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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership


Meghan Hope (Oct 29, 2024 18:31 CDT)

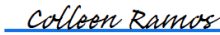
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A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of
Black Entrepreneur Women's Personal Development and Its Effect on Their Self-Identity

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Mayrion Ann Washington

November 2024

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, the late Mr. R. J. and Mrs. Myra Morris Wright. It is with grace, tenacity, and resilience that God graced me to triumph over all obstacles and mountains to reach this moment. Although you are not here in person, your spirit, teachings, and love assisted in carrying me through this journey. At this moment, reminiscing over having to give up my Saturdays from the age of three to go and take music and voice lessons, summer camps, and mom you “making” me learn *Psalms 23* at the tender age of five and quote it every day, my heart thanks you. It was not easy being the baby girl of the family, expectations were high, but the love was strong. Losing dad at the vulnerable age of 16, you stepped into his shoes and guided me through high school telling me “you are to always have a job and not just sit at home.” Today, I honor the woman I was, the woman I am, and the woman that I am about to become all because of you mom and dad. I am so glad to make you proud.

Acknowledgments

I gratefully share this accomplishment with the special people in my life who assisted me in one way or another to get here. When I started this doctoral journey, I had no idea how it would change my entire life and being; but truly this has been the most challenging thing I have ever accomplished. Simply put, I lost all of my family through this journey, my dad the hardest working man I know, R. J. Wright and my wonderful and loving mother Myra Morris Wright who was hard on me but it made me the wife, mother, Christian and business woman I am today, my three brothers eldest brother C. D., middle brother Jimmy, youngest brother David, and big sister and best friend Mattie.

I praise God for showing me that “I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me,” Philippians 4:13 and overall, I thank God for the friendships and relationships that I made along the way. Most of all I am mystified for developing a deeper and more meaningful relationship with my Lord, my God, and my Savior.

First, a very special thank you to each of my cohort members Dr. Julie Lane; you stepped into my life at a time that I was about to give up. Now I know the meaning of “standing on the shoulders of giants.” I’ll never forget you. Next, Dr. Dana McMichael’s for answering all of my many emails and ensuring that I crossed the finish line. To my distinguished committee members Dr. Jaime Goff and Dr. Colleen Ramos; I am thankful for your tenacity, resilience, and professionalism in bringing out the best in me and out of me. You didn’t give up on me and I will forever be grateful. My student advisor, Stephanie Ferrell, the amount of telephone calls you received from me always left me in a good place. Your advice was always on point and I thank you. Lastly, editorial reviewer Emmy Ammirati, thank you so much for your professionalism,

patience, and efficiency in assisting with the publication of my dissertation. It is with great appreciation that I praise your awesomeness.

My dear Brandon, you would always call me when I had a paper due, that beautiful laugh and just to say, “mom I love you.” Thank you for those special moments and this one is for you. To our eldest Professor Reginald Scott, Baylor University, Kevin, and Bralyn, I am so honored to make you proud and to have you along this journey with me. Your words, smiles, and encouragement kept me going.

Reece Camille, my granddaughter, thank you for reverse coaching your GiGi. Watching you submit paper after paper as you were becoming a published writer propelled me to keep going. Thank you for your persistence and resilience.

Mr. Raymond “Ray” Fidel, family, friend, faithful, King thank you for being there. Having you as a very special part of my doctoral journey fills my heart and I will forever be grateful for your friendship and support. You stepped in when complete darkness had overshadowed my life. Time has never diminished how special you are to our family and forever will be.

And last, my darling husband Calvin R. Washington “Wash” my first and only love. You have been my roommate for the past 6 years; you pushed me, coached me, prayed for me, provided spiritual guidance and coaching and you never gave up on me. The days and nights I cried because I had readers and writer’s block, you ensured that I had healthy meals and as I have transitioned to the next level in my life you always said, “do what God tells you to do.” King, only you could have weathered this journey with me and for that I am grateful. Your faith in my God given abilities, talents, skills, and gifts assisted in propelling me to this level. My heart is overwhelmed for you pushing the best version of me out of me. You always supported me as I

have continued to transition from a 9 to 5 into my next level of entrepreneurship and there is no one else that I want to share this exciting moment with. I'm so glad to make you proud and I will be eternally grateful for your love and support.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. The study specifically aimed to explore personal development, entrepreneurship, and self-identity as they related to and affected Black entrepreneur women, in the United States, and their experiences with oppression, challenges, barriers, intersectionality, and systemic subordination. Historically, Black entrepreneur women have experienced systematic oppression and faced increased challenges that have and continue to negatively affect their entrepreneurial progress and their self-identity. Preliminary findings from the literature found that when Black entrepreneurial women engage in personal development, the results are reflected in both their personal and business growth in a positive manner. While Black women continue to be marginalized, oppressed, suppressed, and depressed, they continue to be the fastest growing demographic group in starting new businesses. This solidifies the Black woman's uniqueness and their ability to push through oppression and the intersectionality of race, gender bias, and sexuality despite such challenges. Black feminist thought and intersectionality theory served as the conceptual framework that guided this study and assisted with the interviewing of 11 Black entrepreneur women. The findings of this study are grounded in Black feminist thought and the various dimensions of intersectionality theory and support the unique perspective to understand the Black woman's consciousness, struggles, and double jeopardy treatment, and Black women's personal development, its processes, and its effect on their self-identity.

Keywords: Black entrepreneur women, challenges, barriers, intersectionality, oppression, personal development, self-identity

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A person's personal development is a result of their unique experiences and efforts to improve themselves (Irving & Williams, 1999). The personal developmental process is also crucial in shaping self-identity over time (Crocetti et al., 2023). Personal development and self-identity are important to entrepreneurs because they have been identified as essential for success (Obschonka et al., 2015; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018). Personal development plays a significant role in the lives of individuals. It can substantially affect one's confidence, allowing one to step outside one's comfort zone and become the best version of oneself (Johnston et al., 2023). Its importance is reflected in how the U.S. personal development industry is a high-growth industry, growing from \$5.7 billion in 2020 to approximately \$11.6 billion in 2019 to an estimated \$13.6 billion in 2023 (Grand View Research, 2024a).

Historically, however, Black women entrepreneurs have experienced systematic oppression and faced increased challenges that negatively affect their entrepreneurial progress (Conley & Bilimoria, 2022). To overcome these challenges, personal development and personal growth are essential and intersect in meaningful ways; therefore, these competencies develop from personal experiences and personal development work (Irving & Williams, 1999; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018). Preliminary findings from the literature suggest that when Black entrepreneurial women engage in personal development, the results are reflected in both their personal and business growth (Johnston et al., 2023).

Identity roles lay the foundation for a person's development in their occupational profession (Stanford et al., 2021). However, to many U.S. individuals and organizations, Black women's professional identity has historically been stereotyped as that of a "devoted domestic worker" who will give their lives for White bosses, with short-term and long-term negative

ramifications (Stanford et al., 2021, p. 9). This and other draconian thinking continue to plague the Black woman's identity, which has oppressed her career as an entrepreneur (Conley & Bilimoria, 2022).

Background

The process of personal development involves looking inward and striving to improve oneself (Sutton & Crobach, 2022). Through this process, one can discover and develop their full potential in all areas of life (i.e., self-develop, decision-making, achieving goals, exploring possibilities, creativity, stability, confidence, independence, autonomy, self-learning, and building healthy relationships; Chlebikova et al., 2015). Also, through the personal development process, one may overcome the historical labeling of personality traits that would allow them to abandon societal stereotypical behaviors (Liñán et al., 2022). Therefore, a strong sense of identity, living a sustainable life, maintaining relationships, and contributing to society's growth are all essential elements of personal development (Hay, 2010).

A key explanation of Black entrepreneur women's failure in their business's dates throughout history (Jones & Norwood, 2017). Specifically, Warren et al. (2022) pointed to the treatment of Black women and how they were relegated to reproducing on plantations to have a workforce for White planters. Their Black self-image was referred to as savages, which were attached to their labor. This left a permanent mark on some Black individuals with the label of a people who should be controlled, dominated, and trained to be subordinate (Warren et al., 2022).

As a result of this type of treatment, thinking, and behavior, some Black individuals internalized the abuse, which left them lacking an understanding of who they were and how they related to others as well as deficiencies regarding how they saw themselves (Warren et al., 2022). With this overall oppression of Black women, it was important to research and understand the

Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. Furthermore, not examining the lived perspectives of Black entrepreneur women's personal development could further perpetuate the failure of Black women's businesses leaving them with significant gaps in knowledge and personal development growth which may hinder and affect their self-identity and the on-going overall steps in their developmental processes (Krokosz, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

The general problem addressed in this dissertation is that Black entrepreneur women in the United States have limited access to business-related resources (Jackson, 2021). In many studies, racial and gender bias have been identified as institutionalized problems that have negatively shaped the experience and work patterns of Black women (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2023). For example, Black women have historically been denied access to some high schools, and occupations and sometimes even limited in domestic jobs and working in a factory (Blakemore, 2021). This has limited Black entrepreneur women's access to resources that could have been used to support their businesses: as Jackson and Sanyal (2019) noted, the twin problems of race and gender contribute to significant challenges for Black entrepreneur women. However, Goldman Sachs (2023) found that investments in Black women made a big difference in the areas of education, housing, healthcare, and more and raised the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) to approximately \$525 billion annually. Although this led Goldman Sachs to create an investment strategy for one million Black women, Black entrepreneur women face a significant opportunity gap compared to many other groups (Goldman Sachs, 2023).

The specific problem addressed in this dissertation is the lack of information, resources, and financial wealth available to Black entrepreneur women which has impeded their holistic

progress and impacted their self-identity. Personal development, particularly through embracing education, is an important path to development and growth (i.e., spiritual, mental, physical, emotional, and psychological well-being), particularly with regards to entrepreneurship (Shir & Ryff, 2022). A lack of personal development among Black women in the United States has long historical roots leading back to the slavery period, when they were treated marginally due to gender and racial discrimination and, therefore, Black women had to disguise their literacy skills because they were considered dangerous if they could read and write (Nelson, 2004). According to many successful Black entrepreneur women, their success often results from building social capital, which assists in developing key social relationships that facilitate further increases in capital (Cooper et al., 2017). For example, many Black women have capitalized on building social currency that consisted of embracing their knowledge, values, behaviors, and experiences that provide them with a sense of meaning around their Black identity, and ultimately assisted in their resilience to tolerate oppression and business success (Porter et al., 2020). However, there is limited information available in the research literature about the specific habits, behaviors, and knowledge that they used to achieve success.

Personal development can be learned from various perspectives (Stange, 2010). As Black women, they voiced their feelings of being invisible regarding their learned experiences (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Black women's experience of being invisible is a reality of why their identity is sometimes perceived as completely absent from society (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). Because this problem yet exists, it was imperative to explore the lived experience of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. This study specifically aimed to explore personal development, self-identity, and entrepreneurship as it related to, affected, and contributed to the oppression, challenges, barriers, intersectionality, and systemic subordination in the lives of Black entrepreneur women. It specifically examined barriers, challenges, and various forms of oppression that affected the growth and success of Black entrepreneur women. These double-jeopardy experiences are important because they have continued to handicap and confront Black women as they navigate through traumatic and dangerous experiences (Ross, 2021). Therefore, this study was designed to generate findings that could provide guidance to and better equip Black entrepreneur women to foster group relationships with other Black entrepreneurs, get a thorough understanding of empowerment, and understand their self-defined viewpoint of themselves.

Positionality Statement

From my own experience, I heard first-hand about the struggles and challenges Black entrepreneur women and corporate executives face as they strived to achieve and be successful in these roles. Specifically, I was aware of how struggles and challenges affected Black entrepreneur women's self-identity.

With over 7 years of experience as a Black entrepreneur woman and over 4 decades in leadership positions in corporate positions, I was acquainted with the struggles, challenges, and barriers that Black women faced when seeking to be successful, grow, and assist others. As a Black entrepreneur woman with expertise in self, personal, and professional development, I created and founded a coaching business that assists in helping women to find their authentic

selves and embrace and become personal with themselves whereby they may learn new skills, know their abilities, become highly skilled in a particular field so they can be promoted to higher positions. From the perspective of Black entrepreneurs, I sought to understand and strengthen their lived experiences and struggles in this study.

Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study was:

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?

To answer the primary research question, two secondary research questions were used:

RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?

RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because Black entrepreneur women face many challenges and barriers that include oppression coupled with racial disparities and gender bias (Jackson, 2021).

As a result, many of these entrepreneurs are handicapped by factors such as:

1. no capital to start their businesses,
2. no support,
3. low production, and
4. no access to resources that are required to grow their businesses (Stevenson et al., 2021).

Definitions of Key Terms

Black woman. In this dissertation, a person assigned as a female at birth and associated with one's racial identity. The term Black and African American woman is also used interchangeably and viewed as being unsuccessful and historically racially charged when relating to Black people (Jones-Brown et al., 2021).

Entrepreneur. A person or person(s) who starts and operates a business and is willing to take risks. The term is also associated with building relationships, networking, and possessing social skills (Audia & Rider, 2005).

Negativity. In this dissertation, a term denoting acts of disagreement, depression, and the opposite of being positive. There is no association between negative and positive situations; negative and positive are opposite of each other (Grankvist et al., 2004). Negativity can be revealed through words, behaviors, writing, character, and values.

Intersectional identity. The crossing of race, gender, and class that results in social oppression and difference (Crenshaw, 1991). In society, marginalization occurs when race and gender intersect (Abdellatif, 2021).

Oppression. In this dissertation, unfair and malicious treatment resulting in the exercise of power over marginalized and poverty-stricken groups or individuals as it relates to class, society, and undue punishment.

Personal development. In this dissertation, an individual's improvement of skills, talents, and competencies, resulting from inner work and focus on themselves to be better human beings. Personal development is important because it can help to expand self-awareness, and confidence, and to achieve goals and aspirations (Jitaru et al., 2021).

Self-identity. A person's self-concept and related behaviors that they display. Self-identity helps a person to identify who they are as a person and provides a deep sense of self (Baumeister, 1997).

Strong Black woman (SBW). In this dissertation, a descriptive term for Black women who are psychologically strong enough to resist abuse, entrepreneurs' general bias, negative comments, and oppression with characteristics of emotional and mental strength, independence, and sacrificing oneself to protect their survival (Jones et al., 2022). Images have been created that represent Black entrepreneur women as infrangible, able under any conditions to endure hardship without any damage while possessing indomitable strength (Graham et al., 2022).

Summary

In 2024, U.S. society continues to shift to new paradigms that reshape the conversation for the world to critically look at the treatment of Black women and the personal challenges they face as entrepreneurs (Goldman Sachs, 2023). Black entrepreneur women are starting companies at record-breaking numbers with over four times more growth than any population (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). Although Black women are outpacing all others in starting businesses, the revenue generated by these businesses continues to be low, leaving many ventures unproductive and unprofitable (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019).

Chapter 1 provided a snapshot of some of the struggles that confront Black entrepreneur women. In addition, this chapter highlighted the importance of personal development and the effect it has on the Black entrepreneur woman's self-identity. Moreover, the chapter provided the purpose of the study along with a detailed list of definitions associated with this study.

Chapter 2 centered around the history and process of personal development and its effect on the lives of Black entrepreneur women and how personal development and knowing one's self-identity assist in becoming successful Black entrepreneur women.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this research study was to explore Black entrepreneur women's personal development and identify successful factors that impact their self-identity. The general problem addressed in this dissertation is that Black entrepreneur women in the United States have limited access to business-related resources (Jackson, 2021). As a result, Black entrepreneur women are confronted with race, gender, negative stereotypes, oppression, challenges and additional barriers that hinders their success as entrepreneurs (Jackson, 2021). The specific problem addressed in this dissertation is a lack of information about the successful strategies of Black entrepreneur women in the United States that have enabled them to succeed as entrepreneurs.

This literature review includes a historical overview because much of the literature surrounding Black women's experiences has emphasized the role of oppression and its intersection with race and gender throughout U.S. history (Chambers et al., 2021). Despite Black entrepreneur women outpacing everyone in starting new businesses, they continue to suffer from such oppression and interdependent systems that hinder their success (Chambers et al., 2021). The continuous labeling of Black women with such words as *dangerous* spans throughout history (Chambers et al., 2021). Therefore, this literature review discusses the history of oppression and its accompanying systems that combine to function as systematic racism in the lives of Black entrepreneur women. It also discusses the extant scholarly information on how Black women entrepreneurs may overcome such oppression, barriers, and challenges by engaging in personal development, knowing their self-identity, and collaborating in group settings.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature for this study was gathered by searching Abilene Christian University's online library databases. The following main search terms were applied: *personal development*, *self-identity*, and *Black entrepreneur women*. The search engines included Abilene Christian University's (ACU) online research: EBSCOhost, Sage journals, PsycNet, J.S.T.O.R., and Prosocial Behavior. I researched and located peer reviewed articles from 2000 to 2023. To find additional articles, I used Google Scholar. I also researched specific books and journals relating to professional development and self-identity.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study utilized the dual lenses of Black feminist thought (BFT; Collins, 2022) and intersectionality theory (Billups et al., 2022) to examine the lived experiences of Black women entrepreneurs' personal development and its impact on their self-identity. BFT originally utilized a poststructuralism approach that frames the Black feminist standpoint around race, gender, and class (Collins, 2022). However, Collins (2022) extended BFT to also consider sexuality as a form of oppression, with an expanded view surrounding issues of social class, culture, and social justice. Intersectionality theory describes and vividly puts a face to the many intersections of race, class, gender, and other categories that overlap with the oppression of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory was included because it provides a framework for holistically examining Black woman's experiences and hear their voices (see Table 1). As Collins (2022) noted, the voices of Black women and their experiences have historically been treated by many as a collective subject to oppression; as a result, they suffered many penalties resulting from a predominantly White society treating them as an overall marginalized people.

BFT, as expressed by Collins (2022), has been used by many authors explain many of the challenges, struggles, and marginalization of the lived experiences of Black women is noteworthy for confirming this qualitative study. For example, BFT as expressed by Collins (2022) recognized how the United States had changed over time, laying a foundation that ignited many women's thought processes and provided innovative ways to gain clarity around reading the rich classic text. According to the knowledge, instructions, and guidance which Collin's (2022) provided in her writings, it is possible for Black women to move forward, have a future, and experience freedom in every area of her life.

BFT is also important because it used many voices to be heard collectively in raising awareness of race and gender which provided an extended look into the experiences of Black women (Leath et al., 2022).

At the time of this study, there was limited research that documented Black entrepreneur women's personal development throughout history; therefore, it was appropriate to explore and research the link between Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its impact on their self-identity (De Beer & Du Rand, 2021). An example of prior research is Valdez's (2011) study documenting how some Black entrepreneur women assisted in shaping the economy and how their past works evolved and are trending toward shaping the future for more recent Black entrepreneur women. The ideas, knowledge, and consciousness that Collins (2022) noted provided a way for Black women to dominate and be successful, but in insufficient detail to inform broad follow-through and entrepreneurship. However, BFT was a useful guide for identifying specific oppressions that Black women have faced as well as other ways for them to develop and grow. Collins's (2022) BFT was in sync with this research study which focused on Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its impact on their self-identity.

Regarding Black entrepreneur women, BFT specifically shed light on the many ways the knowledge they already possessed could elevate them to be empowered (Collins, 2022). However, according to Collins (2022), it was not clear what specific characteristics were helpful and contributed to empowerment.

For this exploration of Black entrepreneur women, BFT was appropriate as part of the conceptual framework because of its extensive use to explore the mistreatment, oppression, and challenges of how Black women have long been patriarchal influenced throughout history. These voices led to new insights into Black women's lived experiences and provided a clear depiction of Black women using their ideas, resilience, and being mentored which is in alignment with Collins (2022) views (see Table 1).

