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From the boardroom to the laptop: an exploration of African-American women's journeys navigating the transition from corporate America to digital entrepreneurship

Nina Grace Shelby

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

FROM THE BOARDROOM TO THE LAPTOP: AN EXPLORATION OF AFRICAN-

AMERICAN WOMEN'S JOURNEYS NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION FROM

CORPORATE AMERICA TO DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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by

Nina Grace Shelby

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Gabriella Miramontes, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Nina Grace Shelby

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Doctoral Committee:

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D., Chairperson

Gabriella Miramontes, Ed.D., Co-Chair/Committee

Maria Brahme, Ed.D., Co-Chair/Committee

Kevin Wong, Ph.D., Co-Chair/Committee

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DEDICATION

To my beloved grandmothers, Nina and Gracie. As I write my dissertation, I am reminded of the love and guidance you both provided throughout my life. Although you have passed on, your memories and legacies continue to inspire me in ways I could never have imagined. You have been two of the most influential figures in my life, and I owe so much of who I am today to your love, guidance, and support.

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Gracie, you were always the picture of grace and elegance. Your unwavering strength and resilience in adversity continue to amaze me. Your wisdom, humor, and no-nonsense attitude have helped me navigate life's challenges with confidence and resilience. Your love for education and lifelong learning inspired me to pursue my academic goals and create a desire within me to make a difference in the world.

As I embark on this academic journey, I do so with the knowledge that you both are with me in spirit. Your unwavering support and love continue to guide me, and I am forever grateful for the time we shared. Moreover, I am continually thankful for the opportunities you created for me through the sacrifices you made in your life. I dedicate this dissertation to both of you with all my heart. It is a testament to your love and legacy, and I hope it will make you proud. With all my love and gratitude, your granddaughter and namesake, Nina Grace Shelby.

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Nina Grace Shelby

VITA

EDUCATION
Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA - Doctor of Philosophy, Global Leadership and Change

Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA -   Master of Science, Management and Leadership

Wiley College, Marshall, TX - Bachelor's of Arts, Mass Communication: Public Communications and Marketing

CERTIFICATIONS AND LICENSURES
Essec Business School, Paris La Défense, France**:** Executive Education International Program- Luxury Brand Management Certification

SKILLS:

- Strong leadership and project management skills.
- Excellent communication, collaboration, and interpersonal skills.
- Ability to build relationships with stakeholders and partners.
- Strong analytical and problem-solving skills.
- Proficient in Microsoft Office Suite, Salesforce, and project management software.
- Demonstrated proficiency in implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives across various companies and organizations.

TECHNICAL SKILLS:

Articulate Storyline 360 | Articulate Rise 360 | Salesforce | Microsoft Office Suite | Google Suite | Website Design Tools | Canva

AREAS OF EXPERTISE:

eLearning | Microlearning | Blended Learning | ADDIE/SAM Models | Adult Learning Theory Methodologies | Virtual Instructor Led Training | Instructor Led Training | Kirkpatrick Model | Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Research Methodologies

EXPERIENCE

Microsoft, Los Angeles, CA
Worldwide Learning Program Manager

- **Strategic Learning Leadership:** Led the development, management, and promotion of global learning programs and initiatives. Utilized data-driven insights to identify organizational needs and secure resources, resulting in measurable impact.
- **Tech-Savvy Influence:** Educated and influenced leaders and stakeholders by staying at the forefront of the latest trends and technologies in the field. Pioneered the adoption of cutting-edge learning solutions.
- **Alignment with Strategic Vision:** Aligned learning and skilling capabilities with the organization's strategic vision. Consistently exceeded performance goals and drove innovation through strategic experimentation.

- **Engagement Enhancement:** Enhanced learner engagement significantly by introducing innovative touchpoints and launching iterative, ramped pilots and experiments at scale. Achieved high levels of learner participation and satisfaction.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Developed strategic relationships with key stakeholders and partners across diverse audiences and business units. Effectively represented and advocated for learning-related needs.
- **Diversity and Inclusion Champion:** Championed diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Fostered a culture of continuous learning and improvement within multiple teams of learning stakeholders.

Merrill Lynch, Beverly Hills, CA
Resident Director Assistant/ Market Client Associate
- Collaborated closely with Financial Advisors to seamlessly onboard new clients, excelling in meticulous documentation review and precise paperwork execution to enhance the client onboarding experience.
- Spearheaded the meticulous upkeep of a 300-client database, guaranteeing data precision in all aspects, ranging from trade executions to account-related activities.
- Exhibited unwavering commitment to achieving objectives and delivering project excellence, resulting in an impressive 90% boost in customer satisfaction scores and operational metrics enhancements.

Maersk Los Angeles, CA
Senior Project Manager, WND Technical Sales
- Spearheaded the end-to-end delivery of mission-critical strategic initiatives, demonstrating a mastery of stakeholder management, resource allocation, and proactive risk mitigation. This encompassed the entire project lifecycle, from inception to successful go-live.
- Pioneered transformative initiatives within the sales development team, orchestrating the redesign of systems, processes, and policies. Oversaw a portfolio of 30+ projects, leading a cross-functional task force to meticulously capture requirements and swiftly resolve challenges. Employed cutting-edge hybrid project management methodologies and advanced tools to streamline operations.
- Orchestrated seamless collaboration with multifaceted, cross-functional teams, orchestrating the meticulous planning and execution of high-impact events. Developed comprehensive action plans, intricate event schedules, and meticulous financial budgets, ensuring the precise execution of these initiatives.

Chrysalis Los Angeles, CA
Employment Specialist
- Managed over 100+ client relationships while increasing program completion rate and retention through job readiness assessments while providing crisis management and employment counseling.
- Performance Management: motivation and management of staff, including resource planning and recruitment, etc.
- Leveraged internal controls to mitigate organizational risk by identifying, researching, and escalating applicable governance, laws, and regulation issues.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS AND LEADERSHIP

- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. *Member.*
- National Black MBA Association- Los Angeles Chapter, *Vice President of Operations*
- Los Angeles Urban League Young Professionals, *Director of Professional Development*
- Hike to Yoga LA, *Director of Strategic Initiatives*
- Brea Chamber Women in Leadership Council, *Women Rising Leadership Academy Participant*
- Council of Urban Professionals Los Angeles Fellowship, *Fellowship Participant*

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- African-American studies
- Entrepreneurship
- Feminist studies
- Behavioral Economics
- Educational Psychology
- Leadership
- Artificial Intelligence

RESEARCH

- Dissertation: *From The Boardroom To The Laptop: An Exploration Of African-American Women's Journeys Navigating The Transition From Corporate America To Digital Entrepreneurship.*
- Unleashing Success: Developing an Employee Onboarding Training and Development Program for Employees in the Technology Field.

HONORS:

- L.A. Civic Leadership and Impact Awards, *Community Engagement Nominee*
- L.A. Works · *This award celebrates trailblazers who defy convention, inspiring others to drive impactful change in Los Angeles.*

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explores African-American women's challenges transitioning from Corporate America to entrepreneurship. It aims to highlight the lived experiences of African-American women entrepreneurs and the strategies they employ to achieve successful business ownership. The study utilized a phenomenological approach, using in-depth interviews with African-American women entrepreneurs to gather data on their experiences. The research findings identify significant challenges such as bias and discrimination, lack of resources and support, and personal obstacles that African-American women face when transitioning to entrepreneurship. The research study also identifies effective business practices used by African-American women, such as networking, mentoring, and having a solid support network. Overall, this study presents insightful information about the experiences of African-American women entrepreneurs and offers suggestions for policies and initiatives that can support their success in their entrepreneurship endeavors.

Keywords: African-American women, women of color, Black business ownership, intergenerational wealth transfer, entrepreneurial succession planning, minority-owned businesses, economic empowerment, legacy building, wealth creation strategies, black wealth generation, multigenerational wealth creation, legacy entrepreneurship

Chapter 1: Introduction

I had to make my own living and my own opportunity. But I made it! Don't sit down and wait for the opportunities to come. Get up and make them.

— Madam C.J. Walker

Background/Historical Context

Entrepreneurship within the African-American community is not a new concept, as there have been noted entrepreneurs dating back to the 1800's. Entrepreneurship has been and still plays a significant role in African-American history, and African-Americans helped to shape American society into what it is today. The story of entrepreneurship originating within the African-American community stems back to a deeply rooted construct of self-governance. This construct, created by African-American ancestors, now leaves an impactful legacy for the advancement of this generation today to continue that work. Furthermore, some of the most notable African-American entrepreneurs were women, such as Madame C. J. Walker, born in 1867, who established herself as the first self-made millionaire, or Annie Malone, born in 1877, the first multimillionaire, who laid the foundation for future generations to be inspired to do the same (Huber, 2009). For this dissertation, the terms *Black* and *African-American* were used interchangeably throughout the study.

Data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM; 2022), an annual comprehensive survey of entrepreneurship rates and attributes, showed that Black business ownership in the U.S. has dramatically increased over the past several years. Moreover, it is African-American women who are accelerating that growth. The 2020 U.S. census reported that Black-owned businesses have grown to over two million and generated 150.2 billion dollars into the economy within the last 10 years (Cunningham, 2021). Additionally, 35% of these Black-owned businesses were founded by women, many of whom used their capital to initiate business ventures. Although this

number may seem minuscule, compared to women business owners of other racial identities, African-American women exceed them by nearly 10%. As of 2021, 17% of African-American women were in the process of or have established new businesses within the U.S. This data is comparable to the 10% of Caucasian women doing the same.

It can be assumed that the term *entrepreneur* is indeed a working definition. Originally derived from the French verb *entrenprendre*, meaning to undertake, scholars have interpreted the definition of entrepreneurship in several different ways, concluding that there is no universal consensus on the exact meaning (Ahmed & Seymour, 2008). The absence of a consistent definition of entrepreneurship continues to be an unanswered challenge to researchers in the academic field. With the scholarly intention to highlight African-American women pursuing entrepreneurship and its historical context, it is imperative first to provide an understanding of the term and what it means. Thornton (1998) stated that Richard Cantillon provided one of the first definitions of entrepreneurship in 1730, describing self-employment. Thornton also described entrepreneurs as non-fixed income wage earners and risk takers because the return on investment is not guaranteed (Hisrich, 1990).

According to Drucker (1970), *entrepreneurship* indicates the creation of a new business, thus suggesting that any individual who succeeds in establishing a new business is an entrepreneur. The GEM (2021) research project, which provides an annual assessment of the national level of entrepreneurial activity in multiple diverse countries, defines entrepreneurship as the creation of a new business or any attempt to do it, such as the expansion of an existing business, a new organization, or established businesses. Each of these definitions is based on the economic environment. However, additional schools of thought propose that there are also personality trait definitions of entrepreneurship.

Differing from the economic definitions that focus primarily on economic stature, scholars stressed that the life experiences of an individual play a significant role in individual entrepreneurship, which is the focus of their definitions. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation formulate several traits that one needs to be a successful entrepreneur. These entrepreneurial characteristics are noted as a need for achievement, self-confidence, pro-activeness, and a focus on the future, demonstrating initiative and creative thinking. In 1934, Joseph Schumpeter added the trait of innovation to the definition. He defined an entrepreneur as someone who can manipulate the market through technical and organizational innovation (Schumpeter, 1965).

More recently, sociological definitions have also been introduced about entrepreneurship. These definitions focus on the connection between group characteristics such as ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, or gender and how these characteristics influence the development of a business endeavor (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Understanding the lack of consensus among researchers and scholars, Ahmad and Seymour (2008) provided the most straightforward explanation, stating that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) contributed to the confusion of studies focused on entrepreneurship, often providing varied definitions for this term. For instance, in the 1997 OECD Economic Survey, entrepreneurship was defined as the vigorous process of recognizing economic opportunities and acting on those prospects through developing, producing, and selling products and services. Ahmad and Seymour explained that entrepreneurship was also defined as the ability of the individual to collect resources and start new business opportunities. However, again, in 2001, the term changed its definition, and entrepreneurship was now equal to self-employment, where an individual worked for themselves and not for anyone else. A final definition came from Cunningham, where entrepreneurship was conceptualized as individuals capable of taking risks

and generating innovative concepts to produce varied products and services (Pihie, 2009). It is evident that the definition of entrepreneurship is ever-changing and up for interpretation depending on the individual; however, there are still many common facets among the definitions set forth by the scholars. Thus, for this academic research, the term was theorized by three commonalities which were

- entrepreneurship consists of creating or growing a business,
- educated risk-taking with no guarantee of a triumphant return on investment, and
- an entrepreneurial identity with attitudinal and behavioral characteristics.

Background of the Study

COVID-19 was a virus that evolved from the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 and has become one of the worst pandemics in modern history (Musselwhite et al., 2020). The virus's rapid infestation and severe health consequences compelled governments worldwide to devise strategies to contain its spread. One of the most significant initiatives was social distancing. As a result of this strategy, educational institutions, workplaces, tourist attractions, and even specific modes of public transportation were permanently closed. Companies and organizations encourage employees to work remotely and comply with national and local containment policies (Xiao et al., 2021). Organizations adhering to government regulations and companies operated primarily from employees' private homes thanks to the widespread adoption of telecommunications technology, specifically video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams. Because of the integration of information technology, businesses are run more efficiently by offering ways to work remotely, which has become an established trend and, for many, a catalyst for change (Marco et al., 2020).

As the government lifted social distancing restrictions, the expectation was that employees would return to offices and resume work as they had before the pandemic. Unbeknownst to employers, many workers had moved into more affordable cities or decided that it was not in their best interest to work in an office, thus initiating a wave of resignations across all economic and business sectors nationwide. This has been dubbed "The Great Resignation," with 3.9% of the workforce resigning as of June 2021 (Weber & Erer, 2023). Interestingly, as resignations increased, entrepreneurship also increased; thus, the conception of digital entrepreneurship was born (Marco et al., 2020).

Digital Entrepreneurship

A survey of working arrangements and attitudes conducted by Barrero et al. (2021) confirmed that many employees preferred working remotely instead of at the office. Moreover, the survey findings indicated that only 57% of employees would comply and return to work, while nearly 35% would not return; instead, they would seek work-from-home opportunities. In addition, the survey indicated that more women than men (57.8%) considered opportunities to work remotely. In many cases, work-from-home opportunities quickly transitioned into entrepreneurship.

Many people developed new interests and hobbies during the pandemic, including social media. Daily challenges, reels, and vlogging via social media platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, became increasingly popular. It was soon realized that being a content creator was not only for fun; everyday people could make a living wage as a social media influencer, a form of digital entrepreneurship. Additionally, small business owners realized they could only do with a physical business to operate from. Instead, these owners could create an online store through websites offering online storefronts and sell their merchandise via their

social media platforms while getting paid from those social media sites while doing so through advertisements. While some individuals pursued digital entrepreneurship full-time, others kept their traditional jobs but followed it in their spare time, creating supplemental income. The great resignation continues today, with more and more people, specifically women, resigning from their positions and pursuing digital entrepreneurship. However, whether "The Great Resignation" is just a trend or digital entrepreneurship is a new and long-withstanding career option remains.

The Promotion of Entrepreneurship in Pop Culture

In July 2022, Beyonce, one of the most admired superstars worldwide, released her hit song "Break My Soul" (Maury, 2022). This song supported the workers' malaise of working in unsatisfactory settings. This song, which the public has deemed the anthem of The Great Resignation, is the latest cultural reference to this labor trend as the country accepts this new normal of living with the COVID-19 virus indefinitely. Some of the song's prominent lyrics expressed African-American women's frustration in Corporate America. For instance, the lyrics examined her love for her position and ultimately left it for something else. In her song, Beyonce discussed how employers work employees beyond their time, making it difficult for them to achieve rest. Thus, there is the idea of being motivated to find something new and building a groundwork where workers release the notion of working a traditional job.

As the song's popularity increased on social media, so did the resignations from a younger public demographic (Maury, 2022). On TikTok, Americans have uploaded hundreds of videos of them quitting their jobs, so much so that this group self-identifies as Quit-Toks. On the popular commentary website Reddit, users use forums to share stories about quitting their jobs and even share resignation emails that they have sent to their managers.

In their research, Peterson and Berger (1971) argued that there are no specific requirements to become an entrepreneur or, in this case, what is known today as a social media influencer, which seems surprising. The primary reason this is astonishing is the societal norms where one would be considered successful in their traditional career; this means the individual would typically have an educational background in their respective field or vast knowledge and experience to substantiate their success. With the advent of digital entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs can now succeed without starting a specialized small business in their specific industry. An individual only needs the capacity to advertise themselves on social media. Everyone who believes that producing content merely entails taking pictures while on the go in routine scenarios is entirely mistaken. Preparing, planning, setting, and editing good content takes hours daily. Fortunately, the majority of people do it because it is their passion. These entrepreneurs are often referred to as professional storytellers, and brands now approach these individuals as real business partners. This claim is also statistics that demonstrate their success. The online persona profession is no longer being undervalued. On the contrary, brands have adapted to depend on these individuals to connect with (and engage) their target consumers.

Statement of the Problem

African-American Entrepreneurs Generational Analysis

Research shows that African-American entrepreneurs are essential to the small business financial system. African-American women alone make up almost 50% of entrepreneurs within the African-American community (Guidant, 2023). This is among the highest percentages of female entrepreneurs within any segment, currently 53% greater than white entrepreneurs (Guidant, 2023). The plurality equaled 33% of surveyed African-American entrepreneurs with a

bachelor's degree. According to that data point, the second most common level of education that small business owners obtained was a master's degree, at 26%.

African-American entrepreneurs tend to be younger than their Caucasian contemporaries. 27% of African-American small business owners classify as baby boomers, compared to 46% of white small business owners (Guidant, 2023). A similar data point shows that 49% classify as Gen X compared to 43% of white small business owners, 21% are classified as Millennials compared to only 11%, and lastly, African-American small business owners who classify as Gen Z sit at 3%, equating to less than 1% of white small business owners.

Happiness Levels Analysis

The research also examined the motivational factors of these entrepreneurs (Cunningham, 2021). There were both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors depicted in the survey results. 36% of African-American entrepreneurs, the majority decided to establish a small business for themselves because the notion of being their boss was attractive. The second largest percentage, 24%, chose entrepreneurship to pursue their passion. The last two groups fell at 17%; one group felt inspired by a new innovative business venture, and the latter were simply disgruntled with Corporate America and the notion of working a standard 9-5 job (Guidant, 2023). The plurality, which sits at 42% of African-American small business owners, classified their "Happiness Level" as very happy with their decision to embark on entrepreneurship even with the obstacles of a COVID-19 society, which gives a clear impression that entrepreneurship is not an anomaly.

Financing Methods

Currency is undoubtedly the most common small business financing alternative for African-American entrepreneurs. In 2021, 43% of African-American entrepreneurs' funding choice was either cash alone or combined cash with another financing method available to them

to establish their small business (Guidant, 2023). Although there are better preferences than this, African-Americans often need more financing options. The data shows that 59% of the surveyed entrepreneurs required $50,000 or less to begin their small business. 77% of entrepreneurs chose to initiate their new enterprise independently, as opposed to simply buying an already established franchise or acquiring a small business that already existed. Regarding a return on investment, the data depicts that only a little above 50% of these small businesses were profitable in 2020.

Establishing or maintaining a small business is a challenge in itself. Doing so during a worldwide pandemic offers even more obstacles. Over the past three years, thousands of small businesses have been unable to sustain themselves and have decided to close their doors indefinitely. One of this segment's biggest non-covid-related challenges was the need for more capital, especially over the last year. Marketing, recruiting and retaining employees, and providing benefits to them are challenges those small businesses face (Cunningham, 2021).

The Future of the African-American Entrepreneur

Regardless of these adversities, more than half of the surveyed African-American small business owners want to enhance their enterprise and continue to grow and flourish instead of selling it or attempting a new enterprise venture. Looking towards the future, 61% of respondents stated their intention to expand or remodel their business in 2021. Additionally, 51% intended to invest in digital marketing, and 46% planned to employ additional staff. It is evident from these responses that the pandemic and political trials have not entirely diminished African-American entrepreneurs' fortitude for progress and achievement.

There will always be a disparity between African-American and Caucasian-owned small businesses, but there is hope that the inequality is lessening. President Joe Biden implemented the economic "Build Back Better" plan, which specifically focused on the notion of creating

business aid that is more attainable and equitable throughout any minority population (Cunningham, 2021). It is the hope that with additional governmental assistance and a mindset that is more determined than ever for future success, African-American entrepreneurs, especially women, will have the fortitude to sustain their businesses for years to come.

Purpose Statement

Through extensive research, scholars have provided significant evidence that women are essential to the workforce. Now more than ever, women, specifically millennial women of African-American descent, add tremendous value to the workplace, economically and socially, and are becoming more and more prominent in executive leadership roles, but are just as qualified as any man to perform at any job or task. Being that employment is essential to sustainability, it is interesting to note that millennial women of color intentionally choose to take the risk and leave their high-level careers within Corporate America for what is outside societal norms. It is even more interesting that they are doing so when unemployment is at an all-time high amid a worldwide pandemic, and companies are desperately seeking to hold on to their employees. There is a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion. The purpose of this research was to explore the following.

- Understanding why African-American women face the distinctive obstacles and challenges of transitioning from full-time employees within Corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs.
- The lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to currently being full-time entrepreneurs and to gather recommendations for others hoping to do the same.

Likewise, it was the researcher's primary intention to celebrate the accomplishments of African-American female entrepreneurs while at the same time highlighting African-American women's unique lived experiences. This study aimed to draw attention to African-American female entrepreneurship through an appreciative lens, hoping to add to future research in this field. There are hundreds of examples throughout history of African-American women who have been pioneers in entrepreneurship, but these stories are seldom brought attention to. Their stories are not glamorous or effortless, and often, their "glass ceiling" is instead a "concrete ceiling," making it nearly impossible to break through. Still, African-American women see entrepreneurism as equating to boundless opportunity, economic mobility, and passionate work that leads them to happiness. This phenomenological research has not been explored in the past but will be this study's focus through practical and scholarly analysis.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

- RQ1: What distinctive obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within Corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?

- RQ2: How do African-American women who make the educated risk to transition into full-time entrepreneurship define, evaluate, and monitor their career success?

- RQ3: What techniques and tools are used to support African-American women in transitioning their careers to full-time entrepreneurship?

- RQ4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being full-time entrepreneur, what are some recommendations they would give to

emerging African-American female entrepreneurs in a post-COVID-19 society who aspires to do the same?

Frameworks

The two frameworks used as tools within the study were appreciative inquiry and critical constructivism.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a technique that uses storytelling and positive psychology to establish an affiliation of strengths (Cooperrider et al., 2000). The typical human response to adversities is to view them from a hostile place and then create a narrative surrounding that challenge that adopts a deficit-based perspective and embraces the idea of failure rather than hope and progress. AI solely concentrates on optimism rather than pessimism.

Critical Constructivism

Critical constructivism is a theoretical framework that suggests that human perspectives on the world, oneself, and others are created by historical, social, cultural, economic, and political conditions (Kincheloe, 2011). Within this paradigm, researchers aim to comprehend how socio-historic factors have impacted and affected the object of investigation. Constructivism's central tenet is that knowledge and critical thinking are the primary constructs integrated within cognitive, cultural, emotional, and social spheres (Rogers, 2012). This theory also emphasizes that learning is a lived experience and a lifelong process that involves attention and active participation (Kincheloe, 2011).

Significance of the Study

Female entrepreneurship is fundamental in establishing the U.S. and served as a stimulus for women's economic emancipation and self-sufficiency (Akee et al., 2019). The choice to

transition from a traditional career to pursue entrepreneurship by African-American women within the U.S. is multifaceted. It stems from historical experiences within the U.S. dating back to the early 1800's. The history and legacy of African-American entrepreneurship are often overlooked and forgotten because of the injustices incorporated within American history. One of the most devastating and egregious racially motivated domestic terror attacks happened over a century ago in Tulsa, Oklahoma (Messer, 2011). This domestic terror attack, known as the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, eliminated within a matter of hours a prospering black community that took years to establish. A violent mob of white terrorists single-handedly destroyed over 1,250 homes, murdered hundreds of residents, and erased years of African-American success in moments (Albright et al., 2021).

In the years following slavery, racial oppression was abundant. Black people yearned for a community where they could live freely and feel safe. The residents of Greenwood, composed of all Black residents, decided to create their community built on the premise of a society with no limitations on possibility and prosperity for Black people. The residents made a utopia of opportunity comprised of schools, grocery stores, hotels, theaters, doctor's offices, churches, barbers and hair salons, restaurants, newspaper publishing businesses, parks and recreational centers, and beautiful homes and apartment buildings. The neighborhood thrived, creating economic growth and psychological safety for over 10,000 people. Soon, the vibrant neighborhood of Greenwood was called *America's Black Wall Street* (Messer, 2011). However, with the success of this newly founded Black entrepreneurship society, resentment and hatred from white people soon followed, which was the catalyst that spearheaded the dissolution of this great community.

The financial impact of the massacre equates to 27 million dollars today, which was notated in the 2001 State Commission report (Messer, 2011). For over 20 years, the report has been one of the most comprehensive examinations that exposes the horrific financial damage the massacre caused and the government's culpability. Although the lost lives and destruction of property are terrible, a much more sobering effect is the loss of hundreds of legacies. The lack of inheritance to African-Americans from their ancestors who established these businesses is sobering. The generational wealth that could have been passed along, thus ensuring the fortunes of black families for decades, is incalculable. Children and grandchildren of those ancestors, who quite possibly live in poverty, still today face the effects of these egregious attacks. A New York Times article, *What The Tulsa Race Massacre Destroyed*, interviewed the relatives of Black businessmen and businesswomen who had their enterprises destroyed during that time. One interviewee asked what would have happened if they had been allowed to maintain their family's business. Her entrepreneur grandfather had built a shoe shop from the ground up. The interviewee stated they could have been better off if they were allowed to carry this legacy forward. On the 100 block of Greenwood Avenue, more than 70 businesses were operated or owned by Black entrepreneurs, many of whom were women (Messer, 2011).

This marquee block was indeed the heartbeat of Black enterprise. Unfortunately, this Black enterprise is no more and, until recently exposed, had been hidden deep within the constructs of American history. For the families that were destroyed and are impacted negatively to this very day, there has never been any compensation administered under court order or by legislation, and what is even more hurtful is that there has not been one person held accountable for the ruin of the original Greenwood neighborhood (Albright et al., 2021) The pride and identity of black people was once again taken away instantaneously. With the scholarly intent to

highlight the intricacies that African-American women face pursuing entrepreneurship, it is critical to also explore from an appreciative lens the historical perspective of Black entrepreneurs and the foundation from which they stand. This foundation can be called survivalist entrepreneurship (Boyd, 2016).

Just as history often repeats itself as a response to racial unrest, African-American women are again practicing survivalist entrepreneurship. Many African-American women are establishing entrepreneurship within the Black communities by fostering the idea of self-empowerment and the circulation of monies in intra-ethnic communities (Albright et al., 2021). Boyd coined the term *survivalist entrepreneur* as one who creates a business because they feel they have few options or no choice at all in the matter. Like the Greenwood entrepreneurs, they are impelled to develop enterprises to foster financial independence and provide for their families (Boyd, 2016).

Additionally, multiple scholarly works have contributed to this monumental period in history and align with the significance of this study. Jordan-Zachery (2018) outlined historical events that have impacted the African-American population in connection to entrepreneurship throughout history. The Tulsa Race Massacre was one of the recorded incidents. Jordan-Zachery also investigates the historical progression of African-American women in the U.S. from the past to the present. The literature thoroughly analyzes the themes of race, gender, and female entrepreneurship. They were outlining the historical trajectory of African-American women from the commencement of slavery through the Jim Crow era, reconstruction, and into modern society in the 21st century. Throughout these epochs, the historical hurdles, opportunities, and distinctive techniques used by African-American women to develop and sustain entrepreneurial ventures were emphasized. They ultimately influenced African-American women's unique entrepreneurial

experiences and quests for economic independence throughout history. The primary objective of this illustrious work is to enhance the reader's understanding of the influential role African-American women have assumed throughout the historical evolution of the U.S. and to discuss how the entrepreneurial landscape is still developing due to the proactive involvement of African-American female entrepreneurs.

Additionally, Holton and Reid-Merritt (2015) offered a unique perspective of African-American women's experiences during transition through a collection of scholarly articles and essays authored by African-American female entrepreneurs. This literary work delves deep into a wide-ranging analysis, including similar themes such as fostering innovation, recognizing strengths women employ from deep within, illustrating resilience, and making preemptive educational risks used during their transition into the realm of entrepreneurial endeavors.

Furthermore, the book is a love letter to African-American female entrepreneurs (Holton & Reid-Merritt, 2015). It highlighted the historical and cultural intricacies affecting the pursuit of happiness. This illuminating literal work also introduces the concepts of cultural and societal shifts, accenting the highs and lows of the entrepreneurial sphere. In short, the book contributes significantly to African-American female entrepreneurship research by providing a rich collection of personal narratives through storytelling and congruently employing insight into topics such as economic development and the dynamics of the African-American Community.

Assumptions of the Study

It was assumed that participants of this study would support the problem, purpose, and significance of this study despite the differences in their entrepreneurial endeavors. This study examined a particular group within the African-American community. The specific population sample consisted of African-American women who had an educational background with a

bachelor's degree or higher, previously worked in Corporate America, and had established and successfully run a small business from 2019 to the present day. It was assumed that:

As a result of the research participants' successes and capabilities, they were the best fit to provide insight into this field. Their first-hand knowledge and understanding of the topic would significantly add value to the research. The participants would have comparable stories and shared experiences that support the need for this vital research and add to the significance of the study. The valuable insight would add to the previous research completed in this field and, most importantly, fill in gaps that previous investigators still need to uncover.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations when completing this study included, but were not limited to, the following:

- The responses from the research participants were valid and honest.

- All research participants met the research criteria and understood that participating is voluntary, with no expectation of any reward incentive.

- As the research participants came from similar educational and career backgrounds, the researcher was limited to their responses; thus, this drew upon the data collected to assume scholastic generalizations regarding African-American women pursuing entrepreneurship.

Definition of Terms

The researcher established two categories of terms for this study, "who" and "what," to give the reader a thorough perspective on best interpreting the research. The "Who" within the study identified African-American female entrepreneurs, and the "What" within this study

referenced the concept of entrepreneurship with a strong emphasis on African-American-owned enterprises.

Who

- *African-American*: An American of African, mainly Black African descent (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

- *Black American*: "Black" and "African-American" are often interchangeable depending on comfort level and personal choice. Black American refers to individuals who believe they represent a strong cultural connection to America versus Africa.

- *Women of Color*: a woman whose skin pigmentation is other than, and significantly darker than, what is considered characteristic of people typically defined as white; a woman of a race other than white or mixed race (Hamer, 2019).

- *Entrepreneur*: An individual of high-level aptitude who works for themselves. These individuals are often seen as pioneers, leaders, or innovators in their fields, possessing unique characteristics not usually found within the general population (Hamer, 2019).

What

- *Black Women Business Enterprises* (BWBE) are businesses that Black women own.

- *Entrepreneurship*: The activity of making money by starting or running businesses, especially when this involves taking financial risks; the ability to do this.

- *Small Business*: An independently owned business or enterprise comprising less than 500 employees.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the topic that the researcher investigated. The background of the study included a narrative surrounding the topic of African-American Entrepreneurs and

discussed the historical background. The problem statement outlined the gap within published

research on African-American female entrepreneurship. It also highlighted the challenges and

obstacles these individuals go through when initiating a small business. The purpose of the study

was to give insight into how, now, more than ever, African-American women realize that being

intentional about the life they desire is a choice. There are many opportunities for advancement

within their career, and for many, that better opportunity lies within the career path of

entrepreneurship. Over the last several years, there have been several reasons for the increase in

corporate resignations. Some of those reasons are associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and a

failing economy, toxicity within the workplace: racial and sexist oppression or unconscious

biases, peaking too soon within Corporate America, or simply out of survival. Whatever the

cause that inspires them to begin their entrepreneurial journey, many share similar experiences.

As more African-American women obtain higher levels of education, experts also notice that the

number of African-American-owned enterprises is growing astonishingly. Not only are they

growing, but they are being successful.

This chapter also highlighted the significance of this research. This study aimed to

highlight these women's unique journeys but, most importantly, examine the causes of this

phenomenon through scholarly research. It also provided information for the next generation of

African-American female entrepreneurs who may need guidance and support. Now is the time

for action. The research sought to contribute to the broader conversation of the unique challenges

African-American women face as they shift from Corporate America to digital entrepreneurship.

Moreover, despite the vast wealth of anecdotal evidence, it emphasizes the woeful lack of

research surrounding this subject. This study sought to make visible and demolish the concrete

ceiling barrier and enable conversations about how to overcome it. The definition of terms, assumptions, and limitations of the study were also highlighted.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

> Black female entrepreneurs do not make excuses, we find solutions. We are leaders –
> resourceful, ambitious, hardworking, and creative. We are powerful, unstoppable,
> confident, smart, and fearless. We are Exquisite Black Queens who represent Black
> Excellence. We are success! There is no denying it…Black female entrepreneurs are
> resilient, and we rock!
>
> — Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on the Road*

Chapter 2 consisted of a comprehensive examination of literature relating to the study. The presented literature review focused on scholarly articles shaping this study's essence. The purpose was to guide the reader and help them understand the historical significance of African-American female entrepreneurs through a chronological sequence of events. The literature review is divided into three key sections.

