

## ABSTRACT

ADEJUWON, KRISTEN NICOLE. African American Women Entrepreneurs' Experiences in Apparel/Retail: A Phenomenological Perspective. (Under the direction of Drs. Delisia Matthews and Lori Rothenberg).

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of African American women entrepreneurs' lived experiences operating an Apparel/Retail business. To address this purpose, I examined the evolution of business ownership, and how subgroups within business ownership are impacted. More specifically, topics included (1) definitions of entrepreneurship, (2) the history of entrepreneurship, (3) women entrepreneurs, (4) women of color entrepreneurs, and (5) African American women entrepreneurs. Thus, this study highlights gaps in the existing literature and suggests specific areas in need of further exploration.

A phenomenological research approach was used to address the purpose of the study. Specifically, the structures and essences that African American women entrepreneurs describe as their lived experiences were investigated relative to operating an Apparel/Retail business. Three methods of data collection were employed, including in-depth interviews, memos, and fieldnotes. A total of thirteen interviews was conducted, three in-person, two by Skype, and eight by phone. African American women entrepreneurs' ages ranged from 24 to 47. Data were analyzed for shared experiences which were then used in the development of the thematic interpretation.

Three conceptual areas surfaced and are used to structure the interpretation. *The African American Women Entrepreneurs' Experience*, *African American Women Entrepreneurs' Motivations*, and *African American Women Entrepreneurs' Challenges in Entrepreneurship*. Within each area, themes that emerged through the analysis of data are interpreted and issues

important to each theme are addressed. The broader relevance of the interpretation was then considered concerning the existing literature on the topic.

Findings indicate that African American women entrepreneurs' lived experiences are unique to them, even while operating Apparel/Retail businesses. From a holistic point of view, their Apparel/Retail business is a defining characteristic of themselves and their racial community and is used as a tool to support and uplift others while granting them creative freedom. Their Apparel/Retail businesses are also used as a countermeasure for addressing color consciousness and racial discrimination. While this study addresses major gaps in the literature, it also points to the need for further study into more equitable solutions to entrepreneurship, especially for African American women entrepreneurs operating in Apparel/Retail industry.

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African American Women Entrepreneurs' Experiences in Apparel/Retail:  
A Phenomenological Perspective

by  
Kristen Nicole Adejuwon

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APPROVED BY:

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Dr. Delisia Matthews  
Committee Co-Chair

---

Dr. Lori Rothenberg  
Committee Co-Chair

---

Dr. Kate Annett-Hitchcock

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Dr. Marguerite Moore

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to “the top three” – Charles Martin, Joanne Mitchell, and Private First-Class Nathaniel Scott, who according to my Best Friend and Dad, Christian Scott, I share the same intellectual prowess. You all’s inquisitive nature is inspirational (including yours Daddy), and has left a long-lasting impression of encouragement and positivity, that I am honored to be associated with and could not let down. To Dr. Ernie Turner and Dr. Dana Legette-Traylor, two individuals who believed in my graduate-level, academic journey before it began and finished, though you both left me too soon, I hope that my academic achievement makes you both proud.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Frequently, entrepreneurship is defined within the context of business ownership (Barr, 2015; United States Census Bureau, 2020; Ventureneur, 2018). To that end, the Survey of Business Owners and Self-Employed Persons (SBO) categorizes business ownership by 1) *gender*, 2) *ethnicity*, 3) *race*, and 4) *veteran status* (United States Census Bureau, 2020). This distinct categorization of entrepreneurs corresponds with the evolution of entrepreneurship. In the United States, from 1850-1957, business leaders of corporate enterprises (or large manufacturing establishments) holding positions of presidency or chairmanship of directorate, was an acceptable definition of an entrepreneur (Evans, 1957). However, large companies fueled by government support shifting attitudes of entrepreneurship to ideas of “individualism, self-actualization, creativity, and concerns about the work environment accompanied by...prosperity and economic growth” (Hisrich, 1988, p. 2). These examples suggest that the practice of entrepreneurship has also been multifaceted and susceptible to change.

Specifically, with regards to the topic of women in the context of entrepreneurship, we see evidence of women entrepreneurs in various business categories including, but not limited to: Construction, Professional, Scientific, Educational Services, Other Services, and Retail Trade (McManus, 2017). As this study will focus on individuals within the Apparel/Retail business, it is important to know how women are operating in this field. The analysis of 2012 Survey of Business Owners (National Women’s Business Council, 2012) reported that Retail Trade ranks as the 5<sup>th</sup> highest women-owned firm. Out of the top three industries with the highest total revenue for women-owned businesses, retail trade accounted for 15% (Ventureneur, 2018). Matthews, Blanchflower, and Childs (2019) also recognized women business owners’ prominent

role in the Retail industry. Specifically, Matthews et al. (2019) explored the phenomenon of mobile fashion trucks, identifying five key themes impacting the experiences of women entrepreneurs: 1) *One Woman Show*, 2) *Passion Project*, 3) *Taste of the Unique*, 4) *Mobility Equals Flexibility*, and 5) *Partnership for Success*. This study highlights the importance of exploring women entrepreneurs and their unique strategies in the Apparel/Retail industry. While the presence of women exists in many industries, women's experiences in entrepreneurship with attention to Apparel/Retail has been underexamined (Hodges et al., 2015; Matthews, Blanchflower, & Childs, 2019). Thus, assessing this topic will lead to greater understanding of this distinctive group.

Although research has shown the development of entrepreneurship throughout various periods (Chandra, 2018; Ma, Zhao, Wang, & Lee, 2013; Poggese, Mari, & De Vita, 2016), insights of individuals' actual experiences are not discussed. Categories have only briefly identified scholars' interest regarding entrepreneurs, women, and women of color, lacking depth when explaining the lived experiences encompassed in their entrepreneurial endeavors. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs operating in an Apparel/Retail business. The guiding question of the research is: *What are the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs operating an Apparel/Retail business?*

## **Background**

In this dissertation, capturing the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs will generate deeper understanding of the participants' social worlds in which they engage in entrepreneurship. Thus, this section briefly outlines, as an introduction, topics relevant

to understanding the experiences of those who identify as an entrepreneur, woman, and African American. These topics will be covered more extensively in the literature review chapter.

### **Women in Entrepreneurship**

Previous studies have indicated the uniqueness of women entrepreneurs are due to their distinct non-economic challenges (Brush, Welter, & de Bruin, 2009; Hodges et al., 2015; Poggesi et al., 2016). For instance, Brush, Welter, and de Bruin (2009) proposed a “5M” framework adding *motherhood* and *meso/macro environment* dimensions to the “3Ms” (*markets, money, and management*). These dimensions allow for additional considerations regarding the women’s role in the household/ family context (motherhood), social, cultural, and institutional arrangements, which impact perceived opportunities, strategic decision-making (macro), and network and business associations (meso) (Brush et al., 2009).

Hodges et al. (2015) explored cross-cultural strategies of successful female entrepreneurs in three countries. Challenges for women entrepreneurs were balancing business decisions with familial responsibilities. While Hodges et al.’s (2015) study entailed deeper understanding of the trials women entrepreneurs encountered, studies on women entrepreneurs still lack extensive research on women of color. This is important to understand as the experiences of women of color may differ from non-minority, White women. In the next section, the focus on gender continues while examining women of color in entrepreneurship.

### **Women of Color in Entrepreneurship**

Demographic trends in entrepreneurship suggest the need to further explore the experiences of women of color (Bates, Bradford, & Seamans, 2018). Minority entrepreneurs’ own, operate, capitalize and control 51% of their business by at least one or more members of the following group: Black American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian Pacific, and Subcontinent

Asian (MWBE Enterprises, Inc., 2020). Aspaas (2004) studied micro enterprises owned by women of color in rural areas of the United States. His research confirmed that their approach to business integrates their families, personal aspirations, and the communities they served. The exploration of these factors provided valuable insight into the women's experiences at the time. Yet, circumstances and situations are expected to have changed, therefore requiring more up-to-date research.

Adkins and Samaras (2013) explored women of color in entrepreneurship by comparing perceptions of women of color to White women business owners. Despite controlling for factors like business size, owner's age, and education, results indicated minority women perceived they were more at risk to make adverse decisions. This study presents the opportunity for deeper understanding regarding the business decision-making of women of color. Further exploration of minority entrepreneurship, according to Adkins and Samaras (2013), should look into perceived and experienced challenges involved in entrepreneurial behavior and decision-making, identify how minority women entrepreneurs become aware of these challenges, and how the effect of these challenges actually faced by minority-women impact entrepreneurial developments. The research about women of color reveals that the impact of their businesses can be influenced by internal and external factors of the entrepreneur, but there is a need to study African American women entrepreneurs specifically. The next section will highlight how African American women's experiences have previously been explored in entrepreneurship.

### **African American Women in Entrepreneurship**

Previous studies have indicated that understanding the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs and their contributions provides deeper insight into the general topic of entrepreneurship (Anderson, Sims, Shuff, Neese, & Sims, 2015; Robinson, Blockson, &

Robinson, 2007). Robinson, Blockson, and Robinson (2007) explored how social stratification (social structure, institutions, and culture) influenced the context, process, experience, and success of entrepreneurship. Awareness of the potential to experience marginalization/social stratification at different levels – individual, group/family, and societal level, hints at the issues that African American women business owners deal with when making entrepreneurial decisions.

The professional development needs of African American women entrepreneurs were studied by Wech, Martin, Martin, and Dolowitz (2009), who found they placed greater importance on business training. In addition, African American women expressed a desire for more training in various topics including general activities, preferred method of communication, and method of receiving assistance (Wech, Martin, Martin, & Dolowitz, 2009). Training topics indicated areas of concern for business development and also support further exploration using a qualitative approach.

Anderson, Sims, Shuff, Neese, and Sims (2015) explored the cost/benefit tensions felt by African American women entrepreneurs. The results of the study found that entrepreneurs experienced roadblocks and setbacks that affected their overall cost of business. While the benefits they experienced were the rewards associated with owning one's own business as an African American female entrepreneur. Identifying what is gained and lost in African American women entrepreneurs experiences emphasize the need for further dialogue.

Collectively, the quantitative and qualitative studies previously discussed provide insight into African American women entrepreneurs' experiences emphasizing various aspects of their lived experiences. Further qualitative inquiry will assist in uncovering unanswered questions about African American women entrepreneurs' experiences in the context of operating an

Apparel/Retail business in the United States, as extensive research on this unique group is lacking.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs operating an Apparel/Retail business. The central research question is: *What are the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs operating an Apparel/Retail business?* Subquestions for understanding African American women entrepreneurs are: (1) *What are the unique experiences of African American women entrepreneurs,* (2) *What motivates African American women entrepreneurs to consider and conduct their own businesses,* (3) *How do African American entrepreneurs' experience challenges, and how is their decision-making impacted,* and (4) *Within Gartner's New Venture Creation Framework considering the individual, organization, process, and the environment dimensions, what are the actual and perceived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs?* To address the research objectives, data will be collected within the context of entrepreneurship from women, minority, and African American owned businesses.

### **Methodological Framework**

Understanding how African American women entrepreneurs uniquely encounter entrepreneurship is the purpose of this dissertation. To address this goal, a phenomenological approach will be used. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), phenomenology reveals deeper understanding of individuals' lived experiences assuming that dialogue and reflection are representative of a particular experience. Examining African American women entrepreneurs' lived experiences - everyday routines, practices, living, conscious experiences, opinions,

feelings, knowledge, behaviors, and actions from the respondents' point of view enable deeper learning of these women's 'reality' within society.

Phenomenology typically involves data collection and analysis through the use of in-depth interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher is the primary instrument for this data collection method which involves having a verbal exchange that occurs between the participants and the interviewee. Therefore, in this phenomenological study, meaning; described as the essences or structures of the entrepreneurs' experiences will be captured solely in the participants' own words (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Kvale (1996) states the purpose of an in-depth interview as follows 1) attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, 2) unfolds the meaning of peoples' experiences, and 3) uncovers their lived world before scientific explanations. Additionally, Kvale (1996) suggests that spontaneous conversation of one's daily life allows the purpose and structure of the research to remain uncompromised. In this dissertation, gathering rich description as a result of capturing continuous, logical verbal exchanges between the participants and the researcher, is key to understanding. Seidman's (1998) in-depth phenomenological interviewing method, which will be used in this study, incorporates three inquiry topics: *focused life history, the details of experience, and reflection on the meaning*. The semi-structured format of these interviews will complement the reflective and conversational approach valued in qualitative studies and phenomenological inquiry. More specifically, using Seidman's (1998) inquiry series will assist in determining the participants' meaning by placing their behaviors in the context of their lives and the lives around them.

To better understand the experiences of African American women in entrepreneurship, I will also use the New Venture Creation Framework as the conceptual foundation for this

dissertation. To do this, I will use Gartner's (1985) multidimensional framework to compare and contrast the complexities of the women's experiences regarding their business ownership by integrating the four dimensions in entrepreneurship: *individual, organization, process*, and the *environment*. Examining these core topics exploring the entrepreneurs' personal background, firm type, environmental aspects impacting one's business decisions, and the process that the entrepreneurs' undergo, will provide a more holistic picture of the lived experiences shared by African American women.

### **Scope and Significance**

Uncovering the structures and essences that African American women entrepreneurs describe as their lived experiences is critical to understanding respondents' meanings and improving social circumstances. The "*inter view*," derived from the actual interview, allows meaning of the participants to develop in a conversation that highlights the entrepreneurs' views and opinions considering the central phenomenon (Kvale, 1996). As for improving various circumstances, Barr (2015) suggests that aiding these entrepreneurs could potentially provide benefits that include income and social mobility and employment related to the spread of innovation. Additionally, Barr (2015) acknowledges that minority and women-headed households experiences are challenged by lower levels of household wealth, internal investment, and external borrowing. This study reiterates the need for women and minority business owners to have greater access to effective resources, especially since learning about African American women entrepreneurs' experiences could lead to more informed policies.

By approaching the topic from a phenomenological perspective, I will be able to showcase the lived experiences by providing rich description gathered from interview data which may further the need to take action (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This perspective is important

because the existing literature focuses primarily on the understanding of entrepreneurship from a quantitative perspective, a perspective that does not consider individuals' in depth and personal experiences in the entrepreneurial process. A phenomenological approach will allow the structures and essences of the entrepreneurs' experience and meaning to be heard as they tell their own stories.

Understanding the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs in the Apparel/Retail industry is an area in need of further study, particularly from a qualitative perspective. African American women entrepreneurs' reflection and articulation of their experiences, from their own perspective, is essential when considering ways to encourage and support women of color in their entrepreneurial pursuits. A phenomenological approach to the topic highlights the complex circumstances in which African American women entrepreneurs experience entrepreneurship. In turn, the described and interpreted meaning of the participants is likely to be valuable to those who participate in this study as well as those who are committed to this issue.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented the research question and subquestions for this dissertation. I have also provided rationalization for the study. In addition to concepts important to this study, the methodological framework and methods were outlined. Lastly, the scope and significance of the study was discussed. The next chapter presents a review of literature pertinent to the study.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LITERATURE THAT INFORMS THE RESEARCH

As introduced in the previous chapter, the central research question of this dissertation is: *What are the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs operating an Apparel/Retail business?* Considering the research question, this chapter highlights existing research relevant to understanding the experiences of those who identify as an entrepreneur, woman, and African American.

This chapter covers the literature on (1) definitions of entrepreneurship, (2) the history of entrepreneurship, (3) women entrepreneurs, (4) women of color entrepreneurs, and (5) African American women entrepreneurs. Lastly, the New Venture Creation Framework is examined. Collectively, this chapter highlights gaps in existing literature and suggests specific areas in need of further exploration.

#### **Definitions of Entrepreneurship**

Scholars' attempts to develop a consensus on a definition of entrepreneurship has been a popular topic for quite some time. Low and MacMillan (1988) believed that obtaining an overall or common purpose in the entrepreneurship literature would be beneficial to the field of entrepreneurship. The two researchers proposed that defining entrepreneurship as the creation of new enterprise would explain and facilitate the role of these enterprises (Low & MacMillan, 1988). Yet, Gartner (1990) suggested that it is the underlying meaning that researchers need to pay attention to.

More specifically, Gartner (1990) explored the underlying meanings of entrepreneurship from leading researchers and practitioners, such as business leaders, politicians, and academic scholars, in an attempt to outline themes in the discipline of entrepreneurship. Within Gartner's

study, participants wrote their own definitions of entrepreneurship and rated attributes from others' definitions of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 1990). A Delphi process, followed by a cluster analysis, revealed the following themes: *innovation, organization creation, creating value, profit or nonprofit, growth, uniqueness, and the owner-manager* (Gartner, 1990). Participants were also required to consider the eight themes in comparison to their own definition of entrepreneurship. His study indicated that although various definitions of entrepreneurship were proposed, few similarities existed. Thus, many scholars remained content in using their own definition of entrepreneurship.

Landstrom (1999) proposed that entrepreneurship be considered as “discovering, organizing, and exploiting more “traditional” business activities – where imperfections on the markets are identified and used, and lead to an equilibrium on the market, as well as activities with strong innovative elements – where changes on the market are created” (p. 17). Landstrom's definition of entrepreneurship emphasized an economic focus. In contrast, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) emphasized the need to consider opportunities when defining it. For instance, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) believed that the definition rested on three core research questions about entrepreneurship. The three questions were: (1) why, when, and how opportunities for the creation of goods and services come into existence; (2) why, when, and how some people and not others discover and exploit these opportunities; and (3) why, when, and how different modes of action are used to exploit entrepreneurial opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

While exploring the history of entrepreneurship research and how this domain has evolved, Carlsson et al. (2013) chose to define entrepreneurship from an economic perspective, but also mentioned opportunities. The researchers defined this domain as: “Entrepreneurship

refer[ing] primarily to an economic function that is carried out by individuals, entrepreneurs, acting independently or within organizations, to perceive and create new opportunities and to introduce their ideas to the market, under uncertainty, by making decisions about location, product design, resource use, institutions, and reward systems. The entrepreneurial activity and the entrepreneurial ventures are influenced by the socioeconomic environment and result ultimately in economic growth and human welfare” (Carlsson et al., 2013, p. 914). This study demonstrated that the review of entrepreneurship has expanded over time encompassing both economic and environmental influences.