Table 1*Conceptual Framework / Theory's Guiding and Aligning With the Research Questions*

Research questions	Black feminist thought	Intersectionality theory
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?	<p>Consciousness: Impact on Black women's self-identity, transitioning through change, a guide to her freedom. Black Women's standpoint/ perspective is unique which has contributed to her change and personal freedom. This has also influenced her self-identity.</p> <p>Black Women's Standpoint/their unique perspective = leadership.</p> <p>Identity = Black women are different from other groups by way of the lived experiences of oppression, self-determination via resilience, and distinctive standpoint on self.</p> <p>Personal Development = Black women's dominated knowledge, tools & strategies for Black women's survival & growth.</p>	<p>Frequently ignores intragroup Differences.</p> <p>Expound identity = as a woman of color relegated/not acknowledged at all.</p> <p>Systemically reveals the everyday lives of black and ethicized women who are simultaneously positioned in multiple structures of dominance and power as gendered, raced, classed, colonized, and sexualized "others."</p>
RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?	<p>Lacking food, money, and shelter, seen as a negative influence.</p> <p>Culture: How Black women survive: resilience, growing, self-awareness, spirituality, emotional, and psychological health, etc. Through knowledge and empowerment, Black women know how to survive and be resilient in business and life. Being aware of herself has had an impact on self-identity and personal development.</p> <p>Knowledge: Black women's development/un-development (education, mentoring, guidance, financial literacy), suppression</p> <p>Contrast: Knowledge provides wisdom, critical thinking, financial reward, and defined identity. Through knowledge, Black woman shows their ability to maintain a business, and this has influenced their personal development and self-identity.</p> <p>Financial Wealth/Freedom = Black women & entrepreneurs (Positives & Negatives).</p>	<p>Challenges = Race, gender, Identity as a Black woman, intragroup differences.</p> <p>Multiple oppressions of race, class, and gender—referring to this concept as "interlocking oppressions," "simultaneous oppressions," "double jeopardy," and "triple jeopardy."</p>

Research questions	Black feminist thought	Intersectionality theory
RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?	<p>Empowerment: Knowledge fosters Black women being empowered, Historical data and lived experiences of Black women's ancestors provide a snapshot of the suppression of their knowledge and ideas. Black women lived in an environment of suppression, and thus empowerment has had an impact on her business and personal development.</p> <p>Groups: Self-defined viewpoint (a unique viewpoint from a Black woman's perspective and defined from their viewpoint and perspectives); No usage of they, their but WE. Through groups, Black entrepreneur women have been able to voice their concerns and articulate their perspectives and viewpoints. Groups have empowered black entrepreneur women to evolve through personal development and this has influenced her identity.</p>	<p>Where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.</p> <p>Groups = Millions speak more powerfully than the pleas of a few isolated.</p>

Note. Table 1 provides a thorough breakdown of (1) Patricia Hill Collins Black Feminist Thought and Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality theory which provides an overall viewpoint on how two remarkable and powerful systems, oppression and race and gender intersect and the power struggle leaves Black women at the intersection of being situation at a "theoretically interesting point" (Collins, 2022).

A guiding question for the literature search was: *Why do Black entrepreneur women continue to struggle with their businesses?* The irony surrounding this question is that, at the time of the study, Black entrepreneur women comprised the fastest-growing demographic in starting businesses; however, financially Black women are not experiencing success (Umoh, 2020). This, therefore, suggested a second guiding question for the literature search: *What role does personal development play in the Black entrepreneur woman's business success and how does it impact the Black entrepreneur woman's self-identity?* Historically, Black women's self-identity has been shaped in large part by their connection to family (Collins, 1986). Collins's (1989) provided rich content around the Black woman's identity and self-concept, using these to explain a combination of subordination, flawed consciousness, and self-defined standpoint that led Black women to be accountable for their identities. Collins's (1989) writings provided an understanding of the Black woman's lived experiences and debunked negative labels that have longed minimized the Black woman's identity.

The concept of intersectionality is about more than numerous identities and spoke of inequalities, relationality, complexity, power relations, and social justice (Hopkins, 2017). Crenshaw's (2013) study enabled many readers to see the differences that intersected with one another and noted that all categories were separate and should not be seen as one main problem; however, as originally articulated, many problems (i.e., race, class, and gender) surrounding systematic categories were not mutually inclusive. Crenshaw's (2013) empirical study was divided into three parts: (1) structural, (2) political, and (3) representational intersectionality, and discussed the differentiation of Black women from all others, analyzed the political ramifications of racism and the disempowerment of women of color. Crenshaw's (2013) works related to the

Black entrepreneur woman's experiences where she was subjected to all forms of oppression and the systematic categories that intersected (see table 1).

Although there are other versions of BFT, the framework was coined by Patricia Hill-Collins in 1989. BFT explored the various forms of oppression that Black women faced and also guide this study. The tenets of Black feminist thought are that if Black women rearticulate and reaffirm their own identities, they can create a different perspective on the world and themselves. Through this, Black women can stimulate activism, resistance, and oppositional knowledge or practices that can help in self-definition and autonomy among them. Collins (2022) acknowledged through knowledge Black women have tools to help them resist/end intersecting oppressions and social and economic injustices.

In the 30th anniversary edition of BFT, Collins (2022) presented robust information about the personal challenges that Black women face and explored the importance of Black women's ideas as leading to freedom from oppression (Collins, 2022). Collins (2022) emphasized the importance of empowering Black women, urging them to utilize the untapped knowledge and ideas they already possessed. Although there were other versions of BFT, Collins (2022) noted the importance of her 30th-anniversary edition of BFT simply stating she wanted to "reclaim her voice" (Collins, 2022, para. 3).

Hooks (1990) voiced concerns that White society cannot be freed from their responsibility for their treatment of Black women. BFT gives a voice to the many Black women who cannot speak for themselves. Collins (2022) elaborated in detail her stance on Black women's empowerment and the conditions of social justice something Hill stated she did not go into detail about in her previous writing. With an understanding of empowerment, Collins (2022) laid out her argument regarding empowering the knowledge and ideas of Black women and

asked, “how can the power of Black women’s ideas bring the future that we want?” (p. 26). Furthermore, Collins’s (2022) epistemological stance was intended to outline and shape certain political frameworks that challenged Black women as a group. The group’s standpoint spoke of the Black woman’s experiences and was referred to as “situated knowers.” Knowers in feminist epistemology are situated in certain relationships to what is “known” and to other “knowers” (Collins, 2022). In other words, individuals obtain knowledge through experiences, then these experiences are shared, and this provides an understanding of the ideas they possess; this connects people to the “knowers” (Collins, 1989). Collins (1989) then summed it up by saying that empathy was at the heart of the procedures used by connected knowers.

This is important because Black women and Black entrepreneur women share common experiences with racism, sexism, gender and cultural biases, and oppression that bind them together in group settings (Collins, 2022). This group setting fosters a mindset of “we” which connects everyone to the same voice and experiences (The Combahee River Collective, 2014). This group of voices allows Black women to reminisce about their lived experiences and connects them with historical voices as they express their experiences about their low value and how it affects their mind, spirit, and soul prompting the words “we are all damaged people merely being black women” (The Combahee River Collective, 2014, p. 276)

Williams (1986) noted how Black women were used as nothing more than instruments and not considered as individuals. Collins’s (2022) BFT is built from the historical framework of Black women as they reflect on their lived experiences and the need for their voices to be heard in the social justice conversation which is larger than any one group. With the constant bombardment of negative labels and abusive treatment, there is little room to grow and thrive. However, Collins’s (2022) writings prompted a movement for Black women to let their voices be

heard and found this as key to their survival and growth against the odds and challenges against them (Collins, 2022).

Analyzing BFT puts a face to the hoarse reality of oppression that Black women endured and continue to encounter and allows them as well as other groups to understand why such oppression yet occurs. While analyzing BFT, Collins (2022) voiced what is right with Black women and diluted the falsehoods that “something is wrong with Black women” by empowering this group of women to embrace the knowledge they have and be creative with their ideas (Collins, 2022). This empowerment occurs when Black women create group settings and recognize that the world is every changing. Therefore, Black women must be flexible to be relevant and responsible and hold themselves accountable to create change (Collins, 2022).

This empowerment assists Black women entrepreneurs in creating productive businesses and possessing strong mental awareness instead of taking on the “strong black woman” image, which has left a negative impact on Black women’s lives and more so has affected their mental health. Empowerment instead creates coping skills such as a sense of resilience, which according to Davis (1984), provides a shield to combat oppression and the intersecting of racism, sexism, gender bias, and cultural norms.

On the other hand, Kasturirangan (2008) argued that rather than seeing empowerment as a single event, it should be viewed as a continuous, ongoing process reflecting the values and needs of battered women and their communities. Kasturirangan (2008) further wrote that one’s needs and values will depict how race/ethnicity, socioeconomic statuses, and cultural origin, such as immigration status and socialization level are likely to be affected. Kasturirangan’s (2008) argument was problematic because Black women’s needs and values have historically been

negatively impacted leaving them holistically not being valued as mere human beings (Chinn et al., 2021).

Nineteenth-century Black woman thinker Maria W. Stewart used her voice to pinpoint the reason for the oppression of Black women (Shorter-Bourhanou, 2022). Stewart admonished Black women to be independent and become self-reliant and stop sitting around being content with folded hands criticizing White people for the downfall of Black people because that will never lift Black people to the place they should be (Shorter-Bourhanou, 2022). Instead, Stewart exalted Black women to own their independence, be bold, be fearless, and never be afraid (Shorter-Bourhanou, 2022). Collins (2022) identified Stewart as one of the first Black feminists in the United States who beseeched Black women to build a community where Black women could specifically come together and create relationships.

Although Stewart voiced some of the same expressions as Hill-Collins when her writings are referenced, they are merely articles that are hidden behind the voices and discussions of other historical feminist thinkers like Patricia Hill-Collins; yet Stewart used her voice to advocate for the equality of Black women (Shorter-Bourhanou, 2022). The conversation around “group setting” gives credence to the power of community where all Black voices unite and come together because as Stewart wrote, when Black women have one focus, they can then find that “knowledge is power and improvement” (Collins, 2022, p. 41).

To obtain a clear perspective into the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women and their personal development and its impact on their self-identity, BFT will guide this qualitative research study to explore the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women’s personal development and impact on their self-identity. Through the lens of BFT, Collins (2022) admonished Black women to collaborate in group settings where knowledge and ideas could be

leveraged to empower Black women and propel them to success. This success provides additional means for Black women to develop their identity which heightens awareness of their value and professional identity and development needed to elevate their businesses, the individual self and identity, the Black woman's community, and self-preservation (Melaku, 2022).

It was so important until Collins (2019) took several looks and the one core question "what role does knowledge play in such resistance?" The intersection of Black women forming groups where they share some of the same obstacles and oppressions creates power and knowledge that levels up their awareness and allows them to survive, be resilient, and resist oppression and its categorical systems (Collins, 2019).

Collins (2022) wrote about the power that Black women can gain through collaboration and learning in groups. When women are empowered, Collins (2022) argued, Black women embark upon their journey of freedom. This freedom leads to the development of oneself and to achieve this, one must be in a relationship with others, however, it must be different from others (Huegerich, 2021). This is where knowledge and self-identity intersect.

Personal Development as a Concept

The concept of personal development in written history was first recorded in detail over 2000 years ago by the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, who has been called the *father of modern personal development* (Inerize, n.d.). Aristotle described personal development as being in a class of wisdom and then applying it to one's life and this practice leads to a full life of happiness, human flourishing or where one lives a healthy life (Inerize, n.d.). This was considered Aristotle's self-improvement which was a journey of being made whole.

Another Greek philosopher, Plotinus (the founder of Neoplatonism), provided an example of personal development when he said that one must go inside themselves, look, and if what one sees of oneself is not beautiful, realize there is work to be done and start the process of becoming until what they see is pure beauty. This is considered the process of personal development (Inerize, n.d.).

Not only were the Greeks huge partakers of personal development, but the Romans were as well. Their philosophy was built on having control over one's emotions, desires, or fearing pain, and when one accomplishes these things, they can live a life of happiness because they are living in a moment of acceptance (Hirsch et al., 2023). This was called Stoicism, which has concepts surrounding paying attention to oneself, living in the moment, acceptance, all surrounding living a certain life, and this life becomes one's lifestyle (Hirsch et al., 2023).

According to Confucianism, moral character is the key to affecting the world around oneself through cosmic harmony (Tu, 1998). Self-development according to Confucian is rooted in loving oneself and only then can you love others (Sullivan, 2024). This is important because the concept of personal development, from its inception, has stemmed from religious and philosophical viewpoints (Matthew, 2023). While combining philosophy with religion allows the unification of knowledge, virtue, ethics, and being good to oneself and others it also provides a path to become the best person one can be. According to Matthew (2023) that is becoming as much like “*god*” as one possibly can. From its inception, personal development was studied and practiced by philosophers, theologians, and psychologists with a focus on family, community, values, morals, ethics, knowledge, and living a wholesome and happy life (Matthew, 2023).

Over the years personal development has continued to grow and transform lives by incorporating the likes of Wattles' (2020) *The Science of Getting Rich*, where he wrote about

changing negative habits and working on one's thought process. Hill (2018) published a book *Think and Grow Rich* where he expounded on the process of obtaining wealth through purpose, focus, and persistence (History of Personal Development, n.d.). Lastly, according to estimates, the global personal development market size will reach \$43.77 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual rate of 5.5% (Grand View Research, 2024b). The consistent oppression and abuse that slavery unleashed in the lives of Black people left them void of receiving the proper education, learning, and growing, and void of their self-identity. The next section covers the historical process of literacy learning for Black people holistically.

The lines regarding personal development and professional and can often be blurred; however, it is the objective that distinguishes personal development from professional development meaning the purpose of personal development is to assist one in developing their emotional, physical, and social well-being. By contrast, professional development aims to improve one's performance in a specific role or their career in general (LinkedIn Learning, n.d.).

Schultz's (2011) study provided examples of ways to combat the odds through professional development and wrote about various forms of professional development with some skills being more effective than others. For some, according to Schultz (2011), professional development is merely imparting technical information to others which is less collaborative leaving groups only receiving procedural information.

On the other hand, professional development can serve groups where questions and answers are at the center of the professional development meeting and everyone learns, grows, and understands one another, which provides an empowering experience.

Historical View of Literacy Learning

The lack of skills surrounding reading and writing for Black people hindered their ability to move forward and experience any type of success. Anti-literacy laws were put in place that prohibited slaves, predominately Black people, from exceling in society (O'Brien et al., 2016) Warren et al. (2022) expounded on the history of slavery in America as rooted in a disregard for Black lives. Snyder (2013) described slavery as Black individuals being captured, exploited, and bound by slave labor which provided an abundant and rich life for their master. Warren et al. (2022) particularly pointed to the treatment of Black women and how they were relegated to reproducing on plantations to have a workforce for White planters.

A consequence of this type of treatment, thinking, and behavior left some Black people internalizing the abuse, which resulted in deficiencies in how they viewed themselves along with an incomplete understanding of who they were as Black people. This impacted their interpersonal relationship with others and their learning abilities (Warren et al., 2022).

Snyder (2013) further wrote that Black people being captured and violently torn away from their society negatively affected their identities, which they had to relinquish for a degrading status. However, to gain greater control over slaves, some slave owners allowed slaves literacy opportunities and those individuals who found learning to be resourceful took advantage of this opportunity to learn and to increase their powers (Cornelius, 1983). This allowed learned slaves to teach others, and as a result paved the way for slaves to communicate, network with one another, and pass valuable information to those not fortunate enough to learn (Cornelius, 1983). Moreover, some slaves used their learning to escape from their slave masters (Cornelius, 1983).

Educational historians distinguished “Bible literacy” from “liberating literacy.” Bible literacy was distinguished as slaves conserving their love and trust for God while “liberating literacy” according to Graff (2011) referred to diversity and movement. This meant that most slave owners agreed that slaves should be able to read the Bible due to the strength of the Protestant movement who believed that even poor people ought to be able to read the Word of God. However, the learning for slaves was often limited because not all slave owners allowed or taught slaves to read; mobs were formed and dispersed, and the plantations were often torn apart to stop such progress and learning (Cornelius, 1983). At this time, teaching slaves to write was forbidden because it would place the social order at risk (Cornelius, 1983).

However, historically things changed, and thousands of slaves were granted the opportunity to learn to read and write (Cornelius, 1983). Slaves who learned to read and write taught other literacy skills and demonstrated the teaching ability that some slaves possessed in educating and teaching. This also provided those Black individuals the opportunity to learn leadership skills (Cornelius, 1983). Although slaves were not initially allowed to write, learning to read was the start of the slave’s developmental process making a path to literacy learning (Graff, 2011).

Cornelius' (1983) noted that approximately 3,400 ex-slaves were interviewed and only 5% (179) mentioned they learned to read and write. An overview of Cornelius's (1983) peer-reviewed article provided a vivid account of the lived experiences of ex-slaves and the horror and struggles they faced with being fluent in literacy. Such agonizing accounts of the suffering of slaves that sought to elevate some learning bought about the pain of their lived experience with one ex slaving stating “if they caught you trying to write they (slave owners) would cut your

finger off and if they caught you again, they would cut your head off' (Cornelius, 1983, p.179).

Therefore, the learning and developing process came with a price for slaves.

Some slave owners' wives taught domestic Black women house servants how to read (Cornelius, 1983). Because teaching was considered and approved as a female role, this allowed some Black women to also obtain leadership skills (Cornelius, 1983). By observing, Black women were able to develop some of their skills and talents from their White owners; in addition, in the post-emancipation period, having learned to read and write provided them with the ability to later be business-oriented (Cornelius, 1983). This provided slaves with the ability to benefit from taking their learned knowledge to the next level and seeing their value as humans (Cornelius, 1983).

Gundaker's (2007) ethnographic research study provided a thorough look into the knowledge, critical thinking, and craftiness slaves possessed although they were lacking in receiving the proper literacy skills on their time-off the slave masters allowed them to sing, dance, and tell stories. Through such freedoms slaves were afforded by their masters, they found a way to educate themselves which formed a community of learning (Gundaker, 2007). This learning provided a path for Black people to grow, gain knowledge, communicate, and escape negative thinking, and eventually overcome challenges that would lead to their freedom which first started in their minds (Henderson, 2021).

Personal Development

Personal development is the act of improving oneself which, when engaged, produces positive outcomes with benefits in all areas of one's life (Shir & Ryff, 2022). Aristotle described personal development as a classification of applied wisdom, whereby practicing virtues leads to individuals being happy, flourishing, and/or living a fruitful life (Silverstein, 1990). On the other

hand, Coopersmith (2002) defined personal development as a way for individuals to better understand who they are and embrace their strengths and weaknesses.

The personal development of Black women is an ongoing conversation that intersects with their professional development and self-identity (Hammonds et al., 2023). Hammonds et al.'s (2023) case study examined Black identity development and professional identity in a White institutional setting and found that racism, sexism, and classism had a significant influence on the lives of Black women's health and career prospects.

The developmental process of individuals rests in their identity and educational experiences (Porter & Byrd, 2021). How Black women make meaning of who they are, who they are becoming, and whether they deem their institutional experience successful determines how well they navigate their development (Porter & Byrd, 2021). It is how Black women make meaning of themselves, who they are becoming, and what college means to them that determines their ability to navigate their development (Porter & Byrd, 2021). Mullings' (1997) book described an ethnographic perspective of anthropology that pinpointed the literacy that complicated the lives of slaves and left Black women abandoned of receiving a proper education. Even today, Collins's (2022) study confirms the lack of proper schools for young Black women.

Bachik and Kitzman's (2020) scholarly article noted that personal development is vitally important in education. With various authors noting the connection between personal development and education and Black women not possessing a proper education, the question arising is where does that leave Black women entrepreneurs in operating successful businesses? Next, Black women's personal development experiences have also been linked to their psychological and physical needs (Flowers et al., 2012). Even the Black woman's personal development has been marginalized which has handicapped her identity; therefore, the Black

woman's identity cannot be a separate entity from the many problems that plague her existence but are linked inseparably to one another. However, no one category affects the oppression of Black women's personal development, but many (Collins, 1986).

With the oppression of Black women's education which impacts their personal development where does this place Black entrepreneur women regarding the essential skills and talents to successfully overcome challenges and barriers to thrive in their businesses? Furthermore, how do Black women entrepreneurs meet their goals? With these questions remaining unanswered, it places the importance back on the need for personal development to be a great part of one's overall growth. Irving and Williams (1999) posed that development is directional and only when individuals are developing in a specific direction should the term growth be utilized. When one becomes successful during the developmental process it is because there were needs within a specific time that were required in a specific situation.