- A historical overview of African-American female entrepreneurship.

- African-American women and the American wealth gap.

- The future of African-American female entrepreneurs.

Thus, the chapter focused on each section and examined the areas of African-Americans and entrepreneurship corresponding to the research.

The Landscape of the African-American Female Entrepreneur

Shirley Chisholm was a powerhouse in her own right who became not only the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. Congress, but the first African-American female candidate to run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination (Akee et al., 2019). Ms. Chisolm created the first significant crack in the highest glass ceiling in the U.S., the Presidency. She paved the way for many other women who would follow behind her, such as Vice President Kamala Harris, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and House Representative Gabrielle

Giffords, to name a few who had a great example of being a savvy, no-nonsense and intellectual leader.

Years after she passed away, Ms. Chisolm's directives still hold and have become a clarion call for the next generation of African-American businesswomen who have come after her (Akee et al., 2019). Although Ms. Chisolm was not notable or recognized for her political career, she was also an entrepreneur. She was the first female member to sit on the Black Enterprise Magazine's Board of Directors. The history of women's political leaders relates to this study and research because it provides evidence that women have led throughout history. African-American women often set the standard of leadership in various avenues of leadership and entrepreneurship throughout history. Thus, in today's society, more than ever in history, women are becoming more prominent as leaders; however, sexism, biases, and obstacles are just as prevalent.

There is a myth that entrepreneurship, especially among African-American women, is a 21st-century newfound venture (Anna et al., 2000). However, this could not be further from the truth. African-American women have been involved in entrepreneurial enterprises since the 1600s when Africans were brought to North America as enslaved people. Long before Africans were considered people, not to mention Americans, they played an influential role in developing economic systems within the U.S. Although brought to the U.S. against their will, they were among the first voyagers who participated in trading between Africa and the Americas. Africans were already well versed in economics due to their trading practices among tribes within Africa. They also learned quickly about the trading practices that the enslavers participated in. This innate skill was slowly trickled down through generations and into the 1960s, when more and more Black enterprises were being developed despite ridicule, Jim Crow laws, and the constant

reminder of the frightening history of slavery. African-American women had another obstacle on top of these challenges: the concept of patriarchy, not only among Caucasian Americans but also within the African-American community. Due to this patriarchy, African-American women created small businesses centered on domestic public services such as food and hospitality, cleaning, beauty, and childcare.

Eventually, these businesses would expand to incorporate broader services in the 21st century. African-American women were making their mark on Corporate America, becoming CEOs of multi-million dollar companies, including arduous fields such as technology, communications, and retail. The transformation from the traditional services expected in the 19th century happened quickly and significantly impacted how African-American female entrepreneurs were perceived.

Survivalist Entrepreneurship

As mentioned, it is historically documented that African-Americans have played a significant role in the economic power of North America through entrepreneurship. However, what needs to be highlighted is the notion that the primary incentive for them to work for themselves was not the idea of becoming wealthy but instead creating a business out of survival. This is known as *survivalist entrepreneurship theory* (Serviere, 2010). A survivalist entrepreneurship theory is defined as one that is expected to generate a sustainable income for a short time or even provide employment. In short, this type of business is doomed for failure from the start and needs to be recognized by the government as a viable enterprise.

One of the effects of the American slave trade was that many families were torn apart, sold to various enslavers, and never connected again. The most vulnerable were children and older adults. Children had to grow up quickly and understand that survival was their priority. In

addition, older adults who could not find employment in the mainstream labor force had to fend for themselves. These two groups had to create their own opportunities to survive. Some examples of survivalist entrepreneurship jobs could be farming, food preparation, janitorial services, sewing, laundering, and childcare (Boyd, 2000).

Although, for decades, these entrepreneurial endeavors were only meant for survival, African-Americans taught the next generation their skills as time passed. By 1910, the U.S. Census had publicly recognized that African-Americans, specifically African-American women, owned and operated their free enterprises. Farming had evolved to agriculture services; food preparation had evolved to dining and drinking establishments; janitorial work had grown to maintenance services, such as plumbing, electrical and lighting, and sewing and laundry services had evolved to embroidery and dry-cleaning shops and so on (Butler & Kozmetsky, 2004). By 1975, one out of four women were self-employed; however, by 1990, this changed, and one out of three women were business owners, setting a new precedent of what an entrepreneur looked like.

Entrepreneurship Within the Era of COVID-19

Each year, the Small Business Trends Alliance (SBTA) issues a national survey to business owners to discover new small business data trends and insights of the small business owner (Guidant, 2023). The SBTA report comprises data that helps small business owners continue developing their enterprises. However, more importantly, it provides transparency to prospective entrepreneurs regarding the state of the small business sector. The intention is to provide a guide for small business owners to be successful.

In 2021, SBTA surveyed over 2,400 current and aspiring entrepreneurs nationwide. This year, the questions posed focused on the experiences of African-American small business owners

throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey's primary intention was to understand their confidence in their business, employees, and the economy, given the current political landscape and questions regarding the successes and challenges they have encountered as business owners (Guidant, 2023).

The Political Effects of COVID-19 Within the African-American Business Community

The COVID-19 pandemic had dire consequences, negatively affecting people of color and low-income individuals. African-American small businesses primarily sit within the service industry sector. This, combined with the financial hardship African-Americans encounter with financial aid, affected the community more negatively than others.

The Small Business Trends survey noted that these obstacles were reflected in the variance between survival expectations among the average of their businesses (Guidant, 2023). When comparing the average survival expectations among small business owners and African-American small business owners, the survey found that 17% fewer African-American entrepreneurs projected their businesses to fail because of the pandemic than the average small business owner. In contrast, 81% of white small business owners anticipated that there might be a decrease in revenue but had no anticipation that their business would not survive the pandemic. However, only 67% of African-American small business owners had the same assumption.

Around 24% of African-Americans who owned small businesses lost income, and 12% closed temporarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. It was obvious that the survey results illustrated that African-American entrepreneurs were much more anxious about COVID-19 because their businesses were hit harder than white businesses. When questioned about the importance of COVID-19 as a current topic, 82% of African-American entrepreneurs noted "very important" on a five-point Likert scale from "not important at all" to "very

important." In comparison, 57% of white entrepreneurs noted that COVID-19 was "critical" to them (Guidant, 2023).

The survey also questioned entrepreneurs about the importance of economic relief. As expected, compared to their white peers, a more significant percentage of African-American small business owners stated that it was essential was an astounding 73% to 43%. Furthermore, before January 10, 2021, before the new stimulus act was passed into law, over half of the surveyed African-American respondents still needed to receive economic aid via governmental financial support systems such as the Paycheck Protection Program or Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL). However, around 30% more white business owners did receive economic aid from the government even if they did not need it to sustain their business (Cunningham, 2021).

The government's response to African-American small business owners was deficient. On a five-point Likert scale of "strongly disliked" to "strongly liked" the US government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 41% of African-American entrepreneurs responded with "strongly disliked" compared to 28% of Caucasian entrepreneurs that answered "strongly disliked" (Guidant, 2023). Due to the current political climate, on average, African-American entrepreneurs are impartial regarding their confidence level in the government regarding supporting entrepreneurship. The data showed that the future of the sustainment of small businesses in a post-pandemic world is uncertain.

Most significantly, 41% of African-American small business owners who responded to the survey stated they felt excluded or underrepresented in any U.S. political party. In comparison, only 25% of Caucasian small business owners replied the same. Around 40% of the African-American small business owner population listed the Democratic Party as their political party, and 13% listed their political affiliation as the Republican party (Guidant, 2023).

How the American Criminal Justice System Affects Entrepreneurship

In Black and Brown communities, economic and upward mobility opportunities are often out of reach to these residents. Self-employment tends to be a viable pathway to financial success, especially if these individuals have a criminal history and cannot obtain traditional employment. However, it is still a challenge for these individuals to pursue entrepreneurship because they are deemed unworthy of starting their enterprise. In fragile communities, it can be argued that individuals with the skillset of an entrepreneur considered starting a business but did not because of their criminal history, even if their criminal background only consisted of petty crimes.

On average, people of color are sentenced harsher than their white counterparts for the same crime. With the notion that the criminal justice system is unfair in their community, the likelihood that these individuals would be able to apply for a small business loan or receive support from the government to start a small business is minimal to none. With the prospect of finding traditional employment limited and the possibility of gaining support for operating a small business minimal, these individuals often are stuck in poverty, even though they are skilled enough to do more.

The effects of incarceration within American culture, the economy, and society tie into local crime within the U.S. The effects include the demand for unskilled labor (non-high school or college graduates), the cost of living, and the accessibility to narcotics. In addition, the pressure and social anxiety one has to provide for one's family or themselves can affect survival choices. The American Model of Punishment governs through massive imprisonment measures, although costly, inefficient, and produces a higher unemployment rate. Mark Mauer (2006), author of the book *Race to Incarcerate*, comprehensively analyzes the U.S. historic

imprisonment rates from 1972-1995 and compares that to other nations. His research found that African-Americans were overrepresented due to inequality in arrest rates, conviction, and severity of punishment among various races for identical crimes. In addition to this, drug trafficking (specifically the crack epidemic) was heavily politicized. Crime had been radically signified as an issue in electoral movements, and the media's attention created this as a metaphor for social anxiety in all its forms.

Political interference is decisions made for political gain rather than the country's long-term practical economic benefit (Kagan, 2020). With crime being used as political propaganda, government leaders initiated bills into law that still have long-term adverse effects decades later, such as the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 and the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. These laws increased poverty, unemployment, and welfare dependency in the U.S., especially among African-Americans. Policymakers may have initially intended to save federal dollars by restricting them to a particular class but instead extensively increased statewide spending and decreased labor market participation.

Political dynamics played a significant role in criminal justice reform, and the legacy of the crime bill influenced generations to come. Federal funding incentivized states to manufacture more prisons and jails and enact additional punitive measures that instantaneously increased the quantity and span of sentences while reducing the probability of early release options (Kagan, 2020). From the cost of taxpayer dollars to the falsehoods of these measures in the name of public safety, it is well documented that these tough-on-crime measures were complete failures. The national debate surrounding these bills has re-emerged from elected leaders, as significant attempts have been made to correct this statute.

The Connection Between Education and Entrepreneurship

African-American women are now classified as the most educated group within the U.S. (GEM, 2022). Similarly, the number of women of color who pursue entrepreneurship has grown steadily over the last decade, surpassing Caucasian females and being designated as the fastest-growing group of female entrepreneurs (Akee et al., 2019). It can be assumed that there is a distinct connection between this educational growth spurt and this newfound entrepreneurship surge. Education no longer serves the sole purpose of fulfilling a requirement necessary for a career, but it promotes critical thinking. Critical thinking improves one's ability to understand oneself, their intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, and one's goals. Even more importantly, education gives individuals access to an underestimated resource. Access to groups of people, places, and assets that one may not have been able to access without education.

More than 50% of African-American women self-fund their business ventures. Even more impressive, they do this even though more than 70% of African-American female entrepreneurs reside in households with a median annual salary under $75,000. Furthermore, it is a fact that African-Americans who attend college often have limited financial support. When they graduate, they are burdened with student loan debt. With significantly higher debt than their counterparts, they enter into careers that pay them significantly less and, therefore, are less likely to purchase a home because of the financial strain, low collateral, and inadequate personal resources. Even so, they pursue entrepreneurship with persistence and determination. With all the obstacles, African-American female entrepreneurs continue to exude resilience by establishing enterprises without guaranteeing success.

In 2019, The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs published the Women's Entrepreneurship Report. The report elaborated on the critical factors

influencing female entrepreneurs; education was a primary factor. It noted that women with a college degree or higher were 73 times more likely to start a small business. In many instances, a college education is a qualification for a traditional corporate job. Through that job, one obtains financial stability, which allows women to save for their small business goals (GEM, 2022).

In many cases, black women have difficulty securing support and investments. Access to capital and funding options are limited and expensive; therefore, the best way to start a business quickly is to self-fund. The Commission's Director for the Gender, Poverty, and Social Policy Division, Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo, stated that female entrepreneurship was recognized as the most underutilized chance for continued development and economic growth (GEM, 2022).

African-American women who pursue entrepreneurship are highly educated. Three-fourths of these women have at least a bachelor's degree. Colleges and universities provide classes and leadership opportunities through clubs or student leadership boards that teach experiential business practices, thus enabling them to learn and practice entrepreneurship in various capacities (Randall et al., 2017). Additionally, women who take part in these leadership opportunities develop capabilities for overcoming constraints they will encounter in the future, as well as the peer support and relationship building and, in many cases, professional advising they receive from the collegiate leadership.

Globalization, Penitentiaries, and the Role It Plays Within Entrepreneurship

Capital has also played a prominent role in corporate globalization concerning prison institutions. More and more corporations benefit monetarily from mass incarceration, and most commonly, the people affected are poor people or working-class people of color. Power structure affects this. Many prison companies benefit directly from the globalization that occurs, such as Wackenhut in South Florida. The deeply rooted power structure, which comes from

multinational corporations, military, media, global finance, etc., allows those at the top to gain more economic and political influence as they control those at the bottom. These power structures support these agendas. This top-down power structure where corporations benefit from inexpensive labor is nothing new and does not only apply domestically within the U.S. criminal justice system. Specifically, within third-world countries, corporations thrive on using poor people who work in sweatshops, similar to prison conditions, for cheap or free labor and then selling their products at inflated rates. Military strength enforces globalization abroad, and this is due to the training as well as weapons that are supplied by the U.S. Thus, prisons create complex systems for internal globalization.

The role globalization, capitalism, and politics have played within the criminal justice system for centuries is significant (Alexander, 2019). The specific laws developed as early as 1895 that enforced racial segregation, primarily in the South. It was not until 1968, when the Civil Rights Movement began over 100 years later, that the discussions surrounding abolishing these laws emerged. More specifically, Jim Crow laws were developed to purposely legalize racial segregation by implementing local and state statutes that marginalized African-Americans. Civil liberties such as the right to vote, gain employment, receive an education, and these laws hindered many more opportunities. Many who attempted to defy these disdainful laws faced imprisonment, monetary fines, and sometimes even death. Alexander (2019) then explained in detail how, although decades later, the negative impact of these laws still affects people of color significantly. The author also uses the reference to signify that mass incarceration is the "new" Jim Crow. Many examples of inequality in our history, such as the War on Drugs, are provided, and details how those government structures played and still play a factor in systems such as mass incarceration.

The American criminal justice system is severely broken. As a start to amendment and a way forward, elected officials who serve today must first dismantle the instruments that support the apparatuses that caused so much destruction in the past. Only then can the rebuilding process begin to prevent future harm. Author Geoffrey Hughes (2007) asserted that lawmakers must embrace the idea of "first do no harm" just as it is prescribed in the field of medicine, or essentially, "do no more harm" (p. 127). Comprehensive public safety solutions are a positive investment. They reduce the need for reliance on incarceration measures, and the connection between profit and the criminal justice system is redefined and reconstructed.

The Center for Advancing Opportunity (2019) surveyed 5,000 U.S. residents with a criminal history regarding abandoning individual aspirations to create a small business. The survey revealed that the probability of abandoned nascent entrepreneurship increased concerning rises in a person's assessment or perception that the U.S. criminal justice system is biased and unethical within black and brown communities. The criminal justice system is indeed an obstacle to entrepreneurship for these individuals. However, criminal justice reforms that support fairness in policing and overseeing judges within the judicial system could enhance economic and social mobility for individuals with a criminal background, thus increasing the possibility of individuals embarking on entrepreneurship.

Research has shown that for the formerly incarcerated, the likelihood that they would be generally discriminated against after their release is very high. The probability of labor-market discriminatory hiring practices is even higher, especially for Black and Brown individuals. Hwang and Phillips (2014) examined this probability in their research. Utilizing data and statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' National Longitudinal Survey of Youth revealed that individuals who have been incarcerated have an unemployment rate of 27.3% (Couloute &

Kopf, 2018). This is astounding compared to the general public unemployment rate, which was merely 5.8% then. The primary reason for this disparity was that these individuals were far less likely to be hired by a reputable employer because of their background, or if they were employed, they were hired under the table and earned lower wages, thus more downward wage mobility.

With the U.S. being one of the countries with the highest rate of incarcerated individuals (2.3 million), the majority of these individuals, Black or brown, are introducing the idea of creating entrepreneurial training within prisons (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). If incarcerated individuals can build entrepreneurial skills and qualities when released, it could result in higher incomes and a key driver in possibly lowering recidivism rates. Hwang and Phillips (2014) stated that entrepreneurship can be difficult for individuals, but it is especially hard for those incarcerated because they are Black. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth observed and interviewed close to 9,000 people within the last 20 years to understand the formerly incarcerated entrepreneurial experience (Couloute & Kopf, 2018).

As previously mentioned, it can be difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to obtain financial backing or support to fund their small businesses (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). Without much human and financial capital, individuals tend to start businesses with the help of family or close friends, and they do not even consider starting enterprises that may require government funding, bank loans or, even a brick-and-mortar type of business. Most of these entrepreneurial endeavors are service-industry jobs, such as barbershops and cleaning services, and they usually work alone. According to Hwang and Phillips (2014), African-Americans who have been through incarceration face similar barriers most entrepreneurs face when they work toward acquiring financing. Launching a business is challenging, but even more so for those with

a criminal record. Although entrepreneurship is only practical for some individuals formerly incarcerated, it can be essential to building a community and offering the individuals the confidence to start over.

The Foreseeable Future of Entrepreneurship

Leadership Within Entrepreneurship

Leadership has been conceptualized in a multitude of ways. In more than 70 years, over 65 classification systems have been developed to define this term (Northouse, 2015). The meaning of the word is fluid and often depends on the circumstance, perspective, and setting; similar to the definition of an entrepreneur, it can be argued that the context of leadership is subjective. Northouse (2015) illustrated various ways to conceptualize leadership. For instance, leadership may also be defined as a behavior or an act in which leaders bring change into their groups. The Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (n.d.) defines leadership as leading individuals, groups, or an organization. Northouse (2015) also stated that another set of meanings conceptualizes leadership from a different perspective, suggesting that leadership combines particular traits and characteristics that few people possess, influencing others to fulfill their tasks. Higginbottom (2018) substantiated this claim through their definition of leadership, describing it as communal guidance, amplifying others' efforts to achieve goals. Lastly, educator Peter Drucker (1970) explained the term more straightforwardly. He stated that leaders are defined as those individuals who have followers. In addition, Northouse (2015) provides a basis for this definition, saying that some define leadership as a relationship between the leader and follower and the existing power dynamics. Thus, leaders have the power to change others through their leadership power.

All definitions have a common component: leadership is an effective process involving additional individuals to achieve a common goal. Northouse (2015) summarized the report and aspects of a coach. An entrepreneur must have this trait. He stated that coaches understand how to institute culture change to address loss of trust and alienation; they are good communicators and can motivate people when handling various interpersonal challenges between group members. Coaches provide constructive feedback and know how to delegate tasks to others. This aligns with the leadership style of an entrepreneur, as they must be skilled in establishing urgency and change initiatives. However, they can also be highly compassionate and have a viable understanding that every situation may not have the expected outcome.

There is a new challenge for entrepreneurs, and it is necessary to be skilled in leadership to effectively administer objectives, direction, and expectations daily and weekly. Entrepreneurs work with others; they have team members who work together on the joint mission, vision, and goals shared with each individual.

Entrepreneurs must be able to:

- consistently coach and develop their team,

- empower and not micromanage to gain anticipated results,

- communicate with a clear vision and strategy.

According to Kouzes and Posner (2018), there are five best practices for leaders to guide them within entrepreneurship.

1. Model the way: The individual chooses to lead by example by being authentic and empathetic to others around them.

2. Inspire a shared vision: The individual chooses to follow their heart, take educated risks, and embrace failure.

3. Challenge the process: The individual seeks to find innovative ways to improve themselves and others around them so they do not stay within the status quo.

4. Enable others to act: The individual chooses to strengthen others by mentoring and providing resources to enhance weaknesses and build confidence.

5. Encourage the heart: The individual chooses to recognize unique talents and contributions from others and promote that exemplary leadership is found in action, not in titles.

Generating Generational Wealth Through Entrepreneurship

A primary motivator for why people embark on entrepreneurship is to build generational wealth for their offspring. There are disparities in income in traditional jobs between black and white families. The problem of racial inequality in economic outcomes in the U.S., specifically between black and white families and individuals, is the underlying issue. According to Chetty et al. (2020), prior studies have generally applied empirical research to studying a single generation. In contrast, this study seeks to understand better the income differences between black and white families across the generational divide of parents and children. The question posed by the research considers if black children have lower incomes than white children as a condition of their parental income, and if so, how can the generational gap be reduced. At its base, this study identifies two independent variables of black and white children's incomes and its contingency on the dependent variable of parental income. While the initial presentation of the problem and its research question appear linear and with easily identifiable variables, the quantitative, empirical, and longitudinal approach to the study reveals numerous subfactors and categories of measurement to evaluate the measure of the research question and validate its outcomes.

Chetty et al. (2020) posed a vital research question in their study, asking whether Black children have lower incomes than their white counterparts on parental income, and if so, could these intergenerational gaps be reduced? Various forms of longitudinal data were required regarding population, income, race, and other variables between 1989 and 2015 to analyze this question. While the literature cited across the study utilized primary source studies, the source of data consulted in the study used two secondary data sources from the Census Bureau in the preliminary analysis. Data was derived from the Census 2000 and 2010 short forms, and data was also drawn from federal income tax returns. For example, information regarding parental characteristics, income, and race was derived from a study by Akee et al. (2019). This unidentifiable data linked information from the 2000 and 2010 decennial censuses to the American Community Surveys conducted from 2005-2015. The article stated that each unique person identifier was used to maintain the privacy of the individuals whose information was studied. These datasets were interconnected through an exclusive individual identifier called a Protected Identification Key (PIK). This key was allocated by Census Bureau personnel utilizing details like Social Security numbers (SSNs), names, addresses, and dates of birth. The Census Bureau employed the Numident dataset, which encompasses all SSN holders and other administrative data, to allocate these PIKs. All analyses in the article used a linked data set containing PIKs but were stripped of personally identifiable information.

This analysis introduced quantitative evidence that complements qualitative case studies (Akee et al., 2019). In conclusion, the results found were that within the U.S., a significant aspect that leads to continual racial disparities is the discrepancies in intergenerational upward mobility. The authors' discoveries implied that numerous extensively debated recommendations might not be adequate to reduce the unconditional income disparity between Black and white individuals.

Approaches concentrated on ameliorating economic prospects for a sole generation—like cash transfer initiatives or increments in the minimum wage—can lessen the gap at a particular juncture but are less inclined to yield enduring outcomes unless they simultaneously impact intergenerational advancement. Instead, their findings proposed that initiatives targeting specific racial subsets, such as Black boys, by addressing local communities and schools and enhancing their environments might prove more productive in diminishing the disparity between Black and white populations. Regarding recommendations for future research, the focus was on evaluating proposed interventions to help narrow the gap for these communities. Entrepreneurship is a viable solution that could limit the wealth gap between Caucasian and African-American families and generate generational wealth.

Entrepreneurship in the 21st Century

Female Entrepreneurship Within Technology

This section provides insight into entrepreneurship characteristics within the global technology industry. The terms leader and entrepreneur are interchangeable within the context of this study. One of the interesting paradoxes of the tech industry is just how important and the role that entrepreneurs play in the success of this industry. The fast pace, rapid change, and constant innovation mean that engaged, productive, and empowered leaders are essential to the success of any firm. However, amidst the whirlwind and pressure in the global technology industry, leaders can often be accidental rather than intentional in how they develop their organizational culture and capacity (Medcalf, 2017).

This section addressed the challenges and opportunities in the global technology sector for entrepreneurs and analyzes their experience in the industry. Entrepreneurs within the tech industry are unique because their understanding of the rapidly moving marketplace of global

technology is vital for success. The research explores leadership styles, strengths, and strategies that have enabled current entrepreneurs to expand their enterprises while also investigating the factors that hinder and support the progressive changes in advancement for entrepreneurs in this sector. Therefore, the researcher aims to bring attention to the critical skills and characteristics needed in the global technology industry due to the pace of change, the globalization of the industry, and the need for entrepreneurs who can layer new leadership skills onto those skills historically required to be successful in more traditional industries.

The notion of entrepreneurship within literature comes primarily from two sources - expert opinion and empirical research. The earliest mention in entrepreneurship literature began in the 1990's, mainly driven by extrapolations from domestic leadership research and literature. However, the differences in degree and kind between domestic and global leadership are also rooted in global entrepreneurship multidisciplinary evolution, incorporating fields such as international affairs, diplomacy, anthropology, and cognitive and cross-cultural psychology (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

Tichy (1993) began the discussion regarding true globalists and extended the conversation to focus on entrepreneurs working with a culturally diverse and remote workforce inherent to the technology industry. He explores such concepts as a global mindset, building effective teams, and affecting change worldwide. The reality is that globalization and its demands have shifted the skill sets necessary to lead in the 21st century, and individuals are creating more organizations to develop innovative or groundbreaking concepts. No longer is a leader defined as a CEO or an executive; leaders are entrepreneurs (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

What becomes interesting is the idea that today's researchers and practitioners alike are incorporating the original ideas of leadership theory into the concept of entrepreneurship. To add

to the complexity, as Bolman (2012) mentioned, scholars are also examining the global

technology industry as a unique phenomenon due to its lightning pace of change and escalating

failure rates. While the global technology sector has generated unimaginable wealth, two-thirds

of the Inc. magazine's list of the 5,000 fastest-growing technology companies have shrunk, gone

out of business, or been disadvantageously sold after 5-8 years (Medcalf, 2019), there is a keen

interest in entrepreneurship and the impacts it has on the success of the global organization in

fast-paced industries such as technology. As literature and commentary begin to reflect, some

distinct and unique entrepreneurial characteristics are needed in the worldwide technology field

that is proving challenging to harness (W. Coleman, 2017).

At the start of the 21st century, behaviors associated with technology leadership, which is

inherently global, began to be deeply investigated and disseminated (Bodek, 2008; Boyatzis &

McKee, 2005; Brown, 2017; Burns & Nielsen, 2006; Greenwood & Hinings, 199; Howell, 2010;

Kendrick & Sullivan, 2009; Legris & Collerette, 2006; Oren et al., 2012; Thompson, 2010).

Scholars such as LaFair (2009) and Hinterhuber and Friedrich (2002) observed that the

heightened role of technology, particularly information technology, has been a catalyst for

scholars to understand better how entrepreneurship behaviors affect success within fast-moving

technology settings. The comments of these scholars are a reflection of the need for

organizations to understand better how entrepreneurship behaviors can translate into the

achievement of substantial goals as technology takes on an increasingly widespread and

significant role in the global economy (Bolman, 2012; Hinterhuber & Friedrich, 2002).

Mendenhall et al. (2018) coined this period as the rise of global leaders. The authors

indicated that entrepreneurs are consistently involved in global teams, projects, operations, and

supply chains. They asserted that while the entrepreneur's focus and work span has expanded

exponentially, the leader's location is not necessarily global. Entrepreneurs now have more access to establish virtual enterprises and work with others from across the globe without ever changing addresses or even regularly seeing their remote employees; they lead direct reports from many countries simultaneously from a single location.

Grenny and Maxfield (2017) cited factors that are not just challenging but uniquely challenging in global technology. According to their research, the following four categories are extraordinarily predictive of execution and innovation. They are indicators of global technology organizational performance: the rapid and continuous development of bleeding-edge technology, relentless pressure to perform, consistent ambiguity in international markets, and the growth and maintenance of a continually expanding and recurring global network of entrepreneurs.

With rapid change and the enormous growth of new enterprises in the technology field often continuing to evolve at an alarming pace, entrepreneurs must also grow at the same rate to maximize opportunities and compete with other entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs in the global technology industry must continue to advance rapidly. However, they must be more closely examined and better understood to identify and accelerate areas that need development and emphasis.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is continually considered a necessary and critical component of a global technology entrepreneur's repertoire. EI is the subsection of social intelligence involving observing one's emotions and those of other individuals to classify between both and ascertain information to direct thoughts and actions (Turner & Rojek, 2001).

Strang (2002) and Gladwell (2000) suggested that entrepreneurs who exhibit the traits of understanding their emotions and those of colleagues and employees are better equipped to perform leadership roles in global business environments. Strang (2002) specifically commented

that this ability to monitor emotions and adjust actions to meet the needs of everchanging situations is particularly relevant to entrepreneurship during times when the field of technology is continually producing paradigm-altering vicissitudes (Bolman, 2012).

This aligns with and indicates the need for Situational Leadership, coined by Hersey and Blanchard (1969) when evaluating leadership traits and characteristics in the global technology industry. Because situational leadership focuses on leading across diverse situations, it is appropriate for entrepreneurs in the global technology sector. The premise is that different situations demand different leadership styles and characteristics.

Northouse (2015) states that from this perspective, an effective leader must adopt a style to the diverse demands of different situations. Leaders in the global technology industry must not only move and change at an incredible pace, but they are also required to work across multiple regions, with individuals from various cultures incorporating numerous worldviews. The influential global leader in this sector must regularly adapt his leadership style across boundaries and borders.

In addition to frequently adapting to diverse situations, today's global leaders must consider the Style Approach. According to Northouse (2015), What a leader does and how a leader acts can determine their ability to succeed as a leader. This varies significantly across cultural, industry, and organizational boundaries. Depending on subordinate roles and characteristics across various cultures, a leader may adopt a more task-oriented behavior pattern or lean more toward relationship orientations. In most cases, leaders combine these two types of behavior to influence subordinates to reach their goals.

In addition to the mentioned leadership theories, the Globe Study leverages both Implicit Leadership Theory (ILT; Lord & Maher, 1991) and Culturally Endorsed Leadership Theory

(CELT; House et al., 2014) to evaluate how societal cultures can impact individual norms–fundamental to the theme. In a study conducted by House et al. (2014) that surveyed over 17,000 leaders across 62 countries, this exploration gains momentum as both ILT and CELT are shown to be at the crossroads of global leadership. It was found that of the 112 attributes identified, only 22 of them were found to be universally desirable. This indicates that today's global technology entrepreneurs must not only have the core competencies to do the job, but they must also have the capacity to adapt both stylistically and situationally on an individual, cultural, and organizational level.

Opportunities and Challenges in The Global Technology Sector

By its very nature, the technology industry and global leadership are inherently linked. Technology has enabled global business and, as such, the necessity for global leadership. In an interconnected world, the opportunities appear endless for entrepreneurs, and so they are, but they need significant challenges to overcome simultaneously (W. Coleman, 2017). As organizations reach across borders, global leadership capacity is surfacing more and more often as a binding constraint. According to one survey of senior executives, 76% believe their organizations need to develop the mindset of entrepreneurship capabilities in their employees. However, only 7% think they are developing an entrepreneurial mindset effectively (Ghemawat, 2012).

In a separate study by Bergethon and Davis (2018), organizations' top challenge is retention efforts as more and more young people transition to entrepreneurship. Developing "next-gen" leaders and failure to attract/retain top talent were rated as top challenges by 64% and 60% of respondents, respectively. Leaders indicated that top talent and influential leaders will be

needed to address the challenges and position their organization for future success (Ghemawat, 2012).

The technology sector's combination of high-velocity competition, complexity, global talent, and interdependence among rivals makes it a unique environment, requiring a distinct set of entrepreneurship skills, challenging and ripe with opportunity. Dense geographic concentrations of entrepreneurs with a virtual global footprint (such as Silicon Valley, London, Shanghai, and Bangalore) foster even more idiosyncrasies for entrepreneurs in the global technology sector (Grenny & Maxfield, 2016). However, pursuing entrepreneurship in technology is challenging, and many entrepreneurial endeavors fail. In order to overcome these challenges, leaders must evolve (Gries & Naude, 2009). In a complex, cyclical, dynamic, and often unpredictable sector, entrepreneurs must acquire diverse skills and competencies to lead technical personnel and multicultural teams with very different worldviews.

Critical Leadership Skills and Characteristics in The Global Technology Sector

Today's global technology leaders must be able to multi-task on an enormous scale - serving across many boundaries and borders. As a result, as mentioned above, Emotional Intelligence is at the top of the required skills list because it is emotional intelligence that allows an entrepreneur to balance their own goals and objectives with those of their team and company. Emotional intelligence ensures that a leader does not unthinkingly follow their vision all the time without taking on board the advice and suggestions of others. Instead, emotional intelligence allows a leader to be open to ideas from others and, from time to time, even to put their ideas first (W. Coleman, 2017). By its defining factors, emotional intelligence requires a focus on context, self, and others, all simultaneously.

One of the interesting paradoxes of the global technology industry is how important people are to success; the industry moves at an unheard-of pace. However, it cannot do so without the hearts and minds of people. The fast pace, rapid change, and constant innovation mean that engaged, productive, and empowered leaders are essential to the success of any firm in the industry (Medcalf, 2017). Although an entrepreneur starts a business alone, a team must be established to help support said business, or it will not grow and be sustainable.

