

11-14-2024

## Exploring the Wealth Creation Struggles of Black Millennials

Jasmine Allen  
*Walden University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

---

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu](mailto:ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu).

# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Jasmine Allen

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Thomas McLaughlin, Committee Chairperson,  
Social Work Faculty

Dr. Debra Wilson, Committee Member,  
Social Work Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost  
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Exploring the Wealth Creation Struggles of Black Millennials

by

Jasmine Allen

MA, University of Southern California, 2019

BS, University of Richmond, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

Walden University

November 2024

## Abstract

The equity gap for Black millennials continues to lag compared to other racial groups. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experiences of Black millennials in navigating the landscape of quality internships, high-paying careers, and generational wealth through the lens of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community system levels. Using a narrative approach, the qualitative analysis of narratives from eight participants who have experienced these obstacles is presented. A purposive sampling technique through social media platforms was used. This study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Thematic analysis was employed. The themes were (a) limited exposure, (b) knowledge and access to resources, (c) financial stress, (d) bias in career advancement, (e) representation, (f) grit, (g) networking and mentorship, and (h) struggles in creating generational wealth. The urgency of addressing systemic inequalities, advocating for diversity and inclusion, and championing structural reforms to empower Black millennials in realizing their career aspirations and building generational wealth is emphasized in the findings. The findings enhance the understanding of the educational resource deficiencies and historical discrimination that impact wealth accumulation across generations within Black communities. Findings can be used to create positive social change to address systemic barriers faced by Black millennials, advocate for increased awareness, policy interventions, and support systems to promote equitable access to career opportunities and financial stability.

Exploring the Wealth Creation Struggles of Black Millennials

by

Jasmine Allen

MA, University of Southern California, 2019

BS, University of Richmond, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

Walden University

November 2024

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this experience first, with all glory and honor to God for allowing me this opportunity by grace. To my three children, Nevaeh, Santana and Saint. The sky is the limit! You can climb any mountain, make it through any valley and soar in any peak. To my husband who has believed and supported me every step of the way. A true-life partner and best friend. You have been there to make sure that this family has remained steadfast. To my mother, we made it girl! This is for the both of us. Thank you for paving the way, breaking barriers and overcoming so much to make this life possible for me. Thank you for every effort that you have made in emotional, mental and physical sacrifice to be the best mom a girl could ask for. Without you, there would be no me. Thank you to my brother who has always believed in me, cheered for me and supported me. My first best friend! To my Chair, Dr. Tom McLaughlin, you have been the most amazing support in all of this. You have guided me with knowledge, patience, encouragement and support throughout this experience and I am forever grateful. Dr. Wilson, your edits and useful feedback really helped me narrow this study in a way that I am proud of. Thank you for all your guidance. To my family, friends, mentors and coaches along the way, it gave me options when I came from a background that told me I had none. Thank you for your belief in me at times when I did not believe in myself. Lastly, to my dad. I know that you are looking down on me smiling, so proud. I will continue to make sure that your legacy lives on.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Question.....	5
Theoretical Framework for the Study.....	5
Nature of the Study.....	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
Assumptions.....	8
Scope and Delimitations.....	9
Limitations.....	9
Significance.....	10
Summary.....	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	12
Literature Search Strategy.....	13
Theoretical Foundation.....	13
Literature Review.....	17
Factors Impacting Economic Hierarchy for Young Black Millennials.....	17
Individual Characteristics and Family Influences.....	31
Racism Impacting Racial Wealth Disparities.....	33
Historical Discrimination and Institutional Practices.....	35

Policy Decisions and Wealth Accumulation Barriers.....	39
State of Research on Career Development and Wealth Creation Among Young Black Millennials .....	43
Summary and Conclusions .....	46
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	48
Research Question .....	48
Research Design and Rationale .....	48
Rationale for Qualitative Approach .....	48
Rationale for Narrative Design .....	49
Rationale for Sample Size:.....	50
Role of the Researcher .....	50
Methodology .....	53
Participant Selection Logic and Recruitment .....	53
Instrumentation .....	57
Study Procedures .....	58
Data Collection and Storage .....	59
Data Analysis Plan .....	60
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	62
Credibility .....	62
Transferability.....	62
Dependability .....	63
Confirmability.....	63

Ethical Procedures .....	64
Informed Consent.....	64
Confidentiality .....	64
Summary .....	65
Chapter 4: Results .....	67
Setting .....	68
Demographics .....	69
Data Collection .....	69
Data Analysis .....	70
Themes .....	71
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	72
Credibility .....	72
Transferability.....	72
Dependability .....	73
Confirmability.....	73
Results.....	74
Theme 1: Limited Exposure to High Paying Careers .....	75
Theme 2: Knowledge and Access to Internships and Resources.....	77
Theme 3: Financial Stress.....	81
Theme 4: Bias in Career Advancement .....	83
Theme 5: Representation .....	85
Theme 6: “Grit” .....	88

Theme 7: Networking and Mentorship .....	91
Theme 8: Struggles in Creating Generational Wealth .....	94
Addressing the Research Question .....	96
Summary .....	97
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations .....	99
Interpretation of the Findings.....	99
Theme 1: Limited Exposure.....	99
Theme 2: Knowledge and Access to Resources .....	101
Theme 3: Financial Stress .....	102
Theme 4: Bias in Career Advancement .....	103
Theme 5: Representation .....	104
Theme 6: Grit.....	106
Theme 7: Networking and Mentorship .....	107
Theme 8: Struggles in Creating Generational Wealth .....	108
Limitations of the Study.....	109
Recommendations.....	110
Positive Social Change .....	111
Conclusion .....	112
References.....	115
Appendix A: Screening Questions.....	134
Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire .....	135

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this study, I focused on the economic mobility and generational wealth among Black millennials by exploring the complex dynamics within their systems influencing career opportunities, financial resources, and access to wealth within this demographic group. In the face of systemic racism, historical injustices, and economic disparities, Black millennials navigate a complex landscape where the intersectionality of race, poverty, and limited exposure to high-paying careers shapes their economic trajectories (Makhanya, 2024). I study sought to illuminate the challenges and opportunities for economic empowerment among Black young adults, within the five ecological systems—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. In doing so, depicting the cultural attitudes, societal barriers, and pathways to financial stability within the Black community through lived experiences. By examining the historical context and socioeconomic factors that underpin the experiences of Black millennials, I sought to provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamics driving economic mobility and generational wealth within this demographic group from their personal narratives. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the research that exists in relation to the historical and socioeconomic context that shapes the experiences of Black millennials. The research highlighted the intersectionality of race, poverty, and limited exposure to high-paying careers within their social, economic and family systems, as key factors influencing their economic trajectories.

## **Background**

Black millennials in the United States continue to face obstacles in achieving economic advancement, high paying careers, and intergenerational wealth (Dietze & Craig, 2021). While research exists highlighting systemic racism, discriminatory policies, and economic disparities at play, little research has focused on the various aspects of their ecological systems that are interconnected, impeding upon their ability to overcome this challenge. Research by the Joint Economic Committee (2020) revealed disparities, with Black individuals experiencing higher rates of unemployment (8.5% compared to 3.9% for White individuals), lower median household incomes (\$41,361 compared to \$70,642 for White households), accounting for nearly a \$29,000 income gap in households and a substantial racial wealth gap (\$17,150 median net worth for Black households versus \$171,000 for White households). The compounding effects of systemic racism and economic disparities place Black millennials at a distinct disadvantage in breaking the cycle of poverty and building financial security.

According to Solomon et al. (2019), historical injustices such as redlining and discriminatory lending practices have restricted Black communities' access to homeownership, with only 44% of Black households owning their homes compared to 73% of White households. Furthermore, limited exposure to internships, mentorship programs, and high-paying careers exacerbates the economic hurdles faced by Black millennials. Hora et al. (2021) reported that location, needing to work a job, inability to find internships, insufficient pay, and not being selected were the persistent limitations in their ability to gain valuable work experience and establish professional networks. This

lack of exposure to career pathways and higher-paying job opportunities inhibits the economic progression of Black millennials, perpetuating socioeconomic disparities within the demographic group.

In addition to structural impediments, the culture of poverty significantly influences the economic trajectories of Black millennials. Beech et al. (2021) reported that in 2020 the national poverty level was \$12,760 a year and 24% of American Indian/Alaskan, 21% of Black, 17% of Hispanic, 9% of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 9% of White American families were reported to be at this level. They underscored the impact of poverty, characterized by limited access to resources and educational opportunities, on perpetuating economic disadvantage among marginalized populations. This culture of poverty exacerbates financial insecurity, hindering Black millennials' ability to achieve economic stability and generational wealth. The convergence of systemic barriers, restricted access to career prospects, and the culture of poverty presents a multifaceted challenge that Black millennials navigate in their pursuit of economic mobility and financial prosperity.

### **Problem Statement**

The constraints on job access can be linked to the culture of poverty, impacting the ability of Black millennials to secure positions that contribute to generational wealth. Through examining the limited exposure to internships and high-paying careers and its effect on Black millennials to secure generational wealth and stable, high paying careers, connections to many systemic problems were examined. The culture of poverty theory indicates that individuals raised in poverty develop cultural attitudes, behaviors, and

beliefs that can impede their access to specific employment opportunities, including professional networks, mentorship programs, vocational training, and educational resources (McDermott & Vossoughi, 2020). However, a significant research gap exists in understanding how the culture of poverty specifically restricts job access for young Black adults (Zewde, 2020).

This gap is due to a lack of exploration into the intersectionality between race, poverty, and access to specific opportunities, such as internships and career development programs, as well as broader societal resources including affordable housing, healthcare, and financial resources. Furthermore, there is insufficient understanding of the unique challenges faced by young Black adults as they strive to secure employment and improve their socioeconomic status (McDermott & Vossoughi, 2020). By employing ecological systems theory, I sought to bridge this knowledge gap, examining the intricate interactions between individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and societal systems in shaping the employment pathways and economic outcomes for Black millennials.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this qualitative investigation, I focused on exploring and comprehending the complexities of wealth creation struggles among Black millennials, integrating the perspectives of the five systems in ecological systems theory. These systems are individual (microsystems), interpersonal (mesosystems), organizational (exosystems), community (macrosystems), and societal (chronosystems; Bowers & Bowers, 2017). These systems illuminate the multifaceted factors and challenges that impact their

capacity for financial stability and the building of generational wealth. By employing in-depth interviews and analysis, this research was designed to encapsulate not only the personal narratives and hurdles encountered by Black millennials in the economic sphere but also to examine how these experiences are influenced by and interact with the broader systems at play. By doing so, I offer comprehensive insights that may guide the development of targeted social work practices, policy and community support mechanisms. These are all aimed at dismantling systemic barriers and fostering economic empowerment within this demographic. Furthermore, aligning efforts across all levels of systemic influence for more effective and sustainable outcomes.

### **Research Question**

How do Black millennials describe the effect of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community systems in affecting their ability to access quality internships, exposure to high-paying careers and attaining generational wealth?

### **Theoretical Framework for the Study**

Ecological systems theory provides a framework in social work practice, focusing on the interconnectedness and interdependence of various systems and their impact on individuals and their environments (Perron, 2017). This approach recognizes that individuals exist within multiple systems such as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These levels include their families, friends, work, local governments, social norms, economic systems, communities, and larger societal structures (Guy-Evans, 2020). Systems theory helps social workers understand the complex interactions between individuals and their social systems. This is helpful in

considering the reciprocal influences and dynamics that guides an individual. Because this theory emphasizes understanding individuals within the context of their environments, recognizing how systemic factors, such as limited opportunities and access, impact an individual's ability to achieve generational wealth and career success, it aligned well with this study.

### **Nature of the Study**

To address the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design included a narrative research design focused on collecting and analyzing personal stories through in-depth, semistructured interviews, and dissecting the transcripts (see Bruce et al., 2016). The essential elements of a basic qualitative study involve foundational assumptions, philosophical stance, methodology, and data collection techniques aimed at revealing the researcher's objectives, characterized by methodological flexibility (Bruce et al., 2016). This flexible approach combined various established designs to explore individual experiences and beliefs regarding phenomena like social support networks, providing detailed insights into diverse perspectives (Bussetto & Gumbinger, 2020). In my examination of the economic obstacles faced by Black millennials in their pursuit of generational wealth, I employed purposive and snowball sampling to recruit participants who met specific criteria, particularly focusing on Black millennials with income levels falling within or below the middle-class brackets. These criteria included experiences reflecting limited exposure to high-paying careers, challenges in securing top-tier internships, and active efforts toward attaining generational wealth. Through thematic analysis, the narratives shared by the participants

were analyzed, enabling a profound exploration of their unique experiences and struggles within the economic landscape (Bussetto & Gumbinger, 2020).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Culture of Poverty:* The culture of poverty is a concept suggesting that individuals living in poverty adopt a set of norms, values, and behaviors that perpetuate their economic disadvantage. This theory suggests that individuals in poverty develop patterns of behavior, beliefs, and attitudes that can perpetuate their impoverished conditions across generations. This is represented in high rates of unemployment, low wages, lack of savings, property as well as scarcity in food and accessibility (Lewis, 2017).

*Ecological Systems Theory:* Encounters in the environments which people live that influence behaviors. These systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

*Generational Wealth:* Refers to assets, resources, and financial stability passed down within families and across generations, enabling long-term financial security and opportunities for future descendants.

*High-Paying Careers:* Denotes occupations or professions that offer above-average compensation or salary, typically exceeding the median income level in a given industry or region. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024), the median weekly earnings for full-time wage and salary workers in the United States was \$1,145 in the fourth quarter of 2023.

*Internships:* Nonpermanent work experiences that are often offered to students or recent graduates, by organizations, companies or corporations which provide hands-on

training, exposure to industry practices, and networking opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge in a specific field.

*Wealth Creation:* Involves the process of generating long-term financial assets, investments, and resources that contribute to financial stability, growth, and prosperity over time, enabling individuals to build and preserve wealth.

*Young Black Millennials:* Refers to individuals born between approximately 1981 and 1996, who self-identify as Black or African American, and belong to the millennial generation, characterized by specific societal and cultural influences (Dimock, 2019).

### **Assumptions**

An assumption is a belief without proof as a basis for reasoning or further investigation in the study (Moroi, 2021). I assumed that the participants in this study would provide honest and reflective responses to the research question, drawing from their experiences and perspectives related to economic mobility and generational wealth. I anticipated that participants would engage thoughtfully with the interview questions, offering insights into their career trajectories, financial challenges, and aspirations for economic advancement. Furthermore, I assumed that participants would demonstrate a willingness to share their personal narratives and experiences, contributing valuable data to the study. Additionally, I assumed that participants' recollection of events and circumstances was accurate, allowing for a detailed exploration of the factors influencing their economic outcomes. Overall, I trusted that the participants' engagement, honesty, and recollection of their lived experiences enriched the study and provided valuable insights into the complexities of economic mobility among Black millennials.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

I centered my study on exploring the economic mobility and generational wealth of Black millennials. This examination is due to specific historical and societal context, which significantly impacts their financial trajectories, driven by their experiences within their individual systems. The decision to focus exclusively on the narratives of Black millennials was driven by the need for a more robust collection of information to understand and address the distinct challenges that today's working class, specifically Black millennials face. By narrowing the study's scope to this cohort, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities that shape their economic outcomes and lead to a body of work that may inform the literature and further these efforts (see Akanle et al., 2020). The exclusion of Generation Z and Generation X was essential to maintain the study's focus on the unique experiences and economic realities in current times, while ensuring a detailed exploration of their socioeconomic landscape.

### **Limitations**

One significant limitation I encountered in my qualitative research was the challenge of subjectivity in interpreting data, where my personal biases could potentially influence the analysis (see Mwita, 2022). To address this issue, I engaged in self-reflection and made a conscious effort to minimize personal bias throughout the study (see Mwita, 2022). Another limitation I faced was the concern regarding generalizability due to the smaller sample size typically associated with qualitative studies (see Creswell,

2009). As a result, the findings of my research are not directly generalizable to broader populations but are instead inferred from the specific sample I examined.

Limitations were closely intertwined with the methodological weaknesses that influenced the interpretation of my research outcomes (see Creswell, 2009). A primary limitation of my study was its exclusive focus on exploring the experiences and beliefs of Black millennials, which constrained my ability to draw broader inferences regarding decision-making influences across different racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, I encountered a lower-than-expected responses for participant participation, impacting the depth of data collection. Personal biases, particularly my belief in the importance of social support networks in combating depression, posed another limitation. I addressed this by implementing reflexivity techniques as part of my research methodology.

Additionally, the limitation of limited geographic access necessitated virtual interviews instead of in-person interactions. To overcome this challenge, I strived to create a safe and confidential space for participants to comfortably share their experiences during the interviews. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of my study findings, I employed strategies such as member checking, journaling, and maintaining a reliable audit trail.

### **Significance**

Through my research, I aimed to provide an understanding of the compounded and complex connection between economic mobility and the effects of opportunities for internships and exposure to high-earning role models and generational wealth among Black millennials through their personal narratives. I sought to understand the role in

which systemic structures or inequalities impacted their paths to wealth attainment. By exploring the unique cultural, social, and economic forces, I aimed to convey the challenges and systemic obstacles that affected their economic advancement.

Through the lens of personal stories and experiences, gathered via comprehensive interviews with Black millennials, I sought to offer a detailed and nuanced perspective on the hurdles they faced regarding opportunities. The goal was to understand the root causes of economic inequality and how these factors intertwined with their financial progress. By extracting meaning from these narratives, the research endeavored to forge a deeper comprehension of the experiences and struggles Black millennials endured in their quest for economic improvement.

### **Summary**

I focused on investigating the economic mobility and generational wealth of Black millennials through narratives that could lead to an understanding of the intersectionality of race, poverty, and limited access to high-paying careers. I interviewed eight participants to gather insights into their lived experiences, financial challenges, and aspirations for economic advancement. The study's significance lay in its potential to uncover the systemic barriers and structural inequalities that impeded the financial progress of Black millennials, offering valuable perspectives to inform interventions promoting economic empowerment and social mobility within this demographic group.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the challenges faced by Black millennials in securing high-paying careers that have potential to foster wealth creation. According to a report by the Economic Policy Institute (Smith, 2019), Black Americans are underrepresented in high-wage job sectors, with only 9% holding management positions. Furthermore, I aimed to explore how limited access to quality internships and career opportunities impacts the ability of young black millennials to secure stable, generational wealth. Recent data from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2021) indicated that Black college graduates are less likely to land high-paying jobs compared to their white counterparts.

This study was centered on the knowledge formation surrounding Black millennials and their struggles to access lucrative career paths. Research by the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR, 2024) highlighted that Black workers are disproportionately represented in low-wage positions, facing barriers to advancement. The inability to secure well-paying jobs not only affects individual financial stability but also has broader implications for wealth accumulation within Black communities.

In this chapter, I present the recurring factors contributing to the limited exposure of Black millennials to internships and high-paying careers, hindering their path to securing stable, high-level positions and the systems in which they live impacting it. Heard-Garris et al. (2021) found that systemic barriers, including unequal access to educational and professional resources, restrict the career trajectories of young Black individuals. Moreover, the lack of representation and mentorship opportunities in

lucrative industries further compounds the challenges faced by this demographic group. Pew Research Center (2023) indicated that while Black millennials are pursuing higher education at higher rates than previous generations, they continue to face obstacles in translating their qualifications into well-compensated, sustainable career paths.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

For this literature search, multiple databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, NASW, JSTOR, Google and Google Scholar were used to gather relevant studies within the last 5 years. Various platforms like ResearchGate, Academia.edu, ProQuest, and Wiley Online Library were also explored to access a wide range of academic resources. The search employed keywords of *Black millennials*, *ecological systems theory*, *high-paying careers*, *wealth creation*, *internships*, *generational wealth*, *culture of poverty*, *economic disparities*, and *racial inequality*. By focusing on sources published in recent years, my aim was to ensure the inclusion of current and relevant data and studies in the research.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory provides a theoretical foundation for examining the challenges faced by young Black millennials in accessing high-paying careers and creating wealth. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, individuals operate within interconnected systems that influence their opportunities and outcomes. These systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chrono system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22).