For example, "a runner runs a race and personally does their best, however, they lose the race; this would be termed a success although they may have lost the race" simply because they engaged in a specific activity at a given time and did "their best, was resilient, and showed up" which were all lessons learned (Irving & Williams, 1999). This is an example of the personal development process whereby one could experience a win or a loss (Irving & Williams, 1999). But growth, on the other hand, only occurs when there are positive results. This is important because it can be assumed that personal development yields growth, however, Irving and Williams' (1999) study as noted above differs.

Throughout the years psychological theories researched various ways individuals change and grow when making decisions and executing those decisions (Lapsley & Hill, 2009). A study conducted by Sellers et al. (1998) noted that African Americans (Black Americans) are

drastically different from other ethnic groups. Sellers et al. (1998) further noted that other groups have been discriminated against; however, in the United States, the Black American experience is unique. This unique situation includes being denied in America by the United States Constitution and no other group was denied. The United States Government defined Black Americans as legal property for nearly a century and, due to such oppressions, it affected the lives of Black Americans (Sellers et al., 1998). This oppression leads to the question “What is wrong with Black women?” (Winfrey-Harris, 2015). According to the labels that society has placed on Black women, “everything is wrong with the Black woman” (Winfrey-Harris, 2015).

Such negative words, treatment, and verbal abuse would affect the Black woman’s identity and how they view themselves along with the display of certain actions and reactions (Jones & Norwood, 2017). Additionally, Jones and Norwood (2017) further noted that since the days of slavery, little has changed regarding how Black women are viewed. So, to understand the lack of improvement in the way that Black women are viewed, it is important to take a deeper look into how one is impacted by their natural environment, family, community, and relationships all of which provide one with individual identities that make each person unique and assist with building a strong foundation that can sustain an overall transformation by the way of personal development (Hay, 2010). So, the question becomes how can Black women mature, and their self-identity be formed if personal development is absent (Hay, 2010)?

Bachik and Kitzman (2020) explored the revised guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2013) where the personal development curriculum as a core goal was removed placing the central focus on professional development instead. Personal development is an essential part of life’s growth, skills, tools, talents, and gifts, all of which build upon one’s skillset and life-long learning journey (Gray Group International, 2023). So, if it is

taught on an educational and academic level the life skills that are essential for success (i.e., resilience, self-regulation, prevention of stress and depression, goal setting, and self-understanding) all affect one's psychological well-being. This leaves individuals undeveloped and lacking psychological skills and the strategies to cope with themselves and life which are of utmost importance to thrive in one's daily life and to maintain a successful career (Gray Group International, 2023). Psychological skills and development are important to one's development because it causes them to flourish and thrive in their person (Silverstein, 1990). The Black entrepreneur woman's development on all levels enhances their voices to a heightened degree of awareness regarding their value, identity, self, personal and professional development, and this is the self-defined knowledge that Collins (2022) voiced in her works.

Process of Personal Development

Coopersmith (2002) connected five key concepts to the personal development process that speaks to the development and application of one's skills. This is at the center of one's personal development where one grows and develops within themselves and develops their skills.

1. The development and application of skills. This allows one's skillset to continually grow and develop which is at the core of one's personal development.
2. Self-awareness. This allows one to be aware of thoughts, values, actions, and emotions.
3. Self-efficacy. This is the ability to effectively manage one's resources and skills.
4. Self-exploration. This is the ability for individuals to realize the potential they possess which is linked to their seeking their purpose and what they want to become in life.
5. Continuous improvement. This is where individuals' growth is dependent on seeking and asking for support.

Coopersmith (2002) further noted that personal development is an ongoing process that occurs throughout one's lifetime.

Also, Coopersmith (2002) sought a full understanding of personal development and its link to leadership, researching personal development and leadership development. The study was important because entrepreneurs are called upon to be self-leaders; therefore, developmental needs, growth, and skills are required to maneuver through various networks, relationships, and clientele (Coopersmith, 2002). Most importantly, Coopersmith (2002) wrote that making personal development plans was a special tool to assist leaders in continually growing and developing their skills while increasing their capacity to think and manage themselves and others without a doubt.

Coopersmith (2002) provided important information on the necessity to have a strong thinking capacity while being creative and serving as a change agent for others which can assist in growing and possessing the skillset to be more agile in business while addressing and growing from their strengths and building their weakness. This sheds light on the need for Black entrepreneur women to possess skills that will allow them to grow individually and translate to being productive in their businesses. Therefore, when an individual seeks to grow, such growth can only be identified way of one's lived experiences which lead to them growing (Irving & Williams, 1999). These lived experiences lead to building confidence, character, and stronger skills and decision-making to handle complex situations (Silverstein & Trombetti, 2013).

According to Irving and Williams (1999), growth and development intersect and the attributes of both are not shared until the intersection occurs meaning developing occurs when there is an increase with some level of complexity while growing occurs with quantity. Irving and Williams's (1999) description of developing and growing and its intersectionality seems to

imply that developing meant “starting something,” while growing implies “more than it was” (p. 518). Both growth and development are important to the Black entrepreneur women’s success, experience, and growth. First, an entrepreneur starts the business; however, when it comes to growth it does not align with Irving and Williams’s (1999) study because Black women’s businesses are not “*more than it was*” because their businesses are not experiencing the “*more than*” factor surrounding growth (Umoh, 2020).

Not only are Black entrepreneur women not experiencing growth in their businesses, but they continue to be marginalized and oppressed as women (Crenshaw, 1991). Therefore, the developmental process for Black women proves to be necessary and should be ongoing and requires further conversations around the oppression and social categorization that Black entrepreneur women continue to experience as business owners. On the other hand, Irving and Williams (1999) provided positive input regarding developmental processing and noted that development can happen, but individuals must try, apply themselves, and set goals.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Developmental Process

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, there are five steps to personal development (Acevedo, 2018). Maslow proposed that humans are motivated and achieve results when they fulfill five basic needs: (1) physiological, (2) safety, (3) social, (4) esteem, and (5) self-actualization. Through the lens of Maslow, Acevedo’s (2018) study described the five motivational levels of need. These five levels are described from bottom to top starting with the basic needs known as the physiological needs consisting of food, water, and shelter, which is the first stage of survival. Second, safety needs consist of having a secure place to live where one is not threatened by disastrous weather, or violence and finances are stable. Third, love and belonging comprise fulfilling one’s social needs, loving and being loved, and being in

affectionate relationships which form through community, religion/spirituality, family, friends, or even belonging to clubs, groups such as networking, joining spiritual groups and/or attending religious services, joining a gang. Maslow's fourth need, esteem needs, consist of respecting oneself and others, one's accomplishments, how one views their self-worth, and one's desire for prestige, independence, and status all of which affect how individuals feel about themselves. An individual's esteem can be affected negatively or positively, leaving a sense of inferiority about how one views oneself. If something occurs leaving a negative feeling or when something happens that is positive, one can be left with a sense of value, be respected, and gain status.

Lastly, self-actualization needs to refer to one's developmental and personal needs and overall growth which leads to the reality of an individual's potential where one reaches their full potential in various areas of their life. During this time, the individual will reach a level of self-fulfillment and is then ready to walk and live out their life purpose (Maslow, 1993).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a roadmap to human personal development that Soren and Ryff (2023) termed a universal roadmap. This roadmap offers a sequence of progressive steps where satisfying one level motivates an individual to proceed to the next level. Maslow's stair-step or pyramid model, therefore, walks individuals through a journey starting at the bottom and the pyramid continues upward to the divine (Soren & Ryff, 2023). A Black entrepreneur woman can benefit from Maslow's motivational theory to gain a better understanding of herself, as well as grow in her business, in addition to growing in her self-identity. Like any other job, there are requirements to be a successful entrepreneur and for those requirements to be fulfilled, Black entrepreneur women must go through a process of growing. Through this growth, the Black entrepreneur women will eventually experience success.

However, Maslow's needs model proposes that as one advances up the pyramid individual needs become complicated (Poston, 2009). So, the journey to living a happy, sustainable, healthy mental, physical, and psychological life while authentically knowing one's self-identity does not occur all at once, but over a process of time (Poston, 2009). Through life experiences, whether failures, barriers, challenges, or lack of motivation, it is a necessity that Black entrepreneur women become conscious and possess a thorough understanding of their everyday lives. Only then can she become empowered and conquer societal challenges (Collins, 2022). Then can Black entrepreneur women be freed in their minds with a consciousness to change the world and everything and everyone around them (Collins, 2022).

Resilience

Resilience is the main word that assists in explaining the success of some entrepreneurs (Ayala & Manzano, 2014). Strong resilience and determination are the number one attributes identified in *The Top Traits That Make Black Entrepreneurs Thrive in Business* (Faster Capital, 2024). Southwick et al. (2014) noted that the APA (2013) described resilience as a process requiring adaptability when confronted with trauma, adversity, tragedy, threats, or when confronted with large amounts of stress. Although this describes certain aspects of resilience, Ayala and Manzano (2014) argued that it does not go far enough into the complexity of what resilience means.

According to Ayala and Manzano's (2014) study, some factors determine the ability to be resilient which include biological psychological, social, and cultural. All these factors coexist in one's life to determine the responses to traumatic and stressful experiences. This is an extra layer of oppression that Black women confront, and the psychological impact is nothing new to the Black woman's lived experience. There are also other factors in fostering resilience that may

cause a different reaction to one's experiences (i.e., family, culture, community, and the individual; Ayala & Manzano, 2014).

According to the situation, experience, environment, and individual overtime resilience may not look the same (Kim-Cohen & Turkewitz, 2012). However, the process of resilience may be the key to entrepreneurial success (Cooper et al., 2017). The ability to be adaptable to the changes in everyday life along with being highly tolerable to situations prepares entrepreneurs for success (Ayala & Manzano, 2014).

The developmental process also includes setting goals. When goals are set, they may not always be accomplished and this assists in learning from mistakes and not being afraid of failure but trying again (Cooper et al., 2017). Goal setting requires being innovative and building high self-esteem which leaves a sense of self-control (Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). If Black entrepreneurs can develop resilience which assists them in overcoming setbacks, facing challenges, and hurdling barriers in their everyday lives, this will have a profound influence on their overall success (Ayala & Manzano, 2014).

Self-Identity

Baumeister (1997) argued that one's identity represents itself, and that the self, therefore, is not simple, but complex, and evolves according to how people interact with one another. Based on the definition of Callero (1985), self-identity involves setting expectations of someone's behavior based on their social position. This is also a tenet that stems from the Black feminist thought standpoint epistemology where knowledge is obtained in the Black woman's social position and is always positioned socially (Collins, 2022).

Both definitions involve interactions with society, social settings, behaviors, interactions, and drives interactions. This self-identity is important because it provides confidence that is

needed to authentically be oneself (Adkins-Jackson et al., 2019). Adkins-Jackson et al. (2019) further wrote that being unique is a possessive part of one's value system and character is built from knowing yourself which also assists in establishing boundaries. According to the concepts of personal development and self-identity, knowing oneself leads to certain actions that assist individuals in understanding oneself and why one does what one does.

Black women possess a unique identity which accompanies distinctive challenges and barriers that create roadblocks which make it even more challenging to not only start their businesses but to also maintain the business (Umoh, 2020).

The identity conversation has shaped the lives of many Black women causing negative images that have reshaped the future of Black women's lives (Windsor et al., 2011). This symbolic image of Black women has affected the way society views their attitude, the way they wear their hair, the way they talk, where they live, what they drive, and wear, how much money they make, and even the type of professional positions she holds in the workplace (Windsor et al., 2011).

Symbolic meaning has always been a huge part of the life of the Black woman. The intersectional of being unique, in a stratification system, yet battling past oppressions to grow and become a successful woman all take an internal battle on an already flawed identity shaped by past experiences (Alinia, 2015). All these factors may affect the personal development of Black women. Webster (2005) argued that personal identity is a social construct that places labels on individuals (i.e., their religion, color, gender, and others). Overall, Black entrepreneur women face issues regarding their personal development, which calls into question their sense of self-identity (Younge, 2021).

Coopersmith (2022) wrote that self-identity is important and defines the concepts of personal development as: (1) Continuous growth of personal skills; (2) self-awareness where one utilizes their skills in being mindful of the things they think about, managing their emotions, holding to a value system, and being mindful of one's actions; (3) self-efficacy which is possessing the ability to manage one's skills and possessions (i.e., income, property, and wealth); (4) self-exploration which is seeking to become the greater version of one's self; and (5) ongoing improvement by continuing to grow.

Jitaru et al. (2021) added that personal development focuses on the inner work that is required for the development of one's skills, talents, and competencies which assist in becoming a better person. When personal development occurs, one can successfully achieve their goals and ambitions while self-identity focuses on the outer works and behaviors to which society views and attaches judgment. Society concludes the individual's behaviors and attaches, and this becomes one's self-identity (Kun-Hu Chen, 2019). As a result, marginalization and decriminalization serve as a steppingstone for the oppression of Black women that hides their authentic selves beneath the surface of oppression.

A Survey of Key Literature on the Importance of Self-Identity

As far back as slavery, Black women and their identities have conflicted (Nelson, 2004). The focus has mainly been on Black women being stereotyped as dominant, angry, and aggressive while suffering discrimination, colorism, and gender bias. Nelson's (2004) research did not expand upon Black women and the impact of personal development as being a factor in their self-identity and the negative images that have been placed upon them. Self-identity and personal development are widely researched and taught both in academia and at work and are continuously being developed in every phase of life (Kuradusenge-McLeod, 2021).

However, there is very little historical data on Black women and their personal development. This is important, especially with the negative treatment of Black women from the past and present. History holds that Black women are unique in their experiences due to being marginalized while intersecting, even today, her many identities are treated as marginalized also (Porter & Byrd, 2021). The history of personal development started in the 1700s during the industrial revolution when progressive thinking provided a new way of thinking where manufacturing paved the way for the United States to become a leader in the world for producing materials and technical proficiency (SchoolTube Community, n.d.).

Orison Swett Marden, a New Hampshire resident, was a young orphan who added to the new movement surrounding innovative ways of thinking and motivated this movement due to the abuse suffered by his employer while working in the fields in New England (Travers, 1977). Marden's aggressiveness led to the discovery of "*self-help*," by Scottish reformer Samuel Smiles whose life was changed and made his career in being inspirational and helping others to reach their full potential (Travers, 1977). All this happened while slavery was still prevalent in society (Wright, 2017).

As the United States continued its aggressive growth, the 1920s known as "the new era," became a time when the economy continued to grow, and prosperity was on the rise (Rikard & Wells, 1997). However, this massive growth benefited the incomes of middle and wealthy-class Americans. At the time of this growth, the Black community was still experiencing widespread slavery and was still marginalized (Travers, 1977). Without the tools, learning, freedom, and skillset, Black people were relegated to working in the fields and some of the Black women were summoned to work in the slave owner's home to wash, cook, clean, and look after the children and wife (Warren et al., 2022). The marginalization of Black people and essentially the lack of

care for Black women left an absence in learning for Black women which impacted their self-identity (Warren et al., 2022).

Bailey (2003) explained that self-identity is a complex concept that incorporates many elements into a combined image of oneself based on one's uniqueness and encompasses one's ethnicity, which encapsulates the unique characteristics that make a person stand out from others. Self-identity encompasses what a person knows and believes, what one holds sentimentally, and admires. Bailey (2003) wrote that self-identity is one's purpose in life and reason for living. Bailey (2003) articulated that identity refers to what one knows, believes, admires, and lastly, one's purpose and reason for living. The results of self-identity occurring are a long process that happens over time (Bailey, 2003). Furthermore, Bailey (2003) provided the steps that occur over this lengthy period in one's life.

The first step was interpreting one's experiences. This is where one's "*fixed human nature*," which is the perception that we are, who we are, and this cannot change (Bailey, 2003). The second step was certain aspects of the first step. Bailey (2003) pointed to translating individual experiences and interacting with others while embracing one's "*feelings*" which leads to building an orderly system of values. Steps one and two are both instrumental in the influence of making major decisions that assist in shaping one's life. The third step built on the second one by prioritizing values surrounding one's philosophy of life with a focus on values. The fourth step dealt with shaping one's traits and identity characteristics from one's thinking and viewpoint of their life. Finally, the fifth step was the feedback one received from society which assisted in creating an individual's personality that forms from one's character.

This complex self-identity that Bailey (2003) spoke of means different things to different people. For instance, Bailey (2003) referred to the word "*respect*" which he said that in the Black

ghetto, it was a respected street code in the streets and represented the top value in their philosophy of life. To gain this respect, Bailey (2003) wrote that the “bad” character trait was to take something that belonged to another and that is how respect was earned and valued in the streets of the Black ghetto. On the other hand, this life philosophy is offensive to one who views respect differently because their life philosophy is to respect others by being kind, not taking anything that does not belong to them, and respecting their space and these individuals as human beings. This is the complexity of self-identity and its image in the lives of different demographics.

Self-Identity and the Black Woman’s Experience

Self-identity starts to develop in the adolescent years (Kun-Hu Chen, 2019). This developmental process is speaking of behavioral patterns, attitudes, and one’s values, according to Tobin et al.’s (1989) study, occurred in the family and when individuals are in the preschool stage. Self-identity has been theorized by many social psychologists (Dien, 2000). The discussion of self-identity is ongoing and has many meanings to different researchers. Dien (2000) argued that the three levels of self were represented separately, and they represented different beginnings, self-worth, and social motivations (Dien, 2000). Furthermore, Dien (2000) wrote that identity development involves the gradual process of the development of a sense of self from early infancy. Dien (2000) also looked at identity from the developmental lens and saw it as an ongoing process with various changes that take place due to the transformations that happen sociocultural and historical. This transformation surrounds one continuously evolving and developing their cultural identity which, over time, shifts one’s perspectives about their self-identity over time (Dien, 2000).

However, Erikson (1994) described self-identity in three parts: (1) the ego “the self,” (2) personal identity “what differentiates people from one another, and (3) social and cultural identity (i.e., the assortment of social characteristic that individuals may display). On the other hand, Sigmund Freud provided a generalized view of identity relating it to people of Jewish descent and referring to it as the “inner identity,” where he linked identity to one’s values and the special way people develop (Erikson, 1994). Horowitz (2012) described the self as a representation of the self and identity as being conscious or having a sense of instinct of uniformity over time. Although Huegerich (2021) wrote that for the “self” to develop it must be in a relationship with others, it must be different from others. In addition, Huegerich (2021) wrote that “self” is a term that is relative and is formed and socially rooted in relations.

Horowitz’s (2012) study provided the unconscious process of self-identity that have been placed on the Black woman which has stained her image, character, attitude, work ethic, and being. Labels are used to describe self-identities, and meaning is then attached to the self (Money, 2023). Roles play a major part in self-identity and differentiate the differences in behaviors (Money, 2023). Lastly, Money (2023) writes self-esteem is also a major part of self-identity and self-image. Gaines (2018) cited that although the label strong Black woman SBW may seem flattering, positive, and smart, and the Black woman can handle anything, it has significant meaning, especially with Black women who enter therapy. The meaning that Gaines (2018) spoke of was the stresses that impacted their mental and physical health, depression from not asking for help and taking on multiple roles, and not engaging in self-care which would minimize some of the overall stress. So, the words self-identity is important to one’s being. One’s unity unfolds over time and as we grow, engage, be open, and negotiate with ourselves, the

question then focuses on “who am I” and not “what we are” (Wilde, 2022). When individuals begin to understand themselves, they can find their self-identity (Wilde, 2022).

Valdes (1991) disagreed with the earlier narrative surrounding identity to personal identity, arguing that an important difference that existed between the identity, namely *sameness* (idem), and the identity, namely *the self* (ipse). Valdes' (1991) study started with an argument and asked the question “Who and what are you?” Valdes (1991) argued the self is much more than described in past research and the self is not just one’s mental state. Rudd (2022) gave a warning not to strip the mere essence of empirical and only look at the self by addressing an idea and then providing a way of expressing it then one ends up with nothing. Moreover, Nielsen (2018) interpreted Kierkegaard's (1980) study simplistically by saying the self was internal and its establishment was external.