Audretsch, Kuratko, and Link (2015) and Bridge (2017) presented two different views on entrepreneurship. Audretsch et al.’s (2015) purpose was to try to make sense of prevalent, disparate meanings and views of entrepreneurship by scholars and thought leaders in business and policy. Rejecting the idea of narrowing the topic of entrepreneurship, the researchers, identified three factors – *organizational status*, *behavior*, and *performance* (Audretsch, Kuratko, & Link, 2015). However, Bridge supported a different approach to organizing entrepreneurship literature. Bridge (2017) argued that the word ‘entrepreneurship’ emerged out of necessity among scholars and politicians, proposing the term as a potential solution to economic problems. Bridge (2017) believed that the definition of entrepreneurship must meet specific criteria and be consistent rather than giving conflicting meanings and associations leading to false parallels within the topic. Bridge (2017) concluded by suggesting that individuals have the tendency of looking for the source of entrepreneurial activity in the wrong places and as a condition for economic growth, when the activity should be looked at as the result of such conditions.

Defining entrepreneurship has proven to be a real challenge, as researchers have sought to collaborate with other scholars, practitioners, business leaders, and politicians, in order to

come to an agreement regarding the term. Within the scope of this dissertation, I will explore the definition of entrepreneurship using a bounded system. This system, using Gartner's (1985) New Venture Creation Framework and its connection to the central research question is detailed later in this chapter. The next section will provide additional information concerning the definition of entrepreneurship through a historical review.

### **Historic Review of Entrepreneurship**

From 1850 to 1957, entrepreneurs in the United States were considered more competitive than innovative as they exploited opportunities and took advantage of the latest technologies (i.e., transportation developments such as highways, railroads, etc.) (Evans, 1957). As the top decision makers in companies, entrepreneurs worked toward creating a strong national and international market presence (Evans, 1957). Their methods for obtaining profits coincided with what was socially acceptable of the period (Evans, 1957). According to Evans (1957), entrepreneurship consisted of transforming large companies from monopolistic or near monopolistic to becoming vertically integrated.

During the 1980s, however, the United States' reliance on large corporations as the driving force of the economy, dependence on plant relocations or expansions, and the economic well-being revolving around big business and government support began to change (Hisrich, 1988). Previous teachings in the work-world such as avoiding risk, being mentored by a higher positioned personnel, and riding their coattails toward success, led to a few individuals operating in very limited environments resulting in a lack of fulfillment (Hisrich, 1988). This caused a shift from corporate employee to the newly inspired entrepreneur. These entrepreneurs could now go beyond the bounds of focusing on organizational structure—like the controlling and monitoring

aspects of a company as an authoritative figure—to seizing the opportunity to innovate and be creative on one’s own terms (Hisrich, 1988).

As environments changed even more during the 1990s, globally, technologically, economically, and demographically, Chittipeddi and Wallett (1991) believed that successful competitive strategies of the future must be highly entrepreneurial in nature. The researchers argued that the previously named trends required large companies to make adjustments that entrepreneurs may have been already equipped to make (Chittipeddi & Wallett, 1991).

Characteristics seen as advantageous for entrepreneurs and their businesses included purpose-driven commitments, limited turf battles and alienation, fewer rules and regulations or policy manuals, commitment to customer service and quality, and entrepreneurial thinking involving a more flexible leadership, structure, innovativeness, and problem-solving capability (Chittipeddi & Wallett, 1991).

In addition to examining the change from large corporations to small businesses owned by an entrepreneur, it is also important to see entrepreneurship through reviews done by two scholars: Chandra’s (2018) evolution of the entrepreneurship field and Ma, Zhao, Wang, and Lee’s (2013) contemporary ethnic entrepreneurship.

Using a combination of techniques such as topic mapping, author and journal co-citation, Chandra (2018) tracked trends in entrepreneurship, noting when specific topics appeared, disappeared, and reappeared in the field of entrepreneurship over a 24-year span between 1990-2013. Chandra found five topics that remained prevalent throughout the 24-year period which were noted as being inter-related and the building blocks of entrepreneurship: *institutions and institutional entrepreneurship, innovation and technology management, policy and development, entrepreneurial process and opportunity, and new ventures*. Other topics that emerged included

but were not limited to the following: *person-centric, performance, network, experience and knowledge, entrepreneurial process and opportunity, culture, community and society, business ethics, ownership and stakeholders, capability, exploration and exploitation, decision making and risk, family business, female entrepreneurship and gender, employment and job creation, SME, and entrepreneurial culture.*

Ma et al. (2013) profiled different themes of contemporary ethnic entrepreneurs during 1999-2008. Initial findings indicated a gap where scholars focused less on their roles as entrepreneurs involving business activities and more on demographic trends such as social and regional developments (Ma et al., 2013). The primary topics from 1999-2003 consisted of *ethnic and immigration enclaves economies, ethnic minority business, constraints of ethnic enterprises, social embeddedness, and ethnic entrepreneurs* (Ma et al., 2013). In the years 2004-2008 a change in viewing these entrepreneurs as disadvantaged groups occurred, according to Ma et al. (2013), and the following topics became of interest: *business activities in the host countries, social networks, connections with their home countries of origin facilitating transnational entrepreneurial activities.*

In the extensive reviews of entrepreneurship developments over time by Chandra (2018), Ma et al. (2013), and Poggesi et al. (2016), the majority of the research studies were quantitative. Thus, while studies focused on entrepreneurs, women, and women of color, personal meaning and operations were not discussed. The present study will explore African American women entrepreneurs by paying attention to context, as suggested by Chandra (2018) and Poggesi et al. (2016) and by using a qualitative approach to understanding this group. First, however, discussions prevalent in the literature about women entrepreneurs need to be presented.

## Women in Entrepreneurship

Warnecke (2013) highlighted two types of entrepreneurship: *necessity and opportunity entrepreneurship*. *Necessity entrepreneurship* involves the entrepreneur starting a business in order to survive. *Opportunity entrepreneurship* provides the entrepreneur the freedom to identify and exploit market opportunities. Differences among the two types of entrepreneurship included: access to participating in the economy, educational and managerial experiences, financial capital and informal and formal network contacts (Warnecke, 2013). In both types of entrepreneurship, challenges faced by women affect the quality of their entrepreneurial venture. Warnecke advocates that understanding the interplay between necessity and opportunity entrepreneurship, and unfreedom and freedom, respectively, can lead to more informed policies. Warnecke's study indicates that there is a need to further understand such connections, as it allows for a deeper understanding of women entrepreneurs' lived experiences. The two types of entrepreneurship and the degree it is experienced by women-owned business owners, highlight demographic and racial concerns for entrepreneurs.

Hodges et al. (2015) provided a worldwide perspective on women entrepreneurs, by using a qualitative research design to explore the strategies used by successful female entrepreneurs in three countries: Russia, South Africa, and Thailand. The authors investigated how women entrepreneurs managed the challenges of running a small apparel business. Findings indicated that despite location, many participants believed that their challenges stemmed from being a female and self-employed, with the following themes present in each interview: (1) figuring out how to do more with less, particularly relative to growing the business, (2) finding ways to deal with the competition, and (3) meeting time constraints and demands, including career and work related considerations as well as those of a personal and/or family nature

(Hodges et al., 2015). This study indicated how diverse challenges can be when owning and operating a female-owned business, including the consideration of their roles as mothers and the environment that surrounds them.

Women experience many personal and organizational obstacles while operating their own business. Yet, identifying as a woman is just one of the many barriers in entrepreneurship. This dissertation also focuses on women entrepreneurs but extends to women of color in entrepreneurship. The next section will provide an examination of research on this topic.

### **Women of Color in Entrepreneurship**

Bates, Bradford, and Seamans (2018) emphasized the importance of understanding the contributions of minority entrepreneurship in the United States. Demographic trends indicate that non-Hispanic Whites, the dominant race operating small businesses, will be the minority several decades from now (Bates et al., 2018). When analyzing key components of entrepreneurship, Bates found that minorities are challenged by specific barriers. Barriers include: discrimination when obtaining financial capital, lack of access to markets, wealth disparities, lack of transferable education and work skills, racial prejudice and discrimination from entry (Bates et al., 2018). As women of color, are a subgroup within minority entrepreneurship, it is likely that that they will also experience these barriers operating their Apparel/Retail businesses.

Similar to Hodges et al. (2015), previous studies have also attempted to explore businesses in different geographical contexts. For instance, Aspaas (2004) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the business and decision-making strategies of Hispanic, African American, and Native American women. The analysis consisted of evaluating the following factors of rural minority women's businesses: *economic, networking, household and familial, spatial* and *personal linkages* (Aspaas, 2004). The women's businesses reflected the traditional

care-giving role of women and their need to improve one's communities by investing in human capital (Aspaas, 2004). Aspaas found similarities among the women's services and how they desired to meet specific needs of their own ethnic/cultural groups, while differences were seen in their infrastructure investment. From most to least investment and highest to lowest amount of loss, African Americans were first followed by Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. The Native American women were operating their businesses because no other wage employment existed, and their businesses allowed them to remain close to their families and culture. Aspaas concluded that the women's small businesses operated along Candida Brush's (1992) assertions of women's roles moving between productive and reproductive; as images of the women's culture, communities, and personal self-actualization were portrayed (Aspaas, 2004; Brush, 1992). While Aspaas' (2004) study of entrepreneurship in the United States was relevant at the time, I believe there may be additional circumstances, and situations that have occurred since 2004 that need to be explored.

Instead of comparing minority experiences to each other, Adkins and Samaras (2013) compared minority individuals' to non-minority individuals. Adkins and Samaras (2013) conducted a quantitative study to evaluate minority and non-minority women business owners' perceived challenges while controlling for variables such as size of business, owner's age, and education. They investigated 14 challenges: (1) securing capital for building or expanding business, (2) health insurance cost, (3) understanding the tax code, (4) the current state of the economy, (5) competitive business environment, (6) regulatory burden, (7) procurement opportunities in the public sector, (8) procurement opportunities in the private sector, (9) managing business relationship with corporate legal advisor, (10) managing business relationship with certified public accountant under the new accounting regulations, (11) understanding the

new accounting regulations, (12) recruiting and retaining an effective workforce, (13) networking effectively, and (14) achieving a satisfying work/life balance. These challenges were generated from the literature and a summary report of the Women Entrepreneurship in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Summit meeting (Adkins & Samaras, 2013). The researchers concluded that among Caucasian and African American women business owners, there were greater perceived challenges among African American minority women. These challenges facing African American minority women needed to be addressed as they impact venture formation decisions, initial decisions to pursue an opportunity, and succeeding decisions concerning financing and/or utilizing social networks (Adkins & Samaras, 2013). Adkins and Samaras (2013) were able to collect quantifiable data, but their study was limited to aggregated data from a single questionnaire. Their study does not provide information on the individual African American women entrepreneurs' lived experience. In this dissertation, minority women's lived experiences will be studied using in-depth interviews in order to capture the underlying meanings behind the entrepreneurs' individual experiences.

Sharma and Gambhir (2017) provided insight into women's experiences when operating their own apparel related businesses. Sharma and Gambhir (2017) described the entrepreneurial outlook and the decision-making process that helped Meena Bindra, the founder of the Indian Apparel/Retail brand BIBA. Bindra's personal case was highlighted to emphasize women's potential economic contributions. Primary and secondary data provided information concerning how Bindra grew her business and brand while making family and business decisions (Sharma & Gambhir, 2017). The researchers were also able to capture Bindra's passion for empowering women and young girls. Bindra's case study shared many similarities with previously discussed research such as the complex nature of entrepreneurship (with an emphasis on exploring an

apparel related occupation), importance of motherhood, and how business decisions are intertwined with the society's expectations of being a wife and a mother. However, this study only presents one case, rather than capturing the common experiences among many entrepreneurs – which will be one of the goals of this dissertation.

### **African American Women in Entrepreneurship**

In an earlier study on African American women, Robinson et al. (2007) explored how social stratification (social structure, institutions, and culture) influenced the context, process, experience, and outcomes of successful entrepreneurship. After conducting in-depth interviews with 62 African American women entrepreneurs in seven metropolitan areas, four themes emerged from the researchers' preliminary observations: *the double minority challenge* (individual level), *the trade-off between passion and growth* (individual level), *the significance of family history and family support* (group/ family level), and *personal calling and community orientations* (societal level). Findings of each theme were noted as the following: articulating tensions regarding one's social identity as a means of overcoming racism and sexism in the marketplace (*double minority challenge*), choosing to maintain their business in a holistic manner (rather than purely economic or financial reasons), while also choosing to either maintain or increase their level of venture performance (*trade-off between passion and growth*), continuing family or economic self-determination traditions while simultaneously attempting to fulfill family and professional commitments without compromise (*the significance of family history and family support*), and working toward local and racial community by providing employment and economic support, being able to serve as a positive role model, or perceiving one's business as a spiritual calling or to serve God for their chosen communities through their ventures (*personal calling and community orientations*) (Robinson et al., 2007). In many

instances, the themes determined by Robinson et al. (2007) are consistent in women and minority entrepreneurship. The lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs were successfully captured; however, I propose a different and more specific context – operating within Apparel/Retail businesses. Similar to Robinson et al.'s (2007) study, this dissertation will analyze African American women who own 100% of their business, as a means of understanding their individual decision making.

Wech et al. (2009) sought to understand the professional development needs of African American women entrepreneurs by comparing their business training attitudes to Caucasian women small business owners. African Americans assigned higher importance ratings to business training than the Caucasian business owners using a questionnaire about 23 training topics. The three categories and corresponding variables of importance for African Americans was listed as the following: 1) General Background–*feasibility analysis, competitive analysis, strategic planning, location decision, pro-forma financial analysis, loan application, and obtaining business licenses*, 2) Organization Process – *initial processes and procedures, cash flow management, accounts receivable management, accounting/bookkeeping, production processes, inventory control, and purchasing*, 3) General Activities – *electronic commerce, marketing, advertising, sales, government procurement, managing technology, and business performance measures* (Wech et al., 2009). The authors argued that this provided insight into the business owner's everyday tasks. However, the study seemed more concerned with confirming the importance of training among African American women, and reiterates the necessity to qualitatively explore African American women entrepreneurship to gain deeper understanding.

Anderson et al. (2015) captured and quantified the tensions felt by African American female entrepreneurs. In this study, twenty African American women were assessed using a

price-based, dialectical approach and an adapted marketing mix approach, which considered the entrepreneur as the product and the costs and benefits associated with the price of being the entrepreneur. The four dialectics led to interesting findings that consisted of entrepreneurs' negotiating the following: one's identity in various social institutions (*Dialectic 1: Changing Self [Cost] vs. Maintaining Self [Benefit]*), acting on faith when making decisions and being on guard of other individuals (*Dialectic 2: Being Suspicious and Distrustful of Others [Cost] vs. Being Faithful and Trusting God [Benefit]*), consequence of not being accepted, and even taken for granted by one's own ethnic group (*Dialectic 3: Weak Support from Own Ethnicity [Cost] vs. Strong Supportive Ethnic Identity [Benefit]*), and learning how to overcome and cope despite misinformation and negative stereotypes (*Dialectic 4: Being Halted by Others' Perceptions [Cost] vs. Moving Forward Despite Preconceived Notions [Benefit]*) (Anderson et al., 2015). Anderson et al. (2015) successfully captured the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs by considering the costs and benefits of being an entrepreneur. This dissertation will consider a different and more specific set of boundaries.

Capturing women's experiences in entrepreneurship is important. This is especially true for African American women as minority entrepreneurs who experience challenges that further reiterate social stratification issues (Robinson et al., 2007), indicate greater perceived challenges such as the lack of preparedness in business (Adkins & Samaras, 2013; Wech et al., 2009), and have the potential to experience a greater sense of loss after business failure (Aspaas, 2004). Exploring minority entrepreneurship with an emphasis on African American women entrepreneurship is essential, especially given the increase in African American owned businesses. Accordingly, Black or African American-owned businesses has climbed 66.9% from 900,000 in 2007 to 1.5 million in 2012. These women-owned businesses also account for 58.9%

of the nation's 2.6 million Black or African American-owned businesses (Becker-Medina, 2016). Although it is clear the practice of entrepreneurship is popular among this group, there are still many unanswered questions concerning their lived experiences. Aspects of the lived experience of African American women have been successfully captured; however previous studies did not focus on the context that this study will explore. Moreover, findings seem to be general factors of influence in entrepreneurship (Anderson et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2007; Wech et al., 2009) versus insights that pertain to the personal, in-depth experiences of entrepreneurs. Using a qualitative approach, the lived experience needs to be captured within a bounded system of entrepreneurship – answering an overarching research question that targets the phenomenon of interest (Landstrom, 1999).

Therefore, this study proposes that exploring entrepreneurship, considering Gartner's (1985) four perspectives of entrepreneurship, will help to provide a more holistic picture of African American women entrepreneurs. Common experiences were analyzed considering the individual entrepreneurs' characteristics, the type of firm such as Apparel/Retail, the environment impacting the business, and the process that the entrepreneurs undergo. The framework guiding this exploration is explained within the next section.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Components of New Venture Creation**

The New Venture Creation Framework serves as the conceptual foundation for this dissertation. Gartner (1985) believes that new venture creation is a multidimensional phenomenon. The framework integrates four perspectives in entrepreneurship: *individual*, *organization*, *process*, and the *environment* dimension (Gartner, 1985). The *individual* dimension is defined as the person(s) involved in starting a new organization. The *organization* dimension

focuses on the type of firm that is created by the entrepreneur. The *process* dimension is the actions undertaken by the individual(s) to start the venture and the *environment* dimension is the situation that surrounds and influences the new organization. This multidimensional framework is thought to maximize entrepreneurship inquiry when exploring numerous dimensions of new venture creation.

The New Venture Creation Framework was proposed as a means to provide a systematic approach to compare and contrast complex ventures (Gartner, 1985). These *new ventures* in its simplest form involve organizing new organizations. Gartner (1985) referenced the Strategic Planning Institute (1978, p. 1-2) guidelines for defining a new organization: 1) an independent entity, or 2) a new profit center within a company that has other businesses established, or 3) a joint venture that meets the following four criteria: a) the founders must acquire expertise in products, process, market and/or technology, b) results are expected beyond the year in which the investment is made, c) it is considered a new market entrant by its competitors, d) it is regarded as a new source of supply by its potential customers (Gartner, 1985, p. 698). Gartner (1985) argued that in order to understand, or describe new venture creation comprehensively, that all four proposed dimensions must be investigated with an attempt to discover how the variables interact with each other.