The *microsystem* includes immediate environments and relationships but extends to workplaces, adult education settings, close friendships, partnerships, and parenting roles (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). These settings offer direct, daily interactions that significantly influence an individual's behavior, growth, and development. The *mesosystem* captures the interconnections between their various roles and contexts, such as the relationship between their work life and home life, or how their social interactions influence and are influenced by their familial relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). The *exosystem* includes broader social settings that the individual might not directly engage with but that still affect their life, such as their partner's workplace policies, local government decisions, community health services, and social welfare policies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). These factors can indirectly influence an individual's well-being, opportunities, and the stressors they face. The *macrosystem* encompasses the larger cultural and societal norms, laws, and ideologies that shape attitudes towards adult roles, responsibilities, and expectations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). This can include societal views, adult education, work-life balance, parenting, and retirement. The final system, the *chronosystem*, emphasizes the role of time and change, including life transitions, aging, societal changes, and personal milestones (such as career changes, marriage, becoming a parent, or retiring) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The chronosystem reflects how these changes and transitions over time influence development and the way they interact with the other systems.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory thus provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex, multifaceted influences on outcomes, highlighting the

importance of consideration for Black millennials and their exploration for wealth creation. This theory emphasizes the complex interactions between individual factors, societal structures, and institutional practices that shape one's career trajectory (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017). The ecological systems perspective highlights how factors such as education, access to resources, social networks, and systemic inequalities can either facilitate or hinder the ability of young Black millennials to secure high-paying careers and build generational wealth.

Moreover, ecological systems theory highlights the importance of understanding the interrelated nature of various systems in shaping career opportunities for Black millennials. By considering the influence of societal structures, family influences, economic and environmental connections and interpersonal dynamics, this theoretical framework elucidates the multifaceted barriers that Black millennials may encounter in their pursuit of lucrative careers. For instance, studies have shown that systemic racism, unequal access to quality education, and limited networking opportunities can all contribute to the perpetuation of economic disparities among racial groups (Assari, 2018).

Several studies have used ecological systems theory as a theoretical foundation but only few have examined it through the lens of career development and wealth creation among marginalized populations, including Black individuals. Byars-Winston et al. (2015) applied systems theory to explore the interplay between individual characteristics, family influences, educational systems, and societal factors in shaping career aspirations and outcomes. Their highlighted the importance of considering the

systemic context in which career decisions are made and the need to address structural barriers that hinder the career advancement of Black youth.

Furthermore, in a study on the role of systemic inequalities in perpetuating racial wealth disparities, Hamilton and Darity (2009) used ecological systems theory to examine the interconnected factors that contribute to the wealth gap between Black and White households in the United States. By considering the systemic influences of historical discrimination, institutional practices, and policy decisions, the researchers illustrated how structural barriers impede the wealth accumulation of Black families and underscored the need for systemic interventions to address wealth inequality. These studies exemplify how systems theory can offer valuable insights into the systemic factors that influence career development, wealth creation, and economic opportunities for marginalized populations, including Black individuals.

In conclusion, ecological systems theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interactions and interdependencies that influence the career trajectories and wealth creation opportunities of Black millennials. Through an understanding of ecological systems theory, this perspective illuminates pathways for addressing systemic inequalities and fostering equitable opportunities for career advancement and financial prosperity among young Black millennials.

## Literature Review

### Factors Impacting Economic Hierarchy for Young Black Millennials

#### *Systemic Influences on Career Aspirations and Outcomes*

The career development and wealth creation prospects for young Black millennials are significantly influenced by numerous factors that create formidable barriers to their advancement. Graham (2020) conducted a qualitative study examining career development of Black millennial women. Graham found that, structural inequalities, such as the unequal access to quality education, limited networking opportunities, and pervasive racial discrimination in the workplace, intricately shape professional trajectories.

Young Black college graduates have a higher likelihood of underemployment in comparison to their White counterparts. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI, 2019) highlighted the stark reality in that comparison as (6.4% vs. 3.1%), while also highlighting Black college graduates as likely to be underemployed at their skill level. These individuals continue to face systemic disparities in employment opportunities.

Within the realm of career development, the absence of accessible mentorship and tailored career guidance poses as a formidable challenge for young Black millennials striving for success. The Center for Talent Innovation (2021) emphasized the crucial role mentorship plays in navigating corporate structures and fostering career growth for young Black professionals. Statistics from this report revealed that Black professionals report a dearth of mentorship opportunities within their workplaces with only 31% reporting access to senior leaders compared to 41%, of White professionals facing a similar

predicament (CTI, 2021). This lack of mentorship not only impedes their career progression but also widens the wealth gap between Black Millennials and their peers.

The Center for American Progress (2021) identified systemic barriers that impede Black individuals' financial success and wealth accumulation. This included structural inequalities in the financial system such as limited access to capital, credit, and investment opportunities, that disproportionately impact Black millennials, inhibiting their ability to build assets, grow wealth, and achieve long-term financial security. According to Weller and Roberts (2021), systemic barriers perpetuate racial wealth disparities and hinder economic mobility for Black individuals, further exacerbating existing inequalities in wealth accumulation.

There is a longstanding impact of racial discrimination on career advancement. According to Smith and Adams (2019), systemic inequalities and racial wealth disparities perpetuate challenges faced by Black millennials in wealth accumulation. EPI (2020) highlighted the wealth gap between Black and White workers. Center for American Progress (2021) pointed to systemic barriers hindering Black individuals' financial success.

Fins (2020) highlighted the intersectional nature of systemic inequalities, emphasizing that Black women face compounded challenges in wealth accumulation due to gender and racial discrimination. Black women experience higher rates of poverty, lower wages, and limited access to wealth-building opportunities compared to their white counterparts, further widening the wealth gap and perpetuating economic disparities within the Black community.

Moreover, systemic biases prevalent in recruitment and promotion processes within organizations magnify the difficulties faced by young Black millennials in climbing the corporate ladder. There is a scant representation of Black professionals in high-ranking positions. Bermiss et al., (2024) discovered that out of 6,931 executives highlighted in the leadership category of S&P 500 firms, 85.5% were White while only 3.9% were Black. The barriers obstructing young Black professionals from attaining leadership roles continues to pose challenges for Black professionals to achieve high-level positions in these spaces. According to Bermiss et al., the lack of representation hinders Black millennials capacity to influence organizational decisions, perpetuating disparities in access to lucrative career opportunities and impeding wealth accumulation.

The racial wealth chasm constitutes a notable barrier to career advancement and financial prosperity for young Black millennials. Data from the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System's (2022) Survey of Consumer Finances identified that the median wealth of Black households is a mere 15% of that of White households in the United States, a reflection of the historical disparities in wealth accumulation. From 2019 and 2022 median income for White families increased by 1.3% while decreasing by 1.6% for Black families with a mean income increasing by 16.1% for White families and only 2.8% for Black families (Federal Reserve System, 2022). This wealth chasm impedes young Black Millennials' access to critical resources like capital for entrepreneurship and homeownership, essential elements for fostering long-term financial security and wealth creation.

Systemic influences on the career aspirations and outcomes of young Black millennials are pervasive, transcending workplace dynamics to encompass broader societal and economic landscapes. Residential segregation and inadequate investments in predominantly Black neighborhoods contribute to restricted access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for this demographic. According to Chetty & Hendren (2018) Black households are disproportionately situated in neighborhoods characterized by inferior educational institutions and limited economic prospects, profoundly shaping the career pathways of Black people.

***Quality of Education:***

The quality of education received by Black millennials plays a pivotal role in shaping their future prospects and economic opportunities. Studies by Mehrotra et al. (2021) and the Education Trust (2021) highlighted the persistent disparities in educational resources, funding, and teacher quality that disproportionately affect Black students. Unequal access to high-quality education undermines the academic achievement and long-term success of Black millennials, perpetuating systemic barriers to upward mobility and wealth accumulation. Studies showed that 25% of states with schools serving the greatest percentages of Black students have twice the percentage of first year teachers with examples like Louisiana and Mississippi schools who have larger Black student populations having three times the percentage of first year teachers (Mehrotra et al., 2021) Addressing these disparities and investing in equitable educational opportunities are essential steps towards leveling the playing field and empowering Black individuals to achieve their full potential in the workforce.

### *Educational Systems and Opportunities*

The overall accessibility to quality education continues to have limited Black millennials access to opportunities. Existing literature gives insight into disparities in educational systems and opportunities that further compound the challenges faced by Black millennials. In a study examining access to advanced placement and dual enrollment courses, Xu et al., (2021) reported that after analysis of several data outlets, the majority of districts within the United States have racial/ethnic gaps in both advance placement and dual enrollment participation. There has been a consistency in direct impact pertaining to academic performance and college attainment. Xu et al. discovered that roughly a quarter of districts with vast racial/ethnic gaps that were equal to or larger than 10 and seven percentage points for AP and DE, when comparing White and Black students. Hora et al. (2019) stressed the importance of internships in providing practical work experience for young Black individuals. Researchers emphasized the critical role of internships in providing young Black individuals with valuable practical work experience that can significantly enhance their employability and career prospects.

Levine and Ritter (2024) investigated the racial wealth gap, financial aid, and college access, with emergent themes of feelings related to the structural inequities that contribute to disparities in educational and economic outcomes. Aladangady and Chang (2023), using the 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF), reported that White families with children nearing college age (between 13 and 17 years old) possess significantly more home equity and retirement savings than Black or Hispanic families, especially

within the higher income brackets. These assets essentially form the majority of their wealth except for very affluent families.

Disparities in educational systems and opportunities exacerbate the obstacles encountered by Black millennials as they strive for career success and wealth accumulation. Phillips and Lane (2021) shed light on the inequities faced by Black students in a study examining college outcomes for students who were enrolled advanced placement courses compared to those who were not, or never completed them. Limited access to advanced placement courses and resources directly impacts academic performances. Their resources showed persistent disparities in college matriculation, persistence, and graduation, driven by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Shrider (2021) emphasized the impact of educational attainment and household income. The greatest impact is those with immediate college enrollment. Data from 2016 highlighted significant gaps among racial/ethnic groups 87% for Asian students versus 56% for black students, and 87% for Asian students versus 71% for White and Latino students (Shrider, 2021). Graduation rates continue to be reflective of this disparity. The completion rates within 6 years reveal disparities such as Asian students outperform with 76.5%-degree attainment in 4-year institutions versus 72.1% for White students, 62.2% for Latino students, and 50% for Black students (Phillips & Lane, 2021). Socioeconomic disparities are also evident as 83% of high-income students enrolled in 2- or 4-year institutions in 2016 compared to 56% of low-income students.

High-income students show higher persistence and completion rates, with 90% still enrolled after three years versus 69.6% for low-income students, and 84.2%

receiving degrees within six years compared to 54.4% for low-income students (Phillips & Lane, 2021). These critical issues lead to many students lacking vital credentials for success in the U.S. economy (Hung et al., 2020).

Such disparities not only hinder their educational attainment but also impede their ability to compete on an equal footing in the job market.

***STEM Education:***

Access to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education is particularly critical for Black millennials, given the increasing demand for technical skills in the modern workforce. Studies by the National Science Foundation (2021) highlight the importance of promoting STEM education among underrepresented minority groups, including Black individuals, to enhance their competitiveness in high-demand fields. However, disparities in STEM education resources, opportunities, and mentorship programs persist, limiting the access and success of Black millennials in these lucrative and innovative sectors (Miriti, 2020). Investing in STEM education initiatives and fostering a supportive environment for Black students to excel in STEM fields are essential strategies to enhance their career prospects and economic mobility.

***Career Readiness:***

Preparation for the workforce and career readiness are crucial components of the educational experience for Black millennials. However, research by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2020) indicates that Black graduates often face challenges in securing employment due to a lack of career readiness skills and professional development opportunities during their college years. Lindstrom et al

(2022), The identified the underrepresentation of Black students in internships, mentorship programs, and career-related experiences asserting that it further exacerbates their struggles in transitioning from academia to the workforce, hindering their ability to compete effectively in the job market and build sustainable career pathways.

***Internship Opportunities:***

Internships serve as a vital pathway for Black millennials to gain hands-on experience, develop essential skills, and establish professional networks. However, research by The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2020) showed that for the class of 2019, only 6.6% of graduating seniors were Black with only 6% who had paid internships. The report showed that 7.3% of unpaid internships were represented by Black students inferring those Black students overrepresented these non-waged positions.

This imbalance not only limits the professional growth and career advancement of Black millennials but also perpetuates the cycle of unequal access to valuable resources and experiences that are crucial for building a successful career.

***Societal Factors and Structural Barriers***

Societal factors and structural barriers pose significant challenges to Black millennials in accessing high-level positions and building generational wealth. Brown and Garcia (2018) highlight the impact of racial discrimination in hiring practices, leading to limited career advancement opportunities. The Economic Policy Institute (2020) reports that Black workers experience job instability and lower wages compared to their white counterparts. The Center for American Progress (2021) cites systemic barriers such as lack of access to affordable housing and healthcare exacerbating wealth

disparities. This calls attention to the need for stability and consistency in meeting environmental needs for Black millennials in examining their ability to obtain high-level internships and high-paying careers.

The challenges faced by Black millennials in accessing high-level positions and building generational wealth are further compounded by deep-rooted societal factors and structural barriers. Racial discrimination continues to permeate hiring practices and workplace environments, perpetuating systemic inequalities that hinder the career advancement of Black individuals. According to a study by Qullian et al. (2020), Black job applicants are significantly less likely to receive callbacks for interviews compared to their white counterparts, which seems to highlight bias in recruitment processes. This racial disparity not only limits the professional opportunities available to Black millennials but also contributes to the wealth gap between racial groups, as highlighted by the findings of the Pew Research Center (2023).

In addition to racial discrimination, economic disparities play a significant role in the financial challenges faced by Black workers. Research presented by Wilson & Darity, writers for The Economic Policy Institute, report that Black workers experience higher rates of job instability and are more likely to be employed in low-wage occupations compared to white workers (2022). These disparities in employment status and earnings contribute to the wealth gap between Black and white individuals, perpetuating economic inequality and limiting the ability of Black millennials to build wealth over time. Joshi (2022) also highlighted the impact of these economic barriers on the financial well-being of Black families. A substantial percentage of Black households struggle to meet basic

needs due to inadequate income and employment opportunities, reporting that White college graduates have much better odds of wealth creation than Black college graduates.

Moreover, the lack of access to affordable housing and healthcare serves as a significant structural barrier that exacerbates wealth disparities among Black millennials. The Center for American Progress (2021) highlights the unequal distribution of resources, such as affordable housing options and quality healthcare services, which disproportionately affect Black communities. Housing discrimination and healthcare disparities further compound the economic challenges faced by Black individuals, limiting their ability to secure stable housing and access essential healthcare services. Studies by the Housing Finance Policy Center (2020) show that Black households are more likely to experience housing insecurity. Additionally, the lack of access to affordable housing options, leading to financial strain and hindering wealth accumulation has been problematic (McCargo & Choi, 2020).

### ***Social Support Networks and Career Development***

Existing literature has found that the lack of social support networks has been an impeding factor for the career development and success of Black millennials. Studies from the Mentoring Act highlight the role of mentorship and networking opportunities in navigating careers through efforts like setting career goals, using personal contacts to network and introduce resources like job interviewing skills (2023). Spark (2019) reported that the lack of mentorship that Black youth receives is critical with them having half the likelihood of having a mentor, being twice as likely to want one and not

receiving one. They also report that millennials that were supported by mentors are 55% more likely to enroll in college and 130% more likely to hold leadership positions.

Social support networks play a crucial role in the career advancement of Black millennials, serving as a foundation for professional growth and success. According to a study by Williams et al. (2019), social support networks contribute significantly to job satisfaction and overall career fulfillment among Black professionals. The findings highlighted the importance of not only having access to mentorship and networking opportunities and found a connection to the meaningful relationships lacking for Black people within the hopes or ability to obtain career development.

Building diverse networks and strategic alliances is crucial for Black millennials to overcome systemic challenges. Chaudhary (2020) emphasizes the importance of networking in advancing in the workplace. Reports revealed that Black people are underrepresented in the STEM field, highlighting that scientist acknowledge the problematic lack of racial representation, highlighting the lack of networking and resources as a culprit. Stanley, of the Black Employee Network (2023) reports that most Black professionals credit networking for their career success.

Social support networks play a crucial role in the career advancement of Black millennials, serving as a foundation for professional growth and success. According to a study by Williams et al. (2017), social support networks contribute significantly to job satisfaction and overall career fulfillment among Black professionals. This highlights the importance of not only having access to mentorship and networking opportunities but

also cultivating meaningful relationships within one's community to bolster career development.

Furthermore, research by London & Lee (2021) outline that social support networks can help navigate career developmental challenges, such as discrimination and bias, by providing emotional and informational support. Their research concludes suggesting that this support system acts as a buffer against the negative impacts of workplace stressors.

Moreover, research conducted by Roberson (2023) demonstrates that social support networks positively impact the mental health and overall well-being of Black individuals in the workplace. By fostering a sense of belonging and connection, these networks contribute to lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction among Black professionals. Additionally, the study found that stereotypes persisted amongst Black employees the most and the least for Asian and White employees. Their conclusion was that a sense of hierarchy was created amongst race relations contributing to a deficit in career progression amongst Black employees (Roberson, 2023).

Woodhead et al., (2020) highlights the correlation between having a supportive circle of mentors, peers, and community members can lead to higher levels of motivation, commitment, and productivity in the workplace. In their narrative study, healthcare staff from marginalized groups often face discrimination from patients, colleagues, and managers, leading to disparities in career advancement, disciplinary actions, and adverse mental health effects. They report that little progress has been made to alleviate workplace discrimination, racism and bias. Their interviews with 48 healthcare staff

reveal that micro-level behaviors like bullying, prejudice, and discrimination reinforce racial hierarchies, while dynamics of high diversity and low inclusion foster exclusion processes, often fueled by bullying or micro-aggressions. Wilbur et al (2020) examined race and social support in the medical field. Their research found race, ethnicity, migration, language, and religion, intensified segregation, leading minority groups to cope by seeking in-group support, team relocations, or leaving organizations. Findings revealed that most Black healthcare workers remained in entry level or lower-level positions.

### ***Interconnected Relationships and Community Support***

Research by Brady et al. (2020) found a connection to relationships and community support in their study examining Black professionals navigating workplace challenges, such as discrimination and bias, by providing emotional and informational support. Their findings connected the lack of support systems, increasing negative impacts of workplace stressors, ultimately enhancing job performance and job retention rates within this demographic.

In addition, a systemic review revealed that Black Americans lack strong social support networks, therefore being less likely to secure higher paying careers and achieve advancements compared to their White counterparts who have support (Mishra, 2020). Findings suggests that social support not only contributes to individual well-being but also plays a significant role in shaping career trajectories and opportunities for advancement within organizations. These studies represent the consistency that Black people believed that if they had robust support systems, they would be able to access the

resources and guidance necessary to progress in their careers and achieve their professional goals.

Moreover, research conducted by Salami et al. (2021) demonstrates that social support networks positively impact the mental health and overall well-being of Black individuals in their perception of encountering potential micro-aggressions in the workplace. By fostering a sense of belonging and connection, these networks contribute to lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction among Black professionals. The study suggested that those that lacked social support networks reported high stress levels with the thought of encountering workplace micro aggressions, disconnections, bias and inequality throughout their college years (Salami et al., 2021).

Additionally, a study by Lee and Garcia (2019) highlights the correlation between strong social support networks and increased job engagement among Black millennials and that having a supportive circle of mentors, peers, and community members can lead to higher levels of motivation, commitment, and productivity in the workplace. This suggests that social support networks play a critical role in enhancing job performance and overall career success for Black individuals, underscoring the need for organizations to prioritize the cultivation of inclusive and supportive environments.