Social Identity and the Black Entrepreneur Woman’s Experience

For this research study, it is only appropriate to discuss the social identity of Black women in business. Social identity is defined as a collective group of people classified and belonging to the same social identity (Tajfel, 1979). Furthermore, Tajfel’s (1979) social identity sought to integrate perceptions and behaviors through the lives of individuals. Through this process, social identity theory helps to deal with conflicts within groups and how relationships form breakdown and get beyond differences. Much of social interaction between Black entrepreneur women and other races is based on oppression due to gender and the systemic views, processes, and history of race that has left Black women abused, in the workplace, legal system, academic world, and the healthcare system (Hall et al., 2012).

In Davis and Jones’s (2021) research, the image of the SBW is cast from history as an explanation for Black women’s oppression. This same image serves today as a means of survival

which has obliged and aided Black women in society especially Black entrepreneur women in surviving obstacles and barriers in a society that continues to oppress their being. Social identity has long been associated with the labeling of Black women and society has practiced stereotypes (Geyton et al., 2022). Geyton et al. (2022) further proclaimed that the experience of Black women is unique where race and gender connect. The study also noted that perceptions are shaped by society when assumptions of people show various patterns of one's identity (Kulig & Cullen, 2017). Therefore, society has a strong impact on how people are viewed and perceived.

Much of the oppression stems from a historical view relating to Black women as SBW because of their housekeeping skills (i.e., cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children of their masters, and also tending to the master's wives, friends, and friends of friends) while caring for their own families, cooking and cleaning their homes, working the fields, washing the family laundry, and tending to other slaves when they were sick (Stewart, 2021). The name "stigma of slavery" is noted in Stewart's (2021) study where domestic work was a mainstream way of survival for Black women. This left Black women with no social interaction and were not considered to be a part of social circles (Stewart, 2021). Further, Black women felt disrespected and disheartened by only being associated with a "servitude" attitude and title, and this treatment continued through the 20th century (Du Bois, 1899).

Domestic work continued to be the primary job for Black women with low wages and extremely long hours. Black women were asked to do demeaning tasks that put them in a place of being mistreated, abused, and in bad situations (i.e., to be raped and sexually abused; Stewart, 2021). Domestic work yielded a job for housekeeping but did not grow beyond custodial duties. This left Black women at an impasse with social interaction and integrating with others to become professionals with the skills to work in an office (Stewart, 2021). Therefore, the lack of

socialization communication, being marginalized, racial stereotyped, often no wages, and disrespect left Black women with little to no identity with and at the mercy of slave owners (Stewart, 2021).

Ervin's (2014) research explored Black women and the negative attitude that American society has placed on them which has hindered Black entrepreneur women from obtaining wealth and success. Black women are among the highest disadvantaged population and according to the disadvantage theory of entrepreneurship, the oppressed members of society are often faced with making hard decisions between being without a job or being self-employed pursuing the life of starting a small business as an entrepreneur (Light, 1979). Being a Black woman, underprivileged, possibly suffering from an identity crisis, lack of funding, lack of learning in business, and an absence of personal development leave the Black entrepreneur woman in "survival" mode, meaning pursuing the entrepreneur journey because of a means to find employment may leave them without a livelihood (Light & Rosenstein, 1995). Therefore, the negative stigma that plagues this oppressed group of women leaves a lack of positive social interaction that would otherwise result in positive change.

Self-Expression and Self-Identity

The need for love as human beings is a great part of human authenticity (Huegerich, 2021). Huegerich (2021) argued that love becomes personal in individuals who as people know themselves: Love, therefore, is an expression that requires a deep level of knowledge in order to become personal. In addition, love is a developmental gift of knowledge of the self, which is important because when someone knows the deeper part of themselves, they then also have love to give to others (Huegerich, 2021).

The love that Huegerich (2021) described focused on loving God first, then one could experience loving oneself, which provided the ability to love others. Huegerich (2021) further proposed that love can look different in each relationship one engages in because relationships must be explored and getting to know one another leads to authentic knowledge. However, before an individual can experience authentic knowledge, they must know and live as their authentic self; then love can be authentically shared with others by embracing them, which Huegerich (2021) described as the most genuine love that one can experience.

When the inner self is expressed to others, a greater and more personal love is formed by way of gender authenticity (Huegerich, 2021). According to Huegerich (2021), this expression comes from the authentic self and is a transitional process that encompasses social, physical, and emotional expressions that allow individuals to express their authentic selves. This is a sacred and personal love that allows one to experience God and his presence more deeply (Huegerich, 2021). Self-expression is an important part of the Black entrepreneur woman's experience because it starts first with being true to oneself and only then can one relate to others in a "true" sense of the human self (Welz, 2008). Also, self-love is a critical part of the personal development process and, when we make ourselves a priority the foundation is being laid for personal growth and success (Moi + Me, 2023). Through the self-love process, Black entrepreneur women can connect to new legacies that remove negative labels and foster healthy relationships, both personally and professionally, which are the real essence of who they are.

Entrepreneurship

Historical View of Black Women and Entrepreneurship

This literature review spans many decades as Black women continue to be the topic of discussion regarding the SBW and the strength they possess (Liao et al., 2020). Upon evaluating

the impact that personal development may have on self-identity, the history of the treatment of Black women must be considered because of the effect that negative treatment has on how Black women view themselves. Wyatt's (2008) study documented the lives of Black women and their ancestors and the hardship they faced with abusive treatment but did not give a full account of how the struggles affected the Black woman's personal development.

Therefore, this literature review is meant to shed light on the importance of the personal development of Black women and its connection to their identity. Without pause, looking at the history of the Black woman sheds light on her journey as an entrepreneur. As previously noted, the struggle of Black women has left and continues to leave a stained image that has affected her entrepreneurial role (Jackson, 2021).

An entrepreneur is defined in many ways. For instance, Lumpkin and Dess (1996) described an entrepreneur as not only being about an individual's creation of a new business but also extending to taking risks, creating new ideas, thinking, being independent in decision-making, being aggressive, and competing with other entrepreneurs. According to the National Women's Business Counsel dating from 2004, in the United States, out of approximately 365,110 majority-owned privately held firms, over 6% are owned by Black women (Robinson et al., 2007). This success places Black entrepreneur women in an avenue to create more than \$14 billion in revenue (Robinson et al., 2007). Although this is the positive side of the successes that Black women are enjoying, it comes with its negative outcomes as they continue to fail at maintaining their businesses because they cannot obtain funding from White-owned organizations (Bonds, 2007). According to Jackson and Sanyal (2019), there is a revenue gap when Black women are compared to Black men and White women; Black women tend to start businesses that do not turn a profit.

Black female feminist, teacher, and activist Anna Julia Cooper brought attention to the challenges and negative experiences that Black women faced (Moody-Turner, 2009). Cooper's documentation of the Black woman's struggle in the South when segregation was ongoing, noted the literacy problems in education and the lack of learning for Black women (Moody-Turner, 2009). It is important to research if this lack of learning, challenges, and negative experiences affects the personal development of Black entrepreneur women because of absenteeism of self-identity.

As Moody-Turner (2009) noted, learning was a big part of being a self-made business owner and networking is a definite requirement because building relationships adds value to networks and one's net worth. The positive side of Black women and entrepreneurship is due to their tenacity to start businesses well above society's industries (Barr, 2015). Their increase in starting business has continued to be on the incline with a 67% rise dating from 2007 to 2012. However, it does not come without challenges, especially in making money and maintaining profit (Becker-Medina, 2016). There are reasons for these entrepreneurial problems that exist with Black entrepreneur women.

Inman (1999) noted Black women live their lives differently; therefore, they are motivated to approach and move differently on new paths. Some of the differences in their lived experiences relate to the attitude of Black entrepreneur women and how social identity impacts their entrepreneurial journey. This included Black women and their professionalism, the attitude of Black women, and the angry Black woman label. Van Vlaenderen and Cakwe (2003) claimed that these Black Women were not able to fully develop. Black Women face challenges such as lack of financial support and obtaining credit while being stereotyped negatively (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). This is where personal development must intersect with the Black entrepreneurial

woman's journey because it helps them get to know themselves inside so that they can continue to go on their self-discovery journey, which translates to transforming the lives of others (Bench et al., 2015). Individuals' lives can be shaped and reshaped by seeking various ways to learn about their inner selves (Frunză, 2017). Without exploring various resources and seeking the means to improve one's overall thinking, individuals become stagnated, have no self-confidence, feel that they have no value, and many other negative thoughts and actions can saturate one's life (Morris et al., 2022).

Many studies examined Black women's leadership, their identities, and their entrepreneurship, but few have explored how a lack of personal development can affect Black women's self-identity and self-esteem (Robinson et al., 2007). Webster's (2005) article confirmed the societal norms of labeling Black women are ongoing (i.e., the way Black women wear their hair "*nappy head*," called angry, and aggressive, just to name a few; Williams & Lewis, 2021). Furthermore, Dozier (2010) stated that the regression of Black women has continued not only with the personal image of who Black women are, but this has also affected the growth in their wages in the workplace and their mobility in being promoted to higher positions. For instance, Dozier's (2010) research showed the period dating from the mid-1990s through 2002 noting that salaries of women working in the United States continued to double; however, the positions and salaries of Black women went on to decline.

The ancient African word "Ubuntu" means "I am what I am, because of who we are" (de Villiers Scheepers et al., 2017, p. 24). But the question yet remains for Black women "Who are we and what are we?" This question is yet to be answered because of the many labels that are attached to Black women. Haney et al. (2015) pointed out that a lack of personal development

hinders the learning experience of individuals, shapes and reshapes their lives and allows them to identify with themselves and their ability to be their best version.

Finally, building community, increasing social networks, establishing communal ties, and joining volunteer groups were found to be important to one's entrepreneur journey. However, Jackson (2021) noted that women owners, holistically, experienced little support with interacting with others and building community. Jackson (2021) also found Black women are faced with issues regarding race, class, and gender which have a major impact on being integrated into various groups and/or organizations. The skills needed to be successful as an entrepreneur like strategizing, communicating, and risk-taking were sometimes hindered from being displayed (Jackson, 2021).

Disadvantaged people who possess little, or no resources have few to no chances to engage in social groups, get positive human interaction, or have access to financial resources (Light & Gold, 2000). This is due to what Jackson (2021) called "*intersectionality*." Intersectionality provides a framework to look at the way Black women engage in business and become owners of those ventures (Browne & Misra, 2003). This view provides a broad look into the entrepreneurial struggle, barriers, and hindrances that Black entrepreneur women continue to face in the past and present.

Leadership and the Black Entrepreneur Woman Experience

Kassai (2022) study identified five leadership styles relevant to entrepreneurs and noted the leadership characteristics that provide success for entrepreneurs. However, Kassai (2022) pointed to four leadership styles that specifically assist in entrepreneurial success:

- lone wolf,
- teambuilding,

- explorer, and
- architect.

In the lone wolf style, where the entrepreneur is a doer and completes the work; according to Kassai's (2022) entrepreneur leadership model, a lone wolf leader makes good decisions, is detail-oriented, and understands the demographic with whom they engage. A lone wolf entrepreneur leader works independently, has impeccable time management skills, and uses their resources wisely. A lone wolf entrepreneur also adapts to change quickly under varying situations (Kassai, 2022).

According to Kassai (2022), the entrepreneur leadership style is based on entrepreneurs embracing social competencies that allow one to reach their goals. A teambuilding leader is extremely oriented and excellent at building long-lasting relationships inside and outside of their business circle (Kassai, 2022). A team-building entrepreneur leader thrives in motivating people and communicates effectively at a high level (Kassai, 2022).

According to Kassai (2022), the explorer entrepreneur's leadership style describes an entrepreneur who is a visionary, has a creative mindset, and is strategic. An explorer entrepreneur leader sees the future through a different set of lenses, and this leads them to believe they can impact society with their views, plans, and ideas (Kassai, 2022). The explorer leader is normally technology savvy (Kassai, 2022).

The central competence of the architect entrepreneur leader style unique being this leader develops and designs the organizations blueprint for big picture goals which requires strong competencies because they are the gatekeeper for the organization's core values (Kassai, 2022). The importance of Kassai's (2022) study makes a valuable contribution to the debate discussion

and provides an innovative approach to the entrepreneurial leadership conversation and looks at the construct of a new model described as entrepreneurial leadership styles.

Notwithstanding, Sethuraman and Suresh (2014) as cited in Kassai (2022) reminded readers when self-awareness is developed along with a focus on education, leaders are then able to adapt their style of leadership to verifying situations. According to Kassai (2022) article denotes that one does not have to be innately born with 's leadership styles because leadership and leadership styles can be developed. First, engaging in the life of an entrepreneur provides exceptional growth, and new opportunities to give back, provide jobs for others, and make an impact in society (Kruse et al., 2023). Kruse et al. (2023) described a psychological view of the social entrepreneur (SE) with a focus on mental health and happiness. Kruse et al.'s (2023) SE contextual framework is defined as a framework that is determined by a social mission. The uniqueness of the life of a SE is being able to tap into the special skills and apply their innovative skills to reach their goals. In the study, it is apparent that research on the SE continues to grow and there is significant interest among scholars in different disciplines. To date, there have been no additional studies on the SE's impact on the lives of entrepreneurs and its focus is on the mental health of entrepreneurs and what makes them happy despite the barriers they face.

Kruse et al.'s (2023) study was relevant to Black entrepreneur women because the demographics of the study used a sample size of South African participants which makes the study credible due to the cultural and ethical background of the participants. The strengths of the study rested on the premise of SEs being happy if they have strong support with the fulfillment of their life, to make work a better place to live, and to add value to society and the lives of others (Kruse et al., 2023). For Black entrepreneur women, the SE experience is a positive step to enjoying the entrepreneur life.

However, some problems accompany being an entrepreneur especially for individuals who are in minority groups and communities (Latifi et al., 2022). According to Kea-Edwards et al. (2023), Black entrepreneur women lack leadership skills, core competencies personality, confidence openness, self-transcendence, and external support, all of which are needed to be an effective leader as an entrepreneur and to be successful.

Kassai (2022) explored entrepreneurial leadership styles, concluding that there was minimal research surrounding the leadership styles of entrepreneurs, with some authors stating that there is no such thing as leadership styles for entrepreneurs. There have been some thorough studies that relate entrepreneurial leadership styles to one's culture and other countries are becoming similar, linking behaviors to culture (Gupta et al., 2004). Another study proposed that there are three unique mindsets relating to entrepreneur leadership styles which include (1) people-oriented, (2) purpose-oriented, and (3) learning-oriented (Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020). All these mindsets play an important part in being an entrepreneur and are considered entrepreneur styles (Subramaniam & Shankar, 2020). Bagheri and Harrison (2015) created a self-developed measurement tool where three leadership styles were discovered namely (1) entrepreneurial orientations, (2) transformational leadership, and (3) creativity-supportive leadership. Such leadership styles are significant to this study because people utilize and embrace leadership differently (Kassai, 2022). Kassai's (2022) model will provide context around the cultural styles of the lived experiences of Black women and how they embrace, leadership, business, learning, and building relationships.

Omri et al. (2015) noted that being competent is extremely important and if individuals are competent, it is highly likely they will be successful entrepreneurs. This view of leadership and engaging in a life of being an entrepreneur negates the Black woman being successful

because history dictates that they lack adequate skills, core competencies, support, and social connections to be successful (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020). This negative prototype surrounding Black women has also left her not receiving proper recognition and not being believed when she speaks of being discriminated against (De Leon & Rosette, 2022).

There was also a lack of opportunities for Black women and the inability to be connected to those who would accept them in their inner circles (Carter et al., 2023). Nevertheless, Carter et al. (2023) noted that some opportunities assist in one's personal growth such as developing skills and improving one's attitude which may assist in becoming successful inside or outside the workplace. These opportunities are popular in leadership coaching and companies are retaining coaches for staff members to improve so they can move up in the workplace.

Corporate leadership coaches are highly sought after by companies and the success rate is at 86% when corporate leadership coaches are retained (Carter et al., 2023). Incorporating corporate strategies and procedures is a main component in the life of an entrepreneur, with entrepreneur leadership is also defined as leadership in a corporate environment (Kassai, 2022). Therefore, growing, developing competency skills, and possessing strong leadership skills would benefit Black entrepreneur women need to engage in personal development which will assist them in identifying their strengths and weaknesses (Kassai, 2022).

Summary

Chapter 2 familiarized readers with the conceptual framework of Collins's (2022) Black feminist thought and intersectionality (Cho et al., 2013), which guided the content of the literature review. Also discussed was the origin and history of personal development and its interaction or lack of in the lives of Black women and Black entrepreneur women. The robust information discussed the history of women engulfed in slavery and their lack of literacy

provided a vivid look into the lack of knowledge of Black women and learning that left them challenged. However, the oxymoron stems from not having reading and writing skills but still being able to be creative in maneuvering their way to learning from their lived experiences (Cornelius, 1983).

To understand the lived experiences of Black women and oppression, it is appropriate to look at the professional development process because it unfolds key concepts, growth, and developmental strategies. Maslow's (1993) hierarchy of needs provided a five-step guide to becoming one's best self as well as a review of being skilled as a highly successful entrepreneur, which is resilience. Chapter 3 provides the research methodology for the study. The research design, methods, and research questions are restated. Chapter 3 also includes my role, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness. Additionally, population samples, proposed materials, and data collection methods are explained.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. Although personal development is studied in many arenas (i.e., school, work, and church) some issues have been largely overlooked in past research and are of pressing importance due to the growing awareness of racial inequality in society, especially in the personal development journey of Black entrepreneur women due to oppression accompanied with the lack of emotional support, sexism, and poor mental health due to the lack of self-care (Godbolt et al., 2022). Thus, this research study sought to provide a better understanding of the Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. Research indicated by engaging in personal development, one improves their business performance, productivity, time management, self-awareness, and mental health (Aeon et al., 2021).

In fact, over decades the scores for women managing their time continued to rise (Aeon et al., 2021). However, that is only one component of personal development. The Black woman's mental health and self-care continue to be in decline writes Godbolt et al. (2022) with labels like "strong Black woman," potentially having negative consequences on her mental health.

For a Black entrepreneur woman to be successful in her overall business and personal life, she must participate in educational opportunities and other programs that promote overall personal development which provides a positive reflection of her self-identity (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). In this section, qualitative data were collected and analyzed from the lens of Black entrepreneur women expressing their views and perspectives regarding their personal development and its effect on their self-identity.

The purpose of utilizing a phenomenological research methodology is to discover and explore questions regarding the lived experiences of participants related to a particular problem that has not been previously studied and additional research is needed on a given topic (Creswell, 2014). However, in Hill (1973) some research evidence revealed the importance of self-identity and how it may have hindered the growth of Black women.

When exploring a specific subject matter, one has a deeper understanding of the problem/issues at hand but also by exploring a matter the researcher may not uncover or find a definite answer; however, the research can provide a better understanding of the research study (Austin & Sutton, 2014). This research problem will explore Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. If personal development is absent what are the implications it may have on her personal life as well as in her business? These questions require a response that will assist in helping Black entrepreneur women to react positively when placed in difficult situations, and when showing up as "*her authentic self*," leaving their self-identity unblemished.

In addition, this research study will analyze the data collection to gain a clearer picture of the Black woman's journey to finding her self-identity as an entrepreneur. Using the results of this study, one will gain a better understanding of the Black woman's personal development and its effect on her self-identity. As a result, Black women will have access to better resources and services, and this will assist in facilitating their full potential.

As researchers try to provide a thorough understanding of various phenomena, it is clear some limitations must not lead researchers to seek answers from individual knowledge and self-interest. Such is the case with this research study. I am committed, ethically aware, and have precise intentions to proceed with this study without any bias, prejudices, or emotional ties due

to being a Black woman. Although the topic of Black women and their identity is popular and continues to be explored extensively, little research has been studied regarding Black entrepreneur women and their self-identity (De Beer & Du Rand, 2021).