The four dimensions of the New Venture Framework (individual, organization, process, and environment) frames the core topics of the dissertation in order to understand the experiences of those who identify as an entrepreneur, woman, and African American in the Apparel/Retail. For example, what are African American women entrepreneurs' experiences and how are they shaped by their (*individual*) personal background, the dynamic aspects the entrepreneur performs (*process*) considering their entrepreneurial activities, surrounding

conditions to which the firm must adapt to (*environment*), and type of firm (*organization*)?

Although the differences were accounted for, the lived experience was evaluated, and compared along with the women entrepreneurs' similarities, to better understand the common or shared lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs. These concepts were explored in the context of the African American women entrepreneurs operating in Apparel/Retail businesses, fitting the description of new ventures, and operating in the North and Southeastern parts of the United States.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of relevant research concerning the topics of entrepreneurship with an emphasis placed on understanding the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs. Gaps within the literature were highlighted, and the conceptual framework used to guide the study was stated. Next, the methodological framework and data collection will be discussed.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study seeks to address the question: *What are the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs operating an Apparel/Retail business?* A phenomenological approach was employed to collect data and examine African American women entrepreneurs operating in Apparel/Retail businesses. This chapter provides a description of the research design and consists of several parts. The following sections are presented in this chapter (1) qualitative methodology overview, (2) an overview of several qualitative approaches, (3) phenomenology as qualitative inquiry, (4) data collection methods, and (5) data analysis and interpretation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the systematic procedures used for analysis and interpretation of data.

#### **Qualitative Methodology Overview**

Qualitative research comes with the assumption that individuals exist in social worlds and that these natural settings enable socially-constructed or socially-embedded sense-making (Bernard, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Meaning is mediated out by the researcher and systematically analyzed, thereby revealing the participants' own view of reality (Merriam, 1998). The types of data used in qualitative research consist of interviews, artifacts, cultural texts, productions, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). All of these data forms help to describe routine moments within the lived experience.

In all qualitative inquiry methods, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998) the researcher must be responsive to many aspects within the data gathering phase – the physical setting, people, overt

and covert agendas, and nonverbal behaviors. A qualitative researcher engages in an active learning process with the purpose of learning about some aspect of the social world, contributing to new understandings that can be used (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This study explored individual's personal experiences and everyday routines as African American woman entrepreneurs, using interviews as the primary method of data collection. Interviews as a data collection method is further discussed later in this chapter.

### **Overview of Qualitative Approaches**

The multidisciplinary nature of qualitative research uses many inquiry forms in order to understand and explain various social settings. Moustakas (1994) outlines five qualitative inquiries that guide human science research: *ethnography*, *grounded research theory*, *hermeneutics*, *Duquesne University's phenomenology*, and *heuristics*. Merriam (1998) states the five types of qualitative research, commonly found in education as *basic or generic qualitative study*, *ethnography*, *phenomenology*, *grounded theory* and *case study*. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note a few qualitative approaches including: *ethno-methodology*, *phenomenology*, *hermeneutics*, *feminism*, *rhizomatics*, *deconstructionism*, *ethnography*, *interviews*, *psychoanalysis*, *cultural studies*, *survey research*, and *participant observation*. Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight five inquiries: *narrative*, *phenomenology*, *grounded theory*, *ethnography*, and *case studies*. In this study, phenomenology is used as the primary method for qualitative inquiry.

### **Phenomenology as Qualitative Inquiry**

At the core of the phenomenology approach is the desire to capture an individual's lived experience, or everyday practices and living, as a result of gathering comprehensive descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Manen, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). As the primary researcher, I will be

uncovering the participants conscious experiences – a vital aspect of phenomenology (Manen, 2014). According to Seidman (1998) the complexity of the individuals’ worldview becomes meaningful, as telling stories allow respondents to select details from their stream of consciousness. In this phenomenological study, *essences or structures* of the experience, derived from the participants’ individual descriptions and general or universal meanings (Moustakas, 1994), was inquired about using semi-structured interviews.

### **Data Collection Methods**

As discussed, a phenomenological approach was used as the form of qualitative inquiry for this dissertation. Meaning, therefore, evolved during the process of investigating the participants’ ‘reality’ captured through participant interviews. Data took the form of verbatim, transcribed interviews, later, systematically evaluated, and interpreted along with the use of memos and fieldnotes to report the essences of African American women entrepreneurs’ experiences. The following sections detail each of the methods used.

### **Interviews**

The essential goal of a researcher, when conducting a phenomenological study, is to gather enough detailed descriptions from the participants in order to determine experiences, opinions, feelings, knowledge, behaviors, and actions from the respondents’ point of view. Interviews allows for a necessary verbal exchange to occur between the researcher and the participants which results in collecting rich descriptions (Kvale, 1996). In this section, I discuss how I used the interview method in my study and why.

Phenomenological in-depth interviews assume various understandings in order to generate meaning. Marshall and Rossman (1999) states that this type of interviewing allows for deeper, lived meaning assuming that these meanings guide the participants’ actions and

interactions. Rossman and Rallis (2003) suggest that meaning is revealed when dialogue and reflection of a particular aspect of the experience is the focus of the in-depth interview. Rossman and Rallis (2003) also assume that meaning is determined by shared experiences that participants' are able to describe as structures and essences. The rationale to conduct phenomenological, in-depth interviews in this study maintained that meaning was captured assuming all of the following assumptions. That is, rich data emerged through the unique experiences of the participants.

When collecting qualitative data, researchers should be aware of the interview types and amount of information each structure allows for. The types of interviews are *highly structured/standardized*, *semi-structured*, and *unstructured* (Bernard, 2002; Merriam, 1998). Structured interviews consist of closed-ended questions (Merriam, 1998). These interviews are often criticized for focusing more on the investigator's preconceived notions of the world rather than the perspectives of the participants (Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured interviews contain open-ended and closed-ended questions that are more or less structured (Merriam, 1998). Unstructured interviews use open-ended questions and typically are used in exploratory studies to gain insight when there is not enough information on the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 1998). This dissertation utilized semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews use an interview guide containing questions determined ahead of time by the researcher (Bernard, 2002; Merriam, 1998). The wording and order of questions are flexible and allows for new leads, the ability to respond to the situation at hand, and the ability to uncover the emerging worldview of the participant without using excessive control from the researcher (Bernard, 2002; Merriam, 1998).

Valuable participant data of qualitative researchers are often captured when emphasizing the conversational nature of in-depth interviews (Kvale, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 1999;

Merriam, 1998). Kvale (1996) states that interview questions can be evaluated by two dimensions: *thematically* (considering the relevance to research theme) and *dynamically* (considering the interpersonal relationship in the interview). In this study, the researcher concurs that the interview guide's structure, while considering the two dimensions, which enabled carefully planned, purposeful interviews that allows a wealth of participant data to be collected.

More specifically, this study's format aligns with Seidman's (1998) phenomenological in-depth interviewing methods while uncovering aspects important to entrepreneurship considering Gartner's (1985) four perspectives of the New Venture Creation Framework. Seidman's (1998) approach to in-depth phenomenological interviewing is primarily open-ended with the goal of allowing participants to reconstruct one's experience within the topic under study. Asking the participants to reconstruct their experiences is imperative as the process is partially based on memory and on what the participant senses is important about past events (Seidman, 1998). This study incorporates the inquiry method of Seidman's (1998) three interview series: *focused life history*, *the details of experience*, and *reflection on the meaning*. The *focused life history* stage allows the researcher to ask the participants to put their experience in context considering as much as possible about their life in light of the topic up to the present time. The *focused life history* question asked the following: *Tell me about your life up to the time you became an African American woman entrepreneur operating in this field? Going back as far as possible if you can remember.* The *details of experience* stage allow the participants to reconstruct concrete details of the participants' present experience within the context in which it occurs. This stage question asked the participant to: *Share with me a typical day of operations within your business?* Stories about the participants' experience as an entrepreneur elicit details (Seidman, 1998). The *reflection on the meaning* stage allows the participants' to reflect on the meaning of

their experience (meaning is not limited to satisfaction rather it is addressed by the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life). The questions for this section asked: *How do you feel about your experiences considering what you have said about your life and the work that you do? Do you find your experiences meaningful? How so? Why not?* Meaning was captured by maintaining these three interview stages' structures which enabled participants to reconstruct meaning of their own experiences while continuing an open and conversational interview structure.

Asking good questions is crucial when interacting with individuals to uncover socially constructed and embedded meanings. Merriam (1998) proposed four types of questions to stimulate responses from respondents: (1) *hypothetical* (asks what the respondent might do or what it might be like in a particular situation; usually begins with "What if" or "Suppose"), (2) *devil's advocate* (challenges the respondent to consider an opposing view), (3) *ideal position* (asks the respondent to describe an ideal situation), and (4) *interpretive* (advances tentative interpretation of what the respondent has been saying and asks for a reaction). Another successful tactic to obtaining adequate descriptive data is to use probes. Various types of probes exist; however, it is not a requirement that all of them be used in a study. Yet, knowing these options may help to stimulate deeper reflection from the participants and allow the researcher to gather richer content during the interviewing process. Gartner's (1985) New Venture Creation Framework assisted in combating information overload creating a selective process or lens to interpret African American women entrepreneurs' experiences when operating in Apparel/Retail. In addition, to semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to complete an 8.5 x 11 collage, prior to starting the interviews and detailing "What it is like to be an African American

woman entrepreneur” and/or “What does being an African American woman personally mean to you as an individual?”

### **Memos and Fieldnotes**

Although interviews provide a great deal of in-depth data, a researcher needs a strategy for keeping track of one’s thoughts throughout the analysis process. I was able to do this by utilizing memos and fieldnotes. I prioritized the use of memoing as a strategy of keeping an audit trail. Memos can consist of short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that can lead to uncovering meaning through hunches, intuition, and serendipitous occurrences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As for the field notes process, I utilized “field jottings” (Bernard, 2002), where I wrote informal summaries based on what I heard, and observed after completing the interviews. In turn, valuable explanations of the setting, context, and participants was used to describe, classify, and interpret data.

### **Research Participants**

In this phenomenological study, the sample consisted of thirteen participants that have experienced the phenomenon being studied for best results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This means that purposeful sampling is used to select individuals that informs understanding regarding the central research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants may also be referred by individuals who are aware of the study’s criteria through snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Upon Institutional Review Board approval at North Carolina State University, participants were recruited using an e-mail invitation, based on referrals, and information obtained by various online sources to recruit fitting candidates for this study. These contacts were asked to identify African American women entrepreneurs operating in textiles and apparel.

A digital and paper flyer was also distributed through these channels and on the researcher's LinkedIn page. Organizations that fit the study's criteria was contacted to advertise in an attempt to assist with recruiting participants. The first 13 individuals that met the study's criteria was interviewed. All participation in this study was voluntary.

The participant's data was collected using face-to-face, over the phone, and Skype interviews that took place at a quiet and convenient location to the participant. With the goal of interviewing participants within a one to one-and-a-half hour time frame, four interviews met this goal, six interviews surpassed this time period, and three interviews took less than one hour to conduct. I began all interviews with a brief introduction discussing the purpose of this study. Afterwards, the participants explained their collages, then we proceeded through the rest of the semi-structured protocol. Using a semi-structured interview script and audio recording protocol assisted the researcher with achieving reliability in the data collection process. Pseudonyms was used to protect the anonymity of the participants and all data was stored on a password-protected computer.

Table 1

*Participant Information*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial Role</b>
Alexandra	33	Knitwear Designer
Latia	42	Pattern maker
Natalie	39	Fashion Designer and Online Secondhand Reseller
Saray	47	Secondhand Boutique Store Owner
Rose	24	Fashion Designer
Kierra	27	Online Boutique Owner
Abigail	45	Accessory Designer
Kelsey	29	Accessory Designer
Shanice	39	Boutique Store Owner
Kia	34	Maternity wear Designer
Imani	32	Online Boutique Owner
Renae	39	Couture/ Formal Wear Fashion Designer
Sophia	24	Custom/Tailor Clothing Designer

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

As data was collected, memos and fieldnotes were written, and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Memos were examined along with the interview transcripts as a digital audit trail to validate thinking processes that clarify understandings through the data analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Collectively, the data allowed meaning to be examined by patterns and inferences. Spiggle (1994) suggests that *analysis* and *interpretation* are key to breaking down and assessing participant data. Analysis consists of several operations to assist in classifying and describing data: *categorization* (involves classifying or labeling data into units or groups), *abstraction* (groups previously identified categories into more general or conceptual classes), *comparison* (explores the similarities and differences across incidents within the data), *dimensionalization* (clarifies and enriches conceptual meanings and explores and defines relationships among categories and constructs), *integration* (moving back and forth between data collection and data analysis revising data where it is needed), and *refutation* (deliberately scrutinizing emerging inferences - categories, constructs, propositions, or conceptual framework) (Spiggle, 1994).

After transcribing participant interviews, I checked to confirm that the information stated in the interview was documented in the same manner they spoke. Then I began to carefully read through each interview, as I used memos and fieldnotes, and categorized common ideas and experiences that emerged. Then, I compared and contrasted data to explain common themes and categories I had identified. Thereafter, patterns of meanings, grounded in data, was transferred from the meaning of texts, objects, or domains identified by the researcher (Spiggle, 1994). Thus, the common meaning was systematically drawn out. As a result of the analysis, three conceptual areas were identified and used to structure the interpretation: (1) *The African*

*American Women Entrepreneurs' Experience, (2) African American Women Entrepreneurs' Motivation, and (3) African American Women Entrepreneurs' Challenges in Entrepreneurship.*

The first conceptual area sheds light on the unique entrepreneurial experiences of African American women entrepreneurs that influence their decision making in their Apparel/Retail endeavors. The second conceptual area considers African American women entrepreneurs' motivations with regard to entrepreneurship. Lastly, the third conceptual area discusses how African American women entrepreneurs are challenged, and impacted by their experiences in Apparel/Retail.

Integration is one of the most important steps to the interpretation process. Integration involves making “connections” considering various conditions, contexts, strategies, and outcomes (Spiggle, 1994), and how findings compare to objectives, existing literature, and theoretical considerations. As a result, I looked for similarities in the experiences of my participants and observed how themes confirm or disaffirm previous literature. I explored African American women entrepreneurs' life history, concrete details of their experience, and how they articulated their meaning. Additionally, I examined the data to discuss the broader implications of my findings considering aspects of their overall lived experiences, motivations, and challenges within in Apparel/Retail businesses.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, an explanation of the methodological framework was provided. Methods to be used in the data collection were explained, and anticipated approaches to data analysis and interpretation were described. The next three chapters (Chapters IV – VI), I present the resulting thematic interpretation of data. They are followed by a discussion of the broader significance of the main findings that emerge in the thematic interpretation (Chapter VII).

## CHAPTER IV

### THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS' EXPERIENCE

As discussed in Chapter II, past literature identifies many challenges faced by African American women entrepreneurs. Participants in this study self-identified as African American or Black, and articulated similar challenges in their Apparel/Retail entrepreneurial pursuits. For the purpose of this study, African American or Black refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

As will be discussed in this chapter, data show that African American women entrepreneurs have unique entrepreneurial experiences that influence their decision making. Three thematic areas provide insight into the participants' experiences as African American women entrepreneurs: (1) *Color Conscious: Being Black Twice Over*, (2) *Working Up to Queendom*, and (3) *Help Me, So I Can Help Others*. Each thematic area is discussed in relation to the root of their lived experiences as a subgroup of entrepreneurs such as being African American and a woman.

#### **Color Conscious: Being Black Twice Over**

According to participants, race is an inescapable feature of being an African American woman entrepreneur. As a result, they are constantly aware of their race in their interactions with others, and often possess a need to be representative of their "true selves" within the context of their race. For each participant in this study, the importance of proper representation in action and portrayal is essential to their entrepreneurial experiences. Participants discussed color consciousness as an aspect of how the world viewed them versus how they wanted to be seen and embraced by others. Three experiences surfaced as important to understanding this type of awareness and emphasized representation in this specific way: (a) *Projecting Your Negativity on*

*My Professionalism, (b) Limited Representation and Recognition, and (c) A Model for Example.*

Each of these themes will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Projecting Your Negativity on My Professionalism**

The topic of race was consistently a factor in the experiences of participants. They often shared how they were negatively treated or not taken seriously in regard to their Apparel/Retail business efforts. Given their meaning of professionalism, which refers to how one is expected to act within the work or business environment, participants expressed specific occasions where their level of professionalism was seen as subpar. Abigail discusses how she personally, is not taken seriously by other women despite her status as a solopreneur and Board member.

Abigail: I do think a lot of times that even other women don't take me as seriously because I am a Black woman and trying to do this for myself. They look at you as if you got to have a White person involved somewhere in order for you to have gotten this grant or to be able to be at this networking event, or to be a Board member of this organization. I am sometimes not taken as seriously as I would like. The positive on that is that that pushes me even more.

From Abigail's perspective, not having a White person involved when applying for a grant or attending a networking event deems her unqualified as a professional. While her skin color is seen as a determinant of her qualifications, she still chooses to embrace herself and her community members. Abigail is not alone, as this discriminatory view of incompetence is seen by other African American women entrepreneurs too. They strive for their level of professionalism to be seen as equal to others. Additionally, Abigail acknowledges that in an environment promoted to exchange information and ideas, establishing positive networking outcomes depends on the extent to which individual differences are accepted. As she identifies as a Christian, Black woman she believes that obtaining a combination of specific characteristics such as being "transgender or Muslim" for example, can also leave individuals feeling like a double or even triple minority at times. With this in mind, having preconceived notions can

result in discriminatory behavior that contributes to unconsciously or consciously dismissing a person's professional value.

For Renae, the belief that other people's status does not equate to special treatment impacts her interactions with privileged White clients:

Renae: A lot of my clients are White. [Most] of my clients do treat me well, but there are a lot of people that still look down on us. We won't be as good as someone else or not value us as much or wanting to pay us as much. Then some will just look at us as just service people. Like, you know, you are just here to service me. This [is] where I [say] you are never too important to be nice to people, I don't look at people's titles and salaries and income...we are on the same level.

In Renae's case, she feels that her value operating in Apparel/Retail is seen from a historically, racist perspective shared by many individuals toward people of color during periods of segregation and Jim Crow. The phrase just "service people" is clearly a negative connotation of Renae's services, and while she acknowledges this entitled White viewpoint, she refuses to tolerate these types of behaviors in her establishment because everyone is equal and deserves to receive the same level of respect – despite one's individual status.

