

THREE THE HARD WAY: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO
UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS USING BUTLER'S
THEORY OF PERFORMATIVITY

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BY

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family and friends. Robert and Rosa McNeill who instilled self-reliance and a fighting spirit in me. “Anybody can be a nobody, but it takes someone to be somebody” still rings in my head from Robert McNeill Sr. saying it to me daily, for the people on my block, 230th, and 130th Avenue in Queens. You all challenged me to be better, stronger, and faster at every turn. I appreciate that; my Tenacious, Talented, and Capable brothers (TTC); I thank you for being brothers, confidants, life coaches, and comedians; Fawzi James, for having my back since the 5th grade. Finally, Christopher Fuller and Terry Scott, for all your support and cajoling to finish this project.

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ABSTRACT

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African American women entrepreneurs are the fastest growing business start-up demographic in the country. They represent 45% of all women minority-owned enterprises (Walker's Legacy 2016). Many African American women entrepreneurs feel that entrepreneurship can help them achieve holistic success and retain agency that they would not experience in the workplace (Mirchandani 1999). However, much of the literature on African American women entrepreneurs focuses on discrimination issues. Existing research on African American women entrepreneurs is based on their race, gender, geographical location of their business, and industry sector. Many of the methodologies underlying this research on African American women entrepreneurs are informed by a culture of masculinity and white supremacy (Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio 2004). In scholarly works, African American women entrepreneurs are placed in a deficit compared to their white male counterparts. These tendencies cause these entrepreneurs to be steeped in a double otherness, as both women and African Americans.

This dissertation uses the discursive anchoring of Butler's (1990) performativity theory to provide a fresh lens with which to analyze the journey of African American women entrepreneurs. It employs Butler's theory in conjunction with an intersectional approach to understanding the narratives of 20 African American women entrepreneurs. This study demonstrates how race, class, and gender interact to affect the success of these African American women entrepreneurs.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurism is the process of creating, innovating, and managing a business for profit (Carland et al. 1984). Entrepreneurism is generally understood as an undertaking powered by creativity, innovation, and hard work. Unfortunately, much of the discourse surrounding entrepreneurship is targeted towards a masculine ideal. A qualitative post-structural entrepreneurial narrative analysis of African American women entrepreneurs has the potential capture entrepreneurship in a different light (Ahl and Marlow 2012). The fact that the classification “African American women entrepreneurs” even exists is an example of how these women’s entrepreneurship is viewed as “other” in terms of race, gender, and entrepreneurship.

In this dissertation, I explore the following research question: How do gender, race, and class affect African American women entrepreneurs? The intersectionality of these three variables can make for a challenging entrepreneurial journey. The title of this dissertation title, “Three the Hard Way,” refers to the intersection of race, class, and gender with regard to African American women entrepreneurs. It is also an homage to the 1974 movie of the same title, which featured three African American martial artists who thwarted an attempt by white supremacists to taint the water supply of three major urban cities with poisons only harmful to black people (Parks Jr. 1974).

Much of the literature on African American women entrepreneurs concentrates on issues that push them out of the workplace toward entrepreneurship, rather than on the possibilities that pull them away from working for a corporation and towards becoming entrepreneurs (Barbieri 2003). Not surprisingly, women workers with high levels of human capital perform better in garnering resources germane to self-employment (Patrick, Stephens, and Weinstein 2016). In

addition, many African American women entrepreneurs report that the vehicle of entrepreneurship can help them achieve holistic success and have control of their work in a way that they would not in another workplace (Mirchandani 1999). Dy and Marlow (2017) have expressed the need for research on African American women to be grounded in theory that accommodates their intersectional location:

Consequently, unless gender theorising within entrepreneurship adopts a critical feminist perspective, refutes universality, and explores contextual influences, it is in danger of producing, at best, a blunt instrument which assumes that gender only applies to women and homogenises disadvantage, whilst at worst, in making such assumptions, reproducing the subordination it purports to critique. (6)

This dissertation's findings are informed by in-depth interviews with 20 African American women entrepreneurs. Butler's theory of performativity (1990) is applied as a lens to explore the intersectionality of race, class, and gender among this group. At its core, Butler's theory of performativity is about power relations, and how words can tell the subject—in this case the African American woman entrepreneur—who they are and how they behave. Thus the subject is linguistically regulated based on the majority's idea of how race, class, and gender should be behaviorally communicated. Consequently, the subject repeats the behaviors communicated through language (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). Butler (1990) refers to the behavior mentioned above as a stylized repetition, "how the subject reiterates or recalls those words and puts them into actionable behaviors. As Jackson and Mazzei (2012) point out:

This repetition is not a performance by a subject but performativity that constitutes a subject and thus produces the space of conflicting subjectivities. Paradoxically, the agency is derived from within this constitution as subjects' performative acts both reproduce and contest the foundations and origins of stable identity categories. (72)

This dissertation critically examines how subjects repeat or disrupt behaviors based on race, class, and gender.

TERMS

I use the following terms throughout this project:

Agency—an individual or social group’s right to self-define and self-determine (Collins 2000).

Discourse—a collection of statements, assumptions, concepts, themes, and shared ideas about how knowledge, subjects, behaviors, and events are described and defined (Butler 1990).

