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African American female entrepreneurs: what motivates them to pursue entrepreneurism

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AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS: WHAT MOTIVATES THEM TO PURSUE ENTREPRENEURISM

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Elton and Gloria Bailey, who supported me with steadfast love and encouragement every step of my doctoral journey. I truly appreciate everything you have done and continue to do for me. I thank God everyday for blessing me with such wonderful parents. You are my best friends. I love you dearly. Thank you for being you.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my brother, Elton Reginald Bailey. You are dearly missed. I know your spirit has helped guide me through this journey. My love for you will never fade. Your memory lives on.

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ABSTRACT

African American women have the highest percentage of businesses owned by women in the United States. Social barriers and economic challenges unique to African American women make their success in persisting beyond the 5 year start-up average astounding. Yet, while these women have been successful in building their enterprises, despite social and economic encumbrances, there is limited research available about this group of entrepreneurs.

Through phenomenological examples, this research explored the motivational factors that influence African American women to pursue entrepreneurism and how they use their motivation to cultivate and sustain their businesses. Semi-structured interviews explored 4 variables to provide a complex, detailed lens into the lived experiences of 6 African American women entrepreneurs. Through a cross-case thematic analysis 5 themes emerged from the data: A belief that education was beneficial to their success; they did not deliberately pursue entrepreneurship; once established, they felt passion and love doing what they always wanted to do; the role of race and gender and strong parental support.

Conclusions of the study reveal varied reasons for success of African American women entrepreneurs. They do not define success by financial growth. Their career choice was made independently of family influence. The idea of returning to corporate America is inconceivable. African American women entrepreneurs' support networks are linked to their community involvement. Their challenges of social barriers are viewed as character builders. Finally, age and social exposure significantly impact their approach to entrepreneurism.

This study documents historical information about a growing population of business owners who have been overlooked in America. This historical information serves as an instructional tool for educators and professionals who work with women desiring to become entrepreneurs. Even though the study focused on African American women, the research findings would benefit all young women, as the data reveal examples of positive self-images to which they can aspire. Recommendations for future research include exploring further the lived experiences of these women as well as expanding the number of respondents by recruiting participants from a broader geographic area.

Chapter One

Introduction

African American women have contributed, significantly, to the economic development of America, as they have always been part of the labor force. Due to the limited opportunity to work in the mainstream enterprise districts, African American women resorted to creating jobs for themselves using skills that would permit them to service the needs of specific market sectors (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004; Herman, 2008; Reuben, 2008). Because they were restricted from opening businesses in certain parts of their cities, the majority of their services were operated from their homes or in the homes of their patrons (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004). The 1910 United States Census listed specific businesses owned and operated by African American women as agriculture, lodging places, private household services, eating and drinking establishments, dressmakers, beauty shops, health practitioners (midwives), and education (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004, p. 11). Ownership of many of the businesses listed above continues to be common business ventures among the African American female sector, particularly health services, social services, retail, and education (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004).

In 1975, one in four of all women in America was self-employed. By 1990, the number of all self-employed women was one in three (Devine, 1994). As of 2008, "10.1 million firms were owned by women, employing more than 13 million people, and generating $1.9 trillion in sales" (Center for Women's Business Research, 2007, p. 1). The National Foundation for Women Business Owners reports, "Nearly half of all privately held firms in 2004 were at least 50 percent owned by women" (*Ewers*, 2007, p. 1). Just 1 year later, the Center for Women's Business Research (2008) reported a

percentage increase, raising the average to more than 51%. The rise in women-owned businesses has motivated researchers to examine various aspects of female entrepreneurs (Buttner & Moore, 1997; Klein, 2007).

Generally speaking, the number of women entrepreneurs has increased, tremendously, over the last decade with the most marked rise in women owned businesses being women of color. At the top of the list are African American women who, currently, are the fastest growing sector of female entrepreneurs and holds the largest percentage of businesses owned by women in the United States (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004; Herman, 2008; Reuben, 2008; Robinsons-Jacobs, 2001). "The overall growth rate for privately-owned businesses was 23%, but businesses owned by African-American women grew at the astronomical pace of 147%" (Herman, 2008, p. 111). The number of businesses owned by African American women increased by 120% between 1997 and 2006 (Herman, 2008; Klein, 2007).

Although African American women have the largest number of businesses of all women, the *per firm* average per annual receipts displays a different picture. When dividing female self-owned businesses into ethnic categories, Asian and Pacific Islander women have the biggest intake annually, averaging $336,000, per firm, in revenue. By contrast, African American women have the lowest per-firm average of $43,300 annually (Robinsons-Jacobs, 2001). Even though their revenue stream is the lowest compared to other ethnicities, Black-women Owned Business Enterprises (BOBE) tend to persist beyond the start-up average of three to five years for new businesses. However, there is little research that focuses on African American female entrepreneurs and the influences that motivate them to pursue entrepreneurism (; Buttner & Moore, 1997; Klein, 2007).

Problem Statement

African American women, as with all women, decide to go into business for themselves for reasons more similar than different. Some have young children at home and seek work-life and family balance. Others have become bored with their jobs and have an interest in the business they are starting. There are also women who feel they have gone as far as they can in their professional jobs and desire to move to the next level. Realizing this transition will not happen in their current positions, some women branch off and start their own businesses. Being self-employed gives them the autonomy to advance to levels that they would not, otherwise, have reached had they remained at their jobs. In a downturned economy, others lost jobs due to company downsizing and decided to venture into self-employment (Buttner & Moore, 1997; Kepler & Shane, 2007; Paton, 2007). Buttner & Moore (1997) refer to these motivators of self-employment as *push and pull* factors. Pull factors are characterized as boredom and frustration with the job and a desire for autonomy. The *glass ceiling*, is the predominant organizational push factor (Buttner & Moore, 1997, p. 2).

While women of all ethnicities may find pursuing entrepreneurism as challenging, African American women's paths to entrepreneurism might present an even greater challenge. Many African American women have been marginalized into a circumstance identified only among African American women as the *third burden* (Malveaux, 2008, p. 77). Societal norms in America result in many African American men lacking economic security, rendering them unable to provide for their families. As a result, the financial burden of sustaining the family falls at the feet of African American women, which is descriptive of the third burden. They often take on the responsibility of the

primary breadwinners or the sole financial providers in the household. In comparison to White women, African American women bear the responsibility of providing for the home, caring for the children, and working outside the home full-time in low wage paying jobs. By contrast, more White women have had the benefit of staying home with the children while the husband works outside the home. While marriage seems to be a key factor in improving the economic level for Whites, the same is not necessarily true for African American families whose salary wages are much lower than the average white family (Conrad, 2008; Malveaux, 2008). In California alone, 13% of African American women workers were poor. Additionally, the highest percentage of families living in poverty are African American, yet African American people only make up 13.4 % of the United States population (U.S. Census, 2006). Consequently, starting a business might pose a greater risk for African American women, as the financial support for their families heavily relies on their income.

Many African American women begin their self-owned businesses as second jobs (Gynn & Hoke, 2004, Paton, 2001). The demands of a full-time job, coupled with the time spent owning and operating a personal business, will limit the amount of time single mothers have to spend with their children, making work-life and family balance more imbalanced. The financial strain of starting a new business might be a greater challenge for African American women who are the primary "bread-winners" in terms of collecting the start-up capital for their businesses. As the sole providers, they must ensure that the needs of their families are not jeopardized in their pursuits to establish their businesses. There is also the threat of social barriers, particularly race discrimination combined with

gender bias, which may obstruct their pathway to wealth attainment through the pursuit of entrepreneurism.

Financial stability, time constraints, and the reduction in work-life and family balance would cause many women to decide against entrepreneurism. But there is a growing percentage of African American women who have chosen to persist despite the challenges they might face when starting and maintaining a business. What motivates African American business women to pursue entrepreneurism?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify the motivational factors that influenced African American women to pursue entrepreneurism. Through phenomenological examples, the information derived from these cases will expose readers to the growing population of African American women entrepreneurs. This study will likely help the business community identify opportunities to market to this target population of business owners. It will also serve as a resource for African American women who are considering entrepreneurism.

Research Question

The research question will address the motivations that influence African American women to become entrepreneurs and discuss how they use these factors to lead their organizations. The central research question will be:

1. What motivational factors have influenced African American women to pursue entrepreneurship?

Significance of the Study

This study is to add to the limited research of African American female entrepreneurs. The increase in Black Women-owned Business Enterprises (BWBE) has given cause for more research in this area. Earlier research excluded African American women from studies (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004; Buttner & Moore, 1997). More recent studies have included African American women as subjects, but as a portion of a small cluster of women of color. In these cases, a segment of minority female entrepreneurs is lumped into one category, thus limiting the findings of individual ethnic groups (CWBR, 2008; Vaughn, 2008). Research into the motivations that lead African American women to persevere beyond social and economic barriers in pursuit of BWBEs is pertinent to the business world and society. The information extrapolated from this study, along with other research outcomes, needs to be readily available to educators and corporate America, but most of all, young African American women who are in search of examples of powerful role models as they embark upon their academic and professional pursuits.

These research findings will serve as resources to the educational development and positive reinforcement of young African American girls and young women as they transition to adulthood. Young African American women are in a difficult position. During their crucial stage of development, they are subjected to the negative stereotypes depicted in mainstream media and pop culture from an early age (Malveux, 2008, p. 78). While deciphering these images in search of themselves, they also receive messages from home and their communities telling them they must take on the primary responsibility of caring for themselves and their families in addition to sustaining their communities. These messages can be overwhelmingly confusing to a young African American woman

in search of her identity. The good news is there are positive examples to counteract the negative images represented in media and pop culture for young African American women to follow. Not only are African American women succeeding in the entrepreneurial sector, they are also receiving college degrees in record numbers. Catalyst (2004) reports,

> African – American women represented 5.9 percent of those getting B.A.'s which was the highest proportion among individual race/gender groups…The number of African – American women getting master's degrees increased 149.5 percent from 1991 to 2001…This increase is larger than that of the number of white men and women receiving M.A.'s in the same period (p. 11).

It is the hope of this researcher that young African American women will view these findings as a motivational resource, as many of them will bear the responsibility of sustaining their families and communities.

African American women are viewed as pillars of their communities. They regularly take on leadership roles in the areas in which they live. They are the pinnacle link within their homes, churches, and surrounding environments. As such, African American women business owners are fundamentally connected to their communities. The majority of their businesses are in health service, social services, and education. Since their businesses contribute to sustaining the African American community, the research findings can be applied to studies related to the economic empowerment of their communities.

As African American women have taken the top spot of self-owned businesses, research into their leadership methods along with their business needs would be beneficial to corporate leaders who may wish to market to this group. Research that demonstrates what motivates African American women to choose entrepreneurism and

how they use their motivations to lead their organizations will provide insight into the leadership styles and needs of African American female professionals. The study findings will be useful to corporate management that have African American women in management positions or are considering hiring or advancing women of color into management positions in their businesses.

In terms of social support and sustainability, research into African American women entrepreneurs' use of social capital will convey the connection between their relationships with people and the success of their businesses. Social networks include relationships with family, peers, close friends, role models, current, and past employees. These groups provide support by way of finances, paid or unpaid labor, and motivation to African American women business owners, particularly at the start of their businesses (Boyd, 2000; and Smith-Hunter, 2003). The social capital that African American women entrepreneurs build and maintain serve as links to sustaining their businesses and gaining financial stability (Smith-Hunter, 2003). Empirical evidence demonstrating the ability for African American women entrepreneurs' to, potentially, establish thriving businesses will serve as useful data to financial corporations who provide business loans.

Assumptions

Although the subjects in the study will come from varying backgrounds, with individualized experiences, it is assumed that they will share enough common experiences to justify the focus of this study. Women who have been entrepreneurial for a minimum of 5 years will have valuable insights into what originally motivated them toward self-employment as well as what has contributed to their success. It is assumed that women whose businesses have succeeded beyond the initial stage of small business

ownership will have more to share than brand new start-ups with regards to how their personal motivations have helped them in leading and sustaining their businesses beyond the infant phase of personal ownership.

Limitations

There are possible conditions that could limit the study. The perceived limitations are listed:

- It is assumed the participants are truthful.
- The participants in the study are volunteers. Therefore, the research is limited to the individuals who are willing to participate.
- The participants come from varying backgrounds. In that respect, some of their experiences are unique to them. However, there are enough common responses to generalize findings to the majority of African American female entrepreneurs.

Conceptual Foundation

This study uses theories of social entrepreneurship as its primary foundation. Also, ethnic studies and practices toward marginalized people provides context to the unique experiences of African American women.

Definitions

Entrepreneur**.** Can range from anyone who wants to work for himself or herself to someone of very high aptitude who pioneers change, possessing characteristics found in only a small faction of the population (Taylor, 2005).

Social Entrepreneurship. Applying practical, innovation, and sustainable approaches to benefit society in general, with an emphasis on the marginalized and poor (Parries, 2008).

Black. Of or belonging to an American ethnic group descended from Africa peoples having dark skin (American Heritage Dictionary, 2006). The terms Black and African American are used interchangeably by some people. To some, African American made a stronger representation of the race to show a stronger connection to Africa. While other groups of people preferred to maintain the use of the term Black.

African American. A Black American of African Ancestry (American Heritage Dictionary, 2006).

Women of Color. Women who are not of European descent. Rather than listing all non-European ethnicities in the discussion, a single term was used to describe all other nationalities.

Third Burden. A circumstance specific to African American women who shoulder the disproportionate responsibility in supporting households and children without sufficient contribution from spouses, partners, or fathers (Malveaux, 2008).

Black Women Business Enterprises (BWBE). Businesses owned and operated by Black women (Reuben, 2008).

Small Business. An independent business with less than 500 employees (Kepler & Shane, 2007).

Business success. Profitability and longevity of five or more years in business (Kepler & Shane, 2007).

Summary

The African American woman has always been a vital member of the workforce in the United States. However, she has received limited recognition for her contribution. As a member of the leading group of business owners among women in America, she has succeeded in sustaining her business beyond the initial start-up phase of personal business ownership. Yet, her per firm average remains lower than other women business owners. Despite this fact, the African American woman is doing well in the entrepreneurial arena. Her path to becoming an entrepreneur is unique to her personal experiences, and her story is one that warrants being told.

