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African American Experiences of Racism When Operating a Small Business

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Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2019

BS, Coastal Carolina University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

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Abstract

The problem addressed in this study was the racism that African Americans experienced when operating a small business. African Americans are more likely to start a business than members of other minority groups. However, African Americans are also less likely to succeed. Low success rates relate to the racial inequities that contribute to systemic racism. The racism that African Americans experience is deeply rooted in societal constructs that have been ingrained for many years. General racism and systemic racism are societal constructs that work against the socioeconomic status of African Americans and their communities. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the racism that African Americans experienced when operating a business. Phenomenological design allowed for obtaining experiences through interviews and written descriptions. Transcendental phenomenology was applied to understand the human experience. The data analysis plan included Moustakas's eight-step process of horizontalizing, reduction of experiences to the invariant constituents, thematic clustering to create core themes, comparison of multiple data sources to validate the invariant constituents, crafting of individual textural descriptions of participants, construction of individual structural descriptions, construction of composite structural descriptions, synthesis of the texture and structure into an expression. Findings indicated themes of microaggression, systemic racism through funding, overcoming challenges, and support from their community. This study may foster positive social change in rejecting systemic racism and creating positive experiences for future African American business owners.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and my husband, the two most important

individuals in my life who have been my pillars of strength and support throughout my

academic journey. Thank you, always.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Racism is still a prevalent issue that African Americans experience in today's society. The issues of racism and discrimination has been ingrained in American societal constructs for years. The cognitive biases and social ideologies of racism have reinforced the opportunities and statuses to White Americans that are, often, denied or limited to African American counterparts (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). Past studies have provided information regarding African Americans and their experiences in corporate America regarding racial limitations and inequities (Sisco, 2020). However, this study addressed the gap of recent racism that African Americans experience in operating a small business. It, further, addressed the racism and discrimination that are experienced by African American women. This study may bring awareness to the racism that African Americans experience when operating a small business. The study may also bring awareness around the depth of systematic racism and its impact on African Americans, which can contribute to positive social change in providing more equal opportunities at a systematic level. In this chapter, I discuss the study's background, problem statement, purpose, research question, theoretical/conceptual framework, nature, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance.

Background

Racism and discrimination are still prevalent issues that African Americans experience in the workplace. These issues can be in the form of blatant racism that leads to purposeful exclusion from important meetings or even derogatory name calling (Keeler et al., 2020). However, these issues can also present themselves in the form of

microaggressions. The microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional negative stigmas and stereotypes that are directed towards the individual (Keeler et al., 2020).

Racism and discrimination in the workplace stem from systematic racial oppression that has formed throughout the years (Davis et al., 2021). African Americans of small businesses face those same barriers, challenges, and issues stemming from racial oppression. On a gender-based level, African American women have experienced additional stereotypes in workplace environments. African American women are stereotyped as loud, aggressive, angry, hostile, and defensive, which contributes to the microaggressions and inequalities in the workplace (Lanier et al., 2022).

DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2020) indicated findings around racial microaggressions experienced by African Americans in a higher education workplace consisting of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, as well as the use of coping strategies to mitigate the effects of racial microaggressions. Dickens et al. (2019) indicated major findings around the discrimination experienced in the workplace by African American women based on race and gender as well as the use of identity-shifting to mitigate negative outcomes in the workplace.

Hall et al. (2019) discussed the unequal compensation of African American coworkers due to performance stigmatization that contributes to lower salaries as well as the devaluation of African American employees in the workplace. Keeler et al. (2020) described the unequal treatment of African Americans in the workplace due to discrimination as well as ways to decrease racial discrimination while improving harassment and discrimination training. Mbilishaka (2018) described major findings

around the challenges, barriers, and racial issues that are perceived to affect African American-owned hair salons through storytelling, providing further information on overcoming barriers and becoming an important part of the community in fighting oppression. Noon (2018) noted racism in the workplace due to unconscious bias being deeply ingrained, influencing attitudes and behaviors of unawareness in perceived racism.

Ozturk and Berber (2020) stated major findings around stereotypes in the workplace towards African Americans resulting in misrepresentation in terms of assertiveness being seen as aggressiveness, confidence as arrogance, and ambitions as pushy and annoying. Shrikant and Musselwhite (2019) described the concept of neoliberalism in a Texas commerce setting indicating that racial inequalities no longer exists while promoting the ideology of individualism and racial diversity in professional settings. Spates et al. (2020) described societal expectations, lack of resources, lack of relationships, and limited opportunities in the workplace experienced by African American women due to gendered racism.

Taylor (2018) described the concept of African American businesses within underdeveloped neighborhoods that use the community to build their business and foster connection as well as indicating the difficulty in obtaining capital loans to compete with other ethnic entrepreneurs. Thomas et al. (2018) described the importance of illuminating and unmasking racial inequities in social settings such as the workplace as well as discussing the social and economic inequalities that contribute to systemic racism.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study was the racism that African Americans experience when operating a small business. African Americans are more likely to start a small business than members of other minority groups (Thomas et al., 2018). However, African Americans are also less likely to succeed. Their low success rates in this regard relate to the racial inequities that contribute to systemic racism (Thomas et al., 2018). The racism that African Americans experience is deeply rooted in societal constructs that have been ingrained throughout the years. General racism and systemic racism are societal constructs that work against the socioeconomic status of African Americans and their communities. Over the years, the overt bigotry that African Americans have experienced in terms of physical abuse, mockery, and racial segregation has evolved into a more quiet and indirect form of racism (Sisco, 2020). The quiet and indirect forms of racism can manifest in unintentional and intentional isolation from networking and social events. This leads to lesser opportunities for African Americans.

African Americans who experience racism such as discrimination are less likely to obtain and secure business loans and investments due to systemic racial oppression (Davis et al., 2021). There is a gap in the need to address African American experiences of racism when operating a small business in order to break barriers and advocate for more equal opportunities. Research has been done around conglomerates and systemic racism on a higher level. However, there is a gap concerning systemic racism and its impact on smaller businesses, especially in predominantly Caucasian communities. Although there have been pivotal changes throughout the years, regarding racism, there is

still a prevalent problem that exists. Understanding the societal problem can facilitate efforts to break societal constructs of systemic racism.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and understand the racism that African Americans experience when operating a small business. African Americans have struggled with racism, discrimination, and oppression throughout history and, to this day, continue to struggle when it comes to issues of racism. This racism is also directed towards African American-owned businesses. Research has been conducted to explore and identify the systematic racial issues that African American business owners experience, in terms of power disparities and unequal treatment in social and economic structures (Davis et al., 2021). Racial barriers have been present in well-established African American-owned businesses throughout generations that have stemmed from oppression, segregation, and discrimination (Thomas et al., 2018).