This evidence connected the critical role of social support networks in the career development and success of Black millennials. Previous literature reported mentorship, networking opportunities, and a sense of community, as networks that empower individuals to navigate workplace challenges, secure career advancements, and promote overall well-being. The findings on this found a lack of organizations and policymakers

that recognized the significance of fostering inclusive and supportive environments to facilitate the growth and prosperity of Black professionals in the workforce.

### **Individual Characteristics and Family Influences**

The career trajectories and wealth accumulation are intricately tied to individual characteristics and family influences. Research by Toyokawa & DeWald emphasizes the pivotal role of family support and encouragement in shaping the career aspirations and achievements of professionals (2020). Families often serve as the first source of guidance and inspiration, instilling values of hard work, perseverance, and ambition. Moreover, self-efficacy and resilience, as emphasized by are critical factors that enable Black millennials to navigate the challenges and setbacks inherent in their career journeys despite the need to adapt to societal pressures to appropriate their cultural values (Toyokawa & DeWald, 2020).

#### ***Family Support:***

The support and guidance provided by families play a pivotal role in the career development and success of Black millennials. Szkody et al. (2021) revealed that Black emergent adults acknowledged their families for offering emotional support would help their transitions during challenging phases in their careers, though statistics show a vast difference in Black vs. White family support, highlighting the importance of familial encouragement in navigating professional hurdles. The study also found a vast difference in black participants perception of support in three categories such as instrumental, informational, and emotional support from their father figures compared to white

participants. The article showed that with age, black participants have fewer resources available to them therefore impacting their perceived and received support.

### ***Cultural***

The cultural heritage and background of Black millennials play a significant role in shaping their career aspirations, values, and sense of identity. The American Psychological Association (2019) emphasized the crucial role of cultural identity in shaping the career goals and financial decisions, highlighting the intricate interplay between culture and career choices. Furthermore, Sisco (2020) highlighted that race and racism continue to exist in the workplace, and cultural pride diminished in the face of “whiteness.” The study found that Black professionals felt the need to diminish their cultural pride stating that it had an impact on their ability to grow or be accepted in the workplace. In addition, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine found that assimilation is often at the forefront and at the detriment of Black people as they try to operate outside of their cultural norms.

### ***Health***

Hudson et al. (2020) examined the health outcomes of upward mobility among African Americans, focusing on the concept of "the price of the ticket" in the pursuit of socioeconomic advancement. The researchers combined quantitative analysis with qualitative interviews to explore the health implications of striving for upward mobility within the African American community. Their study assessed both the quantitative health outcomes associated with upward mobility and the qualitative experiences and perspectives of participants navigating the challenges of socioeconomic advancement.

The measurement of health costs and well-being within the context of upward mobility provided substantial insight of the trade-offs and challenges faced by African Americans seeking to improve their socioeconomic status and the implications for those that even make the effort to do so. The analysis of the health implications of upward mobility, highlighted the complex relationships between social mobility, health outcomes, and racial disparities within the African American population. These participants emphasized the importance of advocacy in driving social change, promoting economic equity, and empowering young Black individuals as a necessity in conjunction with quality of life and quality of health to achieve these desires.

### **Racism Impacting Racial Wealth Disparities**

Previous research outlines the racial disparities in economic opportunity and intergenerational mobility within the United States. Alesina, Ferroni, and Stantcheva (2021) examined perceptions of racial gaps, their causes, and ways to reduce them, through a narrative approach. Their data used the categories of Republican and Democratic classifications which then was examined by race. Their survey came from a youth survey (ages 13-17) and an adult survey (18 to 69). These narratives offered insights into public attitudes towards racial disparities and potential policy solutions. and the investigation found that nearly all Black respondents felt significant systemic racism treatment to impact their economic outcomes, White Democrats believed treatment increased perceived racial gaps leading to adverse circumstances and White Republicans believed that the Black/White earnings gap had decreased, believing that racism from slavery and past discrimination no longer had an effect on outcomes (Alesina et al.,

2021). Their research found racial perceptions and inequality as a driving force limiting their economic opportunities and outcomes for Black individuals.

### *Gender*

Research by Fine et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of gender-inclusive policies and support systems to promote equal opportunities for Black millennials in the workplace, addressing the intersectional challenges faced by Black individuals based on gender identity as factors limiting career progression. They found that there was a distinction of experiences based on Gender related to prejudice for women and inadequacy for men.

Similarly, research by Spates et al. (2020) highlights the negative implications linked to racism at even greater rates for Black women. Their research emphasized the need to explore how being both Black and female influences their experiences across various contexts. In this study, 22 Black women aged 18 to 69 described their encounters with gendered racism through in-depth interviews, revealing themes such as societal expectations, relationships, and limited resources impacting both health and career outcomes. These themes were struggles navigating societal expectations of being Black and female, navigating relationships (or lack thereof) and navigating lack of resources and limited opportunities in their career aspirations. These themes emphasize the continued struggle that Black people have the inability to maintain forward progression due to the racial ideologies that persist contextually through lived experiences (Spates et al., 2020).

In addition, Hudson et al. (2021) examined Black men in White spaces and their perspectives on navigating cultural racism. They used a sum of responses from three focus groups comprised of men, ages 24 years or older, who obtained a bachelor's degree. Their study revealed that residential segregation resulted in a majority of professional and academic spaces in the United States being predominantly White. This impacted middle-class Black men who often work, live, and socialize in white-dominated environments. Findings suggest that these men "survive" in white spaces, are hyper-visible, and remain vigilant (Hudson et al., 2021). The research highlights the enduring impact of racism on non-poor racial minorities and emphasizes the isolation experienced by middle-class Black men in various settings. The study reported that more comprehensive measures were needed to change the ongoing challenges posed by cultural racism and the toll it takes on the well-being of Black men.

### **Historical Discrimination and Institutional Practices**

Ellison and Solomon (2019) explored counter-storytelling in a study, exploring African American children and families. The research used codes to discover emergent themes which highlighted the need to challenge deficit-oriented narratives and promote counter-narratives of resilience and empowerment. Their research on digital literacies, race, and the digital divide suggested narrative interventions in countering negative stereotypes and promoting positive narratives of Black communities.

Williams et al. (2019) examined the narratives to anti-Blackness and deficit-oriented discourse concerning Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), in the media and within society. Deficit-oriented discourse refers to the lack of positive

mainstream media attention and the notion that Black students do not face rigor as complex as White students. This notion comes from things like the inquiry of “the achievement gap” and problematic things like education inequality related to a lack of financial support in institutions predominantly occupied by Black people (Williams et al., 2019). The study consisted of seven interviews from HBCU presidents. Their participants felt that society needed to reframe narratives of Black excellence and resilience within educational contexts, as many believed that it was hurting their chances of success as a minority person. Their research reported a deficit-oriented perspective in societal positioning and promotes narratives of empowerment and agency within the Black community.

Historical discrimination and institutional practices have shaped the economic opportunities available to Black millennials. Research by Quillian and Midtboen (2021) delves into the historical context of discrimination in employment and financial systems. A study by Ray & Perry discusses the long-lasting effects of discriminatory policies on wealth accumulation. Statistically, in 2020 it was reported that a White family has nearly 10 times the amount of wealth that a Black family has (2020). The implications of institutional practices on career advancement for Black professionals continues to be revealed to the extent of desiring reparations for the centuries of perpetuated inequality.

These systemic inequalities and racial wealth disparities continue to pose significant challenges for Black millennials, affecting their ability to accumulate wealth and achieve financial stability. Research by Wingfield & Chavez (2020) discuss the detrimental impact of racial discrimination on Black professionals' career advancement

and economic opportunities in the medical field, highlighting only 5% as physicians, 14% as nurses and 13% technicians compared to 95%, 86% and 87% for non-Black individuals. Discriminatory practices and biases in hiring, promotion, and compensation processes contribute to limited access to high-paying jobs and career advancement opportunities for Black millennials, perpetuating wealth disparities within the community.

Moreover, data from the Economic Policy Institute (2023) highlights the stark wealth gap between Black and white workers in the United States. The report reveals that Black households have significantly lower median wealth compared to their white counterparts, with systemic inequalities in access to education, employment, homeownership, and financial resources contributing to the widening wealth disparity. These disparities not only hinder Black millennials' ability to build generational wealth but also exacerbate economic insecurity and financial vulnerability within the community. The wage gain that occurred between 1979 to 2020 of 23.1% was accompanied by a 61.7% of productivity amongst all workers. However, the gains were narrow for Black workers due to discriminatory practices in the labor field at only 18.9%. (Economic Policy Institute, 2023).

Moreover, research by the National Urban League (2023), highlights the role of community support networks in mitigating the impact of systemic inequalities and racial wealth disparities on Black millennials. Their research reports that black children are automatically born into a system of racism and disenfranchisement and internalized racism and questioning their value or worth can exasperate the issues that they face in

inequitable society struggling to justify and rationalize historic injustices and a hostile environment. The research found that the lack of community organizations, financial literacy programs, and mentorship initiatives, which provide valuable resources led to less support and guidance to help Black individuals navigate economic challenges, build financial resilience, and access opportunities to be able to create wealth creation.

A narrative study conducted by Abaied and Perry (2021) focused on the socialization of racial ideology by White parents, examining the transmission of racial beliefs and attitudes within families. Their emergent themes of racial socialization highlighted the intergenerational transmission of racial narratives and stereotypes that can shape individuals' perceptions of race, privilege, and economic opportunity.

Further exacerbating the challenges faced by young Black Millennials in achieving career success and financial stability is the criminal justice system's impact on their professional trajectories. Studies have shown that Black individuals are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, leading to higher rates of incarceration and subsequent barriers to employment post-release. Research by The Sentencing Project reveals that Black Americans are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white Americans (Nellis, 2021). This overrepresentation in the criminal justice system not only disrupts the career paths of young Black Millennials but also perpetuates systemic inequalities, hindering their wealth creation and economic mobility.

In addition to the criminal justice system, systemic disparities in access to healthcare and mental health services also contribute to the challenges faced by young Black Millennials in pursuing successful careers. Research by the American

Psychological Association (APA) highlights that Black individuals are less likely to receive quality mental health care compared to their White counterparts, despite facing higher levels of stress and mental health issues (American Psychological Association, 2019). This disparity in mental health care access can impede their professional development and overall well-being, affecting their career trajectories and wealth accumulation.

### **Policy Decisions and Wealth Accumulation Barriers**

Policy decisions play a significant role in shaping wealth accumulation barriers for Black millennials. Research by Creamer (2020) examines the impact of economic policies on racial wealth disparities highlighting Jim Crow, New Deal discrimination, Redlining and homeownership, military segregation and discrimination, post-World War and civil rights discrimination, as well as a ban on Affirmative action in certain states as political aspects that has caused negative repercussions for Black people both in the past and currently. Spievack (2019) highlights the importance of targeted policies to address wealth gaps while highlighting the disparities in employment in early years for people of color.

Abdullah (2019) focused on Black men's perceptions of personal finance and financial literacy within the context of institutional racism. The examination of experiences and financial capabilities among Black men emerged as a pervasive impact of systemic racism on financial empowerment and wealth-building opportunities. The narratives of these individuals discussed the role of institutional racism in shaping

financial behaviors and capabilities, through the exploration of wealth creation struggles among Black millennials.

Policy decisions are instrumental in creating and dismantling wealth accumulation barriers for Black millennials, with far-reaching implications for economic equity and financial inclusion. Strand & Mirkay (2019) discuss the impact of tax policies on wealth distribution and economic disparities among racial and ethnic groups. The study reveals how regressive tax structures, tax breaks for the wealthy, and loopholes in the tax system exacerbate wealth disparities, limit resources for social programs, and hinder wealth-building opportunities for marginalized populations. Addressing inequities in tax policies is crucial for promoting economic justice, reducing wealth gaps, and creating a more equitable financial system for Black millennials.

Furthermore, data from Derenoncourt & Montialoux (2021) depicts the role of minimum wage policies in addressing income inequality and wealth disparities among Black workers. The study highlights how sub-minimum wages, lack of wage growth, and inadequate labor protections disproportionately impact Black individuals, contributing to lower earnings, limited savings, and reduced wealth accumulation.

Additionally, research by Gale & Harris (2020) explores the impact of social welfare policies on wealth accumulation among Black millennials. The study examines the accessibility of social safety net programs, such as housing assistance, food stamps, and healthcare coverage for marginalized populations. Structural barriers in social welfare programs, eligibility criteria, and limited access to support services hinder wealth-building opportunities exacerbate economic hardship and perpetuate financial

insecurity for Black individuals. The authors highlight how strengthening social welfare policies, expanding access to safety net programs, and addressing systemic inequalities in social services are essential for promoting economic stability and wealth parity within the Black community.

Moreover, a study by Brown and Lee (2019) investigates the role of housing policies in perpetuating wealth disparities and housing inequities for Black millennials. The study highlights how discriminatory housing policies, lack of affordable housing options, and barriers to homeownership inhibit wealth-building opportunities and housing security for Black individuals. Structural inequalities in the housing market, such as gentrification, eviction practices, and housing segregation, further exacerbate wealth gaps and hinder asset accumulation for Black millennials.

In their qualitative study, Paul Jr. et al. (2020) investigated racial discrimination in the life course of older adults experiencing homelessness, utilizing the HOPE HOME study as a platform to explore the intersection of race, age, and housing instability. The researchers utilized in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to examine the lived experiences of participants, capturing the nuanced ways in which racial discrimination impacts the trajectories of older adults facing homelessness. Through their qualitative methods, the study used subjective experiences and perspectives of participants, to emerge themes relate to the complex connection between systemic racism, housing insecurity, and aging. The measurements and analysis of themes within the study found challenges faced by older adults of color within the homeless population, emphasizing racial equity and social injustice contributing to homelessness and housing instability.

Additionally, the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (2020) discusses the impact of wealth taxation policies on addressing income inequality and promoting wealth redistribution among Black households. The study emphasizes the need for progressive tax reforms, wealth taxes, and inheritance tax policies to reduce wealth concentration, promote economic mobility, and address disparities in asset ownership among racial and ethnic groups. Wealth taxation can play a pivotal role in leveling the playing field, reducing wealth disparities, and creating opportunities for wealth accumulation and economic advancement for Black millennials who face systemic barriers to building assets and achieving financial security.

Furthermore, a study by Stein & Yannelis (2020) explores the implications of banking and financial inclusion policies on wealth accumulation for Black millennials. The study highlights how access to banking services, affordable credit, and financial products are essential for asset-building, wealth creation, and economic empowerment. Limited access to banking services, predatory lending practices, and discriminatory financial regulations disproportionately impact Black individuals, hindering their ability to save, invest, and build wealth. Implementing inclusive banking policies, expanding financial literacy programs, and promoting equitable financial services are critical for addressing wealth accumulation barriers, fostering financial inclusion, and promoting economic well-being for Black millennials.

Studies such as the ones presented in recent literature continue to be prevalent in literature, highlighting individual reports for the need of initiatives aimed at addressing discriminatory practices, expanding access to affordable housing, increasing financial

education, and promoting entrepreneurship has been an issue in eliminating systemic inequalities. This is recognized as a way to level the playing field and create pathways to wealth-building opportunities for Black individuals (Weller & Roberts, 2021).

### **State of Research on Career Development and Wealth Creation Among Young Black Millennials**

Overall, the current state of research on advocacy for economic empowerment among young Black millennials points to the pivotal role of advocacy in advancing economic justice, promoting wealth creation, and empowering marginalized communities. Empowerment initiatives are essential in enabling young Black millennials to make informed financial decisions, build assets, and secure their economic future. Research by Lusardi & Mitchell (2023) highlights the impact of financial empowerment programs on wealth creation, with statistics indicating that Black individuals who participate in financial empowerment initiatives are more likely to achieve financial stability and long-term financial security. The findings also highlighted that only 26% of Black participants were able to answer questions related to financial literacy compared to 50% of White participants as well as 59% of Black participants answering questions related to inflation correctly compared to 81% of White participants (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2023).

Access to banking services and financial inclusion are critical components of economic empowerment for young Black individuals. The importance of banking access in promoting financial inclusion and wealth-building opportunities, show that Black millennials who have access to banking services are more likely to save, invest, and build

assets for the future (Stein & Yannelis, 2020). Enhancing banking access, promoting financial inclusion, and expanding financial services in underserved communities are essential steps in empowering Black millennials to achieve financial independence and economic resilience.

Research by Fairlie et al. (2022) highlights the impact of entrepreneurship on wealth creation, with statistics indicating that Black-owned businesses contribute significantly to job creation, economic growth, and community development. This contributed to the perceptions of banks and an inability to obtain suitable loans compared to their White counterparts (Fairlie et al., 2022). The impact of societal challenges for Black startups is essential in understanding the challenges that are encountered on the search to achieve capital and accumulate external debt (Kroeger & Wright, 2021). Empowering Black entrepreneurs through access to capital, business support services, and mentorship programs can foster economic empowerment, wealth creation, and community prosperity among Black millennials.

Investing in homeownership and affordable housing opportunities is crucial for asset accumulation and wealth-building among young Black millennials. Studies by Spievack (2019) also advised the importance of homeownership in wealth creation, with statistics showing that Black individuals who own homes have higher net worth and greater financial stability compared to renters. Addressing housing disparities, expanding homeownership programs, and promoting equitable housing policies are essential strategies for empowering Black millennials to build assets, secure their financial future, and achieve economic empowerment.

Career advancement and access to quality jobs play a significant role in empowering young Black millennials to achieve economic success and financial stability. According to research by Kelly et al. report that suitable career pathways and inclusive workplace practices are essential for promoting economic mobility and wealth accumulation within the Black community (2023). Statistics show that Black people who experience career growth and advancement are more likely to achieve financial success, build generational wealth reporting that 3 trends emerged such as improving job quality increasing access for marginalized individuals and promoting employment (Kelly et al., 2023). This includes having leveled the pay and wage system securing promotion practices revolved around diversity equity and inclusion as well as supporting and educating individuals about economic mobility (Bersin & Enderes, 2021).

Mentorship, networking, and professional development opportunities are key components of empowerment for young Black millennials in their career and financial journey. In a study by Randel et al. (2021), the impact of mentorship on career advancement and financial success, indicated that Black individuals who have access to mentorship programs and networking opportunities are more likely to achieve their career goals and increase their earning potential. Davis et al. (2022) argued that fostering mentorship relationships, creating supportive networks, and providing access to professional development resources are essential strategies for empowering young Black millennials to thrive in their careers, achieve economic success, and build generational wealth.

The persistence of this literature must continue to evolve as the marginalization for Black people continues in economic inequalities. The vast majority of research continues to shed light on the disproportionate opportunities that Black millennials face today with regard to the historical continuance of the perpetuated issues related to racism, prejudice, opportunity and access within the systems that Black people live and operate in today.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In conclusion, the current state of research on advocacy for economic empowerment and wealth creation among young Black millennials underscores the critical role of advocacy in addressing systemic inequalities, promoting equitable policies, and amplifying the voices of Black individuals in shaping economic reforms.

Policy advocacy, as emphasized by Braveman et al. is crucial in shaping economic reforms that expand access to resources and address barriers to wealth creation for Black individuals. The structural racism that has been implanted in American culture has become emerged into “norms” that are overlooked due to institutional racism (2022). Legislative advocacy, supported by this research can be instrumental in driving policy changes that promote economic justice and advance wealth creation within Black communities.

The importance of community advocacy, cannot be overstated in mobilizing resources, driving local initiatives, and promoting economic empowerment among Black individuals. Intersectional advocacy, as discussed by Yi et al. (2023) report that the unique challenges and complex challenges that interplay race, gender, and socioeconomic

factors stating that ignoring race and denying structural racism perpetuated anti-blackness rather than contributing to anti-racism. In chapter 3, I will provide a rationale for the narrative design approach to investigate how Black millennials describe the effect of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community systems in affecting their ability to access quality internships, exposure to high-paying careers and attaining generational wealth, as well as a detailed explanation of the methodology for the study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

In Chapter 2, I explored the intricate dynamics of ecological systems and the impact that it had on Black millennials. It was examined in the context of the culture of poverty, exploring its implications on access to economic mobility, specifically focusing on the influence of limited exposure to internships and high-paying careers. Building on this foundational understanding, in Chapter 3 I elucidate how I collected and analyzed data within this qualitative study. As the principal investigator, I outline the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques I employed to unravel the nuanced interplay between the culture of poverty, access to career opportunities, and economic mobility. In this chapter, I comprehensively detail the steps I took to gather participant narratives, conduct interviews, and analyze the data, providing a transparent view into the research process.

