narrative inquiry is political in nature (Riessman, 2008). Having Black women share their experience stories is a political act. African American women sharing stories about their economic experiences have historically been dangerous and highlighting these stories can be viewed as an act of resistance (Gibbs Grey & Williams-Farrier, 2017). In a society that often does not account for the stories of women of color, narratives have been an outlet for stories that are often not shared in education research.

Narrative inquiry offers a multifaceted methodological approach that allows the stories of African American women to be told through their own eyes. Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2011) believed that feminist research should create empowering relationships with research participants. CRF aims to research an empowering feministic research perspective that centers on intersectionality. Coupled with a CRF analytic framework, narrative inquiry



provides an empowering intersectional analysis for explaining the education and entrepreneurial lives of African American women from their own perspective while acknowledging the research participants as holistic beings.

### **Participants**

I interviewed 10 African American female entrepreneurs with PhDs. In order to qualify for this study, they were required to meet the following criteria: (a) self-identify as Black or African American women, (b) must have completed an accredited doctoral program and graduated, and (c) must have made at least \$50,000 or more within the last year of business. I chose to focus on this group of women because they are traditionally underserved in dominant society. I also chose this audience because they understand the value of research and their contributions to research after completing accredited doctoral programs. They were able to provide valuable information that contributes to the knowledge base and help scholars better understand and support Black women entrepreneurs. I obtained research approval from University of Wisconsin-Madison's Institutional Review Board. I created consent forms that were emailed out to each participant prior to their scheduled interviews. Each participant submitted a signed consent form. We scheduled the interviews via WebEx and each interview averaged 35–60 minutes. The interviews are saved on the password-protected university box drive. See Appendix A for a copy of the interview protocol. Two years after study completion, the recordings will be destroyed. Each participant happily shared their stories and was open to answer follow-up questions. The research participants varied in age, years in business, marital status, location, and family dynamics. Some of my research participants currently work as faculty at a number of universities across the country while other participants run their businesses full time. In Chapter 4, I provide a brief demographic summary of each participant.

## Research Study Process

I posted my research flyer on Facebook and asked my Facebook friends and extended network to tag and recommend Black women for my study. I received over 100 responses through this process. I reached out to a number of the women who responded to my post. Some did not meet the criteria for the research study. In addition to crowdsourcing names from my Facebook friends, I also personally reached out to women in my network who were PhDs and also entrepreneurs. Convenience sampling was used to gather the participants. The next round of participants was achieved through snowballing. Ten women who fit the inclusion criteria were selected and were interested in being interviewed.

I developed the research questions based on the areas that I was the most interested in learning more about when it came to Black women entrepreneurs. Traditionally the experience of the Black woman is often untold. Although Black women are increasing the number of enrollments on college campuses and also the number of entrepreneurs, they still face challenges of isolation, stress, discrimination, and have a difficult time getting acclimated to dominant campus cultures across the country (Conrad & Gasman, 2017; Hannon et al., 2016; Keels, 2013; Stewart, 2015). Race is a major factor in how students of color view their college experience (Winkle-Wagner & Locks, 2013). In addition to the academic challenges, Black households have 90% less wealth than White families (Struyven et al., 2021). On average, Black women entrepreneurs make six times less than the average of all women entrepreneurs (American Express, 2019; Rhinehart, 2021). While being the largest growing group of women entrepreneurs, Black women are still making less money and employing fewer people (American Express, 2019; Rhinehart, 2021). If Black women were able to make the average of their female counterparts, they would contribute to creating over four million new jobs and create 981 billion dollars of revenue (Rhinehart, 2021). It is important to research successful entrepreneurs and successful matriculators of doctoral

programs in order to truly understand the key components to creating more successful scholars and entrepreneurs who happen to be Black women.

This study consisted of one 35–60-minute semi structured interview per participant. Each interview was conducted virtually; due to COVID-19 restrictions, in-person interviews were not an option. Some of the participants logged in via their phones or computer. They did not receive the interview questions in advance. Due to the experiences of this group, all were familiar with conducting research and had an in-depth knowledge of how academic research is conducted.

The interviews were conversational in nature (see Merriam, 1998). I conducted the interviews over the period of 1 month. The first part of the interview focused on their background and identity as an entrepreneur. The next series of interview questions focused on their experiences as graduate students and some as faculty. These interviews also highlighted their transition from the academy to career to business. The third part of the interview focused on how they operationalize success in their personal and business life.

In addition to interviews, I also asked the participants follow-up questions via email and provided them with the opportunity to review their participant summaries. I wanted to ensure that I was doing my due diligence and accurately representing the participants. I also examined secondary sources to validate the data, such as media articles, social media profiles, and their business websites. I searched to see if they have published books and journal articles. Some of the information is not verifiable, but I believe these participants provided me with the most accurate information to the best of their ability.

### **Data Analysis**

Once my data were collected and transcribed, I began the data analysis process. I speak more in detail about the data analysis process in Chapter 4. For this part of my project, I conducted thematic narrative analysis as outlined by Riessman (2008). Thematic analysis is

one of the most commonly used forms of narrative analysis and emphasizes what is being said by the research participants. This analytical approach can be applied to a number of data sources, such as written text, oral interviews, and group observations (Riessman, 2008).

I coded the interviews by hand. Once the interviews were coded, I reviewed the codes and condensed codes and identified the emerging themes. See Appendix B for the full coding scheme I applied to the interview transcripts. In addition to thematic coding, I share significant pieces of each participant's story throughout my research project. These individual stories allowed me to better understand the experiences of African American female entrepreneurs who hold PhDs. These vignettes contributed to a richer and robust research project. This analysis process allowed me to identify and highlight themes across the stories. Braun and Clarke (2013) expressed partiality towards qualitative research by stating, "It captures the complexity, mess and contradiction that characterizes the real world, yet allows us to make sense of patterns of meaning" (p. 8). Narrative inquiry highlights the lives of the research participants in their own words and provides the template for reviewing the complexities of lived experiences.

### **Data Saturation**

According to Creswell (1998), selecting a sample size of five to 25 participants is in alignment with the constructs of qualitative research. Guest et al. (2006) conducted 60 interviews with women in Ghana and noted that basic saturation began to occur with six interviews, and saturation was found within the 12 interviews. Consistent with the literature, I reached data saturation with 10 interviews. Many of the members had similar stories and a number of the themes were frequent so saturation was achieved.

### **Trustworthiness and Mitigating Risk**

Participation in this research study was voluntary. All of the participants had the right to withdraw at any time. No compensation was given. Many of the participants were more

than happy to share their experiences for this research project. There was minimal risk involved, and most of the participants were familiar with interviews and would have shared this information publicly. In order to maintain anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. Due to the experiences of this group, all were familiar with conducting research and had an in-depth knowledge of how academic research is conducted.

### **Limitations of Study**

I aimed to provide an in-depth look at the lives of African American female entrepreneurs. I did not look at African American male entrepreneurs or subsets of the population. I only focused on a small sample size of entrepreneurs. There was a major challenge with generalizability because of the narrative construction of this research study. Due to the depth and richness of narrative inquiry and the purposeful selection of participants, the generalizability of this study may be limited in nature. The findings from this study may not be leveraged to understand the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs as a whole, but it will be more intentionally designed to study the research participants in greater depth. This research project will help facilitate a better understanding of the experiences of Black women entrepreneurs with doctorate degrees. This is also an opportunity to emphasize the intersection of race and gender. However, there is still valuable information that can be gained and applied on a more individualized research basis.

The goal of employing qualitative research and narrative inquiry in this study was to privilege in-depth information and storytelling over brevity. The data produced from this study were rich, detailed, and provided a focal point on the individual over the collective. I identified themes among the research participants that can possibly be applied to studying Black women in business overall. While the sample population, drawn primarily from my personal and social media networks, may not be indicative of the entire population of Black women entrepreneurs, as a member of the community of Black women entrepreneurs, I am

confident I tapped into a population that can provide rich insights into this intersectional population. My research aim was to expand the knowledge base and provide entrepreneurial and education researchers with a greater understanding of the experiences of African American female entrepreneurs. I believe that this study can be a springboard for future academic and entrepreneurial studies.

### **Investigation/Research Positionality**

As a researcher and entrepreneur, I was fully aware that positionality was intertwined with my research participants. I am them and they are me. This proximity to the participants may have hindered some of my objectivity while also providing a safe and familiar space for my research participants to fully share their unfiltered and candid experiences. I also reflected on the data presented to me and highlighted where I may have some personal bias. I am fully aware that my research has an impact on me and my research participants. In alignment with narrative inquiry, there are stories being created during this research while stories are simultaneously being told. I also understand that my age, race, gender, past schooling experiences, upbringing, and current collegiate status deeply impact my research. My positionality as an African American woman and understanding of life limited my full ability to remain completely separate from the experiences of my research participants. Riessman (2008) noted that the researcher participates in the creation of the narrative. We are in this collective “storied” struggle together. I see and live through a critical, classed, gendered, and racialized lens and I am fully aware that I bring these sets of lenses to the work that I do. Knowledge construction is dynamic, ever-changing, and omnidirectional.

As a researcher, my participants learned about me while I learned and wrote about them. Through this research process, a powerful and more thoughtful research project was born. I am committed to making sure that their stories are told in an effort to make life better for the next generation.

I also understood that I am working on becoming a member of this group, and it was important for me to better understand how to work with Black women and help them develop their businesses. Two months before starting my doctoral studies, I started an online coaching business. Through my search for a better understanding on how to be a good entrepreneur, I searched for mentors, programs, and events that catered to my need to find a community. Through this process, I consistently came across women who identified as Black women with higher education degrees who were pursuing entrepreneurship. We shared stories and commonalities. I understand my role as an insider, and this helped me create better rapport with my participants. My role was to better understand their experiences as Black women in business. I was also interested in seeing how these experiences impacted their identity and what they identify as success.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, I share the narrative inquiry methodology of approach to research for this particular project. I introduce the importance of narrative inquiry and the power that it provides in centering the lives of Black women. I used a CRF framework. I conducted 10 semi structured interviews with my research participants. I reviewed the transcripts and listened to the interviews on WebEx multiple times in order to identify the emerging themes that came from this research study. In Chapter 4, I reveal the thematic findings of this study and a synopsis of each research participant.

## Chapter 4

“No black woman writer in this culture can write “too much”. Indeed, no woman writer can write “too much”...No woman has ever written enough” (hooks, 2013, p. 30 ).

### Introduction

There will never be enough stories told about Black women. I aimed to remedy this problem in this research study. Additionally, the purpose of this research study was to examine the lived experiences of Black women entrepreneurs and answer the following research questions through a narrative lens: (a) What are the lived experiences of African American female entrepreneurs with PhDs?; and (b) How do African American female entrepreneurs with a PhD define business success? In this chapter, I introduce my 10 research participants. Each participant is introduced via a short summary. Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity. My research participants shared their challenges and successes that arose during their life journeys. I then introduce the relevant themes that resulted from the research study. I also explain how the themes were produced and detail the coding process. Additionally, this chapter includes stories from each participant, demographic information, and charts describing the findings of each research question. Following the participant summaries, I share a thematic analysis of the research findings. Table 1 contains background information on each participant.



**Table 1**

## Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Type of business	Number of employees	Type of PhD	Year graduated with PhD	First generation college student	First generation college entrepreneur
Dr. Allison	52	Coaching	7	Political science	2000	No	No
Dr. Brittany	35	Mental health, individual therapy, higher educational consulting, speaking, and accountability coaching	2	Higher educational leadership and with research concentration in administration	2017	Yes	Yes
Dr. Shannon	51	Coaching and speaking	6	Psychology	2015	Yes	Yes
Dr. Jasmine	34	Both are centered around helping PhD students and candidates to graduation	0	Industrial and Systems Engineering management, research area is trust	2016	No	Yes
Dr. Jennifer	55	Leadership development firm	2	Management	2010	No	Yes
Dr. Barbara		Business research consulting	2	American Studies	2007	Yes	No
Dr. Willow	55	Digital marketing	0	Industrial/organizational psychology	1994	No	No
Dr. Toni	44	Consulting and education	0	Curriculum and instruction	2013	Yes	Yes
Dr. Natasha	44	Sales training and consulting	0	Doctor of management in organizational leadership	2009	Yes	No
Dr. Danielle	43	Education research consultant and dissertation coach	0	Organizational leadership & policy studies	2016	No	Yes

***Dr. Allison***

Dr. Allison is the daughter of a sharecropper and a schoolteacher from rural Virginia. At the age of 14, her father founded a lumber company in the Jim Crow South in order to provide for his family. During this time, many Black families were unable to purchase wood to build homes, so Dr. Allison's father saw an opportunity to fill a void in the marketplace.