Implementing racial counter-frames and intersectional counter-frames lends itself to examining systematic racism and African American entrepreneurs. Racial counter-frames and intersectional counter-frames emphasizes the disadvantages that people of color experience while also considering how class and gender intersect with race (Dickens et al., 2019). Such findings indicate that gender, race, and class do affect racism in African American-owned entrepreneurships, especially among women (Spates et al., 2020). Future research should be done to explore the business organization, processes, and environment through gendered, racial, ethnic, and cultural lenses within smaller businesses. This dissertation study was conducted to fill a gap in understanding and

explore recent racism that small African American-owned business owners have experienced, including the advantages and disadvantages of gendered-based businesses.

Research Question

RQ–Qualitative: What are the lived experiences of racism for African Americans when operating a small business?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was based on the critical race theory that, according to McCoy and Rodricks (2015), is attributed to scholars such as Bell, Williams, Delgado, Williams Crenshaw, Phyllis Jones, and Matsuda in response to delayed civil rights movements in the 1970s. Critical race theory is based on the societal construct of the deep-rooted racism that exists. Critical race theory was formulated by scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado (Delgado et al., 2017). It includes the concept of internalization of racism and racial oppression as well as the concept of institutional racism through structures, policies, and practices that contribute to disadvantages of minorities. The theory aligned with the overall research in terms of using semistructured interviews in exploring individual experiences of racism in operating and maintaining a business. Critical race theory was helpful in exploring the full impact of racial inequality experienced by African American small business owners (Christian et al., 2019). Chapter 2 will present a more detailed explanation of this framework.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study was conducted using a phenomenological design focusing on transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology involves an effort to understand human experiences without judgement and other biases (Christias, 2018). The study explored the racism that a group of eight African American small business owners experienced within the local community. The sample was chosen from a target population using a purposive sampling approach. The study incorporated open-ended interview questions and in-depth narratives to obtain the participants' lived experiences.

Definitions

Intersectional counter-frames focus on the disadvantages that people of color experience while also considering how class and gender intersect with race (Dickens et al., 2019).

Microaggression is a term that describes verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights and insults targeted to an individual or group (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020). Microaggressions can be presented by assaults, insults, and invalidations.

Systemic racism is based on implicit bias within environmental features where stereotypes and inequalities are experienced by disadvantaged marginalized groups (Payne & Hannay, 2021).

Assumptions

Assumptions that were critical to the meaningfulness of this study included the assumption that multiple realities and perspectives exist in regard to the participants, the researcher, as well as the reader. It was assumed that the transcendental

phenomenological approach allowed for in-depth and complex responses regarding the participants' lived experiences. It was also assumed that participants were able to answer interview questions honestly regarding their individual lived experiences with racism and operating a small business.

Scope and Delimitations

The study focused on the lived experiences of eight African Americans regarding racism when operating a business. The scope of the study focused on racism and systemic racism deep rooted in society that prevent African Americans from acquiring the same opportunities as their counterparts. The study also focused on the aspects of racial barriers that are experienced by African Americans through microaggressions along with aspects of gender-based businesses. Participants' socioeconomic status was not a focus in this study. Although this factor may have been relevant in some aspects of this study, it was not within the main scope of the study. This study also excluded minors as well as other minority groups.

The delimitations of the study were based on the experiences of African Americans, the population included in the study. Other boundaries of this study included a coastal geographic region located in the south. Therefore, the participants were located in a southern coastal region in the United States. The study was also based on local small businesses rather than big conglomerates or franchises.

Limitations

Potential limitations, challenges, and/or barriers included hesitancy and reluctance by the participants in sharing their experience regarding the fear of revealing their

identity. However, informed consent was presented to the participants in order to ensure their identifiers and their privacy. Participants were also informed of the voluntary nature of the study and did not need to discuss anything they might have felt uncomfortable disclosing. Other limitations, challenges, and/or barriers may have included concerns around COVID-19 and its impact on African American-owned businesses in a small local community.

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Significance

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The significance of addressing the purpose of this study involved bringing awareness to the racism that African Americans experience when operating a business. Freedom and opportunities are assumed in an equal society. However, there are deep-rooted issues that exist preventing African Americans from having equal opportunities. Racism in operating a business is attributed to the systematic oppression that African Americans face due to social ideologies, practices, and institutions, as well as exploitation of people of color (Davis et al., 2021). The results of this study may facilitate future research in providing information around equal opportunities with no attribution to an individual's skin color.

In facilitating future research and providing information around equal opportunities with no attribution to an individual's skin color, changes in the way individuals think and behave can occur. The development of self-awareness and self-determination in adolescence and young adulthood lends itself to thought and reasoning (Kanbur et al., 2020). In understanding systemic racism and its impact on African Americans, opportunities to work towards positive change and reject prejudices and

attitudes may shape self-awareness and self-determination for future generations to come. This research may also shape the thinking and behavior patterns in youth development in terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Doing so may foster potential implications for positive social change in rejecting systemic racism and create positive experiences for future African American business owners.

Summary

This dissertation study was conducted in an attempt to fill a gap in understanding and exploring recent racism that small African American-owned business owners experience, including the advantages and disadvantages of gendered-based businesses. The research contributes to the study of psychology as it addresses the role of race in how individuals think, develop, and behave whilst challenging deep-rooted racism (Roberts et al., 2020). Through this study, I sought to increase awareness around the depth of systematic racism and its impact on African Americans in operating and owning a small business. Stakeholders benefiting from positive results of this study include small business owners, psychology researchers, consumers, suppliers and investors, as well as African American communities. This is because the study brings forth awareness of the struggles of small African American-owned businesses and advocate for change, which may contribute to positive social change in providing more equal opportunities at a systematic level. The study, further, facilitates conversations around diversity, inclusion, and equity in small businesses.

Chapter 2 of this study focuses on the literature review related to racism that African Americans experience in the workplace environment as well as when operating a

business. It also focuses on gender-based stereotypes along with racial stereotypes that African American women experience in the workplace and business setting. Additionally, Chapter 2 will explore themes of microaggressions, systemic racism, African American females in the workplace, and social support and community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem addressed in this study involves the racism that African Americans experience when operating a business. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the racism that African Americans experience when operating a business. African Americans have been continuously experiencing systemic racism that is deeply rooted in societal constructs ingrained throughout the years. This experience contributes unsuccessful rates of operating and maintaining a business (Thomas et al., 2018). While many recent studies have focused on the problem of systemic racism in corporations, few researchers have taken the impact on operating African American-owned businesses into consideration. African Americans who experience racism such as discrimination are less likely to obtain and secure business loans and investments due to systemic racial oppression (Davis et al., 2021). The racism is embedded in the concept of systemic racism that still exists to this day.