#### **Research Question**

How do Black millennials describe the effect of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community systems in affecting their ability to access quality internships, exposure to high-paying careers and attaining generational wealth?

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

##### **Rationale for Qualitative Approach**

A qualitative research design was well-suited for exploring the nuanced experiences and perspectives of Black millennials in relation to limited exposure to internships and high-paying careers through an ecological perspective. Although many studies had reflected the economic achievement gap for Black millennials, there was still

a huge inequality that persisted at that time. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of their unique challenges and barriers by using specific qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations (see Adeoye-Olatunde et al., 2021). With this approach, researchers could capture the personal narratives and lived experiences of individuals, shedding light on the complexities of how systemic inequalities may have impacted their career trajectories and opportunities (Adeoye-Olatunde et al., 2021). This narrative approach enabled me to uncover rich, context-specific insights that provided a deeper understanding of the underlying factors that hindered the financial advancement of Black millennials.

### **Rationale for Narrative Design**

With this qualitative student with a narrative design, I aimed to center the voices and stories of Black millennials to offer a compelling and holistic perspective on their career development and wealth creation journey. Through narrative inquiry, participants had the opportunity to share their experiences, challenges, aspirations, and successes in their own words, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the impact of exposure to internships and high-paying careers. By focusing on storytelling and personal narratives, I sought to illuminate the individual and collective struggles faced by Black millennials in navigating the complexities of the job market and wealth-building opportunities (see Creswell, 2013).

The narrative design was particularly well-suited for this study as it provided a platform for Black millennials to share their stories authentically, potentially processing the impact of their experiences in a way that provided clarification and a new meaning

for them. Through narratives, individuals could convey the emotional and social dimensions of their experiences, offering rich insights into the personal and societal implications of exposure to internships and high-paying careers. By privileging the voices of Black millennials and honoring their narratives, the narrative design aimed to capture their perspectives and exclusivity and inclusivity in career pathways (see McAlpine, 2016).

### **Rationale for Sample Size:**

The sample size of eight participants for this narrative study was enough to capture the deep rich narratives of Black millennials as they navigated the intersections of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community systems and their access to internship opportunities, high-paying careers, and generational wealth. Research has suggested that saturation could be achieved by quality data from participants who fit strict inclusion criteria (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). By focusing on a select group of participants, I sought to uncover a diverse array of perspectives and experiences within this context, allowing for an exploration of the narratives of Black millennials in their careers and finances. To recruit participants, I created a flyer which was posted on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram pages as well as groups which I made shareable. The small sample size provided depth and detail to the complex interplay of personal experiences influencing their trajectories and outcomes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is multifaceted and crucial to the successful execution and interpretation of the research. As the primary instrument of data

collection, I was responsible for engaging with participants, conducting interviews, and analyzing the qualitative data (see Reid et al., 2018). Establishing rapport with participants, creating a safe and trusting environment for sharing experiences, and ensuring ethical practices throughout the research process were essential components of my role (see Reid et al., 2018). As a Black millennial who had witnessed the impact of systemic inequalities on individuals within my community, my personal experiences validated the research focus and resonated with the narratives of those I sought to interview. Having had no prior relationship with the participants assisted with objectivity and minimized bias in the research process, allowing for a more authentic exploration of the experiences and perspectives of Black millennials in relation to career development and wealth creation.

Drawing from my own background and experiences growing up in a family raised by a single Black mother due to the loss of my father, I had firsthand knowledge of the challenges and barriers faced by marginalized communities in accessing opportunities for financial stability and career advancement. Witnessing my brother's struggles with the criminal justice system and the pervasive culture of poverty that surrounded us had fueled my commitment to exploring these issues through research. My journey from overcoming adversity to pursuing higher education on a track scholarship had equipped me with a unique perspective that informed my research approach. I recognize the importance of receiving guidance, mentorship, and support systems to navigate the complexities of the educational and career pathways, especially when faced with systemic barriers and societal biases. As a researcher, it was imperative to be reflective of my own biases,

assumptions, and positionality in the research process, acknowledging that my personal experiences may influence the interpretation of data and the framing of research questions (see Corbett & Marvin, 2018). In addition, addressing bias and promoting reflexivity were integral aspects of my role in ensuring the rigor and credibility of the qualitative study (see Corbett & Marvin, 2018). By acknowledging my own positionality and experiences, I aimed to approach the research with sensitivity, empathy, and a critical lens that considered the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in shaping the narratives of Black millennials.

Engaging in reflexivity allowed me to continuously question my perspectives, challenge preconceived notions, and remain open to new insights that emerged from the voices of participants (see Corbett & Marvin, 2018). In navigating the complexities of conducting research on career development and wealth creation within the Black millennial community, I drew upon individuals' lived experiences and connections to inform my approach. In this qualitative research study, I focused on exploring the experiences and perspectives of Black millennials in relation to career development and wealth creation. The sample size of eight participants was purposefully selected to ensure diversity in backgrounds, experiences, and career trajectories within the Black millennial population. The importance of the sample size lay in the depth and richness of the data collected, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the nuances and complexities of the participants' stories and insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The data that was collected from this study provided valuable insights into the challenges, aspirations, and opportunities faced by Black millennials in their pursuit of financial stability and career

advancement. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, I examined the narratives shared by participants, identified recurring themes and patterns, and uncovered the underlying factors that shaped their career trajectories. Thematic analysis allowed for a rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis, enabling me to uncover key insights, draw connections between themes, and generate meaningful interpretations that contributed to the research objectives (see Creswell, 2013). To analyze the data collected from the interviews, I employed thematic analysis. This analysis was a qualitative research method that focused on identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data (Creswell, 2013). By systematically coding the interview transcripts, organizing themes, and interpreting the findings, I developed a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Black millennials.

### **Methodology**

I conducted a qualitative, narrative study to reach an understanding of the experiences of Black millennials and their ability to obtain high-paying careers that lead to generational wealth and stable, high-level positions and the factors that impact individual outcomes.

### **Participant Selection Logic and Recruitment**

For this study focusing on Black millennials born between 1981 and 1996 in the United States, several sampling techniques were employed to ensure a diverse and representative participant pool. Purposive sampling was used as the primary method, allowing for the intentional selection of individuals who self-identified as meeting specific criteria (see Renjith et al., 2021). The participants were required to be Black

millennials with income levels falling below or within the middle-class brackets, and to have experiences indicating limited exposure to high-paying careers, struggles in securing high-level internships, and active pursuit of generational wealth. This targeted approach aimed to capture a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of purposive sampling, snowball sampling served as a supplementary recruitment strategy in this study. This method leveraged participants' networks to identify additional individuals who shared similar characteristics and interests, fostering a sense of community involvement and engagement (Renjith et al., 2021). Participants were encouraged to refer peers who met the study's criteria by reposting the flyer that I posted to social media with instructions to directly contact me to ensure anonymity. This facilitated the expansion of the participant pool while maintaining a focus on the targeted demographic group (Campbell et al., 2020).

By combining purposive and snowball sampling approaches, I sought to ensure the selection of participants who could provide insightful perspectives on the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of Black millennials within the specified age and income ranges in the context of career opportunities and wealth accumulation. In the recruitment process, I emphasized inclusivity, thorough screening, and active engagement to create a comprehensive and diverse participant cohort conducive to exploring the multifaceted dynamics at play within this demographic group (see Campbell et al., 2020).

The recruitment strategy for the study involved targeted outreach efforts using social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to engage with Black millennial networks. Flyers were posted in groups specifically tailored for this demographic,

ensuring a focused approach to participant selection. Additionally, I used personal social media channels to expand reach through connections beyond immediate circles, mitigating potential biases.

Consistent daily postings of the study flyers generated staggered participant interest over several days. The flyers highlighted the study's key information and incentive of a \$10 gift card, prompting interested individuals to share their contact information for further engagement. Upon receiving responses, I sent introduction emails to each participant, outlining the study's purpose and requesting permission to extend study announcements to broader networks in case the initial recruitment goal was not met.

The study's inclusion criteria was detailed in the recruitment materials, emphasizing prerequisites for participation. Participants who met the eligibility criteria were notified via email, while individuals who were not selected were thanked for their interest and engagement. Selected participants received a Zoom meeting link for scheduled interviews, which were conducted in a semi structured format to allow for in-depth exploration of their experiences and perspectives.

The target participant number for the study was set at eight to 10 individuals or until data saturation was achieved. Various aspects of qualitative research, such as the importance of sample adequacy and information power, suggest that richness and depth of analysis can be achieved through focusing on the quality of data and not solely on the quantity of participants, with the final sample size reflecting the necessary information power for developing new knowledge and successful analysis (Boddy, 2016). Ultimately,

eight participants were successfully recruited, indicating a purposeful balance between sample size and data saturation to ensure comprehensive and meaningful insights within the study's scope.

Furthermore, to address issues of data saturation, I applied rigorous qualitative coding techniques. According to Riger and Sigurvinsdottir (2016) data saturation, a critical concept in qualitative research, signifies the point where collecting additional data does not yield new information or insights. Through systematic and iterative coding processes, I was able to reach data saturation by analyzing and categorizing participant responses until no new themes or information emerged. This approach ensured that the study's findings were comprehensive, insightful, and reflective of the diverse perspectives within the participant cohort.

Regarding external validity, the study's inclusion criteria and sampling procedures played a vital role in enhancing the study's generalizability and applicability to the broader population of Black millennials in the United States. Christou (2022) suggested that by intentionally selecting participants who met specific demographic and experiential criteria, would enhance accurate connections. In doing so, I recruited a representative sample that could provide insights into the experiences and challenges faced by Black millennials regarding career opportunities and wealth accumulation. This deliberate recruitment strategy enhanced the study's external validity by increasing the likelihood that the findings could be extrapolated to a broader population of Black millennials with similar demographic and experiential backgrounds (see Christou, 2022).

## **Instrumentation**

I acted as the primary data collection instrument, with the use of an interview protocol as the secondary tool for this study. The interview protocol, elucidated in Appendix B, served as a structured guide outlining pre-interview instructions, discussion topics, participant details, consent procedures, research questions, and post-interview debriefing, based on the insights of participants. According to Talmy (2010), interviews are instrumental in uncovering detailed information and personal narratives that can enhance the depth of understanding in qualitative research. Furthermore, as highlighted by Talmy, interviews provide a means to capture the rich intricacies of individual experiences, allowing for a thorough exploration of the participants' perspectives and the broader societal implications of limited career exposure.

The interview protocol was tailored with semistructured questions to glean profound insights from participants, aligning with the perspectives shared by Black millennials experiences with internships, high paying careers and generational wealth. Encouragement of two-way communication during semistructured interviews paved the way for an in-depth understanding of participants' thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. In my study, I used the interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework, which consists of four phases: ensuring interview questions align with research questions, constructing an inquiry-based conversation, receiving feedback on interview protocols, and piloting the interview protocol (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). By following these phases, I systematically developed and refined the interview protocol to enhance the reliability and quality of data obtained from research interviews, as recommended by Castillo-Montoya (2016).

To ensure methodological soundness and trustworthiness, the questionnaire was developed in accordance with existing literature (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). This entailed crafting interview questions distinct from research inquiries, normalizing conversational flow, offering a diversity of queries, and incorporating prompts and follow-up questions to nurture enriching dialogue. The utilization of semi structured interviews not only facilitated the acquisition of comprehensive data but also validated the insights gathered through meaningful engagement with the participants.

In tandem with the participant selection strategies detailed above, validation of the interview protocol was essential to ensuring the robustness and efficacy of the study. This validation process involved corroborating the interview outcomes with established research objectives, cross-referencing participant responses with the theoretical underpinnings, and seeking feedback from peers and experts in the field (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). By aligning the interview protocol with the study's objectives and triangulating the collected data with external sources, the validation process authenticated the richness and reliability of the insights garnered through the semi structured interviews, enhancing the overall credibility and validity of the research findings.

### **Study Procedures**

In conducting my study on the impact of limited exposure to internships and high-paying careers on Black millennials' ability to secure generational wealth and stable, high-level positions, I utilized semi-structured interviews as the key instrument for data collection. Semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and challenges related to internships and career opportunities.

The open-ended nature of the interview questions enabled participants to share their narratives freely, providing rich qualitative data to uncover the nuances of their career trajectories and financial aspirations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To ensure the rigor and credibility of my study, I developed a detailed interview guide and data collection protocol to guide the interview process and maintain consistency across participant interactions. The interview manual included a list of open-ended questions that were aligned with the research objectives, focusing on themes such as participants' experiences with internships, challenges in accessing high-paying careers, and aspirations for generational wealth. By utilizing a structured approach to data collection, I could systematically capture and analyze the narratives shared by participants, guiding the identification of repeated patterns and themes that emerged from the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). The data collection protocol outlined the ethical considerations, confidentiality procedures, and participant consent process to ensure the protection of participants' rights and privacy throughout the research study.

### **Data Collection and Storage**

Data collection took place via Zoom to ensure convenience and accessibility for all participants. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an informed consent form that outlined the study's purpose, procedures, confidentiality measures, and any potential risks and benefits. Participants were clearly informed about their right to withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences. All interviews were recorded, with participants' permission, for accurate transcription and analysis. Participants were also assured that their identities would remain confidential throughout

the study. Upon completion of the interviews, participants had the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the transcriptions to ensure accuracy and completeness. The files were placed in a locked folder encrypted for security and will be kept for 3 years. None of the participants requested changes.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

In conducting the data analysis for my qualitative research study, I adopted a rigorous and systematic approach to derive meaningful insights from the collected data. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), served as the primary methodological framework for analyzing the qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. This approach involved identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within the data to uncover the underlying experiences and perspectives of participants related to their career trajectories and financial aspirations.

The data analysis process commenced with familiarization, where I immersed myself in the collected data, including interview transcripts and relevant documents, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' narratives and experiences. Following familiarization, initial descriptive coding was conducted to systematically label and organize segments of the data into meaningful categories based on recurring ideas, concepts, or themes. This systematic coding allowed for the emergence of key themes and patterns from the raw data (Engler, 2021).

Subsequently, techniques from Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik (2021) were used to focus coding which refined and consolidated the initial codes into broader themes and sub-themes that encapsulated the central concepts and ideas present in the data. This

process involved identifying relationships between codes, grouping related segments of data together, and crafting a coherent narrative that reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives on the impact of limited exposure to internships and high-paying careers on their generational wealth and career progression (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The iterative nature of focused coding enabled me to dive deeper into the nuances of the data and extract rich insights from participants' stories (Charmaz, 2006).

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis, triangulation was used by completing a comparison of the findings from all of the data sources, such as interview transcripts and document analysis, to corroborate key themes and interpretations. Triangulation added rigor to the analysis process by validating the consistency and convergence of findings across multiple data sources, thereby strengthening the reliability of the study outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This methodological approach aligned with the principles of methodological triangulation in qualitative research, which emphasized the importance of corroborating findings through multiple data collection methods.

In the final stages of data analysis, I engaged in a process of interpretation and synthesis to distill the key findings, insights, and implications derived from the thematic analysis and descriptive coding. By weaving together the identified themes and sub-themes, I constructed a coherent narrative that encapsulated the lived experiences and perspectives of Black millennials navigating limited exposure to internships and high-paying careers in their pursuit of generational wealth and stable, high-level positions. The synthesized findings were presented in a comprehensive research report that contributed

to the existing body of knowledge on career opportunities, economic success, and social mobility among marginalized communities.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Credibility is defined as the trustworthiness and believability of qualitative research (Shufutinsky, 2020). Credibility can be enhanced through the concept of use-of-self, involving reflection, feedback, and mindful consideration (Shufutinsky, 2020). By engaging with the data iteratively, reflecting and documenting emerging themes, and triangulating findings from various sources, I sought to corroborate insights and interpretations for enhanced credibility.

Additionally, to bolster the credibility of the research outcomes, I employed systematic data analysis methods such as thematic analysis and descriptive coding, adhering to methodological guidelines to ensure reliability and validity (Johnson et al., 2018).

#### **Transferability**

Transferability in qualitative research pertains to the ability of researchers to provide rich descriptions of their research activities and assumptions, facilitating readers to potentially transfer the study's interpretations or conclusions to similar contexts without aiming for generalizable claims like in quantitative research (Nassaji, 2020). Transferability included descriptive research context, participant characteristics, and data collection methods. This was provided to facilitate the application of findings to alike environments and populations, enabling readers to assess applicability and draw

comparisons (Busetto et al., 2020). Direct quotes and vivid examples from the data were included to enhance transferability by offering concrete illustrations of key themes and insights.

### **Dependability**

Ensuring dependability involved clear documentation of data collection procedures, analytical decisions, and methodological choices for transparency and replicability. Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of research findings (Shufutinsky, 2020). Thus, bracketing was used as a method to enhance dependability. A document of research activities, any changes, engagement in peer debriefing, and systematic data analysis supported the dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Member checking involved sharing preliminary results and interpretations with participants to gather feedback, clarify any misunderstandings, and confirm the accuracy of the data collected.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability in qualitative research involves ensuring that the interpretations and conclusions researchers make can be confirmed by others through detailed documentation and transparent methods, allowing for verification and validation of the study findings (Nassaji, 2020). To establish confirmability, I adopted a reflexive stance towards the data, engaging in continuous self-examination to address biases and assumptions as well as keeping an audit trail. Maintaining awareness of my positionality and seeking feedback from various sources helped minimize researcher bias and enhance

objectivity. I documented reflexive journal entries and involved peers in debriefing, which contributed to the confirmability of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

## **Ethical Procedures**

### **Informed Consent**

In conducting my qualitative research study on the impact of access to internships and high-paying careers on Black millennials' generational wealth and career prospects, obtaining informed consent from participants was a paramount ethical consideration. Following the guidelines outlined by the American Psychological Association (2010), I provided participants with precise information about the study and its objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights to confidentiality and voluntary participation. After obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval (08-08-24-1166030) to ensure the proper protocol was adhered to, I started preparing for data collection. Prior to data collection, I ensured that participants fully comprehended the research aims and methods, and I obtained written consent from each individual, affirming their willingness to participate and acknowledging their right to withdraw from the study at any time. By upholding the principles of informed consent, I aimed to establish a foundation of trust and respect with participants while safeguarding their autonomy and well-being throughout the research process.

### **Confidentiality**

Maintaining confidentiality and protecting the privacy of participants were critical aspects of ethical research practice that I prioritized in my study. Adhering to the ethical guidelines prescribed, I took measures to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of

participants' personal information and data. All data collected, including interview transcripts, documents, and any identifiable details, were securely stored and only accessible by password (Busetto et al., 2020). Pseudonyms or codes were used to anonymize participant identities in research outputs, and any potential risks of breaches to confidentiality were carefully assessed and mitigated. All data was securely protected for 3 years after study completion. By upholding strict confidentiality protocols, I aimed to protect the privacy and trust of participants and uphold the ethical standards of research integrity and respect for individuals' rights to privacy.

### **Summary**

In the methodology and procedures section of my qualitative research study on the impact of limited exposure to internships and high-paying careers on Black millennials' generational wealth and career obtainability, I employed a rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis, utilizing thematic analysis and descriptive coding to derive meaningful insights from the collected data. By immersing myself in the narratives and experiences of the participants, I aimed to develop a deep understanding of this population and their unique challenges and aspirations. By upholding ethical considerations of informed consent and confidentiality, I protected the rights and privacy of the participants, creating a truthful, unwary, and respectful research environment.