Grenny and Maxfield (2016) assert that the key differentiator between entrepreneurs who establish technology companies built to last and those who die is that leaders recognize their intrinsic duty to build a product and a culture. In global technology, creating such a culture with geographic, functional, and cultural differences in continual flux presents a significant challenge that requires a combination of transactional and transformational leadership methods (Gagnon, 2013).

In global technology companies, a wide range of internal and external contingency factors may affect the choice of leadership style. This includes the external environment, organizational performance, and organizational maturity (Jansen et al., 2006; Osborn et al., 2002; Simon, 1979; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Waldman et al., 2001). Organizations need to be able to simultaneously focus on efficient management of immediate business demands (transactional) and future opportunities and challenges (transformational; Baškarada et al., 2017).

Bass (1990) rested on the assumption that a charismatic leader with strong moral values can transform his or her followers and, in turn, be transformed by this interaction (Tal & Gordon, 2016). O'Reilly and Tushman (2004) advocated for organizational ambidexterity–the ability to maintain an appropriate balance between transactional and transformational leadership approaches- critical to ongoing organizational success. Yukl (2013) concurred with O'Reilly and

Tushman (2004) by confirming an integrative approach to leadership, promoting the use of a combination of leadership approaches to leverage various approaches in global scenarios (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

In alignment, while ambidextrous leaders encourage their followers to stretch objectives, they also enforce expectations and create an environment where employees support and trust each other (Baškarada et al., 2017; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Zacher & Rosing, 2015), creating a healthy push/pull mentality across the organization. The ability of a leader to have the emotional intelligence to leverage specific approaches based on location, situation, and style preferences is critical to leading in the global technology industry, as it is an ever-changing, complex, and continually evolving marketplace.

When evaluating leader selection criteria, Lindzon (2017) asserts that there is now a premium on leaders who demonstrate strategic skills that help their industries navigate rapidly changing business environment: emotional intelligence (as mentioned above), creativity and innovation, comfort with chaos, technological proficiency, as well as the ability to bring people and technology together.

While there are some similarities, Hesselbein and Goldsmith (2006) reinforce that many qualities of effective leadership—characteristics such as communicating vision, demonstrating integrity, focusing on results, and ensuring customer satisfaction—have not and will never change. However, at the same time, they contend that five additional new factors have emerged as crucial for the future: thinking globally, appreciating cultural diversity, building partnerships and alliances, sharing, and technological savvy.

According to a recent survey by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; 2015), the three most desirable entrepreneurship qualities in the

workplace include negotiating, networking, and working with cultural diversity (indicated by 48% of the respondents), complex problem-solving ability (reported by 28% of the respondents), and global leadership skills (noted by 28 % of the respondents). While there are commonalities, it becomes evident that there are very different ideas as to what a successful leader in the global technology space will look like moving forward, and the research confirms a continuing increase in demand for these global leaders (Stroh et al., 1998).

Gender Diversity in Global Technology

Since the 1990s, research on gender and leadership has been prevalent. However, before the 1970s, academic research disregarded issues related to gender and leadership (Northouse, 2015). Over time, the conversation has evolved from whether women can pursue entrepreneurship in the tech industry to focusing on the biases women encounter as they embark on these endeavors. This trend correlates with an increase in college-educated and career-driven women, stimulating interest in examining female leaders (Jenkins, 2017).

Despite advancements in research, female entrepreneurs in technology are still few and far between. According to Appelbaum et al. (2013), in today's business environment, women's representation in tech has increased slowly, specifically women of color. The gender gap in entrepreneurship in the tech field is a global phenomenon whereby women are significantly disproportionate (Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Northouse, 2015).

This is a trend about entrepreneurship and female executives working within the tech industry in general. The conversation on the underrepresentation of women in executive-level roles is still active after 30 years of research on gender and leadership. Hence, real change must occur in the workplace to close the leadership gender gap (Jenkins, 2017). Despite improvements, women still need to be more represented, accounting for roughly a third of all

employees globally and less than a quarter of leadership positions (Brown, 2017). According to

Brown (2017), the Catalyst census showed that women hold only 14% of Director positions. The

study also showed that nearly 45% of public companies have no female board directors. Also,

recent studies have revealed that only 3% of top executives among Fortune 500 firms are women

and that only a sixth of women in the technology workforce are top earners. Moreover, the lack

of significant proportions of women in leadership and senior management positions in almost

every organization appears to be a worldwide phenomenon (Appelbaum et al., 2013).

The technology industry knows that its small percentage of women needs to be solved.

However, achieving gender equilibrium in the executive ranks across the technology sector

requires more than adding women to the team. For women in leadership, stereotyping often

results in the internalization of the idea that they need to be more capable of assuming leadership

roles or leading their enterprises. As such, they need to identify themselves with potential

leadership positions, thus undermining their motivation and potentially leading to lower

performance. Stereotype threat has been proven to impact women negatively in their professional

aspirations (Appelbaum et al., 2013; Stahl et al., 2010).

Women are often very aware of their gender and the accompanying stereotypes

(Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2003) and respond either with vulnerability (which assimilates

them into the stereotype) or react against the bias. In sum, substantial empirical evidence

suggests that gender stereotypes can significantly alter the perception and evaluation of female

leaders and directly affect women aspiring to become tech entrepreneurs (Northouse, 2015).

As a result, changing the paradigm for the technology industry will mean growing the

number of women leaders in global technology through mentorship, navigating hidden bias, and

cultivating new skills around negotiation and self-promotion, panelists said at the inaugural

Advancing Women in Product (AWIP) Executive Summit in San Francisco (Lawton, 2018).

Despite significant challenges resulting from implicit and explicit bias, the technology sector

needs female representation, whether women entrepreneurs or those who choose to work for

large tech companies. The continued lack of women in technology has empirically led to

decreased organizational performance, creating missed opportunities for companies without

equal gender representation. Noland and Moran (2016) examined profitable firms (average net

margin of 6.4%). They found that going from having no women in corporate leadership (the

CEO, the board, and other C-suite positions) to a 30% female share is associated with a one-

percentage-point increase in net margin, which translates to a 15% increase in profitability for a

typical technology firm. Specifically, greater gender diversity in technology can impact

businesses' bottom lines, as research from Morgan Stanley (2016) confirmed.

There is a strong link between gender diversity and financial returns. A 2016 Noland and

Moran (2018) survey of 21,980 publicly traded companies in 91 countries concluded that the

presence of more female leaders in top corporate management positions correlates with increased

profitability. In addition, there are at least two channels through which more female senior

leaders could contribute to superior firm performance: increased skill diversity within top

management (which increases effectiveness in monitoring staff performance) and less gender

discrimination throughout the management ranks (which helps to recruit, promote, and retain

talent).

Research on large, innovative organizations has repeatedly shown this is the case.

Researchers Deszö and Ross (2011) studied the effect of gender diversity on top firms. They

found that, on average, female representation in higher management roles led to an increase of

$42 million in value for the firm. They also measured the firms' innovation intensity through the ratio of research and development expenses to assets. They found that companies prioritizing innovation saw more significant financial gains when women were in the top leadership ranks (Hwang & Phillips, 2014).

The research is clear, both from a qualitative and a quantitative perspective. More gender diversity translates to increased productivity, more significant innovation, better decision-making, and higher employee retention and satisfaction (Morgan Stanley, 2016). The Global Leadership Forecast 2014–2015 also concluded that having gender diversity within the leadership pool equates to a broader range of perspectives, resulting in enhanced critical thinking and amplified business advantages (Grossblatt, 2016). In the same study, when researchers asked leaders what would help increase their effectiveness, they answered that organizations should initiate increased transparency, more robust emphasis on advancing women into leadership positions, and a culture that fosters equal opportunities for leadership roles.

Individual Change Models within Entrepreneurship

Most change models or theories in research primarily focus on organizations. Managing organizational change involves understanding, facilitating, and implementing the necessary steps to help support the change. However, today, these popular research models are also being utilized at the individual level, supporting entrepreneurs who have transitioned from working for an organization to founding their enterprise. This section highlights organizational change models in research utilized not only for organizations but also as models for individual change management, specifically within entrepreneurship. Change is bound to happen in every organization and every individual's career journey. How change management is implemented sets apart organizations and people that succeed or fail in these endeavors. One could use various

theories and methods to make fundamental changes as an individual, and these strategies can be used separately or together, depending on the situation. These methods are often aligned through a concept of a phase or process, and there are typically steps that an individual must follow to produce a satisfying result.

ADKAR

ADKAR, which stands for Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement, is a goal-oriented change management model developed by Jeffrey Hiatt (2006). The ADKAR model can be utilized as a personal change management model because it is widely used at an individual level within an organization. ADKAR is an acronym representing five outcomes that must be achieved in sequence for a change initiative to succeed. Each element in the model was designed to align with how a person naturally experiences change. As Hiatt stated, awareness must be before desire, as realizing the need for change sparks the individual's wish or provokes resistance. Before knowledge, a desire must exist, as one does not seek an understanding of actions they are not interested in. Knowledge is preceding ability, as they cannot execute what they lack comprehension. Preceding reinforcement is the individual's ability to recognize and value accomplishments.

Awareness. In an organization, the goal of the awareness phase is to help people understand the need to implement change and explain the possible risks if the change does not happen (Hiatt, 2006). On an individual level, it outlines the pros and cons. It helps individuals assess the impasse they have encountered personally, creating a sense of urgency through this awareness process. It is human nature, beginning with childhood, to question things. As an adult, especially in the workplace, questions are continually being asked. When change happens, the need for clarity and understanding is heightened. Individuals must be sincere and transparent

with themselves at this critical stage. Building awareness can create the groundwork necessary for individuals to make personal choices about change.

   Desire. Desire, the second element in the model, represents how motivation and buy-in from the collective drive participation in the change (Hiatt, 2006). Desire is challenging because it is at this phase where the least control is exerted by leadership on individuals. An organization has limited control over an individual's personal feelings or decisions. However, individuals view this phase differently, as their desires often come from an intrinsic place. At the same time, an organization can exert a certain amount of influence on its employees by making them aware of potential consequences and benefits, introducing new processes and tools, investing in the latest technology, or even introducing new incentive systems. The individual must choose to support the change in their own time. Personal motivation includes what the person values and the internal belief within oneself that they can achieve what they want should they move forward. The individual's internal compass communicates the likelihood that the individual could reach the desired results due to this change.

   Knowledge. The third building block of the ADKAR model is knowledge (Hiatt, 2006). At this stage, the question of implementing a change is explored. Knowledge can be expressed in many ways; it can be educational pieces of training focused on developing specific skills or behaviors or new values created in hopes of changing a company's culture or, in this instance, the trajectory of one's career. For entrepreneurs, what is essential at this stage is to understand the factors that may impede progression. Factors include understanding the individual's knowledge base about their enterprise, their capabilities of what they can learn, the resources available throughout the transition processes, and access to said required knowledge. It is essential to

understand that change is a simple process and, in some cases, can transform the way people think.

Ability. The fourth element of the ADKAR model is the ability to demonstrate the implementation methods to achieve the desired performance (Hiatt, 2006). People who are in the process of obtaining knowledge are only once proficient in what they just learned. It takes time to develop skills, but having the ability to do so makes all the difference. External and internal factors play a significant role and can be obstacles. Psychological blocks, physical and intellectual capabilities, timing, and the availability of resources all impact the implementation of a change process. The ADKAR model is achieved when the individual or organization can implement the change to reach the desired performance level.

Reinforcement. The final element is classified as reinforcement (Hiatt, 2006). The term reinforcement can sometimes have a negative connotation, but with ADKAR, it is a positive component. In an organization, examples of reinforcing change are employee recognition, celebrations, and acknowledgment of progress. Within individual change, this is also the stage of stabilization, in which people on an individual level must self-govern and realize that the change introduced must be practiced daily, which becomes an integral part of their personal development. Reinforcement upholds the transformation and safeguards individuals from reverting to previous actions. It nurtures momentum during the shift. Ultimately, reinforcement forges a past that individuals recollect when faced with the following change. When change is supported and commemorated, the potential for further change expands. The ADKAR model is successful because it equips individuals with the language to understand how to implement change in their lives. The change model specifically relates to leader and individual by enabling leadership to have the confidence to plan and orchestrate change activities. As an entrepreneur,

these skills are imperative because these individuals are an integral part of the transition process and the success of their business.

Kotter's Leading Change Model

Kotter's (2012) Leading Change Model, developed in 1996, is an eight-step method whose primary purpose is to minimize resistance and encourage acceptance of change within an organization. Change is inevitable, and when individuals are forced outside their comfort zone, the fear of the unknown causes complacency, lack of followership, and volatile business environments (Kotter, 1995). Kotter's Model provides awareness and skill that helps entrepreneurs understand the key elements that play a significant role in resistance to change and how to combat these obstacles. Most importantly, Kotter establishes how the concept of leadership, over the concept of management, is the healthiest way to drive this process. The following is Kotter's 8-Step process which is described.

1. Establishing a sense of urgency: Analyzing market and competitive circumstances; recognizing and conversing about emergencies, potential emergencies, or significant prospects.

2. Creating the guiding coalition: Forming a team with sufficient influence to spearhead the change initiative while motivating the team to collaborate cohesively.

3. Developing a vision and strategy: Crafting a guiding vision for steering the change endeavor; formulating approaches to attain that vision.

4. Communicating the change vision: Utilizing every available means to convey the fresh vision and strategies, instilling new behaviors through exemplifying the leading coalition.

5. Empowering others to act: Removing hindrances and altering the frameworks that sabotage the vision; promoting embracing risk and non-conventional concepts, endeavors, and understanding.

6. Generating short-term wins: Preparing for noticeable enhancements in performance while acknowledging and incentivizing employees engaged in these enhancements.

7. Consolidating gains and producing more change: Leveraging enhanced credibility to modify systems, frameworks, and regulations incompatible with the vision. Recruiting, elevating, and nurturing personnel capable of executing the vision.

8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture: Expressing the links between the new behaviors and achieving corporate prosperity.

Kotter's (2012) Change Model was developed from researching errors companies were routinely making. By breaking down these common errors and transforming them into guidelines, his model ultimately introduces the concepts of lifelong learning, leadership versus management skills, and the capacity to succeed in the future. Entrepreneurs utilize all of these capabilities as they lead their enterprises.

Senge's Fifth Discipline Model

Peter Senge (2006) developed the Fifth Discipline framework aimed to help lean organizations continuously increase their innovation capabilities to become truly influential. These disciplines outline how learning organizations can build capacity and commitment to the organization and themselves. As an entrepreneur, innovation is constantly at the forefront of one's mind, especially with the competitive nature of society. Senge's (2006) five disciplines are the following.

1. Personal mastery: Consistently refining and enhancing our vision, concentrating our efforts, cultivating patience, and perceiving reality impartially.

2. Mental models: Firmly rooted beliefs, broad concepts, or even mental visuals that shape the individual's comprehension of the world and guide our actions.

3. Shared vision: Sharing the vision with others involves uncovering the collective visions of the future that nurture commitment, dedication, and involvement instead of being compliant. Leaders understand that imposing the vision can be ineffective regardless of how sincere it may be.

4. Team learning: Communication, or dialogue, begins when members come together to think rather than make assumptions. This is how team learning occurs.

5. Systems thinking: A framework of knowledge and tools developed in the last 50 years to help organizations and individuals understand clear patterns and how to change them efficiently.

While each discipline can stand on its own, for an entrepreneur to be truly successful, they all must be interlinked. There are no specific rules as to the order that must be followed in this change model, and it is not recommended to attempt to complete them all simultaneously (Senge, 2006). Entrepreneurs who have been successful and continue to be have concentrated on collective learning, carefully and strategically integrating each discipline into their enterprises at a time for optimal influence.

Senge's (2006) formulation of the concept of learning individuals is highly recognized as an innovative and appealing theory of personal transformation. It introduces a new practice of treating an enterprise and its people as a system and thinking and working together as one unit to drive success.

Lewin's 3-Stage Model of Change

Kurt Lewin's change management model is a three-stage theory denoting the step-by-step phases of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing (Lewin, 1947). The primary purpose of this model is to present a practical yet straightforward prototype that illustrates individual involvement instructed by leaders on change initiatives within an organization. This method can also be considered an individual change management model as the theory is centered around first establishing that a change is needed, then implementing new desired behavior, and lastly, creating norms that reinforce the change. Lewin's (1947) three stages are the following.

1. Unfreeze: Recognizing a problem, and the solution is implementing a change. The first step also aligns with creating a sense of urgency. The more an organization believes that changing systems is necessary, the urgency increases, thus also motivating others to act.

2. Change: The second stage is the stage of transition or transformation. At this point, the organization should have majority buy-in from employees, and everyone is moving towards developing new norms. Support of leadership and open communication is critical here.

3. Refreeze: The last stage is where stability is established. Changes in the organization are now entirely accepted, and the feelings of fear, uneasiness, or confusion decrease.

Lewin's (1947) 3-Step model expressed a simple message. Change will never be maintained if it is not recognized as a priority and reinforced constantly. It is human nature to naturally slip back into bad habits, so if an individual does not constantly reinvent themselves and their business, the change will not be continual.

Lewin's (1947) Model is an ideal strategy for entrepreneurs who need a simple how-to guide. Its strengths lie in the simplicity of embracing change and unfreezing the present norms, moving from the present, and refreezing new actions. This concept can be applied to many different situations and also can work for a variety of different entrepreneurs. Table 1 shows the summary of literature, the critical factors and the themes that correlate with the findings from this study.

Table 1

Summary of Literature

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
1	Anna, A. L., Chandler, G. N., Jansen, E. & Mero, N.P. (2000). Women business owners in traditional and non-traditional industries. *Journal of Business Venturing, 15*(3), 279–303.	This study builds on the background of women's career development and entrepreneurial intentions to examine differences between traditional and non-traditional women business owners.	Empowerment and Independence
2	Alabduljader, N., Ramani, R. S., & Solomon, G. T. (2018). *Entrepreneurship education: A qualitative review of US curricula for steady and high growth potential ventures.* Annals of Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy. https://www.elgaronline.com/	An overview of the state of the field of entrepreneurship education in the U.S., its attempts to differentiate itself from traditional business education, and the curricular confusion between high growth potential ventures (HGPV) and small business or steady state growth ventures (SBGV) is examined.	Breaking Barriers Cultural Identity in Business
3	A Black Feminist Statement. (2014). *Women's Studies Quarterly, 42*(3/4), 271–280.	A collective of black feminist statements that discuss black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.	Resilience and Persistence

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
4	Alinia, M. (2015). On Black Feminist Thought: thinking oppression and resistance through intersectional paradigm. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 38*(13), 2334–2340.	This article offers an interpretive framework for understanding the experiences of African-American women.	Black feminist epistemology
5	Audretsch, D. B. (2007). Entrepreneurship capital and economic growth. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 23*(1), 63-78.	This paper shows how and why the Solow growth accounting framework is useful for linking entrepreneurship capital to economic growth.	Navigating Digital Platforms Skill Transformation
6	Barr, M. S. (2015). *Minority and women entrepreneurs: Building capital, networks, and skills.* https://www.brookings.edu/	This study examines the Increasing the rate of minority and female entrepreneurship may help to reduce the race and gender wealth gaps, to reduce income and wealth inequality, and to increase social mobility.	Redefining Success Personal Branding
7	Basu, A. (2006). Ethnic minority entrepreneurship. In M. Casson, B. Yeung, A. Basu, & N. Wadeson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of entrepreneurship* (pp. 580–600). Oxford University Press.	This article examines the definition of ethnic entrepreneurship and evaluates the forces affecting entry into ethnic entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial survival and success, as well as the factors underlying the heterogeneity in entrepreneurial behavior and performance among ethnic minority groups.	Mentorship and Support
	Bates, T., & Robb, A. (2013). Greater access to capital is needed to unleash the local economic development potential of minority-owned businesses. *Economic Development Quarterly, 27*(3), 250-259.	This study gives an analysis on the limited access to financing restricts the ability of minority business enterprises (MBEs) to achieve viability, to generate new jobs, and, generally, to reach their full potential to contribute to the economic development of the communities and	N/A

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
		regions in which they operate.	
8	Bird, B.J. & BrushC.G. (2003) A gendered perspective on organizational creation: *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice. 26*(3), 41-65	This paper discusses the distinction between biology (sex: male and female, man and woman) and socialized perspectives (gender: masculine and feminine). While research and the general public often use the concept of gender loosely to signify sex, we follow a more precise feminist distinction. The paper advances new concepts of gender-maturity (an individual difference) and gender-balance (an organizational quality).	Liberal Feminist theory, Social Feminist theory, Psychoanalytical Feminist theory,
9	Bliss, R. T., & Garratt, N. L. (2001). Supporting women entrepreneurs in transitioning economies. *Journal of Small Business Management, 39*(4), 336-344.	This paper discusses the need for supporting women entrepreneurs. A review of past research reveals both a lack of government support for entrepreneurs in general, and differences in the needs of female and male entrepreneurs.	N/A
10	Blockson, L., Robinson, J., & Robinson, S. (2007). Exploring stratification and entrepreneurship: African-American women entrepreneurs redefine success in growth ventures. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 613*(1), 131-154.	In this article, the authors discuss these relationships in the context of African-American women engaged in high-growth entrepreneurship. Using the concept of entrepreneurial success as an example, the authors demonstrate how a social stratification and entrepreneurship framework may be useful for scholars who seek to understand the process of entrepreneurship.	Social Stratification Theory
11	Buttner, E. H. (2001). Examining female entrepreneurs' management	This paper reports the results of a qualitative analysis of female	Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
	style: An application of a relational frame. *Journal of Business Ethics, 29*(3), 253-270	entrepreneurs' accounts of their role in their organizations using Relational Theory as the analytical frame.	
12	Boyd, R. L. (2000a). Conceptual and analytical issues in testing the hypothesis of survivalist entrepreneurship: A response to Fitch and Myers. *Social Science Quarterly, 81*(4), 992- 996.	This Journal discusses the variation in rates of ethnic entrepreneurship across urban areas.	Balancing Work and Family Life
13	Boyd, R. L. (2000b). Survivalist entrepreneurship among urban Blacks during the great depression: A test of the disadvantage theory of business enterprise. *Social Science Quarterly, 81*(4), 972-984.	This study tests the proposition that, during the Great Depression, joblessness, the most serious form of labor market disadvantage, compelled urban Blacks to become "survivalist entrepreneurs," that is, persons who start small businesses in response to the need to find an independent means of livelihood.	Financial Freedom
14	Boyd, R. L. (2000c). Race, labor market disadvantage, and survivalist entrepreneurship: Black women in the urban north during the great depression. *Sociological Forum, 15*(4), 647-670.	This study examines the disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship holds that members of destitute ethnic groups often respond to labor market exclusion by becoming "survivalist entrepreneurs," that is, persons who start marginal businesses in response to a need to become self-employed.	Intersectionality in Entrepreneurship
15	Bowie, L. D., & Kenney, N. E. (2013). The Invisible Woman: The Status of and Challenges Facing Black Women Preface. *The Review of Black Political Economy, 40*(1), 5–10.	This article examines the intersectionality between race and gender.	Networking in the Digital Space

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
16	Brah, A., & Phoenix, A. (2004). Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies, 5*(3), 75–86.	This paper revisits debates on intersectionality in order to show that they can shed new light on how we might approach some current issues.	Innovating Traditional Business Models
17	Bruni, A., Gherardi, S., & Poggio, B. (2004). Doing gender, doing entrepreneurship: An ethnographic account of intertwined practices. *Gender, Work & Organization, 11*(4), 406–429.	This groundbreaking new study considers both gender and entrepreneurship as symbolic forms, looking at their diverse patterns and social representation.	Digital Marketing Strategies
18	Brimmer, A. (1999). Long-term trends and prospects for black-owned businesses. *The Review of Black Political Economy, 26*(1), 19–36.	In the following article an overview of the growth of black-owned businesses is presented, as well as a discussion of trends in market shares and, finally, long-term prospects for black firms are examined.	Digital Product Creation
19	Brush, C. G., de Bruin, A., & Welter, F. (2009). A gender-aware framework for women's entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship, 1*(1), 8–24.	The purpose of this paper is to offer a new gender-aware framework to provide a springboard for furthering a holistic understanding of women's entrepreneurship.	"3Ms" (markets, money and management)
20	Cantillon, R., & Say, J. B. (2021). *Economic functions of the entrepreneur.* https://entrepreneurhandbook.co.uk/define-entrepreneur/	Cantillon was the first to introduce the role of the entrepreneur into economic analysis. He also provided considerable insights into value theory, the circular flow of income, the monetary approach to the balance of payments, and the law of one price.	E-commerce Ventures
21	Coleman, S. (2000). Access to capital and terms of credit: A comparison of men- and women owned small businesses. *Journal of Small Business Management, 38*(3), 37–52.	This article compares access to capital for men-and women-owned small businesses using data from the 1993 National Survey of Small Business Finances The second part of this study examines the terms	Financial Freedom

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
		under which women obtain credit to determine whether they are at a relative disadvantage from that perspective.	
22	DeMartino, R., & Barbato, R. (2003). Differences between women and men MBA entrepreneurs: Exploring family flexibility and wealth creation as career motivators. *Journal of Business Venturing, 18*(6), 815–832.	This study explores motivational differences using a sample of MBA entrepreneurs. This allows comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs, who are similar in terms of business education, educational credentials, and other important variables.	Health and Wellness Entrepreneurship
23	Dishman, L. (2020, February 6). *Why community matters for Black and brown female founders.* Fast Company.	This article highlights the journey of a African-American female entrepreneur and the challenges she faces string her own small business.	Social Media Influence
24	Dumas, C. (2001). Evaluating the outcomes of micro-enterprise Training for low income women: A case study. *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship, 6*(2), 97–128.	This article on the Centre for Women and Enterprise Community Entrepreneurs Programme (CEP) demonstrates the use of a case study as a research method.	E-learning and Online Courses
25	Greene, P. G., Brush, C. G., Hart, M.M., & Saparito, P. (2001). Patterns of venture capital funding: Is gender a factor? *Venture Capital: An International Journal of Entrepreneurial Finance, 3*(1), 63–83.	This exploratory study utilizes longitudinal data to track US venture capital investments by proportion, stage, industry and gender.	Financial Freedom
26	Gundry, L.K., & Welsch, H.P. (2001). The ambitious entrepreneur: High growth strategies of women-owned enterprises. *Journal of Business Venturing, 16*(5), 453–470.	Focusing on women entrepreneurs whose businesses have grown rapidly, the authors examine the strategic growth intentions, commitment level, opportunity costs, structure, and success factors that distinguish their	Tech Startups

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
		businesses from those of less successful entrepreneurs.	
27	Fairlie, R. W. (2006). Entrepreneurship among disadvantaged groups: An analysis of the dynamics of self-employment by gender, race and education. In S. Parker (Ed.), *Life cycle of entrepreneurial ventures: International handbook series on entrepreneurship*, (pp. 437–478). Springer.	This study examines the entrepreneurship patterns among several disadvantaged groups	Health and Wellness Entrepreneurship.
28	Fairlie, R. W. (2013). Entrepreneurship, economic conditions, and the great recession. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy, 22*(2), 207–231.	Using the regression estimates for the local unemployment rate effects, this study examines the predicted trend in entrepreneurship rates tracks the actual upward trend in entrepreneurship extremely well in the Great Recession.	Theory of Economic Incentives – Papanek and Harris
29	Fairlie, R. W., & Fossen, F. M. (January 2018). *Opportunity versus necessity entrepreneurship: Two components of business creation*. IZA Institute of Labor and Economics, (11258).	This article examines the "opportunity" vs. "necessity" entrepreneurship is associated with the creation of more growth-oriented businesses.	Storytelling for Branding
30	Fairlie, R. W., & Robb, A. (2007). Why are Black-owned businesses less successful than White owned businesses? Role of families, inheritances, and business human capital. *Journal of Labor Economics, 25*(2), 289–323.	Using confidential microdata from the Characteristics of Business Owners survey, this study examines why African-American-owned businesses lag substantially behind white-owned businesses in sales, profits, employment, and survival.	Mentorship and Support
31	Fischer, M., & Massey, D. (2000). Residential segregation and ethnic enterprise in U.S.	In this paper, we specify and estimate a model of minority group entrepreneurship that	Art and Creativity Entrepreneurship

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
	metropolitan areas. *Social Problems, 47*(3), 408–424.	incorporates individual, household, and metropolitan-level factors.	
32	Giacomin, O., Janssen F., & Lohest, O. (2011). *Opportunity and/or necessity entrepreneurship? The impact of the socio-economic characteristics of entrepreneurs*. MPRA (Munich Personal RePEc Archive) Working Paper 29506.	This study examines the impact of the socio-economic characteristics of entrepreneurs on the alignment of their project with a necessity or opportunity entrepreneurial dynamics.	Sustainable and Eco-friendly Business
33	Gold, S. J. (2016). A critical race theory approach to Black American entrepreneurship. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 39*(9), 1697–1718.	This paper reviews three of the most common explanations for black Americans' low rates of entrepreneurship: the cultural/psychological perspective, the ethnic enterprise perspective and the critical race approach.	Critical Race Theory
34	Gupta, V., MacMillan, I. C., & Surie, G. (2004). Entrepreneurial leadership: Developing and measuring a cross-cultural construct. *Journal of Business Venturing, 19*, 241–260.	Based on the new development of the transformational leadership theory, namely differentiated transformational leadership, this paper sorts out the related concepts, structures and measurements of individual-focused transformational leadership and team-focused transformational leadership.	Remote Work Opportunities
35	Hackler, D., & Mayer, H. (2008). Diversity, entrepreneurship, and the urban environment. *Journal of Urban Affairs, 30*(3), 273–307.	This article examines the ways in which a region's creative milieu and its opportunity structures may help or hinder different kinds of entrepreneurs, in particular nontraditional entrepreneurs.	Virtual Services and Consulting
36	Harvey, A. (2008). Personal satisfaction and economic improvement: Working-class	Rather than adding to the voluminous literature that addresses the structural	Fashion and Beauty Industry Online

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
	Black women's entrepreneurship in the hair industry. *Journal of Black Studies, 38*(6), 900–915.	causes for Black women's overrepresentation in this sector of the labor market, this study explores the viability of entrepreneurship as a route to economic stability for working class Black women.	
37	Haynes, P. J., & Helms, M. M. (2000). Women entrepreneurs: Moving front and center: An overview of research and theory. *Bank Marketing, 32*(5), 28–36.	This study examines female entrepreneurship – looking specifically at women founders, their ventures, and their entrepreneurial behaviors as a unique subset of entrepreneurship.	Cultural Preservation Through Digital Venturesy
38	Jean-Marie, G., Williams, V. A., & Sherman, S. L. (2009). Black Women's Leadership Experiences: Examining the Intersectionality of Race and Gender. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 11*(5), 562–581.	In this article, the experiences of Black women educational leaders are highlighted to examine the intersection of race and gender in their leadership experiences and tease out approaches to gender inclusiveness to disrupt the isms (racism, sexism, etc.)	Social Impact Entrepreneurship
39	Jones, S., & Malveaux, J. (2008). The State of Black America 2008: In the Black Woman's Voice.	This journal provides the black female perspective of the challenges that currently confront women of color in America.	Resilience and Persistence
40	Iromuanya, J. (2018). Are We All Feminists? The Global Black Hair Industry and Marketplace in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah. *Meridians 1 September 2018; 16*(1): 163–183.	This paper seeks to illuminate the questions that Adichie raises in Americanah regarding the centrality and alterity of women, who, like traditional middleman minorities, act as consumers and producers within a market that is deeply entrenched in the racial, political, and economic framework of the larger patriarchal society, while	Cultural Identity in Business

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
		also operating with a great deal of autonomy.	
41	Kamberidou, I. (2013). Women entrepreneurs: 'We cannot have change unless we have men in the room'. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, 2*(1), 6.	This paper examines discussions and research on female entrepreneurial activity and provides Tips from successful women entrepreneurs who tell how they have been using new technologies - and social media in particular - to excel in their careers and balance their professional and family lives.	Tech Education Initiatives
42	Mack, E., Pierre, L., & Redican, K. (2017, March). Entrepreneurs' use of internet and social media applications.	This study analyzes survey data from entrepreneurs to understand factors that influence the adoption of multiple Internet and social media platforms, and the role of business incubation facilities in providing information technology assistance to these ventures.	Digital Content Monetization
43	Parker, K. F. (2015). The African-American entrepreneur-Crime-drop relationship: Growing African-American ownership and declining youth violence. *Urban Affairs Review, 51*(6), 751–708.	This article explore the relationship between African-American entrepreneurship and rates of juvenile violence, net of the effects associated with labor market shifts and the concentration of disadvantage within these areas.	Empowerment and Independence
44	Shane, S., & Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 217–226.	To date, the phenomenon of entrepreneurship has lacked a conceptual framework. This article draws upon previous research conducted in the different social science disciplines and applied fields of business to create a conceptual framework for the field.	Building an Authentic Online Presence

Lit No.	Reference	Critical Factors	Themes
45	U.S. Bureau of Census. (2021). *Women Owned Business*. 2021 Economic Census. U.S. Department of Commerce, 2021.	This article analyzes the number of Women-Owned Employer Firms Increased 0.6% From 2017 to 2018.	Access to Global Markets
46	Weiler, S., & Bernasek, A. (2001). Dodging the glass ceiling? Networks and the new wave of women entrepreneurs. *The Social Science Journal, 38*, 85–103.	Openings of women-owned businesses have radically accelerated recently. This paper explores the causes and results of this phenomenon.	Collaborative Online Projects
47	Yadav, V., & Unni, J. (2016). Women entrepreneurship: Research review and future directions. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research, 6*, 12.	The objective of this study is twofold. First is to examine the number of papers published on women entrepreneurship in 12 established entrepreneurship journals from 1900 to 2016. Second is to assess the growth of the field by specifically reviewing literature reviews published from 1980s till 2016 and put forward future research directions.	Social Impact Entrepreneurship

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 of this study provided readers with a comprehensive literature analysis. The literature focused on:

- a historical overview of African-American female entrepreneurship,

- African-American women and the American wealth gap,

- the future of African-American female entrepreneurs, and

- frameworks.