Systemic racism is a concept that has been ingrained in societal structures throughout the years and still impacts African Americans. Systemic racism perpetrates the discriminatory outcomes that are experienced by African Americans in a societal and professional manner (Davis et al., 2021). It creates a socioeconomic imbalance, segregated social networks, and a decrease in opportunities. It can be argued that racism and racial inequality do not exist. Often times, the phrase "I don't see color" and denial of racial inequality are still embedded in systemic racism. In order to bring awareness and understanding of racism in the workplace, it is necessary to have difficult discussions and

highlight the lived experiences that African Americans continuously face (Thomas et al., 2018). This literature review explores the racism African Americans experience when operating a business. This study was conducted in an attempt to fill the gap in understanding and exploring recent racism that small African American-owned business owners experience, including the advantages and disadvantages of gendered-based businesses.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases used for this research consisted of SocIndex, APA PsycInfo, Taylor and Francis Online, and Sage Journals. The key terms used for this research were *Black entrepreneurs*, *systemic racism*, *Black small business owners*, *racism*, *microaggressions*, *microaggressions African Americans*, *lived experiences of Black business owners*, *critical race theory*, *racial oppression*, *small business or small firms or small enterprises or small companies or SMEs or SME*, *racism or prejudice or racial bias or racial discrimination*, and *disparities or disparity or inequities or inequality or bias or disproportionality*. Research articles that contributed to this study were, predominantly, published within the past 5 years. Based on the search of these terms, it was found that racism and discrimination are still prevalent issues that African Americans experience in the workplace. These issues can be in the form of blatant racism that leads to purposeful exclusion from important meetings or even derogatory name calling. However, these issues can also present themselves in the form of microaggressions. The microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional negative stigmas and stereotypes that are directed towards the individual.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was based on critical race theory. The theory aligned with the overall research in terms of using its storytelling and narrative approach in exploring individual experiences of racism in operating and maintaining a business. Critical race theory contributed in exploring the full impact of racial inequality experienced by African American small business owners (Christian et al., 2019). The phenomenological study provided information on the lived experiences of the participants who had encountered the phenomena of racism.

Critical race theory leans on the cultural and societal construct of racism that is ingrained in American history, which is still an issue to this day. The theory emphasizes race consciousness and identity, radial power, and modes of race, gender, and ethnic intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995). Microaggressions can be explained with critical race theory as it is based on deep-seated racial exclusion leading to harm and insult.

Critical race theory connects racism in the workplace in terms of racially abusive slurs and language. It does so by highlighting the normalization of such behavior and acts in the workplace deeply rooted in systemic racism (Bohonos, 2021). Bohonos (2017) discussed the connection between critical race theory and racism in terms of benefiting White individuals in the workplace in creating a ritual bond. For example, racial jokes and slurs in the workplace may seem inconsequential to one group. However, they do significant psychological and emotional damage to another group. Bohonos discussed the normalization of such language that creates an unsafe environment for African

Americans in the workplace, which also contributes to stereotyping and stigmatization of African American workers.

Critical race theory provides a perspective on the racial phenomena that exist in societal norms and expectations (Christian et al., 2019). Christian et al. (2019) discussed the use of narrative storytelling in order to understand the extent of racial oppression experienced by African Americans. Christian et al. (2019) highlights the "racial ignorance," inequality, and skepticism around racial inequality. Christian et al. (2019) further discussed how racism is based on institutionalized White privileges, societal norms, and racialized hierarchies. Christian et al. (2019) also described how certain actions may be perceived as harmless in the workplace but are dehumanizing to African American workers.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

After an exhaustive review of the current literature related to this study, it was deduced that there is a gap in the literature regarding the racism that African Americans experience when operating a small business. Researchers in related disciplines have approached the problems, strengths, and weaknesses inherent in their approaches in similar topics related to this study. The key variables discussed in this chapter consist of microaggressions, systemic racism, African American females in the workplace, social support and community, as well as debates, conflicts, and contradictions.

Microaggressions

Racial barriers have been present in well-established African American-owned businesses throughout generations that stemmed from oppression, segregation, and

discrimination (Thomas et al., 2018). Such racial barriers are also seen in the workplace that present themselves in forms of microaggressions. Microaggressions in the workplace may consists of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020). DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2020) discussed such microaggressions leading to feelings of inadequacy and lack of inclusivity. DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2020) further discussed the subtle exchanges of verbal, nonverbal, and environmental actions that are experienced by African Americans in the workplace. The microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional negative stigmas and stereotypes that are directed towards the individual (Keeler et al., 2020).

Examples of such microaggressions involve physical appearance and what is considered "proper" hairstyles of African Americans in a workplace environment. Many natural hairstyles are considered inappropriate in the workplace, leading African Americans to go through damaging processes to have their hair fit the status quo of the workplace (Mbilishaka, 2018). Mbilishaka (2018) discussed the internalization of racism that limits African Americans' emotional and self-expressive well-being in order to fit a narrative that has been created in the American workplace culture. Such microaggressions and modern racism have instilled a psychological and emotional toll on African Americans.

African Americans have also experienced microaggressions in forms of misrepresentations involving stereotypes of being aggressive, loud, pushy, and arrogant (Ozturk & Berber, 2020). These stereotypes are misinterpretations of traits of assertiveness, confidence, and ambition. Many times, when complaints against

microaggressions are stated, the complaints go unanswered or present themselves in overreactions and group meetings where not much is solved in the end. Ozturk and Berber (2020) discussed experiences of microaggressions in forms of bullying and harassment, denial of opportunities in recruitment and selection, training and development, network access and promotion processes, and lower performance ratings, pay, and other rewards. Such factors also contribute to racial barriers when starting and operating a business. Lack of network access prohibits opportunities in promoting one's business as well as obtaining the necessities to operate and maintain the business.

African Americans still experience such barriers when it comes to fighting the oppression in the workplace. The microaggressions stem from an unconscious bias that is deeply ingrained in societal structures that have developed through years of oppression and inequalities (Hall et al., 2019). Because of this, there is an underlying sense of devaluation among African American workers in the workplace. Hall et al. (2019) discussed how such stigmas and negative connotations lead to African Americans being perceived as being of lower worth and less deserving than their equal counterparts, thus perpetuating the ostracization and marginalization of African American employees.

African Americans also experience microaggressions in the workplace due to their names. African American applicants who do not have "White-sounding" names are often less favorable even with perfect credentials and experiences (Whitaker, 2019). Whitaker (2019) further discussed the negative implications that African American names are associated with, which provide academic, professional, social, and cultural disadvantages. Whitaker (2019) also discussed the conformity and comfortability of

employers who seek employees who share a commonality. This form of microaggression and unconscious bias results from years of negative implications within the African American community.