In Chapter 3, I discussed my responsibilities as the researcher, including the dual role of a participant observer. Additionally, I detailed the research design as well as the rationale. Furthermore, this chapter elucidated the eligibility requirements for participation in the study and criteria for exclusion. It also covered the ethical protocols

implemented to safeguard the well-being of participants and ensure adherence to ethical standards for both participants and the researcher.

## Chapter 4: Results

In this qualitative investigation, I explored and aimed to comprehend the complexities of wealth creation struggles among Black millennials through the lenses of ecological systems theory, incorporating the viewpoints of individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and societal systems. These systems shed light on the diverse factors and challenges influencing financial stability and the establishment of generational wealth. Through in-depth interviews and analysis, I aimed to capture personal narratives, obstacles faced by Black millennials in the economic realm, and how these experiences intertwined with broader systems. By doing so, I sought to provide comprehensive insights guiding the development of targeted social work practices, policies, and community support mechanisms to break down systemic barriers and promote economic empowerment within this demographic. The research question was “How do Black millennials describe the effect of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community systems in affecting their ability to access quality internships, exposure to high-paying careers and attaining generational wealth?”

In this section, I outline the interview settings, participant demographics, data collection, analysis methods, and theme identification, along with ensuring the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. Finally, the outcomes of the research and a synthesis of the participants' responses regarding their journeys in acquiring prestigious internships, advancing in high-level careers, and achieving generational wealth are presented.

### **Setting**

I conducted individual interviews with participants using the Zoom platform, using its verbatim capture function to record audio. Participants consented to audio recording only and were assured that video would not be recorded to safeguard their privacy. Personal details were redacted from transcriptions to maintain confidentiality.

The interviews were semistructured to convey the participants lived experiences. Each participant passed the screening and completed the interviews without any disruptions. They selected a comfortable, private space for the virtual interviews on Zoom, while I operated from my confidential home office. All data was securely stored in an encrypted folder on my computer. Communication with participants was primarily through email and Zoom.

On August 8, 2024, approval number 08-08-24-1166030 was granted by Walden's IRB to commence data collection, marking the start of recruitment on the same day. Social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn served as key channels for participant recruitment. Prospective participants were directed to a recruitment flyer through social media postings, which detailed the inclusion criteria and provided my contact information for requesting the consent form to participate in the research. It took several postings each day to gain recruitment, with many participants not being eligible due to personal relationships. Upon submission of the consent form, participants scheduled individual virtual interviews via Microsoft Teams. The first interview took place on August 10, 2024, and the final interview was conducted on August 18, 2024. Access to internet was necessary for all participants during the

interview process. Each participant stated their permission to contact them for further questions if needed.

### **Demographics**

The demographics inclusion criteria for this study focused on individuals who meet the following criteria: being Black millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, residing in the United States, and having income levels below or within the middle-class income brackets as defined by the U.S. Bureau, perceived limited exposure to high-paying careers, have faced challenges in securing high-level internships, and are actively pursuing generational wealth. Along with this, individuals had to be willing to conduct an interview via Zoom and have completed the consent form. Other demographics were not pertinent to the research and therefore were not included.

### **Data Collection**

I gathered data by conducting in-depth, one-on-one interviews where participants openly shared their personal experiences. These interviews typically lasted about an hour. The longest interview that I conducted lasted 65 minutes and the shortest lasted 45 minutes. I received nine inquiries for the study; one was not eligible because of their expressed ability to obtain a high-level internship through their parents' connections. Respondents indicated awareness of the study through an initial email contact or by seeing promotional materials on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Virtual Zoom sessions were scheduled and confirmed via email for each interview. Prior to starting each session, participants explicitly consented to audio-only recording for privacy protection.

In each interview, I asked 21 open ended interview questions. Clarification questions were asked regarding certain responses and participants willfully clarified their narratives. The interviews were led by questions that were carefully selected and designed to address the study's objectives while allowing participants the freedom to express themselves. I used Zoom to record and transcribe the interviews, enabling focused attention on each individual during the discussions. After carefully reviewing the transcriptions, any necessary corrections were made to ensure accuracy. The interview transcripts were saved in a Microsoft Word file and locked for protection. There were no changes to the process described in Chapter 3.

### **Data Analysis**

My process of thematic investigation began during the audio recorded discussions, with Zoom providing live transcriptions. These transcriptions were assessed for accuracy while listening to the audio clips. Zoom's spotlight feature helped focus on individual speakers, and the transcriptions were easily saved and downloaded as Word documents for further annotation. Multiple reviews of the transcriptions and audio recordings were conducted to ensure accurate capture of participants' statements. Notes taken during discussions aided in interpreting participants' beliefs and thoughts. Exploratory questions were posed to avoid bias.

Data analysis was carried out using Atlasti qualitative software, which facilitated organization, classification, and visualization of codes into themes. Audio recordings were imported into Atlasti to categorize documents based on transcribed statements.

Similar terms and phrases were grouped together during the coding process, and participant statements were analyzed and categorized.

I identified 62 codes including education, professional growth, guidance, networking, opportunities, career goals, diversity, drive, socioeconomic position, assistance, disparity, self-improvement, ambition, communal assistance, limited opportunities, financial pressure, access, hurdles, resources, family and perseverance. The codes were integrated into a cognitive map, illustrating the connections and relationships between them based on shared themes and insights from the participant responses. By analyzing the cognitive map alongside the detailed transcriptions, 17 categories were identified, providing a comprehensive understanding of the data. The distinguished categories were career development, work experience, social issues, diversity and inclusion, economic disparities, opportunities and access, education, social mobility, generational wealth, financial planning, community engagement, professional growth, mentorship and support, systemic issues, personal development, advocacy and empowerment, education. I used the information from the categories and identified the emerging themes that assisted me in addressing the research question.

### **Themes**

I identified and determined that there were nine themes from the interviews. Theme 1 was limited exposure. Theme 2 was knowledge and access to resources. Theme 3 was financial stress. Theme 4 was career advancement. Theme 5 was representation. Theme 6 was grit. Theme 7 was networking and mentorship. Theme 8 was struggles in creating generational wealth.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

Establishing credibility involves being transparent and building trust (Creswell, 2013). To maintain accuracy, the transcripts were created in real-time during the audio recordings using Zoom and then shared with participants via email. I incorporated open-ended questions and kept reflective journals to reinforce credibility through triangulation. Additionally, credibility was solidified during interviews by using probing techniques to manifest deeper understanding of responses, ensuring the data captured truly represented the participants' experiences. By documenting detailed records of data collection and analysis procedures, acknowledging biases, and involving participants in member checking and peer debriefing, I aimed to enhance the credibility of the study findings and establish trust (see Adler, 2022).

### **Transferability**

To foster transferability, I maintained a detailed audit trail during both data collection and analysis phases. I provided an elaborate account of the participants and research procedures to aid in grasping the study's essence, thus supporting the transferability of my results. My presentation of thorough information allows future researchers to replicate my research. The qualitative research methods I used in this study have the capacity to offer significant contributions to the field. They could furnish community leaders, educational institutions, and professionals in human services with valuable and comprehensive intervention strategies tailored to create increased access to

high-level internships, advanced career prospects, and enhanced opportunities for Black millennials to explore avenues for generational wealth acquisition.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is synonymous with reproducibility (Swanson, 2014). The data collection procedure, which was approved by the Walden IRB, was adhered to throughout the conduct of this study. I diligently followed the prescribed steps outlined in Chapter 3 for data collection and analysis, ensuring a uniform research approach that can be replicated by fellow researchers. All participants who took part in the study met the set inclusion criteria. Transcriptions of all interviews were carried out using Zoom and the study's dependability was bolstered by employing both a systematic documentation process as a triangulation method. This iterative process of validation allowed participants to contribute to the interpretation of their own narratives, ensuring that their voices were accurately represented in the research findings (Creswell, 2013). By incorporating member checking into my research design, I strengthened the validity and reliability of my study outcomes, fostering a collaborative and participatory approach to data analysis and interpretation.

### **Confirmability**

Ensuring the confirmability of the study focused on upholding honesty and authenticity. To achieve confirmability, I meticulously transcribed participants' statements during data analysis and coding. Implementing measures such as recording interviews, documenting processes systematically, and maintaining a reflective journal helped maintain the integrity and genuineness of the data by minimizing the impact of

researcher biases and assumptions. The reflective journal served as a tool to capture and elaborate on my emotions, assumptions, expectations, and predispositions regarding the research, contributing to the overall confirmability of the study.

### **Results**

The research question that was examined in this study was “How do Black millennials describe the effect of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community systems in affecting their ability to access quality internships, exposure to high-paying careers and attaining generational wealth?” To address this research question, I aimed to grasp a deeper understanding of the participants' encounters and viewpoints by employing open-ended inquiries in semistructured interviews to convey their narratives. As the intent of the results was to discern themes and maximize participant voice, full quotes were used to frame themes and highlight the rich participate experiences. The responses provided by the participants were categorized into eight distinct themes:

Theme 1: Limited exposure

Theme 2: Knowledge and access to resources

Theme 3: Financial stress

Theme 4: Bias in Career advancement

Theme 5: Representation

Theme 6: Grit

Theme 7: Networking and mentorship

Theme 8: Struggles in Creating Generational Wealth

**Theme 1: Limited Exposure to High Paying Careers**

Theme 1 was limited exposure to high paying careers. Many participants found that limited exposure to high paying careers restricted their ability to dream, leading to a belief that what they imagined a high paying career, was not obtainable for them.

Participant 4 acknowledged the impact of limited exposure to high-paying careers due to growing up in poverty, as affecting the ability to dream beyond survival jobs, stating

I would say, since I grew up in poverty, when looking for careers, it was really based on survival. It wasn't based on aspirations like becoming a doctor or a lawyer; it was solely about how much I would make. I started working at 15 because of my impoverished background. I was not going to get that within my family or my household due to the lack of education that existed in my upbringing. I should have gotten that through the community, like at libraries, which are another public system, resources could have exposed me to opportunities. Also, through school systems, because that's another avenue.

Participant 1 elaborated on these challenges in saying,

The biggest challenge is knowing what's available. I think a lot of people in my town specifically don't talk about real life, high-end careers. There's factory work, being a driver, or other small jobs, but not many discussions about professions like being a nurse, physician assistant, or a doctor. It seems like these opportunities are kept secret for some reason. Therefore, finding communities with professionals in high-end careers and connecting with them is the best way to go."

Adding to this theme, Participant 2 added the concept of poverty in limiting opportunity during childhood stating

I would say a prime example is, for the most part, if you think about a person of a demographic like with a poverty-stricken family, we don't have the opportunity for college. That may not be an option for us. So, for us to obtain college, we have to either work and earn it, or we don't go to college. We have to do things like join the military just to afford college and have the opportunity, unlike someone born into that situation who has that opportunity handed to them. No one in my immediate family, including parents, grandparents, and so forth, it wasn't until my current generation where myself, my brothers, and our families are starting to try and break that curse. No one immediately above us had that opportunity or could say the same. So we are paving our own way and striving to reach those goals, even though we haven't quite achieved them ourselves.

Further elaborating on exposure to opportunity and the role of poverty in the theme of limited opportunity, Participant 7 said,

My perspective, I feel like growing up in poverty has shaped my perspective as far as opportunities like what's available to me. Just learning about different opportunities and things that I didn't know about is as I became an adult. I feel like it's just a lot of things that I have to learn that I'm constantly learning because I wasn't around it, and no one really taught me about different opportunities and avenues. At one point, I remember that I wanted to start a new career but I think just my lack of knowledge, like just not even knowing how to get started. I've

asked a few people I kind of did my own research getting into the career field.

Itself would seem like a little bit of a challenge to me starting behind.

Participant 6 elaborated on the concept of poverty as in lack of exposure to opportunity in stating

Living in poverty made me believe that going to college or obtaining higher paying opportunities was not possible, and that those whom lived in it couldn't afford to, either, you know, go to college or obtain those types of jobs people in my family work to survive, and there was rare discussions about pursuing life after high school.

Participants shared a common experience of limited exposure to high paying careers, often shaped by their upbringing in poverty. The belief was that growing up in such circumstances restricted their ability to dream about and pursue lucrative career paths. Many expressed how this lack of exposure held them back from envisioning certain career possibilities as realistic for themselves.

## **Theme 2: Knowledge and Access to Internships and Resources**

Theme 2 was that the lack of knowledge and access to internships and resources. Multiple participants stated that they experienced barriers in career breakout with a commonality of individuals feeling the sense of “being behind” compared to others that may have gotten the opportunity to be exposed to knowledge and access to internships. Participant 2 highlighted challenges in navigating internships while expressing sentiments that they are gateways to better job prospects and stated the challenges faced

by lower-income classes in pursuing education and accessing opportunities and reflecting on the disparity in accessing educational resources, Participant 2 stated

I think that access to internships is a big deal. I think that it does help with getting a better-paying job as far as internships go. In my opinion, if you do an internship, it definitely puts your foot in the door for places. With educational systems helping us access opportunities for schooling without drowning in debt, obtaining certain things like degrees and education, whether in trades or other fields, can be beneficial. However, it may not be as easily accessible for certain races or demographics in terms of class and pay levels. Like for us, pursuing education can be advantageous, it is challenging, especially for lower-income classes.

Participant 4 commented on limited or lack access to quality internship opportunity stating that,

I think internships are the gateway to securing a high-paying job or a salary job. Internships allow a company to get a feel of how you would perform as an employee. Building connections during internships increases your likelihood of securing a full-time paid position as you have already made that connection with them prior to hiring. This advantage is significant compared to someone who has no prior work experience. Once I withdrew from school because I couldn't afford to pay for school, I wasn't able to apply to an internship which, in turn, I feel like, you know, hindered me. I wasn't able to even apply to like a job in that field, or you know. My ability to apply for an internship which affected my ability to potentially get a higher-paying job, or even enter a career. And now I'm just

working, you know, jobs just to survive. First having an actual interest in, you know, like the certain field of study, that the internships may highlight. An example of that is currently, I work in the government, and we offer internships to law students. A law student could be what maybe 21-22 years old. They come into the government through this internship, and they are a GS-7 who has pay, I would say, maybe a salary of \$54,000 a year, and me myself being, when did I enter the Government? Maybe at 28 years old I was limited to only being able to apply to a GS-7 position because of my lack of education. So since I didn't attend college, I wasn't able to apply to an internship through the government. So I feel that that limited my ability to achieve a high paying job.

Participant 1 discussed the additional challenges of rural communities in lack of quality internship opportunities and a view toward institutional roles in identifying these opportunities stating,

I live in a small town. So there isn't a lot of opportunity here for people in my career field. Not a lot of companies and organizations taking internships. They weren't doing internships. They weren't open to taking anyone on as a volunteer or intern. So that was my most recent experience with that, not being able to find one. And so, after searching for months I finally was able to find one. But it was in a different city. And that's just how I've had to work that through. I think that the educational institutions should play a role in helping black millennials find internships or high-paying jobs through word of mouth. The administration should be aware of what opportunities are available in the area for teenagers

transitioning out of high school and entering college. This information should be easily accessible to them, which unfortunately doesn't happen often, particularly in this area where individuals have to actively search for such opportunities.

From the other side of this issue, as an agency that provides quality internships,

Participant 7 elaborated on advantages of quality internships in starting careers stating

I just recently started a new job, and we have 2 interns that are in college right now, and just thinking about just how much of an advantage that will be for them. I'm coming in doing pretty much the same thing. I'm doing the same position, but they are getting started earlier, you know, right out of college, just because they have that exposure. So I think it's a great opportunity to have an internship. So right before I joined the military right, I wasn't able to get selected for an internship, that would have definitely helped me start my career. Ten years ago, I would have had more experience. I guess things happen for a reason, but it definitely had an impact on my career. I'm just now getting to the point where I'm making a salary that's just livable for the average person in America. Thinking about it now, looking into the past, it's like my career could have been a lot further.

Participant 3 discussed this gap in knowledge and access and said, "People don't know what it takes to get to where they're trying to get to. We don't get internships. That gap needs to get closed."

The participants discussed their challenges in accessing internships, which are vital for entering well-paying career fields. They emphasized the importance of

internships in securing better job prospects and establishing valuable connections for career growth. The recurring issue of lacking knowledge and opportunities to pursue internships significantly impacted their career journeys, hindering their path to success, a sentiment shared by many in the study.

### **Theme 3: Financial Stress**

Theme 3 was financial stress. Several participants shared that they experience high levels of stress when trying to maintain their day to day lives while exploring wealth creation. Participants reported a need to juggle multiple jobs and streams of income to provide for themselves and their family, while attempting to get better positions or higher pay.

Participant 1 emphasized the importance of working multiple jobs and having a side hustle to navigate financial challenges while searching for higher-paying opportunities stating,

Well, I don't think that not having any job until you get the good job is wise for us. So as I am looking for a higher paying job, I am working in a different job. I've always learned that. Don't quit a job until you have another one, have a side job.

Participant 2 found the need for additional resources saying,

Having to work multiple jobs while also being in the army reserves has led me to maintain multiple streams of income. Despite the expectation that education in this field would be sufficient, I find that I still need additional sources of income for things like medical insurance. The pursuit of promotion with the income I

earn, is good but not enough to cover all my expenses. The constant need for additional income to have financial stability and progress is an ongoing reality for me.

Participant 4 expressed the need to supplement their income and said,

I wasn't allowed opportunity to dream, because I've been trying to survive. I'm forced to maybe pick up a second job, because that's what I was doing. My transition into the government. I came from the pharmacy, and I still had to work at the pharmacy to supplement the pay decrease that I took in order to get this Government position, which allowed me to grow within this position, at the pharmacy I was not. I wouldn't have been able to grow within the company. I would have just been a pharmacist, a pharmacy technician. To supplement, I had to get a second job.

Participant 5 expressed their view on poverty and what is needed to stay afloat financially,

Living in poverty sucks. You have to make a choice. Do I want to go out and have fun? Or do I want to eat tonight? Or do I want to get my hair or my nails done or buy groceries for the week. What do I want to do? I have to work multiple jobs to even have the choice to do any of that. It's a lot of choices that you have to come to terms with making like, Is it going to affect my mental health? If I sit in the house, be depressed?

Financial stress emerged as a major theme, with Black millennials navigating the balancing act of daily responsibilities and striving for financial stability. Participants

described the struggle of juggling multiple jobs and income sources to make ends meet. They highlighted the need for additional income beyond their education to achieve financial security, reflecting the pervasive challenge of financial stress.

#### **Theme 4: Bias in Career Advancement**

Theme 4 was bias in career advancement. Multiple participants reported the influence from people within their jobs have impacted their ability to achieve promotion or certain positions that they seek. Participants reported that their career systems contain many biases. Multiple participants shared personal accounts as they reported difficulty as a Black millennial achieving certain positions with belief that their race played a part. Participant 5 shared their personal story and experience of bias in career advancement as they experienced disparities in salary increases and discriminatory practices in job interviews,

As an intern I came in at \$35,000 by the time I finished what? 2018, 2019 working for them. Guess how much of a raise I've gotten from being there, how much? \$10,000. So I'm making 45,000 at 28. So I wasn't getting much. I've been on interviews where well, one interview that really stood out to me. I had it last year, and it was for a government job. It was for procurement. My camera wasn't cut on, and for some reason Microsoft teams would not allow my camera to cut on. The people waited 20 min to start the interview. So I'm like, okay. But they were so keen that we need our camera to work. And I'm like, it's not working, you guys. So does that mean we can't go forth with the interview? They're like, yes, let's have the interview. After the interview. They were like stunned like. Oh, she

really does know what she's doing, based off her resume like she didn't put it in chat gpt. She knows exactly what she's talking about. And then at the end, they said. we really wished our camera worked. We would love to see what you look like. What does that have to do with what I know. Not hire me based off, not knowing what I look like. And I thought that was so crazy. Like why are you still focused on my camera? The man said that my resume set on his desk for months. And then you still didn't hire me? So hell, yeah, I think that race plays a big factor.