Through this study, her experiences will be explored. The motivating factors that influenced her decision to pursue entrepreneurism will be identified. As a result, her story will be unfolded to readers, giving them a broader understanding of her experiences.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

This chapter is a review of the literature related to the study. The content in this chapter discusses the various types of entrepreneurism, as well as offers motivational factors that influence African American women to pursue entrepreneurism.

This literature review is divided into four major sections. Section one discusses entrepreneurs, which includes theoretical explanations of entrepreneurism along with descriptive conditions to support the latter. The second section covers the growth of African American Female entrepreneurs, as well as formal and informal educational motivating factors. Section three provides a historical background of Black women business owners. Due to the limited research of African American women entrepreneurs, it is critical to include this section, as it lays the foundation for the research. This section helps develop a complex understanding of the study. The final section discusses the motivational factors that influence African American women to pursue entrepreneurism.

Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs contribute to the improvement of social issues, such as unemployment, underemployment, poverty, low productivity in the workforce, communication, and enhanced community sustainability. In a like manner, they benefit the country's economic growth by providing capital for reinvestment (Zimmerman, 2008; Boyd, 2000).

As a point of clarification, some researchers make a distinction between the terms business owner and entrepreneur, arguing that they should not be used interchangeably as is commonly practiced (Molina, 2005; Robinson, personal communication, December 17,

2009). These researchers believe that a business owner is one who owns a business establishment for profit, while an entrepreneur starts with an innovative idea and uses that idea to grow a business to significant volume or worth. For example, a woman who owns a shoe store would be considered a business owner. There is nothing about her business that is innovative or sets it apart from other shoe stores. On the other hand, a woman who designs athletic shoes for her shoe company is an entrepreneur because she used her innovation to create a new product. She does not own a shoe store that sells products from various designers. The key to identifying an entrepreneur is to determine whether there is an element that sets her apart from a business owner (Robinson, personal communication, December 17, 2009). However, for the purpose of this study, the term entrepreneur will be defined as, "One who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise; anyone who runs a small, medium, or large business in an independent operation; or one who works as part of a team or in a partnership." (Business World, 2000, p.1)

Types of Entrepreneurism

Some of the various types of entrepreneurs are social entrepreneurs, survivalist entrepreneurs, commercial entrepreneurs, remedial entrepreneurs, and opportunity entrepreneurs (Boyd, 2000; Hassett, 2008; Smith-Hunter, 2003; Walker, 2009). Many of these categories overlap. The remedial or survivalist entrepreneur starts a business because she lost her job or otherwise had no other alternative besides homelessness (Hassett, 2008). For example, historically, many African American women have started businesses out of necessity. As a result, after falling upon misfortune such as joblessness, they had to decide between homelessness or create opportunities for themselves that

would provide substantial incomes to support them and their families. Their choice to seek avenues that would generate economic resources in order to survive is referred to as survivalist entrepreneurism (Boyd, 2000; Smith-Hunter, 2003; Walker, 2009).

Survivalist Entrepreneurism

African American women have practiced survivalist entrepreneurism since the slavery era (Walker, 2009). For example, in addition to working on the plantations, many enslaved women were permitted by their masters to work elsewhere for pay so that they could eventually purchase their freedom. Although they were required to give a portion of their wages to their owners for allowing them to use their time and skills to earn money, they saved the remainder of their wages until they had enough money to buy themselves and their families freedom (Smith-Hunter, 2003; Walker, 2009). The specific term used for the independent economic activity of enslaved women and men who *hired their time* for pay was African commercial survivalism (Walker, 2009). These survivalist entrepreneurs initially worked in some form of agriculture, mostly selling produce. An example of a commercial survivalist who bears mentioning is Althea Turner. Over a 25-year span, Althea Turner purchased her freedom along with 22 other slaves with the earnings she accumulated as a produce vendor.

Not only did early entrepreneurs purchase their freedom; they generated enough income from their enterprises to purchase real property. In 1670, Zippora Potter paid full purchase price for a lot and house in Virginia (Walker, 2009). Owning property was synonymous with freedom and empowerment. To illustrate, upon discovering that California had made slavery illegal and taking her owner to court on habeas corpus in 1851, Biddy Bridget Mason moved to California with her children and purchased a home

in downtown Los Angeles, making her the first African American female to own property in Los Angeles. Overtime, she purchased a large amount of property, which included a commercial building used to provide boarding and social services to the downtrodden. She reinvested the income from her business into the building of schools, churches, and hospitals (Vaughn, 2000).

Disadvantage Theory

Although the purchasing of land by freed slaves was illegal in southern states, as well as other regions, it was commonly practiced and somewhat easier before the Black Codes and Jim Crow eras beginning in 1876 and continuing until 1964. Severe punishment for violating these separatist laws did not stop African American entrepreneurial women from continuing to operate their businesses; however, oppression created by these unfair laws placed them at a greater disadvantage. In order to survive, they had to choose between destitution and self-employment. This exclusion of privileges due to race is referred to as the disadvantaged theory, which overlaps with survivalist entrepreneurism (Boyd, 2000; Smith-Hunter, 2003). In addition, the race of these women, coupled with their gender, placed them at a double disadvantage. Because of their race, they were denied access to work. Likewise, when African Americans were allowed to work in certain establishments, African American women were refused employment because of their gender. As a result, widely skilled and educated women resorted to domestic work or created their own income-generating businesses (Boyd, 2000; Smith-Hunter, 2003).

The limitation of resources due to racial separatism branded African Americans as a disadvantaged group. Nevertheless, with persistence, survivalist entrepreneurs who had

the skills to provide services to a centralized population found a way to benefit from the oppression caused by segregation. Discriminatory practices resulting in the refusal to provide services to African Americans, along with the geographic separation of cultures, created a protected market. Thus, African American entrepreneurs opened businesses in concentrated areas to customers in need of their services, creating an ethnic niche and enclave economy (Boyd, 2000; Smith-Hunter, 2003).

Census Data of Businesses Owned by African American Women

African American women always worked, yet they were not counted as part of the labor force in the United States until the early 1900s. The 1910 census was the first to include "employment statistics and information about ownership and race" (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004; p. 2). Agriculture and personal services were principal markets during the nineteenth century, with African American female entrepreneurs ranking in the ninety-seventh percentile. Of these women, 50% owned businesses that provided personal household services. Over 1,000 African American female entrepreneurs employed workers in "lodging places, private household services, and eating and dining establishments" (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004, p. 11). The numeric breakdown of African American women who owned businesses were 35,000 dressmakers, 10,000 boardinghouse businesses, and 1,750 beauty shops. Restaurants and clothing stores held a similar number to beauty shops, followed by 1,000 health practitioners, who were primarily midwives. Nearly 1,000 African American female entrepreneurs owned and operated educational services (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004).

Influence of the Great Migration – Housing Boarders

The Great Migration contributed to the high demand for housing boarders in the African American community, making it a lucrative business. One-third of Northern families opened their homes to boarders who migrated from the South and needed temporary housing (Boyd, 2000). Running a boarding house was financially feasible for African American women because it provided a better work-life balance. These women had the ability to coordinate the care for their homes and children while simultaneously earning income. In contrast, women employed as domestic workers were required to be on call and work long hours, seven days a week if summoned by their employer. As a result, the care of their families was left in the hands of others in the community while they were away from home. These women were also under the authority of the person who hired them. As a by-product of their businesses, these women "played the connective leadership role" (Boyd, 2000, p. 652). These pillars of the community were the resource connectors within the neighborhoods who provided information and support that helped residents acclimate to the northern African American communities. They connected people to churches, places for employment, social services, health care providers, and entertainment. Ironically, critics within the African American community who wanted to change the social structure in the community discouraged housing boarders (Boyd, 2000). They surmised that having adults, particularly male adults, in the home who were not part of the nuclear family would demoralize the family structure. To the contrary, lodging boarders contributed to stabilizing the family, as it improved the work life balance of African American women. This business allowed them to stay home and care for their families while producing income by providing services to boarders such

as cooking, laundering, sewing, and hairdressing (Grossman, as cited in Boyd, 2000, p. 652).

Personal Services

Personal services were not limited to the income-producing businesses listed above. Other personal services were socially influenced by the conditions that African American women and their families were subjected to due to resource disadvantage created by racial discrimination. For example, entrepreneurial women established programs to help families with burial expenses for loved ones or provided assisted living services to the elderly. African American women entrepreneurs who ventured into this sector of personal service were social entrepreneurs. They were change agents who identified a need to improve the conditions of their neglected communities and disadvantaged residents (Brooks, 2009; Light, 2008).

Unlike commercial entrepreneurs whose primary goal is profit, social entrepreneurs do not work for mere profit. Their primary purpose is to help others and improve social conditions. Such services operated by social entrepreneurs include social service programs, community development, and social benefit groups, also known as non-profit organizations. African American women who are social entrepreneurs work to change the social conditions of their communities and the people who reside there. Their target population is people who have limited financial means or lack political influence to improve their circumstances themselves (Brooks, 2009; Light, 2008).

Growth of African American female entrepreneurs. Presently, African American women have continued to be influenced by many of the same circumstances from the past. Additionally, they have transcended from the traditional self-owned

businesses such as hair care, social services, and food service to income-generating businesses in construction, engineering, and computer design. Still, it is imperative to point out that African American women continue to operate businesses in the former areas, which have roots in the cultural history of African American women and have paved the way for women to pursue careers in the latter non-traditional fields (Gite & Baskerville, 1996; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Walker, 2010). Selected stories of successful women provide support for the understanding of the African American female experience. Motivational factors are presented as essential for understanding the foundation from which entrepreneurs, in general, emerge.

Selected Stories

Two women who have carried the torch are Educator Wendi Long and Public Relations Executive Kim Etheredge. As bi-racial women, they had difficulty finding products on the market specifically designed for their hair texture. In 2004, they created a line of hair care products for bi- and multiracial women and men called Mixed Chicks. They started their business using $10,000 of capital from their personal savings. By 2009, their gross annual revenue was $3.5 million. They supervised three employees and expected to double their gross revenue in 2010 (Holmes, 2010).

Although there has been limited research pertaining to African American women entrepreneurs, an increase in interest began in the 1990s, perhaps due to the census data identifying the rapid growth of Black women owned enterprises. In 1996, Gite & Baskerville listed 10 African American Women Entrepreneurs whose annual earnings fell within the low to high millions. Prior to venturing into entrepreneurship in the areas of construction, engineering, computer science, and fashion, all of these women held top

level positions for major companies. In the area of science, technology, and engineering, (Gite & Baskerville, 1996) spotlighted Margie Lewis, President and CEO of Parallax, Inc. Lewis developed an interest in space and nuclear power at an early age. After working as a safety advisor at a nuclear power plant and an inspector with the Nuclear Regulatory Agency in Washington, she decided to launch her own engineering and environmental management company. Lewis began operating her business in her home with $10,000 of her savings in 1993. Within 3 years, her enterprise grossed $13 million. As of 1996, her firm employed 160 employees with offices in five states. At that time, her goal was to gross $50 million by 1997 (Gite & Baskerville, 1996). All of the women listed used their personal income as start-up capital, which is common among African American women entrepreneurs as compared to other ethnic groups (Boyd, 2000; Blockson, Robinson, & Robinson, 2007; Smith-Hunter, 2003).

One possible contributor to the surge of African American women-owned businesses is education. As mentioned in chapter one, African American women ranked highest in receiving Bachelor's degrees from 1991 to 2001 among all race and gender groups. Likewise, the percentage of African American women who received graduate degrees increased by 145.9 % during the same period, surpassing the percentages of both White men and women receiving graduate degrees in the same time frame (Catalyst, 2004).

Potential Barriers in the Workplace and Coping Strategies

While the level of education beyond high school has opened the doors for African American women to attain economically self-sustaining professional positions, the uniqueness of their historical past in the United States subjects them to issues in the

workplace exclusive to Black women (Blockson, et al. 2007; Catalyst, 2004; Smith-Hunter, 2003). Rather than the *glass ceiling* that women of all races reference, African American women tend to be faced with a ceiling that is more dense and difficult to shatter, the "cement ceiling" (Catalyst, 2004, p. 3). According to Catalyst (2004), the following barriers make it difficult for African American women to transition to upper management positions: "stereotypes; visibility and scrutiny; questioning of authority; credibility; lack of *fit* in the workplace; double outsider status; and exclusion from informal networks" (p. 3).

Another barrier for African American women is the disadvantage issue of social identity. Many African American women identify themselves differently depending on the social setting in which they are (Blockson, et al. 2007). When they are in a group with other African American women, color and gender are not considerations. They are not consciously aware of their race or gender. When they are among African Americans of both genders, they first become cognizant of themselves as women. When they are in a group of all ethnicities, they see themselves as African American first, regardless of gender inclusion (Blockson, et al. 2007).

Moreover, both race and gender could possibly pose challenges for African American women entrepreneurs. For example, from a fiscally operational standpoint, the pursuit of government set-asides brings the subject of race and gender to the forefront for African American women contractors who are competing for contracts in a, typically, White male dominated business. In their research findings, Blockson, et al. (2007) discuss two African American women who owned construction firms. The women avowed that prior to applying for government set-asides, they needed to be assured that they were not being

used by majority firms who wished to gain leverage by contracting with them because of their dual status as women and minorities. Even though their ability to cover two categories might improve their chances for receiving the business, they want to be chosen for their capabilities, not their race and gender (Blockson, et al. 2007, p. 146). By the same token, the women reported that 25% of the government contracts are reserved for minorities and women owned businesses. However, in actuality, 20% of those contracts are reserved for White women who are prized contractors, leaving African American women and minority men to vie for the remaining 5%. Notwithstanding, those African American women contractors who decide to pursue the contracts do so with steadfast persistence and belief that the contracts are "fairly available to them" (Blockson, et al. 2007, p. 31).