Systemic Racism and Funding

Microaggressions in the workplace continue to reinforce the concept of systemic racism and the role it plays in racism among African Americans (Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2021). Skinner-Dorkenoo et al. (2021) discussed the concept of false colorblindness, denial of racism, and promoting these ideas to reinforce and maintain systemic racism in the workplace. Microaggression, as previously stated, can be unintentional or intentional. However, it does cause some sense of harm towards the targeted audience. Skinner-Dorkenoo et al. (2021) addressed efforts to protect the system of racial oppression as well as establish White superiority. Skinner-Dorkenoo et al. (2021) further discussed how the denial of the existence of racial inequality lends itself to the notion that African Americans' lived experiences of social injustice are invalid and unfounded.

Systemic racism deeply impacts African American business owners, as they report lower levels of financial capital compared to paid employees (Bento & Brown, 2021). Bento and Brown (2021) noted that, due to systemic racism, African Americans may not generate as much wealth as their counterparts. Bento and Brown (2021) further discussed systemic racism in terms of undermining African American economic mobility. Low levels of assets and lack of financial funding or loans lead to fewer chances of starting and maintaining businesses. Compared to other minorities, African Americans

tend to experience the lowest self-employment rates due to systemic racism and its disadvantages (Bento & Brown, 2021).

Another form of systemic racism is the concept of implicit bias. Implicit bias refers to the mental associations already established for certain social groups (Payne & Hannay, 2021). Payne and Hannay (2021) discussed how implicit bias is a cognitive reflection of systemic racism. Payne and Hannay (2021) also described that such implicit bias tends to result in discriminatory behavior and prejudiced comments and beliefs in the workplace. Payne and Hannay (2021) further discussed the need for more visible representation in positions of power in order to combat illicit bias. In order to motivate change in terms of systemic racism, it is important to revise policy and procedures that are aligned with the disadvantages and racism that exist.

Systemic racism is still a prevalent issue today. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, White males makes up 84% of management positions and 88% of chief executive positions (Adejumo, 2021). Adejumo (2021) stated that African Americans accounted for .08% of Fortune 500 chief executive officers and 3.2% of senior-level executive positions. Adejumo (2021) discussed the underrepresentation of African Americans within management positions. Adejumo (2021) further addressed the internalized belief and practice of African American that they must work harder than their counterparts in order to advance within their organization. Adejumo (2021) discussed the feelings of inauthenticness that are experienced by African Americans in the workplace in order to identity shift into a personality suitable for the workplace.

African American Females in the Workplace

African American women are more likely to experience disadvantages in the workplace than African American men due to multiple adversities and disparities in the form of gendered racism (Spates et al., 2020). Spates et al. (2020) discussed the lack of resources and opportunities as well as societal expectations that are perceived towards African American women. African American women may experience racism as well as sexism in the workplace. Spates et al. (2020) discussed the pressure African American women experience to play the role of a strong African American women as well as provide for a family. Spates et al. (2020) depicted the challenges that African American women experience as "double trouble" in terms of being African American and female.

Spates et al. (2020) further highlighted the education and credentials factors of African American women in the workplace. African American women may have the same or better credentials as their counterparts but are often less likely to be considered for promotions (Spates et al., 2020). Because of workplace mistreatment, a lack of opportunities and networking events hinders African American women's professional growth. As previously discussed, microaggressions manifests themselves in forms of bullying and harassment; denial of opportunities in recruitment, selection, training, and development; disadvantages in network access and promotion processes; and lower performance ratings, pay, and other rewards (Ozturk & Berber, 2020).

In order to minimize or neutralize such microaggressions, African American women will go through identity shifting in the workplace. Identity shifting occurs when the individual modifies their appearance, language, and mannerisms in order to negate

cultural assumptions and stereotypical expectations (Dickens et al., 2019). Dickens et al. (2019) discussed how African American women who are hyper visible in the workplace will identity shift to manage their behaviors in terms of negative perceptions conceived by coworkers. This also allows African American women to assimilate into the dominant workplace culture. Dickens et al. noted that even with credentials and knowledge in their field, Black women are often questioned about their expertise as well as their competence.

Even when African American women are depicted as successful businesswomen and business owners, there still is an underlying challenge and misconception concerning how they maintain and operate their business. Trying to obtain a business loan in and of itself can be a challenge in terms of discrimination (Jackson, 2021). Jackson (2021) discussed the financial hardships and unequal financial opportunities that exist for African Americans, especially African American women, in trying to start their own businesses and maintain those businesses. Because of this, their own personal money becomes invested in their business. In order to obtain social capital and support, African American women tend to support networks of like-minded individuals such as other African American women business owners. Such networking events give these women a space to obtain resources and support where, otherwise, it might be difficult to obtain (Jackson, 2021).

Social Support and Community

As previously stated, it can be difficult for African Americans to obtain loans to start up businesses due to discrimination and racism. Therefore, they invest their personal

savings and money into their business. If they do not have the means or money to start a business, they may borrow money from family and friends and then use that seed money in order to obtain a lender (Taylor, 2018). Taylor (2018) discussed the importance of business development linked to community development where small African American-owned businesses are supported by their communities to produce profits and reinforce their culture. Opening a business within the community also helps to strengthen social networks. Taylor (2018) acknowledged that possibility and hope of reversing underdeveloped communities through business ventures within the community.

With restricted access to employment alternatives, small businesses within the community have more chances to develop rather than opening a business in a predominantly White community (Bates et al., 2021). Bates (2021) discussed the restricted access to mainstream markets that have restrained the growth and scope of African American owned businesses. Bates (2021) also highlighted the inability to sustain growth if individuals lack access to financing. Therefore, community resources, supports, and funding are essential to operating a small business in order to sustain that business.

The oppression in the United States economy is still prevalent in this day and age as well as racial wealth disparities (Clarke, 2021). Clarke (2021) discussed communal uplift in African American communities in order to obtain entrepreneurialism within the community to foster development and racial unity. Clarke (2021), further, focuses on the achievements in entrepreneurship despite the unequal position of a "free market" that are experienced by African Americans. Clarke (2021) discussed the resilience and resistance

that it takes for African Americans to maintain a business despite their disadvantages and pushback from their counterparts.

Social support may also manifest itself in forms of mentorship. Mentorship programs offer support in overcoming biases, career-advancing benefits, as well as advocacy (Randel et al., 2021). Such efforts of mentorship challenge racial stereotypes allowing African Americans advance their potential. Randel et al. (2021), further, discussed the psychosocial elements of mentorships in which provides workplace and career satisfaction.

Debates, Conflicts, and Contradictions

Although there is still deep-rooted systemic racism and microaggressions in the workplace experienced by African Americans, there are success stories that may contradict such findings. Despite racial barriers and limitations, African Americans have overcome such circumstances leading to highly achieved professionals in cooperate America (Sisco, 2020). Sisco (2020) discussed the concept of African Americans working twice as hard than their counterparts in order to climb the cooperate ladder. Sisco (2020), further, discussed the emotional and psychological trauma as well as burnout and exhaustion that comes with the success African American experience. Maintaining a sense of resiliency and competitive mindset contributed to the success stories.