Participants want to be seen for their abilities to design, create products, and offer services in Apparel/Retail effectively without being judged on irrelevant aspects of their individual character and background. As a professional, Latia explains what aspects should be judged, further reiterating for her, that the proof is in the pudding:

Latia: I figured the proof is in the pudding, so I had to get to a point to where [they] didn't have to know what my skin color was. Just look at my work! So, that's what it was for me... just showing and proving. You might have your assumptions, but here is what I can do for you. I will get the job done...don't worry about my skin color. Don't worry about what I drive, where I live. Here is what I can do... can we negotiate and agree on terms?

For Latia, she feels strongly that the products and services she offers is the only thing that should matter when negotiating and agreeing on terms. Skin color, what she drives, or where she lives

do not determine her professionalism. It is essential for these African American women entrepreneurs to be taken seriously, and ultimately recognized for who they really are in addition to their professional capabilities.

### **Limited Representation and Recognition**

While many participants mentioned the lack of diversity in fashion, even more women felt they had to be their own advocate for a more accurate depiction of self. In understanding this need to be more representative, Shanice believes that interaction is essential for social change:

Shanice: I am the only Black owner so when they walk in, they are shocked. I have gotten the comment, “well I sure hope you do well here,” yeah, I mean some of them, they don’t even walk all the way into the store. They just stand at the door and look in, it is interesting. However, like I said, I am a public administration, public policy major and so social change is important to me. And you can’t teach people if you don’t interact with them or you don’t force some type of interaction. They can’t avoid me! And I am not the type to back down, so they need to know what it looks like for a Black business to be in this town!

Majoring in public administration public policy, Shanice is unimpressed with other people’s intimidation tactics. As she encourages engagement by her presence in a predominantly White area, Shanice takes it upon herself to showcase what a Black business in Apparel/Retail looks like and hopes positive social change can occur through her representation.

The idea of working twice as hard is discussed as a popular countermeasure to combat the negative experiences participants face due to their race. Natalie explains this idea and how it relates to the limited representation of Black females in Fashion and Apparel:

Natalie: ...the gymnast picture, which was perfectly my thinking because number one, we don’t see a lot of Black girls in gymnastics and when they are, they have to be damn good, so that’s how I think it is in Fashion as well...I think it is in Apparel and in business we have to be really good.

Natalie acknowledges that like Black girls in gymnastics are not recognized for their own skillsets, in Apparel, Black women have to be exceptional or better put...damn good!

When discussing the limited representation and recognition of African American women in Apparel, a common phrase among participants was, “I want to see us” or “I want to see me.” For Alexandra, the lack of diversity hinders her relatability with ads, commercials, and billboards as she questions the messages that the fashion industry is really trying to tell her. While referencing magazines like InStyle and Allure, Alexandra felt there was only a sprinkle of diversity here and there. She states, “Out of all the magazines this was really the only Black girl that I found. And this is a Barbie doll!” Barbie dolls are stereotypically thought of as being pretty and not much else. Stereotypes associated with Barbie include a lack of diversity in societal roles as women, exhibit preferred and unrealistic physiques, and showcase limited racial features. From Alexandra’s perspective, Black women’s representation has been reduced to a Black Barbie doll ultimately, exuding a sense of confinement (see Figure 1). As with the phrase “seen and not heard” for children, Alexandra suggests that Black women are supposed to stay silent unless spoken to or asked to speak. Alexandra acknowledges that for Black women, not being able to have opinions, attitudes or be embraced for their diversity of style, dialect, or “weird quirks” perpetuates racial stereotypes. These stereotypical expectations reflect how society thinks Black women are portrayed. And while she felt Black people were villainized in mainstream media, presenting a negative world-wide perspective of them, she refuses to abide by

these false narratives that limit what people see as beautiful: “so I don’t believe this right here, this is not the standard of beauty for me...” (see Figure 2).



Figure 1. Alexandra’s Black Barbie reference indicating a stereotypical expectation for Black women.

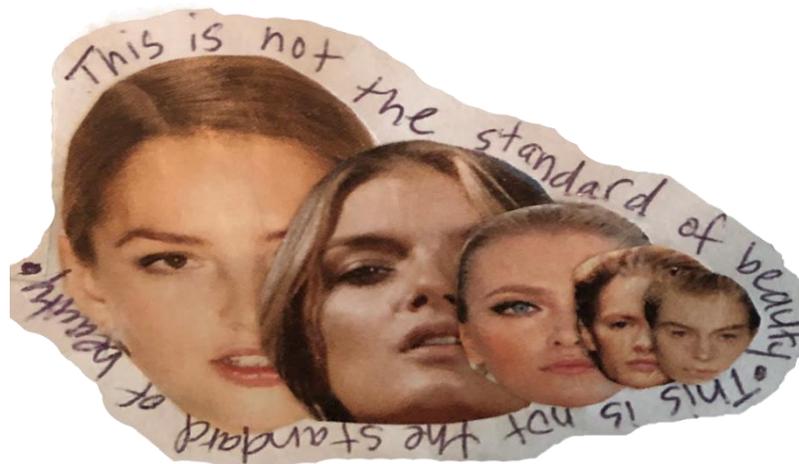
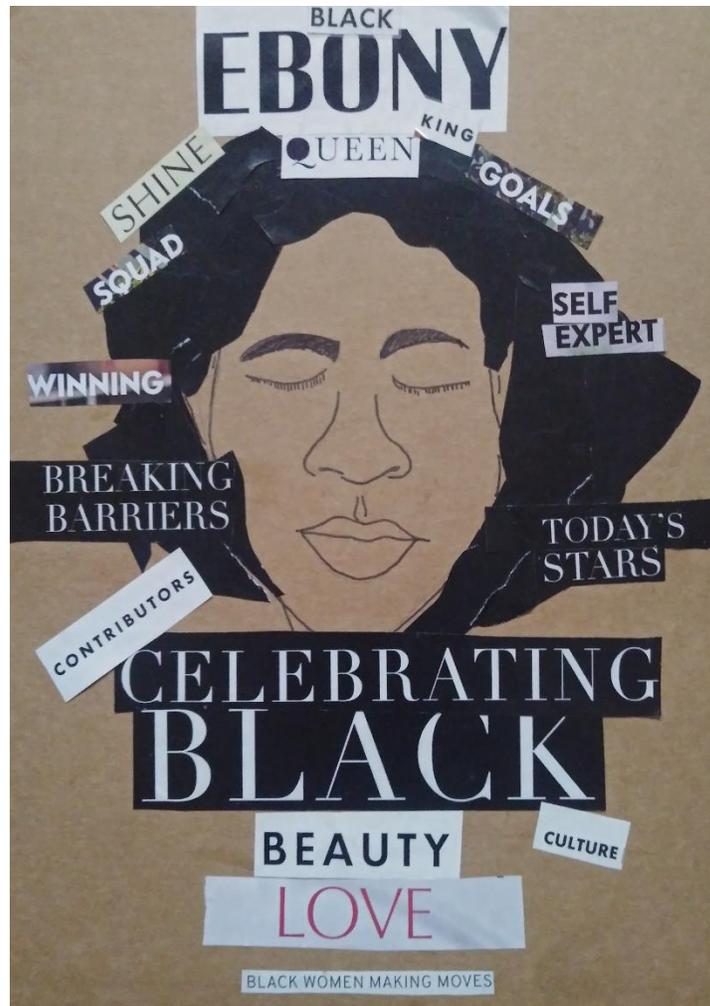


Figure 2. Alexandra’s image showcasing a limited standard of beauty.

Regarding being an African American business owner, participants suggested that there are levels to understanding what these characteristics really mean in regard to their entrepreneurial experiences. Moreover, they regard their experiences as entrepreneurs as defining them personally, and also relating to a larger extent, their race. Kelsey displays this in her collage, and discusses the image a Black woman must personify in the context of an entrepreneur (see Figure 3). She describes this in detail:

Kelsey: I think that as a whole we just have to properly represent ourselves, and our race, and our womanhood. To provide that example for our future, for our sisters, because everybody has different experiences that makes them who they are. We are a thread from an interesting cloth, so I feel like we just kind of had to take it upon ourselves to be that reflection of learning for ourselves, understanding ourselves, learning how to properly communicate, think logically, and pay attention to what we feel internally. But, to also pay attention to how that may be seen through other people's eyes.

Kelsey's commitment to properly represent herself as a woman to her race, sisters, and future generations through her personal development in Apparel/Retail, shows how she advocates for others by choosing to embody positivity from all of her unique experiences.



*Figure 3.* Kelsey’s collage indicating defining characteristics of Black women.

In a similar sense, Abigail also shared a strong desire for representation due to the lack of Black women’s presence in a networking setting:

Abigail: Socially as far as networking, do I always feel comfortable because I am the only Black woman in the room? No. It is not always comfortable, but I have to show up, because if I don’t, they won’t get use to the fact that we are here, we are not going anywhere. So, I want everyone to know that if I have to be that so-called token for the day, representing all Black women, today, then I will.

For Abigail, her obligation to be present at these types of events are similar to other participants, as these interactions reinforce the power of Black women businesses and how they are here to

stay. While Abigail's actions are exemplary of all Black women, many participants also share this desire to serve as a model for others in their Apparel/Retail endeavors.

### **A Model for Example**

The majority of the participants expressed the importance of having the right foundation, which they define as the right support system of individuals setting an example that inspires others to own and operate a business based on their model. In doing so, the "right foundation" did not necessarily mean imitating individuals who directly aligned with their line of work. In fact, the need for participants to set a better example was modeled to them by other African American or Black business owners' who exhibited realistic examples of successful entrepreneurship. As Kia explains, her foundation of personal examples of entrepreneurship gave her the courage to model herself after them:

Kia: I think being in their presence and kind of knowing that they have had successful businesses gave me the courage to try. Not necessarily so much that it was like, I am going to pick their brains on how to get started or anything like that. But it was more so like, oh well, they did it. And like my Grandfather, Uncle, and Mom didn't go to college. So, if all these individuals who didn't necessarily have the highest level of education or anything like that can just go out and do (start a business), then why can't I be successful in business having several college degrees? There wasn't any fear in trying.

For Kia, knowing that having a college degree was not a mandatory aspect for her Grandfather, Uncle, or Mother's business, reiterated that her formal education made business success possible. That is, the model of their example gave her confidence. Some participants attest that Black people in business is not always viewed as a realistic or practical occupation among family members, friends, and/or colleagues. To that end, this causes many to believe black entrepreneurship is not attainable. Shanice emphasizes how mentoring could change this belief by allowing people to see themselves in her shoes:

Shanice: Regarding my mentees and Blacks in business, it is seen on tv like it is this big far-fetched thing until they see somebody (black) doing it. And that is my thing... I

believe in modeling has everything to do with people being able to see themselves in your shoes. For them to actually be able to put themselves in your shoes. So, when I say come behind the counter and ring this stuff up and help this other person, they're like [made a sound to represent shocked/ panicked] what am I supposed to do? And I am like ...get the bag and put the receipt in [it], say thank you, and smile. Then, they're like okay, that's it? We as a community haven't really made that realistic for kids in our community. Still, they look at you with big eyes and in awe like you are doing this grandioso kind of thing.

From Shanice's perspective, Black entrepreneurship is not a far-fetched idea. Moreover, she believes that the Black community should expose and train youth on business operations, as operating activities has become second nature to her. In doing so, Shanice models a certain standard for her mentees in Apparel/Retail that can be imitated by the Black community. She regards her example as something the youth can model in their future.

### **Working Up to Queendom**

In many ways, participants expressed that their entrepreneurial experiences have been a journey that consisted of trial and error when making Apparel/Retail business decisions. This constant state of learning is a necessary aspect of being an African American woman entrepreneur. Participants talked about the pressures of adapting and adjusting to changes over time. Thus, working up to Queendom entails gaining a better understanding of one's self, in addition to, finding balance in regard to one's holistic responsibilities. These distinctions can be organized as (a) *Collectively Overwhelming Pressures* and (b) *Learning as We Go*.

#### **Collectively Overwhelming Pressures**

Many participants expressed how essential finding balance is to their overall health and well-being as they worked to effectively manage multiple tasks within their Apparel/Retail business, family, or both at the same time. Managing these tasks proves to be overwhelming for some participants. Saray further explains her challenges through the use of her collage images:

Saray: The woman in the image has a migraine headache and I am a migraine sufferer. In this picture is a person that suffers from vertigo. And I think that my migraine as well as a little bit of a vertigo has been due to the stress level of being a business owner...being a Black woman business owner. Daily, I have to figure out how to deal with taking amitraz and other pain medications. When I think about what I have to do the next day and managing business, managing my family and household, dealing with bringing revenue in, and keeping things fresh and new as a business owner, I tend to have serious headaches and it can become overwhelming at times.

For Saray, distinctive characteristics like being a Black woman in addition to the typical challenges of being a business owner has partially contributed to her migraine headaches or vertigo as she tries to balance daily operations with family and household responsibilities.

Many participants also described their Apparel/Retail entrepreneurial experiences as being harder than what they or other people expected. At times, it was clear for some participants, either in their tone or by what they were discussing, that conducting multiple tasks on their own was troublesome, and even contributed to instances of doubt or depression. While Renae received a consistent paycheck as a teacher, the stress of teaching negatively impacted her health and interactions with other people. Renae recalls what was going through her mind at the moment she realizes she has had enough of teaching:

Renae: I was like just sitting there the whole time. They were talking and showing the book and explaining and I was just sitting there like there is no way. I cannot do this another year like I cannot do this every day...I can't sit, I can't take no more of these kids every day. I can't stand to hear Ms. [Renae] this Ms. [Renae] that, I was like I just can't...I just can't write no lesson plan. I don't want to do no parent teacher conference. I don't want to go to no PTA meeting. I don't want to go outside for recess...like I just don't want to do it. I just don't want to do lunch duty. I don't want to be standing out there with them buses. This is not the life I want. I can't do this, so the meeting was over, and I walked back to my classroom. I don't know anything that they said in that meeting like I don't, I don't know nothing that they said, but I just walked back to my classroom and I was just like kind of zoned out...

For so long, she was teaching because she was the primary provider of her children. She did not have another job lined up, she had to pay for her house and other bills, and she did not want to disappoint her parents. While it was clear that Renae's teaching career contributed to her

unhappiness, working in her own shop also proved to be a difficult experience. As many entrepreneurs “wear multiple hats,” conducting all business operations by oneself, can feel mentally and physically exhausting at times. This is evident as Renae is almost brought to tears while describing how her efforts were all in vain.

Renae: I still had my shop, so I am like, okay now, I am full time working in this shop, ... it was lonely in there [Laughs] and I hated it, being with people all day, but sitting in that little shop downtown by myself it was different. I was the boss, I was everything the cashier, customer service person, and custodian. I had to buy all the supplies and pay all of the bills. I’m like, I don’t even get paid, because all the little money that did come in, went right back into overhead and all that kind of stuff...it was hard, it was very hard, because even with all the customers that came in...it wasn’t enough. And even as hard as I worked, I would stop and think about it, and like, it doesn’t even matter, I might cry now. It doesn’t matter like how much I do...it was just hard, but I still went.

Renae’s heartfelt statement, suggests how difficult being the boss really is – serving as the cashier, customer service person, custodian, the main contact to purchase supplies, and having to pay for her store’s overhead expenses without even being able to pay herself for doing multiple task as just one person. Not only are these women feeling overwhelmed with balancing many tasks within their Apparel/Retail business operations in addition to their personal lives, but they are constantly learning as they go.

### **Learning as We Go**

On many occasions, participants stated how they developed a better understanding of business as time progressed because of their change in their mindset, knowledge, or personal preference. While three participants indicated that their college degree was apparel-related, all participants noted the importance of going through a process of “figuring things out.” Alexandra explains her learning process from the perspective of someone who has not gone to school to study fashion:

Alexandra: Everything is a lesson learned, I can’t expect to come into the fashion world and be like well this is what they said in school, because I have never been to a fashion

school. I have an English degree, but this is what they said on Project Runway. I don't know what the hell they are doing on there! It's just like this is what I know this is supposed to look like. And I kind of know what steps to take and we are going to see it. Okay, this is not it. Test trial number one, on to the next one...it's like getting better and better and better.

According to Alexandra, having an idea of how things are supposed to look, as well as creating multiple prototypes, is essential for her to create aesthetically pleasing finished products since she does not have the expertise of those who pursued a formal education in fashion. While Alexandra's experiences are reflective of participants who seek to learn how to develop products, Latia's learning process consists of becoming more in tune with her personal preferences in Apparel/Retail:

Latia: It still wasn't registering that these hands were able to do things that were worthy because in my mind, I'm still on the outside looking for other things. When I already have what I needed inside. So, that balancing act in the thirties, that's what that was like...looking outside for what I already had inside. I always thought it was about doing something for others and securing that job that would eventually get me to entrepreneurship in the long run. It was like every time I was denied at anything, I doubled up on me, like learning what I needed to do, to do that same job that I got rejected for.

In Latia's case, she did go to college for fashion, however, experiencing rejection for positions in the industry as a Black woman made her "double up" on herself, meaning she took the time to develop her skillsets on her own time. In doing so, she was able to get on the path to entrepreneurship faster, stop looking for outside validation of her personal abilities, and realize the talent she has always had from working with her hands. In essence, the rejection she believes she received as a Black woman fueled her to press more towards her goal.

For some participants, getting better over time was the result of changing one's mindset due to age and necessity. Natalie explains this notion of a proactive mindset with regards to building her dreams in her collage (see Figure 4):

Natalie: Basically, I placed the two support beams under the gymnast on the bar to support the idea that she is building her dreams. Right next to it is strategy. So, you have to have the mindset for planning, doing, and trying to figure out how to get it done, because the world always has its own say. And that's on top of the road and I did that intentionally because everyone has a journey and so it's what you make of it. So, that is why I placed an empty lane with opportunity on one side and almost heaven on the other.



*Figure 4.* Natalie's image reflecting her building dreams mentality.

From Natalie's perspective, the process of planning and figuring things out are part of everyone's journey. Despite what other people or the world may say of someone, for her, life is what she makes it, and opportunities are considered to be great or Heaven-like. In a similar vein, Kia's analogy articulates the process of understanding, persistence, and learning:

Kia: It's kind of like the dog stuck in water, you know, he is moving real calm on top of the water, but under the water he is kicking like crazy to keep his self afloat. Keep it propelling forward, so on the surface it looks like not a lot is happening. I do realize that underneath the surface, there is a lot going on to make things happen. So, understanding that and learning the process is big for me.