These are the areas of opportunity and gaps that are missing and have not been clearly explained or understood. These gaps have led to exploring this topic relating to Black woman entrepreneurs, their personal development, and its effect on their self-identity. This research study can also motivate future researchers to look at upcoming generations to support the development of additional studies.

This chapter discussed research design and methods, population, selection criteria, sample size, data collection, trustworthiness, interview protocol, demographic information, and interview questions. The conclusion of this chapter provides a summary of the study and ushers the reader into Chapter 4 where the findings will be discussed.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided and supported this phenomenological study addressing Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity.

The primary research question guiding this study was as follows:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?

To answer the primary research question, two secondary research questions were asked:

RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?

RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?

Research Design and Methodology

To properly explore, address, and respond to the research questions, it was appropriate to engage in a qualitative phenomenon approach to gain a clear understanding of the lived experiences of personal development and its effect on self-identity in the lives of Black entrepreneur women (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). The research design accompanying this study stemmed from Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology founded by the 20th-century philosopher, Martin Heidegger.

The philosophy of Heidegger's phenomenology guided a qualitative study that assists researchers in data collection from participants regarding their lived experiences, aids the study in making sense, and places clarity on the lived experiences of participants (Guerrero-Castañeda et al., 2017). Lester (1999) further confirmed that Heidegger's phenomenological methodology allows participants to relive their individual experiences while being truthful about their perceptions and providing their experiences from their perspectives.

The interpretative phenomenological analysis also assisted in asking critical questions of Black entrepreneur women (Guerrero-Castañeda et al., 2017). For example, "Does the researcher sense there is something deeper happening than the participant knows?" It is possible these serious questions may lead to answers that otherwise would be overlooked. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis, there is a theoretical and academic commitment to Black entrepreneur women as rational, philological, emotional, and physical beings with a

relationship that connects them and the way they think and connect with one's state of emotion (Broomé, 2022).

Next, the results from this qualitative study were based on an interpretive approach that assisted in answering the research questions according to the perceptions and lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women which served to capture and guide the theory according to best practices (Larkin et al., 2019). Delgado-Romero et al.'s (2018) study on qualitative methods stated the importance of conducting a diverse philosophical paradigm surrounded by a divergent population. Minority populations such as Black women have continued to attract attention according to Delgado-Romero et al. (2018), since the 1960s. Studying race, cultural backgrounds, and culture provides a voice for this underrepresented population and purposeful sampling is the best strategy for conducting a study regarding lived experiences (Van Manen, 2015). Therefore, Delgado-Romero et al.'s (2018) study solidified this study regarding the Black entrepreneur woman and the importance of personal development and knowing her self-identity.

This research study employed an explanatory research design that leaned on phenomenological research. This research design sought to describe personal development and Black entrepreneur women and its effect on their self-identity (Peoples, 2020).

Phenomenological Research Methods

The main objective of any qualitative research study is the researcher's skills and abilities to seek meaning from the lived experiences of the subjects researched, captivate the meaning, and then clearly express the observations and findings that are convincing and be astute in writing the results (Emiliussen et al., 2021). Furthermore, a phenomenological research study provides a pathway to the research process and aims to provide life to the research question

(Barrell, 1993). Van Manen (2015) also noted that it is important to let the language speak, and this is referred to as a pedagogic experience.

Pedagogic experiences are described as performing a self-study which can also be considered action research where the researcher reflects on the findings and study in a critical manner and with caution (Emiliussen et al., 2021). According to Emiliussen et al. (2021), when the researcher looks at the study through the eyes of pedagogic research, they view the research through a critical reflection lens and reflexivity on the current practice that leads to new insights.

It is important that the researcher conducts proper research to obtain an explanation for the phenomenon. Using a phenomenological design allows the researcher to obtain a clear, logical, and systematic approach to analysis and combine the information to obtain descriptions of the individual's lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher must then articulate and clearly describe the phenomenon of Black entrepreneur women and personal development and its effect on their self-identity (Van Manen, 2015). Creswell (2014) explained that researchers may obtain a thorough understanding of the meaning of bracketing; this is called bracketing. Bracketing allows the researcher to postpone or bracket possible biased ideas that may describe the phenomenon and the lived experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Bracketing also prevents the researcher from being biased and prejudiced. Thus, bracketing allowed me to be confident; my thought process was straightforward and pure and was not attached to them by any means. This allowed me to review and look at the participant's lived experiences and not be codependent upon my own opinions, presumptions, beliefs, or guesses regarding the subject matter.

Target Population

The population of this phenomenological research study consisted of Black entrepreneur women with operative businesses in the United States. This exploratory study examined the personal development of Black entrepreneur women and its effect on their self-identity. The participants were recruited from the Black Women Entrepreneurs Business Network Facebook group. I obtained all contact information from the Facebook group; however, before initiating any interviews, I ensured that Abilene Christian University's policies and procedures for this research study were followed.

Selection Criteria

Participants chosen for this study were Black entrepreneur women. The criteria were as follows: (a) must identify as a Black woman, (b) must be an entrepreneur with an operable business, (c) must be between the ages of 25 and 65, and (d) must have no less than 5 years of entrepreneur experience. I adhered to all of Abilene Christian University's (ACU) protocols when collecting data and handling confidential information obtained from participants. The information obtained can also be reviewed and utilized for future research.

Study Sample

This research focused on the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. Therefore, I focused on the population of Black entrepreneur women within the United States. Black entrepreneur women who founded various businesses formed this sample study. Because this is a particular demographic, namely Black entrepreneur women, I used convenience sampling to locate and select 11 Black entrepreneur women in the target population (Etikan et al., 2016). Convenience sampling allowed the participants to be accessible and readily available at an appointed time; the participants were

within geographical proximity and were willing to participate in the study due to the purpose of the study (Etikan et al., 2016). For these reasons, convenience sampling is the best method for this research study.

Next, these Black entrepreneur women were in the same Facebook group, all entrepreneurs that operated their businesses. This study population was in the Facebook group A Billionaire's Blueprint. At the time of this study, the total number of Black entrepreneur women in this Facebook group is approximately 61,000 members, with Black entrepreneur women joining daily. Once I received approval from the network administrators, I posted the recruitment flyer inviting participants to join the study (Appendix C). I emailed some group members to ensure that I received a substantial number of participants (Simkus, 2022; see Appendix B). Everyone in the group may not have visited the group daily, but as businesswomen, their email addresses were visible; therefore, sending emails to potential participants ensured they were afforded the option to participate. Upon receiving responses from participants, I emailed the consent form (see Appendix D) to each participant for their review and signature before starting the interview process (Simkus, 2022).

The entrepreneurial women in this group collaborated with one another, and their communication was strong. Furthermore, these businesswomen had similar qualifications, missions, visions, and characteristics (Simkus, 2022). When posting the recruit flyer (see Appendix C), I added a comment asking the potential participants to communicate with other entrepreneurs regarding participating in the study and to contact me for assistance in being a part of the study. To ensure that the demographic of Black entrepreneur women was diverse according to the demographic information, I reviewed the participant's Facebook profile, which provided some demographic information (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Upon reviewing all potential participants, I chose 11 Black entrepreneur women who aligned with the criterion and demographic component. Delgado-Romero et al.'s (2018) study on qualitative methods stated the importance of conducting a varying philosophical paradigm surrounded by a diverse population. Minority populations, such as Black entrepreneur women, have continued to attract attention (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018). Studying race, cultural backgrounds, and culture provides a voice for this underrepresented population, and purposeful sampling is the best method for conducting a study regarding lived experiences (Van Manen, 2015). Currently, no research has been conducted in the Facebook group that examines the affect that personal development has on self-identity in the lives of Black entrepreneur women. Therefore, this research study will provide essential data and information for future researchers.

Lastly, I employed purposeful sampling to select the 11 participants for this research study. Purposeful sampling allowed me to properly identify and select the participants that possessed the knowledge regarding the lived experience of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. The participants could properly articulate their experiences and answer the questions expressly while reflecting on their past and present experiences (Bernard, 2002; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Spradley, 1979).

Data Collection

A phenomenological approach was utilized in this study to collect the data. The phenomenological approach helped gather robust and healthy responses from this small sample-sized population (Lester, 1999). When gathering data, I maintained an open mindset and remained unbiased (Vagle, 2018). This was especially important when performing research as Vagle (2018) guided novice researchers through how a phenomenological approach should be conducted and what that process should look like. The interview process is an effective way to

obtain valuable information because the research is placed on the voices and views of the participants (Young et al., 2018). Also, interviewing the participants provided structure with an organized system guided by a central question with additional probing questions that allowed them to answer questions from their viewpoint regarding their lived experiences openly.

When conducting semistructured interviews with a specific population, such as Black entrepreneur women, personally interviewing the targeted audience is the best option (Creswell, 2014). In all the interview sessions conducted via Zoom, I respected and treated all participants equally to ensure the accuracy of the information. I also wrote and typed notes from the interview conversations and audio recordings. Finally, I strictly followed the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the appropriate participants participated in this research study. This confirmed that the data collected was relevant and prosperous for the outcome of this study.

Participants' interview responses were recorded, and after each scheduled interview, the data were transcribed for proper documentation. The questions were open-ended to allow both the participant and researcher the opportunity to build a healthy rapport. The interview questions also sought to gain a high-level view into the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women, and this allowed them to share their lived experiences freely regarding their entrepreneur journey, personal development, and the affect it had on their self-identity.

Finally, I provided the interviewees with a copy of the interview transcript for their review. I received any feedback for additional information they wanted to provide or any revisions/corrections they wanted to include. This ensured that all information was accurate. This also included all notes that were taken during the interview session, i.e., noting hand and facial gestures and the tone of their voices when speaking of specific subject matters, which assisted in capturing the lived experiences of the interviewees. Then, this information will be stored on the

researcher's personal computer, which will be safely protected via password and locked in a safe place (Creswell, 2014). All names of the interviewees were altered to ensure that their identity was safeguarded.

Trustworthiness

As I reviewed and researched all protocols of this study, I realized my responsibility to be unbiased while remaining open-minded and free of all preconceived thoughts, which would cause a mindset of assumptions that could affect the participant's interviews regarding their lived experiences relating to this study. Trustworthiness, considered worthy for readers, is described as the degree of confidence in the data collected, data interpretation, and the methods employed to ensure that the quality of the study meets protocol and procedures (Amankwaa, 2016).

Adler (2022) pointed out the importance of trustworthiness in all research. Furthermore, Adler (2022) wrote that qualitative research is often thought of by some in the scientific community as being less credible than quantitative research; therefore, this study needs to be researched with a goal of trustworthiness in mind from beginning to end. To keep in line with the trustworthiness of this study, I kept detailed notes and a research journal of notes when interviewing the participants. I also retained daily reflections that kept me motivated to stay true to the research and participants taking part in this study. These steps ensured that I remained a trustworthy researcher who recognized the importance of keeping the interviewee's information safe as well as themselves.

Interview Protocol

The protocol surrounding this research study included 11 semistructured interview questions that were open-ended and parallel with all research questions (see Appendix F). The total number of participants interviewed was 11 Black entrepreneur women. As the researcher, I

took additional responsibility. I reviewed all parts of this research study, including (a) the research topic, (b) the purpose of the research, (c) research questions, and (d) interview questions. If additional information was needed, I contacted the interviewees and scheduled a follow-up meeting to discuss and clarify any unanswered/unclear questions.

As the interviewer, I asked the participants 11 semistructured, open-ended questions that were parallel with the research questions. To ensure that all questions were clarified, if needed, I scheduled a follow-up meeting with each interviewee. As stated, the demographics of the interviewees are in the Facebook Group A Billionaire's Blueprint, and the participants are in the United States. Next, all interviews were conducted via Zoom, and to capture the complete interview accurately, I used Fathom video conferencing for audio recordings and transcriptions. I also took notes. Before starting the interview, I verified all contact information and then proceeded to ask the interview questions that aligned with the research questions:

Demographic Information

Each Black woman entrepreneur's lived experience was analyzed using demographic information to identify their similarities and differences, their unique experiences, values, oppression, and challenges, and how they overcame those obstacles. The discussion with the participants begins by asking the following questions:

1. How many years have you been an entrepreneur?
2. What is your total number of years in a leadership role?
3. What is your level of education? (1) Didn't graduate; (2) High School Graduate; (3) Some College; or (4) College Graduate
4. Are you between the age of: (1) 20-30; (2) 30-40; (3) 40-50; (4) 50-60; or (5) over 60

5. Are you in the average economic status of: (1) Below \$28,000; (2) \$55,000 - \$89,000; or (3) \$149,000 - Up

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

To assess the key factors defining this study, I first acknowledged that being a Black entrepreneur businesswoman, a professional, and a researcher, I sought to understand the lived experiences surrounding Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. Historical data provided lists of important assumptions and labels plaguing Black women. Thus, these assumptions and labels continue to be a part of the lived experiences of Black women, which have hindered their personal growth and have had a significant effect on their self-identity (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019).

Assumptions

The first assumption was that all the participants were telling the truth, that they were Black women entrepreneurs. This was important because this study was designed to explore the lived experience of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and how it affected their self-identity. The study also assumed participants would adequately provide answers to selected interview questions while being honest and precise.

It was also assumed that participants chosen to participate in this study must have experienced some of these problems as they continue to grow and challenge societal norms on their entrepreneurial journey. Because of these assumptions, hindrances, historical data, and challenges as a Black woman in an entrepreneur position, each participant received a detailed outline of the study before engaging in the interview process. The outline assisted in the data collection process and provided a path to understanding the lived experiences of the 11 participants participating in this study (Mishra & Dey, 2022).

Lastly, it was assumed by voluntary consent that each participant would be truthful regarding their lived experiences and share those experiences with the researcher. Each participant also received instructions regarding the interview process, an outline of the primary interview and probing questions, and a consent form to sign. The consent form ensured that all participants' information and conversations were confidential, as outlined in the IRB guidelines.

Limitations

It was important to define the limitations of this study because it established boundaries, reservations, and exceptions that could occur in research studies (Creswell, 1994). This phenomenological research study had several limitations. First, the sample size was small. Second, the study focused on one demographic and only recruited participants from a Facebook group that may not represent the larger population of Black entrepreneur women. Third, in alignment with Simkus (2022), the study was limited to participants having at least 5 years of experience.

The major potential limitation of this study was the small sample size and its focus on a specific population. The phenomenological approach was unsuitable for capturing data from a large group of Black women entrepreneurs across the United States, creating potential barriers to generalizability because the participants were narrating from their own lived experiences, which may not speak to all Black entrepreneur women. This study also considered that the findings may have a different outcome because the sample size is small, and there are differences in Black entrepreneur women's experiences due to their level of education, the type of cultural exposure in a Black community, and family dynamics.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this research study included Black entrepreneur women who were at various personal and business levels in their lives and had different life experiences. The participants received equal treatment and were asked to answer the same questions. Additionally, this study did not reflect the general population of Black entrepreneur women who experienced success and engaged in learning when investing in personal development, which yielded a strong and positive self-identity.

Ethical Considerations

Upon starting a research study, ethical considerations are important for conducting healthy research guided by principles that direct the research design (Eyo & Hasan, 2021). I considered these principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, potential for harm, and anonymity. Notwithstanding, all participants acknowledged and signed the informed consent form (Appendix D) before each interview.

After carefully reading the guidelines for ethical consideration, I understood my responsibility as the researcher to follow the guidelines of ACU and not to contact participants or collect any data regarding this study without the approval of ACU's IRB committee.

At the appropriate time, I followed the lead of my dissertation chair, and upon approval of all content, I moved forward and applied for IRB approval, IRB-2024-18 (see Appendix A). Next, ethical considerations required that I treat each participant reasonably, be respectful, and embrace personal integrity while engaging with them in this study. When collecting data, I stored the data received on my Google Drive; this is a private setting, meaning that I am the only one with access. All information, notes, and videos will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the methodology of this study. This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. The phenomena assisted in providing an understanding of situations that Black entrepreneur women face and placed historical context around their personal development and the potential implications it may have on their self-identity. When employing a qualitative research design, I interpreted Black entrepreneur women's beliefs, feelings, and perceptions, which clarifies the phenomenon being explored in this study (Hammersley, 2000).

The participants chosen for this study had no less than 5 years of entrepreneurial experience. The study is researched through the lens of a phenomenological approach. The information I researched and provided will help examine the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women and the nature of the challenges and barriers that may be linked to their personal development and the effect on their self-identity (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Approaching this research from a qualitative approach will help to obtain a holistic view into the lives of Black entrepreneur women and how the barriers, struggles, labels, gender, and SBW model may have caused their personal development to be at a standstill, which in turn affect their self-identity. By conducting semistructured interviews with selected participants, I gained in-depth information regarding their lived experiences, views, and perspectives regarding their personal development and self-identity. Lastly, Chapter 3 provided pertinent details surrounding the methodology that guided the methodology design and the data collection process that ensured ethical guidelines guided the study. This study also followed ACU's IRB guidelines. In Chapter 4, I discussed the results and findings derived from the data collected and provided clarity and support for the research and interview questions.

Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative study was designed to explore the lived experience of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. This research study provided in-depth information about the lives of Black entrepreneur women's perceptions, views, and lived experiences regarding their entrepreneurial and personal development journey and the various ways it affected their self-identity. In this chapter, 11 Black entrepreneur women shared their perceptions regarding their lived experiences of personal development, which provided rich context into their negative or positive self-identity because it is a predictor of behaviors. Prior research shares commonalities regarding the treatment of Black women and the challenges they face in starting a business because of a lack of funding, not being invited to the table because of the color of their skin, and not purchasing their services and products.

This exploratory study investigated the lived experiences of the 11 Black entrepreneur women's personal development and how it affected their self-identity, in addition to their challenges, barriers, financial woes, and the strategies to assist with overcoming historical vicissitudes. As part of this research study, I interviewed 11 Black entrepreneur women and captured their lived experiences surrounding their personal development and it's affected on their self-identity.

The research questions guided and researched Black women's (1) personal development journey, (2) their views and perceptions of their self-identity, (3) the affected that personal development has on their self-identity, and (4) the holistic lived experiences of struggles, challenges, and oppression as Black businesswomen (see Appendix E).

The primary research question guiding this study was:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?

To answer the primary research question, two secondary research questions were used:

RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?

RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?

The interview process consisted of recruiting 11 Black entrepreneur women. Participants were asked five demographic questions and 11 semistructured open-ended questions (see Appendix E). Additionally, the researcher asked questions for clarification or to probe for further information that would fully satisfy the interview questions. To ensure that all transcripts were accurate, participants were asked for verification of the interview transcripts.

Participant Demographics

Participants were entrepreneurs, had no less than 5 years of experience, had operable businesses, and were between the ages of 25 and 65. The participants were all in the United States and operated various types of businesses (i.e., jewelry, fitness, stem research, coaching, and tax preparation). Participants were recruited from a Facebook group, which has approximately 60,700 members, who are predominantly Black entrepreneurial women.

Abilene Christian University's IRB was secured. A flyer was posted on the Facebook group page. The recruitment flyer provided the study's title, purpose, criteria, contact information, and the criteria required to participate in the study (see Appendix C). Lastly, it was assumed by voluntary consent that each participant would be truthful regarding their lived

experiences and share those experiences with the researcher. Each participant also received instructions regarding the interview process, an outline of the main interview and probing questions, and a consent form to sign. The consent form ensured that all participants' information and conversations were confidential, as outlined in the IRB guidelines.

The Facebook group members had their contact information listed for their businesses; therefore, each participant was emailed to ensure recruitment. Due to the size of the Facebook group, not all members are logged into the group daily; therefore, sending emails and posting the recruitment flyer provided an opportunity to recruit.

Overview of Participants Selected

The youngest entrepreneur's business was in operation for 5 years, and the oldest has been in operation for 45 years (see Table 2). Next, only one participant had some college but no degree; all other participants held an associate degree up to a doctorate. Four of the participants were between the ages of 30 to 40, four of the participants were between the ages of 40 to 50, one of the participants was between the ages of 50 to 60, and two of the participants were over the age of 60. Lastly, six participants' businesses were in the lower class financially, three participants operated businesses in the middle class, and two participants were in the upper class. The selected participants had various occupational businesses ranging from (1) tax services, (2) paparazzi jewelry, (3) childcare, (4) physical fitness, (5) financial advisors, and (6) branding coach, and more.