This study deeply investigated the multifaceted experiences of African-American women who pursue entrepreneurship. By examining the leadership skills, characteristics, and strategies of entrepreneurs, the goal is to understand better the unique qualities required of global leaders in

fast-paced markets and better leverage the evolving roles of women to enable new insights and growth in various industries, specifically technology. It was the intention to seek to provide insight into the rapidly evolving global technology industry and what skills, characteristics and strategies will be most needed as the landscape continues to evolve.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Research design is the blueprint that ensures your data collection efforts lead to meaningful and actionable insights. Without a well-thought-out plan, you risk wasting time and resources on information that does not help move your business forward.

— Janice Bryant Howroyd, *Founder and CEO of The ActOne Group.*

Introduction

This chapter offered a comprehensive outline and synopsis of the researcher's intentions. This research aimed to methodically examine the essence of the lived experiences of 10 successful African-American women who have cultivated, owned, and operated small business enterprises. Included in this qualitative research study was a reinstatement of the significance of the study and the research questions. The chapter also discussed an overview of the research design methodology used to conduct the study. The research design methodology that will be used to collect and examine the data obtained by the researcher is referred to as a qualitative phenomenological approach. With this method, the chapter describes participant selection, the protection of human subjects, instrument design, the chosen technique for gathering and analyzing data, and the researcher's statement of bias.

Through qualitative research, the study sought to concentrate on the lived experiences of African-American women today. The researcher captured 10 African-American women's perspectives on transitioning from corporate America into entrepreneurship and their lived experiences, highlighting their successes and unique challenges.

Restatement of the Research Question

This section described the research methods that were applied to achieve the objectives of this study to answer the following four main research questions:

- RQ1: What obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?

- RQ 2: How do African-American women overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?

- RQ3: How do African-American Women measure their success as entrepreneurs?

- RQ4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being full-time entrepreneurs, what recommendations are emerging African-American female entrepreneurs?

The principal research questions directed this phenomenological study's data collection and analysis. The research questions were intentionally wide-ranging, with the hope that the interview responses were not controlled. The goal was to have the participants freely interpret events without hesitation. All of the questions were open-ended with the intent for dialogue between the researcher and the participant. Similar to how discourse creates meaning, open-ended questions do the same. As a result, the questions are written in an open-ended manner (Creswell, 2007).

Nature of the Study

Historically, African-American women's accomplishments and experiences should be more noticed and taken seriously. Through qualitative research, the researcher aimed to highlight the unique testimonies of their strength and perseverance. The objective of qualitative studies is to comprehend theories, beliefs, or human experiences via the collection and analysis of data. Transcriptions, audio, or video are examples of this form of non-numerical data. By sharing their

stories, their experiences may guide and inspire new generations of African-Americans who will follow in their footsteps and continue to pour into the rich legacy of entrepreneurship within the African-American culture.

Qualitative research encompasses multiple approaches, including ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Similarities that the approaches may encompass are the following.

- Information is obtained in the participant's natural environment.

- The researcher is the sole collector of the information provided by the participants.

- Data analysis is carried out by examining the information and coding emerging trends and commonalities.

- Analysis is carried out by looking over data and identifying patterns and themes.

- The researcher explores the significance behind the participant's personal experience.

- The study is organized around a philosophical framework

- The researcher analyzes the results to develop a comprehensive and integrated perspective on the study's results. Data can be accumulated through various sources such as interview sessions, video or audio content, and documents such as scholarly articles, newspapers, or journals.

Within this particular study, data was collected by interviewing African-American female entrepreneurs. The chosen interview method was semi-structured in the form of open-ended questions, with the purpose being as similar as possible to a dialogue. Open-ended questions generate meaning in a style analogous to how conversation does. The questions are, therefore, constructed in an open-ended manner (Creswell, 2007).

Methodology

  Qualitative research is a research method that is comprised of gathering and analyzing data to develop an understanding of theories, beliefs, or human experiences. This type of non-numerical data includes transcriptions, video, or audio. This structured research method is often used in phenomenological studies to gather in-depth insights into a complex issue or generate new research ideas (Donalek & Soldwisch, 2004). Although multiple data-gathering strategies can be utilized that align with qualitative methods for this study, the chosen qualitative design was the phenomenological approach. The rationale for the qualitative research design and phenomenological approach was discussed further.

Rationale for the Phenomenological Methodology

  The researcher used a qualitative research design for this study, enabling themes to emerge and give meaning to the participants' unique lived experiences. The data was reviewed through a grounded, emergent leadership theory described by Creswell (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary goals of phenomenological research are to develop in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon and to look for reality in people's accounts of their experiences and feelings. In educational contexts, empirical research studies typically reflect participants' perceptions, feelings, and personal experiences of a topic. Many philosophers in history have used phenomenology for research, such as Kant, Hegel, and Husserl. Immanuel Kant originally introduced the term phenomenology in 1764. Phenomenology is derived from the Greek word "painting," which means "to appear." The framework develops into a process that seeks to understand an individual's first-person viewpoint of a phenomenon they have lived through. (Cilesiz, 2011; Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). The following philosophies make up phenomenology: theories of transcendence and existence (Cilesiz, 2011). Existential philosophy

reflects a desire to focus on our lived experience, in contrast to transcendental philosophy, which is frequently associated with being able to go beyond the lived experience, as if one is standing outside of oneself to observe the world from above (Ihde, 1986; Langdridge, 2007).

In understanding the appropriateness of the validation for using the phenomenological methodology within this study, the existential philosophy was deemed appropriate to align with this research. Instead of depending on viewpoints and ideologies that could have bias and not adequately capture the substance and meaning generated from the interviewee's lived experiences, the phenomenological approach allows ideas to emerge from their actual experiences and are more authentic.

Husserl (1970) coined the Greek word epoché, which means to refrain from making assumptions or judgments about the phenomena being studied. (Langdridge, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research does not have an established hypothesis or make assumptions, so it is often used quantitatively. The idea of the epoché is to allow the researcher to describe the issues themselves while attempting to leave aside the natural stance or all of the researcher's presumptions (Langdridge, 2007). The research aimed to identify the themes that frequently appear throughout the phenomenological research and then best capture the fundamental essence of the study.

Research Design

The researcher adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to address the research questions. The researcher collected data via interviews with African-American female entrepreneurs. Thus, the qualitative phenomenological method was the most suitable research approach for exploring the participants' in-depth cognitive processes and views regarding entrepreneurship among African-American women and obtaining valid research results.

Analysis Unit

For this study, the ideal candidates were determined to be African-American women who were over 18, had a level of education of a bachelor's degree or higher, and were entrepreneurs. In order to highlight African-American women pursuing entrepreneurship and the historical backdrop for it, it is essential first to define the phrase and explain what it entails. One of the earliest definitions of entrepreneurship was provided in the year 1730 by Cantillon (Thornton, 1998), who defined the term as any form of self-employment and defined entrepreneurs as wage earners with no source of a fixed income but instead took educated business risks with the hope that they would gain a return on investment although it was not guaranteed.

Population

The sample was drawn from a portion of the target population, known as the study population. It goes beyond the concept sample frame in scope (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Women of color drive the women-owned company movement in practically every sector (Randall, 2017). Despite making up 39% of all American women, women of color have created over 1,500 net new women-owned businesses daily in the past year, or 89% of all new women-owned enterprises overall. While the number of women-owned businesses increased by 21% between 2014 and 2019, the growth of businesses run by women of color was impressive, rising by 43% and reaching 50% for African-American women-owned enterprises (Gines, 2018). In 2019, these businesses' average annual revenue was over $65,000.

Between 2014 and 2019, African-American women-owned businesses experienced the fastest growth rate of any demographic regarding the number of businesses. These African-American women created three times as many women-owned enterprises (42%) as the general population (14%). According to the analysis, the U.S. economy would gain four million

additional jobs and $981 billion in revenue if minority women-owned businesses' revenues were equal to those of all women-owned enterprises. As of 2019, 50% of all women-owned enterprises are operated by women of color. Nearly 2.4 million individuals are employed by the projected 6.4 million women of color-owned enterprises, which generate $422.5 billion in revenue. However, the revenue gap widens even as new minority-owned enterprises open (Gines, 2018).

Although the participants who will be selected for this study are all African-American women, their experiences will reflect the diversity within the population. The population will consist of businesswomen from various industries and trades in different geographic locations across the United States of America. The population is determined to be all African-American females who are over 18, have a level of education of a bachelor's degree or higher, and are entrepreneurs.

Sample Size

Small sample sizes are typical in qualitative research to facilitate the in-depth case-oriented analysis central to this type of research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, qualitative data gathering is purposive, intending to select participants who can offer thorough feedback that applies to the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling targets information-rich experiences instead of probability sampling, which is used in quantitative research. Creswell and Poth (2018) highlighted that five to 25 people are needed for a study in phenomenological research. The study, which focused on single-interview-per-participant qualitative designs, attempted to further the discussion of sample size in qualitative research by providing empirical information regarding sample size justification best practices. A sample size of 15 African-American female entrepreneurs was selected to obtain a comprehensive data analysis of their

shared experiences through interviews with the researcher. The sample size was peer-reviewed and accessed with approval by the dissertation committee.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling has a lengthy development history, and opinions on its simplicity and complexity are equally divided. Purposive sampling is used because it better aligns the sample size to the goals and objectives of the research, enhancing the study's rigor and the reliability of the data and findings. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the four components of this paradigm (Creswell, 2007). This qualitative study aimed to use these components to document the participants' personal experiences and highlight their successes. The participants who will be included in the study will be selected based on their unique attributes and experiences and their clear understanding of the research topic. All factors that contributed to the selection of participants were determined from research explored through literature and documented within the literature review section of the study. The researcher recruited participants, explained the purpose of the study, and asked for the participants' commitment using the IRB-approved script.

Participant Selection and Sampling Framework

The researcher assembled a finalized list of African-American businesswomen who have successfully navigated transitioning from corporate America to developing and operating their enterprises. The researcher chose study participants based on their comprehension of and capacity to explain the phenomenon or a particular component of the phenomena being studied (Donalek & Soldwisch, 2004). This initiative occurred after IRB approval. The recruiting and selecting of eligible participants was conducted through the generated eligibility list. The list was developed from the researcher's network of colleagues; this included professors, advisors, and

university staff's extended network. Secondly, the researcher used social media to compile a list of participants' names. A focused search was conducted using the terms *African-American women in business, African-American female entrepreneurs, African-American founder* and *CEO,* and *African-American enterprise*. The primary social media outlet used was LinkedIn (https://www.linkedin.com). LinkedIn is an American business and employment-oriented social media platform that operates via websites and mobile apps. Individuals participating in publishing and research within the field were also welcome to participate. Each potential participant was added to a spreadsheet alongside their contact information and company website.

The criteria for maximum inclusion were used so that the sample size was 20 potential participants, although the researcher intended to recruit 15 participants for the study after a thorough examination. After the eligible participants were selected, they were sent an email outlining the study and requesting participation. If an email was unavailable, a LinkedIn message was sent instead, requesting an email for contact. When received, the participant was sent an identical recruitment email.

Criteria for Inclusion. To be considered for the study, the participants needed to meet the following criteria of inclusion:

- they were a citizen of the United States,

- they identified as African-American or Black,

- they were female,

- they were available to participate in an interview between March and April 2023, and

- they sustained their business for at least three or more years

Criteria for Exclusion. The criteria of exclusion excluded participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria. The following were the exclusion criteria:

- participants who were unavailable to complete the interview during March-April 2023 and were not available during this time,

- participants who declined the recording of interviews and

- participants who refused to sign the informed consent form.

Criteria for Maximum Variation

The goal of the sample size was 15 participants. The sample size is predicated on prior qualitative research and estimated that the average participant total who agreed to participate in the survey was about 50% of the original number. If the researcher could not guarantee 15 participants, the action was planned to have the individuals who confirmed potentially nominate others in their network that met the criteria. If the researcher acquired the participation of more than 20 participants, the plan of action that involved a procedure to achieve maximum variation was implemented.

The criteria for maximum variation was centered around the notion that the researcher considered the participants from fluctuating viewpoints to achieve a purposeful yet thorough examination. In phenomenological studies that included qualitative research, maximum variety sampling, also known as heterogeneous sampling, was a way of choosing participants for the study from a wide range of perspectives on the core issue. To ensure a diversity of viewpoints, the researcher facilitating the study chose participants who identified as African-American female business owners between 18 and 65 with at least three years of experience as full-time entrepreneurs operating in various industries.

Criteria considered for maximum variation were pre-selected as follows:

- Geographic Location Variation: Participants were chosen from various areas of the United States. The study's findings will become more geographically diverse as a result.

- Industry Variation: An assortment of entrepreneurs with experience working in various fields were selected. This added diversity in entrepreneurial experiences to the results of the study.

- Age Variation: The variation of age (18-65) offered the opportunity for unique perspectives from the participants at various phases of life.

Protection of Human Subjects

It is essential to guarantee adequate protection, as stated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Subjects while using human subjects in research. Institutional review boards (IRB) monitor the protection of human subjects. The Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board partners with Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology (GSEP). GSEP specifies that the mission of the IRB is to provide a complete circle of protection for research participants and researchers which include the following.

- Promoting and facilitating the protection of human research participants' rights, welfare, and dignity.

- Helping ensure compliance with federal regulations, state laws, university policies, and national research standards for research involving human research participants.

- Providing timely and directed high-quality education, review, and monitoring for human research projects.

- Assist investigators in conducting ethical, sound research of the highest quality that complies with applicable regulations.

An IRB is necessary when meeting the following requirements outlined by Pepperdine's policies:

- According to Pepperdine University policy, all research involving human subjects must be carried out in conformity with recognized ethical, governmental, and professional standards for research and must receive IRB approval. The ethical guidelines outlined in the Belmont Report serve as a guide for Pepperdine University when reviewing and conducting research.

- Correspondingly, all human subjects research carried out by or under the supervision of Pepperdine University will be conducted under Title 45 Part 46 (45 CFR 46), entitled Protection of Human Research Subjects, and Parts 160 and 164, entitled Standards for Privacy of Individuality, of the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, DHHS (CFR).

- The California Protection of Human Subjects in Medical Experimentation Act and identifiable health information. The FDA's guidelines for using human participants in research shall be followed where appropriate (CFR Title 21 Parts 50 and 56, Protection of Human Subjects and Institutional Review Boards).

- Additionally, research involving human subjects must adhere to the accepted ethical standards established by specialized associations or societies relevant to the field of study. Moreover, Pepperdine University shall abide by any additional relevant local, state, and federal laws and regulations. The OHRP has granted Pepperdine University a Federal Assurance after receiving assurances from the university that all human subjects research will conform to 45 CFR 46. 12–14.

This study involved interviewing a collection of unprotected adult human subjects, requiring the submission of an IRB application. Participants in the study will be African-American female entrepreneurs throughout the United States of America. The minimal risk discovered for these participants is the amount of personal time they used to complete the study. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2), which pertains to the safeguarding of human subjects, finds that this study satisfies the prerequisites for exemption.

The institutional review board at Pepperdine University received an application for the claim of exemption. All study participants received an informed consent form, created per Pepperdine University's guidelines for informed consent for participation in research activity, which contains information about the participation requirements, the purpose of the study, specifics about the research study procedure, how the data would be used, potential risks, potential benefits to oneself and others, and alternatives to participation, cost, and compensation.

All content provided by any participant remained anonymous; only the researcher had access to the original unrefined data set conducted from the analysis. Participants in the study were informed that the information gathered during the interview was used for research, and the purpose of the study would be clearly stated. The interview process was explained to study participants; they were informed that it would be audio-taped. Each participant in the study received assurances of privacy and secrecy, and their real names and companies were given pseudonyms. Participants were referred to as Participants 1, 2, and 3, with the researcher being the only one who knew their real names. To further assure the safety and protection of the study participants, any gathered data will be housed in a password-protected file on the researcher's

personal laptop computer and be deleted immediately after transcription and coding have been completed.

Data Collection

The participants were secured through the following three steps: initial contact, participant confirmation and thank you, and interview scheduling distribution.

Step 1: Make Initial Contact

The principal researcher (PR) invited the interviewees to participate in the study by contacting them via e-mail, or if they did not have an email address, they were contacted via LinkedIn requesting a contact email. A recruitment script was sent to each participant. During this step, the PR answered questions the participant may have regarding the nature of the study. The participants will have a deadline of seven days to respond with their agreement to participate. If no response is noted from the participant after seven days, the PR sent one follow-up request notifying the participant of an extended deadline of three days. If there is still no response after the second request, they will be considered not eligible for participation in the study. Participants who reply and agree to participate will be given instructions on scheduling their interview.

Step 2: Participant Confirmation & Thank You

After the participant list was finalized and the participant signed the informed consent document, the principal researcher sent a personalized thank you email to the participant for agreeing to participate in the research study, and an interview was scheduled.

Step 3: Interview Scheduling Distribution

The researcher scheduled the time and date with the interviewee. The interview flow was designed to earn the participants' trust so they felt comfortable sharing personal stories and

honest, raw emotions. The interview began with an icebreaker question and then transitioned into open-ended questions. Audio conferencing via Zoom (https://www.zoom.us) was used for interviews with each participant. Audio conferencing allows for the transcription of oral communication during the interview and the recording the interview session for future reference. The researcher actively listened, limiting feedback and responses to the participant's comments. If needed, the researcher provided additional comments or clarity to motivate the study participants to continue sharing their experiences. The goal was to reassure each participant that their responses were appreciated and understood. Follow-up questions were only posed if the participants' comments needed to be expanded upon. References to the participants and their companies were removed from the transcripts and replaced with fictitious names and general descriptions.

Interview Techniques

Pilot testing within qualitative research and being adaptable enough to embrace changes before the actual research study is strongly advised (Creswell, 2007). A pilot was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the interview protocol, specifically the validity and reliability of the questions, using the questionnaire, interview procedure, and an audio conference that was recorded. During the pilot, the researcher can confirm that the questions are practical enough to prompt insightful, moving reactions that it intends to record.

The study primarily collected data using open-ended, semi-structured interviews because of the richness and breadth of information they may provide (Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews, in particular, maintain a consistent framework that makes it simple to collect the data to the extent that it does not significantly stray from the research questions while allowing participants to provide additional details as necessary. A rigorously designed interview would

make getting the participants' insights more challenging, whereas an unstructured interview would take more time to conduct and classify. To assure the accuracy of the data, the final report incorporated the participants' own words, taken from the interview transcript.

Each interview was captured through Microsoft Teams or Zoom audio platform. The participants could speak via audio with their videos turned off, and it was recorded with a separate recording device, such as an audio recorder. The recordings were secured and stored on the researcher's computer in a password-protected file to which no one had access other than the researcher. The recordings were deleted immediately after transcription and coding were completed. To improve the accuracy of the transcripts downloaded, they were addressed and amended by participant confirmation.

Interview Protocol

Participants were asked to participate in an approximate 30–60-minute semi-structured interview survey of open-ended questions. The questions were structured in a manner that related to each overarching research question but were broad enough to limit bias. The participants were interviewed on their experiences transitioning from corporate America to becoming full-time entrepreneurs and their success. The participants were African-American female entrepreneurs, as the population being studied were African-American females. The interview protocol was used, and the research questions and corresponding interview questions were listed in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

Table 2

Icebreaker Question

Icebreaker Question
1. What is your passion and how does it reflect in your business?

Table 3

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: What obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	IQ 1: What obstacles within your career have you encountered while transitioning from corporate America to entrepreneurship as an African-American woman in the United States and how did you overcome them?
	IQ 2: What obstacles within your personal life have you encountered while transitioning from corporate America to entrepreneurship as an African-American woman in the United States and how did you overcome them?
	IQ 3: What cultural and societal challenges have you encountered while transitioning from corporate America to entrepreneurship as an African-American woman in the United States and how did you overcome them?
RQ2: How do African-American women overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	IQ 4: Can you tell me how your company got started? Beginning from ideation, explain how did the concept occurred to you? What served as the foundation for your company's mission?
	IQ 5: Can you tell me how you first began working in corporate America? What was the most challenging aspect? What was the most rewarding?
	IQ 6: What was the most challenging part of launching your business? Do you have any help or assistance?
	IQ 7: Was funding ever an issue? If so, what methods of financing did you use? What knowledge have you gained? Are you continuing to employ the same plan to finance the expansion that is now keeping your company afloat?
	IQ 8: How do you define and measure success? Has your definition of success changed over the years?

Research Questions	Interview Questions
	IQ 9: What was the approximate length of time it took to achieve profitability after launch? What methods do you employ to achieve and sustain profitability?
RQ 3: How do African-American Women measure their success as entrepreneurs?	IQ 10: What strategies and resources are available to assist African women in the transition to full-time entrepreneurship? What would you say are the most critical to implement?
	IQ 11: Did you transition into entrepreneurship with the intention of building a legacy? If so, where are you on that journey, and was it vital for you to achieve generational wealth?
	IQ 12: Were there any experiences from your time working in corporate America that shaped or prepared you for entrepreneurship?
	IQ 13: Do you currently or have you in the past had a mentor? Do you currently or have you in the past had a sponsor?
	IQ 14: Have you had any missteps in your transition to entrepreneurship? How have you avoided making the same mistakes?
RQ 4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what are some recommendations they would give to emerging African-	IQ 15: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what are some recommendations they would give to emerging African-American female entrepreneurs in a post Covid-19 society who aspires to do the same?
	IQ 16: How has covid-19 affected or still affected your business? What skills, tools, or resources do you use to strategically combat the notion of another global pandemic?
	IQ 17: Looking back at your career, if you could do one thing differently, what would that be?

Research Questions	Interview Questions
American female entrepreneurs?	IQ 18: What has been your experience as an African-American woman creating and operating her own small business?
	IQ 19: Has your journey been influenced by any historical or modern African-American businesswomen?
	IQ 20: Do you have any books that have been helpful to you on your journey? If so, would you mind sharing?
	IQ 21: In one sentence, what do you want your legacy to be known for and remembered as?

The instrument used in this study was the questionnaire that held the interview questions the researcher asked the participants. The literature and research on the topic in Chapter 2 were utilized to formulate the questions and interview format. The researcher had a clear understanding of the potential obscurity that the data may have. The legitimacy of this data set was fundamental, and the researcher emphasized the importance of completing the interview in full with the participants. This consists of asking each question and receiving a response.

Alignment of the Research Questions and Interview Protocol

In this study, the process of gathering qualitative data will be directly correlated to the established interview questions. Following Creswell's (2007) guidance on qualitative research, the open-ended interview questions were purposeful to elicit the participants' unbiased first-person experiences of the phenomena. The participants will elaborate on their experiences navigating the shift from corporate America to entrepreneurship. After a robust analysis of the

literature outlined in Chapter 2, the gap in the analysis prompted the researcher to develop the interview questions. For example, according to the findings in the literature, there is little to no research on women who have successfully navigated corporate America and entrepreneurship. The questions developed stem from this finding. Participants will be able to expound on and convey their experiences in this topic area and elaborate on challenges experienced by African-American entrepreneurs, strategies, and suggestions for other women in the same predicament.

Validity of the Study

To confirm that the interview questions were suitably related to the philosophical components of the research field of study, the researcher established the validity and reliability of the interview process. The study's validity served as a screening or evaluation for the interview questions presented (Golafshani, 2003). The three-step process for forming validity within this research study is the following.

1. Formulating the research question.
2. Collecting data through interviews.
3. Evaluating the data through a coding process.

Member Checking

The foundation of quality qualitative research is the reliability of the findings. Member checking, sometimes called responder or participant validation, is a method for examining the authenticity of results (Creswell, 2003). Participants receive data or results to verify accuracy and accuracy within their experiences and give feedback regarding the themes the researcher substantiated. This qualitative research obtains validity by allowing the participants to contribute to the study's final narrative. Member checking is frequently listed among the various validation methods for research.

Peer Debriefing

Peer reviewers for this research will include fellow doctoral candidates at Pepperdine University and the institution's alumni. According to Thyer (2010), substantiating data points through peer review improves the study's validity. Moreover, academic researchers often utilize numerous peers as sources to validate the researcher's dictations and analyses of the conclusions made from the data.

The researcher of this study will use a peer to review the questions within the questionnaire as required for this research. The primary purpose of peer debriefing is to obtain scholarly insight and consider valuable feedback that would help strengthen the validity of the survey in its totality. Based on their responses and feedback, the researcher made the appropriate modifications to the questionnaire, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Revised Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: What obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	Think of an actual scenario where you successfully overcame an obstacle in your transition from corporate employee to entrepreneur
	IQ 1: What obstacles did you face?
	IQ 2: What challenges or obstacles do you believe African-American women face in making the transition from corporate to entrepreneurship?
RQ2: How do African-American women overcome the obstacles and challenges	IQ 3: Tell me about your career journey within corporate America? What was the most challenging and rewarding aspect?

Research Questions	Interview Questions
they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	IQ 4: What was the most challenging part of launching your business? Do you have any help or assistance?
RQ 3: How do African-American Women measure their success as entrepreneurs?	IQ 5: Did you transition into entrepreneurship with the intention of building a legacy and what role does generational wealth play within that intent?
	IQ 6: What is your personal definition of success and has it evolved?
	IQ 7: Have you had any missteps in your transition to entrepreneurship? How have you avoided making the same mistakes?
RQ 4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what are some recommendations they would give to emerging African-American female entrepreneurs?	IQ 8: What is the best piece of advice you would give to an emerging African-American female entrepreneur in a post Covid-19 society who aspires to do the same?
	IQ 9: Looking back at your career, if you could do one thing differently, what would that be?
	IQ 10: In one sentence, what do you want your legacy to be known for and remembered as?

Statement of Personal Bias and Lived Experiences

The phenomenological epoché does not eradicate everything, does not negate the

existence of everything, and does not cast doubt on everything–it solely suspends the natural

perspective, the predispositions of common knowledge, as a foundation for truth and reality. The

scientific facts and the preconceived understanding of things are subjected to skepticism, arising

from an external standpoint rather than internal contemplation and significance (Moustakas, 1994).

    Epoché, which Hall (1989) defined as the suspension of judgment, enables the researcher to be impartial and examine data objectively, explicitly stating that the focus should be on the meaning of the research rather than questioning. When doing their phenomenological analysis, researchers should use the epoché technique. To fully grasp the participants' experiences and avoid prejudging the outcomes, they should, for instance, be aware of how their own experiences can include potential biases. Phenomenological research that is considered qualitative is often studied and instituted by a human being. With that consideration, it is necessary to recognize that human error is always possible. There is always a possibility for a margin of error as researchers are imperfect, and bias can be integrated unknowingly (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Although bias can occur during any portion of the process during this research, the researcher was careful to remember to be cognitive of personal bias to lessen that possibility. The researcher had no personal connection to the subject matter, nor was she an entrepreneur, nor did she have any direct friends or relatives who are entrepreneurs. The researcher's experience is in technology, so there could be a bias in understanding how a female working in corporate America navigates challenges identified as a study limitation. The researcher solely relied on the literature as the foundation of the research topic, and their personal experience had minimal effect on the study. The researcher recognized that although she is an African-American female living within the U.S., her experience is unique and will not allow potential bias to affect how the dataset is interpreted. To overcome potential bias, the researcher did the following.

- Reviewed the findings with peers and had several individuals code the data to ensure consistency in interpreting the content.

- Inquired whether the individuals who submitted the data believed the researcher's interpretations to be accurate, aka member checking.

- Triangulation: Confirmed using multiple data sources such as observations, in-depth interviews, and secondary research.

- Look into additional explanations via alternative sources such as scholarly journal articles (research-based), personal narratives, interviews, and autobiographies.

Data Analysis

The primary approach for data analysis within qualitative research is preparation and organization. This can be completed by coding information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The first stage after acquiring the data set was to read through the interview transcripts in their entirety, then look for any recurring themes and any that may be emerging and create a codebook within a spreadsheet. Each audio interview was recorded and transcribed to gather applicable keywords or phrases mentioned during the interview. A word or brief phrase that metaphorically provides a cumulative, prominent, and poignant attribute for a subset of language-based data is defined as a code in qualitative research (Mohaffyza et al., 2001).

The codebook contained examples, concepts, and themes. The literature review guided the researcher to analyze the collected data and identify new connections within the findings. Items (such as sentences or questions and answers) serve as the coding unit, and the researcher manually coded transcripts in a spreadsheet-style. A series of color-coded frequency charts will be utilized to present the findings. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was referred to as Participant 1, 2, 3, etc. Frequency charts, interview transcripts, and interrater reliability analysis supported the themes. Chapter 4 addressed the primary themes, their interpretations, and sample participant responses to substantiate them.

Interrater Reliability and Validity

Considering the primary research constructs, a measurement is deemed legitimate if it accurately reflects the feelings and ideas that people empirically encounter in the real world. A measurement is considered reliable when the same study results are obtained in conditions identical to those from similar studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Validity and reliability are essential evaluation factors for high-quality research, which is imperative within a qualitative research study (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability is the degree to which measurements seem consistent even when the researcher or time changes. In contrast, validity is the amount to which the researcher correctly measured what the researcher initially intended to measure (Creswell, 2018).

The following two-step process was used to ensure the analysis's findings' validity and reliability.

- The researcher first coded information collected from participant interviews as part of the data analysis procedure. This was done by identifying relevant keywords and placing them in thematic categories.

- The researcher then had a peer review of the coding that the researcher had completed.

The peer reviewers were Ph.D. students who knew the coding process and were familiar with the phenomenological research methodology when conducting a qualitative study. The researcher and the peer reviewers came together to address the differences or commonalities only after the peer reviewers had worked independently to code the transcripts, themes, and key phrases. The aim was to reach a consensus, but if this is not possible, the researcher would include the dissertation committee and inquire about their recommendations, thus satisfying

expert review validity. In this study, consensus was reached by the researcher and peer reviewers.

Chapter Summary

The qualitative phenomenological methodology was used to identify the components of a successful transition to entrepreneurship from the lived experiences of African-American women. This approach applies to this study because past research shows that with qualitative studies, the phenomenological method allows ideas to emerge from participants' actual experiences and are deemed authentic and trustworthy. Utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method, the study's scope was expanded to include participants nationwide, ensuring anonymity. The participants were chosen because they had previously worked in Corporate America before switching to entrepreneurship. Participants must be 18 and have had business for at least 3 years. Potential participants were identified through a network of peers or colleagues through the University and social media professional sites such as LinkedIn.com.

Protecting the study's human subjects was of the greatest priority. Preceding the interview completion, each participant received informed consent, and an application to an international review board will be submitted. Additionally, to ensure the confidentiality of the information, all data, including the selection of participants to interview, the protection of human subjects, instruments design, data collection and analysis processes, and the researcher's statement of bias, will be held electronically on a folder within the laptop that is protected through the use of a password and the content will be deleted immediately after transcription and coding have been completed. Security and confidentiality are of the highest importance for all parties involved in the research study. After the interviews were conducted, the phenomenological methodology was used for data analysis. Chapter 4 included a comprehensive analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This study delved deeply into the varied experiences of African-American women who intended to begin their ventures. The objective was to understand better the distinctive qualities required of female leaders in fast-paced markets and better leverage the changing roles of women to enable new insights and growth in various industries. This is accomplished by examining entrepreneurs' leadership abilities, traits, and strategies. The goal was to shed light on the rapidly changing global digital entrepreneurship landscape and the characteristics, abilities, and approaches that would be most valuable as the environment fluctuated. The researcher's findings related to digital entrepreneurship, specifically over general entrepreneurship, because the COVID-19 global pandemic's direct effect reshaped the entrepreneurship landscape forever. Numerous individuals discovered new interests and hobbies during the epidemic, many of which incorporated social media. Daily challenges, reels, and vlogging on social media sites like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have grown in popularity. It was quickly understood that being a content producer was not just for fun but that ordinary people could earn a livable salary as a social media influencer, a digital business type.