As a result, he was able to employ family members and provide a comfortable lifestyle for his family. She shared,

You know, I have the unusual experience and the blessing of having, not only two parents, but one who, you know, who has through his business provided us a level of financial freedom that a lot of black people didn't have where I came from.

Dr. Allison admired her father's boldness and the luxury that entrepreneurship provided her. She also shared that her college tuition was funded through her father's business endeavors.

Dr. Allison also talked about her experiences in higher education. Once she finished with undergrad, she was interested in becoming a civil rights attorney and considered attending law school. However, one of her mentors who had both a PhD and a law degree encouraged her to apply to a political science PhD program instead. Dr. Allison obliged and received a full scholarship into the PhD program in political science at the University of Maryland.

Dr. Allison positively described her experiences of being a PhD student at the University of Maryland. "It was a good time to be Black and in political science." Dr. Allison lauded her program for "bringing in the next generation of Black scholars." Dr. Allison was on track to become a tenured professor; however, she wanted more. She shared, "A professor that has a tenured track position, that's supposed to be the holy grail. That wasn't really where I wanted it to be. I didn't want to be a professor."

While in her PhD program, Dr. Allison held internships with political figures. After graduating, Dr. Allison worked for a number of Washington, D.C.-based think tanks doing research on race and gender. Her research later led to specifically focusing on Black women. She stated, "Black women are more likely than anybody to work. Then, at the same time, we're the most underpaid. A Black woman with a PhD typically makes on par what a White man makes with a GED." During her time at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Dr.

Allison commented that although their work focused on social justice and poverty most of the research benefited and centered on White women. She stated,

It pulls down the numbers, so that you're not seeing that white women are doing so much better, And then when things are created white women are the ones to get the biggest advantage. While black women are getting screwed. Black women are consistently undervalued, overworked, and underappreciated, and I didn't want that reality for my life.

Dr. Allison's life and research encouraged her to pursue entrepreneurship. She also believed that she would not be compensated for her worth working for someone else. She stated,

I wanted to have a business because that was a lifelong dream of mine, because of my father, but also, I wanted my own business because I knew that I would never be able to make what I was worth.

Dr. Allison talked about loving what she does in the world and the research and work that she has been able to do on the continent of Africa. She talked about working a lot but doing what she loves and being able to make a difference. She shared,

I wanna be able to grow a business that will be able to be for other families what my father's business was to the families who worked for him and that's really the next level of what I want to do.

### ***Dr. Brittany***

Dr. Brittany is a first-generation college student on both sides of her family. Her mother obtained a GED, and her father was incarcerated. Despite her family's background, she knew that education was the pathway for creating a better life for herself. She pursued higher education because her dream job required it. Regarding her decision to pursue a PhD, she said, "I knew in order to have a seat at the table. I needed the degree to go with it." Dr.

Brittany's educational aspirations were tied to her desire to have access to better career opportunities.

Dr. Brittany had a positive doctoral experience; she described it as "supportive and great." She talked about having a Black male mentor who supported her and made sure she graduated. She shared the importance of having mentors. Both male and female mentors encouraged her to finish graduate school. Her overall experience in graduate school was positive. However, there was one setback, she mentioned, having to replace her dissertation chair in order to graduate. Dr. Brittany shared how this experience also discouraged her from finishing her degree by stating, "I would not have allowed someone to shift my mindset so quickly. That man doesn't have anything to do with my legacy. Just like, I walked into the world, I walked in that program without him." Despite the challenges she experienced with her chairperson, other mentors encouraged her to stay the course and finish her doctorate.

After graduation, Dr. Brittany taught at a PWI and at a community college. While working as an instructor, she later decided to open up a private practice in Louisiana. Her experiences in higher education began in the field of social work. Dr. Brittany is a speaker, coach, and author.

Dr. Brittany's experiences as a single mother also impacted the way that she sees herself as an academic and an entrepreneur. She wants to be an inspiration to her daughter. She works hard at her craft in order to provide for her family. Failure is not an option. She talked about not wanting to be a statistic and specifically wanting to "break generational curses."

Dr. Brittany views entrepreneurship as rewarding, and she loves the idea of being able to call her own shots and make her own decisions. Some of the challenges that she experienced in entrepreneurship included a lack of collaboration and not having enough resources. She also cited mindset as being a powerful resource for business growth and

development. Dr. Brittany views happiness as business success. She stated, “We can target six figures. That will not make you happy when you’re depressed, anxious, and lacking things in your relationship you like and things your family. You feel disconnected from God. None of it is going to matter.” She believes that happiness is the true measure of business success.

Dr. Brittany revealed that industry-specific knowledge and mentors are needed for novice entrepreneurs. She also encourages entrepreneurs to do their research and stay true to themselves. Happiness and faith go hand in hand for Dr. Brittany, and these characteristics are what equates to success for her.

### ***Dr. Shannon***

Dr. Shannon grew up in rural Arkansas and is the youngest of 13 children. Her mother had a third-grade education, and her father had a second-grade education. Dr. Shannon’s parents were older when they had her, and she shared that they did not have as much time for her as they did her older siblings. She did not have a relationship with her older siblings until later in life. Dr. Shannon openly shared that she became a teenage mother at the age of 15, and at the age of 17 she experienced a horrific ordeal; she was raped and left for dead in an open field. Dr. Shannon has publicly shared this information in her published books, Facebook live videos, and YouTube videos. She is open and honest about her upbringing and childhood trauma.

Despite the challenges of her harsh teenage years, she was able to beat the odds and receive a college basketball scholarship. Later she enlisted in the military where she served for 21 years before retiring. While in the military, Dr. Shannon married and had three children. She also dabbled in entrepreneurship during her time in the military. However, she did not take entrepreneurship seriously until after her divorce. Dr. Shannon desired more from life.

Dr. Shannon openly shared about her desire to reach the masses and how social media changed her life. She envisioned creating a business that would allow her to work one hour a day and make \$100,000 a month. Currently, Dr. Shannon runs a successful multiple seven-figure business helping women from around the world share their message as a coach and speaker. One of her challenges while growing her business was that she believed that she could not coach or consult people who did not look like her. Currently, she works with clients of all backgrounds. Dr. Shannon also shared her experience with working with women of faith. She expressed that one of the biggest challenges she has experienced was them not seeing the importance of investing in higher-level mentorship and coaching. She shared, “Women that are women of faith, we don’t have a conversation about investing in yourself, and I’m not talking about what we look like.” Dr. Shannon actively advocates for making financial investments in order to create financial business success.

Dr. Shannon also shared about her academic experience. She believed that by obtaining her doctorate, she could make a difference in the world. She believed that as an African American woman, her degrees would position her as an expert. Her academic journey was not an easy one. During her time in the military, she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and memory loss as a result of a traumatic brain disorder. Her doctors recommended that she not pursue her PhD because it would be mentally damaging to her brain. Dr. Shannon shared,

Being in the doctor’s office you know; they’re talking about surgery and all these things, and I don’t think so cognitively. You’re not gonna be able to do this, you know, the anxiety and all that and I’m like, oh my God. Am I crazy or something?

Despite her doctor’s recommendation, Dr. Shannon ignored the doctor’s orders and pursued her doctorate anyway. She shared that she heavily relied on the help of tutors to finish school. After receiving her PhD in psychology, she started a counseling private

practice. When she started her practice, she made about \$7,000 for the entire year, and she realized that there had to be more, so she started her speaking and coaching business, which has transformed into a multiple seven-figure business. Dr. Shannon laughs now because some of the same people who doubted her credentials now ask her for business advice.

Dr. Shannon has a sincere desire to help people. Dr. Shannon believes that money and wealth provide choices for people and their families. She stated, “If you didn’t come from a wealthy family, let a wealthy family come from you.” Dr. Shannon believes that business success provides women with freedom and the ability to make their own decisions.

***Dr. Jasmine***

Dr. Jasmine grew up with both of her parents and two siblings. Her parents were active in their children’s lives and stressed the importance of higher education. Her father has a PhD and two master’s degrees while her mother has a bachelor’s degree. Her parents started an educational organization that she and her siblings hold executive positions in. Dr. Jasmine serves as the chief operating officer for the organization. Her family’s organization focuses on introducing young children to careers in STEM and has been in existence for over 30 years. Both of her siblings have degrees in STEM fields.

After receiving her master’s degree, Dr. Jasmine believed that seeking a PhD was the natural progression for her career. She noticed that her degree provided her with a level of influence to accomplish her goals. “I knew that once I finished, I would have a certain influence to do what I was able to do.” Currently, Dr. Jasmine is a professor at a historically Black college and university (HBCU) in Maryland. She said that working at an HBCU sparked her entrepreneurial interests. Currently, she helps doctoral students pursue academic careers and navigate the academy. She also coaches doctoral students through the dissertation process as well as assists high school students with career development. She believes that it

was meant for her to be in academia to help nurture and impact the next generation of engineers.

Dr. Jasmine along with her sister's support students through the doctoral process. Their organization also hosts annual retreats for Black female doctoral students. She stated, "Being that mentor, doing what I can basically do to impact the next generation of students to make sure that they have some type of person out there that they can come talk to. We as Black women don't have a lot of support."

Dr. Jasmine shared the importance of seeking mentors inside and outside of your industry. She shared that business success is defined as meeting the needs of your client. She also noted that financial business success comes directly from serving the needs of your target market.

***Dr. Jennifer***

Dr. Jennifer was raised by her mother from the age of 9 after her parents divorced. She grew up spending a lot of time with her maternal grandparents who were sharecroppers in Arkansas. Her grandmother strongly believed in faith, family, community, and education. Dr. Jennifer shared that her grandmother had 19 children, and out of the 19 siblings, 11 received law degrees, her mother included. Several of her aunts and uncles received their degrees from Ivy League institutions. Her mother was a schoolteacher before becoming a civil rights attorney and activist.

During her younger years, Dr. Jennifer remembered groups of women sitting in her mother's living room talking about marching for equal rights and fighting for women's equal rights. Dr. Jennifer says that her "strong mother" was a major influence in her life. Her mother inspired her to help women live life to their fullest potential.

Dr. Jennifer has a bachelor's degree in psychology and an MBA in finance. She graduated at the top of her class. She also holds a PhD in management. Her mission is to help



organizations and leaders build relationships with the internal and external marketplace. She is also an executive coach and is committed to helping women succeed in business as well as in the corporate arena. She ultimately went into business to help others. Her goal is to help organizations build trust. According to Dr. Jennifer, she lost about 75% of her business due to COVID-19. She stated, “Qualitative research, focus groups, and in-person research can’t be replaced with online tools. So, this work has to happen in person.” Prior to starting her business, Dr. Jennifer already had experience as an intrapreneur. She worked at a bank where she developed services and products for entrepreneurs inside of her company. She shared, “I’ve always had an entrepreneurial/intrapreneurial spirit where I believe people should be enumerated for what they do.”

At the age of 36, Dr. Jennifer became a widow. Her first husband unexpectedly died of a heart attack. This was a painful time for her. She later remarried and enjoys spending time with her current husband.

Dr. Jennifer transitioned from intrapreneurship into full-time entrepreneurship when she became spiritually disconnected from her job at the bank and no longer had the passion she had before. She reached out to her White male mentor and friend. He helped her develop a business plan that turned her passion for people and research into a business. She described her mentor as a White male Republican whose views varied from her own. Despite their different perspectives, he played an integral role in helping her start her business and becoming a full-time entrepreneur.

In addition to the work that Dr. Jennifer does with companies, she also helps women flourish in their lives and careers. She calls her work with women her, “God job.” She also shared, “I was born and built for this, this empathy for people, and this desire to help them be better, particularly women.”

Dr. Jennifer candidly shared her feelings about racism in America by sharing,

I still didn't understand the systemic nature of racism. So, going up through the bank in my banking career and even becoming an entrepreneur even though I do diversity, equity, and inclusion work, I've written papers about it. I did not understand systemic racism. Really until I watched the 9 minutes of George Floyd's life being taken from him before my eyes.

Dr. Jennifer's interview was conducted just a couple of days after the world watched Derrick Chauvin sit on George Floyd's neck and kill him on video. During our interview, Dr. Jennifer was preparing a piece for a major publication about the George Floyd murder. Emotions were high, and we were both disturbed by the events that transpired. Being a Black woman in business does not remove us from very public scenes of Black pain. However, both Dr. Jennifer and I are childless, and we collectively lamented over George's final plea for his mother as he laid on the ground dying. Dr. Jennifer works as a diversity, equity, and inclusion facilitator, and I work as a critical race theorist; we both could see the permanence of racism and the taint of hate that often burdens Black people. We were both impacted by this event.