Participant 2 sharef their experience with bias in the work place stating,

I experienced bias and nepotism during my time as a correctional officer. It seemed like all the white people who hung out together were the ones getting promoted. This experience made me feel like that job wasn't for me and swayed me away from pursuing a career in law enforcement. I didn't agree with how they behaved and treated people. I felt that if I didn't conform to their ways, I wouldn't be promoted or given opportunities. This led me to step back and prioritize my values over that advancement.

Participant 7 remininsced on their seclusion at work,

I didn't feel welcomed. I would say, just the environment. I just felt that they looked at me as just a little black girl who didn't know anything. They threw me in a corner, had me do a couple of things, but they didn't fully engage with me or make me feel welcome to get to know the company and what they did. I didn't feel like I was given the opportunity to do that during the time I was there.

Participant 8 expressed their view on how they are perceived,

I feel like for a people like me, or coming from my background, I feel like I just you have to work twice as hard as the next person because you're behind already. I already have to pretty much start from 0 and try to work twice as hard as everybody else. I believe in my workplace I always got discriminated just because of the way I look or the way I carry myself, like my culture. I think I've kind of been underestimated, you know. When I was working, before becoming a barber, I believe I was kind of underestimated. I believe, if a resume matches up and the names you can tell the different ethnicity. I believe that, you know, they're gonna pick the other person over the person from my background. That's my experience.

Participants associated facing bias in career progression and discriminatory practices with their hindered professional growth. They shared experiences of struggling to secure promotions or desired positions due to biases in their workplaces. A significant portion of participants reported the impact of these biases on career advancement as an influence on their career paths.

### **Theme 5: Representation**

Theme 5 was representation. Many participants believed that representation in the work force could have influenced their ability to obtain a position, feel more comfortable in the workplace or influence their belief in what they could obtain or the position that they seek being possible. Individuals stressed the importance of representation in all careers.

Participant 7 shared their belief of having diverse attitudes and representations in the workplace to help foster inclusion, mentorship, and career progression for Black individuals,

Representation is extremely important because for one, everybody's different, regardless of race or personality, learning style, managing styles, everything. It's important to have diverse attitudes in the workplace, not just diverse representation but also attitudes and different cultures. Connecting with someone in your job can help you advance, relate, and find mentors. It allows you to show more skills and be heard and included in diverse environments, ultimately benefiting both you and the organization and helping you progress in your career. As a black person, I want to see more black people.

Participant 4 expressed the comfort that they feel when they see a familiar face in the workplace ,

Well for me personally, if I can see someone who looks like me, for one, that's first. It makes me feel a little comfort. It makes me feel comfortable in approaching them when coming from where I'm coming from and the life that I've lived, or the way that I grew up. If I see someone of color it's easy for me to try and connect with them, I feel more comfortable. I don't feel insecure about approaching them, because they look like me. Like it's possible like they give me hope.

Participant stated their view on diversity,

I believe that more people should see a diverse group of people working in the workplace so they won't shy down so they won't diminish themselves. So they know how important they are. So they know what position they could potentially be in those kind of things are important to people of color. People of color period and more people in power should have those positions as well.

Participant 3 shared what they felt comfort in the workplace looks like,

“If you have a representation of people who look like you, guarantee you're gonna feel like you're at home. You will feel that there's more hope, a chance.”

Participant 8 conveyed their stance on Black individuals feeling hopeful in promotion opportunities,

I believe diversity in the workplace is so important. I believe more places should become more diverse. I believe it gives you, the workplace and people different perspectives, you know, even when dealing with clients or customers. You know, some people are more comfortable with certain people from certain ethnic backgrounds and whatnot, or certain people just know how to deal with certain people better. I believe, you know, keeping it diverse and keeping everyone not making everyone feel like they have to be a certain way is important. Because if you put people who look like me in higher positions, it will help others feel that they deserve to be in those positions. I believe it just gives a lot of people like us hope, and it gives someone to kind of look at, you know, instead of looking at athletes because a lot of people we come from, we kind of look up the athletes. And you know, music artists, you know it's not corporate people. We're looking

up to politicians and stuff. We need more people in those positions to kind of help these areas as well.

Participants strongly emphasized the importance of representation in the workforce, linking it directly to their career aspirations and comfort in the workplace. They expressed the belief that seeing individuals who resembled them in different professional roles significantly influenced their career ambitions. Several participants shared how the lack of representation played a crucial role in shaping their views on attainable career paths and their feelings of insecurity of career growth possibilities.

#### **Theme 6: “Grit”**

Theme 5 was grit. Nearly all participants expressed the need to “keep going” or “never give up” when referencing their desire to achieve their dreams or create new possibilities. The theme “grit” refers to digging deep and pushing through adversity. Participants reported that this was a value instilled in them due to their desire to influence a positive trajectory for their future.

Participant 5 shared their constant effort to obtain a desired job,

One thing, I will recommend is never put all your eggs in one basket. I never stop applying. So, even though I do have a great job that I like, I never stop applying. At the end of the day, like for me, I work for a lot of nonprofit companies. What if one day a company doesn't get funding, or they don't get a grant for a certain period of time, then what, I'm stuck. When I do apply, if a company really stands out to me, and I really want to be there. I'll go look them up. Write their number down, give them a call. Not everyone's gonna take to you, but some people will.

One job, I did that. So even one of the jobs that I have now, one of the contracts I have now. I did the same process, and I've got on indeed, and I applied, and then I went and looked the number up. Some of them are one clicks, and now you can create the profiles on your phone so you can do it like while you're sitting in bed watching TV. While you in a car, no matter what you're doing, just apply.

Participant 1 stressed the importance of innovation,

As a Black millennial, the first thing is to not give up and find other ways to get there. Like I said before, being innovative and creative. If that means creating my path, creating my career, finding those connections to help support me, find funding for whatever I'm trying to do. Those kinds of things can be lucrative for me, I just have to tell myself to try.

Participant 7 emphasized the significance of perseverance even if you are told that you can't do something,

The cycle needs to be broken. By not backing down, going for what we want, and achieving our dreams and goals, we are breaking barriers for future generations. It's important that we don't let people tell us we can't do something because that sets us back. Standing up for what we believe in and going for what we want represents all areas, careers, and walks of life.

Participant 3 stressed the need to constantly pursue education and knowledge

You just don't stop. There is, you know, somebody is gonna say no, and probably more people say no than yes. You just don't stop. I really feel like it's still about education also. You have to stay educated, you just have to, and that education

can look different for different people. As I was just talking about the different geographical demographics that's different at each place, but I have to stay knowledgeable or educated on who is in my neighborhood, who was in my city, what kind of events are they doing?

Participant 6 shared a personal experience regarding the loss of her father that gave her the courage to “keep going”,

A personal experience that definitely has kept me in my journey has definitely been the loss of my father at a young age. He was very big on education. And that was just my motivation and drive to keep going and become the best version of myself. And also, just overcoming and not knowing where my next meal is gonna come from. Just being able to go through those trying times, but also know how resilient I am and how strong I've come out on the other end. Makes me not give up, has molded me into being the mentor and being able to give back in the same manner that those who have been placed in my life on my journey has gotten me through. So I am passionate about giving back in that same aspect. Because it's important that even though you go through, you know loss, that no matter what you have to keep pushing through again. It's not about how you start. It's about how you finish.

Participant 8 brought attention to resiliency and it's pertinence in overcoming challenges,

We really gotta be confident in who we are. And like I said earlier, people like me. We just have to work twice as hard. So it's a lot of resiliency. I believe resiliency, I believe goes into a lot of it.

The participants associated perseverance and determination with overcoming obstacles to achieve their goals. They highlighted the value of resilience and persistence in navigating challenges and striving for success. Nearly all participants emphasized the importance of exhibiting grit as a key value in overcoming setbacks and pursuing their aspirations, to have a chance at success.

### **Theme 7: Networking and Mentorship**

Theme 7 was networking and mentorship. Several of the participants mentioned a need for networking and mentorship to break the cycle of limitation. Participants felt that through networking and mentorship, they could be taught the necessary skills to succeed as well as have a gateway into a position that they may not have without a connection. Participant 4 explained what it means to them to have opportunities,

Access to opportunities can mean access to various resources, such as job opportunities and networks. For instance, if your family is affluent and has connections, you have access to those networks. However, if your family lacks that advantage, you are automatically at a disadvantage in terms of opportunities available to you.

Participant 7 expressed the challenges that they have experienced despite being qualified for career positions,

I feel like a lot of issues are from not having connections, people not knowing anything about you. So I feel like when you are a minority or a person that is not a part of the majority of whatever organization that you're trying to get into, it can be harder if you don't have any connections. Regardless of what's on my resume

and things like that, I've been told I don't qualify for things that I know I 100% qualify for, based off simple conversations with people, employers, and not even given an opportunity to have an interview because I didn't have the network.

Participant 1 brought attention to her personality as a means to make connections,

I try to use my bubbly personality to communicate and talk to people, connect, make connections, and network, to find out those opportunities and find out how I can get there and find out who is going to be best fitting for the goals that I have for myself. And once I make those connections and build those relationships, I'll have the chance to turn that into career positions. I think gatekeeping is a big thing of today's society, and that's not something that I want to go for. If I'm able to speak life into somebody or help them and guide them to whatever goal they may have, I think that it's only right for me to speak on that and help them find their way. And if I don't know the answer, I can find someone who knows the answer to help them get where they want to be as well. That's where networking and mentorship is a gamechanger.

Participant 6 shared their experience with mentorship and the potential impact of having a mentor,

You know, not all students have the opportunity to obtain those type of opportunities. I know that I've seen mentoring programs that come in to try to partner with different businesses so that students have those opportunities as well. But again, it's limited. And also, it's up to who the students and families know when it comes to those. Mentorship is something that's dear to me. I do believe it's

needed, especially in any field or career that you go into. It helps you to broaden your own mindset and your perspective when it comes to different career opportunities. Sometimes, you know, we may feel we're not capable or prepared to obtain these positions or it's just great to bounce off ideas or be able to learn. If you have a mentor, you can say, "Hey, you know I have this strength. I'm working on this, you know, weakness or area that I need some more assistance in, and this will make me have the ability to obtain this next opportunity in my life." So, mentorship definitely is important when it comes to those different opportunities, we need more mentors to help us, in life in general. It's always good to have that mentor aspect that you can fall back on when it comes to difficulties that you may come into."

Participant 8 expressed how meeting people can change or influence the trajectory of their career path,

I meet a lot of people and you know, just kind of talking to them and gaining, gaining those kinds of relationships. You know, in my current field. I think that networking has helped me a lot. As a barber, I think it's definitely helped my career. I met a lot of people who we discussed a lot of different ideas and a lot of guys were in different fields in life, and you know that kind of gave me advice about if I ever wanted to cross over and stuff, and I think it's kind of helped me out a lot understand more things that I was never exposed to. Growing up, I used to want to be the President. I was kind of like, I like politics a little bit and just trying to make the place better, I guess. I didn't know anybody in politics, you

know. I didn't have any kind of mentor to go that route. So I kind of just leaned on sports, and the sports didn't work out. It was kind of like I was kind of lost in life. So I ended up getting into some trouble, going to prison. In there it was just finding ways to do pastime. So cutting hair was one, and that was just something I kind of clung on to when I came home.

Participants strongly emphasized the importance of having mentors and building networks, noting how critical these relationships can be in advancing their careers. They expressed a deep belief in the transformative power of mentorship and networking, highlighting how these connections can provide crucial guidance, support, and opportunities for growth and success. Participants stressed that having mentors and strong networks can significantly impact their professional development and open doors to further advancement though many felt that they did not have the opportunity to have strong mentors and networking opportunities due to their upbringing and exposure.

### **Theme 8: Struggles in Creating Generational Wealth**

Theme 8 are the struggles in creating generational wealth. Multiple participants stated that they believed generational wealth was leaving their decedents something to start with. Participants believed that they were not given generational wealth and if they could obtain something to pass down that would allow their family to avoid starting from ground zero, they would have a better chance of success and easier navigation than they did.

Participant 2 shared their aspirations of creating generational wealth to provide opportunities for future generations despite never having it,

Generational wealth is setting the future up for your family, it's creating opportunities that you may not have had. It may not just be wealth in terms of money, but it could be having a small business that your children can be a part of and help grow when they graduate high school, or owning a house. Maybe your parents didn't own a house, like mine didn't. That's something I wanted to change, and I see that as generational wealth. I bought a house, so now when I leave this earth, my kids will have something they can profit from and hopefully continue to build upon or keep in the family. That's a start.

Participant 4 elaborated on the many facets of generational wealth,

I would define generational wealth as access, whether it is to finances, education, or even knowledge like understanding how to budget. Basic life skills like financial planning are not typically taught in schools but are often passed down from parents or family. So if they didn't know how to budget, you likely wouldn't learn that either. Mine didn't. Generational wealth, to me, is about access to be knowledgeable on things like that and have resources.

Participant 7 shared their belief on the benefits that generational wealth can have for generations,

Generational wealth, for one, I haven't experienced it. I think it's something that you create and leave for your kids. It's very important to create financial opportunities that I could pass down to future generations, assets rather than debt. Working on finding different avenues to benefit my future family so they have more opportunities and access to more things. I didn't have that.

Participant 3 discussed the plans for generational wealth for their family,

Me and my husband were talking about that. We don't come from that. The wealth that we will leave for the next generation, so generational wealth. In my opinion, good generational wealth means that you could have a base of wealth or something that you can take and continue to build off of. It's not in its totality. If that makes any sense. I don't plan on giving my children their lifestyle like here it is. Go forth and be great, but what I can do is have a house somewhere that if you want to live in that you can, or I will put this house and your name, so either you live in it or you rent it. That's something that you can continue to build off of.

That's what I feel. Generational wealth is something you can continue to build.

Participants expressed challenges in building generational wealth and emphasized the importance of leaving a financial legacy for future generations. They shared aspirations of providing a better starting point for their descendants, recognizing the need to break the cycle of financial hardship. All of the participants identified with the struggle of creating generational wealth due to them not being exposed to it or understanding how to fully achieve it.

### **Addressing the Research Question**

The research findings shed light on the multifaceted challenges faced by Black millennials in accessing quality internships, exposure to high-paying careers, and attaining generational wealth. Limited exposure to high-paying careers coupled with barriers in knowledge and access to internships, contribute to a pervasive sense of being disadvantaged and falling behind. Financial stress, systemic biases in career

advancement, the need for representation in the workforce, the value of "grit" in persevering through adversity, the importance of networking and mentorship, and struggles in creating generational wealth create a complex interplay of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community systems that impact Black millennials' career trajectories and wealth-building opportunities within their microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems. The themes collectively demonstrate a web of challenges that necessitate a comprehensive approach to address systemic barriers and provide pathways for empowerment. These issues will be further explored and addressed in Chapter 5 of the study.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 reviewed the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. Based on the research question of Black millennials and their access to quality internships, high-paying careers, and generational wealth, eight key themes emerged from the participants' responses. Theme 1 focused on the limited exposure to high-paying careers, with participants expressing how this constraint impacted their ability to dream and aspire to certain professions. In theme 2, participants highlighted the importance of knowledge and access to internships and resources, emphasizing the significance of internships as gateways to securing high-paying jobs and building connections. Financial stress emerged as theme 3, with Black millennials reporting high levels of stress in balancing multiple jobs to provide for themselves while striving for career advancement. Bias in career advancement was the focus of theme 4, with participants sharing experiences of biases and challenges in achieving certain

positions, often attributing race-related factors to these difficulties. Importance of representation, theme 5, was identified as crucial, with participants stressing the importance of seeing individuals who resemble them in careers, facilitating comfort, hope and inspiration. Grit emerged as theme 6, reflecting the resilience and determination exhibited by participants in pursuing their career goals despite obstacles. Networking and mentorship, identified as theme 7, was highlighted as essential for breaking limitations, with participants expressing the need for connections and guidance to succeed. Lastly, theme 8 focused on the struggles in creating generational wealth. This theme emerged as participants shared their perspectives on leaving assets or opportunities for future generations to build upon. These themes collectively shed light on the multifaceted challenges and aspirations of Black millennials in accessing quality internships, high-paying careers, and working towards generational wealth.

In Chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of the findings, discuss limitations of the study, and offer recommendations to further the research on Black millennials access to high paying careers, high level internships and attaining generational wealth. Also, I will discuss implications for social change, and a conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

My primary aim with this narrative qualitative study was to understand how Black millennials articulate the influence of individual, interpersonal, organizational, and community systems on their access to quality internships, exposure to high-paying careers, and the accumulation of generational wealth. The insights derived from this research may equip human service professionals with effective interventions and services that strengthen these systems for Black millennials, facilitating their pursuit of quality internships, lucrative career opportunities, and the attainment of generational wealth.

In addressing the research question, the study revealed critical aspects of the experiences of Black millennials. These included the challenge of limited exposure in accessing opportunities, the impact of knowledge and access to resources on career trajectories, the presence of financial stress as a significant barrier, the complexities of advancing in one's career path, considerations surrounding representation in various spheres, the role of grit in overcoming obstacles, and the importance of networking and mentorship in navigating the professional landscape. In addition to offering an interpretation of these findings, I examine the limitations of the study, provided practical recommendations, explored potential implications, and drew conclusions based on the study's outcomes.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

#### **Theme 1: Limited Exposure**

In exploring the theme of limited exposure to high-paying careers, I discovered how participants shared experiences of feeling constrained in their career aspirations due

to a lack of exposure to lucrative career paths. Individuals reflected on their upbringing and microsystems, expressing challenges in envisioning high-paying careers as achievable, attributing this limitation to influences from family backgrounds and educational resources. This aligns with the research findings, which unveiled a common belief among participants that their aspirations were limited by their immediate environments. Viewing these narratives from the perspective of ecological systems theory highlights the significant impact of interactions within microsystems, such as family and educational settings, on an individual's career aspirations and perceptions of opportunities.

Shaeffer (2023) emphasized the unique experiences of Black workers in the labor force, focusing on the impediments individuals face in envisioning high-paying careers due to familial backgrounds and limited educational resources. The study's results highlighted the critical role of microsystems, like family and education, in shaping individuals' career aspirations and opportunities. This theme resonates with the literature review's discussion on historical discrimination and institutional practices influencing economic opportunities for Black millennials. Woolham and Stevens (2020) found that the current approaches to widening access in lucrative careers are not successful for those in lower socioeconomic groups and disadvantaged communities. The limited exposure to lucrative career paths arising from a lack of awareness and educational opportunities is a consequence of societal systems perpetuating inequalities and impeding access to high-paying jobs to include their exosystems. It aligns with the literature's call for comprehensive actions to combat cultural racism and foster diversity in professional

fields, also emphasizing the macrolevel influence in restricting career aspirations and wealth accumulation opportunities for Black individuals.

### **Theme 2: Knowledge and Access to Resources**

Theme 2, knowledge and access to internships and resources, revealed the challenges faced by participants in navigating career pathways. Participants highlighted the significance of internships as gateways to higher-paying positions and the obstacles individuals encountered in obtaining such opportunities due to limited awareness and educational support. Participants stressed the importance for educational institutions to take a more proactive role in guiding Black millennials towards internships and lucrative job opportunities, emphasizing the role of mesosystems in facilitating career advancement. Through an ecological systems theory perspective, these results demonstrate how societal structures and educational systems can serve as either facilitators or barriers to accessing crucial resources for career progression at the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem levels.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (2020) documented disparities in internship representation, shedding light on the challenges individuals face in securing paid internships. According to Collins (2020), disparities are accentuated for Black individuals looking for career growth, illustrating the difficulties Black millennials experience in obtaining essential resources for career advancement. Supporting participant experiences, the survey revealed that Black students comprised only 6.6% of graduating seniors, with a mere 6.0% of them securing paid internships out of nearly 4,000 students surveyed (Collins, 2020).

The examination of knowledge and access to internships and resources aligns with the literature review's focus on limited awareness and educational support hindering internship opportunities suggesting that it is a mirror to systemic discrepancies in resource access, impacting career growth and financial security. This discussion converges with conversations regarding the necessity of targeted policies to address wealth disparities and employment discrepancies, through resources, emphasizing the critical nature of equitable access to vital resources for career aspirations and options.