Furthermore, small-business owners recognized they could operate from a physical location. Instead, these business owners began establishing web-based stores using merchants that provided online storefronts. They began to sell their products via social media networks, thus earning money from those platforms through advertisements. While several individuals pursue digital entrepreneurship full-time, others maintain traditional occupations while pursuing digital entrepreneurship in their spare time, generating additional income. The great resignation continues today, with more and more people, particularly women, quitting their jobs to pursue digital entrepreneurship. However, the issue remains whether The Great Resignation is only a

passing trend or whether digital entrepreneurship represents a new and long-standing employment alternative.

Therefore, this qualitative phenomenological study aimed to understand the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working in corporate America to becoming an entrepreneur who has founded and continue to run their enterprise. Participant feedback was needed to attain insight into this phenomenon shaped by their unique stories and experiences. This occurred through interviews with 15 African-American female entrepreneurs. The information shared by the participants yielded a description of the lived experience of their transitions from Corporate America to entrepreneurship. The researcher obtained this information through the following research questions:

- RQ1: What obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?

- RQ2: How do African-American women overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?

- RQ3: How do African-American Women measure their success as entrepreneurs?

- RQ4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being full-time entrepreneurs, what recommendations would they give emerging African-American female entrepreneurs?

The researcher collected answers to the four research questions by creating 10 interview questions and posing them to the participants. Employing inter-reliability and validity methods, the final version of the interview questions were cultivated as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Revised Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: What obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	Think of an actual scenario where you successfully overcame an obstacle in your transition from corporate employee to entrepreneur
	IQ 1: What obstacles did you face?
	IQ 2: What challenges or obstacles do you believe African-American women face in making the transition from corporate to entrepreneurship?
RQ2: How do African-American women overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	IQ 3: Tell me about your career journey within corporate America? What was the most challenging and rewarding aspect?
	IQ 4: What was the most challenging part of launching your business? Do you have any help or assistance?
RQ 3: How do African-American Women measure their success as entrepreneurs?	IQ 5: Did you transition into entrepreneurship with the intention of building a legacy and what role does generational wealth play within that intent?
	IQ 6: What is your personal definition of success and has it evolved?
	IQ 7: Have you had any missteps in your transition to entrepreneurship? How have you avoided making the same mistakes?
RQ 4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have	IQ 8: What is the best piece of advice you would give to an emerging African-American female entrepreneur in a post Covid-19 society who aspires to do the same?

Research Questions	Interview Questions
successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what recommendations would they give emerging African-American female entrepreneurs?	IQ 9: Looking back at your career, if you could do one thing differently, what would that be?
	IQ 10: In one sentence, what do you want your legacy to be known for and remembered as?

The participants reflected on their experiences while working in corporate America and shared insights about these experiences as entrepreneurs. Each interview was audio recorded to ensure the quality of the data analysis was accurate. The data analysis and coding process discovered common themes associated with the lived experiences of African-American female entrepreneurs' responses. Information regarding the study participants, data gathering methods, and data analysis techniques was covered in this chapter. Each interview question's data was presented in both narrative and graphic form. Lastly, a tabular summary of the key themes for each research question was raised.

Participants

This investigation aimed to interview 15 African-American female entrepreneurs who could vividly describe their experiences and transmit them to the interviewer in a manner that yields impactful, valuable information. The 15 participants represented a diverse sample of African-American female businesswomen from various industries and trades in many geographic locations across the U.S. Each participant was over 18, had a bachelor's degree or higher, and owned and operated their enterprise. Consensus was anticipated to be reached with a sample size of 15 when identifying themes that emerged from responses to the posed 10 interview questions.

As no new themes emerged from the subsequent interviews after the fifth one, it was determined that a consensus had been reached.

The study participants' entrepreneurship endeavors included a variety of professions, such as consultancy, tourism, e-commerce, music, public relations, law, and medical groups. Participants ranged in experience from one year to over 30 years in various fields. Table 6 presented a sampling of the field of expertise, experience, and level of education the participants possessed. The table does not associate, in any way, with the participants' identities.

Table 6

Sampling of Types of Expertise, Experience, and Education of Participants

Field of Expertise	Entrepreneurial venture	Experience	Education
Consulting	Business Consultant	5+	Bachelors
Public Relations and Marketing	Freelance Writer	10+	Bachelors
Music	Singer	30+	Bachelors
Law	Professor	15+	Masters
Medical	Therapist	15+	MD
Hospitality and Tourism	Tour Guide	10+	Bachelors
Social Media Influencer	Blogger	5+	Bachelors, Masters
Wine Professional	Wine Connoisseur	20+	Masters, Ed.D

Data Collection

Before starting this study, the researcher received their Human Subjects certification (see Appendix A). Data collection began on March 24, 2023, after receiving formal IRB approval on March 23, 2023 (see Appendix B). Each respondent identified as a potential research participant received a notification email during the participant selection. Email correspondence was sent to over 75 potential study participants, and 25 replied to the email. A thank you email, and an invitation to participate in the research study were issued to the participants only when a

response was received. Out of the 25 female African-American business owners who expressed interest in participating in the study, the number of candidates decreased to approximately 21 eligible subjects once the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. However, three respondents expressed concern over being able to answer the questions adequately. As the researcher attempted to organize the interviews, based on scheduling conflicts, 15 participants verified they were willing to participate. The computation for the maximum variation was satisfied by their commitment.

The IRB-approved recruitment script was provided to the participants (see Appendix C). Following each participant's confirmation, follow-up emails were sent to schedule the interview and distribute the IRB-approved informed consent form to each individual (see Appendix D). Each participant was informed of the study's purpose, advised of the confidential clause, and reminded they could withdraw at any point in the interview process. Participants also had the opportunity to inquire about the research or the semi-structured interview process. Each participant provided the researcher with permission to audio record their interview.

The first interview was held on March 27, 2023, and the final interview was scheduled for March 30, 2023. Each participant was notified that the interview may last up to 60 minutes; however, on average, the duration of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to 45 minutes. Each interview was captured through the audio conferencing software Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The participants and researcher interviewed audio with the video turned off. The recording of participant interviews was done on a separate recording device that was not part of the conferencing software. The recordings were secured and stored on the researcher's computer in a password-protected file without access to anyone outside of the researcher. The recordings were deleted immediately after transcription and coding were completed. To improve the accuracy of

the transcripts downloaded, participant confirmation was conducted. The interviews yielded no

clarifications or additional questions from the participants. Table 7 provided a summary of the

specific dates and the duration of the interviews via Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Table 8 outlines

the steps the researcher conducted when completing the interviews.

Table 7

Dates of the Participant Interviews

Participant	Interview Date	Duration (min)
Participant 1	3/27/23	41
Participant 2	3/27/23	32
Participant 3	3/27/23	30
Participant 4	3/27/23	45
Participant 5	3/28/23	39
Participant 6	3/28/23	42
Participant 7	3/28/23	45
Participant 8	3/28/23	45
Participant 9	3/29/23	38
Participant 10	3/29/23	39
Participant 11	3/29/23	45
Participant 12	3/29/23	30
Participant 13	3/30/23	34
Participant 14	3/30/23	42
Participant 15	3/30/23	38

Note. This table presents the interview schedule

Table 8

Interview Steps

Number of Steps	Interview Process
Step 1	1. 75 participants were identified based on the eligibility criteria; 2. The IRB-approved recruitment script was provided to the participants via email correspondence and 25 participants replied to the email. 3. A thank you email and an invitation to take part in the research study were issued to the participants only when a response was received.
Step 2	4. Following email confirmations from each participant, follow-up emails were sent to schedule the interview and distribute the IRB-approved consent form to each individual. Each participant was informed of the study's purpose, advised of the confidential clause and reminded they had the option to withdraw at any point of the interview process. Permission was given to the researcher to audio record the interview by each participant.
Step 3	5. The number of candidates for the study was whittled down to approximately 21 eligible subjects once the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. However, three respondents expressed concern over being able to give adequate answers to the questions. When attempting to organize the interviews, based on scheduling conflicts, 15 participants verified they were willing to participate. The computation for the maximum variation was satisfied by their commitment.

Data Analysis

Coding techniques were used to examine the data by qualitative research standards. The researcher instituted the epoché approach by recording presumptions and biases before initiating the interviews. Epoché is the suspension of judgment, which enables the researcher to be impartial and examine data objectively (Langdridge, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). To fully grasp the participants' experiences and avoid prejudging the outcomes, the only information considered during data analysis was the information supplied by participants.

The transcription method was audio recordings, the only way to transcribe the presented information. Once transcription was completed, the researcher began the coding process by identifying key phrases taken from the interviews and inputting them into a Microsoft Excel document, where they were then classified and thematized. The results of these interviews were illustrated by creating 10 bar graphs. The findings were recorded, color-coded, and applied in the inter-rater evaluation process that followed.

Inter-Rater Review Process

To ensure coding validity, an inter-rater review was conducted by a doctoral candidate in the Global Leadership and Change program at Pepperdine University with extensive knowledge of the coding process and the phenomenological methodology of research when completing a qualitative study. The peer review consisted of the researcher sharing data from the first three interviews with the peer reviewer via a Microsoft Excel document and the peer reviewer working independently to review the transcripts, themes, and key phrases. Once the review was completed, the researcher and the peer reviewer came together to discuss and address the differences or commonalities of thought. The recommendations provided by the peer reviewer were to limit the amount of repeating themes per question by combining comparable codes. This

recommendation was accepted and instituted into the remaining interviews and data analysis process. Consensus was reached after the fifth interview.

Data Display

The data was summarized through a series of frequency bar graph illustrations created by the aligned interview questions that stemmed from the research questions. Multiple themes are depicted within each graph and paired with a detailed summary of each theme and verbatims from participants taken directly from the transcripts. The interviews had repeating themes when the data from the first five interviews were analyzed. The subsequent interviews continued to explore these ideas. The frequency charts were arranged according to the order of the interview questions. Participants in the study were referred to by pseudonyms such as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on, up to and including Participant 15. The data analysis was conducted via the following steps:

1. Familiarization with the data: Before starting the coding process, the researcher read and re-read the data, such as interview transcripts or field notes, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. This step helped identify the key topics and concepts from the data.

2. Initial Coding: Labels or tags representing the data's key ideas, concepts, and themes. These codes were single words or short phrases that captured the essence of the data. This step involves going through the data line-by-line and identifying relevant segments that can be coded.

3. Organization of codes: After creating initial codes, the next step was to organize them into categories or themes. This process involved grouping similar codes under a broader category. The classes were meaningful and coherent, and the codes were

exclusive to one category. The first three interviews were coded.

4. Refining and reviewing codes: Once the codes were organized into categories, they were reviewed by the researcher and peer reviewers. This step involved checking for consistency and clarity and identifying redundancies or omissions. It was also an opportunity to refine the coding categories and ensure they accurately capture the data. A consensus was reached, and the remainder of the interview transcripts were coded.

5. Creating codebooks: A codebook was used to document the list of all the codes and categories used in the study. It included clear definitions of each code, examples of how it was used, and guidelines for how to apply it consistently. It was essential to have a well-designed codebook to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the coding process.

6. Analyzing data: The final step in the coding process was to analyze the data based on the coded categories and themes. This involved reviewing the data in light of the themes identified through coding and identifying any additional patterns or insights that emerge. After completing all interviews, the results were provided to the co-reviewers.

Research Question 1

RQ1 asked, "What obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?" Participants were asked two interview questions that stemmed from this question as the source for inquiry, which were the following:

- IQ1: Consider an actual scenario where you successfully overcame an obstacle in

your transition from corporate employee to entrepreneur. What obstacles did you

face?

- IQ2: What challenges or obstacles do you believe African-American women face in

  transitioning from corporate to entrepreneurship?

Participants' responses to RQ 1 were analyzed to determine patterns, which were subsequently

grouped and organized into themes highlighting the lived experiences, processes, and techniques

that aided the interviewees in navigating the transition from corporate employment to

entrepreneurship.

Interview Question 1. IQ1 asked, "Think of an actual scenario where you successfully

overcame an obstacle in your transition from corporate employee to entrepreneur. What

obstacles did you face?" Three themes are presented from the analysis of this question: (a)

financing, (b) stagnation, and (c) frustration. Figure 1 displays the themes in a visual bar chart

depicting multiple responses per participant.

Figure 1

IQ1 Coding Results

IQ1 Coding Results
N = 15 - multiple responses per participant
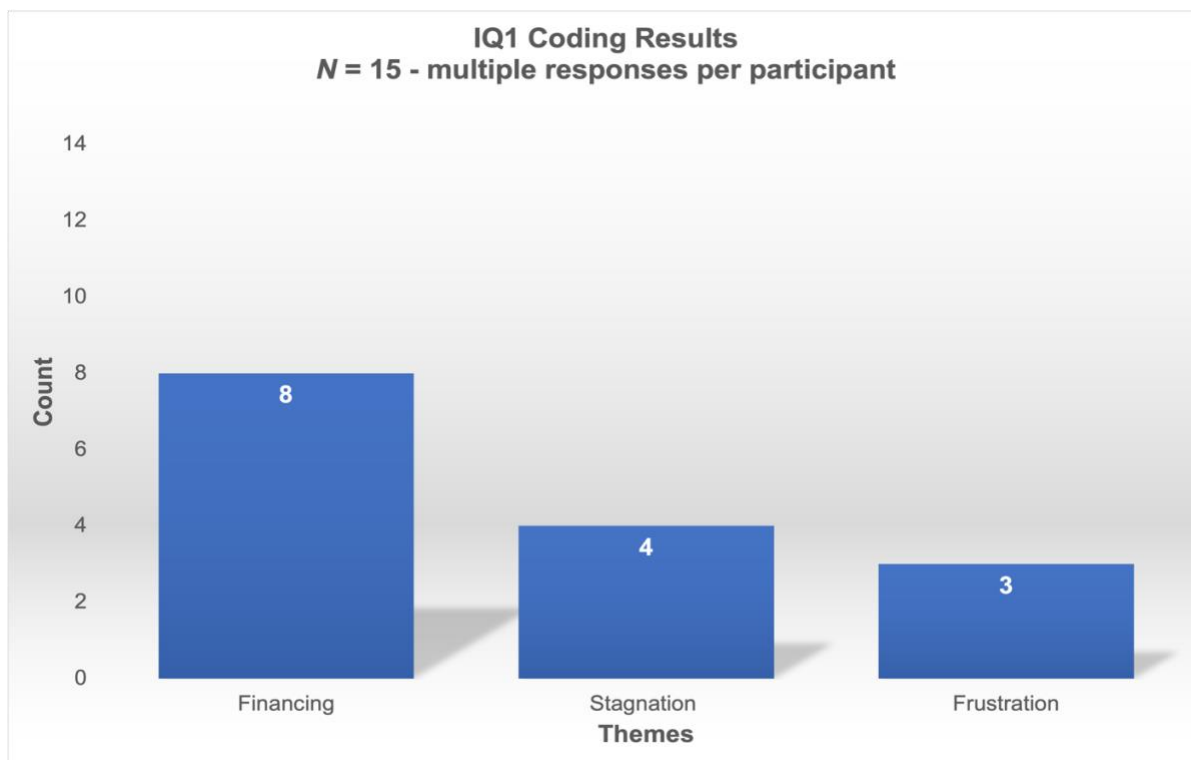
Financing. Participants reported financial difficulties were the most challenging hurdle they had to overcome. Keywords, phrases, and idioms aligned with finances appeared in eight (53%) of 15 responses, alluding to the primary obstacles encountered when navigating the transition process. These included the issue of capital, needing the appropriate access to different financing options that may be available but are unknown to them, and for those options that are known, the process of applying to those supportive programs but not getting approved. For example, Participant 5 stated, "Lack of finance has been the worst barrier I had to overcome as an African-American woman in business. Although many entrepreneurs still face difficulties, it is significantly more challenging for women of color." This quote aligns with Bliss and Garratt's (2001) research, which was conducted to compare men and women-owned small businesses. Using data from the 1993 National Survey of Small Business Finances, Bliss and Garratt

examined access to finance for men versus women-owned small firms. The second section of this study looked at the terms under which women received credit to see if they were at a disadvantage from that standpoint, furthermore enforcing the claims of more than half of the participants that raising capital to start a business was indeed one of the primary barriers that African-American women faced.

Stagnation. The theme of stagnation was concluded to be a common recurrence within this question, with four (26%) of 15 responses suggesting that the process of transitioning careers is slow. These participants needed to transition quickly; instead, they worked two jobs simultaneously until they were confident they could transition 100%. Participant 13 stated, "Maintaining my corporate career and working on personal enterprise was a point of contention. I wanted to be sure I could sustain myself once I fully committed to entrepreneurship." Stagnancy is typically viewed as a weakness for entrepreneurs and is often mistaken for inactivity or procrastination. In the context of this research, the state of being stagnant was a strength for many of the women who participated in the study. Participant 1 stated, "I made an educated risk to maintain by 9-5, although not ideal, I did not want to make a rash decision to start my own business without properly setting myself up for success." Jones and Malveaux (2008) presented a Black female viewpoint on the problems women of color face in America today, quoting stagnation as a direct link between African-American women and the length of time it takes to bring a small business to fruition.

Frustration. Frustration also emerged as a common theme regarding the transition process. Three participants (20%) of 15 responses expressed that frustration with building their business from the ground up was a primary barrier encountered. Examples of these frustrations were, the overall experience, the lack of emotional support, and becoming frustrated with

themselves. Participant 1 stated,

> I had to take action and create opportunities instead of waiting for them to come out of nowhere. I was frustrated working in corporate America and even more frustrated when I launched my business, but setbacks are expected. You have to believe things will get better, and they did.

Similarly, Participant 13 stated,

> It is extremely frustrating to work just as hard as men in particular and see them build their businesses with little to no challenges. Traditionally, men were considered entrepreneurs, not women so, unfortunately, we will always be playing catch up, no matter how hard we work.

DeMartino and Barbato (2003) discussed that frustration can hinder transitioning from corporation employee to entrepreneur. Frustration was mentioned as a common unmotivating factor for women precisely within this study. Using a sample of entrepreneurs with Masters in Business Adminitration (MBA), DeMartino and Barbato investigated motivational differences, enabling comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs with similar business education, educational credentials, and other significant criteria.

Interview Question 2. IQ2 asked, "What challenges or obstacles do you believe African-American women face in transitioning from corporate to entrepreneurship?" Four themes are presented from the analysis of this question: (a) history, (b) discounted, (c) guidance, and (d) no challenges. Figure 2 displays the bar chart with the thematic analysis.

Figure 2

IQ2 Coding Results

IQ2 Coding Results
N = 15 - multiple responses per participant
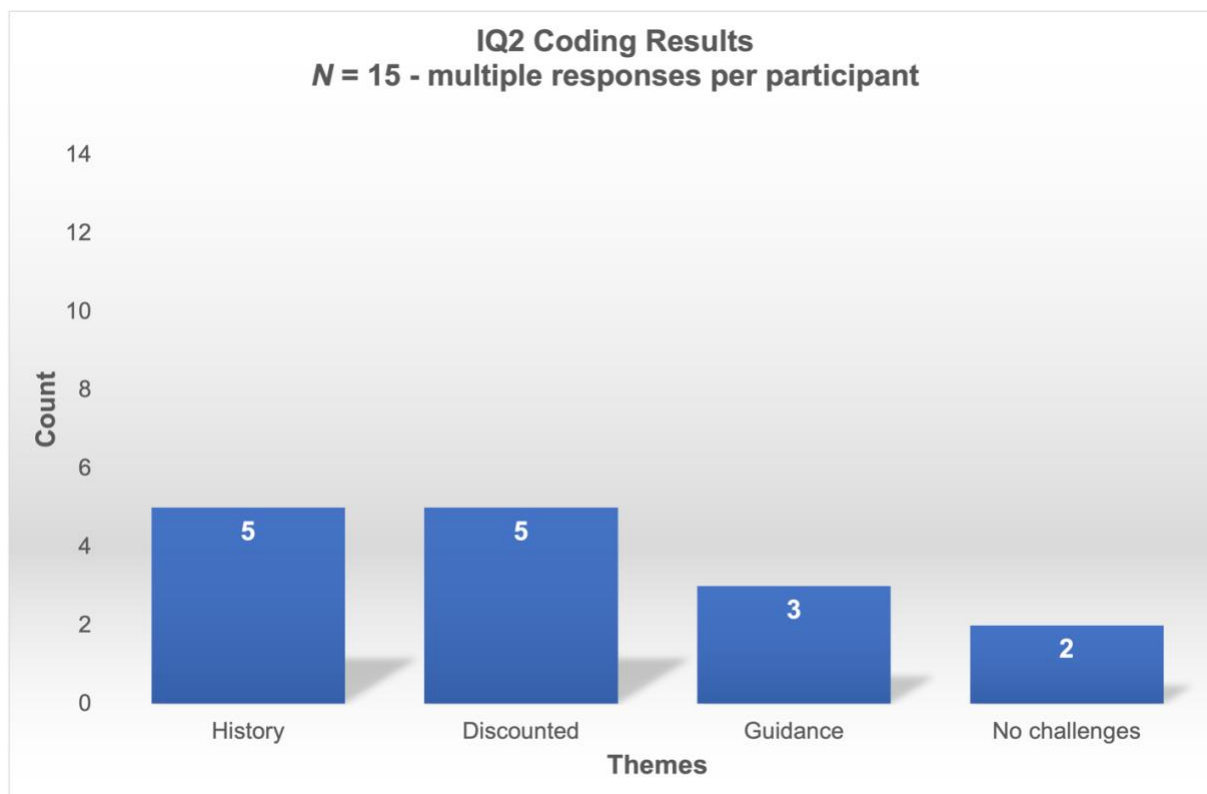
History. Entrepreneurship has a rich history, specifically for African-Americans. Although history is often not considered a significant barrier, it can have a positive or negative effect depending on the circumstance. For African-American women, five participants (33%) agreed with this sentiment. Participant 7 stated, "African-American history is often forgotten, but to move forward, we must always keep it in the forefront of our minds." Participant 15 stated, "The effects of the Tulsa Race Massacre were catastrophic. There were so many generations sundered and ruined in seconds." Massacres such as this one are still deeply rooted in society today. The African-American community is still behind in entrepreneurship due to the history of what occurred and the aftermath of those effects. Boyd's (2000a) study investigated the hypothesis that, during the era of the Tulsa Massacre and the Great Depression, joblessness, the

most severe form of labor market disadvantage, compelled urban Blacks to become *survivalist entrepreneurs,* meaning people who start small businesses to find an independent means of livelihood.

Discounted. The feeling of being overlooked also derived from the responses of the participants. Here, five participants (33%) 15 conveyed that they were not taken seriously when pursuing entrepreneurship, which often led them to feelings of insecurity, imposter syndrome, and second-guessing themselves. Participant 12 stated,

> Being an African-American woman in entrepreneurship, specifically working within the technology industry, means continually being discounted. It signifies working twice as hard to reach half the distance. But it also requires us to be tough, resourceful, and unwavering in pursuing our ambitions.

Participant 4 agreed with this sentiment, exclaiming,

> Women and the term discounted go hand in hand, although I hate to admit it. If I had a penny for every time someone disregarded my work ethic, my abilities and just myself in general, there would have been no need for me to become an entrepreneur. I would have already been a millionaire!

Bowie and Kenney (2013) noted the importance of understanding the intersectionality between race and gender and its significant role for women of color in pursuing entrepreneurship.

Guidance. The theme of the lack of guidance was concluded to be a repetition within this question, with three (20%) of 15 responses suggesting that the lack of mentorship and sponsorship took a toll on them mentally. These participants explained how when one has little to no entrepreneurial guidance, it can make the process of transitioning and launching a business a slow one. Participant 13 stated,

> Many of the successful entrepreneurs I know needed to start their businesses from the ground up technically. They either took on the family business that was passed down to them from generations prior, or they had guidance from other entrepreneurs who were happy to show them the ropes or even invest in their enterprise. As a Black woman, I just did not have that same support system. It was almost non-existent.

In support of this claim, Bliss and Garratt (2001) discussed the importance of assisting female

entrepreneurs. A review of previous studies found both a general lack of government assistance

for entrepreneurs and a need for more guidance from peer groups. Furthermore, it highlights the

disparities in the demands of female and male entrepreneurs and its psychological effects on men

and women.

   No Challenges. The final theme for IQ2 was not having challenges when navigating the

transition process. As shown previously, two participants (13%) out of 15 stated that they did

not encounter any challenges when deciding to transition from working in Corporate America to

Entrepreneurship. Participant 8 stated,

> I was very blessed to learn about how to run a business from a young age. My grandmother owned a grocery store, and I grew up helping her in every aspect from restocking the shelves to managing the expenses. When I decided to launch my beauty salon, I already had the experience and confidence to develop a successful business. However, my experience is rather uncommon.

Participant 15 exuded a similar view,

> Generational wealth played a large role in the foundation of my business. I inherited a family business from a distant relative after they passed away, and I revitalized it to become a successful enterprise it is today. I don't see that I had a challenge in starting the business, because I, quite honestly did not start it. Maintaining it is another story.

Little to no research presents any claims that African-American female entrepreneurs encounter

no challenges. However, the researcher found that this needed to be more extensive in the

literature. While it might not be common, the findings show certainty that many women have not

had this particular challenge, which was why this was imperative to highlight within this study.

Summary of RQ1

   The purpose of RQ1 was to identify the obstacles and challenges African-American

women face during their transition from corporate America to entrepreneurship. Analyzing

participant responses and keywords to the two interview questions yielded seven themes. The

two interview questions revealed the following conclusions: African-American female entrepreneurs experience a multitude of challenges during the navigation process including (a) financing, (b) stagnation, and (c) frustration. Participants also shared their thoughts on factors that are often ignored in society but continue to be silent barriers for them such as (a) the effects of history, (b) being discounted, and (c) lack of guidance. Two participants also shared the viewpoint that they encountered no challenges but understood that this is very rare occurrence within the African-American community. Multiple scholarly articles, journals, and papers were introduced in this section that aligned to the research question and value to substantiate the themes that were derived from the participants interviews.

Research Question 2

RQ2 asked, "How do African-American women overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?" Participants were asked two interview questions that stemmed from this question as the source for inquiry. The two interview questions aligned to RQ2 were:

- IQ3: Tell me about your career journey within Corporate America. What was the most challenging and rewarding aspect?

- IQ4: What was the most challenging part of launching your business? Do you have any help or assistance?

Participants' responses to RQ 2 were analyzed to determine patterns, which were subsequently grouped and collated into themes. The themes that arose from the responses of these interview questions highlight the lived experiences, processes, and techniques that aided the interviewees in navigating the transition from corporate employment to entrepreneurship.

Interview Question 3. IQ3 asked, "Tell me about your career journey within corporate America? What was the most challenging and rewarding aspect?" Three themes were presented from the analysis of this question: (a) challenge: no voice, (b) challenge: culture, (c) challenge: monolith, (d) reward: increased drive, (e) reward: network, (f) reward: financial security. Both Figure 3 and Figure 4 show bar charts representing the challenge and reward themes for this interview question.

Figure 3

IQ3 Coding Results Part 1
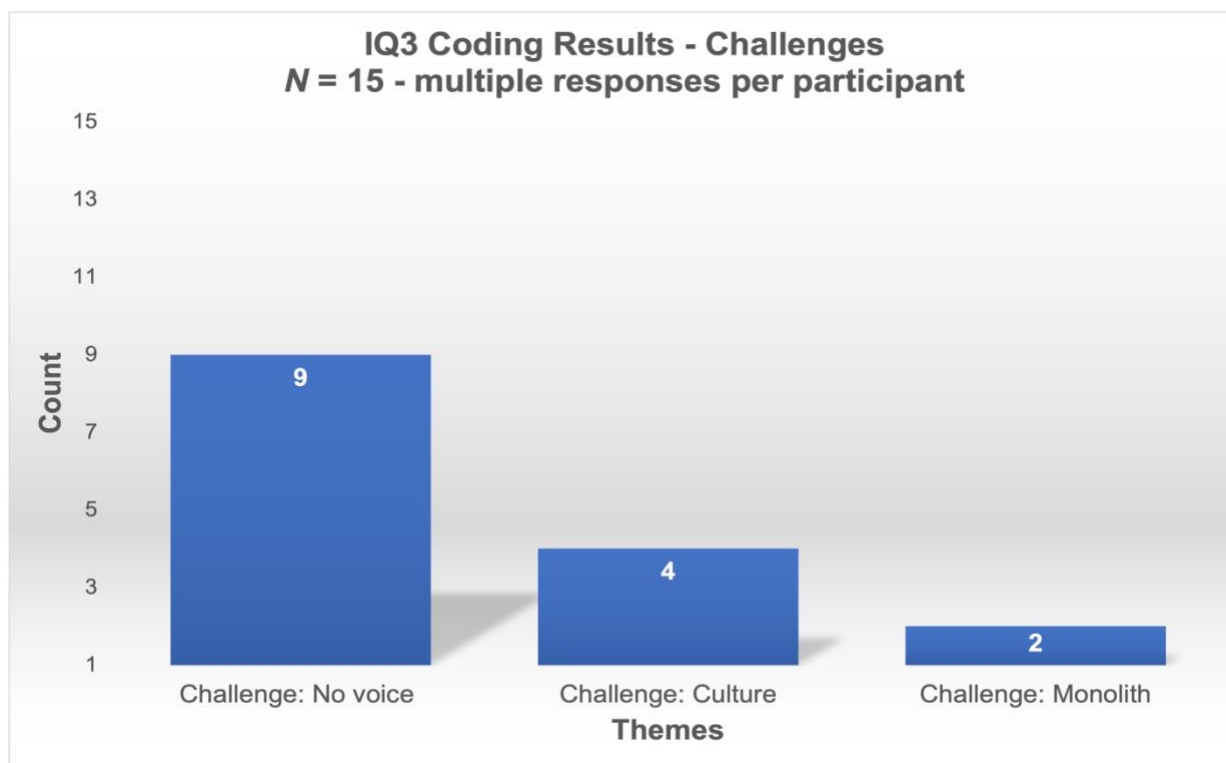
Challenge: No Voice. Regarding the challenges that participants encountered during their career working within corporate America, the theme of having no voice was identified from key words expressed such as, *silenced, not being taken seriously,* and *feeling limited*. Concerning this question, nine (60%) of 15 responses agreed that having no voice was a primary challenge endured. Participant 1 said, "For over 20 years working in Corporate America as an executive I

consistently felt that I didn't have a voice, marginalized, and I was not given the same

opportunities as others." African-American women often have to find value in themselves and

moreover a sense of agency in a culture where often other groups of people are uplifted.

Similarly, Participant 5 stated,

> Over the years it has become almost second-nature to second guess myself when offering suggestions in a meeting. I've contributed great ideas that would be beneficial to the team, but they are often dismissed until a male team member proposes the exact same idea at another meeting. All of the sudden, he's being praised for being innovative.

Barr (2015) stated that women need more diversity in corporate leadership. This plays a large

role in how African-American women feel when they believe their voice is stifled and dismissed

in corporate spaces, thus adding to the many factors as to why they transition to

entrepreneurship. In addition, Barr's study observed how increasing the percentage of minority

and female entrepreneurship could assist to close the wealth gap between races and genders,

reduce income and wealth inequality, and enhance social mobility.

Challenge: Culture. The theme of culture presented itself as a repetition within this

question with four (26%) of 15 responses suggesting that a toxic culture of an organization

played a major role in their career. These participants explained how it not only has an effect on

the individual, but it shapes the organization as a whole. Participant 6 stated, "The more my

company's culture changed into a toxic environment, my productivity and passion decreased. I

and others no longer believed in the company's mission or vision, and eventually, the

organization's reputation was tarnished." Participant 13 stated, "Unfortunately, the entire time I

worked in Corporate America, I never felt comfortable being myself. I wouldn't say I liked the

constant feeling of walking on eggshells around my peers. This negatively affected my career

progression." In support of the participants' statements, Alinia (2015) provided an interpretative

framework for comprehending African-American women's experiences through storytelling

personal accounts within their careers.

  Challenge: Monolith. Experiencing being perceived as a monolith within corporate America is a huge challenge for African-American women. Not only does this limit opportunities and reinforces biases and stereotypes that African-Americans work so hard to move past. This undermines the richness and true value of the experiences and perspectives African-American women bring to an organization with two (13%) of 15 responses establishing a commonality on this notion of thought. Participant 13 stated, "Unfortunately, I have experienced being viewed as a Monolith. It was not long before I resigned, or perhaps they drove me out. I'm still not quite sure." Participant 2 stated a similar sentiment, "African-American women are not all the same. When we are seen as a monolith, this leads to a lack of diverse perspectives, reinforces the notion of tokenism, and limits networking opportunities for us, therefore limiting career opportunities." Basu (2006), in his book, *Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship*, unveiled the personal accounts of African-American women, who shared common challenges. Basu provided a foundation of understanding as to why there is such a stark gap in minorities excelling in Corporate American among their Caucasian counterparts. Moreover, Basu explored the notion of ethnic entrepreneurship and assessed the variables influencing entry into ethnic entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial survival and success, and the causes causing variability in entrepreneurial behavior and performance among ethnic minority groups.