Shifting

In order to be accepted into the *mainstream*, many African American woman alter or shift their behavior to make others feel comfortable with them. This shifting is used subconsciously or consciously to conceal who they are in order to survive in mainstream society, particularly the workplace, and reduce the distress resulting from the cultural disconnect (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Changes in behavior include speech pattern, remaining silent about a topic that she feels strongly against because it is different from the majority, or changing her hair style from cornrows to straight hair. Shifting has become such an integral part of the African American woman's survival skills that her behavior automatically changes depending on her circumstances. Likewise, her recommendations are often overlooked, and her questioning of authority bears the risk of being looked upon as insubordination. As a result, she often isolates herself or creates a

small circle of colleagues with whom to communicate but without fully revealing herself. In order to maintain her position and gain trust and respect, she constantly shifts her behavior to accommodate her colleagues, supervisor, or employees. Her abilities are often questioned, forcing her to work twice as hard as her White counterparts in order to prove her worth in her position. Because of the sensitivity surrounding the topic of race, it is difficult to convey the role that the legacy of slavery, racial segregation, and discrimination presently have in the workplace to her colleagues and superiors of other ethnicities. On the rare occasions when she risks sharing her plight with colleagues or superiors, she is often faced with questions or comments such as, Perhaps it didn't happen the way you think it did; You're overreacting; I don't understand what you mean; or You always want to make it a racial issue, diminishing her concerns. Comments such as those listed above lead to guardedness, frustration, and, again, isolation (Catalyst, 2004; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Benefits of the Disadvantage Theory

Despite the barriers of the double disadvantage theory, African American women have managed to persevere and find the theory advantageous. They have found strength in the role of the *outsider* as they believe their position in the workplace requires them to work harder than their peers. As a result, "they exceed performance expectations, they communicate effectively, they build positive relationships with managers and others, and by being an 'outsider,' they can identify subtle favoritism to those in the inner circle with whom such activities would be overlooked" (Catalyst, 2004, p. 4). They are also more likely than their White counterparts to use mentors. Mentorship helps develop their growth as entrepreneurs, as the support of their informal networks contributes to their

success as business owners (Boyd, 2000; Smith-Hunter, 2003). African American women entrepreneurs use informal networks, including unpaid labor assistance, as resources when starting and sustaining their businesses (Blockson, et al. 2007; Boyd, 2000; Catalyst, 2004; Smith-Hunter, 2003). Unpaid labor assistance encompasses friends and family members who help run the daily operations of the business either visibly or *behind the scenes*.

According to Catalyst (2004), African American women are also most likely to be involved in their communities. Its report shows African American women's incorporation of their cultural background and community involvement enhances their job performance. As a result, the values of teamwork, resourcefulness, fairness, equity, and spiritualism contribute to their work style and success (Catalyst, 2004, p.4). Again, these characteristics transcend to their effectiveness as entrepreneurs.

African American women entrepreneurs come from various social economic and educational backgrounds. Their exposure ranges from low income with variant levels of education to executive status with advanced degrees. Moreover, knowledge of the historical past of African American women entrepreneurs who have paved the way for current day African American women entrepreneurs could prove to be a key influence in the persistence of these women.

Historical: African American female entrepreneurs pre and post twentieth century. As far back as the 1700s, evidence of African American women entrepreneurs has been documented (Boyd, 2000; Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004; Schweninger, 1989; Smith-Hunter, 2003; Walker, 2009; Women in History, 2010). Many of these women were children of former slaves or former slaves themselves. While they might have had

the desire to use their skills and talents more creatively than working on the properties of slave owners, their initial motivation for becoming self-employed was basic survival. These women needed to find avenues to make money in order to care for themselves and their families when they could not find employment in the mainstream labor force (Boyd, 2000; Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004). Boyd (2000) referred to the activities of these women entrepreneurs as "survivalist entrepreneurs" (p. 648). He posited that people who are without means of employment will seek to create a self-sustaining source of income through entrepreneurship. Determined to find a means for survival, these women persevered by identifying needs that their skills could fulfill and became viable resources in those markets (Boyd, 2000; Smith-Hunter, 2003). Resources such as agriculture and personal services, namely, cooking, sewing, laundering, and carrying for the elderly and children were common services that these women used to earn income.

Agriculture and Nontraditional Businesses

Although agriculture and personal service markets were primary business ventures for many African American female entrepreneurs, some chose to embark upon businesses that would be considered nontraditional even by current standards. For example, Financier Eulalie de Mandeville (Madame CeCee Macarty) was the descendant of one of the most prominent White Creole families in New Orleans. Her mother arranged a union between Eulalie and a wealthy white man named Eugene Macarty. It was common for prominent, wealthy White men to have liaisons with free colored women in New Orleans, Louisiana in the 1760s – 1790s (Online Encyclopedia, 2010). Generations of girls were reared to be placed with these men for protection and support. This practice was unique to Louisiana and was known as "placage," (Online

Encyclopedia, 2010; p. 1). These unions were not legally recognized, but the women were expected to remain faithful to the men until the men died or married White women. The union provided independence and power for these women and their children that would have otherwise been unavailable. The children received better education, and the women were awarded money and prime property in their names after the deaths of their wealthy partners. Some of the children born to these liaisons received inheritance from their fathers.

Commercial entrepreneur Madame CeCee Macarty was an intelligent woman who used her finances and unique creativity to increase her assets. Macarty received $12,000 from her partner's estate. She used her wealth to ensure the education of her children. Her son, Victor Eugene Macarty, was an accomplished pianist, actor, composer, and civil rights activist. Eulalie de Mandeville Mccarty operated an import and dry good business in New Orleans and throughout the state of Louisiana. Walker (2009), "She accumulated a fortune of $155,000 (about $2 million in today's dollars)" (p. 5). Her profits were due to her import and dry goods market, as well as her participation in the stock market. Another facet of her wealth was the interest she received upon the repayment of loans from borrowers (Walker, 2009).

United States Census

Even though African American women were independent laborers in the work force, they were not included in the United States Census, which started in 1790 (Hendricks & Patterson, 2002; Schweninger, 1989). During this era, Black people were not included in the U.S. Census as participants in the labor force; they were merely counted as slaves in a household. Hendricks & Patterson (2002) proposed the purpose of

the census was not only a mechanism to count and divide financial resources among the states based on the statistical data received, it was also designed to exemplify the current conditions in America (p. 1). During this period, the government was mainly concerned with counting the number of free White males age 16 and over to document the number of people in the household who were eligible to serve in the military (Hendricks & Peterson, 2002).

Personal Services

The slavery era separated many families, leaving children and elderly African Americans alone. As a result, personal services were widely open pathways for those who possessed the skills and ability to provide resources to those who were unable to help themselves. One such person was Eliza Bryant. Bryant, whose mother was a slave and fathered by the master, was born on a plantation in North Carolina in 1829. When her mother was freed in 1848, she took Bryant and her siblings to Cleveland, Ohio and purchased a home with money given to her by her master. Influenced by her mother's work taking in boarders, Bryant became a forerunner in the "movement to welcome and assist African Americans to Cleveland" (Mabunda, 2006, p.1), Bryant identified the need to provide aid to elderly Black people who were left alone "due to slavery" ("Women in History," 2010, p.1). Her ability to determine an unmet need and advance it to a valuable social commodity is an example of social entrepreneurism. Bryant, along with two other women, established a home for elderly Black people in 1893. By 1897, the doors of the Cleveland Home for Aged Colored People were opened (Women in History, 2010). African American entrepreneurs not only have existed but have done so successfully for

several hundred years. This home is still in existence and is now called Eliza Bryant Village.

While African American women who ventured into social entrepreneurism impacted the community by fulfilling unmet social needs, African American women who chose commercial entrepreneurism played significant roles in the economic development of African Americans and their communities. Maggie Lena Walker began working at a young age with her mother and later began a business that helped many African Americans gain financial security. She was the daughter of former slaves who worked in the mansion of abolitionist and Civil War spy Elizabeth Van Lew. Upon her father's death, Walker helped her mother, who worked as a laundrywoman, with the collection and delivery of laundry and assisted with the care of her younger brother (Smith, 2010). At the age of 14, Walker joined the Independent Order of Saint Luke (IOSL), a fraternal organization that promoted racial solidarity. It administered to the sick and aged and helped families make burial arrangements during the post Civil War period.

Upon completing her education, Walker began teaching in 1883. During this time, she continued to work for the Order, moving up the ranks to Right Worthy Grand Secretary, a position she held until her death. In 1902, Walker began publishing the St. Luke Herald newspaper to promote the awareness of the IOSL. Through her position with the Order, Walker wanted to help her community gain economic independence.
She wanted to help the people of her community "turn pennies into dollars" (Smith, 2010, p. 2) through the purchase of real estate. In 1903, Walker transitioned from social entrepreneurism to commercial entrepreneurism when she founded the Saint Luke Penny Saving Bank. By 1920, the bank had financed the purchase an estimated 600 homes

(Smith, 2010). Penny Savings Bank continued to grow. It absorbed the other Black banks in Richman, Virginia and became the Consolidated Bank and Trust Company. Walker was Chairman of the Board. Currently, Consolidated Bank and Trust Company is the oldest surviving African American bank in the United States. Walker held the position of Chairman until her death in 1934. She was the first woman in the United States to found a bank (Boyd, 2000; Smith, 2010).

Hairdressing: Capitalizing on the Ethnic Niche

African American women resorted to domestic services to generate income due to the rapid loss of jobs. By contrast, those who did not choose domestic services sought personal ventures dissimilar to domestic services (Boyd, 2000, p. 650). In fact, during the Great Depression, boarding houses, lodging, house keeping, hairdressing, and beauty culture were the most prosperous ventures for African American women. These businesses required little or no education and low start-up costs (Boyd, 2000).

Hairdressing was the most profitable market for African American women in the early twentieth century (Boyd, 2000). Although the Great Depression impacted multiple industries, hairdressers and the beauty culture remained stable in the African American communities. This stability was the result of need. As African Americans migrated to the north, they had to find employment, and it was imperative that they were well groomed upon receiving invitations to job interviews (Boyd, 2000). Moreover, hairdressing was a profitable market for African Americans because it was an easy skill to learn. There were plenty of schools available to teach the trade, and the required start-up capital for these businesses was relatively low. For example, some women worked in their homes or vacant storefronts rather than purchasing an office or building (Boyd, 2000, p. 653).

Equally important, White merchants' refusal to provide personal services to African Americans created an ethnic niche (Boyd, 2000; Hunter-Smith, 2003). White hairdressers were unable or unwilling to work with African American hair. "They also did not know how to prepare the cosmetics used" (Boyd, 2000, p. 653). The desire for social distance by White hairdressers and the special demand of the African American consumers made hairdressing and the beauty culture a protected consumer market (Boyd, 2000; Smith, 2010).

Many women transitioned from small businesses in their homes to owning and operating one or more salons in their communities. Capitalizing off the ethnic enclave economy, Annie M. Turnbo Malone was the first African American woman to grow her company from a small hairdressing business to a nationally known hair care empire. Born in 1869 and orphaned at an early age, Malone's repeated absenteeism, due to illness, resulted in her not completing high school. Although she had limited education, Malone was influenced to study chemistry by her aunt who was a trained herbal doctor.

From an early age, Malone enjoyed creating hairstyles for herself and her sisters. Her interest in styling hair prompted her to notice the differences in hair textures. Her curiosity led her to experiment with chemicals to change hair texture. She developed a chemical product that straightened African American hair without damage.

Malone eventually developed her innovative idea into a line of hair care products. Her most popular product was called Wonderful Hair Grower. By 1902, she moved her business to Saint Louis, Missouri. Seeing the potential for her business to grow, Malone hired and trained three assistants. Falling prey to racial discrimination, Malone and her assistances were denied access to traditional distribution systems. Unwilling to be

discouraged, these four women sold products door-to-door and gave demonstrations on their use. They also went to Black churches, community centers and women's clubs to market their products. Two years later, Malone opened a retail outlet "during the 1904 World's Fair" (Peiss, 2003; p. 1). Upon receiving positive feedback and repeat business, she made the decision to distribute her product nationally.

Malone traveled throughout the South and beyond, marketing her products. In each location, she recruited, hired, and trained women as local sales agents. Her agents, in turn, recruited additional agents. This sales and marketing strategy increased her profits and expanded her regional target market. In 1906, she trademarked the name Poro for her products, "a West African term for an organization dedicated to disciplining and enhancing the body spiritually and physically" (Peiss, 2003, p. 2). By 1910, Malone had a national distribution company. In 1918, she built Poro College, which employed 175 employees and housed her business offices, manufacturing operation, and training facility. By the 1920s, it is believed she was worth 14 million dollars. The profits that she accrued from the success of her business provided her with the resources to venture into philanthropy.

As a philanthropist, Malone was committed to community building and social welfare. After business hours, her school served as a location for civil, religious, and social functions. Malone lived conservatively and donated large sums of her earnings to a number of charities. She sponsored two full-time students in every Black land-grant college in the United States. In the 1920s Malone donated $25,000 to Howard University Medical School. At that time, it was the largest gift the University had received from an African American. Tuskegee also received a sizable contribution from Malone.

Malone's generosity expanded to her family and employees. She bought homes for her siblings and paid for the education of her nieces and nephews. Turnbo Malone's employees received lavish gifts as service awards for "attendance, punctuality, anniversaries, and real estate investing" (Peiss, 2003, p. 2). Malone's passion for giving and her trust in others might have been the downfall of her financial empire.

A power struggle with her husband, Alan Malone, over the business was made public with community leaders taking sides in support of either party. Believing that the success of Turnbo Malone's enterprise was due to his contacts, Alan Malone filed for divorce demanding half of the business and profits. This divorce battle caused a division within the Black community. African American leaders and politicians stood behind Mr. Malone. Mrs. Malone's history of charity work and support of education, civic causes, social causes, and African American women, drew the support of the corporation's employees, church leaders, and the press. One of her most powerful supporters was Mary McLeod Bethune, president of the National Association of Colored Women. Turnbo Malone was a member and major donor of this organization. Turnbo Malone triumphed. She kept her company and negotiated a $200,000 settlement (Peiss, 2003, p.2). The divorce and settlement was the beginning of Turnbo Malone's economic downturn.