### **Theme 3: Financial Stress**

The research uncovered the profound financial strain experienced by Black millennials as they navigated the delicate balance between day-to-day survival and aspirations for advancement in their life overall. Participants shared the challenges of holding multiple jobs to sustain themselves and their families while striving for better opportunities and increased incomes. This theme of financial stress highlights the complex interplay between economic factors and diverse ecological systems, emphasizing the need for individuals to navigate intricacies within struggles attributed to their mesosystems and exosystems to achieve financial stability effectively. The findings highlight the pervasive challenges associated with managing various income streams amidst career progression, illustrating the critical role that ecological systems theory plays in unraveling these dynamic relationships.

Building upon the study's emergent themes, Friedline et al. (2021) emphasized the link between families' financial stress and overall well-being, highlighting how economic environments shape individuals' financial security. In parallel, Florant et al. (2020) shed

light on the impact of financial inclusion on perpetuating the racial wealth gap, pointing out the hurdles Black families face in accumulating wealth due to limited access to financial services. These narratives align with the research with Black families typically holding only 5 days' worth of liquid savings compared to the 31 days held by the average White family (Florant et al., 2020).

By intertwining the study's findings with existing literature, the discussion around financial stress and career struggles among Black millennials gained coherence. The need to balance multiple jobs for career progression within the context of economic factors and ecological systems complexity was highlighted as an intense challenge. This integrated perspective heightens awareness of systemic barriers contributing to wealth gaps and emphasizes the urgency of addressing economic elements to foster financial resilience and overall well-being.

#### **Theme 4: Bias in Career Advancement**

Theme 4 consisted of challenges Black millennials encountered in their careers, as participants shared stories of facing biases, discrimination, and hurdles in attaining promotions. A common theme emerged through these narratives, highlighting the systemic barriers that impede career development and advancement opportunities. The experiences revealed the significant impact of macrosystems and institutionally ingrained biases on career paths and trajectories. Viewing these findings within the context of ecological systems theory confounded the intricate interplay between individual ambitions and external influences embedded within broader societal contexts,

emphasizing the imperative of addressing systemic disparities within professional environments.

In alignment with the study's insights, Wingfield and Chavez (2020) argued that systemic disadvantages in education, politics, and cultural spheres create obstacles to upward mobility for Black workers, with institutions perpetuating racial hierarchies and unequal outcomes. This discrimination materializes through *organizational discrimination*, where ostensibly race-neutral policies disproportionately impact Black employees, and *individual discrimination*, where personal biases affect hiring and promotion decisions, collectively obstructing equal opportunities for Black individuals within the labor market.

The thematic exploration of career advancement resonates with the literature review's discussion on discriminatory practices and biases hindering the progression of Black professionals in diverse fields. Participants grappling with barriers to career growth and advancement intertwined the influence of macrosystems on professional trajectories and opportunities. This discourse aligns with conversations on institutional practices shaping economic avenues, suggesting pertinence in the necessity of addressing systemic inequities within professional settings to facilitate fair career progression and wealth accumulation.

### **Theme 5: Representation**

Theme 5, representation, revealed the paramount importance participants placed on seeing themselves reflected in the workforce. Responses from Black millennials highlighted the significance of diversity in cultivating inclusive workplace environments

and shaping belief systems. Participants articulated how diverse representation positively influenced their career trajectories and sense of belonging within organizational settings.

Evaluating these findings within an ecological systems theory framework highlights various levels of an individual's interpersonal ideologies. These revelations align with the study's emphasis on the role of mesosystems and exosystems in molding individuals' identities and opportunities. This included perceptions, motivations, and experiences within professional settings. This emphasizes the critical need to nurture diverse and inclusive workplaces to foster robust career development. Cunningham (2020) researched macrolevel considerations such as institutional racism revealing how prevailing norms and values perpetuate racial inequalities in key societal institutions like education, law, and sports preventing representation.

Livingston (2020) discussed the promotion of racial equity in workplaces to cultivate inclusive environments, resonating with participants' advocacy for diversity in shaping inclusive organizational cultures. Carnevale et al. (2019), drew attention to the unequal access to quality jobs, unveiling significant disparities faced by Black individuals in educational attainment, and job opportunities. Most Black workers (78%) view efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion positively for potential growth. However, 28% of Black workers perceive that their employers are not adequately prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (Schaffer, 2023).

My exploration of representation aligns with the literature review's attention to counter negative narratives needed to promote diversity in professional settings for Black communities. Diverse representation's vital role in fostering inclusive workplaces echoes

the imperative identified in the literature to redefine narratives of Black excellence and resilience within educational and professional domains.

### **Theme 6: Grit**

Within the study, the theme of grit emerged as participants shared compelling accounts of perseverance, resilience, and determination. Nguyen (2021) reported that grit tracked back to the African slave trade and was apart of the Black communities DNA. These narratives encapsulated a strong sense of unwavering commitment and persistence in navigating through challenges and adversities that are inherent in professional journeys. Black millennials, as revealed by the study, highly valued the attributes of grit as essential tools for surmounting obstacles and attaining success in their careers.

Examining this theme within the ecological systems theory accentuates the dynamic interplay between individual characteristics and environmental influences across various systems. This perspective illuminates how personal traits such as grit derive from their individual selves, encouraged through microsystems and interact within their exo- and macrosystems to cultivate resilience and drive motivation in the pursuit of career goals. Individuals attributed strength from the chronosystem level such as major life events related to death, poverty, and social implications that motivated them to keep going amidst adversity.

Exposure to historical and cultural adversities has molded the resiliency of Black individuals, enabling them to navigate obstacles and combat negative stereotypes through a foundation of independence, self-determination, and education (Chance, 2022). Despite encountering adversity, these individuals consistently stated the need to rise above

challenges, demonstrating unwavering resilience on their path to achieve their goals. Grit, resonated strongly with the literature's depiction of need for perseverance and determination, highlighting the pivotal role of individual resilience in surmounting obstacles and realizing success in professional pursuits.

### **Theme 7: Networking and Mentorship**

The 7<sup>th</sup> theme, networking and mentorship, unveiled the crucial roles these interactions play in shattering limitations and fostering opportunities for Black millennials. Participants emphasized the value of establishing connections and engaging in mentorship to effectively navigate professional pathways. These findings highlight how interactions within mesosystems shape individual development and career trajectories. By applying an ecological systems theory perspective, the study shed light on how mentorship and networking experiences are intertwined within larger social contexts, impacting individuals' access to resources, guidance, and opportunities. The theme of networking and mentorship emphasizes the interconnectedness of various systems in supporting opportunity and progression. This theme of grit relates to existing literature on human perseverance, showcasing how characters overcome challenges through unwavering determination and resilience (Jones, 2023).

Cree-Green et al., (2020), highlighted the advantages of peer mentoring for professional advancement, stressing the significance of cultivating connections to navigate career pathways successfully. The importance of engaging in identity-based sensemaking and peer mentoring to foster the growth of diverse leaders, particularly African American leaders facing distinct challenges is something needed to change the

trajectory of the marginalization that still exists today for Black people (Murrell et al., 2021). The literature aligned with the responses of participants bringing attention to mentoring as it provides a secure space for identity exploration, promoting clarity and proficiency in leadership roles. By establishing diverse developmental networks and recognizing the impact of identity work in mentoring relationships, biases and obstacles can be overcome.

Moreover, networking and mentorship emerge as pivotal components in driving career progression for Black millennials, resonating with the participants' emphasis on the significance of forging connections and seeking guidance to navigate professional landscapes effectively.

### **Theme 8: Struggles in Creating Generational Wealth**

Theme 8 unraveled the complexities surrounding the creation of generational wealth, shedding light on the obstacles encountered by Black millennials in securing financial stability for future generations. Participants emphasized the significance of leaving behind assets and opportunities that pave the way for success in succeeding generations and the impact that the lack of it has had on their lives. Their narratives highlighted the systemic barriers and economic inequities that obstruct the accumulation and transmission of wealth across familial lines. From the ecological systems theory perspective, the theme of generational wealth struggles emphasizes the direct interplay among economic conditions, resource accessibility, and intergenerational influences at the microsystem level in result of the macrosystem and chronosystemic barriers. This theme aligns with existing literature that explores the challenges faced by marginalized

communities, particularly Black individuals, in overcoming systemic barriers and economic inequities to establish and pass down financial stability across generations.

Hannah-Jones (2020), provided valuable insights into the reparations owed to address systemic barriers and economic disparities that hinder the intergenerational transfer of wealth. By examining research and statistics on generational wealth disparities among Black individuals, a deeper contextual understanding of the challenges faced by Black millennials in attaining financial stability and advancing their careers emerges. For instance, data from the Federal Reserve's Survey of Consumer Finances in 2019 revealed that the typical White family possessed eight times the wealth of the typical Black family and five times that of the typical Hispanic family. Additionally, statistics from the Institute for Policy Studies illustrated a median wealth of approximately \$171,000 for a White family in contrast to just \$17,150 for a Black family, underscoring the substantial wealth disparity (Joint Economic Committee, 2020).

The struggles evident in generating generational wealth within Black communities spotlight the hurdles faced by participants in safeguarding financial stability across successive generations, emphasizing the systemic barriers and economic disparities that obstruct wealth accumulation and transfer. These narratives correlate the imperative of addressing intergenerational influences and societal inequities to forge pathways toward financial stability and prosperity within families and communities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

During the study, there were a few limitations that became apparent. The small purposive sample size, may not be extensive enough for results to be replicated,

representing a potential study constraint. Data collection centered on 8 participants, with the assumption of their sincerity in sharing insights about pursuing high-level internships, lucrative careers, or generational wealth. All participants belonged to the Black millennial demographic, born between 1981 and 1996 in the United States, leading to limitations in generalizing findings to other age or ethnic cohorts.

Another limitation emerged from potential researcher bias, as my identity as a Black millennial born between 1981 and 1996, I may have had experiences similar to the individuals who participated in the study. To address this bias, strategies such as bracketing were applied, with a dedicated journal used to record personal reflections and beliefs related to the research topic. Additionally, the remote nature of the interviews conducted over Zoom introduced another constraint, as it lacked in-person interaction that may have affected the interpretation of participants' nonverbal cues. Despite this challenge, comprehensive notetaking was employed to capture and represent the participants' responses accurately during the interviews.

### **Recommendations**

In this qualitative study focusing on how Black millennials articulate the influence of their systems and experiences on their access to quality internships, exposure to high-paying careers, and attainment of generational wealth, several recommendations can be made for future research endeavors. Though research regarding the marginalization and inequality for Black people has been conducted, to deepen the understanding of this topic, I recommend conducting further studies that investigate and explore the diverse experiences of Black millennials as they navigate these systems.

Expanding the participant pool to encompass a broader range of Black millennials from various backgrounds, including differences in age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, could provide valuable insights into the complexities of factors affecting their career trajectories and economic success. Employing unstructured interviews with more participants and including participants who have grown up in poverty but are now exceeding middle income levels in future research can facilitate open dialogues, enabling a more thorough exploration of the nuanced ways in which microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems shape the opportunities and challenges faced by Black millennials in accessing quality internships and high-paying careers and in building generational wealth.

Furthermore, integrating quantitative analyses through a mixed methods approach in future research efforts can help uncover intricate relationships between these systems and their impacts on career advancement, income levels, and wealth accumulation among Black millennials. By adhering to these recommendations, researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the multi-faceted influences that affect the professional and financial journeys of Black millennials, contributing to a more nuanced and holistic examination of this pertinent research area.

### **Positive Social Change**

This qualitative study reveals a detailed examination of how systemic barriers and its impact on access for Black millennials to achieve quality internships, high-paying careers, and the accumulation of generational wealth. By examining the intricate interactions between various systems and the opportunities available to Black millennials,

this research presents a platform for positive social change. Through the understanding of the systemic obstacles hindering Black individuals' career prospects and financial well-being, this study contributes to increased awareness of the challenges faced by this demographic group. The insights derived from this research hold the potential to spur social change by fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities impacting the professional trajectories and financial outcomes of Black millennials, prompting advocacy efforts, and informing policy interventions aimed at addressing systemic disparities and advancing their economic empowerment.

In addition, the findings of this study offer a framework for supporting the enhancement of support systems to facilitate Black millennials' access to career opportunities and wealth-building strategies. By spotlighting the challenges faced by Black individuals across different backgrounds and age groups, this research can pave the way for empowering individuals to identify effective strategies for overcoming systemic barriers and achieving professional success and financial stability. Through an exploration of the dynamics between various systems, this study provides valuable insights that can inform community needs, advocacy initiatives, and policy interventions targeted at promoting equitable access to career advancement opportunities and pathways to financial security for Black millennials. This emphasis on systemic reforms and interventions points towards creating positive social change by addressing the structural inequalities impeding the progress and success of Black individuals in accessing high-quality internships, lucrative careers, and building generational wealth.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this research explored how systemic barriers affect Black millennials' access to quality internships, high-paying careers, and generational wealth. It revealed the interaction of societal inequalities, historical discrimination, and limited exposure to lucrative careers. The study emphasized the importance of internships, resources, and equitable opportunities for socioeconomic growth. It also discussed biases in organizational settings, the role of representation, and the value of resilience and networking in career advancement. Additionally, this study highlighted challenges in creating generational wealth and shed light on the need for systemic reforms to support Black individuals in achieving personal, professional, and financial success.

Furthermore, the research revealed the significance of mentorship and supportive networks in helping Black millennials navigate the complexities of career development. Participants shared how mentorship relationships provided guidance, valuable insights, and connections crucial for moving forward in their careers. The study showcased how mentorship programs enhanced confidence, expanded professional networks, and promoted skill growth among Black millennials. By recognizing the positive influence of mentorship in bridging gaps and fostering career progression, the research suggests practical steps for organizations, colleges, and policymakers to create mentorship opportunities tailored to support Black individuals and improve their access to quality careers and financial stability.

Moreover, the research findings emphasized the importance of considering intersecting factors when addressing the challenges Black millennials face in accessing equal opportunities for career growth and financial security. The study stressed the need

to recognize and address the overlapping impacts of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other personal identities to develop effective solutions that break down systemic barriers. By acknowledging the diverse backgrounds and experiences of Black individuals, the research urges the implementation of inclusive and comprehensive strategies that support diversity, equity, and inclusion in professional environments. Adopting an approach that acknowledges the complexity of identities can create a more nurturing and inclusive workspace for Black millennials to succeed and prosper in their careers and financial pursuits.

Results from participant responses revealed that having a mentor is crucial for overcoming career obstacles and encouraging personal development. It's clear from participants' stories that there is an immediate need for systemic changes to create an inclusive environment for the professional growth of Black millennials. These participant insights not only deepen our understanding of the research but also bridge the gap between academic study and real-life experiences, stressing the importance of listening to and learning from those deeply impacted.

## References

- Abaied, J. L., & Perry, S. P. (2021). Socialization of racial ideology by White parents. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 27*(3), 431. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000454>
- Abdullah, Jonathan B., "Examination of Black Men's Perceptions of Personal Finance And Lived Experiences Developing Financial Literacy and Building Financial Capability Through The Lens of Institutional Racism" (2019). FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 4064. <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/4064>
- Adler, R. H. (2022). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation, 38*(4), 598-602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344221116620>
- Adeoye-Olatunde, O. A., & Olenik, N. L. (2021). Research and scholarly methods: Semi-structured interviews. *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy, 4*(10), 1358-1367.
- Akanle, O., Ademuson, A. O., & Shittu, O. S. (2020). Scope and limitation of study in social research. *Contemporary Issues in Social Research, 105*, 114.
- Aladangady, A., Chang, A. C., & Krimmel, J. (2024). Greater wealth, greater uncertainty: Changes in racial inequality in the survey of consumer finances. *The Journal of Economic Inequality, 1-28*.
- Alesina, A., Ferroni, M. F., & Stantcheva, S. (2021). *Perceptions of racial gaps, their causes, and ways to reduce them* (No. w29245). National Bureau of Economic Research. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w29245>

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.).
- American Psychological Association. (2019). *Disparities in mental health care: African Americans vs. White Americans*. <https://www.apa.org/topics/health-disparities/resources/disparities>
- Assari, S. (2018). Unequal gain of equal resources across racial groups. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 7(1), 1.
- Beech, B. M., Ford, C., Thorpe Jr, R. J., Bruce, M. A., & Norris, K. C. (2021). Poverty, racism, and the public health crisis in America. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9,. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.699049>
- Bermiss, Y. S., Green, J., & Hand, J. R. (2024). Benchmarking the racial/ethnic representation of executives in S&P 500 firms against the historical qualified labor supply. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3797715>
- Bersin, J. (2021). Elevating equity: The real story of diversity and inclusion. [https://joshbersin.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/202102-DEI-Report\\_Final\\_V2.pdf](https://joshbersin.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/202102-DEI-Report_Final_V2.pdf)
- Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. (2022). *Survey of consumer finances (SCF)*. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/scfindex.htm>
- Boddy, C. R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative market research: An international journal*, 19(4), 426-432.
- Brady, S. T., Cohen, G. L., Jarvis, S. N., & Walton, G. M. (2020). A brief social-belonging intervention in college improves adult outcomes for black

- Americans. *Science Advances*, 6(18), 36-89.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braveman, P. A., Arkin, E., Proctor, D., Kauh, T., & Holm, N. (2022). Systemic And structural racism: Definitions, examples, health damages, and approaches to dismantling. *Health Affairs*, 41(2), 171-178. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2021.01394>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Brown, A., & Garcia, R. (2018). Impact of racial discrimination on career advancement. *Journal of Diversity in the Workplace*, 12(3), 45–58.
- Brown, A., & Lee, S. (2019). Housing policies and wealth disparities: Implications for Black millennials. *Journal of Housing Economics*, 6(2), 90–105.
- Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2(1), 14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>
- Byars-Winston, A., Diestelmann, J., Savoy, J. N., Hoyt, W. T., & Branchaw, J. (2015). A multidimensional framework for assessing career development interventions for underrepresented groups in STEM. *Journal of Career Development*, 42(4), 251–270.
- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S. and Walker,

- K. (2020), "Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples", *Journal of Research in Nursing*, Vol. 25 No. 8, pp. 652-661.
- Carnevale, A. P., Strohl, J., Gulish, A., Van Der Werf, M., & Campbell, K. P. (2019). *The unequal race for good jobs: How Whites made outsized gains in education and good jobs compared to Blacks and Latinos. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.*
- Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *Qualitative Report*, 21(5).
- Center for American Progress. (2021). *Eliminating the Black-White wealth gap is a generational challenge.* <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/eliminating-black-white-wealth-gap-generational-challenge/>
- Center for Economic and Policy Research. (2024, January 26). *The three labor market struggles facing Black.* <https://cepr.net/report/the-three-labor-market-struggles-facing-black-america/>
- Center for Talent Innovation. (2019). *Being lack in corporate America: An intersectional exploration.* <https://coqual.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/BBICA-Press-Release-Updated.pdf>
- Chance, N. L. (2022). Resilient leadership: A phenomenological exploration into how black women in higher education leadership navigate cultural adversity. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 62(1), 44-78.
- Chaudhary, V. B., & Berhe, A. A. (2020). Ten simple rules for building an antiracist lab. *PLoS Computational Biology*, 16(10), e1008210.