Contradictions to racial barriers experienced by African Americans in the workplace also lends itself to the concept of neoliberal ideology. This ideology contributes to the idea that racial inequality does not exist and focuses more on

individualism (Shrikant and Musselwhite, 2019). Shrikant and Musselwhite (2019) discussed the concept that racial inequalities do not exist and, therefore, providing monetary funding to minorities simply because they are minorities is a disadvantage and not viable for support. Shrikant and Musselwhite (2019), further, contradicted the racial barriers experienced by African Americans by discussing that racial diversity already exists in business communities. Shrikant and Musselwhite (2019) also debated that government funding provides unfair advantages towards racial minorities and such unfair advantages contributes to discrimination against White individuals (Shrikant and Musselwhite, 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

This study attempts to fill the gap in understanding and exploring recent racism that small African American -owned business owners experience, including the advantages and disadvantages of gendered-based businesses. The research contributes to the study of psychology as it factors into the role of race in how individuals think, develop, and behave whilst challenging deep rooted racism (Roberts et al., 2020). In order to create social changes, it is important to discuss topics that may be difficult to have conversations around. However, contributing to "colorblindness" and neoliberal ideologies in notions of the nonexistence of inequality also contributes to the problem of racism and inherent systemic racism that still exists. As chapter 2 focused on literature review and key terms, chapter 3 will focus on research design, role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the racism that African Americans experience when operating a business. African Americans have struggled with racism, discrimination, and oppression throughout history and, to this day, continue to struggle when it comes to issues of racism. That racism is also directed towards African American-owned businesses. Research has been conducted to explore and identify the systematic racial issues that African American business owners experience, in terms of power disparities and unequal treatment in social and economic structures (Davis et al., 2021). Racial barriers have been present for well-established African American-owned businesses throughout generations that have stemmed from oppression, segregation, and discrimination (Thomas et al., 2018).

Implementing racial counter-frames and intersectional counter-frames lends itself to examining systematic racism and African American entrepreneurs. Racial counter-frames and intersectional counter-frames emphasize the disadvantages people of color experience while also considering how class and gender intersect with race (Dickens et al., 2019). Such findings indicate that gender, race, and class do affect racism concerning African American-owned entrepreneurships, especially among women (Spates et al., 2020). Future research should be done to explore the business organization, processes, and environment through gendered, racial, ethnic, and cultural lenses within smaller businesses. Through this dissertation study, I attempted to fill the gap in understanding

and exploring recent racism that small African American-owned business owners experienced, including the advantages and disadvantages of gendered-based businesses.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question was as follows: What are the lived experiences of racism for African Americans when operating a small business?

The qualitative study was conducted using a phenomenological design. Phenomenological research focuses on the lived meaning of an experience and how others communicate about their experience (Adams & van Manen, 2017). In connection, the research question of this study allowed the participants to share their personal lived experiences in relation to the central concept. Phenomenological design also allowed for obtaining experiences through interviews and written descriptions (Adams & van Manen, 2017).

Phenomenology allows for generating new knowledge from lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This design worked well with this study, which incorporated open-ended interview questions to obtain the participants' lived experiences. Through a phenomenological study, I attempted to explore the racism that a group of eight African American small business owners experienced within the local community. The sample was chosen from a target population using a purposive sampling approach.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher included interviewing and listening to individuals' experiences of racism when operating a business through storytelling and narratives, which incorporated open-ended interview questions. My role as the researcher was to be

an objective instrument that offered participants the ability to give voice to their racism-related experiences. It was important to recognize any biases that might occur that might impact the research. Therefore, the selection of participants was not based on professional and personal relationships. As I had no professional or personal relationships with participants, there should be little to no issues with conflict of interest within the research. Any researcher bias was managed through bracketing. Using bracketing, I sought to manage my personal experience and biases as the researcher while allowing a focus solely on the topic and question of the research (Moustakas, 1994).

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted using a phenomenological design. The phenomenological study provided information on the lived experiences of participants who had encountered the phenomena of racism. Transcendental phenomenology was used in this research methodology (Husserl, 1931). This phenomenological concept derives from the work of Edmund Husserl, who sought to understand human experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This phenomenology focuses on the experiences of the participants while using bracketing to minimize personal bias.

Researchers set aside their own bias in order to highlight participants' personal experiences towards a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology focuses on facts and real experiences while letting go of the researcher's ego. Husserl (1931) described the term *epoche* in transcendental phenomenology to describe the reduction of judgment and bias around the true nature of reality. Through this research, I

sought to understand African Americans' lived experiences of racism when operating a small business.

This qualitative study was an attempt to explore the racism that a group of eight African American small business owners experienced within the local community. Therefore, criteria for participant selection specified that participants must identify as African American. Participants also needed to own a small business, as I sought to understand the racism that African American small business owners experience. Another participant criterion indicated that participants needed to be individuals 18 years or older. The sample was chosen from a target population using a purposive sampling approach. The study incorporated open-ended interview questions and in-depth narratives to obtain the participants' lived experiences. Recruitment was conducted through phone calls and emails in which I introduced myself as the researcher as well as the purpose of the research. Once participants were agreeable to the interview and research, informed consent was reviewed.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants in this study included eight African American adults who owned small businesses in the local community. Recruitment procedures involved posting information about the study on online sites where potential participants would see it and then establish contact. Appendix A contains the flyer for the study containing information about the study and how to establish contact. An informed consent form was emailed to participants to explain any risks and benefits of the study. Interviews were conducted

lasting about 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed for data collection. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

Instrumentation

The basis for literature development were through interviews. Data for this study included interviews and narratives with eight African American small business owners within a local community who were current business owners.. Interviews allowed the participants to answer open-ended questions that enabled a discussion format. Overall, participants were based on current business owners in obtaining narratives and lived experiences from various perspectives in terms of racism. Recordings were used in order to collect the data. I obtained consent forms from the participants for the interviews and the use of recordings.

Data Analysis Plan

The source of the data for addressing the research question were interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using software that creates a written transcription. Data analysis also included Moustakas's (1994) process. I used the process of horizontalizing the data for relevant statements. Horizontalizing the data involves placing equal value on each piece of data (Moustakas, 1994). Reduction of experiences to the invariant constituents includes eliminating any overlapping of repetitive themes. I employed thematic clustering to create core themes of the lived experience. Comparison of multiple data sources to validate the invariant constituents verified the accuracy of data sources (Moustakas, 1994). Constructing individual textural descriptions of participants involved the development of narrative explanations of the lived experiences.