Her biggest mistake was entrusting employees to run her business in her absence. Funds were grossly mismanaged. Taxes were not paid and she experienced more law suits. In 1943 the government was owed nearly $100,000 in taxes. After several law suits were filed by the government, it took over Malone's company and sold the property to pay the taxes.

Turnbo Malone died of a stroke at the age of 87 in 1957. Although historians credit Malone for developing her hair care products and distribution system first, Madame C. J. Walker overshadowed Malone because “her business remained successful and more widely known” (Peiss, 1998, p. 4). Madame C. J. Walker is listed as the first African American millionaire.

Sarah Breedlove McWilliams Walker changed her name to Madame C.J. Walker when she founded her hair care enterprise. She was the daughter of former slaves who died when she was 7. She survived by working in cotton fields with her sister. Madame Walker married at the age of 14. Her husband died 2 years later. Walker’s work as a laundrywoman aided her in earning enough financial resources to educate her daughter.

A scalp ailment caused Madame Walker to lose her hair. Embarrassed by her appearance, she began using a hair growth product invented by Annie Turnbo Malone. Malone recruited Walker as one of her agents in the Denver region in 1905. Walker sold Malone’s products until she started her own company selling her modified version of Malone’s product called Madam Walker’s Wonderful Hair Grower. Malone’s product was marketed as a hair growth product. Walker’s product was marketed as a scalp conditioning and healing formula. Her distribution style was similar to Malone’s. Products were sold door-to-door and in-home demonstrations were given. Other sales and marketing strategies included taking ads in papers and giving demonstrations at churches and community events.

By 1908, Walker opened a school in Pittsburgh to train her “hair culturists” (Bellis, 2010; p. 1). Employees who learned to use Walker’s products and style hair. She also owned the patent for a permanent wave machine that was popular among White and

Black women. The machine was invented by Marjorie Joyner who was an employee. Because the machine was part of the Walker Company, Joyner did not profit from her invention. In the span of 15 years, Walker became a millionaire and employed over 3,000 people. She died at the age of 52 in 1919.

The motivational factors that influenced these women from the past to pursue entrepreneurism varied. Given the conditions of the era, many of them were survivalist entrepreneurs. Although some did not have traditional education, they all understood the value of education and promoted education in their communities. However, in addition to their choice to use their ingenuity to develop income generating businesses, they all were committed to helping their communities prosper by providing jobs to residents in the community or through philanthropic endeavors. These factors aided in their determination to sustain and grow their businesses. Notwithstanding, many of the key motivators that influenced African American women from the past to pursue entrepreneurism, continue to influence Black women business owners presently. Although with the change of time, other motivating factors exist to lead these women to persist as successful business owners.

Motivational factors. Even though African American women choose to venture into the entrepreneurial arena for the same reasons as other women, there are distinctive societal and historical factors surrounding African American women that play a role in the motivational factors behind the pursuit of entrepreneurism for African American women (Blockson, et al. 2007; Catalyst, 2004; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Smith-Hunter, 2003). For example, the psychological frustration caused by shifting has influenced some African American women executives to utilize their ideas, skills, and

talents as a conduit to their own business ventures. Other emotional strains in the workplace may include the desire to place themselves in positions for growth that they do not believe they will achieve in their current positions. Catalyst (2004) reported that among the participants in its study, "African American women were more likely than any other group to see advancement opportunities to senior management positions decline over time" (p. 4). For these women, entrepreneurism is an opportunity to set their own work schedules, take control over their professional growth, remove the limitations on their creativity, and increase their financial strength.

Variations in the Pursuit of Entrepreneurism

Some researchers believe there are variations of how one goes about the process of entrepreneurship. The social settings construct the way one would access and pursue business ownership. Those social constructs include where and how the start-up capital is generated, the type of social networks that are utilized, the availability of opportunity, and creative innovation (Blockson, et al. 2007). Blockson, et al. (2007) believe entrepreneurship and social stratification should be observed concurrently. They define social stratification "as the end result of institutional processes that partition society into advantaged and disadvantaged socially constructed groups" (Blockson, et al. 2007, p. 132). They further state that the social constructs include gender, race, wealth, and class. There are privileged and underprivileged groups, and over time, the expression of power and resources by the privileged group is reinforced (Blockson, et al. 2007, p. 132). In other words, those who are members of the advantaged group would pursue the process of entrepreneurship differently than a member of a disadvantaged group.

Social Influences

Societal norms dictate the purpose and path that one takes to become an entrepreneur. African American women have always had a responsibility for others, whether they were offspring or other family members. As a result, they entered the workforce with the reality that they had to earn money for survival purposes (Hooks, 1993). Although African American women come from various socioeconomic backgrounds, they share social norms based on their unique cultural history, which might have an effect on their motivation and decision to become entrepreneurs (Blockson, et al. 2007; Boyd, 2000, Herman, 2008; Hooks, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Malveaux, 2008; Reuben, 2008; Smith-Hunter, 2003).

African American women come from different social backgrounds that lead them into entrepreneurism. Due to the low income of the male counterpart or his absence in the home, some African American women have the sole responsibility of generating economic resources for their families. In an effort to provide for their families, they combine their creativity and skills to generate a second source of income by way of a home-based business. On the other hand, other African American women business owners come from families whose parents were business owners or perhaps were doing well in their positions in top level management but felt that they were not going to achieve any higher than their current position. The emotional distress of the "concrete ceiling" (Catalyst, 2004, p. 3), along with the psychological despair brought on by years of shifting, has motivated African American women to seek alternatives for an improved mental state while generating significant income (Blockson, et al. 2007; Catalyst, 2004; Hooks, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Smith-Hunter, 2003). In addition, job

market discrimination in previous years has resulted in African Americans, as a whole, coming into the workforce through entrepreneurship or through businesses owned by African Americans. Black women business enterprises have more than fifty-three percent of Black-owned businesses, providing 176 thousand jobs (Reuben, 2008).

Psychological Influences

In relation to the shifting performed by African American women in the workplace, it is important to mention that shifting often continues at home when dealing with the needs of her male counterpart. Although she might have had a challenging day at the office, there are times when she will choose to remain silent about her day in order to be a supportive listener to her significant other. If she is a single parent, she also follows the same practice with her children in order to give them the attention they need. Not only does this leave her in an unbalanced psychological state, she has no opportunity for emotional release, which leads to frustration and sometimes depression. The pursuit of entrepreneurism not only provides emotional release, it serves as a sense of accomplishment and control possibly unattained in the workplace, along with peace of mind. In addition, it serves as an outlet for her to chart new journeys and fully exercise self determination (Hooks, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Malveaux, 2008).

Social and Emotional Influences

To counterbalance the silence ensued by shifting, African American women entrepreneurs seek support from one another. The internal support networks that are utilized help them sustain their businesses. These Black women business owners promote one another's businesses and openly share personal experiences and recommendations among themselves in an effort to contribute to each woman's

professional success and, in turn, improve theirs. Their internal networks include friends, family, colleagues, churches, sororities, and community groups. However, they do not utilize informal networks, such as national networking organizations, or culturally diverse support networks, at the same rate as informal networks (Smith-Hunter, 2003; Martin , as cited in Klein, 2007, p. 2).

Community Involvement

One of the key identifiers of success among Black women business owners is their contribution to their communities. Many view their work as a spiritual calling (Blockson, et al. 2007, Boyd, 2000; Catalyst, 2004; Hooks, 1993; Smith-Hunter, 2003). The majority of their community service is religious based, social service, education, physical and mental health and wellness, and economic development. The organizations and committees in which these female entrepreneurs volunteer their time usually pertain to their professional expertise. To illustrate, an entrepreneur who owns an exercise studio will work with a community thrust pertaining to health and wellness. An entrepreneur whose business helps transition emancipated youth into the mainstream might volunteer with a mentoring program. In other words, their choice of community work generally links directly to their professions, which generates reciprocal resources from their businesses to their communities.

While financial and economic growth is a key factor in the pursuit of entrepreneurship for these women, it is not their sole purpose for becoming business owners. It is also not the *bottom line* when defining the success of their businesses, nor the root of their motivation to persist. Their approach to becoming successful entrepreneurs is holistic in that it not only serves their financial needs, it allows them to

contribute to their communities on a civic and social level. They contribute to the economic strength of their communities by employing its residents and meeting the needs of a specific market. They also serve as role models or an influential resource to those who seek to follow in their footsteps (Blockson, et al. 2007, Boyd, 2000; hooks, 1993; Smith-Hunter, 2003). Financial success is an external indicator. Others can see the results of their work. However, African American women entrepreneurs might use intrinsic indicators to determine success, as they likely serve as primary motivators for them to persist and achieve professional growth.

Summary

The African American woman comes from a rich heritage that uniquely prepares her for entrepreneurial endeavors. The societal challenges and limitations in many ways have served as motivational factors toward independent work experiences. The historical past of the African American woman is important in developing the complex understanding of the motivation that drives her to succeed, as it serves to distinctly explain the influences behind her determination to succeed in the world of entrepreneurism while remaining committed to her family and community.

This study will identify the motivating factors unique to African American women that influence them to become entrepreneurs. It will also explore how Black women business owners use those motivators to lead their organizations. Lastly, the research finding will add to the limited body of work that currently exists.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to address one central research question: a.) What motivational factors have influenced African American women to pursue entrepreneurism? The methodology used in the study will be described beginning with the research design, population and sampling plan, data collection strategies, human subjects considerations and proposed analysis.

Research Design & Sources of Data

This study focused on the experiences of African American entrepreneurial women. Because the goal was to understand their *lived experience*, a phenomenological approach was used. A small group of women were interviewed and various other documents, such as resume, writings or published information were reviewed in order to explore the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs and gain insight into the individual lived experiences that influenced them to pursue entrepreneurship.

Qualitative inquiry as described by Creswell (2007) is about discovery and attempts to understand a phenomena or a defined experience. Creswell (2007) states "qualitative inquiry is conducted because a problem or issue needs to be explored. This exploration is due to a need to study a group or populations, identify variables that can then be measured, or hear silenced voices" (pp. 39- 40). Qualitative inquiry is also used to discover a comprehensive understanding of an issue, which can only be done by empowering participants to tell their stories. The exploration is done in a natural setting sensitive to the participants and places under study, providing a pathway for them to express deeper thought and behaviors that ground their responses. Through this process, patterns or themes are established (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Included in the final report are

the voices of the respondents and a comprehensive interpretation of the problem. “The final outcome will extend the literature or signal a call for action” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

Phenomenology has been described as “giving us insight into the meaning or the essences of experiences that we may previously have been unaware of but can recognize” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 52). The basic purpose is to describe the object of human experiences by “reducing individuals’ experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Phenomenology has been noted as a philosophy and a method. The researcher studies a small number of subjects and “develops patterns and relationships of meaning” (Moustakas, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 15).

Target Population and Sampling Plan

The target population in this study was delineated using selected demographic and business variables. Criteria for inclusion were that the women’s ethnic heritage was African American; age of 25 to 75 years of age; born within the United States and having completed at least an undergraduate college degree or equivalent educational preparation. Criteria for their business include organizations that have been in existence for at least 5 years and were their primary source of income unless the annual earnings of the business closely meets or surpasses the salary of the primary source of income.

These criteria were chosen based on the information ascertained from the review of literature. Although studies have shown that African American women business owners have less education than White women (Reuben, 2008; Smith-Hunter, 2003), they have had the highest increase in the receipt of college degrees of all other groups, both male and female (Catalyst, 2004). Consequently, African American women whose businesses

have persisted have been reported as being college educated, with a large number holding graduate degrees. For this reason, the choice to identify college educated women for this study would correlate with the research that has already been done on this target population, adding to the limited body of research that currently exists.

The purpose for choosing the above listed age range was because the average start-up age for women with self-owned businesses is between 25 and 40. The established age range is 35 to 54 (Gynn & Hoke, 2004). Although African American women entrepreneurs hold the highest percentage of self-owned businesses, their per firm revenue is lower than other ethnic groups (Reuben, 2008; Robinson-Jacob, 2001). Hence, selecting a higher minimum gross annual income might exclude a number of women who have successfully sustained their businesses albeit their annual earnings are low. Furthermore, African American women business owners do not determine their success solely on annual earnings (Blockson, et al. 2007). Therefore, excluding women with lower earnings stands to limit the research outcome. Lastly, the self-owned businesses are said to be successful if they surpass the three to five year mark (Holtz, 1999). With that said, it is believed that women who have withstood the start-up phase of their businesses will have more personal experiences to contribute to the research study.

Sampling Plan

A sample of 6 African American women entrepreneurs were identified using a network sampling strategy. Sampling strategy is the process that ensures the sample of participants used represents the population for the research study (Landreneau, 2010). Creswell (2007) states individuals identified for the study can provide an “informed understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p.125). He

further states that more than one type of sampling strategy may be used in qualitative research, which can be used interchangeably during the research process (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). In terms of phenomenological studies, Creswell recommends using a small number of individuals in a single study (p. 128). For this research study, a sample population was gathered by recruiting individuals who met the criteria. Referrals from individuals who were familiar with the targeted population and made recommendations for inclusion were also accepted. The potential interviewees were contacted via phone, letter, electronic mail, or in-person and informed about the study and invited to participate.

Prior to any initial contact with the participants, application and approval from the University's Institutional Review Board were made and obtained (see Appendix A). Following approval, a three stage process for locating the sample occurred.

- Stage One: The first written communication included an introduction of the researcher, followed by a brief description of the research, and ending with a request for the entrepreneur to participate (see Appendix B, C, and D).
- Stage Two: The second communication contained a letter thanking the participants for agreeing to take part in the research study, along with a list of dates and times to choose from for the individual interviews (see Appendix E and F).
- Stage Three: The third communication was a confirmation of the date and a list of the questions for the respondents to review prior to the interview. The purpose of reviewing the questions prior to the interview was to give

the respondents time to think about what they wanted to share (see Appendix G and H).