In Kia's opinion, seeing progress being made on the surface level or the dog in the water is not always representative of how many things are actually happening regardless of the amount of

time that has gone by. As Kia understands how imperative the learning process is for her Apparel/Retail business, it is not surprising that all participants understood how important timing is to learning considering their entrepreneurial experiences. Ultimately, as these women juggle multiple tasks within and outside of their business, in addition to health concerns and learning new information over time, it is important that they are provided with the necessary help they need in order to help themselves and others in their communities.

### **Help Me, So I Can Help Others**

While all participants expressed the importance of obtaining help, it became clear that most of the women were interested in making a difference in their communities despite whether or not they received the help they needed in their Apparel/Retail businesses. For most participants, having a fashion-related business is a new experience. Kierra explains this notion of being new to Apparel/Retail, by suggesting that at times her business initiatives result in her cheering on herself, while also connecting to a network of friends who help to cheer her on towards her entrepreneurial goals:

Kierra: My friends...they are getting excited for me and just texting me like how proud they are of me. Even so, I still have to cheer myself on and figure a lot of these things out by myself because this is a new field for me. So, any information that I see, I try to just gravitate towards it and learn by having studying sessions with whoever I feel like wants to spend time learning this with me.

While Kierra's friends create a supportive network for her, she still seeks out individuals who are willing to work towards gaining more business knowledge in Apparel/Retail. In turn, the business knowledge she gains will be transferred into her business, thereby helping her larger community.

Despite the entrepreneurial hardships expressed above, most of the participants find entrepreneurship in Apparel/Retail to be a rewarding career path. They often discussed how they

like to make other people happy by providing a product or service that suits their clients' needs.

Even so, Saray still considers closing up her shop:

Saray: You know [sighs] it's like today...today was a hard day, all day long we made sixty dollars. Sixty bucks from twelve to eight. It cost one hundred and ten dollars for me to have the people work the store. That can be very hard when financially your revenue is not coming in the way you want it to come in. There are days, there's probably...every day I think about closing that damn store. Every day...I think about is it worth it. But I love it and it's part of my life. I would miss it terribly, but my gosh, new and creative ideas...what is going to bring a person into the store? What's going to make them buy from you so just having that thought all the time, my mind never sleeps.

According to Saray, she is constantly worried about her store operations, especially when the revenue is not enough to pay for her store's overhead expenses and employees. While she often questions what will bring people into her stores to purchase items, Saray understands that this is part of the dynamics of being in an apparel-related business that she is not completely ready to give up something she loves. As for Shanice, service to herself, communities, and organization is key:

Shanice: It's about service and not just service to others, but doing what services me as well because if it serves me then I am all in. My business services a lot of women and communities as well. I'm able to donate to Veteran women's support initiatives. I am able to donate to girl's club-type initiatives and young girl or youth female programs, homeless women, things that are in the same spirit as dress for success. I am able to help women feel better about themselves by helping them gain confidence while letting them know that you can be comfortable, but you also can look above standard.

In Shanice's opinion, her business is all about service despite having to bootstrap when building and maintaining her Apparel/Retail business. While Shanice strives to improve her customers well-being through clothing, she is also able to give to initiatives that share a similar mission of encouraging young girls and women to be confident. For Abigail, the need to address specific concerns and support Black communities further drives her business endeavors:

Abigail: It started off as a need for my natural hair, I couldn't find any products that actually helped with sleep care. Finding some that actually fit, a bonnet, cap, or shower cap was a huge challenge and I just said I need to make my own. I've always done some

type of crafting or sewing and so from there it became well, girlfriends needed it, daughters needed it, cousins needed it, so I am like you know what, I got something that people want, and it is not Asian made. We are buying our products from a country that doesn't even understand our needs. Let's make it here, let's appreciate each other, riding on that wave of supporting a sister and each other in our community.

For Abigail, addressing quality concerns regarding protective natural hair accessories like those mentioned above is a solvable problem. Obtaining natural hair indicates a personal preference to maintain textured hair patterns and styles that have little to no chemical processing. For African Americans, length, volume, and the need to preserve these styles can require many demands, and according to Abigail, the products by Asian manufacturers do not meet the expectations for Black women's hair. As a black woman with natural hair, and while having the know-how to sew and create, Abigail believes that other members in the natural hair community will value her business initiatives. As she creates good quality products, she is also serving individuals that embrace a "Made in America" and "For Us, By Us" mentality. Thus, being able to maintain their business helps them to impact the greater good of women and their community.

### **Summary**

African American women entrepreneurs experience unique challenges in their Apparel/Retail pursuits that impact and influence their decision making. They value being represented and accurately depicted within the context of their race worldwide, while adapting to changes and striving to make a difference in their communities despite many obstacles. As their overall entrepreneurial experiences highlight a collective effort to resist confinement and subjectivity, their motivations are also a direct response to how they handle aspects of their lived experiences. These motivations are examined in-depth in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS' MOTIVATIONS

This chapter focuses on and considers a general understanding of African American women's motivations with regards to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial motivation is defined as “the [reason] which a person uses to boost entrepreneurial opportunities, independence and income, and the challenges of entrepreneurship” (Wulandari, Djastuti, & Nuryakin, 2017, p. 25). This perspective regarding motivation is key to understanding their underlying desires. Thus, these data indicate their motives or willingness to make decisions considering aspects of their lived experiences and business practices. Taking this into consideration, three thematic areas are discussed in this chapter: (1) *Unplanned Paths to Entrepreneurship*, (2) *Desiring to Excel*, and (3) *Creating Opportunities for the Betterment of the Family*. In each thematic area, the data are explored to consider how Apparel/Retail entrepreneurial and business practices reveal participants' motivations.

#### **Unplanned Paths to Entrepreneurship**

As described in Chapter IV, participants are driven despite the hardships they face in Apparel/Retail, which results in them feeling compelled to make a difference. In fact, for the majority of these women, obstacles within their lived experiences drove them toward the decision to pursue entrepreneurship even more, feeling that their new pathway was fate. As many of the participants experienced some type of personal setback/(s), injury, or tragedy, they shared the same sentiment of believing that all things happen for a reason. Thus, their initial thoughts considering their personal satisfaction toward conducting routine or occasional tasks further motivated them to conduct a business of their own. Three themes explained how African American women entrepreneurs remain resilient in their decision making following undesirable

outcomes: (a) *Creating the Change, You Want to See*, (b) *From Unfulfillment to Creative Freedom*, and (c) *Transforming a Hobby into a Business*.

### **Creating the Change, You Want to See**

Frequently participants decided to transform their personal interests into a profitable Apparel/Retail business as a result of filling a need that they desired and shared by their customers. Being personally impacted by shortcomings currently in the market, participants' took the initiative to solve these problems and engage in niche market opportunities.

Kierra finds a niche, but for individuals who travel from the workplace to various social settings:

Kierra: I realized it was a common theme for my friends and also my coworkers to say that they didn't feel like meeting up after work, because they didn't have anything to wear or they didn't like my work clothes, or if we agreed to meeting up after work they would say okay, I'll make sure I wear something cute to work, so that's how I identified a need. If I said I was going shopping at like Ann Taylor different friends would say, oh you are going to shop there, and I am like well, where do you shop? So, just trying to figure out a common place where we all could shop.

Kierra, her friends, and coworkers believe that their work clothes are not fashionable enough to be seen at social engagements. While wearing something "cute" to work seems to be the solution for friends and coworkers to meet up after work, Kierra becomes more inquisitive and sets out to create a platform that enables a common place for professionals to shop for stylish work clothes.

Questioning and looking for a better way to do things is a constant behavior among participants throughout their entire entrepreneurial process. However, their motivations to find better alternatives often leads these entrepreneurs to identify a gap in the marketplace. Kia describes this process and how she identifies a shared need for pregnant women:

Kia: So you know when you are pregnant and you are like aww man, my feet are swelling, they should really come up with shoes that work with you...you always have that feeling that I wish there was something. After I had my son, I realized that there were

a lot more people who felt the same way, and then it got to the point where I said shoot if not me, then who?

From personal experience and targeting the shortcomings of the current products offered to pregnant women, Kia becomes driven to serve this audience. She believes that more can be done. So, instead of waiting for someone else to provide better products for pregnant women, she decides to do it herself.

### **Transforming a Hobby into a Business**

For some participants, their motivations for Apparel/Retail business ownership allows them to return to projects that were familiar to them. In other words, creating, designing, and/or sewing started as an interest earlier in their youth or adult years, which they have now returned to later as older adults through their businesses. Natalie exhibits this as she states:

Natalie: I grew up in [a Northern U.S. state] [and] my Mom always put me in Private School [and the students] wore the same thing. So, every day I'd be doodling on the side of my notebook, little outfits, and things like that. [Also], I would just make my Barbie doll clothes by hand. [Fast forward to]...when I graduated [with my degree in accounting], I said okay, I am going to try something different. [I moved to a Southern state in the U.S.] and in doing that, it gave me some time, so I got bored really quickly in [this Southern state] so the little hobby I pick[ed] up [was] sewing. I just got into it way more, I started getting into all these ideas, dreams, and so I [bought a] sewing machine and some fabric and that was in 2007, I believe 2007 [or] 2008, yeah, and I've been sewing ever since.

Natalie articulates how she has transformed her hobby into a business by returning to designing, something she has been doing since she was younger. Saray recounts this notion of returning to a childhood past time by reflecting on how she was initially inspired by her family:

Saray: My family did that as a living...we would try to buy storage units that people abandoned and then resell that stuff even from the age of eight or nine years old. My family somehow was part of this sustainable business model and that is kind of where I got that love for the Flea market, and the secondhand type of lifestyle.

Saray continues, as she details how she is able to transform her passions into a business:

Saray: My motivation was I love thrifting, I love flea markets, I love yard sales and way before I even thought of the concept of having my company, you would find me on the weekend, early in the morning, going to a yard sale and finding things for myself, my family, my husband, and I loved it. I love finding old things and making them new to me and then I started to find things that I didn't need but maybe somebody else did, and I started collecting pieces like that, and reselling them at my house. On weekends, my husband and I would open up our home to strangers and I would start selling as if I had a store in my home and after about eight months of doing that an opportunity came a couple of blocks from where we lived, and I was able to get a lease and make [my business] happen.

From an early age, Saray developed a love for sustainable shopping practices such as thrifting and shopping at Flea markets. In doing so, she is able to meet her, her family's, and other people's need for this type of shopping experience. While participants are innovative in meeting the needs of people who share the same interests as them, many participants also articulate a strong desire to be creative in their Apparel/Retail pursuits.

### **From Unfulfillment to Creative Freedom**

Since some participants felt unfulfilled in the workplace, they saw the ability to be creative in their own Apparel/Retail business as a means of breaking social norms and working toward creative freedom. This sense of creative freedom is often presented after a struggle occurs between their personal desires and various social influences. Renae recounts a similar experience, and how her traditional job impacts her desires to be creative:

Renae: I just felt like I need to be creating and doing this and [thinking whether I] should just quit. [Do I] close the shop? Do I quit teaching? Like what do I do? I would go to the shop [and] I couldn't even be there that long. A lot of times, I would stay up all night to make a dress or do alterations so that the client could pick it up and I could still go to work and it was just so much going on. It was hard. I just wanted to quit, and my Mom [believes] you got to have a job, but my Dad has always been [like] you can do it you are really good. [There were] days [that] I would call in, like I would not go teach, because I had too much sewing to do and I was like I got to get this done. I got to keep my business going [well]. I got these kids [and] one of them has special needs so that's even more IEP meetings.

In Renae's case, she contemplates how she can be most authentic to herself by creating. However, she is restricted by the constant reminders of real-life circumstances – having a stable income and being the primary guardian of her children.

Abigail displays her motivations, as she discusses how breaking the norm encompasses many benefits (see Figure 5):

Abigail: I think a lot of it was just part of conversations that I had with myself and just some keywords that just stuck out to me. One of the largest things that I see right now in front of me is being unbossed, taking control of your money, your dream, your life, that was big for me, because I did make a career change. I stepped away from a managerial position in retail, I was in furniture at that time, and decided to do my own thing, so it has become a challenge. And all these are about the challenge and the conversation I had to have with myself before I made that decision about making my own rules, being positive, bringing something different to the table. That also stuck out to me because we sometimes get caught up with doing what's the so-called norm. So, it really helped being able to pull out words that said that I was different, and that I was doing something different, and I could be proud to talk to you about it. That my life is going to be far more than the ordinary and that I could work from home.



Figure 5. Abigail's collage describing her motivations for breaking away from the norm.

The decision to switch from a managerial position to entrepreneurship was a challenge worth making. For Abigail, creating her own products while being unbossed, in control of her own

money, and dreams allows her to have the freedom she desires. Essentially, she has the creative freedom to make a difference on her own terms.

Like Abigail, Sophia's collage showcases a combination of images that are reflective of her desire for creative freedom (see Figure 6):

Sophia: I have a picture of a woman and it's like it looks like she is dancing but it is actually like she is being set free, so basically for me like, being an entrepreneur, it allows me to be free with my time, and my energy and whatever I want to put my mind to, I can do it and not have to like work, worry about somebody else over top of me basically so in a way, I'm free.



*Figure 6.* Sophia's image representing being set free as an entrepreneur.

She continues by describing the image with the neon pink lights stating, "Think outside of the box."

Sophia: It says think outside of the box, and for me, a regular nine to five job, I can't be as creative as I want to be or like as I know I am capable of being, so... being an entrepreneur allows me to use my creativity to the fullest it allows me to, put down whatever I am thinking and actually create it.

In explaining the quote, "The goal isn't more money. The goal is to live on *your* terms" she states:

Sophia: The goal is not more money the goal is to live life on your [own] terms so that coincide[s] [with the image of] chain breaking [which I describe as a symbol for breaking away from a traditional nine to five occupations]. I am doing what I want to do, or I am setting up a path where I can do more of what I love to do, and not just what I have to do to get by.

Sophia's images echo the feelings and motivations expressed by many of the participants. Her interpretation of a dancing woman resembles the idea of being set free. For her, entrepreneurship is her opportunity to break away from a traditionally, limiting work environment. As she maximizes her creativity, she is not discouraged by the idea of potentially making less money but driven by living her life on her own terms.

The participants valued the creative freedoms of entrepreneurship rather than just opportunities to make more money. In fact, the majority of the participants operated their own Apparel/Retail business while having a "traditional" or second nine to five job at the time of being interviewed for this study, and at some point in their entrepreneurial experience. Having a position that allowed a consistent income led to financial stability, but it did not grant the same benefits compared to working for themselves. Kierra concisely considers these distinctions:

Kierra: I am very excited about how I get to use my creativity because when I just do my nine to five, I feel like I am just using one side of my brain and I have all this creativity that I don't get to release.

According to Kierra, working for herself allows her to use both sides of her brain, which is known to have a creative and logical side for functioning. As she is used to engaging the logical side of her brain at her traditional nine to five position, she finds value in being able to release her creativity in her own Apparel/Retail business initiatives. As these women strive for creative freedom, it is apparent that they also have a strong desire to excel.

## Desiring to Excel

Participants' desire for personal achievement drives them to excellence, which is an essential part of their competitiveness in the marketplace. Having high expectations for achieving excellence is seen in the products and services they create to meet their customers' needs. While competing, individuals tend to go for the gold, or the highest level awarded to winners. Natalie conveys this idea, and how she desires to remain competitive:

Natalie: I wanted something gold in there, because when a gymnast or anyone goes to compete, they are going for gold, so that's usually what I am going for and it is not that I am going for other people, I am competitive against myself, and I just try to do my best every day, so that was the gold.

Relating the idea of competing for the gold to her own business goals, Natalie acknowledges that for her to do well in her business, competing consists of doing her best daily. Expressing a similar thought, excelling was associated with obtaining an elevated or supreme status for Sophia. She expresses this idea by referencing an image in her collage:

Sophia: I am going to say she is African because she has this beautiful chocolate skin, and she is sitting on her throne and basically, she looks like a queen to me. For me, I feel as though, I am a queen when I am doing what I do best or what I would like to do the most and that picture, it just resonated with me. When I look at myself it's like yeah, you're doing Queen things, like Queen status, so that was that picture.

For Sophia, seeing a woman sitting on a throne, which she interprets to be a beautiful African queen, invokes a sense of positivity for her. When she is doing her best, she believes she is doing "queen things" and embodies a "queen status" (see Figure 7).



*Figure 7.* Sophia's image representing her feelings when achieving and doing her best.

For some participants, doing one's personal best extends to one's clientele. That is, when the entrepreneurs are working at their personal best, their customers reap the benefits. In short, Latia provides an example of how operating at this level impacts her business initiatives:

Latia: You always want to be at the top of your game and be able to offer your clients what it is that they need because you don't want to see money go out of the door.

Latia, like other participants, strives to be at the top of her game. In doing so, she evaluates aspects of her business and is able to determine how well she is serving her clients. As customers' needs are met, she profits financially.

Participants also encouraged excellence from their customers. The entrepreneurs want their customers and communities to make sustainable and practical decisions. For Kia, she communicates the concept of exceling in terms of the complexity of the lives of Mothers:

Kia: Look at some of the more famous female athletes that have gone on to have successful pregnancies and competed at a high level showing that you can exercise and be pregnant and still have successful careers and athletic endeavors. So that is the reason I have Alysia Montano and Serena Williams up there, because I think that picture with Serena was when she won the Australian Opening, when she was pregnant with her daughter.

In presenting images of Alysia Montano and Serena Williams, Kia attempts to motivate women to excel in their careers and athletic endeavors, while feeling comfortable as pregnant women

(see Figure 8). Participants' personal requirement of doing their best, on behalf of themselves and their clientele, is a motivating factor because the act of exceling is deemed an essential part of their business operations. Essentially, doing one's best by engaging in entrepreneurship, enables African American women entrepreneurs to inspire better opportunities for their families.



*Figure 8.* Kia's images of Alysia Montano and Serena Williams to encourage excellence in career and athletic endeavors while being pregnant.