Table 2*Demographic Information for Black Entrepreneur Women*

Participant	Gender	Race	Years as an entrepreneur	Years in a leadership capacity	Education level	Age range	Economic status
P1	Female	Black	5 years	20+ years	College graduate	40-50	Lower class
P2	Female	Black	20 years	30+ years	Some college	40-50	Lower class
P3	Female	Black	6 years	20+ years	College graduate	30-40	Middle class
P4	Female	Black	8 years	20+ years	College graduate	30-40	Middle class
P5	Female	Black	10 years	15 years	College graduate	30-40	Lower class
P6	Female	Black	30 years	30 years	Some college	Over 60	Upper class
P7	Female	Black	10 years	10+ years	College grad	30-40	Middle class
P8	Female	Black	45 years	40 years	College grad	Over 60	Lower class
P9	Female	Black	20 years	20 years	College grad	40-50	Lower-middle-class (fluctuate)
P10	Female	Black	9 years	20 years	College grad	50-60	Lower class
P11	Female	Black	10 years	10 years	College grad	40-50	Upper class

Note. This demographic information was captured from the interviewed participants and carefully followed the interview protocol.

Interview Protocol

Eleven open-ended questions were asked of each participant. Interviews totaled 540 audio minutes of transcription. A total of 33 minutes was the shortest audio recording, and the longest was 60 minutes. Zoom captured the video recordings, and Fathom software captured the recording process for data transcription. Each participant received a copy of their transcription in PDF format to ensure accuracy and to clarify or make any revisions if needed. The research made corrections when the quality was poor or to correct the misspelling of words. Throughout the data collection and interview process, themes emerged.

To ensure the participants clearly articulated the questions' meaning, definitions for personal development, intersectionality, and self-identity were provided (see Appendix E). Based on Van Manen's (2015) hermeneutic phenomenological principles, data were analyzed to develop themes that allowed the assessment and evaluation of participant anecdotes. Themes emerged, and various reactions and interactions also shifted between the themes (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2019).

Display of Data and Thematic Analysis

Themes are composed of perceptions, experiences, feelings, values, and emotions held within the minds of participants/respondents of a study (Mishra & Dey, 2022). I followed Creswell's (2007) four-step method and mirrored his phenomenological guidelines as follows:

1. Prepared and organized the data collected to analyze themes.
2. The researcher used Phantom Video Transcribing Services to transcribe the data, and themes emerged and noted. Next, the researcher uploaded the transcripts to the 'Atlas.ti24 software; the Atlas.ti24 software produced a frequency word count of the most common words spoken by the 11 participants.

3. The themes emerged from the data coded and participant interviews.
4. Lastly, the data were interpreted and presented (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Themes were established and developed following these steps:

1. I gathered and organized the data and then reviewed the data for similarities.
2. Next, the data was color-coded, and I did an additional review of the data to identify themes while simultaneously reviewing transcripts, field notes, and a copy of the summaries produced by Phantom video transcribing services.
3. Lastly, I performed a final review to ensure all findings were accurate and authentic (Creswell, 2007). The 11 Black entrepreneurial women's lived experiences regarding their personal development and its effect on their self-identity were analyzed using emerging themes as described in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3*Categories: Interview Questions (IQ1–4)*

Research question	Interview question	Theme	Frequency word count of coded words	Number of times coded
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?	IQ1. Describe how your self-identity has empowered, inspired, and assisted you in your business.	The Black woman's consciousness	Aware	9
			Belong	11
			Confidence	41
			Deserve	0
			Empathy	2
			Integrity	7
			Knowledge	67
			Positive	35
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its impact on their self-identity?	IQ1. How has personal development propelled you to handle systematic oppression differently as a Black entrepreneur woman?	Self-determination	Professional	32
			Break	7
			Crazy	8
			Different	91
			Harder	21
			Income	13
			Knowledge	67
			Source	2
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?	IQ2. How has knowing your self-identity impacted your entrepreneurial journey (in both negative and positive ways)?	Self-awareness	Authentic	6
			Career	8
			Develop	161
			Feelings	123
			History	37
			Myself	151
			Strength	10
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?	IQ2. How has entrepreneurship reshaped your self-identity?	Purpose	Body	15
			Fulfillment	3
			Mentally	29
			Peace	3
			Physically	11
			Spiritually	18
			Stronger	26
			Woman	208

Research question	Interview question	Theme	Frequency word count of coded words	Number of times coded
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?	IQ3. Describe how your self-identity is displayed as a Black entrepreneur woman in adverse groups when you are the only Black entrepreneur woman present.	The opportunity to be seen and heard	Abilities	3
			Confidence	41
			Deserve	9
			Discipline	12
			Knowledge	67
			Listener	21
			Myself	151
			Positive	35
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?	IQ4. Describe how you have benefited from being a Black entrepreneur woman.	Lifestyle makeover	Prove myself	6
			Show them	38
			Appreciate	24
			Belief	15
			Better	37
			Hope	8
			Knowledge	67
			Opportunity	32
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?	IQ4. How independent are you when it comes to decision-making and exercising and implementing your ideas in your business?	Performance	Respect	10
			Outlook on life	1
			Support	21
			Community	80
			Decision	29
			Idea	45
			Intelligent	7
			Mentor	24
RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?	IQ4. What are some resources you have utilized to grow as a Black entrepreneur woman?	Growth mindset	Trust	7
			Books	19
			Community	72
			Conferences	36
			Networking	21
			Reading	44

Table 4*Categories: Interview Questions (IQ5–8)*

Research question	Interview question	Theme	Frequency word count of coded words	Number of times coded
RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?	IQ5. Discuss how you have overcome negative stereotypes, racism, gender biases, etc. as an entrepreneur and tell me how this may have impacted your finances, negative and positive.	Resilience	Believe	34
			Beyond	3
			Create	21
			Knowledge	67
			Mindset	29
			Plan	14
			Service	23
			Trust	7
RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?	IQ5. Tell me how this may have impacted your finances, negative and positive.	Financial challenges	Volunteer	1
			Work	145
			Approach	7
			Black	305
			Communication	8
			Difference	117
			Chance	11
			Finances	72
			Influence	9
			Limit	7
			Prove	6
			Racism	78
			Unsure	2
RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?	IQ6. Describe your personal development journey as a Black entrepreneur woman and how it has assisted in overcoming racial profiling and other barriers in your business & the impact it has had on your self-identity.	Empowered	Coach	40
			Education	51
			Focus	6
			Intelligence	5
			Knowledge	67
			Power	33
			Prayer	20
			Relax	3
			Strategies	53
			Time	133

Research question	Interview question	Theme	Frequency word count of coded words	Number of times coded
RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?	IQ7. What are some strategies, skills, knowledge, and ideas you have applied to empower you in your business as a Black entrepreneur woman?	Collaborative techniques for learning	Accountable	4
			Approach	7
			Consistency	19
			Determination	5
			Emotional Intelligence	1
			Goals	16
			Invisible	1
			Learn	98
			Understand	46
RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?	IQ8. What has been your biggest challenge in your business as a Black entrepreneur woman?	Her unique Blackness and oppression	Being a Black woman	305
			African	24
			Chance	11
			Communicating	8
			Finance	72
			Money	62
			Hope	8
			Understand	46
			Unsure	2
RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?	IQ8. Did you receive assistance to overcome the problem? If so, please describe.	Support system	Banks	70
			Community	80
			Self (reliant)	151
			Strategized	53
			Training	25

Table 5*Categories: Interview Questions (IQ9–11)*

Research question	Interview question	Theme	Frequency word count of coded words	Number of times coded
RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?	IQ9. Describe what personal development has taught you about success and failure.	Tenacity	Believe	34
			No failure	12
			Opposition	2
			Challenges	75
			Goals	16
			Oppression	62
			Positive	35
			Reflect	2
RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?	IQ10. What processes have you employed on behalf of your personal development journey to assist in your personal and business growth, and did they assist in overcoming historical challenges that you continue to face today?	Financial challenges	Affirmations	6
			Bible	3
			Centered	9
			Education	50
			Exercise	13
			Group Training	25
			Integrity	7
			Intentions	8
			Learning	98
			Meditation	6
			Mental	29
			Prayer	20
			Relax	3

Research question	Interview question	Theme	Frequency word count of coded words	Number of times coded
RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?	Q11. How do Black entrepreneur women describe the impact of empowerment in group settings?	Self-actualization	Affirmation	6
			Community	80
			Confident	41
			Energy	15
			Fighting	7
			Freedom	7
			Growing	52
			People	345
			Possible	22
			Power	33
RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?	IQ11. How did a group environment of other Black entrepreneur women inspire knowledge and ideas that influenced your finances, growth, and self-identity?	Turning opportunities into challenges	Preparation	41
			Pushing	12
			Attract	1
			Change	7
			Information	33
			Interact	14
			Investment	11
			Possibility	22
			Others	16
			Together	45
			Understand	46

Creswell's (2007) process allowed me to engage in the open coding process which allowed for the data to be broken down into smaller parts and assisted with a deeper dive into the interview questions, and provided broader concepts that linked the literature review to the concepts from the participants interviews which helped to identify themes and provided various patterns that were discovered from the collection of data and themes emerged in clusters.

Open coding also allowed me to identify important themes, and the themes continuously surfaced and resurfaced, and additional codes again emerged allowing multiple themes to form. For example, RQ1 answered IQ 1 through 4, the secondary question RQ1a answered IQ 5 through 7, and the secondary question RQ1b answered IQ 8 through 11. From each IQ themes emerged. The themes were then analyzed, group together according to the word frequency count, and the main themes were formed from the clustered themes that were formed by the RQ. Then, RQ1 Theme 1 "*Reinvention Process*," emerged as the main theme from reviewing and analyzing the frequency word count that was created from the IQ. An example of the words that were frequently used were *knowledge* spoken by the participants (67 times), *development* spoken by the participants (161 times), *understanding* spoken by the participants (146 times) and so on.

The semistructured interview process provided the means to address all parts of the research study. According to Jamshed's (2014) study, semistructured interviews captured in-depth, systematic, comprehensive, and effective responses that maximize the interviewer and interviewee's time. The participants elaborated on their experiences and perspectives; when responses were unclear, they responded with examples of situations that provided insight and views connected to the interview questions. All participants were comfortable answering the questions; they were bold, honest, and upfront about their experiences as Black entrepreneur women, their personal development, and their self-identity journey.

All participants were professional, courteous, and open in speaking of their negative and positive lived experiences and remained poised in responding to the interview questions. This chapter will provide a detailed summary of the recruited participants and an accurate account of their lived experiences, perspectives, and views regarding their entrepreneurial journey, personal development, and its effect on their self-identity. I respected and addressed all participants professionally regarding their responses to the interview questions. If, for any reason, the participants did not want to respond, I advised each participant I would proceed without a response.

Familiarizing and Organizing Data

Transcripts and videos were reviewed several times to ensure that all data were presented in its proper context. Formatting changes were also made as necessary. In addition to deleting extra lines and unclear words, the transcripts were checked for spelling errors. Atlas.ti24 software program was used to produce the frequency word count to develop the categories. To further ensure that participants made valuable contributions, I uploaded raw data of the participant transcripts into the Atlas.ti24 software program. For example, I *only* uploaded the transcription of the research participants' words, less the questions and any words I stated. Uploading raw data of the transcripts provided an accurate count of *only* the participant's words, which provided their thoughts, frequency of thoughts, vocabulary, and multiple uses of the participant's words, and this produced the total number of times each participant stated the word repetitively, which utters importance of communicating their lived experience. Four themes emerged from the interviews of 11 Black entrepreneur women that discussed their lived experiences surrounding personal development and its effect on their self-identity. To also assist with emerging themes, a frequency chart of words was generated utilizing the Atlas.ti24 software

program. The word frequency chart is listed in alphabetical order along with a visual representation of the raw data imported from the coding and synthesizing of individual transcripts of the participant's interview.

The frequency word count chart also accounts for frequently used words for Participants 1 through 11, ranging alphabetically from A through Z. Frequency word counts result from the words spoken by the 11 participants, along with the frequency of times each word and phrase was spoken, which led to the emergence of themes. Four themes emerged from each of the interview questions presented to the participants along with the frequency word count generated in Atlas.ti24.

Searching for Themes Using Categories

Following Creswell's (2014) guide, I utilized the Fathom video conferencing software to transcribe the responses of the 11 participants. Next, I downloaded the 11 transcripts, color-coded the participants responses, and uploaded the raw data into the Atlas.ti24 software program. A frequency word count for each participant was generated and downloaded from the Atlas.ti24 software as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

For example, I only uploaded the transcription of the research participants' words, less the questions and any words I stated. Uploading the participant's transcripts provided an accurate count of only the participant's words, which provided their thoughts, frequency of thoughts, vocabulary, and numerous times each participant utilized a word, and this produced the total number of times each participant stated the exact words which utter importance of communicating their lived experiences. Afterward, I circled back to the participants' transcripts and color-coded essential words and phrases to ensure accuracy and capture robust explanations showcasing the participants' lived experiences' intentions and perceptions. As I reviewed the

participant's transcripts, I was able to match them with the word frequency count chart to develop themes

Utilizing Creswell's (2014) template, I reviewed the transcript of each participant's responses and placed them in a coding matrix to code the study for the development of themes. The Research Questions (RQ), which consist of the main RQ (RQ1) through two secondary RQ (RQ1a and RQ1b) along with 11 Interview Questions (IQ), are listed as follows: RQ1 align with IQ1-4; RQ1a align with IQ5-7; and RQ1b align with IQ8-11 and noted as follows: Summary of Themes and RQ's aligning with IQ as shared in Table 6.

Table 6

Summary of Themes

RQ1 Theme 1 IQ1-4	RQ1a Theme 2 IQ5-8	RQ1b Theme 3 IQ9-11	RQ1b Theme 4 IQ9-11
Reinvention process	Her unique Blackness and oppression	Turning challenges into opportunities	Self-actualization
The Black woman's consciousness	Resilience	Tenacity	Affirmation
Self-determination	Financial challenges	Self-efficacy	Community
Self-awareness	Empowerment	Self-actualization	Confidence
Purpose	Collaborative techniques for learning	Turning challenges into opportunities	Energy
The opportunity to be seen and heard	Her unique Blackness		Fighting freedom
Lifestyle makeover	Oppression		Growing
Performance	Support system		People
Growth mindset			Possible
			Power
			Preparation
			Pushing

Presentation of Findings

The four themes that emerged from participant responses were reinvention process, her unique Blackness and oppression, turning challenges into opportunities, and self-actualization. The participants discussed their lived experiences and provided examples for additional clarity that synced with the purpose of this research study.

Theme 1: Reinvention Process

The reinvention process emerged from RQ1, and the findings suggest that Black women were aware of their self-identity, the images and labels that plague their existence, yet these Black women entrepreneurs possessed self-determination, and self-awareness, which assisted them in walking in their purpose. Throughout the interview process, the participants spoke of their lived experiences surrounding their personal development self-identity, their entrepreneurial journey, and how the various challenges and barriers had affected their self-identity, businesses, and overall well-being. Their expressions of knowing their self-identity and being knowledgeable of negative labels were a big part of their conversation. However, the conversation was not void of the importance of engaging in personal development and its importance in their lives. They provided examples of growing spiritually, going through personality changes, standing strong as business professionals as Black women.

For example, the frequency word count noted knowledge being voiced by the women 67 times, as well as the frequency word count noting the word *different* being voiced 91 times. More importantly, these Black women used the frequency word count *feelings* 123 times when speaking about their personal development journey and its impact in their lives. The reinvention process entails acknowledging the personal development work the women engaged in while speaking on the challenges and barriers that oppress them in their personal and business lives.

The participants responded to RQ1 which consisted of 4 interview questions where the women spoke of their consciousness as Black women, self-determination, self-awareness and performance which led to the emerging theme the reinvention process with the following responses being noted:

Participant 1 stated: “I’m not devoid of knowledge, and I can say if it looks like a duck quack like a duck, it’s a duck. If you disrespect me, I am giving you the same disrespect back.” Participant 2 stated: “Now that I know myself better, I took my feelings out of things and looked at logic, which helped me navigate better.” While Participant 3 said: “My self-identity has harmed my entrepreneurial journey because I would say getting caught up in my feelings trying to help people that do not need help.”

Participant 4 stated:

Before making changes, I did not like people. I did not even know my family and, therefore, I didn’t like myself. But now I have changed, and I know who I am, and I am no longer the person I was before I became a Christian. I was angry with people; I didn’t like people, and I didn’t even like my family; therefore, I didn’t like myself.

Participant 5 stated: “Engaging in personal development has inspired me to grow, being an entrepreneur has stretched me and caused me to be resilient.”

Theme 2: Her Unique Blackness and Oppression

Her unique Blackness and oppression emerged from RQ1a where our interview questions were presented to the participants. The research question asked the participants, “How Black entrepreneur women perceived oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses and what are the strategies applied to overcome/resist them? The interview questions were as follows: The participants talked about their greatest challenges and how they overcame

them, being resilient, financial challenges, being empowered and their support system. It was clear that these Black women understood the power of their uniqueness and how being a women and Black keeps them in a state of oppression.

The participants provided various responses, mostly speaking of money problems and getting people to understand them as Black women, being unsure of themselves, and needing to be given a chance. However, one of the participants provided a powerhouse response and stated, “my biggest challenge is being a Black woman.” In fact, “being a Black woman” was noted 305 times according to the frequency word count. Although the words unique and challenging seem to be an oxymoron, Black businesswomen are in a unique position. However, these women are aware of and know what their challenges are and note in their discussions that they are working on them. The frequency word count noted education 51 times, learn 98 times, and finances 72 times.

The participants stated strategies they used to combat the challenges (i.e. they read books to increase their knowledge about themselves and how to handle displaced situations), so books became a resilience resource. Although the women faced racism, challenges, and oppression daily, they did not stray away from their ability to stay positive, continue to gain knowledge, invest in training, and most of all they recognized they had to continue to work hard and go over and beyond what was asked or expected of them. Lastly, the women spoke of how challenges have taught them to be resilient, keep believing in themselves, and keep learning.

The participants were asked the following interview questions: discuss how you have overcome negative stereotypes, racism, gender biases, and so on, as a Black entrepreneur woman. Tell me how this may have impacted your finances, negative and positive; describe your personal development journey as a Black entrepreneur woman and how it has assisted in

overcoming racial profiling and other barriers in your business and the impact it has had on your self-identity; what are some strategies, skills, knowledge, and ideas you have applied to empower you in your business as a Black entrepreneur woman? And what has been your biggest challenge in your business as a Black entrepreneur woman? Did you receive assistance to overcome the problem? If so, please describe.

Participant 1 stated:

My biggest challenge is I think I hold myself back a lot more than I need to because I am still unsure of myself. Sometimes I have that unsure moment because I am not sure about this; and I should be able to post material to contact people on social media, but I have not put it out there yet. Instead of holding myself back, I need to just go ahead and put it out there.

Participant 2 stated:

I do a lot of audiobooks or regular books to overcome stereotypes. I am one of those people. I like books such as *Think and Grow Rich*. I have read the secrets to success, such as *Rich Dad Poor Dad*, which I am reading right now. I read a lot of audiobooks to give myself the help needed to talk to myself out of unwisely responding to unjust situations. I think it is not so much everybody else, but I must ensure that I stay aligned with myself to handle challenging situations.

Participant 3 stated:

I believe that a considerable part of overcoming challenges is in our mindset, and for the past years in business, I have learned that no matter what happens, if we can believe in ourselves, it is always possible for us to overcome challenges. So, I have been pressing my way through things whenever I am down. I look for knowledge, whether I am taking

a training course or reading a book or going for meditative practices, to ensure that I can come back to whatever situation that I am going to face and face it with bravery.

Participant 4 stated: “I probably have experienced racial profiling, but I do not pay attention to it much. But personal development is the foundation of me dealing with issues in my business.”