***Dr. Barbara***

Dr. Barbara is a mother of two children and a part-time professor at a PWI in upstate New York. She described herself as someone who is "always engaged and learning." Dr. Barbara is the oldest of five siblings. She grew up with entrepreneurial parents who encouraged her to learn the family business, a local clothing store. She shared, "I was introduced to business at a young age with my parents. Both my mother and father had a small business growing up, and we all had to take turns learning how to run the business." Her father was a huge proponent of Black identity. He joined the Nation of Islam and converted his family from Christianity to Islam. Through Islam, Dr. Barbara learned Arabic and about African American history. This experience changed the trajectory of her life. She grew up practicing Islam but later converted back to Christianity. Her parents instilled the

value of having a good education in her and her siblings. Her family was her greatest advocate. Dr. Barbara and her siblings grew up understanding the value of obtaining a college education.

Dr. Barbara has a master's degree in sociology with a concentration in African American Studies. She shared, "I decided, you know, years ago that I wanted to do something different for my family and education was part of that." Initially, Dr. Barbara went on to apply for a PhD in education. Her interest was in studying Black mothers and their experiences. She stated, "I wanted to do some phenomenal work on African American women as mothers. I wasn't a mother yet, but I thought the work was important to the Black family." Dr. Barbara had a meeting with one of the department chairs who reviewed her application. She had written extensively about Black women and their experiences emotionally, physically, and so forth, only to be told that her research was not a good fit. She was rejected from the program. She was told, "This is not the stuff we write about."

After being rejected from the doctoral program, Dr. Barbara decided to pursue a second master's degree instead. While she was working on her second master's, a professor told her to reapply to another PhD program and leave her master's program. She reapplied and was accepted into a PhD program for American studies with a concentration in women studies. Dr. Barbara shared her experience as a Black woman in the academic realm and stated that "Some people want to keep you in a box. Racism is real and finding the right people to collaborate with can be challenging." Dr. Barbara spoke directly to the challenge that Black women have in academia.

Currently, Dr. Barbara teaches part-time and works in student services and academic affairs at a university in upstate New York. Later in life, Dr. Barbara converted back to Christianity and shared how God pushed her to take her business seriously. She stated,

God had been speaking to me saying you need to do this business. You gotta do it. You can't keep, you know, spending your time. It works. I started the business and then the Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership Program and it helped me get everything set up the basics. You know, the LLC and the website, all of those basic things.

Dr. Barbara also runs a company that she absolutely loves. Prior to her divorce, she was not taking her business as seriously. Now she is more focused on growing her business. She talked about the value of having multiple streams of income. She is now working with a partner who is helping her to grow her business, apply for government contracts, cultivate strategic partnerships, and start a nonprofit and a school.

Dr. Barbara originally worked with a White female coach. However, she felt she could not help herself with the experiences of being a Black woman. She stated,

She couldn't tell me some of the challenges people would kind of put up with, like you can have the competency. You can have the skills, but they are going to try to pay you less right because you're a Black woman. My other colleague should be like, listen. No, this is your number. Stay at your number. Put your prices up there and then go up. So, you know, it has not been easy. I'm telling you. I wanted to just kind of throw the towel and just say, forget it and not even pursue it anymore.

Dr. Barbara candidly shared the challenges that many Black women face when it comes to being an active participant in the academy. Some of these challenges are apparent in her entrepreneurial journey as well. Despite these challenges, Dr. Barbara exhibits what Yosso (2005) called navigational capital, which speaks to one's ability to successfully navigate spaces that were not distinctively created for people of color. In addition to finding a Black business mentor, she also successfully completed a 1-year certification program for her business and this particular community helped her launch her business.

***Dr. Willow***

Dr. Willow is a New York native and currently lives in New Jersey with her husband. She is a professor at a small teaching college in the state. Everyone in her immediate family has at least a master's degree. While growing up, she lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. Her interactions with Black people came from church and the organization, Jack and Jill. Both entities have greatly influenced how she views the world and race.

Dr. Willow holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and decided to pursue graduate school because she wanted to have a career as a consultant. According to Dr. Willow, her doctoral experience was challenging. She shared, "At the graduate level, the programs are not necessarily diverse, there are a lot of hoops to go through, a lot of hard work, plus trying to finish up courses." After graduate school, she applied for a position as a professor in the school of business. While there, she taught human resources, training and development, and intro to business.

Dr. Willow shared that this was not her original path, but she began to fall in love with it. She started her teaching career at a research-focused institution, but she did not enjoy the research side of the academy and left. She now holds a tenured position at a teaching institution and is satisfied with the academic side of her life but wants to pursue more of her consulting interests.

Her first business was leadership coaching, training, and professional development. She worked for organizations training their teams. Dr. Willow started helping clients with webinars (online virtual trainings) after they asked her how she was able to still run a business while working as a full-time professor. She helps entrepreneurs automate their businesses and sales processes so that they can deliver their virtual coaching content.

Dr. Willow also shared that she experienced burnout during her doctoral studies. However, she credits her graduate school program for helping her to develop critical thinking

skills and preparing her for the rigor of running a business. She plans to transition completely out of teaching and go into a business full time once the business hits the numbers she needs to hit. Dr. Willow believes that business success is joy, peace of mind, and freedom.

***Dr. Toni***

Dr. Toni holds a doctorate in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in literacy. She taught for 10 years in K-12 education and currently teaches in higher education. She is an assistant tenure professor at a community college in Texas where she teaches developmental reading. Dr. Toni teaches graduate and undergraduate students. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology. Initially, she wanted to be a child psychologist. After obtaining her undergraduate degree, Dr. Toni found it difficult to obtain employment with her bachelor's degree, so she decided to go back to school for her master's degree.

Growing up, her family emphasized the importance of getting an education and getting a job. They encouraged her to be on a more traditional track. Education was tied to career attainment. Dr. Toni shared that her family is extremely supportive of her. She had a positive and nurturing relationship with her grandparents and extended family. With the support of her family, Dr. Toni went on to pursue her PhD. While in grad school, Dr. Toni's research focused on Black male literacy. She received pushback from a White male faculty who believed she should change her topic.

After completing her doctorate, some of the challenges that she experienced were being stereotyped, questioned about her skills and her PhD credentials. She shared, "Am I calling myself a doctor, or do I have a doctorate? I realize that as a Black woman you are at the bottom despite the strength and the magic that you possess."

Dr. Toni decided to explore other opportunities that were not tied to her career aspirations. She started an education consulting business. She also wanted to be more

creative. She launched an apparel brand, a magazine for women, and conducted a host of writing retreats.

Dr. Toni also ran into some challenges due to COVID-19. Some of her traveling opportunities were canceled, and some of her products experienced massive shipping delays. Much of her business had to be conducted virtually.

She does not consider herself to be a “9-5” kind of person and enjoys the flexibility and freedom that comes with being able to create her own schedule and spend time with her family. Dr. Toni sees success as helping others and building lasting relationships. She shared, “I’m only successful when I help people. The more people I help, the more successful I am.” She also identified some of her business challenges, which included leveraging systems and navigating technology. She also identified mindset and supporting Black businesses as a challenge.

### ***Dr. Natasha***

Dr. Natasha is a native of Jacksonville, Florida. She was raised in a single-parent household. She holds a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering, as well as an master of business administration and doctorate in management and organizational leadership. Dr. Natasha’s grandparents emphasized the importance of having an education. Dr. Natasha made a promise to her grandmother that she would obtain her doctorate degree. She is happy that she received her doctorate. She is proud of herself and glad that she did not regret the experience. She is very happy that she was able to keep her promise to her grandmother. Dr. Natasha shared,

My grandmother who only had a third-grade education was very influential in me becoming a doctor. Actually, both of my grandparents were big on education. From the time I was born, they were there just, you know, making sure I learned and encouraged me to be in school. Right before I graduated high school my grandmother

had a conversation, and basically, I promised to go all the way through and get my doctorate.

Dr. Natasha had no desire to become a tenured professor after college; she worked as a software engineer at IBM. She has also worked in higher education and in the local school systems. She also worked at a bank and did project management. Her traditional academic experience and academic credentials provided her with a certain level of influence and credibility in the marketplace. She stated, “I feel it puts people at ease, especially if they are not sure of what to expect from this black woman.”

Dr. Natasha shared her business of leadership training and coaching for women who work in predominantly male environments. She was great at business; however, she found sales to be challenging. She later figured it out and launched a sales agency in 2017. Currently, she is married and raises her three nieces. Her family supports her business. Dr. Natasha desires to leave a legacy for future generations.

Dr. Natasha referred to herself as a “reluctant entrepreneur” and said that you have to be “crazy to go into business.” Going into business was not her original path. She also suggested getting a business coach and mentor. Dr. Natasha has greatly benefited from coaching and mentorship. She defined success as “freedom without having the constraints of a job.”

### ***Dr. Danielle***

Dr. Danielle is in her 40s and resides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is the oldest of three children. Her mother was an English teacher, and her father was incarcerated for most of her childhood. Her mother instilled in her the importance of education. Dr. Danielle excelled at school. She enrolled in school at 2 years old and was skipped from kindergarten to second grade. She eventually graduated high school at 16 years old. Dr. Danielle originally



went to college for medicine, but the sight of a dead body quickly changed her mind. She changed her major to African American studies with a minor in business.

It took Dr. Danielle a while to graduate. During her hiatus from her higher education pursuit, she started a nonprofit organization in Pittsburgh and decided to go back for her bachelor's degree after having her first child. She obtained a job at a university in Maryland and went to school full-time while working. Dr. Danielle became acclimated to faculty culture and upon graduation, she attended graduate school. The university paid for her degree while she worked in the writing center and later began teaching classes. Right after her master's, she entered into a doctoral program. She shared, "I was interested in being able to help the African American community and that's why I decided to pursue a PhD." She also married while pursuing her PhD.

Dr. Danielle started her research consulting company for professionals while still working. She stated,

Traditionally this type of work is not done by people who look like me. So, I think that being a Black woman in this space is super important, and it really is a way for me to give back and tell them that all things are possible.

Dr. Danielle shared that she is an anomaly in her industry and that most of her colleagues are White. This makes her desire to achieve even greater. The most rewarding aspect of her business is helping graduate students finish their degrees and graduate. The most challenging aspect of her business has been marketing. Capital and money are challenges that impede successful Black business growth. Black businesses may not be aware of the funding opportunities that are available or do not have the guidelines to apply. For example, they may not know how to get funding outside of self-funding, the value in knowing our worth, undercharging, and our networks.

## **The Research Coding Process**

In this section, I explain my coding and data analysis process. These codes were used to create the emerging research themes that I will share in depth following this section. After conducting the 10 interviews, I conducted a four-part transcription and audio review. The first time, I listened to each interview without taking notes. The second time, I listened to interviews and took notes. The third time, I listened to the interviews while reading and taking notes with the transcript. The final time, I read the transcript and took additional notes. I followed step four multiple times and turned my notes into codes. From my notes, I developed over 100 codes. Saldaña (2009) noted that “descriptive coding summarizes in a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 70). These codes were further condensed and placed into categories based on similarities. I took notes in the margins of the transcript. After going through several iterations of the coding process, themes developed. The themes were developed based on the two research questions, what the research participants directly or indirectly stated was important or significant, and the answers that were constant throughout multiple research participant interviews. The coding process is outlined in Appendix B.

## **Emerging Themes**

Based on the semi structured interviews, the data codes, and reviewing the transcripts multiple times, I identified five of the most common themes that emerged from the data as the answer to the first research question: What are the experiences of Black women with PhDs? Five themes emerged: (a) early emphasis on education, (b) family, (c) faith, (d) meaningful mentorship, and (e) entrepreneurial mindset. Three themes were also identified as contributing factors to business success: (a) personal happiness and fulfillment, (b) income generation, and (c) customer satisfaction/ helping others. Additional themes emerged as challenges for Black women in business which include: (a) obtaining access to capital and

resources, (b) being black/permanence of race, (d) and doubting credentials. These themes were chosen based on the coding process, the frequency of answers, and what the participants signaled as being the most important or significant. Table 2 provides the frequency of responses regarding each theme per participant.

**Table 2**

*The Frequency in Responses to Research Question 1*

Name	Education	Faith	Family	Mentorship	E-Spirit
Dr. Allison	x		x	x	x
Dr. Brittany	x	x		x	
Dr. Shannon		x	x		x
Dr. Jasmine	x		x	x	x
Dr. Jennifer	x	x	x	x	X
Dr. Barbara	x	x	x	x	x
Dr. Willow	x		x	x	x
Dr. Toni	x		x		x
Dr. Natasha	x		x	x	x
Dr. Danielle	x				

### ***Early Emphasis Education***

Many of the participants shared that there was an emphasis on education throughout their childhood. Education and access to educational opportunities were commonplace. Dr. Willow shared, “It wasn’t if you were going to school, it was where.” Fifty percent of my respondents were first-generation college graduates. Many of their family members and siblings were also degree recipients. Some of their parents pursued professional and doctoral degrees. A number of participants shared that at least one parent did not finish high school but emphasized the importance of obtaining an education. Dr. Toni stated, “My family was really big on getting an education and going to school and getting the job. The usual, the traditional track.” The 50% of respondents who were first-generation college students saw education as a mechanism for accomplishing their goals. This was a major contributing factor to why pursuing an education, especially a PhD, was even more important. These groups of women were lovers of learning and were curious about the world around them. High

achieving Black women have leveraged education as a tool for liberation (hooks, 1994; Specia & Osman, 2015). The research participants saw their educational trajectories as an opportunity to be financially stable and higher education was directly attached to their career aspirations. Table 3 presents quotes from participants regarding education.