Construction of individual structural descriptions consisted of creating structures that derived from imaginative variation. Construction of composite structural descriptions helps a researcher to understand lived experiences in explaining how the experiences occurred. Last, synthesizing the texture and structure into an expression consisted of a reflective study of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Issues of Trustworthiness

In order to combat issues of trustworthiness to ensure credibility and validity of the research and data collection, researcher utilized peer debriefing. Peer debriefing ensures accurate representation without biases from a neutral party. Researcher will also utilize the use of reflexive journaling. This accounts for the researcher's opinions and personal notes in the research process, which helps with transferability. Thick descriptions also helped with transferability in order to establish empathetic understanding and heightening trustworthiness (Sankofa, 2022). Lived experiences from interviews were used in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena (Fusch et al., 2018). In order to maintain confirmability, reflexivity in using reflexive journaling was utilized. Reflexive journaling utilizes the researcher's thoughts, values, and opinions.

Credibility

Peer debriefing was used for credibility. Peer debriefing allows for an unbiased perspective from a qualified peer to ensure validity and credibility in the research. Qualified peers will look at transcripts, general methodology, and final report to, further, ensure credibility.

Transferability

For transferability, thick description was used in the research in order for the results to be transferred to other contexts and respondents (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Thick descriptions allow for the behavior and experiences, of the participants, to become meaningful. Thus, establishing trustworthiness and empathy.

Dependability

Dependability in the research included audit trails. Audit trails help the transparency of the research. Audit trails uses an auditor to study the research's transparency. The auditor are the notes on research process decisions, reflective thoughts, sampling, research materials adopted, findings, and data management (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability

Reflexive journaling was used for confirmability in the research. Using reflexivity in reflexive journaling allows for self-awareness of the researcher. Utilizing reflexive journaling includes researcher's notes on the processing of data and researcher's subjective response (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Reflexive journaling allows for the reduction and elimination of any potential biases.

Ethical Procedures

Potential limitations, challenges, and/or barriers may include hesitancy and reluctance in sharing their experience regarding the fear of revealing their identity. However, informed consent was presented to the participants in order to ensure their identifiers and their privacy. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the

study and will not discuss anything they may feel uncomfortable of disclosing. Other limitations, challenges, and/or barriers may include concerns around COVID-19 and its impact on African American -owned businesses in a local coastal community of South Carolina.

In order to maintain reliability and validity for instrumentation and interview questions, consistency in interview questions was maintained. Each participant had the same set of questions where they could give open-ended answers. With open-ended answers, probing techniques can be used to obtain more information. Maintaining reliability and validity of instrumentation and interview questions was also based on the consent form. The consent form established privacy protection with the knowledge that the participant's identifiers would not be shared. This ensured validity and reliability within the interview answers. Volunteering and data collection was anonymous to prevent any identifiers.

In addition to identifiers that were not be shared within the research, identifiers will also be stored separately from the coded data. Any form of identifier has been masked with a general variable of the participant's demographic description. I was responsible and took precautions to ensure the safety of the device that I used to store data. The device has one password to access data and a screen lock to further ensure safety. I own the device and I will be in sole control of the device. The data will be stored in a secured manner for 5 years or as otherwise indicated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The data will then be destroyed by clearing, overwriting, or purging.

Summary

As stated, the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the racism that African Americans experience when operating a business. Chapter 3 addressed the research method along with research design and rationale. The chapter focused on transcendental phenomenology and the role of the researcher. Chapter 3 also addressed the ethical guidelines and procedures that were used in order to protect the validity and credibility of the research. The chapter focused on the source of the data, which derived from interviews. The data were transcribed and categorized into themes. Chapter 4 focused on the settings and demographics of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the racism that African Americans experience when operating a business. Racism has been an ongoing issue in society for many years. Racial discrimination can be experienced in many forms, including business practices. Many African Americans have reported facing racism in access to funding, loans and contracts, as well as customer interactions and marketing opportunities. This dissertation study was an attempt to fill the gap in understanding and exploring recent racism that owners of small African American-owned businesses experience.

Eight African American small business owners in the local area volunteered to share their experiences of racism when operating a business. Data were gathered through conducting interviews in order to obtain the participants' own unique experiences of being an African American business owner. These experiences may have had significant impact on the success and growth of their businesses, as well as their mental and emotional well-being.

The interviews focused on the research question: What are the lived experiences of racism for African Americans when operating a small business?

In Chapter 4, I discuss settings, demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. This chapter also provides themes and subthemes regarding African American experiences.

Setting

In order to obtain participants, I utilized Facebook groups created for small businesses in the area as well as African American-owned businesses in the area. After posting the flyer for the research, I received eight responses from individuals who were willing to participate. I then emailed the consent form to each willing participant. After participants replied to the email with "I consent," we were able to set up a timeframe to conduct the interviews. Interviews were done using phones, as many participants were more comfortable speaking over the phone rather than completing in-person interviews. Utilizing the phone was also an issue of convenience for many participants. One interview was done in person in the participant's office to maintain confidentiality. I used the Rev application through the Apple Store on an iPhone to record the interview. Interviews were conducted in the morning, at midday, or in the afternoon, depending on when the participant was available. There were no known personal or organizational conditions that may have influenced participants or their experiences at the time of the study, nor any outcome of interpretation.

Demographics

Participants included eight African Americans. Each participant owned a small business in the local area, with these businesses ranging from private practices to beauty shops. All participants were over the age of 18. Participants had also established their businesses for over 2 years.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant	Years in business	Type of business
P1	3	Beauty shop
P2	22	Wedding decorator
P3	5	Mental health facility
P4	7	Nonprofit
P5	5	Trucking company
P6	5	Party rentals
P7	6	Mental health facility
P8	3	Fashion

Data Collection

Through data collection, I aimed to shed light on the experiences, challenges, and successes of eight African American small business owners. By gathering information through interviews, I sought to understand the unique perspectives and lived experiences that African American entrepreneurs have contributed to today's business landscape. After flyers were posted to online forums such as Facebook groups targeting African American small business owners in the local area, consent forms were emailed, and interviews were set up through phone calls (with an in-person interview being optional). Interviews consisted of questions where each participant was provided the same set of questions in order to obtain reliability and credibility. The interviews were scheduled to

last within a 60-minute timeframe. Interviews were recorded through the Rev app on an iPhone, which was protected via password and/or face detection. Interviews were then transcribed using the Rev app and uploaded to NVivo in order to organize the data collected. Themes and subthemes were also identified with the utilization of NVivo.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was done through utilization of NVivo in order to identify similar themes throughout the interviews. I reviewed the transcribed interviews several times in order to check for accuracy. I also utilized Moustakas's (1994) process to analyze this phenomenological study. I used the horizontalizing process in order to identify common themes and patterns that uncovered shared experiences of racism experienced by African American small business owners. Transcribed interviews were also reviewed multiple times to identify significant statements, phrases, or ideas related to experiences of racism. Statements were then organized into groups based on commonalities to create potential themes. I was then able to develop overarching themes that encapsulate the essence of participants' experiences. Emerging themes included microaggressions, systemic racism, overcoming challenges, and support from community. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of African American business owners, highlighting the persistence of racism and the resilience demonstrated by these individuals in their pursuit of success.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Peer debriefing was used to ensure credibility and validity. For this purpose, I utilized colleagues who had no interest in my research. However, these colleagues had experience with their own research. Therefore, they were able to offer clear and concise feedback. Utilizing peer debriefing allowed for the elimination of any biases or assumptions that may have been evident. My colleagues were able to look over the overall research, methodology, transcriptions, and findings. Along with peer debriefing, participants were emailed transcripts from their own interviews in order to confirm accuracy and provide clarification.