### **Creating Opportunities for the Betterment of the Family**

In many ways, participants saw their Apparel/Retail business as a means to change the lives of their immediate family. Referring to African American men and women, friends, and colleagues, Alexandra felt that they were “building back up the Black Wall Street.” Before the destruction of Black Wall Street, African Americans living in the Greenwood community in Tulsa, Oklahoma were considered the wealthiest despite segregation (Messer, Shriver, & Adams, 2018). African American community members and leaders promoted and embraced entrepreneurial initiatives that were a social and economic attraction to African Americans seeking financial autonomy and creating improved living conditions such as accumulating wealth for future generations (Messer et al., 2018). Similar to that period of Black progression,

many participants desire to enhance the living conditions of other African Americans. For

Alexandra, she desires to help many generations of her family:

Alexandra: Having a child and just knowing that I need something more is...what really drives me. Knowing that I need to provide. Knowing that I want to provide for my daughter and my family like I said my Mom has done so much for me and it is like I want to be able to retire her. She could still do hair, but I'm like you and grandma can come live with me. We are getting a house, and if y'all want to move in, I got room for y'all.

Alexandra believes it is her time to be the main provider and ensure that her family is taken care of. She continues, by giving specific examples of how she desires to help her family:

Alexandra: The houses [has] been getting kind of old and they need some work on them. I said that if I were to ever make it big enough [as a designer with enough financial capital] where I could move them, just move my family into another house in the country and we all just live out there. I would go back, and I would renovate the houses and turn them into Airbnb's because the houses are in very nice areas. My grandma's house is big, but it is just one level, and it needs to be updated. Like the contractors now and the people that are out there now with the ideas about the buildings stuff, I can turn those houses into something great. Have the money go back into their bank account, so that they're always making money...investing back into our people. I will always have money for my Mama and Grandma if I do this with the houses. I have a plan and I am striving for it like my twenty-year goal to just always circulating that money, and always taking care of my people.

Having an entrepreneurial mindset, Alexandra aspires to venture into real estate as another means of providing opportunities for her family and others. Basically, making the decision to invest in herself is just the start. She plans to also invest in other financial opportunities that will enable her to generate wealth for her family. Additionally, participants' entrepreneurial activities in Apparel/Retail often assisted them in encouraging their families to start their own businesses.

Saray characterizes how she presents this concept to her daughters:

Saray: I want to teach my girls and one of the best parts about being a business owner is the fact that I have two daughters. They see how Mommy works, they see what Mommy does, and they see my husband and I have to work as a team, I don't do this by myself. I have a husband that works with me side by side, but I'm trying to teach my daughters how to own your own business. To get far in this world you really have to take chances and the dream that you want to see happen and do your best to fulfill it. So, I had to put something about my daughters because everything that I do is for them. Specifically,

being a business owner, I do this for myself, but I also do this to show them that this can be done.

Believing in the importance of turning dreams into reality, Saray demonstrates what she thinks is necessary to succeed in life. Consequently, operating as an African American women entrepreneur promotes opportunities for wealth. Entrepreneurship allows these women to further invest in external opportunities and showcase financial possibilities to their families.

### **Summary**

Motivations are reflective of participants' lived experiences and business practices. For instance, recognizing the shortcomings of various products and services offered on the market, African American women entrepreneurs are able to utilize their skills and creativity to serve others. More specifically, addressing quality concerns and desiring to improve the living conditions that impact the Black community is an essential part of their business operations, as they embrace an unconventional career path. In the next section, challenges in Apparel/Retail will be discussed by considering African American women entrepreneurs' experiences.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS' CHALLENGES IN**  
**ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

There are many challenges that impact African American women entrepreneurs' lived experiences. In this chapter, five thematic areas are used to structure an understanding within the scope of their challenges given their Apparel/Retail entrepreneurial activity: (1) *The Challenge of the Mandatory Risk*, (2) *The Challenge of Attracting and Maintaining Customers*, (3) *Operational Hardships*, (4) *A Storefront: Take It or Leave It*, and (5) *Preferences for Obtaining Financial Resources*.

**The Challenge of the Mandatory Risk**

Most participants discussed how risk-taking is an essential part of operating their Apparel/Retail business. In discussing their daily routines, African American women entrepreneurs acknowledged risk by referencing instances that contributed to their personal or business growth and development. Taking these types of risks was often described as a necessary and imperative investment. For example, Saray puts the idea of everyday risk-taking, and how it affects her business decisions into perspective:

Saray: I'm dealing with a risk every single day, I hate to say it, but yeah every single day is a risk. My husband and I had an opportunity to buy some clothes from a store that went out of business which is another way [for us to make money]. I said babe we should buy this, and he is like, I don't know if we should buy those clothes, [and] I'm like let's buy it, let's buy it, and so we spent some money that we did not have, and we went right into another risk. 2300 pieces we bought, it's in our storage unit right now, and every day you decide to move forward, you are taking a risk, but you know what? Every time you walk out your door you're taking a risk, you're taking a risk on everything you do, you [might] as well take a risk with something you love.

According to Saray, risk exists everywhere. In the same manner that risk occurs in one's everyday experiences. For her, risks must be taken when making purchase decisions for her

Apparel/Retail business. While the risk that Saray takes is viewed as an essential investment to growing and maintaining her retail establishment, Kelsey sees risk as a necessary step toward her own personal and professional development. In doing so, Kelsey details moments where she is hesitant to engage and conduct business initiatives:

Kelsey: I feel like even taking the step to start your own business is taking a risk. Once you start to invest into yourself and you are looking to have other people to invest in you that's [a] risk. Initially when I started, I was just presenting it to people at my job, people who I [would] see on a [daily basis]. But people who are also at work, so I had to be mindful of that too, because I didn't want it to be soliciting or [perceived] the wrong way [because I was] doing my personal business at my first job. ...but I have to take the risk. And how do I present it? How do I share this with people to get the proper feedback that I am looking for? And whether or not I am going to receive rejection or not? Rejection is also a part of that too.

For Kelsey, attempting to start and grow her Apparel/Retail business is seen as a risky personal investment, as she invests in herself and then asks other people to purchase her products (investing in her products/business) at a potentially inappropriate time and place. However, she believes this risk is worth taking, and considers all feedback (even at her primary place of work) to be constructive and good for her own business. Similarly, Kia questions her progression regarding her business endeavors:

Kia: One risk you always have is that you spent all this money, and you put out all this time, and energy, and effort into it. And you're like what if it bust? I think that is always going to be the biggest risk...like will it do what you want it to do? Will it grow the way you want it to grow? Because it is just me and because [the business] is so new. I have been able to kind of balance things to where it is not taking away from other areas of my life. [However], at this point the biggest risk is not having success, but knocking on wood, that is not going to happen.

Recounting her efforts – money, time, and energy – Kia is determined to experience success despite considering the idea of not being successful. As this idea seems daunting for most entrepreneurs, Sophia understands this uncertainty is simply a part of entrepreneurship.

Sophia: A risk is a BIG part of an entrepreneur's life because you [are] going against the norm, it's not a typical nine to five so there is going to be ups and downs that you can't

control, one minute you will have customers and then the next minute you won't have customers [at all] so that's a risk. [Meaning] you may have business [or] you may not have business. [Business] could be slow and then another risk is the fact that you are putting money into this and you don't know [whether] the profits you receive from it [will pay off] and you're just going in like...I am going to put my all in it and hopefully, I [will] receive some type of compensation for it.

For Sophia, operating in a non-traditional occupation has uncontrollable highs and lows that are not felt by a typical employee at a traditional nine to five job. While Sophia has financially invested into her Apparel/Retail business, she relies heavily on maintaining a consistent clientele and hopes to be compensated for her initiatives. At some point, these women consider what Imani expresses as her biggest risk besides money which is "taking a leap of faith," and solely working for herself. Regarding risk and the many challenges discussed above, it is important to note that only four out of thirteen participants were able to "solely" be in business for themselves. Nine of the participants are operating their business while maintaining a full-time or part-time job. As risk is seen as unavoidable in life, in business, taking chances are considered to be a mandatory aspect of their decision making. While maintaining and growing one's business is risky, attracting more customers is also a challenge.

### **The Challenge of Attracting and Maintaining Customers**

In discussing marketing and researching practices, the majority of the participants were concerned about attracting and maintaining customers. They used online resources that consisted of many social media platforms, Google services, and other websites/search engines. Often times, the women entrepreneurs' business goals determined their preference for specific platforms. This is demonstrated as Alexandra describes her preferences for marketing as follows:

Alexandra: [I use] social media a lot. [Especially] Instagram just because I feel like that's the biggest way for me to reach an audience, like I can reach superstars, I can reach models, I can reach movie directors. Most of those people do have Instagram. Also, I do have a website that I market my stuff on, [and] I am on Indeed which is also a very big platform for businesses, and I market on that. I market on Facebook and I do a little bit of

marketing on Snapchat. It is not much, but I do and that is a younger client based. Some of the things that I do put up there has to be trendy, but most of the times, I don't post on snapchat. Those are like the main [channels] that I use to market.

Alexandra is careful not to alienate potential customers, knowing that certain social media channels and online platforms attract different clients with varying needs. As participants are strategic in connecting with other people, they also take specific measures to attract new customers. This is especially true for Natalie as she details tools and methods for how she markets her products:

Natalie: I do a lot of research. I also use Google Shopping. I click the button so they can promote my listings based on what people are searching for, so in each of these, online sales kind of depends on what words you use in what you are saying so I just try to describe my items the best I can and use keywords. For example, if it's summer, I might put in summer jumpsuit or romper, things that people will probably be searching for during this time of year.

In hopes of increasing her online sales for her Apparel/Retail business, Natalie incorporates keywords as a search engine optimization (SEO) tactic to promote her products. Ideally she has the potential to increase her online sales because her listings are made available at the moment that customers are looking for the items. Another timely promotional method involved the idea of influencing, or having another person to advertise on behalf of the company. For instance, Kia discusses how challenging and impactful securing the right influencers could be for her Apparel/Retail business:

Kia: Right now, that's the biggest thing, I am trying to figure out once we get the products manufactured and stuff like that because influencing is so big nowadays. Trying to get it in the hands of influencers who would pump it. I was looking at something the other day I think on LinkedIn, where this company will get your product into Grammy parties or whatever for their swag bags and stuff so looking at things like that, reward versus risk, is it going to be beneficial? What happens if a guy gets the bag with [my] product in it?

While recognizing the role of influencers, Kia feels that finding the right representative will assist her in marketing effectively. Focusing on her advertising efforts, Abigail describes an instance where she is left with more questions than answers:

Abigail: I am trying to become more accessible because I realize I [have] just as many White customers. These ladies may have long hair, or they are also embracing their curly, wavy hair and they're seeing that everything that is scaled down and is brought in from Asia is not always working for them. I have a few repeat customers that have extremely long hair and they come for my product because it is big enough to hold all of their hair, so being able to market to them and more is a challenge. I want to include everyone but where is everyone? I guess that's the challenge. [What] are they looking [for]? Where are they shopping? What ads appeal to them? What marketplaces should I be on? Should I be on a different marketplace, and do I need to be on a different marketplace to sell to them. That's [why] I am also always looking for new ways of connecting with everyone. I've actually started making men's shower caps for a gentleman that ha[ve] dreads. [They also have] long dreads. [My product is] for [people] who ha[ve] or is just wearing their natural hair full.

Originally, appealing to Black and Brown clients, Abigail realizes that her audience has extended to include other ethnicities and gender. As she embraces the idea of being accessible, she questions how she should go about connecting and marketing to all who would like what she has to offer. In addition to their marketing and researching practices, they also experience operational hardships.

### **Operational Hardships**

On many occasions, African American women entrepreneurs' felt that operating a business in Apparel/Retail was difficult. Often they described instances where business operations were "hard." In Saray's case, business is "hard as hell":

Saray: Well, I tell you doing anything in the [this mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. East Coast] is hard as hell! It is hard to open up a business here...you are talking about hard, expensive, [and] waiting in long lines. Our government is not as organized so that alone is a challenge. There have been times where I have taken off two and three days to make sure that my licenses and everything is up to par.

Primary Investigator: Do you know why that is?

Saray: Because [this mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. East Coast], is just backwards, we're just not organized. Everything needs a permit, and you got to use a person that you know is certified through the [mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. East Coast]. You have to pay five hundred and ninety-eight thousand for this, and nine hundred and twenty-eight dollars for that, and it is [just] expensive!

In Saray's opinion, operating in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. East Coast is more of a hassle for her as a business owner, because she is unable to get the required paperwork to conduct her business processed quickly. Taking two or three days, has the potential to set her progress back at her traditional, full-time job, which also means that she is not able to be present to manage tasks at her own shop. As participants consider their business needs, it is not surprising that they would experience interruptions. Latia discusses how needing help could impact her business progress:

Latia: I would be a little further along than I am now, and maybe not worried about burning myself out trying to keep that work life/ balance you know? It's definitely about having the right help, because even though you can sew, [they may not be able to] do the quality of work that I would want to see. [For example], I want [my items] to look like they came out of a store. Inside and the outside, that is like a prestigious job, [well] done. But it is hard finding help, and even coming from a town that is a manufacturing town like upholstery, sewing is a lot different from sewing clothing. So even [if] they know how to operate a machine specific for what they were doing [in upholstery], [sewing for my business] is a lot different. I can't stop and train everyone because I am just one person. I am already focused on keeping a roof over my head. I can't, you know, [be]cause that balance all boils down to time, and time is money. I can't stop and break a way to always show somebody how to do something that it took me ten years [to learn how to perfect].

Latia believes that she has become very skillful in sewing over the years, as her personal craftsmanship has been proven worthy to be purchased in retail stores. While she supports the idea that people in her area may be skilled in upholstery sewing, she is hesitant to hire help out of fear that she will end up spending too much time helping her potential employees resulting in losing money for her business. While Latia is fortunate to have the know-how to develop apparel

products, Kia's hardship consisted of changing her perception regarding the ease of operating in Apparel/Retail:

Kia: [My] initial perception is that you just get some fabrics, and you sew up the leggings. But, time has shown me that it doesn't work that way. For example, ...I bought fabric that I thought would work, and my designer got my fabric, and it got to the cut and sew shop, and the seamstress is like [these] fabric[s] [are] not going to mesh well together. We got to find something else. ...it is just me saying okay I know I like this, I like the way it feels, I like the stretch, ...so understanding that there are different grades of fabric beyond just two way stretch and four way stretch...is important. [As a result], [I] r[a]n into hiccups with production and things that initially, I didn't [consider].

For Kia, she originally thought that making clothes was going to be a simpler process. While she works collaboratively, she recognizes that she is the reason for production slowdowns. As daily operations can be seen as a hardship, the next section will consider the impact of place and managing one's business.

### **A Storefront: Take It or Leave It**

Participants weighed the option of having a storefront bearing in mind the practicality, convenience, and affordability of managing their Apparel/Retail business within a new space. Initially, obtaining a new space was viewed as an opportunity. Kierra explains how this idea aligns with her goals of philanthropy:

Kierra: I would really like a store that I could curate and queue an event space because I do see a lot of people in our area really needing an event space, so I would want to be able to transform it to be multipurpose, and really maximize the space.

In recognizing the needs of her community, Kierra expresses how obtaining a multipurpose space would assist her in providing essential event spaces. For Abigail, additional space is needed on a more personal level. As Abigail explains,

Abigail: I have thought about obtaining a workshop, so that I could take it out of the home. I am realizing [that] I am taking up more and more space just cutting tables, supplies, [and] being able to keep everything organized. I have considered a workshop, and it may not be [that close to me] initially purchasing it, but finding a good workspace that I could leave some of my products that [would be] really good. That [is] also huge

here in [the city] and finding those workspaces that you can continuously use or maybe on rotation with other makers that is something that I am looking into.

From Abigail's perspective, her business supplies are getting to the point where it is taking up too much space in her home. As a wife and mother, Abigail remains mindful of the amount of space she takes up because she is working from home, and she is careful not to interrupt the living and functional spaces shared by her and her family. In an attempt to be organized, she has considered looking into workspaces that would grant her more storage options.

For a few participants, the likelihood of obtaining a storefront is diminishing. Alexandra reiterates this challenge considering her presence in a city, that is in a state of being remodeled:

Alexandra: Th[ey] [are] building more and more apartments [because] more and more people are moving into [the city]. They're tearing down more and more [especially] old, abandoned warehouses. They're jacking the prices up on everything, so it seems unimaginable to me, but I'm just going to keep hoping that something will come around, because it always works out [in the end].

As Alexandra chooses to remain hopeful regarding the idea of obtaining a storefront, she recognizes that purchasing a space downtown is steadily becoming out of her price range.

Ironically, in the same manner that visibility and foot traffic was seen as an opportunity, it was also considered to be a negative aspect of having a storefront. Saray articulates how she perceived a different outcome because she had a storefront: "I thought it would be much busier and help me with more sales, but it's not, even if it is busy on a Saturday...your environment still doesn't yield actual sales." As the participants often pointed out, a lot of money goes into owning a store, and those who achieved this goal, at times, described having a great sense of relief when deciding to work from home instead of having a store. Latia recounts these emotions regarding a similar scenario:

Latia: If I had a brick and mortar that was public anybody could walk in. I might meet somebody I would have not met [if] I had not been locked in my studio apartment. [My apartment] shuts me off [from] the world. If they are riding by a building and they see

alterations in the window or something they'll associate [me] with that. [They'll be like] can you make this? Can you make that? [Because] I did get a lot of walk in's when I had my brick and mortar, but they were jobs that could take me off focus of what I was already doing, and it's like I didn't have the manpower to keep up with the response that I was receiving. Being here in my little studio, I guess, it limits me from [other people] out there that do [not] even know about me. But for me it is like a safe zone. It kind of keeps others at bay that I wouldn't necessarily want to do the job for and not have to worry about saying no to them because I didn't want to do it [in the first place].

For Latia, her studio is her protector or "safe zone" as it provides a barrier between her and other people who desire services typically associated with seamstresses. Being physically distant or hidden from "walk ins" allows her to focus on the tasks that she chooses in order to be productive with limited distractions. For some participants, they felt that having a storefront was not worth the trouble. Kia puts it plainly,

Kia: Realistically we would just have to get so large that I can't do shipments from my home like I can't store product here, and then and there might be a situation where we look to a small warehouse with a little storefront and then we can start doing some direct consumer selling deals, but yeah it would have to get to the point where I got too many leggings taking up my living room.

While Kia maintains the belief that her house is sufficient enough to store her products, Imani weighs the idea of obtaining a storefront considering her clients:

Imani: I thought about it numerous times, but I don't have the clientele here. I don't think it would be in my best interest to get a brick and mortar, and plus I would be having to use money for insurance, rent, and lights [if that is] all th[e] stuff I am going to need [then] no, I don't need that. So many retail stores are closing now so I would just rather keep everything online.