Data Collection Strategies

Individual interviews. Individual interviews using open-ended questions were the most appropriate method because it allowed the respondents to speak candidly, as well as give them an opportunity to elaborate on the questions. Open-ended questions also elicited unrestricted discussions, which provided descriptive feedback relevant to the research questions (Creswell, 2003), as well as views and opinions that the respondents felt most passionate about. In addition, personal interviews were beneficial when working with a respondent whose dominant personality could have potentially overpowered other participants in a group setting. A situation such as the aforementioned yields relevance in a study such as this, because the dominance of one person could create a hostile setting or restrict the other respondents from speaking candidly (Creswell, 2003, p. 133).

Interview questions. The interview questions were developed by the researcher based on the review of the literature. The open-ended questions addressed the motivational influences that drove African American women to pursue entrepreneurship and used to collect the data for answering the two research questions. Four major questions were asked during the interview process.

1. What motivated you to become an entrepreneur?
2. What role did family concerns play in your motivation to become an entrepreneur?
3. What social barriers did you face that challenged your decision to become an entrepreneur?

4. What formal or informal educational influences molded you to pursue your current professional role?

To determine validity of the interview approach, the process and questions were reviewed by faculty advisors and colleagues familiar with interview strategies. Once an agreement regarding the overall validity of the process was made, a small pilot study was conducted with women who met the criteria of the sample population, but did not participate in the actual study. The purpose of this was to determine the clarity and sequence of the questions as well as the overall approach to the interview process. Following the pilot study, no modifications or adjustments to the process and questions were made before proceeding with the actual research.

Data Collection Procedures

The research data were collected by gathering the information from interviews, audio recordings, biographies, resumes or career vitas, and other documentation that the respondents agreed to share. The biographies, resumes, and career vitas did not contribute to the research and, consequently, was only used as background information to give the reader a sense of who the women were. During the interviews, an audio recorder was used with four participants. Notes were taken by the researcher with the other two. Written notes were taken due to one interview being facilitated over the phone and the other as a result of technical difficulties which risked delaying the interview. The researcher transcribed the audio tapes and typed the written notes, which she reviewed for accuracy and clarity. The transcripts were also reviewed by a second researcher in order to cross reference for comprehensibility. Both the audio interview and written notes were typed in Word documents and saved on a USB flash drive.

Protection of Human Subjects

In accordance with regulations 45CFR 46.101(b) and 46.101 (b) (2) of the Pepperdine IRB Manual (2005), this research study was approved as exempt for the following reasons (see Appendix A). The participants in this research study were adults who were not part of a protected group. Reponses from the interviews and all documentation were be confidential. All participants were asked to sign a statement of confidentiality. In addition, each participant was asked to sign a consent and confidentiality statement (see Appendix D) rendering the researcher permission to use any or all portions of the interview and documentation submitted in this case study. As a measure of accuracy, respondents were given the option to review their comments prior to the completion of the study. Disclosure of the respondents' responses did not place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or cause damage to their financial standing, employability, or reputation. All documentation collected, such as promotional materials, resumes, career vitas, financial profiles, were already be a matter of public record, therefore there was no violation of confidentiality. In addition, personally identifiable information, such as names, personal contact information and consent forms remained confidential. Documents that were mailed to the researcher were sent to a post office box, to which the researcher had sole access. All written materials will be kept in a file cabinet. The transcripts save on a flash drive will be kept in a safe deposit box at the home of the researcher for 5 years.

The only foreseeable risk to the participants was the time spent during the interview and review of their statements. An estimation of time was explained to the participants prior to beginning the research study. On average, the duration of the

interviews lasted less than one hour. Interviewees were, also, given the opportunity to review their statements once the research was completed. No one requested to review their interview transcripts.

The foreseeable benefit to the respondents' participation in the study was the insight gained into their interpretation of their personal and professional experiences as business owners, supervisors, and community contributors. This insight might transition to self-observation, as according to the findings listed in chapter four, the experiences from the participants' personal lives might have significantly influenced their motivation to pursue entrepreneurism, as well as their steadfast perseverance to successfully cultivate and sustain their businesses.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this phenomenological study followed Creswell's core elements of qualitative data analysis. This qualitative research study used a phenomenological approach, using the four interview questions to answer the research questions. The conclusions were based on the analysis after the empirical data was collected (Moustakas, 1994).

As the transcripts were studied, themes emerged throughout the textual data (Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007). The transcripts were read in their entirety several times to grasp the content of the interviews and get a sense of the phenomenon which these women experienced. Memos were written, notes were made in the transcripts' margins, and categories were highlighted, determining the characteristics of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007). Several types of coding were used, beginning with topic coding and ending with cross-case

syntheses. The information was gathered, then coded into meaningful categories for both topics and themes beginning with descriptive data, storing basic information about the respondents, followed by topic coding, which analyzed the data and created the categories in which the data was subjugated and placed into categories described as analytic coding (Richards & Morse, 2007). The coded data was used to find corresponding information among the categories, which were combined into broader categories or themes, using "cross-case syntheses" (Yin, 2003 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 75) to find similarities and differences among the participants' experiences. The final interpretation of the findings concluded with detailed examples of the lived experiences of the African American women entrepreneurs in the study.

The notes and transcripts were read several times in their entirety to ensure the coding and interpretations were consistent. Before finalizing the matrix, assistance from an independent reader to read over the transcripts and review the data was conducted to ensure reliability. The independent reader and the researcher met to discuss and confirm the accuracy of the data results. A textual narrative of the findings is presented for each variable of the interview questions.

Summary

Using a small sample, a qualitative phenomenological study was used to identify the motivational factors that lead African American women to pursue entrepreneurism. The sources of information used were biographical information about the women and interview data. Thoughtful consideration was given to potential risks, which were minimal. The only foreseeable risk was the inconvenience of time. Participants were informed of the time commitment prior to beginning the research study. Confidentiality

was maintained throughout the research and thereafter. The only foreseeable benefit to the respondents' participation in the study was the potential insight gained into their interpretation of their work as entrepreneurs.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter provides the results of the phenomenological study exploring the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs. Four interview questions were used for collecting the data to answer the central research question. Each interview question focused on a main variable: Motivational Factors; Family Concerns, Social Barriers, and Educational Influences.

This phenomenological study involved 6 participants who were interviewed in a natural setting of their choice. Due to distance, one participant was interviewed by phone. The other participants were interviewed in their offices. On average, the interviews took about less than an hour. Audio recorded interviews were performed with 4 of the 6 participants who were willing to be recorded. Written notes were taken in lieu of audio recording with the remaining two.

This chapter provides the results of the analysis using phenomenological methods and discussion of the findings accompanied with textual narratives of the participants' lived experiences. The chapter is organized into sections. First, a brief description of the women is provided. This section is followed by the findings for the four major variables explored during the interview. A cross-case thematic analysis provides themes among the women; and in closing, the presentation of each woman's unique story. Textual narratives from the raw data will be included throughout. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, fictitious names were used, and business titles were omitted.

The Women

Six African American women entrepreneurs included in this study. Five reside in the Southern California region. The other participant lives in New Mexico. Of the six entrepreneurs, one defines her business as a second source of income.

Table 1 reveals that all but one of the women were married and two did not have children. The average number of children for those who were mothers was two. The participants ranged in age from 42 to 71. Their average years in business were 8 to 40 plus. All but two had at least a Bachelor's degree, with the majority holding advanced degrees. Of the two who did not have college degrees, one had a technical certificate, and the other had a high school diploma.

Table 1

Demographic Data

*Name	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Years in Business as an entrepreneur?	Highest Education
Melanie	42	Married	1	8	Bachelor's
Darla	45	Married	2	5	Master's
Karen	48	Single	0	11	Medical Degree
Sharon	49	Married	0	9	Juris Doctorate
Laura	51	Married	2	19.5	Technical Certificate
Lorraine	71	Married	2	40+	High School Diploma

Note. *fictitious name

The participants' entrepreneurial occupations varied in addition to their journey to entrepreneurship. Tired of moving from job to job every 2 years in search of contentment, Melanie realized her passion for helping others when she began manufacturing hair care products for a specific hair type. Darla accomplished her

childhood dream of becoming a film producer. Through education and resource support, her company helps other producers realize theirs. Karen is a medical doctor who, out of financial desperation upon completing medical school, decided she needed a second stream of income to assist her in preparing for financial security once retired. She found her niche in network marketing and real estate. In her desire to level the playing field for a specific group of youth, Sharon started a nonprofit organization to be a voice for this target population. As a singer, songwriter, and producer, Laura is doing something she loves and has always wanted to do. What makes her unique is the genre of music she sings. As a self proclaimed optimist, Lorraine says she recognizes a need and fills it. She identified a need for hair care products and styling tools for African Americans and began manufacturing them for professional stylists. Lorraine has continued fulfilling that need for over 40 years.

All of these women were motivated to start their businesses for different reasons. Using a thematic data analysis method, themes were discovered as well as unique topics and themes for each of these women. The next sections will provide the results of these analyses.

Motivational Influence

What motivated these women toward entrepreneurship varied. Some expressed the motivation from an early age and others were clear about it not being something they had really considered.

> Sharon: I didn't think I was an entrepreneur until people started telling me I was. I wanted to level the playing field for children by applying fact-based principles through actions and not words. (personal communication, April 25, 2011)

Similarly, for two others, the thought of becoming an entrepreneur was never an option until one's business partner approached her with the idea of starting a business and another's supervisor made an offer for her to purchase the company.

> Melanie: What motivated me was my business partner. Even in that, I never remember being sparked that, wow, I can start my own business, do something, just create a new lane in anything. I never ever thought like that. Even when_____suggested we start the business, I still didn't have the spirit that yes, this is going to happen. I was doubtful most of the time. (personal communication, May 3, 2011)

> Darla: I had no intention of being a business owner. I had not planned on taking on the responsibility, but what I did have was I recognized opportunity. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)

The other three (3) deliberately chose to pursue entrepreneurism for three main reasons: financial need, identifying and filling a need, and pursuing a dream.

> Laura: I started the label, primarily, for a couple of reasons. Genre, culture, and independence, as well as income was some of the key factors for me starting it I'm sure if you know the South and the genre of music, it absolutely makes sense. (personal communication, May 5, 2011)

> Lorraine: I am a person who looks for…where there is a need. I try and fill the need. If there is someone that I can observe and say, "Well, they need such and such," and I try to fulfill that need. That's where I focus best, and that's what I like to do. Fulfill a need. I think my calling is a need. (personal communication, June 9, 2011)

> Karen: The choice was more than financial. There was a desperation about it. The future was a long way away. The desperation came from not knowing what was going to happen. (personal communication, June 16, 2011)

Passion/fulfilling a need. Even those who had not made conscious decisions to be entrepreneurs shared the same sentiment of the latter participants. While similar words were not the first that they spoke, the theme repeatedly evolved during their interviews. However, the passion for what the participants did strongly emerged, even if it came to them as an afterthought or revelation.

> Laura: I started doing independent productions of Bluegrass, gospel, and country gospel groups in the South to cater to an audience that was not being serviced mainly because that area was predominately Black.
>
> I will tell you that the bluegrass family, I have found to be extremely embracing and accepting, and it's the purest form of country music, unlike the most commercial, most profitable potential…. I'm happy to be part of this family. (personal communication, May 6, 2011)
>
> Sharon: I have been successful because this is a faith walk. God has provided this for me. (personal communication, April, 6 2011)
>
> Melanie: When I realized that what I was doing was creating a new lane and making so many people happy….When I realized that need, I really became alive inside and excited about being an entrepreneur. Now the world really is wide open and my brain functions differently in where the ceiling is on anything. (personal communication, May 3, 2011)
>
> Darla: I meet a lot of filmmakers. Some really great ones, and some up and coming ones. I like being able to help them. I like being able to get to know them. I meet a lot of actors and it's kind of fun being able to put people together. That's the kind of producer that I am. I like putting all the pieces to the puzzle together and introduce people. This allows me to do that. This allows me to prioritize my life, and I get to do something I love to do. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)
>
> Lorraine: I just want to be contagious. I just want to touch somebody and say, "Come on, let's go now."…I have a passion for hair, she has a passion for nails. You see God works through people. When he works through people, he's going to give you a different something than I and somehow or another, we're going to meet and we're going to start working this thing together. (personal communication, June 9, 2011)

Family concerns. All the participants said their parents were strong supporters. However, in relation to their career decisions, two stated their families did not play a role in the decision. For another, family concerns played a role in terms of the kind of life she would be able to have as a newlywed who planned to have children in the near future. One participant did not address the question in respect to the nuclear family, but rather as community.

Lorraine: If you look at the family and the industry….I came from the south where we were in our area and we were also across the tracks, but we still had our own businesses….Hair is one of these things that is unique to Black people. We can do hair in our community. The beauty salon has been the anchor of the Black community. They can do hair, take care of their families, and also buy cars. That's what I see, and that's what motivates me, right now, to get that salon going again. (personal communication, June 9, 2011)

Darla: So, I completely fell into it, but I recognized a good deal when I saw it, and it fits. Because it meant I know I could have kids, and I had kids while I was the traveler, which was difficult….It helps that I have a really great husband who can take care of kids. Now we have two of them, and I don't travel nearly as much with the second one, now that I'm in this position. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)

Melanie: I was in my early thirties. I wasn't married, I didn't have children. In fact, I didn't have children on purpose because I didn't feel financially secure or stable enough to have children. I never wanted to cheat myself or my family. So, family didn't play too big of a role because I didn't have a family. (personal communication, May 3, 2011)

Karen: Family didn't play much of a role. My mother was supportive about education and getting a job. My family was surprised about the business. (personal communication, June 16, 2011)

Sharon: I was raised God first, family second. This is what I have always wanted to do. My family was always supportive of everything I did. We all supported each other that way. Whatever we wanted to do, my parents supported us. (personal communication, April 25, 2011)

Laura: My parents were probably my motivators. My parents and grandparents definitely encouraged me to pursue my dream and guided me in an educational way to enhance that….I'd also say the investment of my parents and grandparents' time supporting me when I did pageants and showcases always doing that genre of music. They were involved. They support me all the way through adulthood. (personal communication, May 6, 2011)

Social barriers. The subject of social barriers brought up varied responses, which will be made clear during the single themes sections. Based on the responses received, two did not appear to believe social barriers made an impact on their careers.