**Table 3**

*Emphasis on Education*

Participant	Quote
Dr. Willow	<p>Education was always something that was stressed in our family. So, I have a younger sister, a younger brother, and all of us have, everybody in my family has at least a master's degree. Well, of course, you were going to go to college. It just was a natural progression for all of us to pursue advanced degrees."</p>
Dr. Danielle	<p>My mother really instilled in all of us, but I think mostly in me, the importance of pursuing higher education, the importance of getting good grades, and doing well in school and so that really pushed me to be successful academically. Even at a young age and so I was an early starter I was, and my mother being an English teacher, I think, made that even. You know she really started working with me early on academics</p>
Dr. Jasmine	<p>We learned about computer programming and then sixth through twelfth going into college, we focused on learning advanced computer topics where we would go present and write ten-page papers, all that kind of stuff. And so, we all were in the program of course and so that's kinda what gave us a lot of skills that put us ahead of other people. And this was like, in high school that we were doing this type of stuff. And so, by the time I got to college, it wasn't, you know, that difficult to do different things. I'd already been presenting. I had already been writing papers and things of that nature. So, it made it a little easier to transition into what I'm doing what I did with engineering and doing research because they introduce this to research early on.</p>

## ***Faith***

According to Masci et al. (2018), 79% of African Americans identify as Christian. Compared to Whites and the Latino community, African Americans are the most religious group in the United States. Black women are also more religious than Black men. Faith was a common recurring theme for many of the research participants. Dr. Jennifer referred to her second business of helping women flourish in their careers and life as her, “God job.” Faith was a constant throughout 40% of the stories that the research participants shared. Faith was considered as an opportunity to receive guidance and better understand the steps that were taken and truly understand the pathway that one was on. Three out of 10 participants believe that God was the reason for their success in business and life. Dr. Barbara grew up Muslim and shared how pivotal the nation of Islam was to her family growing up. She also shared that she later converted back to Christianity. She shared a story about how her 5 a.m. prayer group sowed a seed into her business and gave her the courage to push through business challenges. She shared,

It’s a challenging thing, but I have a group of women who are a tremendous support system to me. We pray at five o’clock in the morning and they started this thing where they sow a seed into everyone’s business because like most of the women on the line have their own business, and it’s to help you and encourage you to keep going. You know, Just to help you with a little bit of seed money to encourage you and then my week came, and then I was blown away by how much they had just sewed a seed and believing and faith. I think that act of kindness keeps me looking ahead and knowing that I can do it...

Some of the research participants relied on their faith to make business, career, and life decisions. Some of the research participants worked with people of faith in their businesses. Table 4 presents quotes shared by participants pertaining to being faith led.

Table 4

Faith-Led

Participant	Quote
Dr. Jennifer	My God job is helping women to succeed, which is, I think how we have been connected through your workaround, you know, wanting to be a better you. So, how do you personally, and professionally flourish? And I call them my God Job because literally, I feel like it is.
Dr. Barbara	So, I think that's one thing that's impactful, but I think growing up, I think my experience growing up Muslim, but then converted to Christianity definitely impacted me...My whole family because my father decided to change the trajectory of our lives and both my mother grew up Christian. One Christian Methodist is my father was my mother was Christian you know, in the Baptist church, and he said this is a place of identity we can go into the Muslim community, and it was, you know ironically, we were taught African American history, African history, Arabic. We were thought about who we were as a people, and it became a family.
Dr. Brittany	So, if this is God's will, and you do what He told you to do, and how he told you to do it, you will be successful.
Dr. Shannon	And I was on social media one day, and I saw a post that said something about speaking. I don't remember what it talked about. I just know, I've been praying for that, and I ended up going to an event that changed my entire and fast forward now, where I have a company where I help serve other women, helping them, build their next level in a business where my company generates over \$100,000 a month.

### ***Family***

One hundred percent of the research participants expressed the importance of their families' contribution to their lives. Family support was a major pillar in the experience of these research participants. Grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, and uncles were mentioned

as playing a pivotal role in their lives. Some also mentioned their own children and spouses. Nine out of 10 of the research participants shared positive experiences with their family dynamic. Dr. Sharon was the only research participant that explicitly mentioned tension among her and her family members during her formative years. She was the youngest of 13 children, and her parents were older by the time she was born. Her parents were tired and less attentive. As a result, she became a mother at the age of 15. It is important to note that although Dr. Sharon did not explicitly say how her family contributed to her success, her experiences contributed to who she is today.

Family support provided crucial support to accomplishing academic goals and for some became the motivating factor for pursuing business. Dr. Jennifer shared, “My grandmother and grandfather believed so strongly in community, and obviously family, faith, and education as the great equalizer. They really believed that nobody could take what you learned away from you.” Throughout the interviews, participants shared the values and wisdom that were bestowed upon them from various family members. Parents and grandparents play an important role in the lives of these women. Supportive spouses provided the research participants with the confidence to pursue their businesses while children were the impetus to creating and leaving a legacy behind. Changes in family structure also impacted the research participants, 3 out the 10 respondents mentioned how their divorce encouraged them to pursue business.

The familial influence on academics and career decisions has been researched (Alliman-Brissett et al., 2004; Jackson, 2016). Black family dynamics impact the career and academic trajectories of their children. Growing up in Irvington, New Jersey, I often heard “work hard, go to school, and get a good job.” Educated Black parents are more likely to encourage their children to attain the same level of education or higher (Jackson, 2016). Due to the detrimental impact of racism and sexism, Black women can leverage familial support

as a coping mechanism (Constantine et al., 2005). Table 5 presents quotes from participants as it relates to family.

**Table 5**

Family

Participant	Quote
Dr. Natasha	<p>One resource is that I have an amazing husband. He has been very supportive in just helping me make this transition and, you know, just watching this [business] take flight because it was not quick.</p> <p>And in fact, I will also say the entire time I kept wanting to tell him that I was like, I wanna get a job. I wanna work part-time. I want to take this stuff. While I was in school. Because I want to be able to earn my own money. I just kind of feel bad just send me money and he was very specific use. Just like no, you have the rest of your life. For the rest of your life, you're gonna have to work. Right now, I just want you to focus on school. And it was, I just can't say enough about it. I've had a very fortunate life and a lot of that has to do with the fact that my father made a man's decision as a child and was able to see it through.</p>
Dr. Allison	<p>Right now, I'm just trying to make a difference for my daughter. I got pregnant with London during my last year of my doctoral program. London was due that August and I graduated in December.</p>
Dr. Brittany	<p>Personally, I think some of the things that have impacted me, of course, you know, having a strong mother who was a teacher and married to my dad, they got divorced when I was about nine, I think, or ten. And she raised us. I am a Daddy's girl, but she raised us largely without him. Even though we spent a lot of time with him. My grandmother had 19 children that are one nine children and no twins. No multiples just 19 kids and, you know, growing up, watching these incredible women do so much with so little. My mom ultimately went to law school and became an attorney. And so that's kind of where that desire to help women become the best them, they can be and be okay with whatever they're not. Some of the saying yes to who you are is really important. But saying no to who you aren't is equally as important.</p>
Dr. Jennifer	



### ***Entrepreneurial Spirit***

Ehlichman (2015) identified five characteristics of entrepreneurial spirit, which include: (a) a deep passion for their work, (b) the curiosity of how things can be done better, (c) optimism, (d) a willingness to take risks, and (e) the will to execute on their plans. Each research participant shared their love for entrepreneurship. They worked as a parallel-preneur while working their jobs. They dabbled in entrepreneurship prior to fully jumping into full-time entrepreneurship. Dr. Allison shared that she was inspired by the example her father left for her as an entrepreneur. Dr. Shannon shared that she explored a number of jobs while in the military. Dr. Willow shared her experiences in testing the entrepreneurial waters as well. Dr. Jennifer referred to herself as an intrapreneur and created opportunities for herself while being employed at a bank. Each research participant possessed an active interest in entrepreneurship and many of them actively looked for opportunities to engage in entrepreneurial activities throughout various parts of their lives. Dr. Barbara grew up helping her father with a local family clothing store.

African American women have a unique sense of entrepreneurial alertness when it comes to identifying problems and developing solutions. Entrepreneurial alertness is defined as “an important entrepreneurial characteristic defined as an ‘ability to notice, without search, opportunities that have hitherto been overlooked’” (Kirzner, 1979, p. 545). I would also argue that this sense of entrepreneurial alertness is heightened when Black women have advanced research degrees. The research participants have a layered and unique skill set that allows them to tackle entrepreneurial opportunities from an intersectional lens. Dr. Jasmine and her sisters launched an organization designed to help Black women successfully navigate the doctoral process. Their cultural awareness and the challenges that Black women face in the academy inspired the development of their business. Many of the research participants understood and knew that their businesses had a direct impact on the lives of Black people.

Research forces you to identify, examine, and synthesize problems. Entrepreneurship is the process of finding solutions to problems that people are willing to pay to get solved. My research participants identified problems and placed a value on the solutions. For example, Dr. Natasha shared her challenges with sales at the beginning of her business and later created a sales agency to help people with this area of business. Dr. Willow identified that many of her clients had challenges with the technical side of entrepreneurship, and she provided digital solutions to help them with webinars and virtual training. Many of the research participants saw gaps in their respective industries and decided to fill the void with their businesses. Table 6 presents quotes from participants related to having an entrepreneurial spirit.

**Table 6**

*Entrepreneurial Spirit*

Participant	Quote
Dr. Natasha	You have to be crazy to be an entrepreneur. Which I still believe that's true. I guess I just have some crazy in me.
Dr. Allison	I wanted to have a business because it was a lifelong dream of mine because I admired my father so much, but also I wanted my own business because I knew that I would never be able to make what I was worth working for anybody else.
Dr. Jennifer	I am a horrible employee, so I knew that once I made the decision, the switch went off in my mind, and I became an entrepreneur, I was willing to do whatever I have to do not to have a job.

***Meaningful Mentorship***

Having access to a mentor was also seen as a pillar to success and a constant throughout the lives of the research participants. The presence of mentors was apparent throughout the interviews. Meaningful mentorship experiences were prevalent throughout most of the participants' lives. Mentors encouraged them to pursue doctoral studies. Mentors encouraged some to complete their studies even when some participants wanted to give up, and mentors encouraged them to participate in entrepreneurial endeavors. Throughout the

interviews, the value or lack thereof of mentorship was prevalent. The participants talked about hiring coaches and having mentors who helped them with business development. Mentorship was found to be a crucial business success factor for Black women entrepreneurs (Grant & Ghee, 2015). Expansion of social networks has also proven to be beneficial in both their academic and entrepreneurial pursuits. Most of the women interviewed attributed their success to mentors who encouraged them to go to school and business mentors who gave them advice. Some also viewed access to mentorship as a challenge to business development. Some found that finding the right mentors or support systems was not an easy task. Some respondents specifically talked about seeking out mentors who looked like them and some respondents provided that mentorship to others. It can be concluded that mentorship is valuable to Black women. The conversation about mentorship and coaching permeated throughout the interviews. Dr. Barbara recommended that entrepreneurs, “have up to five mentors that are in totally different fields from you, that have been in business.” Many research participants expressed the power of mentorship throughout their academic lives and also sought out mentors in their business lives. Table 7 presents quotes from participants on the value of having meaningful mentorship.

**Table 7**

Meaningful Mentorship

Participant	Quote
Dr. Brittany	Like I said before, I always try to pay homage to the people who, you know, with the words who lead the way for me. A lot of my great mentors are Caucasian women. You know, cause my industry is predominantly White.
Dr. Jennifer	My mentor happened to also be a sponsor so he would put my name and rooms when I wasn't there and speak on my behalf.
Dr. Toni	And so, if we had to submit a proposal, we had a mentor who will look at our business proposal, who we had to present it from others. We had other business owners. So, it was really a community. And I think that community helps me to launch the business really good.

### ***Definition of Business Success***

Each research participant shared their definition of business success. Based on the semi structured interviews, the following themes emerged as pillars to success: (a) personal happiness and fulfillment, (b) income generation, and (c) customer satisfaction/ helping others. I will further explain each theme below.