Figure 4

IQ3 Coding Results Part 2

IQ3 Coding Results - Rewards
N = 15 - multiple responses per participant
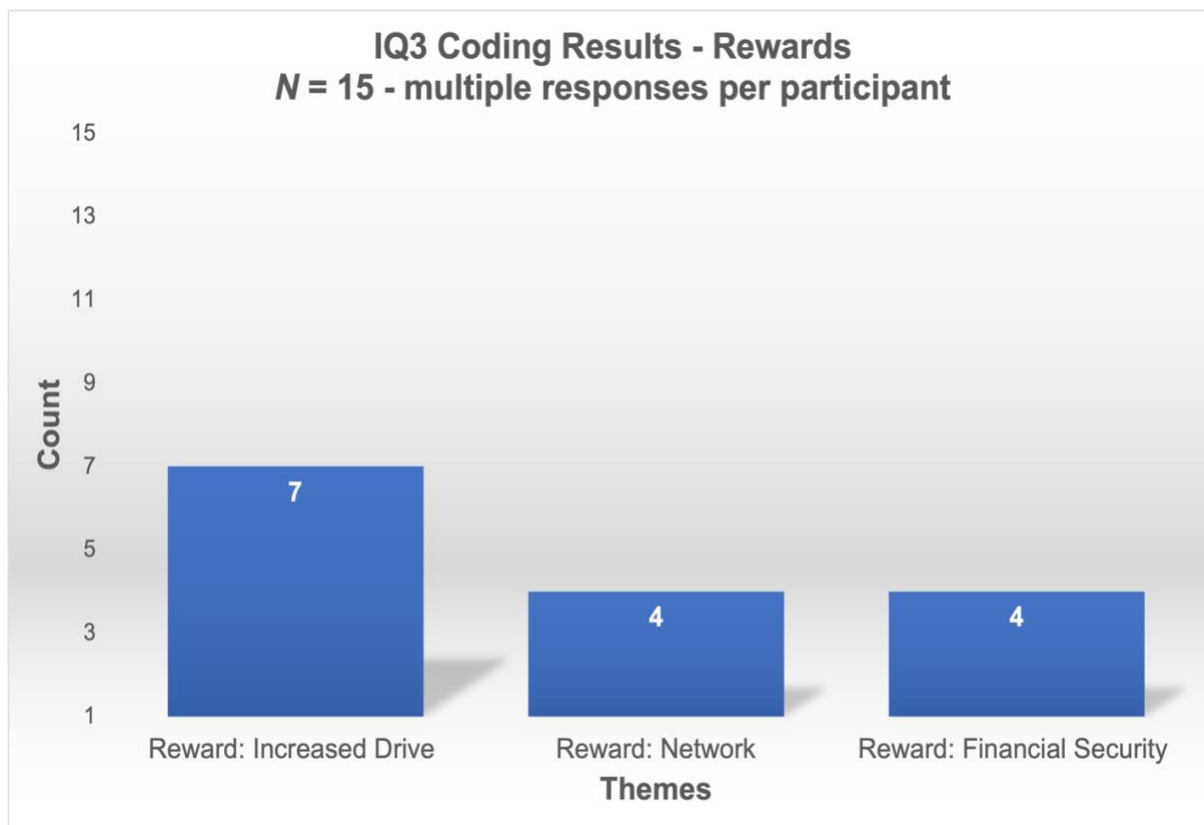
Reward: Increased Drive. This question also considered the rewarding components that participants encountered during their career working within Corporate America, the theme of the increased drive was identified from keywords expressed such as *motivation, eager,* and *accelerate.* Concerning this question, seven (46%) of 15 responded that their drive to pursue entrepreneurship increased significantly from working in Corporate America. Often stemming from unfulfillment, they realized that they could establish their businesses, and this passion pushed them to step out of their comfort zone. Participant 10 said, "The more exasperated I became with my mundane work, the more my drive increased to work for myself." Participant 2 provided context on the subject, stating, "I was not accelerating in Corporate America. The same drive I had to move up in my career, I simply refocused it to work for myself." The Women's

Studies Quarterly (A Black Feminist Statement, 2014) presented a collection of African-American feminist remarks that address African-American feminism as the natural political movement to battle the multiple and concurrent oppressions faced by all women of color.

    Reward: Network. The network theme presented itself as a recurrence within this question, with four (26%) out of 15 responses indicating that creating a network within an organization benefitted their success within and outside their company. Participant 6 stated

> One of the reasons that my business was successful is that I was able to create relationships with stakeholders from my time working within corporate America. Because I established healthy professional relationships, I was able to stay connected with them after my transition. Some of the individuals were helpful with creating new connections or simply supporting my business.

In support of this assertion, Bliss and Garratt (2001) accentuated this argument by discussing the importance of assisting women entrepreneurs. A review of previous studies finds that establishing a solid network can be an excellent asset for African-American women who plan on establishing enterprises. There is a general lack of assistance for entrepreneurs, and those disparities expand even more for women. The more female entrepreneurs prioritize establishing and then building on their network to create meaningful business relations, the more opportunities they create for themselves.

    Reward: Financial Security. Financial security was expressed as a theme through the keywords *good financial standing* and *financially sound.* Participants agreed that working in Corporate America does provide financial security within the realm of being confident that they will be paid consistently and not having added anxiety about financing their enterprise. Four (26%) out of 15 responses shared similar thoughts regarding this subject matter. Participant 13 stated, "One of the best things about working in corporate America was the notion of financial security." Participant 1 shared a similar thought, "As I am now leading a team, I understand how

important financial security is for employees. Financial security is always at the forefront of my mind. I can thank corporate American for that." In support of the claim that financial security can be viewed as rewarding within Corporate America, Bates and Robb (2013) provided an analysis of the comparison of financial security for employees employed at traditional 9-5 jobs within Corporate America versus entrepreneurs. The study examined how restricted access to financing limited the ability of minority business enterprises (MBEs) to achieve viability, create new jobs, and, in general, contribute to the economic development of the communities and regions in which they operate.

Interview Question 4. IQ4 asked, "What was the most challenging part of launching your business?" Three themes are presented from the analysis of this question: (a) challenge: resources, (b) challenge: external opinions, (c) challenge: control. Figure 5 displayed the respective bar charts with the themes to visualize the data analysis.

Figure 5

IQ4 Coding Results
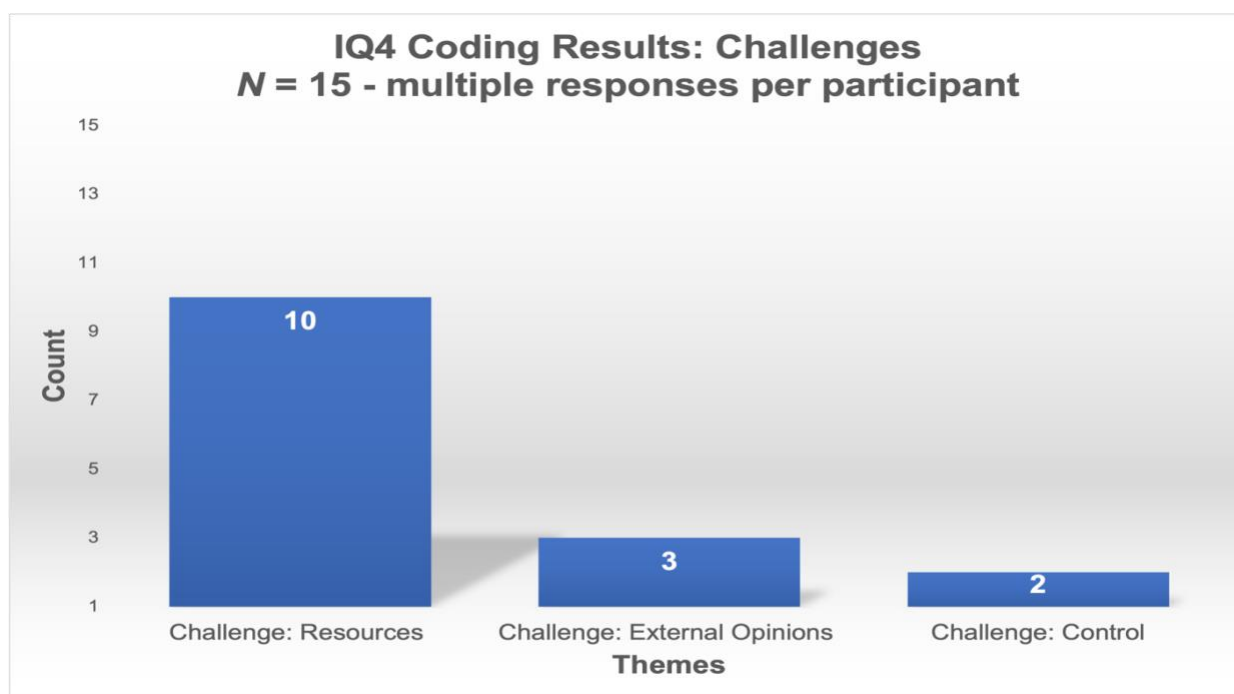
Challenge: Resources. Having no assistance to acquire resources continues to be a significant obstacle for African-American female entrepreneurs. Most respondents declared that they had no assistance from inception to launch. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was nearly impossible to secure funding from the government for a personal business. Factors included African-American women being excluded because of poor credit history, lack of collateral or a short business history. Ten of the 15 participants in the study (66%) expressed the sentiment that the lack of resources often paralyze the growth of their business. Participant 14 stated,

> When I first launched my business, I had access to zero resources. Since the pandemic, there are more resources available to small businesses however, most are loans that have to be paid back. It's really difficult to get a grant from the government. I have applied to several and have just never heard back.

> S. Coleman (2000) elaborated on the importance of African-American entrepreneurs

having financial support as well as physical and emotional support, which validated following participant statements. Participant 12 said the following,

> I financed my business on my own, and I am very proud of that. That experience taught me so much, mainly to go for what I want. Yes, it was hard, and looking back, I wish I did have some support, but I learned so much from that experience.

Additionally, Participant 3 stated,

> My friends were not very supportive of my dream. Most of them are lawyers or doctors, so me pursuing a career within the wine industry seemed out of the box for them. Now, years later, they are asking me how they can transition into the wine industry as well.

Challenge: External Opinions. Three of the 15 participants in the study (20%) admitted that external opinions of others did have a negative effect on them when launching their business. Although, the participants did not give up on their endeavors and have since become a success, they did agree that having friends, relatives or colleagues express negative opinions about their decisions did impact their psyche. Participant 2 stated,

> Leaving my six-figure salary to becoming a social media influencer and digital

entrepreneur, many of my family thought that I was making a terrible mistake. Honestly, their opinions are why I didn't start my business sooner. I held myself back based on the opinions of others.

Participant 4 stated "There will always be someone who doesn't agree or understand why you make the decisions you do. My advice is to ignore them and trust your intuition. It's never steered me wrong." In support of the participants' claims, Dishman (2020) highlighted the journey of an African-American female entrepreneur and the challenges she faced establishing her own small business. This was introduced as a scholarly narrative that validated these affirmations stated by the participants in this study.

Challenge: Control. The theme of control was derived from keywords such as *leadership, power,* and *authority.* Two of the 15 participants (13%) explained why this theme was prevalent when launching their businesses. Participant 1 shared,

It was really hard for me to let go of the control over my enterprise. I wanted to make sure that everything went perfectly, but in the end I just became burnt out. I soon learned that I needed to lean on my team and trust them.

Participant 8 stated "An authority figure is someone who can lead and follow. Being powerful is not what my end goal is." Once again affirming the claims that the participants voiced, Dishman (2020) established context surrounding the notion of how to transition into a leadership role after working as a subordinate and the knowledge that one gains through trial and error as they navigate the landscape of entrepreneurship.

Summary of RQ2

The purpose of RQ2 was to identify strategies that African-American women utilize to overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from corporate America entrepreneurship. Analyzing participant responses and key words to the two interview questions yielded a total of nine themes. The two interview questions revealed the following conclusions:

African-American female entrepreneurs experience both challenges and rewards working within corporate America. The challenges included (a) need for more voice, (b) being viewed as a monolith, and (c) toxic work culture. The rewards included (a) financial security, (b) expanding their network, (c) and increased drive. Participants also shared their thoughts on challenging factors that they often encountered when launching their business such as (a) lack of resources, (b) unsupportive external opinions, (c) and the notion of letting go of their control. Multiple scholarly articles, journals, and papers were introduced in this section that aligned to the research question and value to substantiate the themes that were derived from the participants interviews.

Research Question 3

RQ3 asked, "How do African-American Women measure their success as entrepreneurs?" Participants were asked three interview questions that stemmed from this question as the source for inquiry. The three interview questions aligned to RQ3 were:

- IQ5: Did you transition into entrepreneurship with the intention of building a legacy, and what was the core motivator?

- IQ6: What is your personal definition of success, and has it evolved?

- IQ7: Interview question seven asked, What were the missteps in your transition to entrepreneurship? How have you avoided making the same mistakes?

Participants' responses to RQ3 were analyzed to determine patterns, which were subsequently grouped and organized into themes. As such, the themes from the answers to these interview questions highlight the lived experiences, processes, and techniques that aided the interviewees in navigating the transition from corporate employment to entrepreneurship.

Interview Question 5. IQ5 asked, "Did you transition into entrepreneurship to build a legacy, and what was the core motivator?" Three themes were presented from the analysis of this

question: (a) succession, (b) inheritance, and (c) heritage. Figure 6 displayed the bar chart, which visually depicts themes for IQ5 based on the data analysis.

Figure 6

IQ5 Coding Results
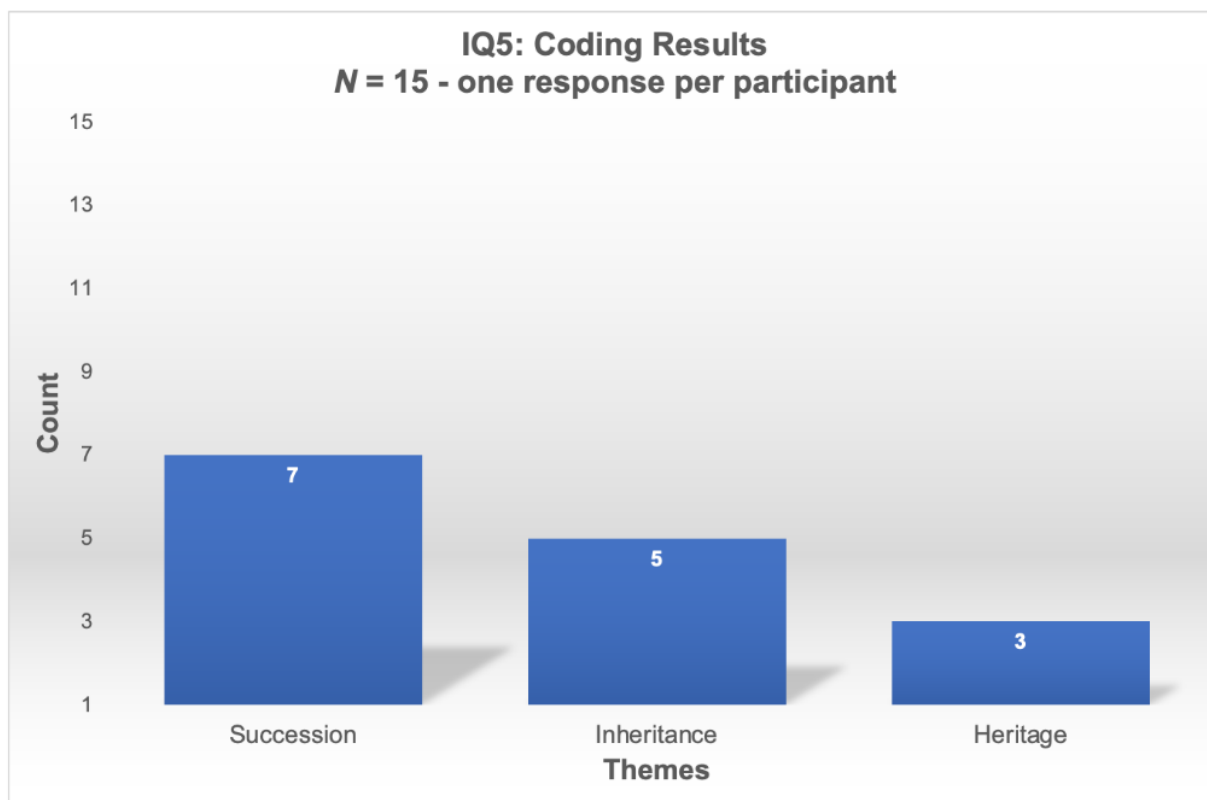
   Succession. Establishing a legacy and creating generational wealth was a core motivator for most study participants, with seven (46%) out of the 15 participants expressing their intention of this concept within their entrepreneurial endeavors. The shared keywords described were *ancestry* and *dynasty*. Participant 12 stated, "Building generational wealth for my family is 100% my goal." Participant 9 said, "Although I do not have children, I want to leave a legacy for my nieces and nephews. Generational wealth does not mean it is only dedicated to offspring." Participant 1 stated, "My family's legacy is very important to me. My motivation is centered around our family name." To substantiate these statements, Harvey's (2008) study was regarding

the viability of entrepreneurship. Rather than do extensive research on the structural

underpinnings of Black women's overrepresentation in this labor market sector, this study

investigated how the viability of entrepreneurship was a means of achieving economic stability

for working-class Black women. Additionally, the study focused on the importance of generating

generational wealth within the African-American community.

Inheritance. This theme emerged as one of the most prevalent thoughts of the 5

participants who answered this question (33%). Keywords and phrases participants stated were

generational wealth, family, and *legacy*. Participant 2 said, "When I first launched my business, I

was just concerned with it being a sustainable endeavor; now that it has become quite successful,

I think about my legacy and the impact my business has on my children." Jones and Malveaux

(2008) expressed similar sentiments from other African-American female entrepreneurs. They

provided a female perspective on the challenges that currently confront women of color in

America. One of the challenges noted was creating a business from the ground up without the

safety net of having an inheritance, but also breaking that stigma and working diligently to create

a legacy for their offspring.

Heritage. This theme emerged from 20% of participants. Keywords and phrases

participants stated were legacy, tradition, and customs. Participant 7 said,

> Heritage and legacy go hand in hand. Many African-Americans do not know what our complete heritage is, and thus creates complexity when thinking about what our legacy looks like in the future. Although, I still have many unanswered questions regarding my heritage, I make a strong effort to still build a legacy through my business for my children. Hoping that one day, the links between my heritage and legacy will come full circle.

Interview Question 6. IQ6 asked, "What is your personal definition of success and has it

evolved?" Three themes were presented from the analysis of this question: (a) fulfillment (b)

work-life balance, and (c) financial stability. Figure 7 displayed the bar chart with the themes.

Figure 7

IQ6 Coding Results
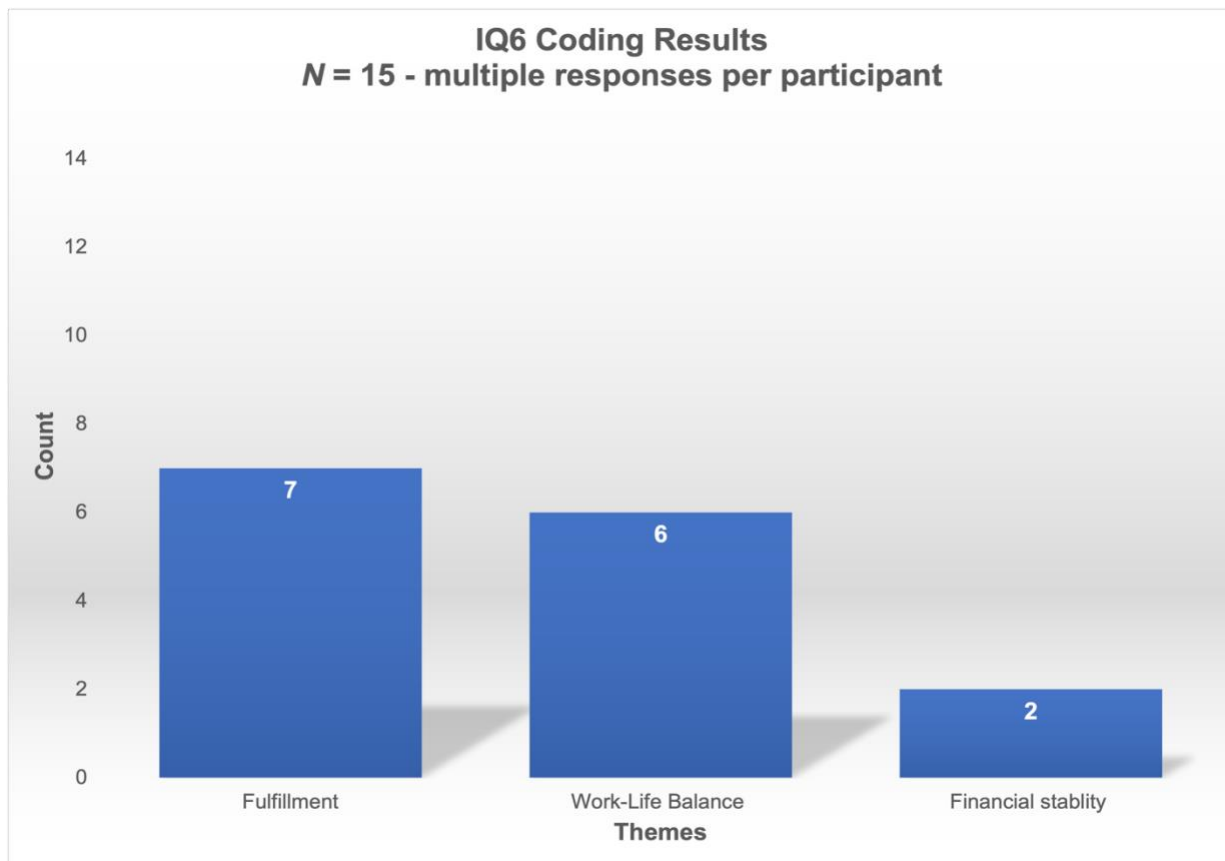
Fulfillment. The theme of being fulfilled presented itself as a recurrence within IQ6, with

seven (46%) out of 15 responses indicating that personal fulfillment was their definition of

success. Participant 8 stated "At the end of the workday I want to feel happy and satisfied.

Nothing more, nothing less." Participant 14 stated,

> After graduating college, I struggled to find a job aligned with my true passion. There
> were times, I thought it would be impossible to ever be truly fulfilled. Today, I awake
> each morning excited for work, because it doesn't seem like "work." I choose to see it
> rather as a contribution to society in a meaningful way.

Alinia (2015) explained the same sentiments, posing whether fulfillment can ever truly be

attained in Corporate America through an interpretative framework for comprehending African-

American women's experiences through storytelling their own narratives within their careers.

Work-Life Balance. The theme of work-life balance was indicated through the following keywords *harmony, lifestyle,* and *integration* with six (40%) out of 15 responses indicating that having a balance between working and everyday life was very important to their health and overall well-being, hence this was their personal definition of success. Participant 13 stated, "My to-do list always starts with me first. Health is wealth. This includes prioritizing your mental, emotional and physical health." Participant 5 stated, "Work will always be there. There will always be something that needs to be done. You only live once so make it count." Iromuanya, (2018) sought to illuminate the questions raised by Adichie in Americanah about the traditional role of womanhood, and explores the deeply embedded notion of patriarchy within society's racial, political, and economic landscapes, while also stating the importance of the African-American women transitioning from traditional roles to exuding independence via creating her own opportunities via entrepreneurship.

Financial Stability. The theme of financial stability has been a popular subject throughout this study and it once again presented itself as a recurrence within IQ6 with two (13%) out of 15 responses indicating that their personal definition of success revolves around this notion. Participant 1 stated,

> Finances is not my first priority, but when I think about what it means for my business to be sustainable that includes finances. Every decision I make, every meeting I take and every opportunity I have is centered around my personal value and the worth of my company.

Finances play a significant role in the success of a business, especially a small enterprise or business venture. Greene et al. (2001) highlighted this exact notion of financial stability and the effects it has on a business. The authors evaluated the strategic growth aspirations, commitment level, opportunity costs, structure, and success characteristics that separate successful female entrepreneurs' enterprises from those of less successful entrepreneurs.

Interview Question 7. IQ7 asked, "What were the missteps in your transition to entrepreneurship? How have you avoided making the same mistakes?" Three themes are presented from the analysis of this question: (a) reflection and (b) continuous learning and (c) taking ownership. Figure 8 displays the bar chart with the themes as a visual representation.

Figure 8

IQ7 Coding Results
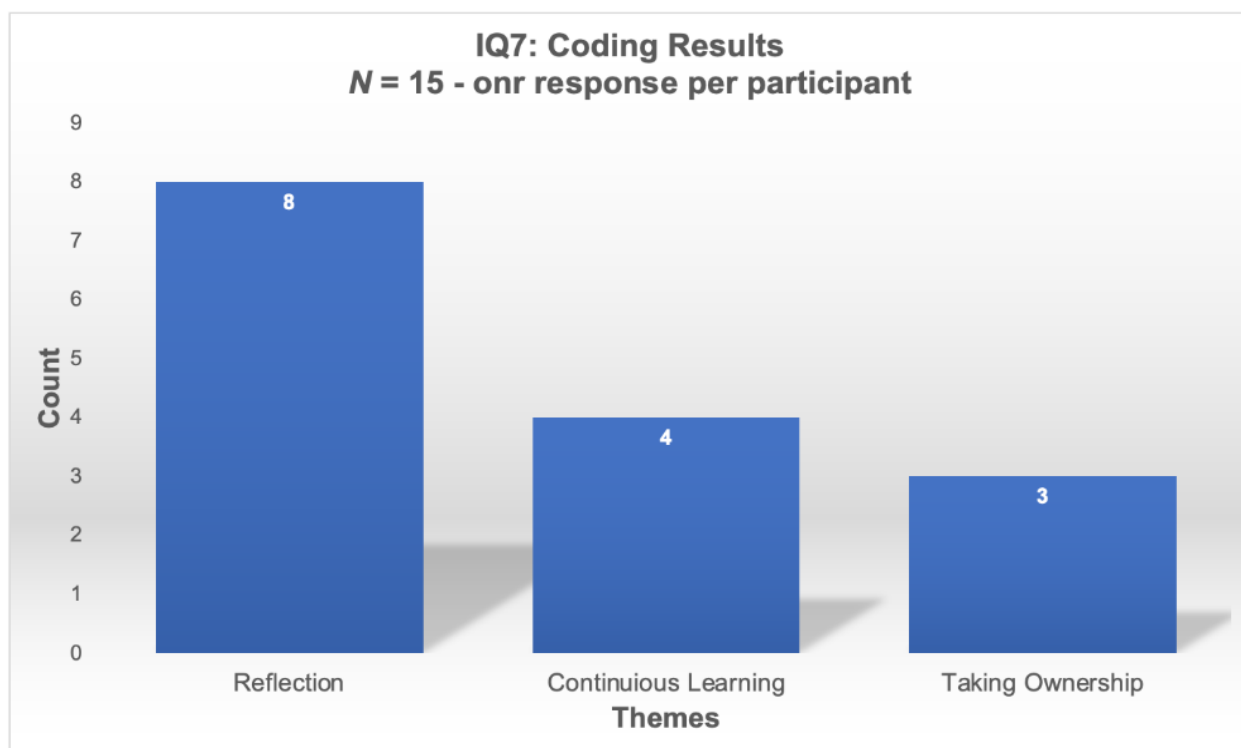
Reflection. This theme emerged as the most significant strategy for handling missteps. Keywords and phrases in relation to reflection was shown in eight of the 15 responses (53%), learning from mistakes, identifying what went wrong and what could have been done differently. Participant 6 stated, "I make mistakes all the time, but the important part is learning from them and moving forward." Participant 3 stated, "Although, I do not intentionally try to make mistakes, I'm human and so is my team. At times we don't have the best judgement, but I have learned to embrace failure." Participant 12 shared similar sentiments stating,

> Upon reflection, there are of course many things, I would have chosen to do differently if I could go back into the past. However, I don't regret the mistakes I have made, they have humbled me and moreover given me a story to share to share with others.

Gundry and Welsch (2001) discussed the concept of reflection of one's choices when creating a business. It aims to give a relatable narrative that making mistakes is a natural part of entrepreneurship thus supporting the sentiments that the participants also stated in this regard.

Continuous Learning. At least four 26% of participants identified the theme of continuous learning. Keywords included *professional development, skilling* and *education.* Participant 6 stated "Although, I do not intentionally try to make mistakes, I'm human and so is my team. At times we don't have the best judgement, but I have learned to embrace failure and learn from it." Participant 1 also expressed thoughts on the benefits of continuous learning.

> As a founder and leader in my industry, I have to stay abreast on all of the changes happening in the tech industry. Continuously learning how to become a better leader, honing my craft and understanding the role artificial intelligence can be utilized. I find that entrepreneurs who do not understand the vital role learning and development plays will not find long-term success.

In support of this assertation Gupta et al. (2004) accentuates this argument discussing the importance of continuous learning in leadership including entrepreneurship. This study separated the related ideas, structures, and metrics of individual-focused transformational leadership from team-focused transformational leadership based on a novel advancement of transformational leadership theory, namely differentiated transformational leadership.

Taking Ownership. The theme of taking ownership was derived from keywords such as *accountability,* and *responsibility.* Four (26%) out of 15 participants explained why this theme was prevalent during their transition. Participant 13 stated,

> As a female entrepreneur, there is still the negative stereotype that women are not as capable or responsible as our male counterparts. As an African-American female entrepreneur I must take ownership of any mistake myself or team makes immediately. I own the outcome, good or bad, and then make necessary changes to avoid the same

misstep. I lead by example.

Summary of RQ3

The purpose of RQ3 was to explore how African-American women measure their success as entrepreneurs. Analyzing participant responses and keywords to the two interview questions yielded a total of nine themes. The three interview questions revealed the following conclusions: The majority African-American female entrepreneurs did factor in the notion of (a) leaving a legacy, and (b) building generational wealth when founding their enterprises. Participants also shared their thoughts on what qualified as their personal definition of success which included (a) fulfillment, (b) having a healthy work-life balance, and (c) financial stability. Two participants also shared the missteps that occurred during their career. Multiple scholarly articles, journals, and papers were introduced in this section that aligned to the research question and value to substantiate the themes that were derived from the participants interviews.

Research Question 4

RQ4 asked, "Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what recommendations would you give emerging African-American female entrepreneurs?" Participants were asked three interview questions that stemmed from this question as the source for inquiry. The three interview questions aligned to RQ4 were:

- IQ8: What is the best piece of advice you would give to an emerging African-American female entrepreneur in a post COVID-19 society who aspires to do the same?

- IQ9: Looking back at your career, if you could do one thing differently, what would that be?

- IQ10: In one sentence, what do you want your legacy to be known for and

  remembered as?

Participants' responses to RQ4 were analyzed to determine patterns, which were subsequently

grouped and collated into themes. Themes that arose from the responses of these interview

questions highlight the lived experiences, processes, and techniques that aided the interviewees

in navigating the transition from corporate employment to entrepreneurship.

Interview Question 8. IQ8 asked, "What is the best piece of advice you would give to an

emerging African-American female entrepreneur in a post COVID-19 society who aspires to do

the same?" Four themes are presented from the analysis of this question: (a) mentor, (b) mindset,

(c) education, and (d) business plan. Figure 9 shows the bar chart with visual thematic

representation.

Figure 9

IQ8 Coding Results
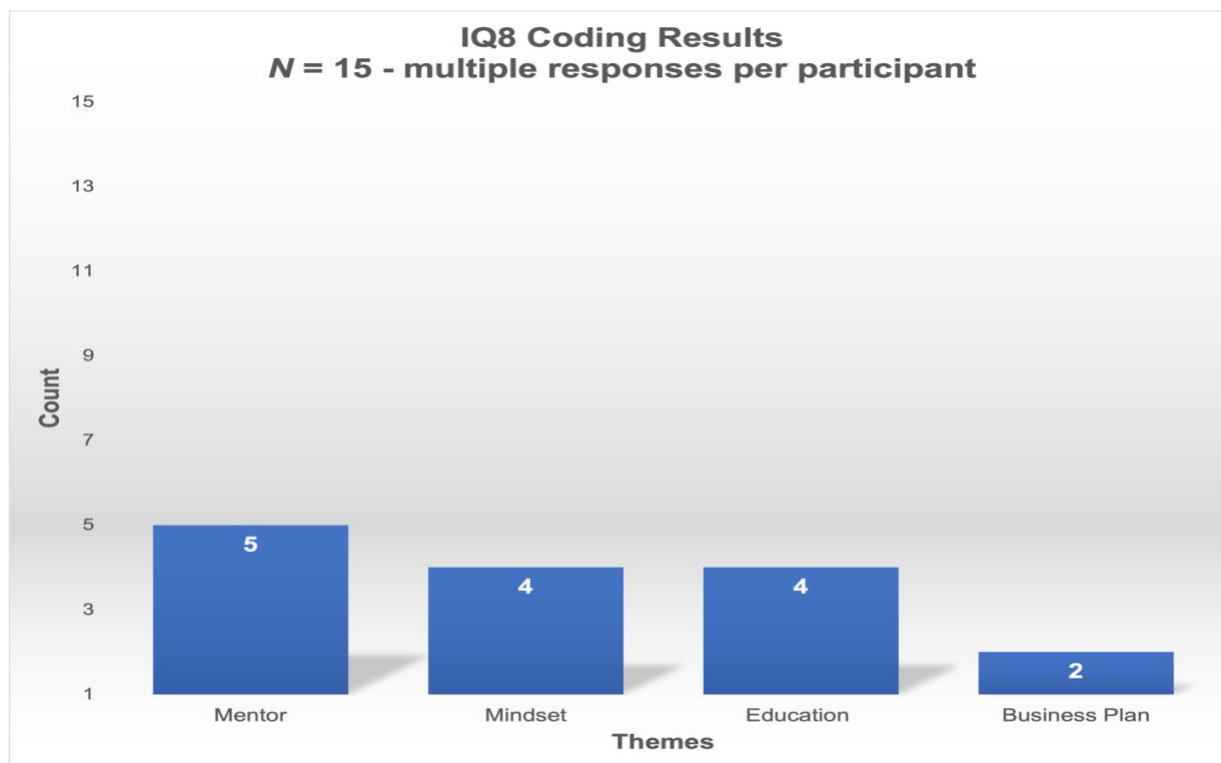
Mentor. The theme of mentorship has been a popular subject throughout this study. It once again presented itself as a recurrence within IQ8, with five (33%) out of 15 responses indicating that the best advice for others pursuing entrepreneurship would be to gain mentors. Participant 14 stated,

> It was so hard for me to find mentors when I was launching my business. I wish that I had actively reached out to my network and sought out advice from others. I encourage all upcoming entrepreneurs not to be afraid to ask for advice from others.