Race was the most common response. However, during the interview, a few of the participants had difficulty discussing the subject. After talking for a few minutes, they began giving examples of their experiences.

> Sharon: There are stereotypes about who helps people of color. The media always portrays people who help people of color as those who do not look like those that the organization is serving. The media leaves one to believe that the ones who are helping are white. However, that is not the case. It is people who look like the population that the organization is helping who help most. (personal communication, April 25, 2011)

> Laura: I don't want to say they held me back. I feel like you hold yourself back when you put up your own obstacles and your own walls. You don't climb over it. I personally didn't think I had a cultural problem, but the industry had a cultural questioning of it. For me, I thought it was as natural as girls of my generation who grew up on Motown who were not of color and pursued their artistic dream. That I could never understand. So, I didn't try to understand it. I just kept doing it because it was totally me, and it is me. (personal communication, May 6, 2011)

> Darla: It's an odd thing. I don't find there's as much of a barrier. Like, I think of my barriers, the things that would be challenging as being a Black female. They are a little bit. A little bit when you're female, but there are female filmmakers everywhere, and there's just a respect among filmmakers, so not necessarily that. A little of a barrier for being Black, only because people seem unfamiliar with the vast and substantial arena in which we work. Like, I'm a Black female who isn't hocking anything that can be sold in a beauty shop. I think that's the first thing that people kind of say, "Oh, your have a business," you know? I'm not hustling. Film is notorious for people hustling. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)

> Lorraine: There have been a lot of social barriers, but I don't let that stop me. Now, it's subtle. Or, even back then, it's subtle….I can't focus because they've been long ago, and like I say, I don't want to focus on and pray before I do anything so God opens the doors….I remember one thing. We had a product, and a company told us we couldn't manufacture the products, even though we were manufacturing it and selling it to our own people. They wanted the opportunity to sell it to our people themselves. With that, we have the company name [company] now. We've had the name [company names followed by spelling], because the person asked if we would consider…and if we didn't consider, they would sue us,

> or something like that. So, that's why we couldn't use that particular name. (personal communication, June 9, 2011)

Formal and informal education. The responses to education varied among the interviewees. However, they all agreed on the fact that education was beneficial to their success, with the exception of two. For one, although she believed education was important in terms of its impact on her as an entrepreneur, she perceived herself as doing the opposite of what she was taught. In other words, the path which she was conditioned to follow was not right for her. Education was a key piece of the journey. However, in turn, she chose to follow a route opposite of what she was taught.

For the other, because her education did not exceed beyond high school, she did not credit education to her success, but rather a desire for a better life. She has gained informal education, mostly by *character building* lessons learned and research for her products, throughout her years in her profession.

Another respondent thought it was better to begin working in her line of work, than get the training she needed. She believed that it was more cost effective to *get your feet wet* and determine the areas in which one needs training than to enroll in training courses without having done any work in the field. To date, she continues to take seminars, periodically, in order to stay abreast of the latest information.

The other respondents, whether formally or informally, believed education was important. Additionally, they found continued education to be beneficial to their work.

> Karen: In my line of work, it is best to wait until you have worked in the field before taking education courses. It's okay to take a course or two to learn what internet marketing is about, but you won't know what you don't know until you've started doing the job. Then, you'll know the areas where you need the training. To do it the other way can be expensive and unnecessary. (personal communication, June 16, 2011)

> Sharon: As a Black woman, you have to be prepared. Do more than others. Because I had the background as an attorney and a missionary who traveled to various continents, people said, "Okay, you're qualified to do this." (personal communication, April 25, 2011)
>
> Melanie: The only thing I can say is my experience, education wise, molded me to not do that. Whatever I learned there was not the way I wanted to do that. (personal communication, May 3, 2011)
>
> Laura: I had a great opportunity to take advantage of a business vocational course…, which totally prepared me for the business sector. The other is music. I had music in school, music in church, even in the community. Associating with people in the music that you do. Or even if you don't do that genre also can influence you and it has influenced me….It make me feel more credible as a singer/songwriter. (personal communication, May 6, 2011)
>
> Darla: Informally, I decided what I wanted to do when I was twelve. I had a whole plan at twelve, and I did it. So, informally, when I said I wanted to make films, my Mom said, "Cool." She never thought it was crazy.
> Formally, I have a Master's degree from the [Program Name] at [School]….I think [program name] helped me put heft behind my opinions and to formulate them in a better way….for me and a lot of the people who are still my friends in the industry, our time at [program name] was invaluable. (personal communication, May 25, 2011)
>
> Lorraine: If you're not educated, you've got to find something physical that you can do. So, that's where I am. It doesn't stop me from succeeding, just cause I don't' have the education, Even though, I'd like to have it and I didn't….I wish I could say education, but it was a desire to do better in life and take my opportunity. (personal communication, June 9, 2011)

Cross-case thematic analysis findings. Through the completed analysis process, I discovered a total of 39 passages. Of the 39 passages, five themes emerged. Of these, five themes, two had subthemes, equaling three subthemes in total. Table 2 displays a cross coding matrix of the themes and subthemes in the form of in vivo codes, actual words used by the participants during their interviews (Creswell, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007). The theme, fulfilling a need, intertwined with passion and the subtheme

loving what one does. Because of this, the former theme will not be discussed separately, but will be included with the other narratives as they apply.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

		Karen	Sharon	Melanie	Laura	Darla	Lorraine
1	Believed Education was Beneficial to Their Success	x	x		x	x	
2	Did Not Pursue Entrepreneurship		x	x		x	
3	Passion/Fulfilling A Need		x	x	x	x	x
	*Always Wanted to do This		x		x	x	x
	*Loving What She Does	x	x	x	x	x	x
4	Race		x		x	x	x
	*Gender		x		x	x	
5	Strong Parental Support	x	x	x	x	x	

Note. *subthemes

Single Themes

The different social environments in which the participants were exposed brought forth themes synonymous with individual participants that continually evolved throughout their interviews.

Karen. Karen is an obstetrician and gynecologist by trade. She encountered a period of difficulty, and in desperation, decided she needed a second stream of income. Initially, her plan was to stop practicing medicine and transition into her second business fulltime. However, time ran out, and she decided to continue working until time to retire and supplement her income with her second stream of income.

Karen's family was surprised at her entrepreneurial ingenuity and played no role in her business decision. Her support from her mother came as encouragement to get an education and a job.

Although she did not go into detail, she stated that her business partner was her only social barrier, and she developed friends though her business who have supported

her. Karen further mentioned that in her business it was difficult to know who was really in one's corner. She said:

> People will approach you saying one thing, but as you get started working with them, you'll find that they don't have your best interest in mind at all. They have a completely different agenda. So, you have to be careful and know who to trust. (personal communication, June 16, 2001)

Karen spoke about the subject of education in detail. She stressed that education was important, but it was easy to overspend in this area. As previously mentioned, she said it was more cost effective to start working in the business, figure out what one needs to learn, then get the education. She continues to enroll in seminars, periodically, in order to remain current on the latest information pertaining to her business.

The themes that emerged throughout Karen's interview were that her business decision was made solely on her own as a way to protect her financial future. As a topic point, she mentioned that besides herself, her grandfather was the only entrepreneur in the family. She recalled:

> My grandfather was an entrepreneur until he died in 1962. He left his estate to my grandmother who never worked for anyone a day in her life. She turned the estate into a stream of income and maintained an income through her earnings from the estate until she died in 2001. (personal communication, June 16, 2001)

Sharon. Sharon never considered herself an entrepreneur. She is merely doing something she always wanted to do, and credits her parents for their continued support. Throughout her interview, Sharon used her father's work in the community as an example for her success. She reminisced:

> I thought my father was everybody's father. Years later I would go into a store and people would day, "You're [father's name] daughter? You can't pay for anything here." I said, "Dad, I didn't know you did all this." He said, "Yes, you're not supposed to talk about the things you do. You're supposed to do them without expecting anything in return. (personal communication, April 25, 2001)

Sharon believed that she would not be successful were it not for her faith in God and the fact that she is doing something that she always wanted to do. "This is a faith walk," (personal communication, June 16, 2001) she says. The challenges are great, particularly as a woman and as a Black woman, separately, and dismantling stereotypes, which were recurring themes. She passionately articulated, "I always have to deal with the fact that I'm a woman. I have to dismantle stereotypes. People who work for me have entrenched beliefs and don't trust my leadership." (personal communication, April 25, 2001)

Melanie. Without realizing it, Melanie was in pursuit of happiness. After graduating from college, she frequently changed jobs, feeling something was missing. The idea of entrepreneurism never entered her mind. Her father was in the military, and her mother always worked. Their influence was to get an education and get a job with benefits and a good retirement package.

Unrelated to her continuous dissatisfaction with her jobs, Melanie was also dissatisfied with the choice in hair care products for her hair texture. She began mixing and matching products until she came up with a concoction for her hair that satisfied her. She gave the concoction to a friend of hers who had the same texture, and she loved it. Melanie gave the product to a few other people and got the same reaction. Melanie's friend asked her if they could go into business together if she found a lab. She said, "Yes."

Through the process of getting the company started, Melanie was skeptical. She felt judged and doubted by her friends from high school and college who went into professional fields. She posited:

> I felt judged and doubted by them like maybe I was just goofing off, instead of this was a really serious business thing that I was putting my all into….But, I also knew I tried to do what they do, and that would never work for me. I was judging myself. They knew I was going to jump around by then. Sometimes they were a little jealous. (personal communication, May 3, 2001)

Melanie's common thread was the fact that entrepreneurism was not a deliberate choice. However, as she began to see the outcome of the effort that she and her partner put into it, she began to feel passionate about what she was doing and the happiness that her product brought to the people who used it. Melanie ended by saying, "Now I really feel passionate about what I'm doing, and I never felt that way before, but I didn't know that." (personal communication, May 3, 2001)

Laura. Laura is doing what she always wanted to do. In her hometown, she was the first Black Country music DJ, a job she loved. Then she began doing independent productions of Bluegrass, gospel, and country gospel groups in an area that wasn't being serviced. The earnings from her independent productions helped start her record label. She relocated to Southern California from her hometown, where she has recorded eight projects since 1992. With the exception of her social networks, Laura handles every division of her company. Her common theme is the unique genre of music which she performs and produces. Included in the thematic thread are gender, race, and culture. She explained that independence was a key factor in starting her label. She said, "It's quite a challenge to take on. Yet, I met with more challenges by being signed by labels that would take me seriously, but felt that I was either too *country* for country or whatever." (personal communication, May 6, 2001)

Although unwilling to allow the barriers of race and culture impede her progress, Laura said there were many social barriers. Although she, initially, talked around them, perhaps, not wanting to relive those experiences. She led into the subject by saying:

> I won't say that I'm allowing things to hold me back. That's why I'm doing it. You know what I'm saying? So, I don't want to say they held me back. I feel like you hold yourself back when you put up your own obstacles and your own walls. You don't climb over it. (personal communication, May 6, 2001)

However, Laura says she's comfortable with what she's done and where she is. She loves the genre and feels accepted by those who work in the genre. She says, "I'm happy to be part of the family. I'm grateful to God."

Darla. Darla's common theme was work and life balance. It was important to her to have a job she enjoyed and the control of her schedule to spend time with her family. Like Melanie, Darla had not planned on becoming a business owner. She worked as a film producer. The company abruptly closed. Around the same time, she became ill. Her illness lasted almost two years. During this time, she began pondering her plans for her future. She said, "I had to make a choice about how I wanted to live, and did I want to keep on the treadmill knowing that it would dictate everything else in my life." (personal communication, May 25, 2001)She knew she wanted to stay in film, but she wanted to have the freedom to control her work environment, as much as she could, and be happy doing it. In her explanation she states:

> I was trying to decide the kind of life that I was going to lead from that point. I honestly thought to myself that life is too short to spend your days and your nights with people you wouldn't want to be with if you don't have to. I decided that I didn't want to work anywhere where I would have to eat a meal with someone that I wouldn't actually invite to my table, which is a lot of meals when you're in development. (personal communication, may 25, 2001)

Darla found the perfect job for herself by chance. It had only been posted for a day or two. Out of 200 applicants, she was chosen for the job. She said, "I really just fell into this job. In some kind of serendipitous *whatever* that I just happened to stumble upon it." (personal communication, May 25, 2001)

Initially, Darla told the owner she couldn't take the job because she was getting married the day after the owner said he wanted her to take her first trip. However, four days before her wedding, he called and offered her the job. She started working four days after her return from her honeymoon. After a period of time, the owner decided he wanted to do something else and asked her if she wanted to purchase the business. Recognizing a good opportunity, she accepted his offer.

Race and gender are somewhat challenges for Darla, but not much. She says what stands out most is age. Darla and her staff dress casually, as compared to the other executives. Normally, she dresses in jeans, t-shirts, and a blazer. This is done in order to relate to the people she helps. However, because of this, she is suspected of being younger than she is and having less knowledge and experience than she does. Darla explains:

> We go places in jeans and maybe a blazer or something. We have to be able to sit in a dive bar, drink a beer, talk, know what people are talking about and know what's there and understand it. So we have to age down. We have to be able to articulate what we need to articulate, but we need to be able to say it, not in slang or lingo and things like that, but of the speak of the people with which we work. (personal communication, may 25, 2001)

Darla loves what she does and likes that she has the freedom to spend quality time with her family. She says the greatest part of being an entrepreneur is that it allows her to have a family life and implement the things that are important to her. She said, "I leave at five o'clock. I pick up my son. My husband picks up my daughter. We go home. We

have dinner. I take them to school in the morning; then I go workout. That part is really fantastic."