As Imani echoes the expensive nature of having a store, she concludes that operating online is more advantageous for her as majority, if not all of her clientele, is reached online. Collectively, the decision to have a storefront was mixed, as finances was one factor that played an important role.

## **Preferences for Obtaining Financial Resources**

Most of the participants discussed financial concerns in terms of their personal preferences for the type of financial help that was available to them in their Apparel/Retail businesses. All of the women utilized their most immediate sources of money first. For instance, they used money from their personal income (for example, income from one's primary job, friends, and family) as a means of budgeting, as their primary funding method. However, lower risk options were also sought out for assisting with their businesses. For example, Natalie highlights this criterion:

Natalie: I was looking for grants the other day, and I am not searching [for] loans, I don't want a business loan. I've seen companies go under because of business loans so I am not willing to look those up.

As Natalie has a background in banking and financial services, it is interesting to note that she refuses to even consider loans for her business. In referencing other businesses' progress, she accentuates that loans have the potential to lead to business failure.

Many of the participants felt that it was their responsibility to secure their own financial funds. Often times, they accepted that their Apparel/Retail business progress was dependent on their personal and business growth and development, which directly affects their funding opportunities. After learning how to sew, and tailor her own clothes, Sophia also desired to create customizable and ready to wear clothing for others. By expanding her product offerings, she felt she would be able to reach a different clientele that would lead to a better financial reward. For example, Sophia comments, "...once I get a little bigger and start reaching different audiences and clientele then, I have to invest in more things. Hopefully, it [will] be easier to get finances." Abigail further clarifies that securing financial resources should be the role of the community:

Abigail: We are always looking for the grant, the contest, the essay, or something that can help us, you know, stretch it out just a little bit more, financially. Access is always going to be tight especially when you are trying to get others to share their funds with each other. I think it always comes down to community and sharing. It is very difficult but again that kind of comes back to networking and being honest and truly embracing community because there is money out there. But are you connecting with those that can show you where it is and how to obtain it? Is it going to be for education, someone who is in Textile and Design? [Are] there enough grants even if there is a two-hundred-dollar contest, or a grant, or a design contest that they can obtain some materials, or what have you? But how is that person able to find out about it if we don't share it? So, sometimes financial access is difficult and sometimes making the decision as to whether I am going to produce new items depends on it. Is the money there? [Are] the funds there?

According to Abigail, access to financial resources is very limited, and to offset these challenges individuals must network with other people in order to be pointed in the right direction – toward more financial resources. For Abigail, when individuals share these types of resources, they are embracing the idea of building a sense of community. Similarly, Kia credits a regional nonprofit organization for her financial resources:

Kia: Not only do they give you money [nonprofit organization], but they try to give you all the resources that you need and connect you to all the resources that you are going to need. So that you are going to be successful because at the end of the day the ultimate goal for them, for me, is to be successful and to give back and to plant back into what they are doing in their foundation, so that they can help somebody else come up. So yeah it's, it's very...very good, just based off of all of my experience[s] with them.

Kia feels supported as she believes that this organization wants to see her become successful in her business. In doing so, they provide her with money and other resources that enable her to build her business, and hopefully give back to others in the same way that she was helped with her Apparel/Retail business. Kia's experience is rare, and notes how impactful receiving financial support can be for African American women entrepreneurs' businesses. Alexandra believes that establishing trust with other people is essential to improving her financial situation:

Alexandra: Just being able to save money for my business is really hard when you don't have a consistent paycheck coming in, but you have persistent bills. Bills are going to come every month, and I might not get paid every month. I'm working very, very hard to save money just for my business on top of everything else I have to save for. I'm not

mainstream enough and I'm not getting loans or grants to get equipment for my business. My business is not certified. Additionally, I don't have that cloud of people to invest in me. If I were to go to an investor and be like I really need five thousand dollars to get this machine, to get this building, to get this and that, they'll be like well what are your profits looking like? I don't know because I am not keeping up with that. I am very, very small and it is like I need all the help that I can get. But I think it is more so with the connections... I am trying to make people really trust and invest in me knowing that I can make a really good product to sell.

Although Alexandra has supportive friends and family, she still feels the burden of being financially unstable – not having a consistent paycheck while having persistent bills. Believing her business is too small, Alexandra does not keep up with the administrative aspects of her business. Therefore, she is unable to obtain grants and loans, relying instead on the trust she establishes with others to build her company. Not having enough financial capital restricts participants from executing certain Apparel/Retail business initiatives (like developing products) and being able to pay for necessary expenses (store, personal/livelihood, employees, etc.).

### **Summary**

As described in this chapter, African American women entrepreneurs are challenged considering many aspects of their lived experiences. They believe business risk is comparable to everyday risk, and is worth taking. In understanding their personal business operations in Apparel/Retail, they do what is necessary for their business to function, leveraging their online resources, weighing locality alternatives, and prefer specific financial options. In the next chapter, I examine the broader significance of the overall thematic interpretation for understanding African American women entrepreneurs' lived experiences and consider key findings of the interpretation relative to the literature.

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Interpreting the participants' descriptions helps to better understand how they view their experiences as African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail businesses, and how their lived experiences capture a general understanding of this group. As participants' experiences are synthesized by the researcher, their everyday practices and living conditions provide a more holistic view of them as African American women entrepreneurs. Likewise, the interpretation of in-person, phone, and Skype conversations reveal the role entrepreneurship plays in their lived experiences, and how their decision-making is impacted as a minority- and woman-business owner.

This chapter is comprised of two parts: (1) *Discussion and Thematic Interpretation* and (2) *Implications*. In the first part, I reflect on the research objectives relative to the process of data collection and interpretation. In the second part, I state the main findings that emerged through the interpretation, and provide some practical recommendations based on the findings. Then, I conclude with a discussion of how the limitations of the study point to possibilities for further research.

#### **Discussion and Thematic Interpretation**

In this chapter, the conceptual relevance of the thematic interpretations is explained through the lens of the framework this study is guided by. Given this, the chapter is divided into four sections, which uses Gartner's (1985) New Venture Creation Framework to shed light on African American women entrepreneurs' lived experiences: (1) *Individual Dimension: Full Representation*, (2) *Organization Dimension: A Community of We*, (3) *Process Dimension: A Work In Progress*, and (4) *Environment Dimension: Obstructed by Society*. Reflecting on issues

discussed in Chapter II, alongside thematic interpretations, findings are discussed concerning the broader research goals and objectives that guide the study. Thus, each of Gartner's dimensions will be discussed with a corresponding theme that further encapsulates the lived experience aspect of the framework.

In the first part of this section, I address the Individual Dimension by highlighting factors that emerged as important to African American women entrepreneurs' experiences, which are explained through discussion of race. For this dimension, the theme of Full Representation is discussed. More specifically, I explain the role race plays for African American women entrepreneurs in relation to their professionalism. I address their desire to be representative and portrayed properly (i.e., positively) within the context of their race. Additionally, I discuss how their passions are prioritized over finances in an attempt to gain creative freedom.

In the second part of this section, I address the Organization Dimension by exploring how African American women entrepreneurs organize their businesses according to their individual and community needs. I highlight how their actions are also representative of themselves and their racial communities. For this dimension, the theme of A Community of We is discussed.

In the third part of this section, I address the Process Dimension by emphasizing how, as African American women entrepreneurs, improving the self relates to their multifaceted roles as business owners and/or Mothers. Furthermore, these roles are ascribed to and managed over time as a result of their individual journey and their desire to better themselves. For this dimension, the theme of A Work in Progress is discussed considering their processes of learning by doing (i.e., referred to as periods of trial and error), and finding a more holistic balance in their personal and professional lives.

Additionally, I note how the importance of timing and skill development is to their lived experiences over time. These obstacles experienced over a period of time, further contributed to their decisions to pursue Apparel/Retail entrepreneurial activity.

In the final part of this section, I address the Environment Dimension by examining the impact of society's color consciousness in terms of skin color, and specifically how it negatively affects African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail. I connect their treatment to Robinson et al.'s (2007) idea of social stratification, explaining discriminatory notions as minority entrepreneurs in unaccepting environments. For this dimension, the theme of Obstructed by Society is discussed.

### **Individual Dimension: The Need for Full Representation**

According to the participants, the topic of race is an inescapable factor that impacts their lived experiences in their Apparel/Retail pursuits. Participants articulate that it is their skin color, a distinctive characteristic of being an African American woman, that is seen as a determinant of incompetence regarding their professionalism. Often times, participants reference either conscious or unconscious behaviors of the individuals that they interact with, where they experience ill-treatment, feeling as though they are "not being taken seriously." This finding supports Robinson et al.'s (2007) notion that African American women business owners share the same sentiment of "not being taken seriously or taken for granted" (Robinson et al., 2007, p. 146). However, in this study, the interpretation shows occurrences of this issue when the participants are in predominately White areas/settings, trade shows, formal networking events, and in informal discussions with other business professionals. While Adkins and Samaras' (2013) study recognized that minority entrepreneurs perceived *networking effectively* as a greater challenge than non-minority women entrepreneurs (p. 84), this study provides additional insight

by acknowledging race as an influential factor regarding their business efforts. For example, Abigail in particular talked about how she feels she is viewed in a business environment:

Abigail: When you are looked at as an entrepreneur being a Black woman the first thing they ask is, “well what is it exactly that you do,” they [sighs] ...it seems that I encounter a lot of people who still don’t see a Black woman as being anything other than someone else’s housekeeper.

For Abigail, and many other participants, not being seen and appreciated for one’s own professional value is exhausting and degrading. In a similar sense, according to Kierra, her and other African American women’s pitches are a result of White vendors questioning their abilities as professionals: “I feel like I have to sell myself so hard, and they do judge me, so I really have to make sure I’m put together, and I do see other Black women really try to sell themselves too.” Essentially, participants reveal the extent to which race influences their business relationships despite their actual competence and professionalism within the work and business environment.

The idea of “proper representation in action and portrayal” emerged as an essential countermeasure for participants, as a result of dealing with other people’s negative perspectives, in relation to who they are as African American women entrepreneurs. Interestingly, this result is similar to Anderson et. al’s (2015) finding, *Being Halted by Others’ Perception vs. Moving Forward Despite Preconceived Notions*, which describes “a dialectic interplay between the benefits associated with overcoming, coping and succeeding despite misinformation and negative stereotypes, while simultaneously dealing with setbacks from others’ low expectations of their abilities as women” (p. 51). The interpretation highlights how, as African American women entrepreneurs, participants seek to be more representative within the frame of their race, as this aids them in defying racial stereotypes in an attempt to offset discrimination. For instance, Alexander reflects on what it means to be an African American woman entrepreneur, and how her race needs to overcome “villanization”: “It’s important we see ourselves... ‘true selves’ in

today's world, especially since they portray us to be the villain in every narrative." Similarly, for Abigail, proper representation consists of her learning how to be unapologetic in her marketing by embracing who she is as an African American woman business owner:

Abigail: I've had times where I hesitated with even putting my face on my marketplace pages. In hopes that I do not deter someone from buying from me. I've gotten to the point now that even my mannequin is a Brown woman. ...if it deters someone then they really are looking at it as face value. ...it presses me to push harder and [I] enjoy th[e] challenge.

While Abigail provides an example of how African American women choose to be representative in their product offerings, they also choose to be representative in considering their presence. Meaning, participants purposely operate their business and attend events in settings that obtain a limited number of African American women entrepreneurs, and in return, they show that African American women business owners exist, and are here to stay. The idea of proper representation for "coping" in spite of racial discrimination, to Imani, reiterates "special powers" (see Figure 9):

Imani: We as women and Black women have a special power and we are able to help people with a lot of influence regardless of how the world actually does treat us and make us think that we are not worthy, so that picture to me is what that represented, ...her looking out and her having power.



*Figure 9.* Imani's image representative of Black women's power despite treatment from the world.

Thus, African American women entrepreneurs choose to embody positivity in hopes of changing negative stereotypes, and racist perspectives that are not representative of their 'true' character.

While African American women entrepreneurs' experience financial hardships that limit participants from adding to various aspects of their business (Hodges et al., 2015, p. 200), they are more driven by their passions rather than their financial circumstances. According to Matthews et al.'s (2019) study, women's desires and passions for establishing and running their own businesses are often rooted in their own wealth and human capital (p. 286-287). This finding is supported in this study as participants are still burdened by their business (i.e., overhead expenses) and personal expenses (i.e., household bills and/or providing for their family), but they believe following their passions are worth the risk. They mostly use their personal income from their primary/traditional job, friends, or family. In a similar manner, that minority women view their businesses as opportunities for creative expression (Aspaas, 2004, p. 287), African American women entrepreneurs, in this study, find value in the creative freedom

their businesses grant them. The interpretation of data reveals that living on one's "own terms" is seen as an attainable "dream" for participants. In conducting their own businesses, they are breaking away from social norms (i.e., traditional work schedule, micromanagement), and have more opportunities to do more of what they love – design, create, sew, knit, buy, and sell clothing, etc.. African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail prioritize their passions as it allows more autonomy considering how they approach creativity in their daily routines/lives.

### **Organization Dimension: A Community of We**

As the thematic interpretation reveals, African American women entrepreneurs organize their Apparel/Retail businesses, and carry out specific activities to assist with the operations of their businesses. This speaks directly to Gartner's organization dimension, as it is concerned with the firm and its operational aspects. Participants answer their own call to action as entrepreneurs, by seeing (i.e., presenting) more of themselves and their racial community within a business context. For instance, some participants make it a point to advertise showing a visual that is reflective of themselves and their community. Advertising is a key factor in their operations and management of their business. Natalie expresses this idea, as she references her mannequin:

Natalie: So, you remember that mannequin I just showed you. Do you see her color? So, my first few mannequins were white, and they're upstairs. Last year I bought this one, she was White too. I decided that I wanted one that looked like us, so I got some spray paint and I painted her. I put some makeup on her, but you know, I wanted my things to be different. I want it to be reflective of everybody, all-inclusive. ...women we all breathe the same air, we got blood, heart, lungs, you know what I mean it shouldn't make a difference what color we are, but sometimes I want to see me.

From Natalie's perspective, being different, by showcasing more than just her White mannequins, allows her to be more reflective and inclusive of everyone. For other African American women entrepreneurs, their experiences consist of them setting a better example to

model, which promotes the idea of improving individuals' living conditions. In fact, it is in their personal desire and motivations to achieve excellence in their daily lives, that they are willing to service others through providing mentorship, making donations to charities, inspiring financial opportunities, and addressing quality concerns of specific clients that were overlooked or poorly served in the current marketplace. In exploring minority entrepreneurship, Aspaas (2004) notes how Hispanic and Native American businesses meet cultural needs of their own ethnic groups (p. 284-285), while Robinson et al. (2007) acknowledge that African American women entrepreneurs also express a responsibility to their local and racial community (p. 149). Thus, as African American women entrepreneurs' desire to be appreciated through increased diversity efforts, and they take it upon themselves to create the change they want to see for themselves, their immediate family (i.e., men, women, and children), mentees/future generations, and racial community.

### **Process Dimension: A Work in Progress**

As discussed in the thematic interpretation, African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail are working to become a better version of themselves. However, challenges persist due to African American women entrepreneurs identification of being females and employed (Brush et al., 2009; Hodges et al., 2015). More specifically, Hodges et al.'s (2015) interpretation described as "meeting time constraints and demands, including career and work-related considerations as well as those of a personal and/or family nature," can also be seen in this study (p. 199). For instance, Imani explains her perspective of a work-life balance, and its importance concerning many aspects of her lived experience:

Imani: When you're a Mom, and a working Mom, and your trying to run your own business you still have to find time to relax. I have come to find that we tend to put every[body] else's need before our own, but I have learned that a happy Mom is a better Mom. So, if I am happy and fully relaxed, recharged, and everything else, then I'll be a

better Mother to my daughter. I'll be a better wife. I'll be a better worker for my business. Then, with having a business, if it goes the way that I want it to go, I'll have a little bit more time to relax.

Imani's perspective illustrates her ideal workflow considering many aspects of her identity (i.e., Mom, wife, business owner, and daughter). Yet, it was clear that finding the right balance brought about debilitating health concerns at times (vertigo headaches, requiring medications, leading to instances of doubt and depression). Participants did not want to compromise any aspect of their lives, therefore, they expressed how difficult managing multiple tasks are within their business. This finding supports Matthews et al. (2019), as participants in this study also exclusively handled their business operations and managerial tasks (p. 312). Additionally, in this study, participants' change in mindset, knowledge, and personal preferences showcased how their personal skills sets developed over the years. For example, participants were asked to answer the following question by completing a collage activity prior to being interviewed: "What does being an African American woman entrepreneur personally mean to you as an individual?" For Latia, she articulates her meaning by presenting a collage filled with balance scales, stating: "the reason that I chose the balance scales is because life is a balance, but then when you are an entrepreneur on top of that, who is African American and female there's the balancing of the balancing, so I figured, let's have one large balancing scale that's holding up two other balancing scales." Interestingly, she further reiterated the importance of time in her collage as she displayed and discussed how her experiences in her twenties and thirties also contributed to her current entrepreneurial experiences being in her 40's (see Figure 10), and the process of developing her skills was also noted in the previous chapters. Likewise, participants' experiences consist of them adjusting and adapting to various challenges. Balancing societal responsibilities and/or

developing one's skills set was a strenuous process of trial and error, as they worked to be their best self for themselves, their family, and larger community.



*Figure 10.* Latia's collage reiterating the importance of balance as an African American woman entrepreneur.