Theme 3: Turning Challenges Into Opportunities

To answer the primary research question (RQ1b), four interview questions were used to respond to the following questions: describe what personal development has taught you about success and failure, what processes have you employed on behalf of your personal development journey, and did they assist in overcoming historical challenges that you continue to face today, and how do Black entrepreneur women describe the effects of empowerment in group settings? How did a group environment of other Black entrepreneur women inspire knowledge and ideas that influenced their finances, growth, and self-identity?

Challenges are a way for one to grow and evolve in their personal and professional lives. The participants discussed how to turn their challenges into opportunities and collectively found that engaging in group settings assisted them in overcoming such challenges which, by engaging, they were able to get wins which turned into opportunities. The theme that emerged was turning challenges into opportunities. The participants shared their lived experiences stating they had to make investments in themselves, stay consistent, create interaction with others which assist in seeing the possibilities of what can be. However, some participants shared they basically had to lean on family to assist with their growth and financial needs. When interacting with others the participants noted this had a positive effect on their self-identity and kept them grinding in their businesses even when faced with challenges and being labeled negatively. The frequency word

count noted challenge 75 times, oppression 62 times, information 33 times, and possibility 22 times.

Participant 2 stated:

When I initially got into the financial space, people started looking at me like “why are you here?” It made me look like I would fail and couldn’t do it. I thought to myself, “I can learn it.” It was automatically assumed that I would fail. Then, they asked “why are you doing something different? And I stated, “because it's going to help my community.” That's number one. So why wouldn't I want it? I could have failed and let that get in my head, but I didn't, I kept going and mastered it.

Participant 5 stated:

The strong sense of community makes me feel confident because all of us as women have a common goal and when you find the right community; everyone is behind you pushing you, growing forward more than you can ever imagine. I am inspired by getting the opportunity to build my confidence level because I keep going to the next level. This allows me to have a lot of liberty in my life seeing women my same color coming together for the same cause, pushing the boundaries, taking away the restrictions that pushes me to my greatness in my personal life and business.

Participant 8 stated:

I will start off with emotional intelligence. I have done a lot of work around that because honestly if you do not understand people, if you do not understand yourself, you won't experience success. Business is really all about people and relationships. This is something I did not know before. I just really was looking at starting myself and we keep it pushing but everything is relational. I have got to understand people, so I have taken a

lot of time to learn about people. learn about how to influence people, to learn about how to win with people.

The second skill I have learned is collaboration. As a Black woman entrepreneur, I know we can get further if we realize that we need one another. We really do need one another to collaborate, to share ideas, and grow. The personal ideas I have had have been blown to the size and to the magnitude that they have reached because of other women who saw it and said, did you know you could do it like this? And I have seen so much power in the community. For example, meeting people like yourself and the different women I have seen on this journey.

Theme 4: Self-Actualization

Self-actualization is at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid. As individuals satisfy the lower needs, they move to the next level eventually reaching the highest level of self-actualization. To reach the self-actualization level is the ability to be the best version of oneself. Everyone expresses self-actualization differently and reaches the self-actualization level at a different time also. Self-actualization emerged as the recurring theme as the participants discussed the effect of their lived experience when engaging in group settings as it elevated their mindset, and potentials regarding their self-identity.

The interview questions surrounding RQ1b was as follows: describe what personal development has taught you about success and failure; what processes have you employed on behalf of your personal development journey, and did they assist in overcoming historical challenges that you continue to face today? And finally, how do Black entrepreneur women describe the impact of empowerment in group settings? How did a group environment of other Black entrepreneur women inspire knowledge and ideas that influenced their finances, growth,

and self-identity? The frequency word count notes the participants saying community 80 times, people 345 times, challenges 75 times, and prayer 20 times all which attributed to the emerging theme *self-actualization*.

The participants provided various responses to communicating and coming together in group environments, mostly speaking of money problems, getting people to understand them as Black women, being unsure of themselves and needing to be given a chance. The people piece was a big part of the conversation noting they enjoyed being surrounded by like-minded women and although they were sometimes challenged by being treated unfairly; they took time to reflect on life lessons of their failures and successes.

One participant stated she loved seeing women fight for their cause in a group setting because it allowed them to push through the boundaries they have set. However, there was a conversation around being in a negative environment when being in group settings, and with one woman stating it did not detour her from wanting to continue in spaces where groups come together. However, the women spoke of being the best version of themselves when they are in group settings which is the self-actualization level.

Participant 3 stated:

Group environments are impressive. When you are in the room, you are going to be able to interact with the realm of possibilities within others. Once you see them interacting, it becomes possible for you to attract people within the group. That group environment has really impacted my life and has inspired me to put my programs out there and stop procrastinating. It has also inspired me to be able to learn, I want to be able to see what needs to be done, and then learn to do it also, I can function as my best self.

Participant 5 stated:

I have had some negative situations occur in group settings, but I refuse to allow that to dictate how I am supposed to interact with other entrepreneurial women. African American women for sure because in that space it is different, and I can be the highest version of myself. You do not have a corporate mindset. I am not competing against you. You are not competing against me. Even if we're in the same fields, there's enough food out there for everybody to eat. This way of thinking leaves room for everybody to treat you fairly and people in the group won't treat you like an outsider and recognize we are all entrepreneurs, and we should uplift one another, and I love that energy. I also love conversating. I love the environment. When I tell you my soul drinks it in because it's just a different frame of mind. The 9:00 to 5:00 frame of mind is completely different from the entrepreneurial frame of mind.”

Participant 6 stated:

I get it by being in group settings. Yes, with other people who are doing the same thing I do or being in the vendor settings. Where there are different vendors doing different things, not only presenting my information, but walking around and seeing what other people do and how they present themselves. Yes, it gives me a sense of empowerment and it's my highest-level self, it does, because for one, I take the initiative to walk over to them, present myself to them and talk to them about what I have to offer. So, I am not just sitting there waiting for people to come to me. As I said, I go to the people. That collaboration piece can be very powerful.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided summaries of the research and interview questions along with the responses from various participants that were recruited and interviewed to participate in this

research study. The four themes that emerged from this study were reinvention process, her uniqueness Blackness and oppression, turning challenges into opportunities, and self-actualization. This research study was designed to provide a holistic view with clarity surrounding the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity. To broaden the information provided, the researcher sought to provide information that shines a light on these 11 Black entrepreneur women's challenges in their businesses and personal lives, barriers, gender biases, cultural differences, and lack of funding to operate their businesses. The study also takes a deeper look into the Black woman's self-identity, historical challenges and how they are perceived in society.

As the researcher, I found during the coding process, Black entrepreneur women have commonalities, and their lived experiences resonate when it comes to their lived experiences, views, and perceptions as entrepreneur women. In Chapter 5, a summary with the findings regarding this study will be provided along with recommendations which aims to assist Black entrepreneur women in being productive in their businesses, continuous engagement in personal development which will enhance their images in their self-identity and self-worth. Chapter 5 will also include a discussion regarding the purpose of the study and how it was identified and a request for suggestions and recommendations for future research in expanding on this study by looking at other areas that would enhance the growth and assist Black entrepreneur women to overcome their overall challenges and enhance their growth.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative phenomenological study, Black entrepreneur women described their personal development and its affect n their self-identity. Eleven participants shared their experiences regarding personal development and how it affected, shaped, and reshaped their self-identity. The 11 Black entrepreneur women acknowledged being oppressed, marginalized, invisible, overlooked, and underpaid, as well as sharing strategies they used to remain resilient as they pursue their purpose. Personal development was an essential part of their journey and with boldness they provided an in-depth look at their abilities and the complexities to remain confident, tenacious, and self-determined as one participant stated, “you just figure things out,” which shaped and reshaped their self-identity in many ways.

Current research notes race and gender are a huge part of the challenges that Black women face in their businesses, and this places them in a unique position apart from all others (Spates et al., 2020). Simply put, Black entrepreneur women contend, and face challenges that other entrepreneurs do not face (Jackson & Sanyal, 2019). This is not just a Black entrepreneur woman’s problem but a societal problem because it limits the revenue flow in the economy meaning this is a group of women that are limited to adding societal wealth, so it places everyone at a disadvantage to grow, thrive, and leave a legacy for others (Obschonka et al., 2015).

Furthermore, this study provided a high-profile view of 11 Black entrepreneur women’s stories of being invisible, overlooked, lack of funding, and Black-on-Black rejection of services and how they overcome these day-to-day challenges by embracing personal development. Additionally, these 11 participants discussed how personal development has affected their self-identity while overcoming historical barriers of oppression.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in this research paper support the data collected from 11 Black entrepreneur women and will speak to implementing a system of best business practices, driving results, and increasing production as to produce economic dollars, engaging in a holistic approach embracing personal development and its importance in their businesses, personalities, emotional intelligence, self-awareness, strategic and critical thinking while empowering their self-identity to overcome systemic racism and oppression.

The data guided the findings and supported areas of strength and opportunities and identified ways that Black entrepreneur women can be productive in their businesses and become visible in building effective business relationships while gaining respect and acknowledgment in the entrepreneurial space. In addition to Black feminist thought contributing and guiding this research study, intersectionality theory also provided its contribution and provided a valuable contribution to this study as well. Crenshaw's (2013) intersectionality theory is discussed in the next section.

Intersectionality Theory

The interviews conducted with 11 participants provided a pathway for a variety of emerging themes. The themes revealed commonalities between Black entrepreneur women's lived experiences and the connection with Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. In intersectionality theory it poses multiple social identities as overlapping (i.e., race, gender, sexuality, and class), contributing to the specific kind of oppression and discrimination one experiences (Crenshaw, 2013).

Crenshaw (2013) makes it clear what intersectionality is not and says in Time Magazine, "It is not identity politics on steroids. It is not a mechanism to turn White men into the new

pariahs. It is a lens, a prism, for seeing how various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz, 2020, p. 1). Inequality for women means women get paid less for their work and over one’s lifetime this multiplies and worsens. Such has been the issue in the lives of Black entrepreneur women. For the Black woman, the categories regarding race, gender, and other identity categories mean a way for mainstream America to dominate and control her life (Crenshaw, 1991). This domination crosses all aspects of the Black woman’s life and forms a framework where the power of others places her at a disadvantage, marginalizes her, and makes her different placing her at a place of ‘not being significant.’

Intersectionality theory overlaps multiple social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, and contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual. The overlapping systems of intersectionality theory showed the systemic oppression and discrimination that has held Black women down from the beginning of time and continues to contribute to their social identities, race, gender, sexuality, and class (Crenshaw, 2013).

The next section will respond to 11 Black entrepreneur women who share the overlapping systems of intersectionality as businesswomen, the challenges, barriers, oppression, and financial woos they faced daily. Emerging themes will be introduced also along with areas of strength and opportunities while finding ways to improve Black women’s entrepreneurial, professional development, and self-identity experience which will allow overall growth in their financial, business relationships, and overall developmental experiences which will assist in improving their self-identity when showing up in society.

Interpretation of Participant Responses

For this study, after being properly vetted, 11 Black entrepreneur women were recruited from a Facebook group and shared their personal lived experiences regarding their entrepreneurship, personal development, and self-identity journey. The participants openly discussed their challenges, barriers, financial struggles, and strategies they used to overcome oppression, how they embrace and engage in personal development, and the affect and reshaping that the challenges, personal development, and intersection of systematic racism had on their self-identity.

The following themes emerged based on the data collected: (1) reinvention process, (2) her unique Blackness and oppression, (3) turning challenges into opportunities, and (4) self-actualization. Let us hear from the 11 Black entrepreneur women who were interviewed.

Research Questions

Specific comments provided by the participants paved a pathway to respond to the research questions. The interview questions assisted in holistically providing answers to each research question. However, RQ1b was supported by the emergence of two themes. The interview questions focused on answering the research question and covered questions regarding personal development, self-identity, and being a Black entrepreneur woman. The results in this chapter provided clarity surrounding the importance of personal development and its effect on Black entrepreneur women's self-identity.

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?

The participants responses to RQ1 were taken from the data of four IQ's that were posed to the participants as follows. IQ1, asked the participants to describe how self-identity had

empowered, inspired, and assisted in the growth of their business; and had personal development propelled them to handle systematic oppression differently as a Black entrepreneur woman. IQ2 asked the participants how personal development has propelled them in handling systematic oppression differently and reshaped their self-identity as Black entrepreneur women. IQ3 asked participants to describe how their self-identity is displayed as Black entrepreneur women in adverse groups when you are the only Black entrepreneur woman present. And finally, IQ4 the participants described the benefits of being a Black entrepreneur woman and their independence in decision making. The participants also spoke on various resources they utilized to grow as Black entrepreneur women.

Theme 1: Reinvention Process

The women were asked to describe how their self-identity had empowered, inspired, and assisted them in their businesses. Throughout the interview process, the participants had several things in common: continually seeking knowledge and their ability to stay positive. Leigh (1999) stated that identity and personal development are a result of past experiences, therefore, it is important to examine how these past experiences are perceived by minority groups to better understand how education influences one's personal development. If past experiences are indicative of the future to a successful life for Black women, then their futures will remain challenged and with no success. Personal development is a main component for personal and business growth and, not knowing who you are and letting society define one's person and character can be harmful holistically in one's life. Therefore, it is important for Black women to redesign their lives through personal development which will assist them in their self-identity.

The women in this study were asked to describe how their self-identity had empowered, inspired, and assisted them in their businesses. The Black woman's consciousness was inspired by Collin's (2022) writings and states the Black woman understands her life every day and the

changes that occur. When she understands these everyday changes, she then becomes empowered.

I asked the participants “what are your lived experiences as Black entrepreneur women and your personal development and its effects on your self-identity?” Personal development provides an understanding of one’s strengths and weaknesses and how change can occur when one engages in various steps to increase their awareness of their self-identity. The women knew who they were and talked about areas of opportunity needed in their lives to experience empowerment.

The need to understand themselves was a topic of discussion, and one woman talked about putting the work in and over delivering and she still felt undervalued; yet someone else gets all the praise for the work she put in. This would place anyone in a negative mindset which translates to not wanting to perform. Another woman discussed how being empowered assisted and enabled her to interact with the possibilities within the realm of others. The need to feel empowered is a way for Black women to redesign the labels that have been placed on them which can translate to a growth mindset. Carol Dweck first introduced the growth mindset theory, and she describes a growth mindset as the ability for skills to be improved over time (Padır & Vangölü, 2023).

Participants stated they leveraged various materials that kept them relevant in their businesses. Communication with others and the community was a big part of the women’s conversation that enhanced a growth mindset. Participant 4 voiced her conversation regarding her self-identity before and after she became a Christian. She spoke about how she did not like people, her family or herself prior to becoming a Christian. However, she said finding her self-

identity through Christendom ushered a change into her life and she found herself and she is no longer the person she was before.

It is clear these women engaged in personal development, and it had a great effect on their self-identity. They are Black women who are conscious of who they are and the changes that have taken place in their personal and business lives. The secondary research question to assist in responding to the primary research question (RQ1) was as follows:

RQ1a. How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?

Research question (RQ1a) served as a guide for this qualitative study and the emerging theme, her unique Blackness and oppression, was developed from the participant responses to semistructured interview questions IQ5, IQ6, IQ7, and IQ8. Freckelton (2019) described resilience as what gets individuals through their misery and losses in their lives and then fortifies individuals to recover even where there is no clear understanding regarding how there is even a possibility of such a recovery. On the other hand, Goodkind et al.'s (2020) article refers to resilience as adapting well to adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or major ways stress enters one's life. The 11 participants were no less than stellar in their voices of "never give up" and exercising resilience in the face of such adversities. Some of the participants perceived oppression as being marginalized, treated like they were invisible, having to work harder than their White counterparts, and going over and beyond the call of duty doing minimal tasks. The participants unanimously had incidents in common regarding the challenges they faced as Black entrepreneur women and acknowledged they're differences from other cultures.

Theme 2: Her Unique Blackness and Oppression

Black women are unique in many ways. Her uniqueness does not start today but dates to history (Leigh, 1999). Winfrey-Harris (2015) noted that labels placed on Black women by society say, “Everything is wrong with the Black woman.” The women in this study discussed the biggest challenge in their businesses as Black entrepreneur women. Responses from the participants revealed that “being Black” was one of the biggest challenges the women faced, and the frequency word count noted *being Black* was stated 305 times. Additional discussions regarding their biggest challenges noted *financial challenges* with a frequency word count of 72 times. There were several women who discussed setting goals, stereotyping, becoming self-assured, and overcoming shyness.

Fox (2024), a contributor for Forbes magazine, gave an example of the uniqueness of Black women noting Black women face challenges and oppression that others do not face, and further stated “across the nation, Black-owned businesses generated over \$183 billion in annual revenue in 2023, and the expectation is this figure will continue to rise.” That is good news, and it gets better. Fox (2024) says Wells Fargo recently reported that 32.7% of Black women-owned businesses experienced a jump in their average revenue between 2019 and 2023 and outpaced women-owned businesses overall.

The uniqueness of the Black entrepreneurial woman’s experience lies in her ability to understand who she is, continue striving for more, and find ways to live her dreams. Although the words unique and challenging seem to be an oxymoron, Black businesswomen are in a unique position. All the women were aware of what their challenges were and discussed the various ways they were working to overcome them. One woman talked about her biggest challenge being she holds her myself back a lot more than she should because of her being

unsure of herself. While another participant stated she had to work on her communication. However, the most profound discussion with one of the participants was one woman saying her biggest challenge was simply “being a Black woman,” and White people place a limitation on her and feel she should only be working with Black people. Feeling different because of one’s skin color can leave anyone feeling useless and without a sense of purpose.

The discussion surrounding the Black community’s not buying from Black entrepreneurs is not a new topic, but it is one that some women mentioned throughout the interview. According to the Pew Research Center (2022), “41% say they feel their fates link to Black people around the world.” History confirms the competition among Blacks has a long history with reasons relating to skin color (i.e., light-skin versus dark-skin, enslaved people working in the big house versus working in the field), and this has been passed down from generation to generation where Black people compete and tear each other down (Keith & Herring, 1991).

Nevertheless, one participant mentioned how difficult it was to get the Brown community to buy her products and services. The uniqueness of the Black woman’s experience is a challenge for her; however, they are finding ways to grow and remain relevant. Lastly, Dr. Lakeysha Hallmon, founder and CEO of The Village, advised Black entrepreneur women to grow and remain “nimble and flexible,” and continue preparing for the learning curve (Fox, 2024). The Black women in this study recognized the problems they faced and acknowledged the importance of redesigning themselves.

RQ1b. How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (e.g., race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?

The participants spoke of racial biases, whether directly or indirectly. However, all 11

participants had strategies to face such challenges. Discussions from the participants on overcoming the negative stereotypes included gaining trust, believing in who they are, engaging in personal development, and more. However, preparation seems to be a central key to overcoming such biases. One participant even said she knew the attitude or thought process before she got to it. The ongoing treatment has taught them to be resilient, keep working on themselves, believe in themselves, and continue to seek and gain knowledge to deal with the adverse treatment. Despite these negative situations, participants discussed mindset and said it plays a positive role in getting through them. The emerging theme was turning challenges into opportunities. The number one frequently used word was *work*, voiced by the participants 145 times, and the second most frequently used word was *knowledge*, expressed by the participants 67 times. Listed below are the discussions from the participants regarding their lived experiences.

Theme 3: Turning Challenges Into Opportunities

The participants shared their lived experiences regarding investments they had to make to obtain opportunities which consisted of staying consistent, creating interaction with others which assisted in seeing the possibilities of what can be, and stepping outside their comfort zone. However, some participants shared they basically had to lean on family to assist with their growth and financial needs. When interacting with others the participants noted this had a positive effect on their self-identity and kept them grinding in their businesses. The emerging theme was turning challenges into opportunities. The most frequently used word was *understand* being voiced 46 times and *together* being voiced by the participants 45 times.

Many of the participants' responses were surrounded by stating they always look at possibilities. For Black entrepreneur women and the challenges, oppositions, and

intersectionality of systemic powers they encounter, they have proven to be women enriched with pushing through and past opposition. From the discussion, the women had a mindset that it does not matter whether you experience success or failure; you keep going, you do not stop. This push-through spirit and drive is known as tenacity. Monaghan (2000) described entrepreneurs as individuals who possess passion, are volatile, and are hungry for growth.