Lorraine. Lorraine's single themes begin as soon as her interview begins and threads throughout her conversation almost without pause. Simply put, she wished she had a college education; however, it was not education but desire for a better life, the ability to identify a need and fill it, and a passion to revitalize the community that motivated her to build and sustain her business. She believes Black beauty salons, which have been the anchor in the Black community, are in need of revitalization. She said:

> Right now, salons are closing and Black women have to go to, maybe, work for hospitals – stuff like that – to try and make ends meet. Where if we can get the salons going again and have people going back into the salons, opposed to wearing this hair, then, I think our community will grow because that's more revenue staying in our community. (personal communication, June 9, 2001)

She had difficulty talking about social barriers, perhaps because she had worked so hard to overlook the challenges they produced, in order to sustain her business. However, she eventually talked about her experiences. Some were racially motivated. Others were competitors attempting to put her company out of business. With each experience, she learned valuable lessons, which contributed to her success.

> Now I know better, so I try to go around all those types of situations so that we can move ahead. I'm not trying to sell to all the other nationalities. I know where my focus should be….So, I have to stick within my grounds and that is to sell within our community and be as interesting, make my product look as good to be able to compete with the competition. (personal communication, June 9, 2001)

Lorraine believes residents in the Black community need to network more and support the businesses in their communities. She also says it is up to business owners like her to provide jobs for people in the community. She posits:

> Being the industry is ten billion dollars, all that revenue is going out. All the hair is going out. If we could get all that money to circulate in our community, then we would be able to survive. But, it bothers me when our communities are lacking in our own businesses. And that's what we've got to do. Set up our own businesses. Let each other know by networking where we are.
>
> What I'd like to see happen is that we network amongst each other and get our people working….If we don't give our own people jobs, where are they going to get them from? (personal communication, June 9, 2001)

Lorraine is passionate about revitalizing the community. She is also aware of the number of residents who are unemployed and lends support by having a community food drive in the parking lot of her business twice a week. Her company partners with a nonprofit organization to provide this service to the community. She also gives out back-to-school items to children at the beginning of the school year. Her most recent community-based project in development is a network resource program for business owners in the community. Her last words were, "Networking and coming together, that's the main thing we need to do." (personal communication, June 9, 2001)

Summary

This chapter provided results obtained from the lived experiences of 6 African American women entrepreneurs. Also presented were the demographic data and themes as derived by the phenomenological data analysis of the study, as they related to the variables taken from the four open ended interview questions. The variables were (a) Motivational Factors, (b) Family Concerns, (c) Social Barriers, and (d) Educational Influences. The motivation for becoming entrepreneurs varied among the women. For most, they were doing something they always wanted to do. However for two respondents, entrepreneurism was not a deliberate choice. Yet once they began their entrepreneurial journey, their passion was realized. Equally important, other participants

stated the primary reasons for choosing entrepreneurism were financial need, identifying and filling a need, and pursuing a dream.

There were five themes that emerged from the data analysis, which included textual narratives from the raw data of the participants' interviews. The five themes were (a) Believed Education was Beneficial to Their Success; (b) Did Not Pursue Entrepreneurship; (c) Passion/Fulfilling a Need; (d) Race; and (e) Strong Parental Support. Of the five themes, two had subthemes. Always Wanted to Do This and Loving What She Does were subthemes of the third theme Passion/Fulfilling a Need. Gender was the subtheme of the fourth theme Race. The themes that emerged from the four variables were derived through the use of cross-case thematic analyses. The explanations of the analyses were accompanied by the use of textual narratives of the raw data. The narratives provided a visual description of the participants' lived experiences and served to draw the reader closer to the women in the study. Finally, the descriptive stories of these 6 African American women entrepreneurs further illustrated who these women are and provided a window into their phenomenon. The analysis of the results resulted in five conclusions which will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview

African American women have been leading in statistics as having the highest growth in business ownership (Herman, 2008; Reuben, 2008; Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004, Robinsons-Jacobs, 2001). Inasmuch as their reasons for pursuing entrepreneurism vary depending on their social construct, their business success often persists beyond 5 years. Although the number of Black women business enterprises is growing, information pertaining to this group of professional women is limited. Their stories are rarely told or merged with other women of color (Business Week Online, 2007; Buttner & Moore, 1997; Vaughn, 2008), serving an injustice to all involved, as each group of women deserves to be heard in its unique voice.

The purpose of this study was to identify the motivational factors that influence African American women to pursue entrepreneurism. In order to gather the data for analysis, one central question guided the research.

1. What motivational factors have influenced African American women to pursue entrepreneurship?

To obtain findings, four open-ended interview questions were asked of 6 African American women entrepreneurs. All participants who resided locally were interviewed in her place of business with her permission. Due to her geographic location, one participant was interviewed over the phone. The interviews were either audio recorded or written in longhand, then transcribed. Participants were provided with the interview questions ahead of time which supported all interviews being completed in less than an hour.

Four variables comprised the focus of the interview questions: a.) Motivational Factors, b.) Family Concerns, c.) Social Barriers, and d.) Educational Influences. Through a cross-case thematic analysis method, data was categorized using the four variables as a foundation for this phenomenological study. The transcripts were read several times in their entirety and categorized into five emerging themes and three subthemes. An explanation of the findings was augmented with textual narratives taken from the raw data. The five emerging themes and three subthemes are as listed:

- Theme 1 Believed Education was Beneficial to Their Success.
- Theme 2 Did Not Pursue Entrepreneurship.
- Theme 3 Passion/Fulfilling a Need.
  - Always Wanted to Do This.
  - Loving What She Does.
- Theme 4 Race.
  - Gender.
- Theme 5 Strong Parental Support.

Conclusions and Implications

Along with the five emerging themes derived from the analyses, the synthesized data uncovered single themes from the individual interviews. The single themes are unique to each participant and are added to the overall conclusions of the analyses. Five conclusions are made from the phenomenological interviews. Each is presented below along with discussion of implications.

Conclusion 1. Driving motivators for entrepreneurship are the pursuit of happiness and passion for the work. While financial growth and economic strength are essential factors in the pursuit of entrepreneurism for these women, they are not the key influences that contributed to their decision to become business owners. Nor is it their litmus test for defining their success (Blockson, et al. 2007, Boyd, 2000; hooks, 1993; Smith-Hunter, 2003). Their passion for what they do was a reoccurring theme throughout the study. Even the respondents who did not deliberately choose entrepreneurism were motivated by the passion they discovered as they delved into their businesses. Moreover, the majority of the respondents were doing something they always wanted to do, stating phrases such as, "I have wanted to do this since I was twelve", "I was led by God", "This was a faith walk". In tandem with their passion, they all found motivation in the idea of fulfilling a need. While the rise in their annual earnings was sought and appreciated, the intrinsic indicators, the fulfillment of witnessing the benefits of their work in others, served as confirmation to their success. They found joy in their work because they loved what they were doing. Therefore, the long hours that come along with the responsibility of entrepreneurism were easier to endure because their work was enjoyable. Furthermore, although operating one's own business can be stressful, the elimination of the psychological strain of reporting to someone, along with the office environment stressors, such as too many failed attempts at piercing through the "cement ceiling" (Catalyst, 2004) or shifting to reduce the cultural disconnect (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) reduces tension and improves work life balance. Entrepreneurism provides an emotional release. The women feel a sense of accomplishment that is possibly unattainable in the workplace, they have more professional and creative control, and there is no ceiling

through which to chisel. Self determination can be fully exercised (hooks, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Malveaux, 2008).

Conclusion 2. Ability to achieve work life balance contributes to success as an entrepreneur. Family was important to all of the participants, but the familial role did not influence all of the participants' decisions to pursue entrepreneurism. However for the majority, work life balance was a key motivator in their decision to pursue entrepreneurism. Although one respondent was single at the start of her business and only had herself to consider, she stressed the importance of having the freedom to bring her two year old daughter to work with her and the benefit of having her husband, who helped care for their daughter, on staff.

Another respondent felt being an entrepreneur created the perfect work life balance for her and her family. With two children under the age of 5, having the freedom to control her schedule was very important to her and her husband, as they wanted to provide a stable home environment for their children. Even though her job required her to travel, she found comfort in knowing she did not have to rely on others to raise her children, as she could take them with her if she chose to do so.

The literature shows that African American women have always carried the responsibility of caring for the welfare of their families, which is also true for women of other ethnicities (hooks, 1993; Malveaux, 2008). History illustrates work life balance was a key motivator for African American women choosing to run boarding houses or other services that could be operated from their homes (Boyd, 2000; Grossman, as cited in Boyd, 2000, p. 652). They had the ability to earn money to support their families without relying on others to care for their children while they worked (Boyd, 2000).

Unlike earlier decades, more men are currently participating in the rearing of their children, which also contributes to the work life balance.

Conclusion 3. Community involvement is viewed as a responsibility. Perhaps due to the age of the participants or their environmental exposure, some respondents in the study related family concerns to community. This did not come as a surprise since it is well documented that African American women are fundamentally connected to their communities. Often viewed as pillars of their communities, African American women feel a sense of responsibility to give back and sustain their communities through mentoring, employing residents, or providing services that contribute to the health and welfare of the population (Blockson, et al. 2007, Boyd, 2000; Catalyst, 2004; Hooks, 1993; Smith-Hunter, 2003).

As confirmed by the literature, one of the key identifiers of success among Black women business owners is their contribution to their communities (Catalyst, 2004). The literature also reveals African American women are more likely than other ethnicities to be involved in their communities. In fact, it is reported that the incorporation of African American women's cultural background and community involvement improve their job performance. The characteristics gained from their community involvement, such as the value of teamwork, fairness, resourcefulness, and spiritualism contribute to their work style, which adds to their success as entrepreneurs (Blockson, et al. 2007, Boyd, 2000; Catalyst, 2004; hooks, 1993; Smith-Hunter, 2003).

The research analysis indicates the participants in this study provide support to their communities by contributing to the economic growth of the community. They recycle their dollars in their communities, employ residents, and volunteer in service

organizations. One of the respondents is a commercial entrepreneur by trade. However, she has a social entrepreneurial spirit. She steadfastly gives back to her community. She makes a point of hiring residents who live in the community of her establishment, and she works with a nonprofit organization that distributes free produce in the parking lot of her establishment to the members of the community. She views her efforts to revitalize the community as a calling. Additionally, two of the participants in this study provide books, backpacks, and school supplies to children who reside in their communities.

Community involvement also serves as a link to the social networks that African American women entrepreneurs use as their support base at the start of their businesses and throughout their existence. This source of support serves as the foundation for the sustainability and financial growth of their businesses (Boyd, 2000; Smith-Hunter, 2003).

Conclusion 4. Reluctance to talk about barriers. The literature reveals that one of the common social barriers that African American women face in the workplace falls under the umbrella of social identity in the form of race. Moreover, because they are women, issues of race and gender sometimes occur simultaneously, creating a double disadvantage (Blockson, et al. 2007, Boyd, 2000; hooks, 1993; Smith-Hunter, 2003). Entrepreneurism does not exempt these African American women from being confronted with the social barriers, namely race. However, research findings show their experiences and their approach to discussing the subject of barriers differed greatly.

When the participants were asked the question about social barriers, responses ranged from an inability to identify barriers to speaking expressively about the encumbrance of race and gender. Those in between mentioned race but were apprehensive about talking about their experiences, leaving the researcher with the

impression that it was a difficult subject to talk about, perhaps because they had devoted substantial emotional energy in transcending the painful barriers that race can potentially create. However, without coaxing, the women gradually began disclosing their experiences about race as it pertained to their entrepreneurial journey. They talked about the fact that, as Black women, their authority was often questioned. Because of their race and gender, it was assumed that they did not know their jobs. One respondent mentioned being forced to change the name of her company in order to avoid a law suit. The interesting piece to her story was that she was marketing her product to the African American community. Recognizing her financial success, a company of another ethnicity wanted to take over her niche of the market, using an identical product and the name of her company. Setting out to do just that, the company gained the legal rights to her company's name and told her she would be sued if she did not change the name of her company. As a result, she changed the spelling of her company's name and cataloged the experience as a lesson learned and one not to be repeated. Other respondents had similar disturbing stories. However, none of these women allowed their circumstances to discourage them. In fact, they found strength during challenging times, making them more determined to persevere.

The responses to the questions of social barriers given by these women were comparable to the research findings presented by Catalyst (2004) and Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) on the subject of race among African American women in the workplace. Both studies assert, in effect, some of the common barriers facing African American women are stereotypes, questioning of authority, credibility, and lack of "fit." Additionally, because of the sensitivity surrounding the topic of race, they rarely mention

the subject to their colleagues. Their apprehensiveness to talk about race in the workplace is due to their unwillingness to risk being misunderstood. As a result, many African American professional women isolate themselves in the workplace or create a small circle of colleagues with whom to communicate, but keep a comfortable distance to avoid fully revealing herself (Catalyst, 2004; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Conclusion 5. Education is essential to sustaining business. No matter the level of education or the era in which it is referenced, education has been encouraged, promoted, and financed by African American women entrepreneurs as early as the 1700s (Boyd, 2000; Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004; Schweninger, 1989; Smith-Hunter, 2003; Walker, 2009; Women in History, 2010). To date, education continues to be viewed as a pinnacle step to advancement in one's professional and social life. The literature states an increasing number of African American women entrepreneurs have advanced degrees (Catalyst 2004). The research findings show, although two of the women in the research study did not have college degrees, all of the respondents agreed education was important and beneficial to their professional growth and sustainability. They all follow professional development practices to stay abreast of the current trends of their professions. Education was the single common theme among the women in this study.

To summarize, these research findings support previous research reported in chapter two. The data analysis in the research study identified like threads through all of the respondents' interviews. However, education was only one common theme among the women in this research study. The importance of education is identical to the literature, as even the African American women entrepreneurs from past history viewed education as a vital resource. The key motivator for the women in this study was having passion for

their work and loving what they do. They all believed they were fulfilling a need, which motivated them to persist. Their responses varied in terms of social barriers; however, race was the most similar thread. In addition, some who raised the subject of race were, initially, reluctant to talk about it in detail, but slowly began to disclose information. Family concerns were significant to all of the respondents, with work life balance being the primary thread. Yet, the reference to family ranged from parents, to husband and children, to community. Each participant's interview contained single themes which were not included in this section but will be addressed in the recommendations.