### **Environment Dimension: Obstructed by Society**

Clearly, African American women entrepreneurs experience color consciousness because of their skin color, and this factor highlights the negativity surrounding them personally, and in their business. For example, situating their lived experiences within Robinson et. al's (2007) definition of social stratification, this study presents additional insight regarding the social influences that impact the participants, as African American women entrepreneurs, conducting businesses in Apparel/Retail. Essentially, social stratification from the authors' perspectives occur in levels, within social structures, institutions, culture, and that influences the context,

process, experience, and outcomes of entrepreneurship (Robinson et al., 2007). The thematic interpretation provides several examples regarding how participants, as African American women entrepreneurs, are negatively viewed by society due to the lack of diversity in media, fashion, and in business. Likewise, it is the perspectives of other people's social interactions and behaviors (i.e., White people, or those who have preconceived/discriminatory notions) that are consequential to them, and emphasize different aspects of being a minority status. Abigail further expresses this idea, as she describes the feeling of being an African American woman entrepreneur as being "Black twice over." In her opinion, her skin color and being a woman owning a hair care business, also catering to the Black community, causes people to question her business viability. She further notes that depending on how different one actually is from a particular group their status can intensify as a "double" or even "triple minority." Indeed, this finding is similar to Robinson et. al's (2007) *double minority challenge*, as their participants experienced tensions from being both a woman and an African American (p. 145). In this study, rather than negotiating their state of being as a "woman first" or an "African American first," women had the tendency to describe both characteristics simultaneously, as a hardship to their experiences. But, concerning the context of their race, participants understood the idea of working twice as hard as a means of being recognized as a member of a disadvantaged group (i.e., African American community and being a female entrepreneur) by an advantaged group (i.e., most referred to as White people in this study, but generally refers to those who have accumulated power and resources over time) (Robinson et al., 2007, p. 133). Kia states,

Kia: ...my Mom would always tell us you have to work twice as hard than the average person just because of the color of your skin, don't expect handouts, work for everything you get, so we very much operated in that realm.

Like Kia, other participants note that just to be recognized as more than “service people” or a “housekeeper” one needs to be exceptional in their business capabilities. It is their character that is impacted by the concept of working harder, as this idea is rooted in the aftermath of handling other people’s racist perspectives. Instead of being stagnant and deterred, they are advocates, deciding to be representative in their actions by embracing their unique experiences and the good within themselves, in hopes of creating positive social change as a means of supporting themselves and their communities. Ultimately, the difference of skin color referred to as “color consciousness” in this study, highlights how African American women entrepreneurs even in Apparel/Retail, are influenced and operate their business, while prevailing racial tensions/circumstances surround them and their businesses.

### **Implications**

This study is of great importance as more organizations consider what true equity and inclusion looks like in entrepreneurship. This can be seen by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation’s goal of assisting with entrepreneur-focused economic development initiatives, as the organization strives to break down the barriers that hinder inclusive prosperity (Guillies, 2020). The CEO of this organization solidifies this as she states, “We can all benefit from an entrepreneurial economy with a level playing field – one that does not limit Black and Brown entrepreneurs, leave women founders behind, or overlook rural America” (Guillies, 2020). Given this, I will provide practical recommendations based on my study’s findings, in an attempt to answer the question: *How do we work to develop true equity and inclusion regarding African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail?*

In answering their own call to action of being more representative considering the larger context of their racial community, African American women entrepreneurs’ lived experiences in

Apparel/Retail businesses, emphasize how more diversity efforts are needed to support them in networking spaces. For instance, participants' talked about how their interactions with individuals outside of their racial group, indicates a lack of acceptance considering diversity efforts (i.e., in media, apparel/retail, and textile and apparel industry) that affect them personally, as individuals' preconceived notions regarding their skin color is seen as a detrimental determinant to their professional capabilities. In their desires to see more of themselves and their racial community, they advocate for themselves and others (i.e., women, men, and children, mentees/future generations) through their presence and making specific choices, as they choose to embody positivity despite all of their experiences (i.e., the good and the bad). In showing their professionalism, these women work to do their personal best by providing the quality products and services to prove their professional/business worth. In understanding how the work and business environments, specifically, with regard to networking settings assist with further marginalizing African American women entrepreneurs, surely, visibility concerns need to be rectified. Approaches to address this issue should consider initiatives that eliminate the surprise factor of all racial groups when seeing a successful/operating African American woman entrepreneur in Apparel/Retail. Taken this into consideration, individuals and organizations could engage in strategically advertising African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail on various online sources and social media channels with the intent to share: 1) Who are they and what they do, 2) how their Apparel/Retail business is beneficial for themselves and their racial community, and 3) present practical ways in which viewers/readers, as consumers, can help support these women despite their racial affiliation.

It is important to note that this idea is not completely novel in its approach, as other organizations have portrayed various aspects of African Americans lived experiences. Since its

establishment in 1970, Black Enterprise is credited for being the “premier business, investing, and wealth-building resource for African Americans,” and work to provide “essential business information and advice to professionals, corporate executives, entrepreneurs, and decision makers” in the form of their website, videos, television, podcasts, live events, social media platforms etc. (Black Enterprise, 2020). As the American economy profits from the diversity that entrepreneurs bring to the table, organizations desiring to re-evaluate and rebuild entrepreneurship toward more equitable and inclusive solutions, should consider partnering with organizations that provide more perspective regarding individuals of color, particularly, African American women entrepreneurs. Collaboratively, increasing the marketing efforts of African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail on platforms targeting the corresponding racial groups, and those outside of this racial group, is a starting point to encourage social change through constant education, communication, and interactions on different channels.

The idea of learning by trial and error when operating an Apparel/Retail business, supports the need for more entrepreneurial, Apparel/Retail-focused, continuing education programs. Interestingly, only three out of thirteen participants received a formal education in an apparel-related degree program, while all of them discussed the importance of timing and learning as they conduct their entrepreneurial tasks. While some participants were better off than others considering risk and administrative work, many of them could profit from working with the Small Business Center Network. These organizations seek to increase business viability by aiding prospective and existing business owners with job creation and retention, and offer training, counseling, referral and information (North Carolina Community College SBC, 2020). Based on this study’s findings, resources like 1) free, confidential one-on-one business counseling services, 2) resource and referral information, 3) high-impact seminars and classes, 4)

entrepreneurial assessment, 5) entrepreneurship training, 6) business plan development, 7) sources of capital and loan preparation, and 8) marketing assistance (North Carolina Community College SBC, 2020), could assist African American women entrepreneurs in making the most of their time. However, these Small Business Center Networks could better assist African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail by offering courses to assist them in fabric knowledge (i.e., stretch, applications) and patternmaking process. Additionally, these centers can take advantage of African American women entrepreneurs' philanthropic spirit, passions, and experiences as a business owner in Apparel/Retail, by bringing them in as speakers as they are willing to help their greater community regarding many aspects surrounding their business operations/efforts. Essentially, Apparel/Retail-focused, entrepreneurial programs would be a good addition to the services Small Business Center Networks already offer, as it will better help them in assisting with the needs of African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail businesses.

While the need for a unique co-working space could address participants' concerns regarding representation/visibility and learning by trial and error (i.e., learning by doing), the consideration for a storefront also supports this long-term initiative for African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail. For example, participants weighed their options for a new space considering their practicality, convenience, and affordability with regard to additional uses for an event space and storage options. Developing this space, could combine many of the ideas and resources established already in the state of North Carolina. For instance, offering similar functions as the NC State Entrepreneurship Garage 1) coworking space, 2) skills workshop, 3) staff mentors, 4) speaker series (NC State University, 2020), and tailoring other resources toward the needs of operating an Apparel/Retail business by providing a space for window displays, a

shopping area, and other equipment/rental supplies, all essential components to creating this unique space. Raleigh Founded is an organization that works to facilitate community programming. Accordingly, the organization seeks to “Build Space for Impact” by providing resources and tools in hopes of building inclusive communities (Raleigh Founded, 2020). While the consideration of creating a unique coworking space for African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail would take a collaborative effort, this suggestion could impact the greater good of many organizations and communities.

In this study, my overall goal was to understand the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs operating an Apparel/Retail business. In doing so, I found that participants desire to be more representative of one’s self and racial community, and that, this is an essential part of their business operations. This perspective on African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail provides deeper insight into the topic, as their race impacts their interactions with other people, the treatment they receive, and their decision-making in various aspects of their business. Further study of African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail from a qualitative perspective is needed as it provides greater depth considering information presented in quantitative studies. More specifically, studies should consider ways in which African American women entrepreneurs experience issues. For example, an attempt to identify the cause of individuals perceived notions/discriminatory actions in entrepreneurship, in addition to how to facilitate change regarding the four dimensions, could impact more inclusive initiatives and policies.

While external environmental factors add to African American women entrepreneurs’ philanthropic spirit, it is important to note how they use their Apparel/Retail business as a tool to improve and uplift themselves and the livelihood of others. Participants of this study

demonstrated this philanthropic, entrepreneurial spirit by being representative, models, and advocates. Future research may also consider how individuals and/or organizations can further assist them in their social entrepreneurship practices, as this study supports the idea that helping these entrepreneurs can result in individual and community advancement.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the broader issues that emerged from the interpretation provided in the previous three chapters. I began with a discussion of what it means to be an African American woman entrepreneur, and how race influences their interactions on a personal and professional level. I expressed how being representative and passionate about what they do is essential to their experiences as African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail. Organizationally, I discussed how their actions are representative of their individual and community's needs. In exploring their processes, I discussed their challenges as business owners, life-long learners and/or Mothers. Last, I presented how their skin color, considering the idea of color consciousness explains how they operate in discriminatory environments. While synthesizing the thematic interpretations within Gartner's (1985) New Venture Creation Framework sheds light on the actual and perceived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail, the implications section provides practical suggestions when considering more equitable solutions to entrepreneurship. I talked about how the networking setting can be improved by strategic marketing efforts. I discussed the nature of how African American women entrepreneurs in Apparel/Retail learn, and how their experiences can be assisted with continuing education programs. Then, I addressed concerns of a storefront, representation/visibility, and learning by periods of trial and error, and how resources and tools in a unique coworking space could benefit their experiences. Additionally, topics with the

potential to improve African American women entrepreneurs' lived experiences in Apparel/Retail businesses was discussed.

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## APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**

**IRB APPROVAL**

Dear Kristen Adejuwon:

Date: June 7, 2019

IRB Protocol 16871 has been assigned Exempt status

Title: A Phenomenological Study: African American Women Entrepreneurs' Experiences in Textile and Apparel

PI: Matthews, Delisia Raychelle

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. Exempt d.2, d.3). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review.

This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website: <http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs/compliance/irb/submission-guidance/>.
4. Any unapproved departure from your approved IRB protocol results in non-compliance. Please find information regarding non-compliance here: [http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance\\_faq\\_sheet.pdf](http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance_faq_sheet.pdf).

Please let us know if you have any questions.

\*\*\*\*\*

NCSU IRB Office

\*Please contact [ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu](mailto:ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu) if an official PDF approval letter with signature is required by your funding source.\*

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM

**North Carolina State University**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH**

**Title of Study:** A Phenomenological Study: African American Women Entrepreneurs' Experiences in Textile and/or Apparel (IRB Number: 16871)

**Principal Investigator:** Kristen Adejuwon, knscott2@ncsu.edu

**Faculty Point of Contact:** Delisia Raychelle Matthews, drmatthe@ncsu.edu

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#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how African American women entrepreneurs describe their experiences in entrepreneurship.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because your experiences along with other African American women entrepreneurs experiences in this field can lead to more informed policies to assist with women of color entrepreneurship. You may not want to participate in this research because participation poses minimal risk with a minor risk of a breach of confidentiality.

In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher named above or the NC State IRB office (contact information is noted below).

#### **What is the purpose of this study?**

This is a research project. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs operating in a textile and apparel occupation.

#### **Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?**

There will be approximately 10-15 participants in this study.

In order to be a participant in this study you must: self-identify as an African American, woman, and entrepreneur (or business owner) operating in any sector of the Textile and Apparel industry. Your business must be owned 100% by you and/or other African American women entrepreneurs.

Participants will be recruited from one of the following areas: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Washington DC, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, or Florida.

You cannot participate in this study if you do not meet all of the inclusion criteria specified above.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all of the following: You will be asked to be interviewed regarding your lived experiences as an African American woman in the Textile and Apparel occupation. On agreement to be interviewed, the interview will last between one and one and a half hours. You will be asked to create a collage detailing “What it is like to be an African American woman entrepreneur” and/or “what does being an African American woman entrepreneur personally mean to you as an individual”. This should be completed on 8.5 x 11 size paper. After you provide consent, your collage will be photographed and further inquired about in the interview discussion. I will also ask you to be available for a review of your experiences and whether or not it has been interpreted correctly. This review will take about thirty minutes. All meetings will take place at a safe, quiet, and convenient location to you.

**Photos of the assignment**

If you want to participate in this research, you must agree to complete an assignment prior to the interview as per the instructions provided by the primary investigator. The final image of the collage will be photographed and used in the study for data analysis, publication, and potentially as part of public exhibits.

I consent to have my collage photographed.

I do not consent to have my collage photographed.

If you want to participate in this research, you must agree to complete the collage assignment before the interview process begins. If you don't agree to completing the assignment you cannot participate in this research.

**Audiotaped**

If you want to participate in this research, you must agree to being audiotaped. If you do not agree to being audiotaped you cannot participate in this research. Digital audio recording will be used to ensure reliability of data collected and to capture your perspectives on your entrepreneurship process considering the context of your life story.

As a part of this research, we would like your consent to audio record your interview.

I consent to be audiotaped

I do not consent to be audiotaped

### **Risks and benefits**

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research, but knowledge may be gained to help other African American women entrepreneurs.

### **Right to withdraw your participation**

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please contact the principal investigator. If you choose to withdraw your consent and stop participating you can expect to do so without penalty. You may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

### **Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on a password protected computer of the researcher. The researcher will create documents in the researcher's Google Drive Account. Consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet, audio files will be password protected, and participants will not be identified by name when data are disseminated. Consent forms will be kept for three years after the close of the study and destroyed by shredding. Audio files will be kept password protected on the student researcher's home computer for a minimum of five to a maximum of seven years upon completion of the study, after which point the files will be erased. There will be a file linking participants' identities to pseudonyms. The pseudonyms will be used in published materials. This file will be kept separate from the data and will be erased no more than seven years after the close of the study.

### **Compensation**

You will not be receiving anything for participating.

### **What if you are a student in college?**

Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at the university you attend.

### **What if you are an NCSU employee?**

Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at NCSU, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

### **What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Kristen Adejuwon, knscott2@ncsu.edu.

### **What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (institutional Review Board) Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at 1.919.515.8754. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities.

You can also find out more information about research, why you would or would not want to be a research participant, questions to ask as a research participant, and more information about your rights by going to this website: <http://go.ncsu.edu/research-participant>

**Consent To Participate**

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

**Participant's printed name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator's signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### African American Women Entrepreneurs' Experiences Discussion Guide

##### Part 1

- First, self-introduction by researcher and brief introduction about the purpose of the interview

(Make this very brief – just share a few details)

- Second, to build rapport, the researcher will ask the participant to introduce herself. The following topics may be used:
  - Name
  - Interest/ hobbies reflective in business?

##### Part 2

#### 1. Personal Meaning of African American Women Entrepreneurs

- This discussion will involve the participants each individually sharing the collages they completed for their homework assignment detailing **“What is it like to be an African American woman entrepreneur”** and/or **“what does being an African American woman entrepreneur personally mean to them as an individual”**. This discussion will allow the participants to reflect upon the deeper meaning of being an African American woman entrepreneur.

**The specific questions/probes will be solely dependent upon what is shared during each collage presentation.** (Passionate about business? Motivations starting and maintain business?)

##### Part 3

#### 2. Seidman's Technique

Now that we have discussed through your collage and what it means to be an African American entrepreneur, I'd like to discuss how this applies to your life history.

- Tell me about your life up to the time you became an African American woman entrepreneur operating in this field? (textile or apparel) Going back as far as possible if you can remember. **(A range of information is expected to be acquired such as family, school, work experience, and professional development)**
- Share with me a typical day of operations within your business? (Owner and employees specific tasks)

- How do you feel about your experiences considering your what you have said about your life and the work that you do?
- Do you find your experiences meaningful? How so? Why not?

### **3. Individual Dimension**

- On a scale from one to ten, how would you rank the success of your business? Why so?

**Questions listed below will be asked only if characteristics have not been explored up to this point.**

- How would you compare your job satisfaction before and after you owned your own business? Would you say that your previous work experience impacted your entrepreneurial experiences? How so? Why not?
- How does risk play a role in your current entrepreneurial experiences?
- Do you have a family background of entrepreneurs? Would you say that being in the presence of experienced entrepreneurs is/ or would have been helpful for your business? How so? Why not?
- How does your age impact your experiences in entrepreneurship?
- Do you feel that your education has impacted your entrepreneurial experiences? How so? Why not?

### **Robinson et al. (2007) Questions**

- What are some of the challenges you face as an individual African American woman entrepreneur?
  - How has your race and gender played a part in your entrepreneurial endeavors?
  - How has fulfilling familial and professional obligations played a role in your business?
  - Does your business align with the personal responsibilities you set for the business? How so? Why not?
- How did your perceptions, considering your individual background, differ from what you actually experienced?
- How do these challenges impact your decision making?

## **Part 4**

### **4. Organization Dimension**

- What is your business focus and/or mission?
- Who is your target audience and how have you built your company to serve them?
- What products or services do you offer?
- Would you say you were able to utilize resources that have been overlooked or undervalued by others in this industry? If so, how?

- How has your company been affected by governmental changes designed to influence the textile and/or apparel industry? (Environmental aspects might be acknowledged considering local, state, and regional taxes, licensing policies, etc.)
- What are some of the challenges you face considering your firm?
- How did your perceptions, considering your organization, differ from what you actually experienced?
- How do these challenges impact your decision making?

## 5. Process Dimension

- How did you identify this business opportunity?
- How do you identify and/or accumulate resources?
- How do you market your products and services?
- What does your process for creating new products typically look like? Who is involved?
- What was it like to create and build your business?
- What are some of the challenges you face considering your process?
- How did your perceptions, considering your process, differ from what you actually experienced?
- How do these challenges impact your decision making?

## 6. Environment Dimension

- How would you describe your accessibility to your customers and new markets?
- How would you describe your accessibility to suppliers?
- What were some considerations for obtaining land or facilities for your business?
- How does locality play a part in your business now?
- How would you describe the receptiveness of your surrounding population in regard to your business?
- How would you describe the availability of supportive services considering your needs as an entrepreneur and operating in textile or apparel business? How can these services be improved? What makes them valuable?
- How would you describe your availability of financial resources?
- How has your business been impacted by existing competitors?
- What are some of the challenges you face considering your environment?
- How did your perceptions, considering your environment, differ from what you actually experienced?
- How do these challenges impact your decision making?
- **Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences in this field that we have not discussed already?**

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in this research study. I assure you that all information will be held in complete confidence. Please do not share any information about our interview. And if you have any additional questions for me you can send me an email at [knsco2@ncsu.edu](mailto:knsco2@ncsu.edu).