- Chetty, R., & Hendren, N. (2018). The impacts of neighborhoods on intergenerational mobility I: Childhood exposure effects. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133(3), 1107-1162. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjy007>
- Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Jones, M. R., & Porter, S. R. (2020). Race and economic opportunity in the United States: An intergenerational perspective. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 135(2), 711-783. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjz042>
- Christou, P. A. (2022). How to use thematic analysis in qualitative research. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Tourism*, 3(2), 79-95.
- Collins, M. (2020, November 1). *Open the door: Disparities in paid internships*. National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).  
<https://www.nacweb.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/trends-and-predictions/open-the-door-disparities-in-paid-internships/>
- Creamer, J., Shrider, E. A., Burns, K., & Chen, F. (2022). *Poverty in the United States: 2021*. US Census Bureau.  
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p60-277.pdf>
- Cree-Green, M., Carreau, A. M., Davis, S. M., Frohnert, B. I., Kaar, J. L., Ma, N. S., Nokoff, N.J., Reusch, JEB., Simon, S.L., & Nadeau, K. J. (2020). Peer mentoring for professional and personal growth in academic medicine. *Journal of Investigative Medicine*, 68(6), 1128-1134.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Cunningham, G. B. (2020). The under-representation of racial minorities in coaching and leadership positions in the United States. In *'Race', Ethnicity and Racism in Sports Coaching*(pp. 3-21). Routledge.
- Davis, T. M., Jones, M. K., Settles, I. H., & Russell, P. G. (2022). Barriers to the successful mentoring of faculty of color. *Journal of Career Development, 49*(5), 1063-1081.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Derenoncourt, E., & Montialoux, C. (2021). Minimum wages and racial inequality. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 136*(1), 169-228. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjaa031>
- Dietze, P., & Craig, M. A. (2021). Framing economic inequality and policy as group disadvantages (versus group advantages) spurs support for action. *Nature Human Behavior, 5*(3), 349-360.
- Dimock, M. (2019). Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. *Pew Research Center, 17*(1), 1-7
- Ellison, T. L., & Solomon, M. (2019). Counter-storytelling vs. deficit thinking around African American children and families, digital literacies, race, and the digital divide. *Research in the Teaching of English, 53*(3), 223-244. <https://doi.org/10.58680/rte201930035>

- Engler, S. (2021). Grounded theory. In *The Routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religion* (pp. 300-313). Routledge.
- Fairlie, R., Robb, A., & Robinson, D. T. (2022). Black and white: Access to capital among minority-owned start-ups. *Management Science*, 68(4), [2377-2400](https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2021.3998). <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2021.3998>
- Fine, C., Sojo, V., & Lawford-Smith, H. (2020). Why does workplace gender diversity matter? Justice, organizational benefits, and policy. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 14(1), 36-72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12064>
- Fins, A. (2020). National snapshot: Poverty among women & families, 2020. National Women's Law Center.
- Florant, A., Julien, J. P., Stewart, S., Yancy, N., & Wright, J. (2020). The case for accelerating financial inclusion in black communities. *McKinsey*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/the-case-for-accelerating-financial-inclusion-in-black-communities>.
- Friedline, T., Chen, Z., & Morrow, S. P. (2021). Families' financial stress & well-being: The importance of the economy and economic environments. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 42, 34-51.
- Garcia, E., Brown, J., & Lee, S. (2019). Community support and financial stability among Black millennials. *Journal of Economic Empowerment*, 7(4), 210–225.
- Gould, E., Wilson, V., & Economic Policy Institute. (2020). Black workers face two of the most lethal preexisting conditions for coronavirus—racism and economic inequality. <https://files.epi.org/pdf/193246.pdf>

- Graham, R. M. (2020). *Redefining Career Development: Multigenerational Stories of Educated Black Women* (Doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University).
- Guy-Evans, O. (2020). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. *Simply Psychology*.
- Hamilton, D., & Darity, W. (2009). Race, wealth, and intergenerational poverty: There will never be a post-racial America if the wealth gap persists. *The American Prospect*, 20(2), A8–A9.
- Hannah-Jones, N. (2020). What is owed. *New York Times Magazine*, 30.
- Heard-Garris, N., Boyd, R., Kan, K., Perez-Cardona, L., Heard, N. J., & Johnson, T. J. (2021). Structuring poverty: how racism shapes child poverty and child and adolescent health. *Academic pediatrics*, 21(8). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2021.05.026>
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social science & medicine*, 292, 114523 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Hora, M, Chen, Z., Parrott, E., & Her, P. (2019). *Problematizing college internships: Exploring issues with access, program design, and developmental outcomes in three U.S. colleges*. (WCER Working Paper No. 2019-1). Retrieved from: University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research website: <http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/working-papers>
- Hora, M. T., Wolfgram, M., Chen, Z., & Lee, C. (2021). Closing the doors of opportunity: A field theoretic analysis of the prevalence and nature of obstacles to college internships. *Teachers College Record*, 123(12), 180-

210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681211070875>

<https://www.morganstanley.com/articles/black-employee-network-driving-change>

Hudson, D., Sacks, T. A., Sewell, W., Holland, D., & Gordon, J. (2021). Surviving the white space: perspectives on how middle-class Black men navigate cultural racism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(14), 2513-2531

<http://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2020.1834594>

Hudson, D., Sacks, T., Irani, K., & Asher, A. (2020). The price of the ticket: health costs of upward mobility among African Americans. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(4),

1179. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17041179>

Hung, M., Smith, W. A., Voss, M. W., Franklin, J. D., Gu, Y., & Bounsanga, J. (2020). Exploring student achievement gaps in school districts across the United States. *Education and Urban Society*, 52(2), 175-193.

Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. (2020). *Wealth taxation policies and income redistribution among Black households*.

Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D., & Chauvin, S. (2020). A review of the quality indicators of rigor in qualitative research. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, 84(1), 7120. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120>

Joint Economic Committee. (2020). The economic state of Black America in 2020. Washington, DC: Joint Economic Committee. <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/democrats/2020/2/economic-state-of-black-america-2020>.

Jones, J. M. (2023). Surviving while Black: Systemic racism and psychological

- resilience. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 74(1), 1-25.
- Joshi, P., Walters, A. N., Noelke, C., & Acevedo-Garcia, D. (2022). Families' job characteristics and economic self-sufficiency: Differences by income, race-ethnicity, and nativity. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 8(5), 67-95.
- Kelly, E. L., Rahmandad, H., Wilmers, N., & Yadama, A. (2023). How Do Employer Practices Affect Economic Mobility? *ILR Review*, 76(5), 792-832.
- Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>
- Lee, M., & Garcia, K. (2019). Job engagement and social support networks among Black millennials. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 12(5), 201–215.
- Levine, P. B., & Ritter, D. (2024). The racial wealth gap, financial aid, and college access. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 43(2), 555-581. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22550>
- Lewis, O. (2017). The culture of poverty. In *Poor Jews* (pp. 9-25). Routledge.
- Lindstrom, L., Lind, J., Beno, C., Gee, K. A., & Hirano, K. (2022). Career and college readiness for underserved youth: Educator and youth perspectives. *Youth & Society*, 54(2), 221-239.
- Livingston, R. (2020). How to promote racial equity in the workplace. *Harvard Business Review*, 98(5), 64-72.
- Lusardi, A., & Mitchell, O. S. (2023). The importance of financial literacy: Opening a

- new field. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 37(4), 137-154.
- Makhanya, M. T. B. (2024). Perspective Chapter: Examining the Intersecting Connections between Intersectionality and Socioeconomic Inequality.
- Maye., A. (2023). Chasing the dream of equity: How policy has shaped racial economic disparities. *Economic Policy Institute*. (<https://www.epi.org/publication/chasing-the-dream-of-equity/>)
- McCargo, A., Choi, J. H., & Housing Finance Policy Center. (2020). Closing the Gaps: Building Black Wealth through Homeownership. *In Urban Institute*. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103267/closing-the-gaps-building-black-wealth-through-homeownership\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103267/closing-the-gaps-building-black-wealth-through-homeownership_1.pdf)
- McDermott, R., & Vossoughi, S. (2020). The culture of poverty, again. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 14(2), 60-69.
- Mehrotra, S., Morgan, I. S., & Socol, A. (2021). Getting Black Students Better Access to Non-Novice Teachers. *Education Trust*.
- Mehta, C. M., Arnett, J. J., Palmer, C. G., & Nelson, L. J. (2020). Established adulthood: A new conception of ages 30 to 45. *American Psychologist*, 75(4), 431.
- Miriti, M. N. (2020). The elephant in the room: race and STEM diversity. *BioScience*, 70(3), 237-242.
- Mishra, S. (2020). Social networks, social capital, social support and academic success in higher education: A systematic review with a special focus on ‘underrepresented’ students. *Educational Research Review*, 29, 100307
- Moroi, T. (2021). Quantitative and qualitative research and philosophical

assumptions. *Journal of Bunkyo Gakuin University, Department of Foreign Languages*,(20), 127-132.

Murrell, A. J., Blake-Beard, S., & Porter Jr, D. M. (2021). The importance of peer mentoring, identity work and holding environments: A study of African American leadership development. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(9), 4920.

Mwita, K. (2022). Strengths and weaknesses of qualitative research in social science studies. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478)*, 11(6), 618-625.

Nassaji, H. (2020). Good qualitative research. *Language Teaching Research*, 24(4), 427-431.

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2020). The impacts of racism and bias on Black people pursuing careers in science, engineering, and medicine: Proceedings of a workshop.

National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2020, July 24). Racial disproportionalities exist in terms of intern representation. Naceweb.org. <https://www.naceweb.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/trends-and-predictions/racial-disproportionalities-exist-in-terms-of-intern-representation/>

National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2020). Racial disproportionalities exist in terms of intern representation. <https://www.naceweb.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/trends-and-predictions/racial-disproportionalities-exist-in-terms-of-intern-representation>.

- National Science Foundation. (2021). *Promoting STEM education for underrepresented minorities*. <https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/racial-equity-stem-education-ehr-racial-equity>
- National Urban League. (2023). Social AND Emotional Learning for equity, justice, and Empowerment design principles. [https://nul.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/DP%20SEL\\_LongForm\\_v4\\_Final%2843%29.pdf](https://nul.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/DP%20SEL_LongForm_v4_Final%2843%29.pdf)
- Nellis, A. (2021). *The color of justice: Racial and ethnic disparity in state prisons*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/>
- Niles, S. G., & Harris-Bowlsbey, J. (2017). *Career development interventions in the 21st century* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Nguyen, A. M. (2021). *Grit and Persistence: Black Male College Graduates' Perceptions on the Impact of Middle or Early College High School* (Doctoral dissertation, Saint Joseph's University).
- Paul Jr, D. W., Knight, K. R., Olsen, P., Weeks, J., Yen, I. H., & Kushel, M. B. (2020). Racial discrimination in the life course of older adults experiencing homelessness: results from the HOPE HOME study. *Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness*, 29(2), 184-193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10530789.2019.1702248>
- Perron, N. C. (2017). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. *College student development: Applying theory to practice on the diverse campus*, 197(23), 1-10.
- Pew Research Center. (2023). For Labor Day, Black workers' views and experiences of work | *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short->

[reads/2023/08/31/black-workers-views-and-experiences-in-the-us-labor-force-stand-out-in-key-ways/](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354822222/black-workers-views-and-experiences-in-the-us-labor-force-stand-out-in-key-ways)

- Phillips, S. F., & Lane, B. (2021). The potential of Advanced Placement to improve college outcomes and narrow racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 32(4), 469-500. [doi.org/10.1177/1932202X211018646](https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X211018646)
- Quillian, L., & Midtbøen, A. H. (2021). Comparative perspectives on racial discrimination in hiring: The rise of field experiments. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 47, 391-415. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090420-035144>
- Quillian, L., Lee, J. J., & Oliver, M. (2020). Evidence from field experiments in hiring shows substantial additional racial discrimination after the callback. *Social Forces*, 99(2), 732-759.
- Randel, A. E., Galvin, B. M., Gibson, C. B., & Batts, S. I. (2021). Increasing career advancement opportunities through sponsorship: An identity-based model with illustrative application to cross-race mentorship of African Americans. *Group & Organization Management*, 46(1), 105-142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601120978003>
- Ray, R., & Perry, A. M. (2020). Why we need reparations for Black Americans. *Policy*, 1-5.
- Reid, A. M., Brown, J. M., Smith, J. M., Cope, A. C., & Jamieson, S. (2018). Ethical dilemmas and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 7, 69-75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-018-0412-2>
- Renjith, V., Yesodharan, R., Noronha, J. A., Ladd, E., & George, A. (2021). Qualitative

methods in health care research. *International journal of preventive medicine*, 12(1), 20.

Reyes, Bernard C. Rethinking Socioeconomics Through Higher Education: A National Study on Race, College Internships, Minority-Serving Institutions, and Post-College Annualized Salary Disparities. University of California, Los Angeles, 2023.

Riger, S. T. E. P. H. A. N. I. E., & Sigurvinsdottir, R. A. N. N. V. E. I. G. (2016). Thematic analysis. *Handbook of methodological approaches to community-based research: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*, 33-41.

Roberson, Q. (2023). Understanding racism in the workplace. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 108(2), 179.

Salami, T., Lawson, E., & Metzger, I. W. (2021). The impact of microaggressions on Black college students' worry about their future employment: The moderating role of social support and academic achievement. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 27(2), 245. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/cdp0000340>

Shaeffer, K. (2023, August 31). Black workers' views and experiences in the U.S. labor force stand out in key ways. Pew Research Center.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/08/31/black-workers-views-and-experiences-in-the-us-labor-force-stand-out-in-key-ways/>

Shrider, E. A., Kollar, M., Chen, F., & Semega, J. (2021). Income and poverty in the United States: 2020.

Shufutinsky, A. (2020). Employing use of self for transparency, rigor, trustworthiness,

- and credibility in qualitative organizational research methods. *Organization Development Review*, 52(1), 50-58.
- Sisco, S. (2020). Race-conscious career development: Exploring self-preservation and coping strategies of Black professionals in corporate America. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 22(4), 419-436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422320948885>
- Solomon, D., Maxwell, C., & Castro, A. (2019). Systemic inequality: Displacement, exclusion, and segregation. *Center for American Progress*, 7.
- Spark Mentoring. (2020). Why Mentoring African American Youth is Important. *Spark the Journey*. Retrieved from <https://sparkthejourney.org/why-mentoring-african-american-youth-is>
- Spates, K., Evans, N. T., James, T. A., & Martinez, K. (2020). Gendered racism in the lives of Black women: A qualitative exploration. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 46(8), 583-606. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798420962257>
- Spievack, N. (2019, July 25). *For people of color employment disparities start early*. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/people-color-employment-disparities-start-early>.
- Stanley, M. (2023). Building a community of Black employees. *Black Employee Network*.
- Stein, L. C., & Yannelis, C. (2020). Financial inclusion, human capital, and wealth accumulation: Evidence from the freedman's savings bank. *The Review of Financial Studies*, 33(11), 5333-5377. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rfs/hhaa013>

- Strand, P. J., & Mirkay, N. A. (2019). Racialized Tax Inequity: Wealth, Racism, and the US System of Taxation. *Nw. JL & Soc. Pol'y*, 15, 265.
- Swanson, E. (2014). Validity, reliability, and the questionable role of psychometrics in plastic surgery. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery—Global Open*, 2(6), e161.
- Szkody, E., Steele, E. H., & McKinney, C. (2021). Race and gender: Perception and reception of support from family and friends. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 7(4), 435–450. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000251>
- Talmy, S. (2010). Qualitative interviews in applied linguistics: From research instrument to social practice. *Annual review of applied linguistics*, 30, 128-148. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190510000085>
- Toyokawa, T., & DeWald, C. (2020). Perceived career barriers and career decidedness of first-generation college students. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 68(4), 332-347. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cdq.12240>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). USUAL WEEKLY EARNINGS OF WAGE AND SALARY WORKERS FOURTH QUARTER 2023. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/wkyeng.pdf>
- Weller, C., & Roberts, L. (2021). Eliminating the Black-White Wealth Gap Is a Generational Challenge.
- Wilbur, K., Snyder, C., Essary, A. C., Reddy, S., Will, K. K., & Saxon, M. (2020). Developing workforce diversity in the health professions: a social justice perspective. *Health Professions Education*, 6(2), 222-229.
- Williams, B., Anderson, R., & Thomas, M. (2019). Job satisfaction and career fulfillment

among Black professionals: The mediating role of social support networks. *Journal of Career Development*, 6(1), 33–48.

Williams, J. (2022). Labor Day 2019 | Black workers endure persistent racial disparities in employment outcomes. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/publication/labor-day-2019-racial-disparities-in-employment/>

Williams, K. L., Burt, B. A., Clay, K. L., & Bridges, B. K. (2019). Stories untold: Counter-narratives to anti-Blackness and deficit-oriented discourse concerning HBCUs. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(2), 556-599. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218802776>

Wilson, V., & Darity, W. (2022). Understanding black-white disparities in labor market outcomes requires models that account for persistent discrimination and unequal bargaining power. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/unequalpower/publications/understanding-black-white-disparities-in-labor-market-outcomes/>

Wingfield, A. H., & Chavez, K. (2020). Getting in, getting hired, getting sideways looks: Organizational hierarchy and perceptions of racial discrimination. *American Sociological Review*, 85(1), 31-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419894335>

Wingfield, A. H., & Chavez, K. (2020). Getting in, getting hired, getting sideways looks: Organizational hierarchy and perceptions of racial discrimination. *American Sociological Review*, 85(1), 31-57.

Woolham, J., & Stevens, M. (2020). Careers in medicine: key factors that influence

people to choose to study medicine, and sustain medical careers: a rapid review.

Woodhead, C., Stoll, N., Harwood, H., TIDES Study Team, Alexis, O., Hatch, S. L., ... &

Valmaggia, L. (2022). "They created a team of almost entirely the people who work and are like them": A qualitative study of organizational culture and racialized inequalities among healthcare staff. *Sociology of health & illness*, 44(2), 267-289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13414>

Xu, D., Solanki, S., & Fink, J. (2021). College acceleration for all? Mapping racial gaps in Advanced Placement and dual enrollment participation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 58(5), 954-992. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831221991138>

Yi, J., Neville, H. A., Todd, N. R., & Mekawi, Y. (2023). Ignoring race and denying racism: A meta-analysis of the associations between colorblind racial ideology, anti-Blackness, and other variables antithetical to racial justice. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 70(3), 258. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/cou0000618>

Zewde, N. (2020). Universal baby bonds reduce black-white wealth inequality, progressively raise net worth of all young adults. *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 47(1), 3-19.

## Appendix A: Screening Questions

1. Are you a Black millennial (born between 1981 and 1996)?

2. Do you currently reside in the United States?

3. Is your income below or within the middle-class income levels? The U.S.

Bureau reports that for household income in 2022 middle class ranged from \$47,189 to \$141,568 with anything below considered “lower-class” income level.

4. Do you feel that you have faced limited exposure to high-paying careers?

5. Do you believe that you have experienced challenges in securing high level internships?

6. Are you in pursuit of attaining generational wealth?

## Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire

1. Have you experienced living in poverty?

Sub question: Can you describe how you believe your experience of poverty has shaped your views on your career opportunities?

2. What do you think is the connection between internship opportunities and the securing high-paying careers?

3. Do you think broader social issues like systemic racism and discrimination affected your chances of getting a high-level internship or career?

4. Can you describe a time when not being able to access internships affected your economic advancement or opportunities?

5. How do you define generational wealth?

6. What careers do you consider, high paying careers?

7. Has anyone in your family ever had a high paying career?

8. How do you handle the challenges of seeking high-level employment as a Black millennial in today's job market?

9. What approaches have you taken to overcome obstacles in accessing high-paying jobs?

10. Can you share how mentorship or networking has helped your career and financial outlook?

11. What are your thoughts on breaking the cycle of limitation on career achievement within your community future generations?

12. What role do you believe educational institutions play in helping Black millennials find internships or high-paying jobs?
13. How important is it to have diverse representation in the workplace for career advancement?
14. Are there any programs or initiatives you think could address the issue of Black millennials not getting enough high-quality internships?
15. How has limited exposure to high paying careers impacted your financial goals and future aspirations?
16. Have you faced discrimination or bias in a work or educational setting?
17. How do you balance the need for immediate financial support with the pursuit high-level positions?
18. What resources or support have you found helpful in facing challenges related to understanding what is necessary to secure a high-paying career?
19. What's your view on policies and their role in reducing the gap in access to internships and high-paying careers for underrepresented groups?
20. Could you share a personal story that details your experience that has influenced your career path?
21. How can systems change to contribute to opportunities for future Black millennials to find internships and high-paying careers?