**Table 8**

#### *Frequency of the Themes Identified in Research Question 2*

Name	Happiness/freedom/fulfillment	Income generation	Customer satisfaction
Dr. Allison	x	x	x
Dr. Brittany	x		
Dr. Shannon	x	x	
Dr. Jasmine			x
Dr. Jennifer		x	x
Dr. Barbara	x	x	x
Dr. Willow	x	x	X
Dr. Toni			x
Dr. Natasha	x	x	
Dr. Danielle			x

### ***Helping Others Achieve their Goals/ Customer Satisfaction***

The research participants saw helping others as a major achievement and the definition of business success. Dr. Jennifer's work revolves around building a brand and creating trust, defining success as "providing value and servicing the customer." Other respondents noted that great customer service and helping your clients achieve their goals contributed to personal success. Dr. Jasmine shared that meeting your clients' needs is a measure of success. The most rewarding business win is when clients experience success. Dr. Willow shared her joy in knowing that what she created positively impacted her students. Helping others was the most frequent answer from the respondents. Helping people was genuinely repeated by multiple respondents and regarded highly.

They defined success in direct relation to helping others succeed. They were successful because they helped someone else. Historically, Black women have tied their own success to the success of others around them. This ideal takes on a more community approach in contrast to an individualistic approach. It is important to note that great customer service was also deemed a metric of success. This finding is congruent with the other research on Black women in business. Value is placed in the collective and not just individualistic. Historically, Black people have used business to help others achieve their goals and this is also apparent today. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that Black women value helping others. This can be leveraged as a core business component. Fifty percent of my research participants value helping other people. Table 9 presents participant quotes on helping others.

**Table 9**

*Helping Others Achieve Their Goals/Customer Satisfaction*

Participant	Quote
Dr. Danielle	And then first and foremost business success for me is having a happy customer base, making sure your client is receiving the services that they requested and even some services that they may not have, but they need but I was able to provide. So, making sure that your customer is happy, by the services that you provide. I think while financial success or being able to make money is traditionally a marker for success. Definitely making sure your client is happy. Number one marker of success
Dr. Jennifer	For me, anyway, success is that I'm delivering on the promise that I make to the marketplace and to my employees. That is number one to me, that is more important to me than anything else. That I'm delivering on that promise.

### ***Happiness (Joy/ Fulfillment/ Freedom)***

Happiness was seen as a major key to business success according to the research participants. Many of the research participants wanted to be happy and enjoy their line of work. They wanted to receive fulfillment and satisfaction from their business, which also came from helping others. A number of the respondents saw entrepreneurship as a pathway to freedom. Enterprise brought freedom a pathway to freedom (Quale, 2019). Dr. Allison shared how her father's entrepreneurial pursuits provided options and opportunities for her family, and she wanted to be able to provide that same level of freedom for others. She experiences the freedom and flexibility as a child growing up with an entrepreneurial parent. This influenced her to continue that legacy within her family.

A sense of fulfillment was also defined as success. Being their own boss provided a sense of fulfillment. All of the research participants were passionate about their work. They were excited about what they were creating and had a sense of fulfillment based on their work. It can be concluded that the internal trait of happiness contributes to business success. Black women want and deserve to be happy. The pursuit of happiness is often frowned upon. Black women are just supposed to be happy with what they receive or sometimes they are labeled "difficult" or "hard to work with" or called names. The act of happiness goes against the stereotypic homogenic grain and allows Black women to find happiness in business on their own terms. Happiness is radical. Table 10 includes quotes from some participants on what they felt personal happiness and fulfillment encompassed.

Table 10

*Personal Happiness and Fulfillment*

Participant	Quote
Dr. Shannon	So, business success, when you have the freedom and the choices to do something outside of what you do and bringing in someone else, so you can be a CEO and not an employee at your own company.
Dr. Willow	I would consider myself successful in business if I am enjoying what I'm doing overall. It doesn't necessarily have to be day to day, but if I'm enjoying in general, what I'm doing in the business. If I am making a difference, and if I am earning the profit necessary to allow me to live the life I want to lead outside of the business.
Dr. Natasha	Oh, my definition of business success is to have the freedom to do what I wanna do when I wanna do it. And, and for example, because we live so far away Toby and I have actually had this conversation. At some point, do we move closer to home? Or do we just make more money so that we can just go home whenever we want to? You know, but then, of course, also, obviously, having the time freedom, so you don't have the constraints of having a job, you know, to just be able to have that level of freedom to go and be whether it's family or just go and see the world.

**Money**

The respondents saw success in business as financial gain. Dr. Shannon talked about wealth building and creating a legacy. This was an opportunity to make decisions about what you do in life. Although money was not a top metric of success for many of the entrepreneurs, they could not ignore the affordances that having a financially successful business provided. Dr. Willow noted that she would leave her job once her business hit a certain income number. Dr. Allison lauded how her father's business was able to create jobs and provide her family with a middle-class upbringing. According to the report for American Express (2019), on average, Black women-owned businesses make an average of \$24,000 a

year compared to \$142,900 of all women-owned businesses. Disparities in revenue have economic repercussions and contribute to less hiring, business growth, and development. Historically, Black people have had less money to invest in the business, make less, and receive less venture capital as previously mentioned. Economic empowerment is a pathway to creating more equitable outcomes for Black people. However, it is important to note that economics does not erase racism.

The third finding, Eurocentric views of business success, deemed access to capital and acquisition of capital the pillars of business success. However, the research participants viewed success as helping others. Historically, Black women have tied their own success to the success of others around them. This ideal takes a more community-based approach instead of being individualistic. Helping others was not the only reason to go into business. The research participants also emphasized the importance of making money. Finances and money came up throughout multiple interviews. Based on this finding, Black women must also be committed to making money and seeking funding opportunities. Funding provides the opportunity for longevity, job creation, and wealth building. This will be important if we are committed to closing the wealth gap between Black and White families. Since the majority of Black families have a female head of household, it has become more important than ever for Black women to create wealth for themselves. Table 11 presents quotes from participants pertaining to mon



**Table 11**

Monetary Gain

Participant	Quote
Dr. Allison	To me business success is first of all having a business that is financially sound and robust. A business that will provide you with the revenue and the revenue potential that is necessary for you to not only live a comfortable lifestyle for yourself but to position you so that you can build wealth, and for me, business success also means having a business that you really enjoy.
Dr. Sharon	If you didn't come from a wealthy family, let a wealthy family come from you.

### ***Challenges For Black Women in Business***

In the previous section, I highlighted the views of success for my participants. In this section, I will reveal some of the challenges that arise for Black women entrepreneurs.

Although these impediments are not uniquely native to Black women, their condition and position as Black women impact how these challenges to success show up in their lives. Table 12 presents noted challenges in business based on personal experiences.

**Table 12**

### ***Challenging Experiences in Business***

Name	Access to capital	Permanence of race	Credential doubting
Dr. Allison	x	x	
Dr. Brittany	x		
Dr. Shannon		x	x
Dr. Jasmine		x	
Dr. Jennifer	x	x	
Dr. Barbara		x	
Dr. Willow		x	x
Dr. Toni		x	x
Dr. Natasha	x	x	
Dr. Danielle	x		x

### *Access to Capital and Resources*

One of the major challenges expressed by the participants was access to capital. Not having the capital to grow their business or limited access to capital created a challenge to success. Some of the respondents talked about opportunities for grants while others sought them out. Many of the interviewees self-funded their businesses through their jobs and personal savings. Dr. Jasmine shared that startup capital is one of the biggest challenges facing Black businesses. Challenges with access to capital remain a consistent problem for Black business owners. Black businesses are less likely to receive traditional bank loans and venture capital. Wallace (2017) also noted that access to capital is a major impediment to success for Black-owned businesses. Tyler (2021) interviewed the co-founder of Curl Mix, Kimberly Lewis, who raised over 5 million dollars in crowdfunded capital, revealing that only 93 Black women had received 1 million dollars in venture capital. Kim and her husband Tim own a natural hair care company that targets Black women. She also revealed that a former investor, a White male did not understand her business model and did not want to invest. After Kim's business began to take off, this same investor expressed regret for not investing. Access to capital provides Black women with the necessary funds to purchase inventory, hire, market, and grow their businesses. Capital allows businesses to thrive. Table 13 presents quotes about challenges Black women have in business.

*Table 13**Access to Capital*

Participant	Quote
Dr. Natasha Dr. Allison	“I think one is capital.” We know, for example, that it is much harder for us to get venture capital. If we’re in that space. Those sort of built-in institutional racist and sexist dual challenges that we face, oftentimes means that our businesses are undercapitalized.
Dr. Danielle	“But I feel that funding is definitely a big challenge. It was for me and me; I know it’s a big challenge for a lot of my fellow female entrepreneurs.”

***Being Black***

Blackness was seen as both an asset and a challenge for the research participants. I personally do not believe that any of my research participants would deny that they love being Black but being Black comes with a unique set of rules that are not often faced by our White counterparts. Dr. Brittany expressed how she worked hard to not be a statistic. Dr. Barbara expressed the challenge of being a Black woman in the academy. Many shared that their credentials were questioned on several occasions and people wanted to know if they were “real” doctors. While Blackness was seen as a challenge to some of the participants, it was definitely an asset. Dr. Allison shared that it was a great time to be a Black scholar in political science during the time that she was enrolled at her university. Dr. Jasmine revealed that she and her sister created a program for Black women in a doctoral program to support and mentor them. Some of the participants talked about being the only person of color pursuing their educational endeavors and then allowing them to garner some support during their time in school. “It’s kinda that one-two punch of being Black and a woman,” said Dr. Willow. Although being a Black woman was and is a constant challenge, the research participants view their racial identity as a marker of strength and hope from within. Table 14 presents quotes from participants on being Black.

Table 14

Being Black (Permanence of Race)

Participant	Quote
Dr. Barbara	But some of the challenges are that people look at you, and they just want you to keep you in this one box, right? When you are much more than that, and I think the other challenges, you know, you look around sometimes and you see people get these sometimes get contracts and they don't even do anything, right? They're not even doing anything to change the system; it's just that they know someone who is connected so it's who you know, right. So that's networking and connected and I think discrimination is real.
Dr. Toni	I'm Black, and I will say that I know I'm Black. I've had experiences to remind me I'm Black.  And so, it seemed like they were questioning where I got it from, and how I got it. And of course, I did a lot of blocking and printing, but I realized in the midst of that when I started because, you know, I'm a researcher. So, I started looking at the trends and patterns, and I realized it was White women. I thought I'd expect it to come in. I expected men. I speak to White men. I even possibly expected Black men because men, you know, but to have another woman and then a White woman, I realize though, that's where the rate of racism and the things that the challenges came from and the questions came from was from that, so there's an order to it, and I realized that as a Black woman, you're at the bottom. Despite your strength and the magic you possess.
Dr. Jennifer	You have to work harder for every single job that we get for every client. We have to be perfect where my White colleagues don't. We have to take half of the money for projects. We have limited access to capital. And then again, the pandemic of COVID-19 exposed a lot of that. Then the pandemic of racism.
Dr. Allison	"Black women are consistently undervalued, overworked, and underappreciated, and I didn't want that reality from my life."
Dr. Jasmine	"We as Black women don't have a lot of support, period."

### ***Not Being Believed as Authority/Doubting Credentials***

Once the research participants completed their doctorate degree, some experienced people questioning their credentials. People did not believe that they were real doctors or that they were actually competent experts. Many of the respondents noted that most of this pushback came from White women. Dr. Willow shared, "I find that I have to prove myself more often to certain audiences." Organizations that were more predominantly White male

and White female had to talk more about her credentials. Although there were instances where their credentials were called into question, a number of the participants also mentioned that their degrees also helped with positioning themselves as experienced experts in the marketplace. Dr. Allison expressed that the PhD has helped her instantly position her expertise and authority status. She stated, “I also think that it’s helped me in terms of my positioning, in terms of my expert status, and authority in my space.” Some of the respondents expressed that their credentials made people more comfortable with working with them. Once proven to be “real” degrees, the respondents were praised and even regarded as more credible and believable as entrepreneurs due to their advanced degrees. Table 15 presents quotes from participants on not being believed to be an authority and doubting credentials.