Transferability

Thick descriptions were used in this research in order to increase transferability of the research findings to other contexts. Using thick descriptions allowed me to encompass explicit incidents of racism that African Americans experience but also nuanced ways in which it affects their daily lives. Through the lens of transferability and thick descriptions, the lived experiences of these eight participants can be a catalyst for change. By disseminating their narratives, I hope to help policymakers, academics, and society as a whole develop a heightened awareness of the systemic racism that hinders the success and growth of African American small businesses.

Dependability

I utilized audit trails in order to outline the research process, including data collection, data analysis, and interpretation, to ensure transparency, rigor, and credibility

in the research findings. By documenting the research journey, the audit trails aimed to enhance the trustworthiness and replicability of the study, thereby contributing to the broader understanding of racism and its impact on African American small business owners.

Confirmability

Research journaling was used to document my own biases and preconceptions throughout the research process. This allowed for transparency and self-reflection, which then prevented biases or influences in the interpretation of data. I was also able to seek out feedback from participants to help validate the accuracy of the analysis by providing them with a copy of their transcribed interview. Taking such measures allowed for the ability to establish and maintain objectivity and neutrality throughout the research process.

<div align="center">

Results

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The experiences of racism faced by African American small business owners revealed several recurring themes of microaggressions, systemic racism through limitation of capital funds, overcoming challenges, and the importance of support and community. I found that a topic that was not a recurring theme was the disadvantages of African American females in the workplace. However, despite the adversities African Americans encounter, these small business owners continue to persevere, demonstrating resilience and inspiring others to break down barriers and achieve success. Their experiences serve as a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of unity in the face of discrimination.

Table 2

Emerging Themes

	Themes
Experiences of racism when operating a small business	Microaggression
	Funding
	Overcoming challenges
	Support and community

Emerging Themes Based on Research Question

Theme 1: Microaggression

Microaggressions can manifest in various ways, such as racially biased or motivated comments, stereotypes, or exclusionary behavior. The constant need to navigate microaggressions can be draining, making it much more difficult to focus on running a successful business.

P2 shared,

When you show up you get, there's kind of a, not necessarily a tension. But you get a feeling that the way they view you is you can't do what you need to do for them because you don't look the part. That's what I run across a lot often. They don't do it blatantly, but you can tell they look at you funny.

P3 shared,

Well, my name is P3, and when they see the credentials and they talk to me on the phone, they assume it's a Caucasian female, until I come down that hallway and

take that right by that corner. And they see I am African American, a Black

female, and they'll ask me, "Are you Dr. P3? I'm here to see P3" I'm like, "Yeah,

that's me." You know what I mean? Or even nonverbally, you kind of see their

expression.

P7 shared,

Sometimes I get treated less than you can tell that people talk down to me or don't

feel that I'm their equal. Um, I don't know about specific events other than I feel

that I've noticed walking away after that I felt treated less than because of my

color.

P8 shared,

I guess sometimes clients or customers, when they come into the store and,

sometimes, I design custom pieces for them and they come in and they want

something and I feel like they don't value my work and the price that I put on my

work. I feel if it was someone who was White who was selling the item to them,

they would have no problem paying for it, but I feel like they tend to try to

lowball me on prices and I feel like it's due to my race.

Theme 2: Systemic Racism

Systemic racism has historically made it more difficult for minority entrepreneurs

to secure loans and investments. As a result, African American entrepreneurs find

themselves having to be resourceful in seeking alternative funding options, such as

grants, crowdfunding, or community support. The following are experiences of

participants in obtaining loans or capital funds referring to systemic racism:

P4 shared,

> Applying for grants and different funding, a lot of those, well, most of them, I
> didn't really receive any type of monetary support. I was connected to someone
> that worked for a local company, which was a plumbing company in the area, and
> they gave a cash donation of $250. But it was just kind of hard-to-get funding,
> whether I was soliciting or fundraising or applying for grants and foundations.

P6 shared,

> It was really hard for me to get a loan and a business license. The process was
> longer than what needed it to be and I had a good plan set up and I got denied a
> couple times, but I kept trying.

P8 shared,

> Well, I guess I would say when I was looking to get a loan to finance my
> business, I found that I was getting denied a lot. When I talked to other people,
> they didn't seem to have the same issue. If they match the criteria, it was very
> streamlined, but for me, it was a lot more difficult.

Theme 3: Overcoming Challenges

Despite challenges faced, African American small business owners have shown resilience and determination in overcoming obstacles. A commonality with participants in this study was the refusal to let racism define their success and working diligently to prove their worth in the business world. Through hard work, innovative strategies, and a commitment to their craft, they were able to push past barriers and achieve their accomplishments.

P3 shared,

> I would say Chamber has definitely helped me a lot as far as connecting and networking with people. There are people I would not have met or known or had the opportunity to work with if it wasn't for Chamber and that connection. So, I guess when we talk about being a connector, I love talking to people. I love connecting.

P5 shared,

> The world, unfortunately, is very daunting at times. And a lot of people, when they face different obstacles, they give up. They give up because they don't see the light at the end of the tunnel and some lose their way. If it's going to be something that you are interested in doing, and you're very earnest about getting your business up off the ground and promoting yourself and promoting your business, and just making the business work for you, you've got to stay with it.

P7 shared, "Don't let fear stop you. You have the power to control your destiny. If you are passionate about something, you can achieve your dream."

Theme 4: Support and Community

Another theme that emerged was based on support and community to uplift and create a sense of unity and empowerment. This, then, strengthens African American small business owners' resilience and fosters a supportive environment.