However, Monaghan (2000) explained that passion and hunger are insufficient to keep one going when things get tough. But Britto et al. (2023) described tenacity as being determined to keep going and push against all the odds and setbacks. For these women, tenacity keeps them going with a “don’t stop” attitude. The women voiced tenacity to turn their challenges into opportunities. Participant seven talked about pushing herself beyond the limits and venture into things she had never experienced, while another participant spoke on how professional development has taught her to believe in herself first and never give up. She was focused on continuing to push through all the challenges and she stated eventually she knew she would get opportunities.

The women in this study responded to the processes that assisted them in their personal development journey, which links to their personal and business growth. Self-efficacy assisted the women in maintaining belief in themselves, which assisted them in being motivated to pour into themselves and their companies, be mindful of their behaviors, and monitor their emotions. For these women, self-efficacy kept them anchored and centered with themselves; they continue to go forward when setbacks arrive and experience strong comebacks when they fail.

Bandura’s (2013) self-efficacy theory is the belief in oneself and the ability to achieve goals, having confidence in oneself, which controls one’s behavior and surroundings while staying motivated to achieve success. All the women acknowledged and indicated they engaged

in personal development. They realized the importance of having processes to remain connected to themselves so they can experience overall growth.

Theme 4: Self-Actualization

Theme 4 was also guided by RQ1b. Empowerment in group settings was a significant topic in this research study; therefore, the question posed to the participants was, “In group settings, how do Black entrepreneur women describe the effect of empowerment? Collins (2022) clearly described oppressed groups and how dominant groups perceive their language when they voice their ideas. Collins (2022) made it clear that if the language of oppressed groups was framed in a particular way or where the dominant group can understand it, they then feel comfortable hearing the oppressed group.

The lived experiences of these Black entrepreneur women expressed how a group environment changed their lives and how they saw people. The conversation around people was essential to the ladies, and the word *people* was voiced at least 345 times, while the word community was used at least 80 times. Therefore, people and community were significant factors in women’s group settings. For example, one woman discussed being in a group environment had a profound affect in her life and changed how she now sees people.

However, not all the women agreed about the positivity of group settings, and one woman described her experience in group settings as being hyped and excited while you are there; but when you leave the conference, the work should begin. However, she stated she did not feel challenged after leaving the group setting because she did not feel challenged and there was no sense of what she should do next. Then, you must pay \$300,000 for a ticket to get further information. Although the women enjoyed being in group settings, they did not all have a sense of urgency that led them to be a part of the group environment.

Collins (2022) solidified the importance of Black women coming together in group settings and says when Black women come together, they have shared experiences with racism, sexism, gender and cultural biases, and oppression that bind them together in group settings. This group setting fosters a “we” mindset, which connects everyone to the same voice and experiences (The Combahee River Collective, 2014). Although most women had positive things to say about being empowered in group settings, a few were less than impressed, with one woman stating she had experienced negativity in group settings. Still, she did not allow that to hinder her from participating in the group.

Black women are aware of the power and empowerment that group settings may have in their lives. They understand the power of collaboration, sharing stories and ideas, and meeting other women. Therefore, the women in this study agreed with Collin’s (2022) writings regarding the group setting, which assists the women in becoming centered with themselves, which stirs up ideas and increases their knowledge. Therefore, coming together can help women reach their highest self-actualization level (Maslow, 1993).

Conclusion

This study provided evidence that Black female entrepreneurs face different challenges than any other demographic in business. The participants in this study provided detailed but different views of their experiences, barriers, challenges, and other difficulties they had encountered as Black entrepreneur women in business. All the women voiced displeasure about how they experienced unfair treatment as Black entrepreneur women. They expressed how it made them feel when treated as tokens. They responded to how they handled these challenges (i.e., self-determination, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and a growth mindset).

During the interview process and observing the women's reactions and interaction, I discovered that resilience, tenacity, a strong support system, and maintaining a coach or consultant is crucial for Black entrepreneur women to be successful and progress in their personal lives in businesses. Personal development was a topic of conversation that led to the women expressing their lived experiences around learning, embracing knowledge, reading, joining communities, and networking, which was a big part of their ability to stay the course in their businesses. Personal development was one of the things all the women had in common. The study found Black women lacked opportunities to enter various group settings. When some of the women were allowed into multiple groups, they felt disrespected and mistreatment of some of the women or some women felt like they did not belong in the groups. This treatment left these Black women not being able to obtain funding for their businesses. This disrespectful treatment left the women feeling left out, and some had to look to family for assistance, along with relying on a full-time job to cover expenses.

There were also similarities where the participants spoke about their challenges as Black women in business and just being "a Black woman." The participants candidly explained their experiences and provided suggestions that would assist in preceding the stressors, challenges, and oppression that Black women experience. Some of the suggestions were (1) building better relationships by reaching out to White clients and colleagues, (2) trusting people, and (3) learning to minimize microaggressions, to name a few. However, the participants noted that self-identity is essential and that embracing their true self assisted them in looking at situations and people differently. Their conversation surrounding resilience gave a clear path to them not giving up on themselves and the changes they continually need to make and not giving up on their businesses as Black women.

Black entrepreneur women can be successful and slowly receive assistance because they create wealth and affect in society. However, according to the participants' lived experiences in this study, they are not receiving the assistance they need to succeed in their businesses without asking for help from family members or getting a full-time job to fund the business. The responses from the participants were positive regarding their participation in their personal development, which positively affect their self-identification as entrepreneurs and as Black women. Doing the personal development work while enduring the constant challenges of oppression has not made a significant effect on their being successful as Black entrepreneurial women.

Implications for Change

Developing and building solid relationships is essential to experiencing business success and enhancing one's social and self-identity. Personal development can enhance Black entrepreneur women's ability to create such relationships and give them a strong self-identity. However, Black entrepreneur women continue to suffer from the oppression of gender bias, cultural barriers, sexism, and racism without adequate support to overcome the challenges. This research study found a holistic need for better processes around solidifying and collaborating to close the gap between Black women and all other demographics. Due to this ongoing problem, Black entrepreneur women are engaging in some personal development such as reading books, viewing YouTube videos, and engaging in community and networking opportunities; however, they are not able to be a part of various groups and inner circles that would allow them to grow, thrive, and experience the success required for their businesses and personal growth.

At this time, I recommend the following implications for change. First, Black women should not only read books and videos but also join communities and network; they must learn to

pivot and continue to reach across the lines of racism and build positive relationships, and this will reshape the image of the negative image attached to them while providing a solid showing for creating a healthy business partnership. Also, Black women's personal development should include attending courses that provide high-impact, high-value learning to enhance another level of practical coaching to increase the ability to cross party lines and break racial barriers plaguing the Black woman's growth.

Next, to further minimize the stereotyping of Black entrepreneur women, the conversation surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion would be beneficial. A few of the women spoke about being in adverse groups, how they wanted to be respected, and how they would not tolerate it; however, there was no conversation about closing the gap and possibly fixing the problem. Therefore, investing in relationship or diversity coaches, consultants, or training will assist in understanding cultural, communication, listening, and partnership issues that stifle the growth of the participants and the adverse groups. Investing in diversity coaching or training would begin with understanding personality and cultural differences, historical data, and commonality and similarity differences. Lastly, I recommend that coaches, consultants, and Black entrepreneur women strengthen and implement ways to build relationships across minority lines and learn to resolve conflict surrounding racism and stereotyping of Black women effectively, and in turn, establish boundaries that will allow Black entrepreneur women and diverse groups to co-exist.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative research study had a limitation; it only researched a small sample size of Black entrepreneurial women. I recommend future research on a larger group of Black entrepreneur women who make more significant sums of money in their businesses, had White

paying clients, and have engaged in personal development where it yields financial gains across all racial lines. Additionally, I would recommend that Black entrepreneurial women implement processes in their businesses to ensure that they can build teams and business connections that will minimize risk, increase productivity, and yield results. The overall results will improve their personal development journey and have a positive overall effect on their self-identity which will yield positive results in their overall personal lives (i.e., mental, spiritual, psychological, emotional and physical lives) which enhances their well-being in their homes, businesses, and in society. The inclusiveness of self, personal and professional development could comprise of a comprehensive range of updated skills, embracing one's talents and gifts, while taking deep dives into cultural and ethical differences which provides a rich background of relevant data for the good of social and all individuals and will also provide cultural competences for all (Baumeister, 2012).

Future studies may propel Black women to robust and heighten positions if methodology and praxis includes the voices of Black women in prominent circles where utilitarian is not reviewed as color but as being useful for researchers to broaden their research into the lives of not just Black women but women everywhere (Cilli, 2019). In addition, conducting research with various types of personal development studies with diverse groups as a mixed-method study may also provide avenues that everyone can comprehend the complexities that have hindered the growth of society. For example, today's research should include qualitative data to understand the quality of life that enhance Black women when they secure proper mentoring, learn processes, and invest in comprehensive life skills that stimulate personal growth (Walton et al., 2023).

Lastly, I would recommend that Black and White entrepreneur women experience more interaction by meeting, networking, and learning their social and moral values and spiritual rituals

while sharing various ways they can enrich positive vibes with one another. This recommendation would also include White males as well.

Concluding Statement

I have researched and analyzed Black women entrepreneurs and the challenges, oppressions, and fulfillment that accompany the life of being Black and embracing the entrepreneur life. Furthermore, the focus of this study specifically analyzed how such challenges and oppression in the entrepreneur space affected the Black woman's self-identity. Personal development, along with self and professional development is helpful in gaining a clear perspective of oneself while gaining skills and developing self-awareness, emotional intelligence, strengthen personal and business relationships, which leads to making healthy personal and business choices that align with one's character, values, and goals.

Although attending and embracing development courses is intended to better one's life, it does not negate continuously doing the work and broadening one's perspective of their lives while building inner strength, confidence, and improving one's overall potential, employability, and identity. Throughout the interview process the women voiced their confidence and assurance they belonged at the table and even graced the rooms with such confidence however there were gaps in the personal development process meaning when it came to taking actionable steps, flexibility in setting goals, and clarity regarding the developmental process there were often missing parts of their journey. I found that a lack of planning and broadening one's view of themselves and other cultures skewed their ability to be open to personal change which has the tendency to affect oneself identity.

In contrast, I found engaging in personal development and not fully understanding cultural norms may cause more harm and diminish one's overall value if the mind-set is not

improved and there is no partaking with various cultures while learning to network and communicate effectively. This study resonates and acknowledges the challenges that Black women face in their personal lives and as entrepreneurs as well as the oppressions that possibly chain Black women and Black women entrepreneurs to negative behaviors. However, due to the complexities, barriers, and challenges that Black women face holistically in society this study found that personal development does assist in reinforcing purpose in one's life, providing cultural awareness which establishes a healthy rapport and setting boundaries that allow strained relationships, negative labels of Black women, and improving and promoting healthy and harmonious businesses that further assist in Black women entrepreneurs careers in gaining financial wealth which establishes a strong sense of their self-identity.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

Date: February 12, 2024

PI: Mayrion Washington

Department: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online

Re: Initial - IRB-2024-18

A Phenomenological Study: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black Entrepreneur Women's Personal Development and its Impact on Their Self-Identity

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for A Phenomenological Study: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black Entrepreneur Women's Personal Development and its Impact on Their Self-Identity. The administrative check-in date is --.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Research Notes: Approved for IRB Exempt 2a Research protocol

Additional Approvals/Instructions: If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still

applicable. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.

According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.

It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website <http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...>

or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

Appendix B: Participation Letter

Dear _____,

My name is Mayrion A. Washington, and I am a Doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University. I am requesting your participation in my doctoral qualitative research study titled: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black Entrepreneur Women's Personal Development and its Impact on their Self-Identity. Research states that Black entrepreneur women are the leading demographic in the entrepreneurial space in starting new businesses however, Black women entrepreneurs are not being productive in these businesses as entrepreneurs. This research study intends to explore the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its impact on their self-identity. The study will also look at the challenges and barriers that Black entrepreneur women face in their businesses. Exploring this study may provide skills, tools, knowledge, and strategies to future Black entrepreneur women. This study will involve a semistructured interview to be held via Zoom and will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete. Also, this semistructured interview will be recorded both audio and video and transcribed for accuracy for data analysis purposes. This semistructured interview will be confidential and kept in a safe place.

Upon receipt of this solicitation email if you are interested in taking part in this research study and being interviewed, please respond to this email and you will receive a Consent Form via email. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Respectfully,

Mayrion A. Washington
Abilene Christian University,
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

Currently seeking participants for a research study on “**BLACK ENTREPRENEUR WOMEN’S PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR SELF-IDENTITY.**”

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women’s personal development and its impact on their self-identity. This study is important because Black women are the largest demographic of women starting businesses, however they are struggling for profit. Only 3% of black women-owned companies mature and survive longer than 5 years. This study will look at the importance of personal development in the lives of Black women and its impact on their self-identity. The study seeks to provide strategies, knowledge, and ideas to assist in the growth and profit for Black entrepreneur women.

REQUIREMENTS

- *Currently employed as an entrepreneur
- *Must be between the age of 25-65
- *Must have at least 5 years of experience in an entrepreneurial capacity
- *Participants will be asked to do a one-on-one interview for 45-60 minutes via Zoom where they will be asked 11 questions.
- *Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- *The interview will be pre-recorded, and you may get a copy of the recording for your records.
- *All information will be kept confidential.

**For any questions, or to receive the consent form,
please contact:
Mayrion Washington at
xxxxxxxxxx@gmail.com**

Appendix D: Consent Form

Introduction: A Phenomenological Study: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black Entrepreneur Women's Personal Development and its Impact on Their Self-Identity

As a participant, you may be able to take part in a research study to investigate the lived experience of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and the impact on their self-identity. Today Black women are the fastest growing demographic in the country in starting new businesses. However, they are not being productive in those businesses. This study will look at oppression and all the systematic challenges that Black entrepreneur woman are confronted with. It is important to explore their personal development and its impact on their self-identity which is a big part of building their business, themselves, and relationships.

This form provides important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you as a potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions that you may have about the study. You can ask about research activities and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as your family doctor or a family member.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop your participation at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its impact on their self-identity. You will be asked to participate in an individual virtual interview and a follow-up phone interview, if needed to clarify any information. Your

lived experiences of being a Black entrepreneur woman and your personal development and its impact on your self-identity will be the topic.

The virtual interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The follow-up telephone interview, if needed, will last approximately 30 minutes. The interviews will be audio and videotaped and then transcribed. These are the only requests that will be made of you. This is an exploratory study and is being conducted to gain clarity around oppression and racial biases that Black entrepreneur women are challenged with today. The study seeks to provide strategic ways to enhance the role and visibility of Black women entrepreneurs so they can grow and thrive personally, individually, and as businesswomen.

RISKS & BENEFITS: There are risks to taking part in this research study. Below is a list of the foreseeable risks, including the seriousness of those risks and how likely they are to occur:

Although highly unlikely, there is a small risk that the audio recording may become compromised in the event of hacking. However, there is no plan to use identifying information during the audio recording of the interview.

However, there are potential benefits to participating in this study. Such benefits may include overcoming historical challenges as a Black entrepreneur woman, learning the importance of ongoing personal development, and being aware of one's self-identity which show-cases behaviors, intelligence, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence which will enhance a positive self-image and provide productivity in they're businesses.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information you provide will be confidential to the extent allowable by law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals

outside of the study team, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. All research materials (written and taped) will be stored in a locked file in the researcher's home.

The researcher will record the interviews on a password-protected phone or app for transcription and coding purposes. I will remove all identifying materials about you and others you talk about. The final data that is reported will be drawn from the transcriptions without identifiers. Audiotapes and videotapes will be destroyed after they are transcribed; all other research materials will be kept for a period of no more than 5 years following the completion of this research. The information in this research will be held confidential by the researcher.

CONTACTS: If you have questions about the research study, the lead researcher is [Mayrion Washington, and may be contacted at xxx-xxx-xxxx, xxxxxxxx.xxxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx. If you are unable to reach the lead researcher or wish to speak to someone other than the lead researcher, you may contact Dr. Julie Lane, Dissertation Chair at xxxxxxxx@acu.edu if you have concerns about this study, believe you may have been injured because of this study, or have general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Executive Director of Research, Qi Hang, at xxxxxxxx@acu.edu.

Additional Information

There are 11 expected participants to be enrolled in this study.

There are no unexpected risks associated with your participation in this study; however, you will notify you if any such risks are identified throughout the course of the study which may affect your willingness to participate.

Your participation may end early for certain reasons. For example, we may end your participation if you no longer meet study requirements, is believed to no longer be in your best

interest to continue participating, you do not follow the instructions provided, or the study is ended. You will be contacted and given further instructions if you are removed from the study.

Please let us know if you are participating in any other research studies at this time.

Consent Signature Section

Please sign this form if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Sign up only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You should receive a copy of this signed consent form. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this form.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining
Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining
Consent

Date

Appendix E: Demographic Questions

Demographic Questions

Each Black woman entrepreneur's lived experience will be analyzed using demographic information to identify their similarities and differences, as well as their unique experiences, values, oppression, and challenges, and how they overcame those obstacles. The discussion with the participants will begin by asking the following questions:

- (1) How many years have you been an entrepreneur?
- (2) What is your total number of years in a leadership role?
- (3) What is your level of education? (1) Didn't graduate; (2) High School Graduate; Some College; (4) College Graduate
- (4) Are you between the age of: (1) 20-30; (2) 30-40; (3) 40-50; (4) 50-60; (5) over 60
- (5) Are you in the average economic status of: (1) Below \$28,000; (2) \$55,000 - \$89,000; (3) \$149,000 - Up

Appendix F: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

The data collection in this phenomenological study will be guided by the following interview questions:

RQ1. What are the lived experiences of Black entrepreneur women's personal development and its effect on their self-identity?

(Self-identity refers to being conscious of mental activities (such as thinking, reasoning, remembering, behaving, and beliefs about what is normal behavior).

(1) Describe how your self-identity has empowered, inspired, and assisted you in your business. Has personal development propelled you to handle systematic oppression differently as a Black entrepreneur woman?

(2) How has knowing your self-identity impacted your entrepreneurial journey (in both negative and positive ways)? How has entrepreneurship reshaped your self-identity?

(3) Describe how your self-identity is displayed as a Black entrepreneur woman in adverse groups when you are the only Black entrepreneur woman present.

(4) Describe how you have benefited from being a Black entrepreneur woman. How independent are you when it comes to decision-making and exercising and implementing your ideas in your business? What are some resources you have utilized to grow as a Black entrepreneur woman?

RQ1a: How do Black entrepreneur women perceive oppression and unjust situations as challenges/barriers in their businesses, and what strategies are applied to overcome/resist them?

(5) Discuss how you have overcome negative stereotypes, racism, gender biases, etc.

as a Black entrepreneur woman. Tell me how this may have impacted your finances, negative and positive.

- (6) Describe your personal development journey as a Black entrepreneur woman and how it has assisted in overcoming racial profiling and other barriers in your business & the impact it has had on your self-identity.
- (7) What are some strategies, skills, knowledge, and ideas you have applied to empower you in your business as a Black entrepreneur woman?
- (8) What has been your biggest challenge in your business as a Black entrepreneur woman? Did you receive assistance to overcome the problem? If so, please describe.

RQ1b: How do Black entrepreneur women describe their intersectionality of oppression and power (race, gender, class, etc.) in their businesses, and are they empowered to overcome oppression in group settings?

(*Intersectionality* refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in their individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power”).

(*Personal Development* refers to the development of skills, talents, and competencies where individuals do inner work and focus on themselves to be better human beings. Personal development helps to expand self-awareness, and confidence, and to achieve goals and aspirations).

- (9) Describe what personal development has taught you about success and failure.
- (10) What processes have you employed on behalf of your personal development journey, and did they assist in overcoming historical challenges that you continue to face today?

(11) How do Black entrepreneur women describe the impact of empowerment in group settings? How did a group environment of other Black entrepreneur women inspire knowledge and ideas that influenced their finances, growth, and self-identity?