Participant 2 described her experience with mentorship, stating,

> My experience with obtaining mentors was a challenge because I was afraid to ask people for help. I have learned to never be afraid for ask someone for their advice. The worst thing that can happen is that they don't give it to you, but that rarely happens. Once I learned to be vulnerable, I found it easier to gain mentors and sponsors.

In support of the participants' statements, Haynes and Helms (2000) explained the benefits of African-American female entrepreneurs attaining mentors. This research investigated female entrepreneurship, focusing on female founders, businesses, mentorship, and entrepreneurial behaviors as a distinct subgroup of entrepreneurship.

Mindset. Regarding the notion of having a positive mindset when launching their business, four (26%) out of 15 participants agreed that having an optimistic outlook on their journey was necessary for success. Participant 2 said, "When I launched my business, I had many setbacks and some hard days, but what got me through was truly believing that all my hard work would pay off. " Participant 11 stated, "When no one else believes in your dream, you have to believe in yourself. Whenever times got hard, I intentionally changed my energy to maintain a sense of positivity."

Education. The theme of being educated presented itself as a recurrence with four (26%) out of 15 responses indicating that having an education was vital for success. Participant 8 stated,

> I always tell young women who would like to own their own businesses to obtain all the

education they can about their field. This does not necessarily mean that you need a college degree in your field, but it does mean that you must be a master at your craft.

Participant 13 stated, "I consider myself a lifelong learner, especially being an entrepreneur. We are leaders, and we set the example. I pride myself on the notion that I continue to learn new things every day, even from Gen Z."

Research and data from a scholarly article written by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) elaborated on the link between education and entrepreneurship. The study built on prior research in many social science disciplines and practical business domains to develop a conceptual framework for the relationship between education and entrepreneurship among women in diverse fields.

Business Plan. A business plan or a strategy initiative is a factor that all businesses must incorporate to succeed. There are many positives to developing a business plan, such as establishing milestones, document a revenue model or being able to present a viable document to investors with two (13%) out of 15 responses establishing a commonality on this notion of thought. Participant 1 stated, "A business plan is 100% essential to the success of any business. That is a fact." Participant 3 stated,

> I continue to reinvent a new business plan for my enterprise annually. It has become more of a lifeline for my business, without it , I find it to be challenging to create concrete goals and initiatives to work toward.

Bliss and Garratt (2001) substantiated these claims in their study. Their research examined access to finance for men versus women-owned small firms and highlighted the importance of having a concrete business plan that included a business structure, strategic plan and goals. Without this, access to capital is limited.

Interview Question 9. IQ9 asked, "Looking back at your career, if you could do one thing differently, what would that be?" Three themes are presented from the analysis of this

question: (a) fearlessness. (b) account management, and (c) leadership. Figure 10 displayed the

bar chart with the themes.

Figure 10

IQ10 Coding Results
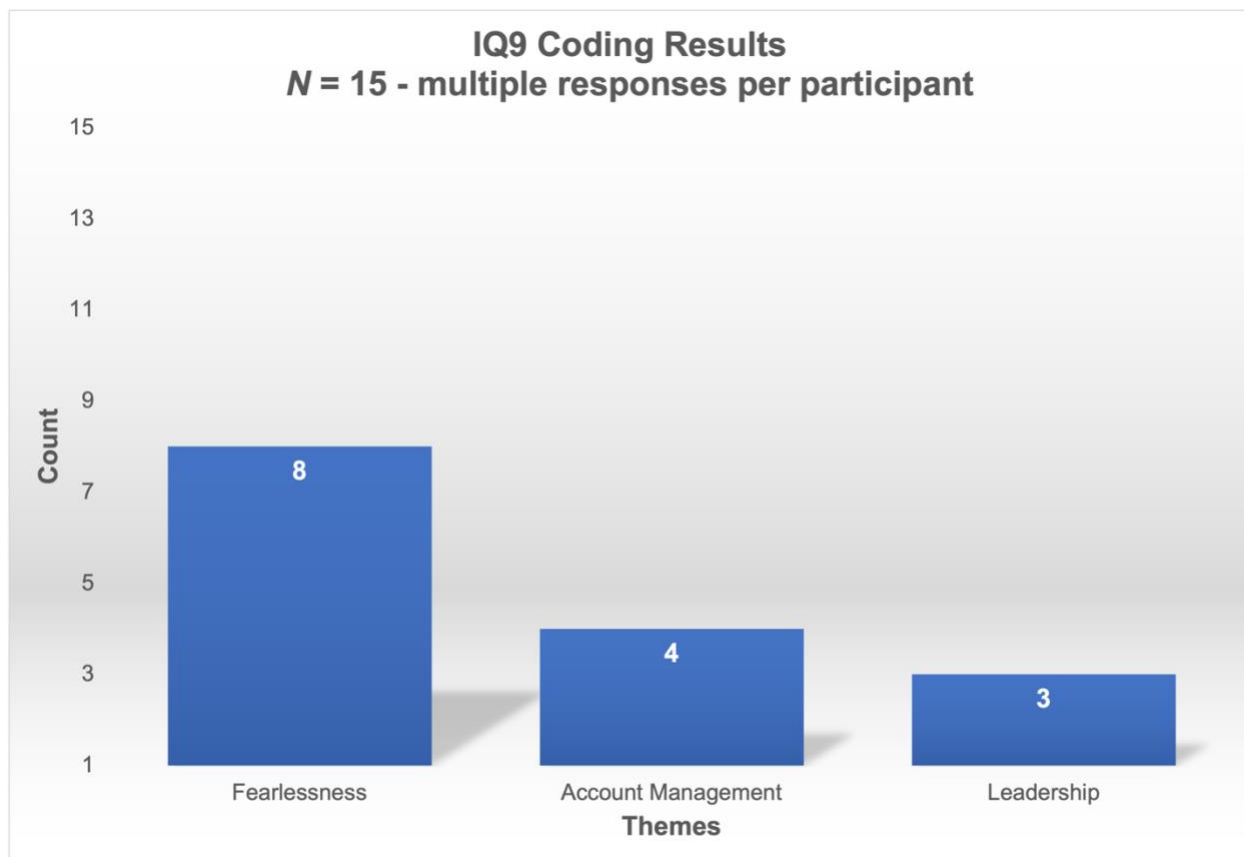
Note. This figure illustrates the three themes that emerged from participant responses to IQ9. The data is presented from the highest to lowest frequency. The numbers displayed then indicate the number of study participants who conveyed accounts of each theme.

   Fearlessness. The theme of being fearless was concluded to be a common recurrence

with eight (26%) out of 15 responses suggesting that being fearless is one thing they would do

differently when embarking on their entrepreneurial journey. Participant 6 stated,

> I wish I would have been braver when I was younger and not worried so much on how things would work out in the end. Although I have been successful, I can only imagine how much more I could have done if I would have embraced fearlessness.

Participant 1 stated "I was a successful lawyer for many years, I chose to leave a six figure, 20

year career, to follow my passion. That is brave. I wish I would have exuded that sense of

fearlessness sooner." In support of this assertation Jones and Malveaux (2008) conveyed an

African-American female perspective on the issues that women of color face in America today.

They cited being emotionally valiant as an immediate connection between African-American

women and the time it takes for them to bring a small company to completion.

Account Management. Account management and budgeting also emerged as a common

theme regarding making better choices. Four participants (26%) out of 15 responses expressed

that frustration with understanding budgeting processes and procedures. Participant 11 stated,

> I learned quickly to hire an accountant. At one point I owed thousands of dollars in taxes, even though I though had paid them in full. Once I hired an accountant, I learned that I was missing a lot of important documentation that was required by the government for small businesses. I never made that mistake again.

Participant 6 expressed a similar thought stating,

> I was fantastic at communicating with my team, networking with others and building an empire. I thought I could do it all, especially managing the finances. That lasted for only a short time, I hired two accountants to assist with my business. Building capital is one thing, managing everything else is so small feat.

Leadership. The theme of leadership was indicated by three participants (20%) out of 15

responses. Participant 3 stated,

> I had led a team when I worked for a large tech company so I was familiar with how to do so, but I also have to continually self- govern myself to make sure that I am being the best authentic leader I can be.
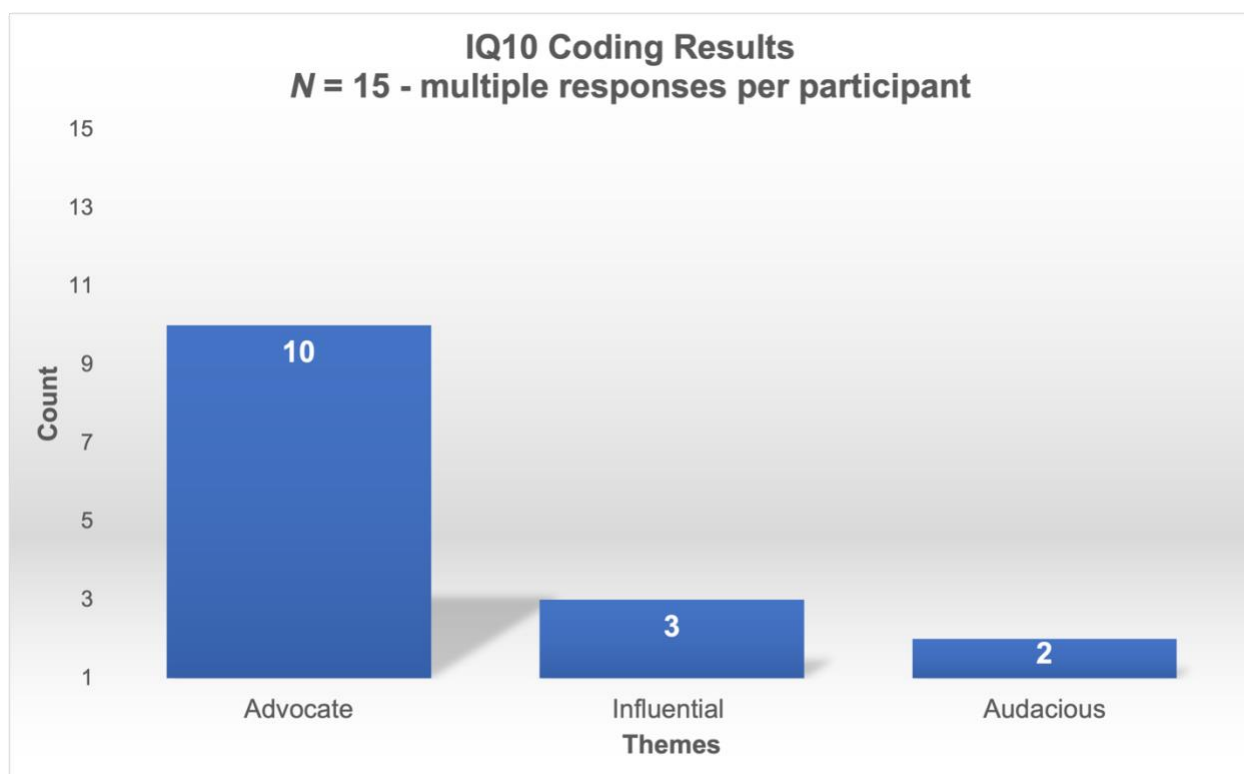
Participant 7 stated, "Leadership is not just a person, anyone within an organization at any time

can be a leader. To me, leadership is action. This is the standard I hold myself an and my team

to." Gupta et al. (2004) accentuated this argument discussing the related ideas, structures, and

metrics of individual-focused transformational leadership from team-focused transformational

leadership based on a novel advancement of transformational leadership theory, namely

become advocates and influential mentors for female entrepreneurs who share a similar upbringing or encountered similar challenges navigating entrepreneurship.

Influential. Three participants (20%) out of 15 responses indicated the theme of influence. Participant 15 stated,

> I have many young girls who look up to me, hopefully some (including my children) who will follow in my footsteps. I hope that I have been a good influence on them, and that they see the value I have brought into the community.

Participant 8 stated, "You never know your impact or influence on someone's life. As a leader, I want my legacy to be that I mastered the art of influencing others effectively and making a difference in someone's life." Hackler and Mayer (2008) echo this sentiment concerning African-American female entrepreneurs' influence in their communities. It calls attention to how African-American women are held to a high standard within their communities.

Audacious. The theme of audaciousness was indicated by 2 participants (13%) of 15 responses. Participant 14 stated "I take pride in the fact that I am a courageous black woman who speaks the truth, and lives authentically. That is who I am and what I hope my legacy is remembered for." Participant 8 stated a similar point of view, "An audacious leader is someone willing to stand out, take risks, and be direct without being disrespectful. I am all of these things and more. Leading with courage has gotten me the success I have today."

Summary of RQ4

RQ4 asked, Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what recommendations would they give emerging African-American female entrepreneurs? Analyzing participant responses and keywords to the three interview questions yielded a total of ten themes. These themes were (a) mentor, (b) mindset, (c) education, (d)

business plan, (e) fearlessness. (f) account management, (g) leadership, (h) advocate, (i) influential, and (j) audacious. Multiple scholarly articles, journals, and papers were introduced in this section that aligned with the research question and substantiated the themes that were derived from the participants' interviews.

The themes revealed recommendations and suggestions for future African-American female entrepreneurs.

- Have a growth mindset and stay optimistic.

- Invest in education and become a master of your craft.

- A business plan is essential for success

- Mentorship, as well as sponsorship, is a valuable entity.

- Be Fearlessness

- Expand knowledge of account management procedures

- Leadership skills have a significant impact on the team as well as on oneself

Participants also shared their thoughts on what they would like their legacy to be, which were:

- being an advocate for all,

- influencing the next generation of entrepreneurs, and

- don't be afraid to live audaciously.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working in corporate America to becoming an entrepreneur who has founded and continue to run their enterprise. Therefore, 15 African-American female entrepreneurs participated in interviews with the purpose of sharing their lived experiences and communicating strategies for the success

of others who follow behind them.

The participants answered 10 semi-structured interview questions intended to provide insight on the following four research questions:

- RQ1: What distinctive obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?

- RQ2: How do African-American women who make the educated risk to transition into full-time entrepreneurship define, evaluate, and monitor their career success?

- RQ 3: What techniques and tools are used to support African-American women in transitioning their careers to full-time entrepreneurship?

- RQ 4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being full-time entrepreneurs, what recommendations would they give emerging African-American female entrepreneurs in a post-COVID-19 society who aspire to do the same?

Data was then composed from the 15 semi-structured interviews and a data coding process followed, which was outlined in Chapter 3. The data was also reviewed with a Pepperdine doctoral candidate. The final analysis of data generated a total of 35 themes. Table 9 provides a summary of all of the themes that were produced from the research questions via the data analysis process. Chapter 5 discussed the research results, its implications, conclusions, and final recommendations.

Table 9

Summary of Themes for Four Research Questions

RQ1: What obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	RQ2: How do African-American women overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	RQ3: What techniques and tools are used to support African-American women in transitioning their careers to full-time entrepreneurship	RQ 4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being full-time entrepreneurs, what recommendations would they give emerging African-American female entrepreneurs in a post-COVID-19 society who aspire to do the same?
Frustration	Challenge: Monolith	Succession	Mindset
Financing	Challenge: Culture	Inheritance	Education
Stagnation	Challenge: No voice	Heritage	Business Plan
History	Reward: Network	Financial stability	Mentor
Guidance	Reward: Increased Drive	Work-Life Balance	Fearlessness
Discounted	Reward: Financial Security	Fulfillment	Account Management
No challenges	Challenge: Resources	Taking Ownership	Leadership
	Challenge: External Opinions	Reflection	Advocate
	Challenge: Control	Continuous Learning	Influential
			Audacious

Chapter 5: Findings

I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. From there, I was promoted to the washtub. From there, I was promoted to the cook kitchen. And from there, I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations. I have built my own factory on my own ground.

–Madam C.J. Walker: *Entrepreneur, Philanthropist, and Activist*

Summary of the Study

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the authentic lived experiences of African-American women who transitioned from working as full-time corporate employees to founding and running their businesses. Their goal of achieving successful business ownership was met through unique strategies and methods employed by each of them. This study also generated advice from these women to the next generation of African-American female entrepreneurs as they attempt to pursue entrepreneurship as a sole career.

The qualitative phenomenological research methodology that was utilized in this study was created to expound on the following four research questions:

- RQ1: What distinctive obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?

- RQ2: How do African-American women who make the educated risk to transition into full-time entrepreneurship define, evaluate, and monitor their career success?

- RQ 3: What techniques and tools are used to support African-American women in transitioning their careers to full-time entrepreneurship?

- RQ 4: Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what are some recommendations they would give to

emerging African-American female entrepreneurs in a post-COVID-19 society who aspires to do the same?

Fifteen participants met the criteria of inclusion. These African-American businesswomen participated in a 60-minute individual semi-structured interview and offered responses to 10 interview questions that stemmed from the four research questions pertaining to this study. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Data analysis included an in-depth coding process where the transcriptions were reviewed, and key phrases and words were grouped to formulate themes (Creswell, 2007).

To validate the accuracy and completeness of this qualitative research study, a two-step validation technique was applied, including peer-review validity. The researcher utilized the inter-rater procedure to categorize and access the data extracted from each interview question; 12 frequency charts were created to track the recurrence of the themes. This method of grouping produced 31 themes that related to the four primary research questions. The researcher then developed a framework for developing a course to help African-American female entrepreneurs traverse the early phases of entrepreneurship. This course included modules that aligned with the corresponding findings from this research study. The ideation of this course contributes to the research study's objective of creating a module or framework that can help support aspiring African-American female entrepreneurs in their endeavors. It is a foundational template that provides the building blocks for understanding best practices used by seasoned African-American female entrepreneurs for success. It also provides them with resources and mentorship opportunities aligned with helping them navigate transitions launch, and maintain successful business enterprises.

Discussion of Findings

This section explained the themes extracted from the four research questions presented in the study. An analysis of how each theme related to existing literature and the participants' consensus is explained. The findings encapsulate the applications, strategies, obstacles, and suggestions of African-American businesswomen who have succeeded in their entrepreneurship careers. Lastly, a discussion of the results for each research question was expounded on.

Results for RQ1. RQ1 asked, "What obstacles and challenges do African-American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?" Analyzing participant responses and keywords to the two interview questions yielded seven themes. The two interview questions revealed the following conclusions: African-American female entrepreneurs experience a multitude of challenges during the navigation process, including (a) financing, (b) stagnation, and (c) frustration. Participants also shared their thoughts on factors that are often ignored in society but continue to be silent barriers for them, such as (a) the effects of history, (b) being discounted, (c) and lack of guidance. Two participants also shared that they encountered no challenges but understood that this is rare within the African-American community.

Discussion of RQ1. The following findings indicate the most significant obstacles and challenges African-American women face when transitioning from corporate America to entrepreneurship. The most significant finding was that more resources and financing are needed for African-American women transitioning from corporate employees to entrepreneurs. This means that African-American female entrepreneurs encounter many financial hurdles when it comes to launching and running an enterprise. Some of the challenges mentioned include a lack of capital, excessive levels of debt, and a limitation of monetary resources. Research shows that,

especially in comparison to other demographic groups, African-American female entrepreneurs have much less access to external funding opportunities. African-American women receive less than 1% rate of economic growth venture capital financing amidst being the collective entrepreneurs in the U.S. with the most significant pace of economic development, according to the 2018 NWBC report. Due to a lack of funding, African-American women find it more challenging to establish or develop their enterprises than their counterparts, thus restricting their potential for creativity and viability in the market. According to the NWBC (2018) report, the research from the National Women's Law Center stated that African-American women are the most educated group within the U.S. They often have high amounts of student debt, making acquiring financing for their enterprises challenging.

Furthermore, many African-American women encounter lending industry prejudice, making it difficult for them to get loans and secure other sources of funding. African-American female entrepreneurs also need more financial resources by having limited access to mentors and business networks that may give financial guidance and support. Due to a lack of resources, African-American women may need help to make educated financial decisions while navigating the complicated economic environment of entrepreneurship. The findings show that, overall, financial challenges indeed hinder African-American women from flourishing as entrepreneurs. To overcome these difficulties, government officials and leaders of financial institutions must improve access to capital and make a concentrated effort to advocate for African-American female entrepreneurs. It is important to note that Bliss and Garratt (2001) compared access to funding for men- and women-owned small businesses using data from the 1993 National Survey of Small Business Finance, thus, confirming the claims of more than half of the participants that raising capital to start a business is one of the primary barriers African-American women face.

The findings in this study suggest that the challenge of stagnation within the African-American community when pursuing entrepreneurship can be attributed to various factors, primarily systemic racism, as outlined. In the business sphere, discrimination and racism can make it hard for African-American entrepreneurs to achieve success. Therefore, African-American entrepreneurs encounter more significant prejudice from potential consumers and investors than Caucasian entrepreneurs, thus resulting in an imbalance of resources and opportunities (Jones & Malveaux, 2008). Jones and Malveaux (2008) presented a Black female viewpoint on the problems that women of color face in America today, quoting stagnation as a direct link between African-American women and the length of time it takes for them to bring a small business to fruition.

The challenge of frustration that plagues African-American women when pursuing entrepreneurship is a complicated subject that has been studied in academic research. When seeking out investors, African-American entrepreneurs are susceptible to discrimination and racism. This often results in disappointment and a sense of injustice since African-American entrepreneurs are frequently held to a higher requirement and subjected to more scrutiny than their white colleagues (Garcia & Baack, 2022). Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that African-American female entrepreneurs frequently confront marginalization and a lack of support from various places, sometimes including family or friends who disagree with their decisions. This often leads to a lack of confidence in the entrepreneur and the perception that success is unattainable, leading to frustration and pessimism (Thomas, 2019). In support of the claim that frustration is an obstacle in transitioning from corporate employee to entrepreneur, a study by DeMartino and Barbato (2003) highlighted this. Frustration is mentioned as a common unmotivating factor for women, specifically within the study. Using a sample of MBA

entrepreneurs, this study investigated motivational differences. This enabled comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs with similar business education, educational credentials, and other significant criteria.

The abundant African-American neighborhood of Greenwood, located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was the target of the Tulsa Race Massacre 1921, also often referred to as the Black Wall Street Massacre. Over 1,200 Black-owned residences and businesses were destroyed due to the massacre, which reportedly killed 300 people. The results of this massacre are still prevalent in today's society. It undermined African-Americans' economic foundation within the Tulsa community and America. The quantity of African-American business owners in Tulsa, Oklahoma, decreased dramatically in the years following the genocide, and the community to this day has yet to recover fiscally (Fairlie & Robb, 2007).

Additionally, the findings indicated that this incident halted efforts to increase generational wealth for African-American entrepreneurs, which has had long-lasting detrimental effects within the African-American community for decades. To support the assertions as mentioned earlier, Boyd (2000b) investigated the hypothesis that during the Tulsa Massacre and the Great Depression, joblessness, the most severe form of labor market disadvantage, compelled the African-American community to become survivalist entrepreneurs, that is, people who start small businesses in order to find an independent means of livelihood.

It was also revealed that African-American women who own their own businesses frequently feel undervalued and encounter unique challenges (Boyd, 2000c). While the majority of enterprises of women-owned businesses in the US soared by 58% between 2007 and 2018, the majority of businesses founded by African-American women only increased by 16%, according to the 2019 State of Women-Owned Businesses Report. This encapsulates the distinct hardships

this segment of the population has in attempting to acquire access to capital. Moreover, African-American women often feel a sense of invisibility and irrelevance within the entrepreneurship community. These findings aligned with the viewpoints unveiled within this study as participants lamented needing access to resources that might have helped their enterprises develop sooner. Bowie and Kenney (2013) validate this popular argument, and discussed the importance of understanding the intersectionality between race and gender and the prominent role it plays for women of color who pursue entrepreneurship.

According to research explored in the literature, there are various reasons why African-American female entrepreneurs may feel a lack of guidance. A research study found within the Kauffman Foundation revealed that African-American female entrepreneurs are less likely to have advisers and guidance in the form of mentors or sponsors than their Caucasian counterparts (Bliss & Garratt, 2001). These professional relationships are vital because they give valuable advice, resources, and potential associations to other entrepreneurs, thereby allowing them to navigate challenges as they establish their enterprises. African-American female entrepreneurs need these valuable support systems to succeed. Bliss and Garratt (2001) addressed the necessity of aiding African-American female entrepreneurs. A review of past research also revealed a widespread absence of government aid for entrepreneurs and peer group mentoring. Furthermore, it emphasizes the inequalities in the expectations of female and male entrepreneurs and the psychological consequences on men and women.

It is very rare for an African-American entrepreneur to face no challenges when navigating the transition from Corporate America to entrepreneurship. However, it is not impossible, as the findings revealed that two participants did indeed feel that they did not encounter any challenges when deciding to transition from working in Corporate America to

Entrepreneurship. This was due to family support and prior experience in entrepreneurship. When resources and support are provided to entrepreneurs, they are much more likely to succeed in their endeavors. Through this study, the researcher discovered a gap in the existing literature. There needs to be more research that presents scholarly articles, journals, or papers supporting the claims that African-American female entrepreneurs encounter no challenges. In this study, the researcher highlighted that although it is uncommon, there are African-American women who do share this viewpoint.

Results for RQ2. RQ2 asked, "How do African-American women overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?" Analyzing participant responses and keywords to the two interview questions yielded a total of nine themes. The two interview questions revealed the following conclusions: African-American female entrepreneurs experience both challenges and rewards working within corporate America. The challenges included the need for more voice, being viewed as a monolith, and toxic work culture. The rewards included financial security, expanding their network, and an increased drive. Participants also shared their thoughts on challenging factors that they often encountered when launching their business, such as lack of resources, unsupportive external opinions, and the notion of letting go of their control. Ten participants also agreed that they needed assistance launching their enterprise. On the contrary, five participants stated that they did receive assistance.

Discussion of RQ2. The most significant finding derived from RQ2 indicates that due to socioeconomic expectations, African-American female entrepreneurs are frequently considered a monolith in the field of entrepreneurship. This means that cultural expectations play a significant role in this perception. African-American women face pressure to abide by cultural and societal

expectations, solid and independent; generalizations, such as being tough and independent, can lead to a sense of being categorized as a distinct identity within the field of entrepreneurship. This study's findings imply that fully understanding the cultural elements that impact how African-American women are seen versus how they perceive themselves or would like to be perceived is necessary to understand their lived experiences in entrepreneurship. Basu's (2006) study unveiled the personal accounts of African-American women who share common challenges. This provides a foundation of understanding as to why there is such a stark gap in minorities excelling in Corporate America among their Caucasian counterparts. Moreover, it explored the notion of ethnic entrepreneurship. The study assessed the variables influencing entry into ethnic entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial survival, and success and the causes causing variability in entrepreneurial behavior and performance among ethnic minority groups.

Toxic work settings significantly negatively impact the psychological health and well-being of African-American women in corporate America. Exposure to workplace incivility was associated with increased levels of depressive symptoms in African-American women however, these levels were not seen in Caucasian women with similar roles. This might be related to the enhanced pressure and expectations that African-American women encounter throughout their careers—for example, stereotypes and institutional racism. Research supports the participants' statements which provided an interpretative framework for comprehending African-American women's experiences through the storytelling of personal accounts within their careers.

Because of the structural impediments they confront, African-American women in corporate America frequently feel as though they have no voice. According to research, these women are frequently subjected to prejudice based on both their ethnicity and gender, which can contribute to feelings of isolation and exclusion at work. Furthermore, these women need to be

more represented in positions of authority, which can limit their prospects for promotion and impact over decision-making processes. Barr (2015) substantiated these claims from the women in this study, explicitly highlighting the lack of diversity in corporate leadership, which plays a significant role in African-American women feeling stifled and dismissed in corporate spaces, adding to the many reasons they transition to entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, African-American women frequently must effectively manage various identities and preconceptions, which can create a sense of double jeopardy (S. Coleman, 2000). For example, African-American women often experience pressure within Corporate America to adhere to white, male-dominated benchmarks while simultaneously coping with expectations regarding their personal racial and gender identities outside of the corporate world. This is often a tough balancing act and a mental strain, creating an uncomfortable position for African-American women to be placed into. Therefore, more often than not they end up not asserting themselves and expressing their experiences and concerns (Barr, 2015).

Working in Corporate America offers multiple advantages for African-American women, including greater networking possibilities, personal motivation, and stability in their finances. Networking is critical for business success, and corporate America provides several possibilities for African-American women to interact with specialists in their area (Ghemawat, 2012). Findings from this research revealed the aligned sentiment that working in corporate America, on the other hand, may allow African-American women to network with other professionals and create meaningful relationships, which can lead to opportunities for employment, mentoring, and career progression. Bliss and Garratt (2001) emphasized the need to aid female entrepreneurs in establishing a solid support system. According to prior research, creating a strong network may benefit African-American women who want to start their own businesses. There is a general

shortage of support for entrepreneurs, which is exacerbated for women. The more female entrepreneurs prioritize creating and expanding their network to form meaningful business-oriented relationships, the more excellent the opportunities they create for themselves (Bliss & Garratt, 2001).

Working in Corporate America fosters entrepreneurial determination and drive among African-American women, in addition to opportunities to build professional connections within a network Corporate America can present possibilities for African-American women to cultivate and demonstrate their abilities and talents within their company and themselves, which as the findings in this study suggest, often lead to improved self-assurance, job fulfillment, and professional achievement.

Employment within Corporate America can boost financial stability for African-American women. According to the National Women's Law Center, African-American women earn significantly less than Caucasian men. It is noted that African-American women make only 63 cents for every dollar that a Caucasian man earns in the U.S., making their demographic far more inclined to live in poverty. In some instances, being employed by a corporate organization provides African-American women with the chance to possibly earn higher wages, obtain benefits such as medical insurance and retirement savings accounts, and have exposure to other services that can help them attain a higher level of financial independence. The study conducted by Bates and Robb (2013) provided an analysis of the comparison of financial security for employees employed at traditional 9-5 jobs within corporate America versus entrepreneurs. The research by Bates and Robb supported the findings articulated in this study regarding the theme of how limited access to financing limits minority business enterprises' ability to achieve viability, create new jobs, and, in general, contribute to the economic development of the

communities and regions in which they operate.

      Results for RQ3. RQ3 asked, "How do African-American women measure their success as entrepreneurs?" Analyzing participant responses and keywords to the two interview questions yielded a total of seven themes. The three interview questions revealed the following conclusions: The majority African-American female entrepreneurs did factor in the notion of (a) leaving a legacy, and (b) building generational wealth when founding their enterprises. Participants also shared their thoughts on what qualified as their personal definition of success which included (a) fulfillment, (b) having a healthy work-life balance, and (c) financial stability.

      Discussion of RQ3. The most significant finding derived from research question RQ3 indicate the ways in which success is measured, tracked and defined in African-American women's careers entrepreneurial endeavors. Additional, a commonality of the importance of legacy and generational wealth was discovered as fundamental elements of African-American wealth creation and maintenance (Bliss & Garratt, 2001). This means that in today's society, and specifically within the African-American community, Entrepreneurship has become a more mainstream solution for building generational wealth. Findings suggest that it allows entrepreneurs to generate a business or businesses that will be passed down from generation to generation. According to the findings of a Kauffman Foundation research investigation on the topic of generational wealth, as well as the aligned thoughts from the findings of this research study, African-American entrepreneurs are substantially more likely than white entrepreneurs to establish businesses with the specific intent of passing those businesses on to the next generation. This is advantageous as it demonstrates society's evident goal to generate affluence that may be spread both and also within the community of one's own family (Bates & Robb, 2013).