P7 shared,

We all join together to support each other and then we also can bounce ideas off each other. So, if one of us is feeling like we're lacking in certain cultures or diversity, we can share our experiences or ask for help.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences or racism that African Americans face when operating a business. In Chapter 4, I discussed the settings, demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. Emerging themes were also generated in this chapter in order to highlight the challenges of systemic racism, microaggressions, overcoming challenges, and leaning on community support. Chapter 5 will focus on the interpretation of the research findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications of the study, and the overall conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted in order to obtain understanding and insight on the lived experiences of racism that African Americans face while operating their small businesses. Racism is a deeply ingrained issue that permeates various aspects of society, including the world of business. Despite significant progress in racial equality, these small business owners still face unique challenges and barriers due to their race, which may lead to detrimental effects of being self-defeated and much more. This study was grounded in critical race theory to provide a lens in order to understand the structural inequalities that perpetuate injustices experienced by African American small business owners.

These challenges are deep rooted in historical and cultural disparities, anti-Black stereotypes, and identity-based differences (Roberson, 2023). This study examined the experiences of African American small business owners through the lens of developmental psychology in order to gain a deeper understanding of the detrimental effects of racism and the potential avenues for change. Constant exposure to racism can shape identity formation and perception of self, as well as influencing future choices and opportunities. Key findings in this study resulted in themes of microaggression, systemic racism, support and community, and overcoming challenges.

Interpretation of Findings

In the context of microaggressions and systemic racism, findings of this study indicated that owning a small business can be a powerful act of resilience and resistance for African Americans. It serves as a platform to overcome challenges and navigate the

racist environments that they have encountered. Microaggressions experienced by African American small business owners aligned with previous studies of intentional or unintentional negative stigmas and stereotypes that result in lack of inclusivity and feelings of inadequacy (DeCuir-Gundy at al., 2020; Keeler at al., 2020). For example, almost all participants of this study revealed that microaggressions were a common occurrence and that they often experienced unintentional acts or comments that conveyed racist attitudes and assumptions. The prevalence of microaggressions in subtle forms of racism and bias resulted in a negative impact on participants' well-being and business success.

Systemic racism experienced by participants aligned with previous findings that African Americans, who experience racial disparities such as discrimination, are less likely to obtain and secure business loans and investments due to systemic racial oppression (Davis et al., 2021). A majority of the participants shared their experiences regarding difficulty in obtaining financial loans and investments in order to sustain or even start up their business. For example, P4 shared their experience where they were completely unable to receive any monetary funds to sustain their nonprofit. P8 also shared their experience of constant denial when applying for business loans when starting their small business. Limited access to capital hampers the growth and sustainability of African American-owned businesses, hindering their ability to compete and thrive.

Overcoming challenges was another theme aligned with previous findings. Despite challenges and obstacles of racism when operating a business, some participants have demonstrated remarkable resilience, determination, and innovation in overcoming

racism and achieving success. These participants have done so through building partnerships and alliances. Some African Americans business owners offset these challenges by joining affiliations and giving back to the community (Jackson, 2021). For example, P3 discussed utilizing the Chamber, referring to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council, to help overcome the challenges she has experienced when operating her business.

Support and community experienced by participants aligned with previous findings indicating that community resources, supports, and funding are essential to operating a small business in order to sustain that business and the importance of business development linked to community development where small African American-owned businesses are supported by their communities to produce profits and reinforce their culture (Bates, 2021; Taylor, 2018). For example, P7 discussed getting together with her colleagues and coworkers in order to foster conversations around their own challenges and offering support of each other. These experiences foster a sense of support and community to create safe spaces, build networks, and provide employment opportunities that uplift their communities. In the face of microaggressions, systemic racism, and challenges, participants developed a sense of resilience and resistance to overcome barriers and create economic opportunities while fostering supportive communities to dismantle racism and create a more equitable society.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on the lived experiences of racism that African Americans face in the local area while operating their small business. However, a few limitations

occurred during this study. One limitation of this study was the limited number of participants, which could restrict the representativeness of the findings. I was only able to obtain eight participants for this study, and such a sample size may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives of African American small business owners in the local area. This study also focused on a specific region, which may not fully reflect the experiences of African American-owned businesses in other locations. Intersectionality was another limitation of this study, as many participants did not discuss their socioeconomic background, education level, or specific gender-related issues. Therefore, such factors that can influence the experiences of racism may not be adequately accounted for in this research.

Recommendations

This study addressed a gap in understanding recent racism that African Americans have experienced in operating a small business. However, based on the findings, a larger sample size is recommended in order to encapsulate the full range of experiences and perspectives of African American small business owners. Future research should also include exploring intersectionality such as gender, age, or socioeconomic status in order to understand how these intersecting identities influence African American small business owners. A comparative analysis is also recommended for future research in order to compare experiences of African American business owners in different geographic locations or countries in order to identify potential variations in racism and its impact to inform region-specific solutions.

Implications for Positive Social Change

Raising awareness about the experiences of African American small business owners who face racism is crucial. By amplifying their stories and shedding light on the challenges they encounter, society can gain a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers they face. This awareness can lead to empathy and a collective commitment to addressing racial inequality. Supporting African American-owned businesses is another way to effect social change in order to recognize the importance of economic empowerment and the positive impact it can have on the community. Stakeholders can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive entrepreneurial landscape, empowering African American small business owners and fostering economic growth for marginalized communities.

Conclusion

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study involved eight African American participants in the local area operating a small business and their experiences of racism whilst doing so. The research contributes to the study of developmental psychology as it factors in the role of race in how individuals think, develop, and behave whilst challenging deep-rooted racism (Roberts et al., 2020). The findings of this study indicate that these business owners often experience significant barriers and challenges that impact their growth and success. Such experiences were found to have profound effects on participants' self-esteem and overall well-being. Participants in this study discussed significant barriers in accessing capital and financial resources that restrict their ability to invest in their enterprises, expand operations, and develop innovative ideas.

Consequently, it perpetuates a cycle of limited growth and economic inequality for African American business owners. This study underscores the importance of representation and inclusivity. Ultimately, this study also serves as a call to action, urging individuals, organizations, and society as a whole to confront and eradicate racism in the business world as well as society as whole.

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Appendix A: Flyer

Participants Needed For Research Study

Experiences of African Americans when operating a business

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

RQ–Qualitative: What are the lived experiences of racism for African Americans when operating a small business?

1. What is your current role and nature of your business?

2. Please tell me about a time where you have experienced racism in the workplace

3. Please describe specific experiences you have had that has conveyed any form of racism in operating a business

4. What steps do you take to eliminate any biases in the hiring process to maintain inclusion and diversity?

5. Please describe the support that you received with your business

6. Please describe the lack of support or negative feedback, if any, you have received with operating your business

7. Please describe your experience with obstacles that you encountered in operating your small business

8. What skills and experiences, do you think, are important for African Americans in order to open and operate a small business?

9. What advice would you give to young African American entrepreneurs wanting to operate a business?