**Table 15**

*Not Being Believed As an Authority, Doubting Credentials*

Participant	Quote
Dr. Toni	<p>And so, those are some of the challenges just people, stereotypes, and then people questioning my credentials. My ability. I guess credentials is probably the best word. What is my degree? Is it a real degree? Am I just calling myself? Just calling myself Dr. Toni, or do I really have a doctorate?</p> <p>I find that I have to prove myself more often to certain audiences. So more so when I was very general in my networking and was trying to, I’m trying to make inroads in organizations that were diverse, but that might have been predominantly White male or White, male and female. I find that I have to talk a bit more and talk about my credentials and actually, so constantly having to prove myself.</p>
Dr. Willow	<p>I just thought of the perfect example. I had a conversation with a White woman who was talking about what I do, and I was giving her some suggestions on things she might want to do for her business. And I was like, “Hey, do you want to stay in touch?” I gave her my business card, and she said, “Oh, you call yourself Dr. Willow? Did someone give you any problems with that? I was like. “No, not really.” And then all of a sudden, I understood what she meant, and I said, “Okay, let me just clarify. I call myself Dr. Willow because I am Dr. Willow. I don’t just call myself that like I just made that up. I</p>

## Summary

There is an abundance of research on women entrepreneurs and women in the academy. There is also a plethora of data on Black entrepreneurs and the Black educational experience. However, there is a dearth in the research for human beings that live at the intersections of these experiences. The findings of this research provide valuable insight for current and future Black women entrepreneurs. The lived experiences of Black women are unique, and understanding their perspectives is greatly needed (Berry, 2010). I aimed to create a line of inquiry that centers on the experiences of Black women who are entrepreneurial and academic.

In this chapter, I created a profile for each research participant and shared their individual story. Based on my research findings, five themes emerged including: (a) family, (b) meaningful mentorship, (c) early Emphasis on Education, (d) entrepreneurial spirit, and (e) faith. Three business success indicators also emerged, which included: (a) Monetary gains, (b) customer satisfaction, (c) personal fulfillment, and (d) happiness. Three business roadblocks included: (a) access to capital and critical resources, (b) the permanence of race, and (c) doubting of credentials. Next, I revealed a framework for understanding the lived experiences of Black women entrepreneurs with PhDs.

The 10 research participants were both excited and proud to be Black women with a PhD and entrepreneurs. They were ambitious and leveraged their academic skills for entrepreneurial pursuits. These women were well aware of the intersectional challenges that arise due to their status as both Black and women. People questioned their credentials, while others were reassured they were experts with their academic credentials. Support from mentors and family members played a crucial role in their success, and their desire was to

create a business that helped others while creating wealth. These findings in this chapter support previous research (see Bhat et al., 2012; Walker's Legacy, 2016). Their definitions are non-pecuniary centric, even though they concluded that money is an important indicator of business success, which has a major interest in value success and is important to the marketplace and helps others succeed. In the next chapter, I will analyze the findings and provide recommendations for future research. Chapter 5 concludes this research study with an analysis of this chapter's findings and future recommendations of the research.

## Chapter 5

### Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs who have PhDs. In this chapter, I will discuss the research findings. The research participants discussed their experiences and challenges with being an entrepreneur and identified their definition of business success. For this study, I used a CRF framework with a narrative inquiry methodology. The primary goal of this narrative inquiry was to center the lives of Black women and share their stories in their own words. The second goal was to share the experiences of Black women and provide insights to help more Black owned businesses thrive in modern times. Also, add to the knowledge base to benefit future researchers and future entrepreneurs. In this chapter, I will explore the findings, themes, and research analysis. Next, I will move on to recommendations for the practical application of this research and end with conclusions and final recommendations for this study.

Based on my two research questions, five themes emerged from the first research question and three themes emerged from the second. I share the analysis of these findings below. Next, I will share how I use critical race feminism to interpret my findings.

### **Question 1: What are the lived experiences of African American female entrepreneurs with PhDs?**

1. **Early emphasis on education:** Eighty percent of research participants shared their experiences where the importance of education was emphasized. The research participants were reminded about the value of education by family members. Some of the research participants had family members who were educated, which also reinforced the value and importance of education. Where the emphasis was not



explicitly mentioned in the interviews, a sense of ambition and a spirit of wanting to beat the odds were displayed.

2. **Meaningful mentorship:** Black women were able to defy the academic and business space with sound mentorship. The value of mentorship is extremely high. These mentors were fellow Black women, family members, Black and White men. White women were not specifically mentioned as mentors for the research participants. I found this dynamic extremely interesting, some participants expressed that White women were in direct opposition to them in certain instances. This is why it is imperative to leverage CRF epistemology because mainstream feminism does not account for how the intersection of race impacts Black women. Some of the research participants sought out mentors who looked like them. Some participants were encouraged by their mentors to pursue their doctorate degree while others were instrumental in helping with business development and business ideation. It was evident that Black women need meaningful and sound mentorship experiences throughout their lives.
3. **Family:** Nurturing familial relationships create a positive impact on the lives of Black women. Some research participants watched their parents start businesses. Family members pushed the participants to attend school. Some respondents want to be successful in order to leave a legacy for their families. A change in family structure also encouraged these women to start businesses. Three respondents focused on business after a divorce. Family is an impetus for Black women to pursue both educational and entrepreneurial goals.
4. **Faith:** Belief in God was a source of strength, inspiration, and guidance for some of my research participants. Some were led to start businesses because of their relationship with a higher power. Faith encouraged the research participants to

continue their academic and entrepreneurial pursuits even when challenges arose.

Faith also created a sense of identity and belonging for some of the research participants.

5. **Entrepreneurial Spirit:** Entrepreneurial Spirit/alertness is what differentiates traditional PhDs from entrepreneurial-minded PhDs. Previous scholarship suggests that the previous four themes are key features for creating positive experiences and outcomes for black women pursuing higher education (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Greif et al., 2001; Jackson, 2016). All of the research participants were actively engaged and interested in entrepreneurship. Some respondents were inspired as children to start businesses by business-minded family members. Others decided to run a business while being professors at various institutions. The research participants possess a desire to take risks and solve problems via entrepreneurship. They also wanted to create opportunities to experience freedom and maximize their income potential.

### **Question 2: How do black women entrepreneurs define business success?**

1. **Helping Others/Customer Satisfaction:** The findings reveal that Black women entrepreneurs believe that helping others is a top characteristic of business success. They base their overall business success on the results and satisfaction of the customers and clients they support. Customer satisfaction was important to the research participants.
2. **Happiness/Fulfillment:** Black women want to be happy, and entrepreneurship is an outlet for them to find happiness on their own terms. The findings revealed that Black women valued flexibility and freedom to make their own decisions. Their pursuit of happiness was a business must. Historically, Black women have not had the agency to create their own path. Entrepreneurship provides this opportunity (Walker, 2009).

3. **Monetary Gain:** The last finding is that money was an important marker of business success. The money provided some with the freedom, flexibility, and legacy that they desired, while others desired to be well-compensated to build generational wealth and hire others. Money was seen as a tool to accomplish their goals. The previous two findings were about more than money. Black women in business are not just interested in making money. They desire to make an impact.

### **Theoretical Analysis**

In this section of my paper, I will share how my chosen theoretical framework has been applied to the lives of my research participants. As mentioned in Chapter 2, CRF provides an intersectional conceptual framework for better understanding the lived experiences of racialized and gendered beings. Although my research participants are highly educated and successful in their own right, their education and personal and professional attainment has not removed the tinge of sexism and racism that often implicitly and explicitly impact their daily lives.

The permanent presence of race showed up in 100% of the research participants' interviews. Race has affected their childhoods, schooling experiences, family dynamic, doctoral experiences, research interests, personal and professional experiences. Race coupled with the intersectional of gender provide a uniquely crafted pair of bifocals for the research participants to see themselves and their lived experiences.

Being racialized and gendered beings made them hyperaware of their presence in predominantly White spaces and predominantly Black spaces. This hyperawareness also makes them feel cautious and conscious about their perception in the workplace, their interactions with colleagues and professors, and their experiences working with clients in the business space.

Dr. Shannon shared that at one point in her business career, she was unsure if she was qualified enough or able to coach people of other races. Some research participants also leveraged this intersection as an opportunity to support other Black women. Dr. Jasmine's Sister Scholars mentoring program directly speaks to this intersection by providing mentoring, community support, and strategies specifically designed to help Black women navigate the doctoral process.

Some of the research participants believed that they had to work harder and also be perfect in order to be well received in the marketplace. This hyperconsciousness also made some of the research participants understand that even if they worked harder, they still would not be compensated at the rate of their hard work due to their race. Dr. Barbara and Dr. Jennifer shared their experiences of feeling the need to work harder in order to be perceived as valuable.

The omnipresence of race was not always seen as a crutch for my research participants; it is often seen as a catalyst and impetus for achievement. These research participants have channeled their challenges and used them as fuel to accomplish their goals. Even in the midst of racism and sexism, the research participants achieve success. However, their success does not cancel out the damaging effects of racism and sexism.

### **The Value of Storytelling**

Storytelling and the use of counter stories are an essential component of CRT and CRF (Duncan, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This qualitative technique is used throughout my research project intentionally. This technique is used in efforts to center the lived experiences of Black women entrepreneurs with PhDs. Their stories are often untold and their experiences are significantly under researched (Rollock, 2012; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011; Smith, 1976). Storytelling from a critical lens allows their experiences, successes, challenges and autobiographical stories to be told from their unique perspective.

Black women are legitimate sources of knowledge (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). This research project centered on this epistemological underpinning. Throughout Chapter 4, I used storytelling as a device to share the perspectives of Black women through their own lens. Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews (2020) recommended that researchers use “frameworks, methodologies, and educational policies that allow us to view [Black women and girls] as assets and not problems” (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020, p.19). This notion further supports the reality that Black women’s knowledge, and experiences are valuable sources of information.

### **Interest Convergence**

Bell’s (1980) theory of interest convergence is a core pillar of CRT and relevant to Black women entrepreneurs. Black women entrepreneurs in this study in some ways have benefited from interest convergence. Examples of interest convergence came to be seen throughout some of their experiences while attending higher educational institutions and through some of their business endeavors. Some of their progress and achievements are directly and indirectly tied to White interests. For example, Dr. Allison shared that it was a great time to be a Black political scientist in her PWI. Institutions across the nation have attempted to attract Black students through diversity initiatives that support the aims and missions of the university. Through these initiatives, some Black students have directly benefited like Dr. Allison.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic and the killing of George Floyd, a number of companies have had a vested interest in Black women and Black owned businesses. Companies like Facebook, MasterCard, and Walmart, to name a few have issued press releases stating their commitment to actively investing in Black communities and businesses. They have created funds and programming specifically targeting Black women in business. The recent interest in investing in Black owned businesses seems altruistic from a surface

level. However, the uplifting of Black businesses is directly tied to White business interests. These companies seek to attract more Black buyer dollars while also translating all of the good publicity in an increase in their bottom line. While these intentions may not be purely for the good of humankind, this has been a unique opportunity for Black owned businesses to benefit from the increased interests and visibility.

### **Intersectionality Analysis**

CRT is intersectional. However, CRF is explicitly intersectional and for that reason, I chose to center my work around CRF. The lived experiences of Black women entrepreneurs can only be adequately described from a multiplicative and intersectional epistemological approach. Intersectionality provides a lens Black women can see their whole selves. Dr. Barbara's research interests was around studying Black moms. Dr. Allison shared her experience of working for a think tank in Washington, D.C. Her research with the organization focuses on women and race but she effortlessly realized that the focus on women centered on White women while not fully supporting or acknowledging the challenges and experiences of Black women. Dr. Jennifer shared her heartfelt recount of the George Floyd killing. Her experience as a Black woman was directly tied to her re-telling of the event. She was even writing a piece for a major publication highlighting her experience.