      Legacy and generational wealth can bring about change regarding African-Americans'

past economic inequities within American history. African-Americans have endured systematic

impediments to wealth creation for decades, including enslavement, Jim Crow laws, and

prejudiced regulations restricting their access to school, housing, and work. Entrepreneurship can

help to break down these obstacles and create a more egalitarian economic landscape.

Aside from resolving historical imbalances, the creation of legacy and generational

wealth positively influences the African-American community as a whole. According to

research, wealth disparity is a key element in the racial wealth gap, defined as the wealth

difference between African-Americans and Caucasian Americans. Through entrepreneurship,

this wealth gap is closing slowly. Furthermore, business entities passed down through

generations add to the country's economic health by generating employment and driving

economic expansion, thus making a significant economic contribution to society. To corroborate

these assertions, Harvey's (2008) discussed the viability of entrepreneurship as a means of

achieving economic stability for working-class Black women and focused on the importance of

generational wealth within the African-American community.

Work-Life Balance. One of the primary ways that Entrepreneurship benefits African-

American female entrepreneurs is by navigating work-life balance. It offers a sense of autonomy

and control over their work schedules, allowing them the freedom to attend to work activities and

personal obligations and commitments. According to the study's findings, African-American

female entrepreneurs with control over their work schedules have a positive work-life balance

experience and elevated personal gratification while running their enterprises than those without

(National Women's Business Council [NWBC], 2018). Iromuanya (2018) sought to illuminate

the questions raised by Adichie in Americanah about the traditional role of womanhood and

explores the deeply embedded notion of patriarchy within society's racial, political, and

economic landscapes while also stating the importance of the African-American women transitioning from traditional roles to exuding independence via creating her opportunities via entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurialism empowers African-American women to pursue their aspirations and cultivate their success. According to the Small Business Association (SBA), entrepreneurs who pursue a strategic vision that they are enthusiastic about are more and reap personal fulfillment. African-American female entrepreneurs who can transform their passion into a business indeed profit intrinsically from self-gratification. Alinia (2015) explained the same sentiments as the findings, specifically examining the question of whether or not fulfillment can ever indeed be attained in corporate America for African-American women through an interpretative framework for comprehending African-American women's experiences through the storytelling of their narratives within their careers.

Results for RQ4. RQ4 asked, "Based on the lived experiences of African-American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what recommendations would they give emerging African-American female entrepreneurs?" Analyzing participant responses and keywords to the three interview questions yielded a total of 10 themes. These themes were (a) mentor, (b) mindset, (c) education, (d) business plan, (e) fearlessness, (f) account management, (g) leadership, (h) advocate, (i) influential, and (j) audacious.

The question also revealed the following conclusions: Recommendations and suggestions for future African-American female entrepreneurs were to establish a growth mindset and stay optimistic. Another recommendation was to invest in education and become a master of one's craft. This includes creating a business plan essential for success, gaining mentors and sponsors

as they are both valuable entities, and exuding fearlessness. It is also recommended that

entrepreneurs continue to expand their knowledge of account management procedures and

leadership skills. Participants also shared their thoughts on what they would like their legacy to

be, which included advocating for all, influencing the next generation of entrepreneurs and being

fearless in life audaciously.

       Discussion of RQ4. The following findings indicate the most significant

recommendations and strategies derived from African-American women who have successfully

transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time

entrepreneur. The most significant finding was that African-American female entrepreneurs who

desire to pursue business understand that a growth mindset is essential. As the findings within

this research shows, African-American female entrepreneurs that do exhibit a growth mindset are

more inclined to be able to handle complexities, persevere in the face of adversity, and view

failure as an opportunity for learning and progress. Entrepreneurs that have a growth mindset are

more likely to achieve their goals than those with a fixed perspective. Moreover, entrepreneurs

with a growth mindset are more likely to seek out chances for learning and self-improvement,

which may lead to improved business performance and success. This means that as a result,

African-American women who embark on entrepreneurship can set themselves up for success by

implementing a growth mindset into their professional careers. In support of the findings,

Haynes and Helms (2000) explained the benefits of African-American female entrepreneurs

attaining mentors. This research investigates female entrepreneurship, focusing on female

founders, businesses, mentorship, and entrepreneurial behaviors as a distinct subgroup of

entrepreneurship.

       Education is critically valuable for African-American female entrepreneurs. It is the

foundation for the information and skills required to launch and run a successful enterprise. Education can also provide a level of access for these women to enter into spaces they may only have been provided access to with education. Education correlates to favorable entrepreneurial results such as enhanced networking opportunities, employment generation, and capital formation. Furthermore, education improves the cognitive and non-cognitive competencies needed for entrepreneurship, such as creative expression, critical thinking, and strategic skills. As the findings within this study suggest, African-American female entrepreneurs who have expertise in their field or craft are well-prepared with knowledge and experience, which are often factors that are essential to success. Research and data from a scholarly article from the Academy of Management Review elaborate on the link between education and entrepreneurship. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) looked at entrepreneurship as a research field and supported findings that education and entrepreneurship among women in diverse fields are essential.

African-American female entrepreneurs with a sense of fearlessness conquer challenges while confidently pursuing their goals. Fear emerges in different entities, such as anxiety, worry, or stress, frequently preventing individuals from taking educated risks within their career aspirations. The findings from this research show that when African-American women overcome their fears and take these educated risks, they are more likely to prevail and achieve their goals. In their study, Jones and Malveaux (2008) shared that fear can play a critical role in African-American women's transition to entrepreneurship. This conveys an African-American female perspective on the issues that women of color face in America today, citing emotional tenacity as an immediate link between African-American women and the time it takes for them to complete a small business.

Budgeting is essential for the success of any business, particularly those operated by

African-American female entrepreneurs. A budget assists entrepreneurs in managing their money and making sound decisions about spending and investing. In studies, budgeting has been linked to increased financial stability and better financial results. This study's results illustrate the strategies that African-American female entrepreneurs utilize to manage their finances better and increase the potential of their enterprise's financial success by gaining knowledge on budgeting efficiently.

African-American female entrepreneurs who aim to establish and expand their enterprises must learn to lead a team. Effective leadership requires communicating, allocating duties, and inspiring team members to buy into the mission and vision. According to research, impactful leadership has been linked with improved team productivity and achievement. The results of this study show that African-American female entrepreneurs build a healthy and safe working environment and strengthen the potential of their enterprises' progress by understanding and adapting leadership skills. Gupta et al. (2004) discussed the related ideas, structures, and metrics of individual-focused transformational leadership versus team-focused transformational leadership based on a novel advancement of transformational leadership theory, namely differentiated transformational leadership.

Implications of the Study

This study aimed to gain knowledge about the transition process of African-American female entrepreneurs and how they navigate success. As a result, best practices were identified that can be used to impact other entities in strategic planning, formulation of a business, and maintaining that business once established. This information presented can be utilized in several ways. These stakeholders and the potential applications of the study's findings are discussed.

Universities

As more universities are incorporating entrepreneurship within their programs, instructors can draw upon the content outlined within this study to include within their courses or programs. University leadership can also use the statistics and scholarly literature presented in this study as a rationale for creating scholarships or additional resources for African-American female students who need support in launching their businesses.

Minority Groups

While the research is focused on African-American female entrepreneurs, the findings could be expanded to include other minorities or disadvantaged groups who face similar challenges. There are individuals from every culture and demographic group that aspire to pursue entrepreneurship, but do not have the resources to do so. These recommendations and findings can be adapted to meet their needs as well.

Professional Networks. More than ever before having access to networks provides opportunities. Your network is your net worth, is a common quote that still holds true today. Professional networking groups can utilize the recommendations exhibited within this study to create forums, panel discussions, conferences, symposiums, or community mentorship programs within their network.

Within the final sections in this chapter, the conclusions and recommendations from this study's research are assembled into a training course tailored to guide aspiring African-American entrepreneurs. The course distills the knowledge, experiences, and practice guidelines of African-American women who have founded and managed successful businesses.

Application

The purpose of the study was to highlight the lives experiences of African-American women within entrepreneurship. Through those shared stories the researcher was then able to

identify the challenges as well as strategies for overcoming them to achieve success. The findings extracted from the interviews were classifies as themes and these themes were formulated into a comprehensive training consisting of curriculum in the format of modules with the intention of provide African-American women with the knowledge, skills, and resources to transition from Corporate America to entrepreneurship successfully.

Training Program

The following describes the training program and the rationale behind this program for African-American women entrepreneurs;

- Training Program Name: "Mastering Entrepreneurship: The Art of Developing a Foundational Framework and Navigating the Business Landscape for African-American Women.

- Program Description and Rationale: This E-Learning course, offered via the online platform LinkedIn Learning, is designed to aid African-American women in navigating the transition from corporate America to full-time entrepreneurship. The training is depicted in the format of an online course. The course will include modules on coaching and mentoring, account management, business ideation and creation, and additional resources to propel success. This course aims to equip African-American women with the knowledge and expertise they will need to have a positive experience in their transition journey from corporate employee to working for themselves. This training method is accessible, flexible, and can be initiated globally. Various digital technology will be used, such as Microsoft Teams and Microsoft Office 365. The rationale for this training is to equip African-American

female entrepreneurs with the confidence and expertise needed to launch and scale

their businesses.

- Founding Principles: The following are the principles that create a foundation for the

  learnings that are outlined in this training:

  - o   F - Fearlessly shattering barriers and glass ceilings,

  - o   R - Resilient in the face of adversity,

  - o   E - Empowered by their heritage and culture, they control their destiny,

  - o   E - Enterprising and innovative, they seize opportunities,

  - o   D - Determined advocates for social justice and equity,

  - o   O - Overcoming obstacles and challenges with grace and grit, and

  - o   M - Making their mark and leaving a lasting legacy

- Deliverables: The following describes the primary output of the training:

  - o   Deliverables include one e-learning course. There are 10 modules which are

    two hours in length each. Modules are taught in several ways, including

    virtual instructor-led training, online-led training (self-paced, just-in-time),

    and virtual mentorship and shadowing.

- Training Curriculum and Learning Objectives: An outline of the training curriculum

  and the expected objectives within each training module is outlined:

  - o   Module 1: Introduction

    - ▪   Course goals and expectations

    - ▪   Introductions and course overview

    - ▪   Establishing realistic expectations and goals

 - o   Module 2: Understanding Entrepreneurship

- Defining entrepreneurship

- Distinctions between entrepreneurship and the corporate landscape

- Advantages and Disadvantages of entrepreneurship

- Module 3: Identifying Your Strengths

  - Personal SWOT (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)

    analysis

  - Accessing transferable skills from corporate work to entrepreneurship

  - Establishing opportunities for improvement and advancement

- Module 4: Building and Sustaining a Support Network

  - Mentorship Versus Sponsorship

  - Identifying potential mentors and networking opportunities

  - Your Network is your Net wort

- Module 5: Account Management

  - Basics of accounting and financial management

  - Establishing a business account

  - Tracking and managing expenses and revenue

- Module 6: Developing Your Business Plan

  - The value of a business plan

  - Components of a successful business plan

  - Ideation and conceptualization

- Module 7: Launching Your Business

  - Understanding legal requirements for entrepreneurs

  - Launching a business online with AI

- Brand Marketing

  o Module 8: Resources for Success

    - Funding and Grant writing

    - Community resources and support

    - Learning to Lead through Literature

  o Module 9: Challenges and Success Stories

    - Panel Discussion

    - African-American female entrepreneurs will share their lived
      experiences and lessons learned throughout their career

    - Q&A

  o Module 10: Final Project

    - Develop a comprehensive business plan

    - Present the business plan to stakeholders

    - Receive valuable feedback and support

Figure 12 shows the training curriculum outlined via a decision tree model. This figure illustrates an innovative teaching model through the illustration of a learning tree. The data is presented beginning at the base of the tree, signifying the foundational modules, and expanding to the top of the tree which signifies the creation of the final product.

Figure 12

Training Curriculum outlined via a Decision Tree Model
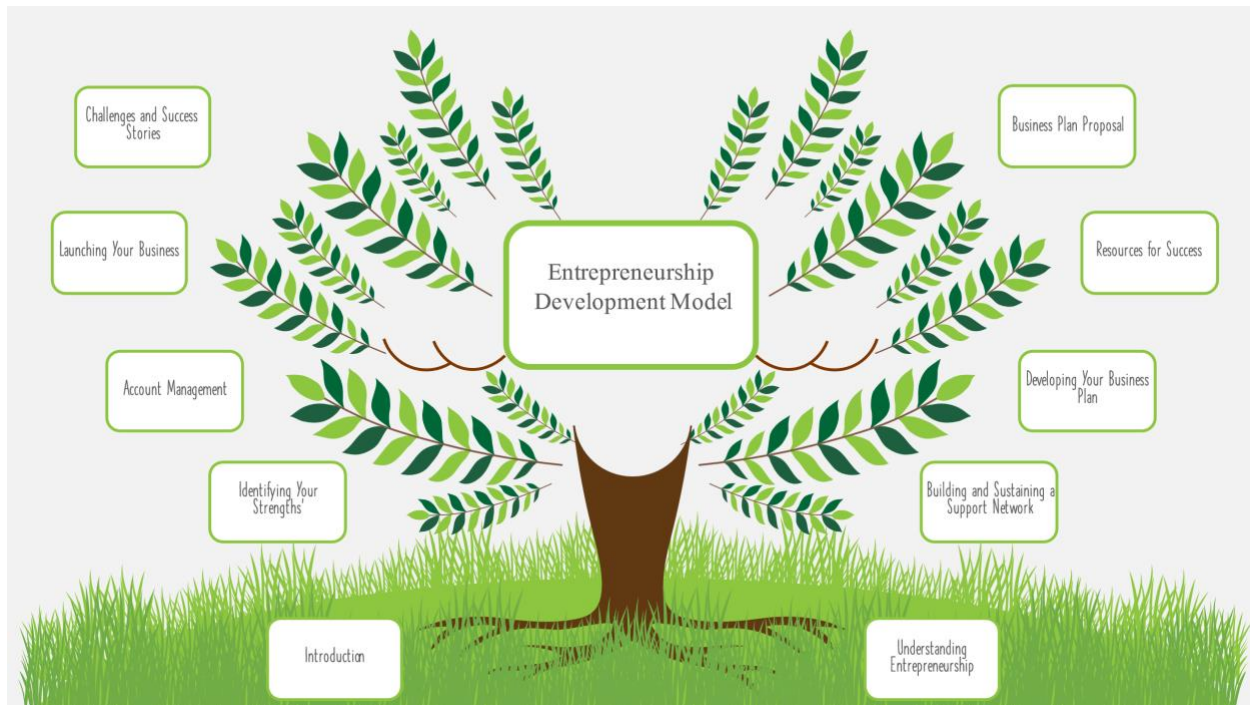
Evaluation

      Utilizing Kirkpatrick's and Kirkpatrick's (2014) Four Levels of Training Evaluation as a

model, the researcher developed an assessment that encompasses evaluation for this training

curriculum in the form of a pulse check. These checks are designed into the training sessions and

completed at the end of each breakout session. The instructor also has the autonomy to add more

if he/she deems it necessary. Specifically, the pulse checks will measure the knowledge, skill,

confidence and commitment of the participants.

Knowledge and Skill

Knowledge is evaluated throughout the training program by having open discussions, and individual/ small group presentations on various topics. When participants take over the role of presenter and lead their peers in the discussion, this demonstrates their knowledge, or lack thereof, of the concept. This method helps identify strengths within the training program and offer less ambiguity as to what the challenges were if after the training is completed, results are not up to expectation.

Confidence and Commitment

Confidence and commitment is evaluated through practice, discussion, and the opportunity for participants to ask questions. This creates a safe environment where individuals can relay their concerns about real-world challenges. While the objectives are essential factors in training programs, open discussions surrounding confidence and commitment can help determine underlying issues. Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2016) note that frequently, training initiatives are densely filled with material, leaving little room for addressing these practical issues. Yet, engaging in such discussions could mark the distinction between a failed endeavor and one in which obstacles to achievement are eliminated. This enables the organization to genuinely advance toward its loftiest objectives at an exceptional pace. Until knowledge is gained as to where concerns stem from, and improvements are corrected, the organization will continue to suffer, and the stakeholders return on investment from the training program will be substandard.

Using this logic, it was necessary to consider formative methods of evaluation that demonstrated that the learning objectives had been accomplished successfully as well as documented results for future reference (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2016). The purpose of the evaluation is so that the researcher may obtain consistent feedback, and constructive criticism for

continual improvement of the program. The data provided from the participants will be used to measure the effectiveness of the training program.

Study Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this study was to highlight African-American female entrepreneurs' journey as they navigate the transition from working within corporate America to founding and sustaining their own small businesses. The results drawn from the interviews outlined the commonalities that African-American women feel are most present in today's society. Women confront considerable impediments while pursuing entrepreneurship, according to majority view, including limited access to money, a lack of financial expertise and resources, and racial and gender stigmatization. It is my recommendation that in order to appropriately address these issues the first step is to acknowledge that this is a real problem, not a figment of the imagination. Once that acknowledgement is taken seriously there would need to be a collaborative effort from the government entities and policy makers, advocacy organizations and community leaders, and men who are entrepreneurs to speak up about topics such as an increase of access for funding, other external resources, and most of all support and mentoring. Moreover, institutional reform is essential and an increased investment in programs and initiatives that empower African-American female entrepreneurs are all elements that could be implemented to help support the initiative of African-American female entrepreneurship.

A significant way to support African-American Entrepreneurs is to recognize the negative historical ramifications of tragedies such as the Tulsa Race Massacre which has had a lasting influence on the African-American community. The destruction of African-American owned enterprises, as well as the continued consequences of racial discrimination, have

hampered Dark skinned capabilities to form generational wealth and grow lucrative business enterprises, resulting in continual inequities in entrepreneurship between African and Caucasian Americans. It is recommended that by highlighting the societal key barriers and bigotries that African-American entrepreneurs have encountered in the past and to some extent still today open communication can contribute to the creation of a more equal and supportive environment for entrepreneurship within this community.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study aimed to highlight African-American female entrepreneurs' journey as they navigate the transition from working within corporate America to founding and sustaining their own small businesses. The research study also sought out to explore strategies and suggestions from African-American female entrepreneurs who have experienced this transition, to not only add to the validity of the study but to provide useful information for other women following in their footsteps. As a result. There were gaps identified within existing research found and additional questions posed for future research. I recommend the following areas of future research focus:

1. Further exploration into the influence of social and environmental factors such as discussions stemming from race, gender, and occupational prestige affect African-American women's capacity to pursue entrepreneurship. This may entail investigating the historical backdrop of African-American women's economic growth and development historical and psychological how it has been affected by historical and psychological variables.

2. Conduct an inquiry into the adverse consequences of institutional impediments: Identify and evaluate the institutional obstructions and difficulties that prevent

African-American women from pursuing entrepreneurship, such as a lack of access to funding, legal and regulatory bureaucratic barriers, and a lack of network connectivity.

3. Investigate strategic techniques that are employed by successful African-American female entrepreneurs: Determine prominent African-American female entrepreneurs and analyze the approaches they adopted to overcome obstacles. This will provide an understanding of the behaviors, educated risks, and decisions that contributed to African-American women achieving business success.

4. Identify and reflect on the effects of technology and AI: Consider the impact that new technology systems and artificial intelligence will have towards entrepreneurship. Assessing how entrepreneurs will utilize social media, virtual communities, and other digital technologies to develop networks, acquire finance, and market their enterprises as one example.

5. Continue to highlight African-American women voices through conducting interviews, surveys and questionnaires: Gather primary data through interviews and surveys to acquire an increased knowledge of their experiences, attitudes, and strategies. This will provide considerable insight into the unique obstacles and opportunities that African-American women who want to be entrepreneur's encounter.

6. Continue to generate plans policy proposals: Based on your research results, create economic plans aimed at addressing the problems commonly faced by African-American women. These concepts should be evidence-based and designed to cater to

increasing African-American women entrepreneurs' access to resources, networks, and opportunities.

Listed below are resources for the future African-American female entrepreneurs yet to be established. One of the most important goals I had when embarking on my research was to ensure that I provided the reader current resources that would help them. At the end of every interview I conducted, I asked the interviewee to please suggest concrete resources for others. I then collected their suggestions and created a small library of resources for others who come behind them.

Resources for Future Entrepreneurs

1. National Association of Black Women Entrepreneurs (NABWE): A nonprofit organization that provides resources, training, and networking opportunities for black women entrepreneurs.

2. Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA): A federal agency that assists minority-owned businesses, including African-American female entrepreneurs, with access to capital, contracts, and market opportunities.

3. The Amber Grant: A monthly grant of $10,000 awarded to a female entrepreneur, including African-American women, to help fund their business.

4. The National Black MBA Association (NBMBAA): An organization that provides networking opportunities, career development resources, and access to capital for African-American entrepreneurs.

5. The Minority Women's Business Enterprise National Council (MWBE): An organization that helps minority and women-owned businesses, including African-American women, with certification, access to capital, and business opportunities.

6. The National African-American Small Business Loan Fund: A partnership between JPMorgan Chase and the Valley Economic Development Center that provides access to capital and technical assistance for African-American small business owners.

7. The African-American Women in Business Grant: A grant program that awards up to $5,000 to African-American women entrepreneurs to help grow their businesses.

8. The Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Women's Business Ownership: Provides counseling, training, and financial assistance to women-owned businesses, including African-American women.

9. The Cartier Women's Initiative Awards: An international business competition that awards funding and mentorship to women entrepreneurs, including African-American women.

10. The Eileen Fisher Women-Owned Business Grant Program: A grant program that awards up to $100,000 to women-owned businesses, including African-American women, that are focused on environmental and social change.

11. Black Female Founders: This organization provides mentorship, resources, and networking opportunities to Black women entrepreneurs.

12. Sistahpreneurs: This organization provides a community and resources to help Black women entrepreneurs start and grow successful businesses.

13. Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) Mentorship Program: This program pairs WBENC-certified women-owned businesses with experienced business owners to provide mentorship and support.

Final Thoughts

As I near the completion of this dissertation on the symbolic importance of African-

American female entrepreneurship, I am filled with heartfelt appreciation and astonishment for the women whose narratives I have had the honor of learning about and sharing. Their lived experiences have emphasized the importance of tenacity, determination, and inventiveness in the face of adversity specific to being both African-American and a woman residing in a patriarchal society that has traditionally underestimated and excluded them.

Through their observations, I've had the pleasure of gaining a greater understanding of transforming power of entrepreneurship as a vehicle for economic and social empowerment, not just for these amazing, strong, independent businesswomen themselves, but more importantly for their communities and the future generations that are diligently following their paths. I've witnessed how these women have utilized their enterprises to create employment for others, mentor and encourage other women, and pour back into their communities in a humble yet prominent way.

As a 32-year-old African-American woman who has never considered the option of pursuing entrepreneurship, these groundbreaking women have inspired me and subsequent generations that the possibilities are endless. Their experiences remind me that the route to success is always complex, but it is attainable with tenacity, perseverance, and a supportive community.

This dissertation is a stepping stone for more scholarly work to be explored on this critical topic. From the start, it was my personal goal for this literature to serve as a call to action for others, within and outside of the African-American community, thus continuing to support and elevate African-American female businesses. Only through these collaborative efforts will we be able to build a more just and equitable society where all women may prosper and have the opportunity to leave their imprint on the world. I close with a Stephanie Lahart quote:

Unapologetic Black Women Leaders think differently. We're the few fearless, strong, resilient, and NOT easily intimated Queens. Integrity, perseverance, and confidence run through our veins! We impact, empower, and inspire ALL people for the betterment of the world. Our authenticity is what makes us POWERFUL and EXQUISITE. Appreciate YOUR success. Keep learning new things and bettering yourself, keep a positive mindset, and focus on YOU. Accept it… Your success is far from over! Build an empire. Achieve greatness. Leave a legacy. Can't you see it? We are Black Women… The REAL game-changers!

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APPENDIX A

CITI HSR Certificate

Completion Date 07-Dec-2021
Expiration Date 06-Dec-2026
Record ID 44961170

This is to certify that:

Nina Shelby

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

GSEP Education Division
(Curriculum Group)
GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Pepperdine University

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wd62f9274-e7ef-4df2-abf7-eb29e419e4bc-44961170

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval Form

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: March 23, 2023

Protocol Investigator Name: Nina Shelby

Protocol #: 23-03-2111

Project Title: A NEW FOUNDATION: HIGHLIGHTING THE JOURNEYS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN NAVIGATING THE SHIFT FROM CORPORATE AMERICA TO DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP DURING THE GREAT RESIGNATION

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Nina Shelby:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

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 an amendment to the IRB. Since 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 IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the 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 IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written 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 IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Script

Dear [Name],

My name is Nina Shelby, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a qualitative research study examining the journeys of African American women navigating the shift from Corporate America to Entrepreneurship and you are invited to participate in the study.

If you agree, you are invited to participate in a zoom interview to discuss your personal lived experience navigating entrepreneurship. The interview is anticipated to take no more than an hour. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Confidentiality will be maintained using a series of security measures, including password protected email communication using university firewall protections, a password protected Zoom meeting, deidentification of data using pseudonyms as well as compartmentalization of the various data -708-elements, keeping all information separate. If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me via my cell phone or by email.

Thank you for your participation,
Nina Shelby
Pepperdine University| Graduate School of Education and Psychology
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

IRB #: 23-03-2111
Formal Study Title: A New Foundation: Highlighting The Journeys Of African American Women Navigating The Shift From Corporate America To Digital Entrepreneurship During The Great Resignation

Authorized Study Personnel:
Principal Investigator: Student, Nina Shelby

Key Information:
If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:
- ☑ (Males and Females) between the ages of (18-80)
- ☑ Procedures will include (Contacting participants using the recruitment script, informed consent, data collection via structured interview, transcription of data, analysis of data, documentation of findings)
- ☑ One virtual visit is required
- ☑ This visit will take 60 minutes total
- ☑ There is minimal risk associated with this study
- ☑ You will not be paid any amount of money for your participation
- ☑ You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation
You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are a leader in the entrepreneurial industry. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

What is the reason for doing this research study?
The purpose of this study is to determine the challenges, successes and lived experiences of African American professional women who have navigated the shift from Corporate America to Entrepreneurship.

What will be done during this research study?
You will be asked to complete a 60 minute semi structured virtual interview. The PI will ask you a series of questions aimed at figuring out what strategies are used by leaders in your field. While the research will take approximately 26 to 52 weeks, your interview will only take 60 minutes.

How will my data be used?
Your interview responses will be transcribed, analyzed, and aggregated in order to determine the findings to the established research questions.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?
This research presents minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and/or psychological distress because the interview involves questions about your leadership practices. You may also experience fatigue, boredom, or anxiety as a result.

What are the possible benefits to you?
You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?
The benefits to society may include better understanding of leadership strategies used within your industry. Other emerging leaders might also benefit from any additional recommendations that are shared through this process.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?
Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no alternatives to participating, other than deciding to not participate.

What will participating in this research study cost you?
There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?
There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?
Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?
Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be deidentified and stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and until the study is complete.
The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific

meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.
For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):
Phone: 1(310)568-2305
Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?
You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.
You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Name:

_____

(First, Last: Please Print)

Participant Signature:

_____

Signature   Date

Interview Protocol

Demographic questions
1. Do you identify ad male, female, or non-binary?
2. What is your age?
3. Please specify your ethnicity.
4. Where is your home located?
5. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
6. What is your annual household income?
7. What is your current employment status?
8. Where were you born?

Research Questions	Key Constructs	Interview Questions
RQ1. What distinctive obstacles and challenges do African American women face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs and how do they overcome them?	Self-Fortitude	IQ 1: Tell me about the obstacles within your career journey and how you overcame them. Did you always know you wanted to be an entrepreneur?
	Self-Fortitude	IQ 2: What obstacles within your personal life have you encountered and how did you overcome them?
	Self-Fortitude	IQ 3: What cultural and societal challenges have you encountered and how did you overcome them?
RQ2. How do African American women who make the educated risk to transition into full-time entrepreneurship define, evaluate, and monitor their career success?	Self-Determination	IQ 4: Tell me how your company got started? Beginning from ideation, explain the conception process and what served as the foundation for your company's mission?
	Competence	IQ 5: Tell me about your career journey within corporate America? What was the most challenging and rewarding aspect?
	Learnings	IQ 6: What was the most challenging part of launching your business? Do you have any help or assistance?

Research Questions	Key Constructs	Interview Questions
	Expertise Realm	IQ 7: What has been your biggest financial turning point for your company? Your 'I made it' moment?
	Expertise Realm	IQ 8: What is your personal definition of success and has it evolved?
	Expertise Realm	IQ 9: What was the approximate length of time it took to achieve profitability after launch? What methods do you employ to achieve and sustain profitability?
RQ 3: What strategies and resources, if any, are used to support African American women with their transition their career to full-time entrepreneurship?	Competence	IQ 10: What strategies and resources are available to assist African American female entrepreneurs?
	Meaning of Work	IQ 11: Did you transition into entrepreneurship with the intention of building a legacy and what role does generational wealth play within that intent?
	Impact	IQ 12: Were there any experiences from your time working in corporate America that shaped or prepared you for entrepreneurship?
	Influence	IQ 13: Who are some of the women who have helped you in your journey?
	Learnings	IQ 14: Have you had any missteps in your transition to entrepreneurship? How have you avoided making the same mistakes?
RQ 4: Based on the lived experiences of African American women who have	Experience	IQ 15: What is the best piece of advice you would give to an emerging African American female entrepreneur in a post Covid-19 society who aspires to do the same?

Research Questions	Key Constructs	Interview Questions
successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what are some recommendations they would give to emerging African American female entrepreneurs in a post Covid-19 society who aspires to do the same?	Impact	IQ 16: How has either global health or the racial pandemics affected your business?
	Expertise Realm	IQ 17: Looking back at your career, if you could do one thing differently, what would that be?
	Experience	IQ 18: What has been your experience as an African American woman creating and operating her own small business?
	Influence	IQ 19: Has your journey been influenced by any historical or modern African American businesswomen?
	Influence	IQ 20: What literature has been helpful to you on your journey? If so, would you mind sharing?
	Meaning of Work	IQ 21: In one sentence, what do you want your legacy to be known for and remembered as?

APPENDIX E

Peer Reviewer Form

Dear reviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The table below is designed to ensure that may research questions for the study are properly addressed with corresponding interview questions.

In the table below, please review each research question and the corresponding interview questions. For each interview question, consider how well the interview question addresses the research question. If the interview question is directly relevant to the research question, please mark "Keep as stated." If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark "Delete it." Finally, if the interview question can be modified to best fit with the research question, please suggest your modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to me via email. Thank you again for your participation.

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: What obstacles and challenges do African American women face	Think of an actual scenario where you successfully overcame an obstacle in your transition from corporate employee to entrepreneur

Research Questions	**Interview Questions**

transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	IQ 1: What obstacles did you face?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	    Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	Rewrite the question to be more specific.
	
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:
	
	What obstacles within your career have you encountered while transitioning from corporate America to entrepreneurship as an African American woman in the United States and how did you overcome them?

	IQ 2: What challenges or obstacles do you believe African American women face in making the transition from corporate to entrepreneurship?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	    Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	Rewrite the question to connect to the interviewee on a more personal level.
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:
	
	How did you overcome them?

Research Questions	Interview Questions

RQ2: How do African American women overcome the obstacles and challenges they face transitioning from full-time employees within corporate America to full-time entrepreneurs?	IQ 3: Tell me about your career journey within corporate America? What was the most challenging and rewarding aspect?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	    Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	Incorporate societal and cultural challenges into the question. Aligns with RQ1
	
	I recommend adding the following interview questions: N/A

	IQ 4: What was the most challenging part of launching your business? Do you have any help or assistance?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	    Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	Elaborate on this question, incorporating ideation of the concept.
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:
	Beginning from ideation, explain how did the concept occurred to you? What served as the foundation for your company's mission?

Research Questions	Interview Questions

RQ 3: How do African American Women measure their success as entrepreneurs?	IQ 5: Did you transition into entrepreneurship with the intention of building a legacy and what role does generational wealth play within that intent?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	    Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	This question should be replaced with a question that inquires about the interviewees journey into corporate America.
	I recommend adding the following interview questions: Can you tell me how you first began working in corporate America?

	IQ 6: What is your personal definition of success and has it evolved?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	    Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	Include a component that examines if the definition has evolved.
	
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:
	Has your definition of success changed over the years?

Research Questions	Interview Questions

	IQ 7: Have you had any missteps in your transition to entrepreneurship? How have you avoided making the same mistakes?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	N/A
	
	I recommend adding the following interview questions: N/A

RQ 4: Based on the lived experiences of African American women who have successfully transitioned from working full-time within the corporate sector to now being a full-time entrepreneur, what are some recommendations they would give to emerging African American female entrepreneurs?	IQ 8: What is the best piece of advice you would give to an emerging African American female entrepreneur in a post Covid-19 society who aspires to do the same?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	N/A
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:
	N/A

Research Questions	Interview Questions

	IQ 9: Looking back at your career, if you could do one thing differently, what would that be?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	N/A
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:
	
	N/A

	IQ 10: In one sentence, what do you want your legacy to be known for and remembered as?
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question –
	Delete it
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	N/A
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:
	N/A