Methodological Limitations

An important limitation of this study involved the interview protocol, which includes the length of time allotted for the interview, the questions asked, and that two of the interviews were note taken rather than audio recorded. In respect for the participants' time, the researcher chose to limit the interview questions to four, as well as provided the questions for the participants to review prior to the scheduled interview. This kept the interview under an hour, allowing the respondents to return to their busy schedules. The questions were scripted to allow the respondents to freely disclose information about themselves. Increasing the time of the interview in order to add one or two more questions would have provided an even closer look into the lived experiences of these women, thus adding to the documented research findings. The use of note taking rather than audio recording runs the risk of losing relevant data. All interviews should be audio recorded. In circumstances where interviews are facilitated over the phone, an audio system should be identified and tested prior to the interview session to ensure that all data will be captured without the delay of technical complications.

A second limitation involves the small number of women involved. It would be reasonable to wonder whether these women were characteristic of all African American women entrepreneurs. During segregation it is more likely that these women would represent an aggregate group. More African American women shared similar experiences, due to fewer opportunities for advancement academically and economically. In fact, the majority of Black people lived in close proximity of each other in centralized locations, which meant their social exposure was similar if not identical (Boyd, 2000; Smith - Hunter, 2003). After integration, this was no longer true. African Americans have taken advantage of the freedom to live where they choose, diversifying their social experiences. They also have unlimited access to education. Although there might be limits to the levels that African American women can advance in certain corporate structures, many have secured executive positions (Herman, 2008; Malveaux, 2008). Additionally, there are many biracial women who identify themselves as African American. With these factors in mind, it is reasonable to suspect that a larger representation of African American women entrepreneurs would be needed to collect significant data for this study.

Recommendations

Recommendations include some related to the methods and others related to the outcome of the collected data.

1. Expand interview process.
    a. Include a question about annual earnings and long range forecasts. Questions about annual earnings were deliberately left out because it did not apply to the research purpose. Statistics show African American

women entrepreneurs have the lowest annual “per firm” average in annual receipts (Robinsons - Jacobs, 2001). However, many Black-women owned enterprises are reaching the millions. These findings need to be documented.

b. Methods for raising start-up capital.

As widely documented, most of the women in this study used their personal revenue to start their businesses (Blockson, et al. 2007; Catalyst, 2004, Smith - Hunter, 2003). If this information is to be used as a resource for young women who desire to become entrepreneurs, insight into the path these African American women business owners took to raise their financial capital would serve as a helpful resource guide.

c. Use of support networks.

African American women entrepreneurs’ social networks are a vital resource to their professional growth. Yet, the literature states the majority of them rarely participate in networks of diverse groups. A question pertaining to this topic will allow the researcher to verify whether previous findings remain valid and identify reasons why African American women entrepreneurs do or do not associate with diverse networking groups.

2. Broaden the geographic location when recruiting participants.

    a. Choose respondents in other regions.

        The literature reveals one's social constructs determines the way one enters into entrepreneurship. Those social constructs include where and how start-up capital is generated, the type of social networks that are utilized, the availability of opportunity, and creative innovation (Blockson, et al. 2007). While African American women continue to share cultural similarities, their freedom to live in different geographic regions has resulted in diverse social experience. Hence, inquiry into how living in different regions influences the social constructs and social stratification of African American women entrepreneurs when accessing and pursuing entrepreneurship is recommended.

3. Develop a resource Guide.

    a. Resource for women aspiring to be entrepreneurs.

        More African American women are choosing to attempt entrepreneurism. In fact, some young African American women have made entrepreneurism a first choice on their career path. This research study provides statistical data about the educational and professional growth of African American women. It explains the various types of entrepreneurs and gives historical information about the women who paved the way for today's African American women entrepreneurs. It is recommended that the data in this document be used as a tool to motivate and educate women who are considering entrepreneurism.

b. Organizations and individuals working with young women.

Although this research study only involved African American women, the data can be used to motivate all young women. The research data reveals examples of self determination, self confidence, and perseverance. It also details the freedom to be individually expressive, the significance of doing what one loves, the importance of education, and the benefits of giving back to one's community. During a period when young women are inundated with negative images of women presented in the media, the information in this document will provide those working with young women with an alternative example to which they can aspire.

4. Recommendation for further research.

a. Study generational variable.

During the discussion of social barriers, some of the participants did not think there were any social barriers, while other interviewees did. Of the group of participants who mentioned experiencing social barriers, half were initially hesitant to discuss their barriers, and the other half immediately began to speak freely about their experiences. Upon reviewing the data, it was discovered that the division was segmented by age. The younger age group did not think there were any barriers. The older age group was hesitant to talk about social barriers, but began to speak freely after a few seconds of conversing. The middle age group immediately began to share their experiences. It is reasonable to suspect that as one gets older one has time to reflect, whereas the younger group has experienced less and might not

recognize social barriers when they come in contact with them. It is recommended that generational variables be explored in terms of how experiences are viewed.

Final Comments

The women in this study were remarkable to work with and a prime example of the strength, intelligence, and perseverance that so many African American women display regardless of exposure, environment, or education. Too often, African American women are overlooked along with all they have to offer the world. However, despite efforts to silence them, the women in this study remained true to themselves, their passions, and their goals. They understood that with running a business comes total responsibility for the sustainability and growth of the company. While embracing the challenges, they found comfort in having the ability to control their schedules, which provided for better work life balance. They felt reassured in knowing the level to which they could achieve was unlimited. These African American women entrepreneurs took pride in setting an example for others to follow and graciously gave of themselves when and where they could.

Lastly, it is believed that the momentum that African American women have taken in the areas of academia and entrepreneurism will not be slowing in the near future. More young African American women are entering college with aspirations of being entrepreneurs. Universities around the country are developing curriculums for entrepreneurship, some specifically emphasizing women. With the unemployment rate among African Americans hovering at 16% (BLS, 2011), the pace will more than likely increase.

Historically, African American women have taken on the responsibility of providing for their families, particularly when their men are without work. This often involves using their creative skills to develop small in-home businesses to help with the household expenses (Blockson, et al. 2007; Catalyst, 2004, Smith - Hunter, 2003). It is believed some of these income generating home operations will have the potential to turn into major corporations, as did some of the women in this study who started their businesses in their homes. Those same businesses are currently bringing in millions of dollars in annual revenue. The rapid growth of their businesses has required them to move into larger spaces and hire employees.

Even though African American women come from diverse backgrounds, they are often categorized as products of undereducated, impoverished, single parent homes, and relying on county assistance for their livelihood. Furthermore, it is assumed that all who have achieved success are the ones who managed to escape the cycle. Speaking from personal experience, I could relate to many of the stories that the participants in this study shared. There have been many times when I have been complimented on how well I was doing by being told that I was not relying on the system to take care of me, but was taking responsibility for myself and doing something with my life.

This body of work is important because it provides historical facts that need to be documented. It also sheds insight into who African American women entrepreneurs are both as a group and as individuals. While they share similar cultural experiences, there are many facets to the individual. African American women entrepreneurs have an abundance of talent to offer this country. This research study will add timbre to a voice worthy to be heard.

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

April 19, 2011

Protocol #: E0311D02
Project Title: *African American Women Entrepreneurs: What Motivates Them to Pursue Entrepreneurism*

Dear Ms. Bailey:

Thank you for submitting the revisions requested by Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools IRB (GPS IRB) for your study, *African American Women Entrepreneurs: What Motivates Them to Pursue Entrepreneurism.* The IRB has reviewed your revisions and found them acceptable. You may proceed with your study. The IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46 - http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) states:

> (b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:
>
> **Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101**, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact me. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Jean Kang, CIP
Manager, GPS IRB & Dissertation Support
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education & Psychology
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cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Associate Provost for Research & Assistant Dean of Research, Seaver College
Ms. Alexandra Roosa, Director Research and Sponsored Programs
Dr. Yuying Tsong, Interim Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB
Ms. Jean Kang, Manager, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB
Dr. Kay Davis
Ms. Christie Dailo

APPENDIX B

Introduction E-mail

Dear_____,

My name is Cassandra Bailey. I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, working under the supervision of Dr. Kay Davis, Dissertation Chair. Currently, I am recruiting African American women who fit the criteria for my study entitled, "African American Women Entrepreneurs: What Motivates Them to Pursue Entrepreneurism."

The women who meet the criteria for my study must be African American women born in the United States and having completed at least an undergraduate degree, are twenty-five (25) to sixty-five (65) years of age, have completed as least an undergraduate degree, have been in business for a minimum of five years, and whose primary source of income is through their business. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Should you decide to participate, you will be asked to schedule a personal interview with me. The interview will take place at your place of business or over the phone and should last no more than one hour. It will consist of four open-ended questions. You will have the option of refusing to answer any or all questions at any time during the interview.

If you think you are interested in participating in this research study, I will follow up with a formal letter, along with a consent form in which you are to return in the included stamped, addressed enveloped. You will, also, be asked to choose a date and time for your interview, which should also be included with your consent form. If you have additional questions, please give call me at [redacted], or Dr. Davis at [redacted].

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your quick response, as I plan to begin interviewing participants within the next two weeks.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX C

Initial Letter to Potential Participants

Date

Recipient's Name
Recipient's Address

Dear Ms. (Last name of recipient)

I am a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University, working on my dissertation through the Graduate School of Education and Psychology in Organizational Leadership. The professor supervising my work is Dr. Kay Davis. My research topic is African American women entrepreneurs: What Motivates Them to Pursue Entrepreneurism.

The 2002 United States Census listed African American women as the fastest growing group of business owners. African American women hold the largest percentage of businesses owned and operated by women of all races (53%). You have been selected as part of a representative sample of African American women entrepreneurs residing in the United States.

I am writing to request your participation in my research study that will involve a personal interview. The interview process will last no longer than an hour, which entails a series of four open-ended questions. In order to best accommodate your time, the interview can take place face-to-face or over the phone. Upon agreeing to participate and confirming an interview date and time, you will receive a list of the questions to review prior to our meeting. The information you provide will be kept confidential, and you will also have the option of reviewing the summarized interview notes once the study has been completed.

Through the results of this study, I hope to identify the motivational factors that have influenced African American women to pursue entrepreneurship and how they use their motivation to cultivate and sustain their businesses. I also desire to tell the stories of this growing population of women business owners, as well as help the business community identify opportunities to market to this target population of business owners. I hope this research will serve as a supplemental resource to women who are considering entrepreneurism.

Your decision to participate must be received no later than _____(deadline date). A consent form for participation has been included for you to complete and return in the stamped, addressed envelope. Should you decide not to participate, please return the included materials to me. If you have additional questions, I can be reached at the address above. My email address is [redacted]. You may also contact me by phone at [redacted]. Please feel free to leave a message on my answering machine. No one will have access to retrieve your message other than me. If you have additional questions to ask prior to making a decision, please feel free to contact me through either of the three forms of communication listed above. Lastly, if you do not believe that you are the appropriate candidate for this study, but know someone who is, please inform them of the study and submit their contact information to me. I will be happy to personally extend a request for their participation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your early response.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX D

Consent and Confidentiality Statement

I, _____, have read the information above and, hereby grant doctoral candidate Cassandra L. Bailey permission to include me in her research study. I understand that all information collected from this study will be confidential. I understand that I may contact Dr. Kay Davis, research supervisor at [redacted], if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Dr. Yuying Tsong, Education Division Methods Review Coordinator at Pepperdine University at [redacted] or [redacted]. I further understand that I have the option of discontinuing the interview or refusing to answer any or all questions at any time. I have been given a copy of this consent and confidentiality statement for my personal records, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

_____
Date

_____ _____
Participant's Signature Title

_____
Print Name

_____
Address

_____
Phone Number

_____
Witness

_____
Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

_____ _____
Principal Investigator Date

APPENDIX E

Follow-up Letter to Participants

Date

Recipient's Name
Recipient's Address

Dear Ms. (Last name of recipient)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. As previously mentioned, you have been selected as part of a representative sample of African American women entrepreneurs residing in the United States.

Through the results of this study, I hope to identify the motivational factors that have influenced African American women to pursue entrepreneurship and how they have used their motivation to cultivate and sustain their businesses. I also desire to tell the stories of this growing population of women business owners, as well as help the business community identify opportunities to market to this target population of business owners. I hope this research will serve as a supplemental resource for women who are considering entrepreneurism.

I wish to make clear that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may discontinue the interview or refuse to answer any or all interview questions at any time. All information collected in the study is completely confidential. You will also have the option of reviewing the summarized interview notes after the study has been completed. No one has access to retrieve mail from this address or retrieve messages by phone other than me. Therefore, your information will remain completely confidential.

If you agree to participate in the study, please sign the informed consent statement and submit it in the stamped, address envelope included with this letter. There is also a list of dates and times for you to choose from, which is to be included with the signed consent statement. Please submit both documents by _____ (deadline date). If you have additional questions, please contact me by phone at [redacted], e-mail at [redacted], or mail at the above address.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX F

Research StudyInterview Schedule

Please choose a first and second option from the interview schedule. Submit your choices in the self-addressed, stamped envelope included with this packet by _____ (deadline date). You will receive a confirmation letter giving you the actual date and time of your interview along with a list of the interview questions by_____. Thank you, again for volunteering to participate in this research study.

Dates Time

APPENDIX G

Confirmation of Interview for Research Study

Date

Recipient's Name
Recipient's Address

Dear Ms. (Last name of recipient)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. Your interview has been scheduled for _____(scheduled date) at _____(scheduled time). A list of the interview questions is included. Please take time to review them prior to the interview.

I wish to reiterate that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may discontinue the interview or refuse to answer any or all interview questions at any time. All information collected in the study is completely confidential. You will also have the option of reviewing the summarized interview notes after the study has been completed. No one has access to retrieve mail from this address listed above or messages retrieved by phone other than me. Therefore, your information will remain completely confidential.

Thank you, again, for volunteering your time to this research study. I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX H

Research Study Interview Questions

Participant ID_____

1. What motivated you to become an entrepreneur?
2. What role did family concerns play in your motivation to become an entrepreneur?
5. What social barriers did you face that challenged your decision to become an entrepreneur?
4. What formal or informal educational influences molded you to pursue your current professional role?