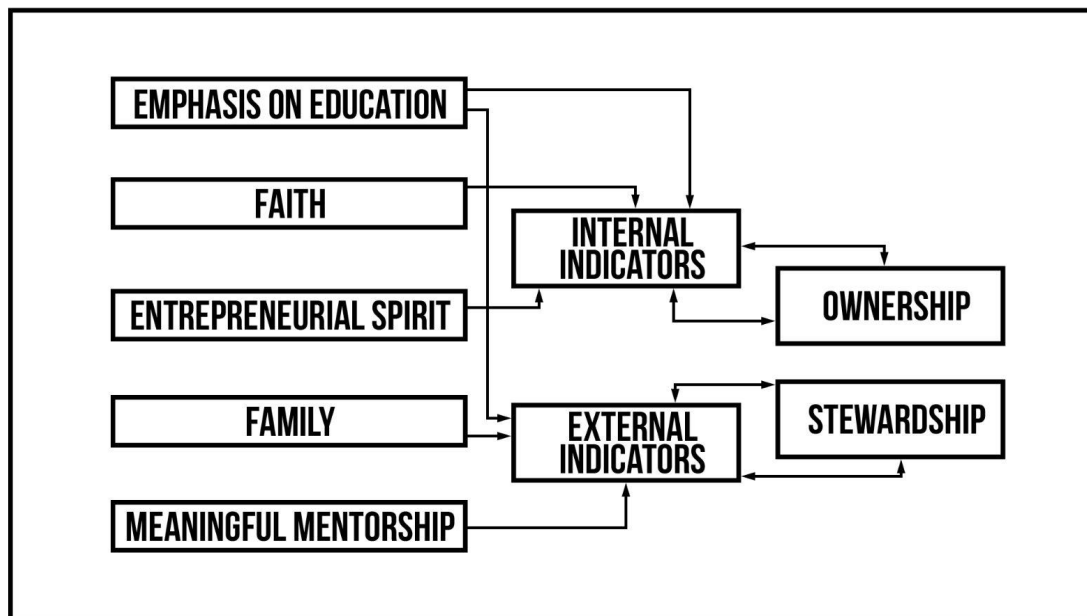
### **Commitment to Social Justice**

Critical Race Theorist and Critical Race Feminist are committed to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Many of the research participants were committed to uplifting other women and specifically Black women. Dr. Allison launched a media company that centers on blackness and Black people. Jasmine's family created STEM programming and camps for children. Dr. Jasmine. launched a program to support Black women through their doctoral process. Dr. Jennifer's "God Job" helps women flourish in their professional lives. There are numerous examples of how the research participants have given back through their

research and business endeavors. Majority of the research participants aim to help others. They are committed to the liberation of others. Most of the businesses were for profit organizations, but they still maintained a commitment to leaving a legacy and providing support for others who came after them. This commitment to social justice differentiates Black women entrepreneurs from other groups of entrepreneurs. Figure 1 provides the ecosystem of Dr. Sisterpreneurship.

### Figure 1

*The Ecosystem of Dr. Sisterpreneurship: A Framework for Understanding Black Women Entrepreneurs with PhDs*



Based on the data and my research findings, I have developed a new framework for understanding the intersectional and multiplicative experiences of Black female entrepreneurs with PhDs. I refer to this concept as the Ecosystem of Dr. Sisterpreneurship. Dictionary (n.d.) defined an ecosystem as “a complex network or interconnected system” (para 1.). The success of these research participants was not created in silos; it was created through a strategic network of internal and external factors. The first layer of this figure displays five emerging themes based on the research participants’ experiences. These five themes are then

divided into internal and external indicators. These two subthemes are then between two major themes of ownership and stewardship.

Ownership is described as taking responsibility for their own actions in life. These research participants took personal ownership of the occurrences that were happening in their lives. This level of ownership has allowed them to achieve and complete their doctoral degrees and also take risks and partake in entrepreneurial pursuits. It should be noted that during the time of this research, only 2% of Americans have doctoral degrees and only 2% of entrepreneurs are considered successful. Despite racism and sexism, they achieve anyway.

Individualistic factors in personal ownership and resilience, contributed to the success of these women in two fields where most people are successful. Their sense of personal ownership is present in their family experiences. Some research participants were the first to pursue entrepreneurship and academic pursuits, while others may have come from entrepreneurial and academic families; the onus of achieving their doctoral degree was ultimately on them and required a level of ownership and personal responsibility. The role of faith also contributed to their ownership of how they saw themselves and their personal relationship with God also contributed to their personal ownership.

However, an ecosystem dedicated to centering the experiences of Black women entrepreneurs who have PhDs would not be complete without stewardship. The lives of Black women are directly interconnected to the people they serve and support and also to the people who also love them. The power of family support and external mentorship contributed to their decision to pursue doctoral degrees and even enter into entrepreneurship. Human connection is a major component of this ecosystem for Black women's success. Family members, mentors, professors, and colleagues shaped how these women engaged with the challenges and opportunities that presented themselves throughout their lives.



Access to mentorship opportunities in tutoring was provided through their interaction with others. Not only were the research participants recipients of stewardship, they were also agents of stewardship. They saw their degrees as an opportunity to be honored to honor loved ones and serve the communities and people that they decided. They overwhelmingly also saw their businesses as an opportunity to help and provide customer satisfaction for their serving communities. Some of the research participants shared their experiences of mentoring others. Through their efforts of stewardship came wealth, resources, knowledge, and support that they needed in order to succeed and achieve their goals. The research participants were explicitly aware that success was contingent upon how they helped and served others.

### **Implications**

Berry (2010) asserted, “CRF suits my sensibilities as it addresses all of my intersecting beings: African American, woman, teacher-educator, researcher, scholar, sister, friend, and more” (p. 24 ). CRF allowed me to fully share the stories of Black women while also telling my own story. These stories serve as counter-narratives to hegemonic normative stories about women in business. CRF proves a lens to share stories that often go untold. In accordance with previous CRF research, the intersection of race and gender affects how Black women see the world and how the world sees them. Research participants shared experiences that directly spoke to their multiplicative experience. Berry (2010) stated, “I can disregard the monolithic discourse of the universal Black woman and acknowledge the multidimensionality of my personhood” (p. 24 ). CRF celebrates multiple identities and experiences within a racialized and gendered lens that is imperative to truly understand women of color. The multidisciplinary nature of CRF allows it to be viewed as a framework for understanding education experiences and entrepreneurial experiences.

One of the overarching goals of this study is to help current and future Black women with PhDs navigate alternative career opportunities beyond the academy. This research was

also designed to help Black women who want to be entrepreneurs identify potential areas of opportunity and resources that specifically cater to Black women and help them grow successful businesses. As the number of Black women entrepreneurs continues to grow, and the numbers of Black women seeking higher education increase, resources, capital, research, and data will need to be created in order to support this particular growth.

Although they are starting businesses and obtaining degrees at accelerated rates, the tinged racism, systematic oppression, classism, and sexism still present a challenge to the growth and development of Black women's enterprises. The implications of this study aim to support future research and develop solutions that will help Black women thrive economically in their entrepreneurial pursuits. This data also can be used by universities to provide opportunities in addition to tenure for Black academics who desire careers outside of the academy. In the next section, I make recommendations for Black women in business and future research.

## **Recommendations That Support Black Women Businesses**

### ***Access to Capital***

Successful business endeavors require capital. Black women traditionally start businesses through self-funding and receive a minuscule amount of traditional bank loans and venture capital to fund their businesses. More money must be set aside to support Black women-owned businesses. Funds for women-owned businesses traditionally benefit White women more and little funding is set aside to fund Black women's business ventures. Capital funds such as Arlan Hamilton, Ariane Simone, and Courtney Adeleye have intentionally created multiple million-dollar funds to support Black women in business. Ariane Simone stated that she wanted to be the angel investor that she was looking for when she started her business (Personal Communication 2020, Clubhouse).

Capital also allows Black-owned businesses to thrive and to employ more people. According to the Small Business Administration, Black-owned businesses employ the least amount of people and have the lowest number of receipts. Additional capital would help with Black women employ more people and growing larger. Only a fraction of Black-owned firms reach the million-dollar mark. Black women also tend to receive less venture capital due to the fact that most venture capitalists are White men and many do not have access to or may not relate to Black-owned businesses.

### ***Mentorship***

Many of the research participants shared the value of having mentors in their lives. Mentorship in academia and in entrepreneurship can be invaluable. It can be the difference between someone succeeding and failing. More mentorship programs and services are needed to produce higher grossing successful Black women-owned firms. Organizations like the Walker Legacy Foundation and Digital Undivided seek to support women of color in business. Arlan Hamilton's venture capital fund Backstage Capital and the Fearless Fund to fund and educate Black women entrepreneurs (Backstage Capital, 2021; Fearless Fund, 2021).

### ***Culturally Relevant Business Education***

Business education must take into consideration the growing demographic of Black women entering the business sphere. Programs and services must be culturally relevant to the unique experiences of Black women. Black women and organizations have stepped in to create programming and training that cater to more diverse populations. Werk University (2021) is an online business trade school that specifically caters to the business development of Black women. This is a paid monthly membership that provides monthly training to Black women. Organizations like the Walkers Legacy Foundation (2016) have more of a multicultural focus and provide funding, research, and programming for women of color.

Digital Undivided (2020) and the Fearless Fund (2020) founded by Ariane Simone and actress Keisha Knight Pulliam are specifically designed to provide business training and access to funding for Black female founders. Organizations like Traffic, Sales, and Profit, founded by husband and wife duo Ronnie and Lamar Tyler (2021), provide marketing training virtually and in-person to Black entrepreneurs. Business education must be culturally relevant and take the skills, expertise, and live experiences of Black women into consideration. (Ladson-Billings, 1995)

### ***Create More Programming That Encourages Alternatives To Becoming A Professor***

According Bethan Cornell's (2020) research at the Higher Education Policy Institute, only 33% of PhD recipients remain in academia after 3 years. However, traditional PhD programs prepare doctoral students for careers in academia. There should be a greater emphasis on programming that encourages students to pursue interests, aspirations, and careers beyond the ivory tower. These alternatives are just as fruitful and beneficial. There were times where I felt like my entrepreneurial aspirations were condemned and not seen as a suitable trajectory for a doctoral candidate. More acknowledgment and research is needed in this area. L. Maren Wood, PhD (2021) founded the Beyond the Professoriate organization that highlights a myriad of professions and career paths. Beyond the Professoriate partner with institutions and individuals and provide training and programming that emphasizes career interests outside of the academy (Wood, 2021).

One of the overarching goals of this study was to help current and future Black women with PhDs navigate alternative career opportunities beyond the ivory tower. This research is also designed to help Black women who want to be entrepreneurs identify potential areas of opportunities and resources that specifically cater to Black women and help them grow successful businesses. As the number of Black women seeking higher education increases, resources, capital, research, and data will need to be created in order to support this

particular growth. Although they are starting businesses and obtaining degrees at accelerated rates, the tinged racism, systematic oppression, classism, and sexism still present a challenge to the growth and development of black women's enterprises.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study provided relevant and valuable research for Black women by a Black woman. This study has opened up the gates of opportunity for additional research in this field. I would love to see more research studies conducted on Black women entrepreneurs and also Latinx women entrepreneurs. This would provide additional insights on how to support academics who decide to pursue entrepreneurial interests and find ways to support these groups. In addition to focusing on PhDs, it would be insightful to see this research conducted with other terminal degree types and non-degree holders. Future research can also explore studying additional industries and business types. In order to have more generalizable data, I would love to do national research and qualitative analysis of this data with a larger research population.

The voices of Black women are necessary for both the educational and entrepreneurial spaces. Two months into starting my own business, I started working on my doctoral degree. Both were equally challenging and mentally taxing. It was through my own personal struggles that this research was born. It was a pleasure to interview these 10 powerful women who understood and identified with my story. It is important to have representation and to be able to see women that look like you are accomplishing great things. These women provided me with hope and determination, and it is my desire that this research will also be a beacon of light for Black women in the academy with entrepreneurial aspirations.

I examined the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs with PhDs. In this study, I highlighted an often ignored group in business and in education. Black women

are motivated by their willingness to serve their community and leave a legacy for future generations. Entrepreneurship is not just seen as a capital-building endeavor. It is an opportunity to reach self-actualization goals and gain fulfillment. The experiences of Black women are unique because they experience both racial and gender biases that intersect simultaneously.

The number of Black women entering the academy is vastly increasing, and the need for research and data representing them is extremely important. Future women entrepreneurs in academics benefit from learning about the tips, tools, and strategies that successful women entrepreneurs are using to grow their businesses and lead fulfilling lives. Based on the findings of the research study, it can be concluded that the intersection of race and gender uniquely impacts the business and academic lives of Black women. Due to their intersectional experiences, they see business success differently than traditional Eurocentric views of business and economic success. Despite inherent challenges faced by Black women, they continue to strive and create successful systems in spaces that were not ideally created for them.

I did not focus on other degree conferrals. For future studies, I would like to see work on Black women with other degrees and entrepreneurs without higher education degrees. I would also like to see how this research looks with a mixed group of Black women and men. The research would also look different for Latinx and indigenous women. The scope of the research was limited to the experiences of Black women.

### ***Career Choices for Black Women PhD***

I would like to see additional research on the career trajectories beyond the ivory tower. According to the OECD (2019), 50% of black doctoral degree earners intended to pursue faculty positions. An increasing number of doctoral degree earners are entering non-academic careers (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2020). Entrepreneurship is a viable

career option for doctoral students. Even greater interdisciplinary partnerships with the schools of business can provide doctoral students with an alternative trajectory.

### ***Entrepreneurial- Brick and Mortar Businesses***

This research involved interviewing Black women who were in the coaching and consulting space. I did not interview businesses in other industries like construction, beauty, eCommerce. More research is needed on Black women in other fields and the STEM fields. During, COVID-19, a traditional business model, has an entirely different experience. For example, hair stylists with salons and the restaurant industry were definitely impacted. The research would have looked different if I chose these industries.

### ***Access to Mentors and Resources***

Mentorship continues to be paramount throughout the lived experiences of Black women and must be continued. Formal and informal opportunities to mentor Black women must be created. Some of the research participants specifically created programs and businesses that catered to Black women in doctoral programs in order to fill in the gap. Black women entrepreneurs often do not know what they do not know, especially first generation entrepreneurs. Most of my research participants were not first-generation college students, but they were first-generation entrepreneurs. First-generation entrepreneurs need resources, guidance, and support in order to succeed in business.

### **Conclusion**

Black women are the fastest group of entrepreneurs in the United States. In addition to becoming entrepreneurs, they are the largest group obtaining higher education degrees. Career limitations, racial injustice, gender bias, family obligations, and job insecurity have forced Black women to forge a path of their own and entrepreneurship has created an opportunity for women to create their own paths.

The findings of this study aim to support future research and develop solutions that will help Black women thrive in their entrepreneurial pursuits. This data also can be used by universities to provide opportunities outside that academy that are more in alignment with this upward trend. This study provides relevant and valuable research for Black women. I would also be interested in seeing research studies conducted for Black men and as well as Latinx women. This would provide additional insights on how to support academics who decide to pursue entrepreneurial interests and find ways to support these groups. In addition to focusing on PhDs, this would be insightful to see this research conducted. In order to have more generalizable data, I would love to do national research and qualitative analysis of this data with a larger research population.

Dr. Allison shared, “You learn just as much from what data is collected as from the data that isn’t collected.” As a researcher and current entrepreneur, I know there is more work that needs to be done. There is much more to learn and much more that needs to be documented. Looking at each section as an individual provides an entirely different perspective than examining experiences from an intersectional and CRF perspective.

### **Future Research**

I would love to see this research expanded and explored with Black women in other industries. I would love to see how race, gender, and education impact the experiences of Black women in less common industries such as industrial and manufacturing. I would also like to see this study be applied to Black women in corporate America who are opting out of this space to start businesses. Many of these women share commonalities with my current participants. I would also love to see this research being applied to Latinx women and women throughout the African Diaspora. Language, class, and culture create additional intersections that are worth exploring. I would also love to research how faith impacts women in business.



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## **Appendices**

**Appendix A**

**IRB Approved Letter of Consent**

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**  
**Research Participant Information and Consent Form**

**Title of the Study:** Dr. Sistahpreuere | A Narrative Inquiry on the Experiences of African American Female Entrepreneurs with PhDs.

**Principal Investigator:** Erica Halverson [REDACTED]

Student Researcher: Shade Adu [REDACTED]

**DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of African American Female Entrepreneurs with PhDs. You have been asked to participate because you have been identified as an African American female entrepreneur who has a pursuit a doctoral degree.

The purpose of the research is to highlight the experiences of African American female entrepreneurs and better understand their challenges and successes.

This study will include virtual interviews via WebEx. The interviews will be no more than 60 minutes each. This research will take place virtually. You can participate from anywhere around the world.

You will be audio taped during your participation in this research. The audio will be kept for 7 years and then destroyed.

**WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in 2-3 one-hour interviews. You will be asked to share your doctoral experiences and your entrepreneurial experiences.

**ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

There is a risk of a confidentiality breach. You may reveal personal, sensitive, or identifiable information when responding to open-ended questions. You have the option to skip or withdraw from any interview questions that make them upset or uncomfortable.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

We don't expect any direct benefits to you from participation in this study.

**WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR MY PARTICIPATION?**

There is no compensation for this study.

**HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. We will keep your identity confidential and all audio files will be kept in a password protected cloud account. We will remove or mask any information that may be identifiable.

If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

**WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research, you should contact the Principal Investigator Erica Halverson at [REDACTED]. You may also call the student researcher, Shade Adu at [REDACTED].

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at [REDACTED].

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

**Name of Participant (please print):** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.	

**Appendix B****Flyers for Participants**

**Research study seeking  
African American women  
entrepreneurs with PhDs.**

**Would you like to be interviewed about your  
experiences for a dissertation research study?**

**In order to qualify for this study, you must:**

- **Identify as a black or an African American woman**
- **Make at least \$50,000 or more annually**
- **Have been in business for a least 2 years.**
- **Have graduated from an accredited institution and have a Ph.D.**

**Please email [sadu@wisc.edu](mailto:sadu@wisc.edu) for more information**



## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

#### Interview 1: Overview of Business

1. Tell me a little about yourself, where are you from?
2. How would you generally describe yourself? (vague)
3. How do you think your family background has impacted the way you see yourself?
4. Why did you decide to become an entrepreneur?
5. What has been your experience as an entrepreneur?
6. Has your experience as an entrepreneur impacted how you see yourself and how you identify as a black woman?
7. What are some of your challenges?
8. opportunities as black women in business?

#### Educational Experiences

9. Why did you decide to get a PhD?
10. What was your academic experience like?
11. Has your formal education impacted your business experiences?
12. Is there anything that you would have done differently?
13. How has your academic life informed your business life?
14. What was your transition like from academic life to entrepreneurship?

#### Operationalizing Success

15. What is your definition of business success?
16. What has been your most rewarding experience in business?
17. What has been your most challenging experience in business? Part of business
18. What resources are available to you as an entrepreneur?
19. In your opinion, what support is needed to create more successful black businesses?
20. What advice would you give a new, or aspiring entrepreneur?

## Appendix D

### Codes To Themes

Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Church</li> <li>● Searching and praying</li> <li>● Purpose</li> <li>● Women of faith and money</li> </ul>	Faith
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parents</li> <li>● Two parents</li> <li>● SES (3)</li> <li>● Daddy girl</li> <li>● Father</li> <li>● Mom teacher</li> <li>● Mom a leader</li> <li>● Father, a second-grade education</li> <li>● Single mom raise with grandparents</li> <li>● Grandmother influenced education</li> <li>● Grandparents encouraged school</li> <li>● Two nieces live with her and husband</li> <li>● Legacy for children</li> <li>● Husband (2)</li> <li>● Husband as a support system</li> <li>● Family support</li> <li>● School teacher parent</li> <li>● Incarcerated parent</li> <li>● Incarcerated father</li> <li>● Single mom inspiration</li> <li>● Dad in prison, single mom</li> <li>● Educated family, Engineer</li> <li>● Family dynamic</li> <li>● Family impact</li> <li>● Parents with degrees</li> <li>● Just like dad</li> <li>● Wanted extra money for the divorce</li> <li>● Wasn't enough, self-doubt</li> <li>● My children are watching. Doing something for them</li> <li>● Siblings with degrees</li> <li>● Middle Class, SES</li> <li>● Military family</li> </ul>	Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scholarship to grad school</li> <li>● Education paid for</li> <li>● Start off as a college professor</li> </ul>	Early Emphasis Education

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Studying black issue</li><li>● Law school or graduate school</li><li>● Full ride to a PhD</li><li>● Enjoyed school</li><li>● Rebel for academia</li><li>● Groomed to be a professor</li><li>● Internships</li><li>● Tenure, not for her</li><li>● Degree positioning</li><li>● Promised to get her doctorate</li><li>● No desire to become tenured</li><li>● Engineer</li><li>● School didn't prepare</li><li>● Importance of education</li><li>● Education</li><li>● Left school</li><li>● Work at university</li><li>● School didn't teach me</li><li>● Education was important</li><li>● Going to college</li><li>● Psychology degree</li><li>● Change majoring to Psychology</li><li>● You are not going to make money with psychology instead of computer science</li><li>● Needed a degree to make money in the field</li><li>● Getting a good job</li><li>● PhD was a part of the plan</li><li>● Did want tenure at research school</li><li>● Has tenure</li><li>● Not believing credentials</li><li>● Burn out</li><li>● School skills and business skills</li><li>● Critical thinking</li><li>● Stem</li><li>● Education</li><li>● Degree in Engineering</li><li>● Professor</li><li>● Education program</li><li>● Education and skills early</li><li>● Gained tenure</li><li>● Didn't have money to finish school so she went to the military</li><li>● Dreams and aspirations and always wanted more</li><li>● Success doesn't equal degrees</li><li>● Degree in Literacy</li><li>● Assistant professor at a community college</li><li>● Love education need to get degree for advancement</li></ul> |  |
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Get help, get business mentors</li> <li>● Dissertation coaching (2)</li> <li>● Working for others</li> <li>● Teaching</li> <li>● Supporting and helping others guiding others,</li> <li>● Coaches and connections</li> <li>● Working with coach/mentor</li> <li>● Coaching support step by step blueprint</li> <li>● Mentor - advisors (2)</li> <li>● Mentorship and apprenticeship</li> <li>● Tutors</li> <li>● Getting training</li> <li>● Homie hookup</li> </ul>	<p>Meaningful Mentorship</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Corporate wasn't right for me</li> <li>● Bad at sales</li> <li>● Reluctant entrepreneur</li> <li>● Sales agency</li> <li>● Tired of corporate politics</li> <li>● Young and black in corporate</li> <li>● Influential as entrepreneur</li> <li>● Impact and power to make a difference</li> <li>● Stress from being in corporate</li> <li>● Dual-preneur</li> <li>● Entrepreneurial spirit, biz aucemen</li> <li>● Content for business</li> <li>● Accidental entrepreneur</li> <li>● Consulting</li> <li>● Hated the consulting</li> <li>● Try something else,</li> <li>● Agency</li> <li>● Doing what you love and enjoy</li> <li>● Passion (2)</li> <li>● Resilience (2)</li> <li>● Didn't want to be stuck</li> <li>● Gone as far as she wants to go</li> <li>● There's more to do</li> <li>● Dual-preneur</li> <li>● Light bulb moment; ES</li> <li>● Proving</li> <li>● Proving myself leaning on credentials</li> <li>● Agency, target market</li> <li>● Lonely in business</li> <li>● Entrepreneurial mindset</li> <li>● Baby business - startup</li> <li>● Connection</li> <li>● Leader</li> </ul>	<p>Entrepreneurial Spirit</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Leadership navigation</li> <li>● Maximize those skills</li> <li>● Mission and purpose</li> <li>● Identify problems to solve</li> <li>● Gaps</li> <li>● Entrepreneurial Spirit (4)</li> <li>● Connections and resources</li> <li>● Action taker</li> <li>● Wanted influence</li> <li>● Love side hustle</li> <li>● Trying to figure it out</li> <li>● Needed a team (2)</li> <li>● Business expansion</li> <li>● More conversations about their wealth and entrepreneurship</li> <li>● Making investment decisions because of culture</li> <li>● Conversations about investing and wealth</li> <li>● Baggage in business</li> </ul>	
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### Definitions of Success

Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Money is success</li> <li>● Making money</li> <li>● Opportunity to create wealth for generations to come</li> <li>● Money, capital, and profit</li> <li>● Money and lifestyle</li> <li>● Wealth building</li> <li>● Money</li> </ul>	Money
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Happy clients (2)</li> <li>● Help client the money comes</li> <li>● Impactful</li> <li>● Client needs are met</li> <li>● Beyond money</li> <li>● Working with women</li> <li>● Community</li> <li>● Helping clients</li> <li>● Helping the community (2)</li> <li>● Helping (8)</li> <li>● Experience to help</li> <li>● Obligation to help</li> <li>● Helping and stewardship</li> <li>● Helping students with self-care</li> <li>● Helping to create jobs and opportunities for others</li> </ul>	Helping Others Achieve their Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Time freedom - success</li> </ul>	Freedom/ Fulfillment

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enjoyment is success</li> <li>● Making a difference</li> <li>● Making my own definition, joy, and peace, agency</li> <li>● Money tied to freedom</li> <li>● Freedom</li> <li>● Creating own path</li> <li>● Challenges in Business</li> <li>● Legacy (2)</li> </ul>	
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### Challenges

Codes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Black experience</li> <li>● Data and black women</li> <li>● Good time to be black</li> <li>● Black cohort</li> <li>● Being black (5)</li> <li>● Black women and lack of support</li> <li>● Perceive credibility</li> <li>● Racial toll</li> <li>● Didn't believe she was a doctor</li> <li>● I can't coach and consult women who I don't took on me</li> <li>● Racism in business</li> <li>● Black dollars</li> </ul>	Being Black
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support</li> <li>● Funding support</li> <li>● Capital Money</li> <li>● Funding</li> <li>● Access to Capital</li> </ul>	Lack of Funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reluctant entrepreneurs</li> <li>● Traumatic rape</li> <li>● Brain injury</li> <li>● Covid</li> <li>● Biz burnout</li> <li>● Not sure what to do</li> <li>● Lack of support</li> <li>● Hit a wall and this is not it</li> <li>● Pursuing goal in spite of circumstance agency</li> <li>● Didn't want to be a cliché</li> <li>● Can do better than circumstances</li> <li>● Social media inspiration</li> <li>● Good job</li> <li>● Business to rebrand</li> </ul>	Uncategorized