Discursive enactment—this happens when individuals begin to act in line with the words and ideas reiterated through multiple discursive mediums (Butler 1993).

Entrepreneur—an individual who creates, innovates, and manages a business for profit (Carland et al. 1984).

Femininity—social expectations of being a woman (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Intersectionality—the recognition that each person experiences discrimination and oppression differently, and that we need to consider everything and anything that can marginalize a person, such as their gender, race, or class (Crenshaw 1991).

Masculinity—social expectations of being a man (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Patriarchal—the idea that men are generally given power over women (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Performativity—behaving in the manner that society associates with our gender. Gendered action consists of behavior, as well as thought and disposition (Butler 1990).

Social construction—the notion that we develop our knowledge of the world in a social context and that much of our perception of reality is shaped by shared assumptions (Collins 2000).

Stylized repetitions—a range of body gestures, movements, and enactments that form the gendered self at various stages in time (Butler 1990).

STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

Chapter 2 critically examines relevant literature salient to gender performativity, racial performativity, and class performativity. Chapter 2 considers intersectionality and gender performativity with regard to African American women entrepreneurs. Chapter 2 ends with a historical overview of African American women entrepreneurs. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology, research design, and data analysis used in this project. Chapter 4 reflects on the findings, analysis, and data collected in this study. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, discusses implications and limitations, and concludes with suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a synopsis of the contextual groundwork for this study, along with a review of the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and gender performativity. The next section discusses the application of Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory to race and class. In the third part of this chapter, I examine the frameworks of gender performativity and intersectionality relative to African American women entrepreneurs. Finally, I provide information and data about African American women entrepreneurs and a history of entrepreneurship in the African American community.

Intersectionality and gender performativity theory are salient to understanding the existence of African American women entrepreneurs in America. In our society, race, class, and gender do not singularly impact lives; they do so in complex combinations. One variable is no more germane than another is to a person's position and treatment in society; all three categories affect a person's journey through life (Andersen and Collins 2010). When African American women entrepreneurs interact in society, they do so from the perspective of being African Americans, women, and members of a particular economic class, whether it be poor, working class, middle class, or wealthy. Each nuance of the three-pronged descriptor, and of how the three prongs interact with each other, can open certain doors for them while closing others.

An entrepreneur, by definition, creates, innovates, and manages a business for profit (Carland et al. 1984). However, much of the discourse surrounding entrepreneurship is geared toward the ideal of masculinity (Mirchandi 1999). The very fact that the "women entrepreneurs" classification exists at all is an example of how women entrepreneurship is viewed as "other" entrepreneurship. Berglund and Thorslund posit that gender performativity theory's interrogation

of heterosexual norms has a subversive potential for women entrepreneurs. They propound “the woman entrepreneur to be a ‘third sex’, a person that moves in between discourses of femininity and masculinity” (2010:34).

African American women have always faced acts of discrimination in this country. Labor situations can become frustrating when a marginalized racial status intersects with gender status (Walker’s Legacy 2016). Confining and limiting work environments frequently motivate many African American women to pursue entrepreneurship (Consulting Premier Quantitative 2017). As a result, some women are pushed out of the workforce by a lack of opportunity due to discrimination or the need to spend more time with their families (Patrick et al. 2016). In contrast, other women have pulled away from the workforce in the hopes of starting their own business because of an opportunity they want to pursue (Patrick et al. 2016).

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

This research employs Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity as a lens with which to explore the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs. Butler (1990) purports that gender is not present when a person is born. However, after the delivery, when the obstetrician proclaims the sex of the child, the child is assigned a gender. The theory thus proceeds from the discursive enactment of gender.

Discourse is defined as written or spoken communication (Foucault 1971). Discourse is used to name and frame situations and phenomena. Institutions such as schools or churches control knowledge production by using discourse to influence individuals’ thoughts and behaviors (Schneck 1987). Discursive enactment happens when an individual’s behavior aligns with the words and ideas reiterated through multiple discursive mediums. For example, phrases

like “big boys don’t cry” or “little girls do not play as rough as boys” help mold children's behavior to act in masculine or feminine roles in society.

Language, then, begins to produce certain gender restrictions and expectations on the child, both in an intrinsic and extrinsic manner. When a child is told that he is a boy, discourse about what it means to be a boy reinforces his gender assignment. This discourse is enacted when the boy presents himself in a gender-approved behavioral manner. When a boy continues to act in ways that are considered masculine, such as being outspoken or aggressive, his masculinity is reinforced. Over time, “masculine” behaviors become ingrained patterns. Thus, a stylized repetition of acts becomes the child’s normal behavior. In this way, Butler argues that gender enactment becomes performative rather than a simple performance; the child “does gender” without thinking about it. Butler writes that “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (1990:191). Scholars have coined the term “doing gender” to explain the social pressures of behavior that are expected based on a person’s sex assignment (West and Zimmerman 1987). Society defines mannerisms and gestures as masculine or feminine, and people are expected to act accordingly. These social arrangements permeate all social institutions. Doing gender is seen as “natural;” behavior not associated with one’s gender is considered deviant. Despite gender being a social construction, it is treated as a concrete set of behaviors (Martin 2003). Our social institutions reinforce these behaviors as ideal or natural, and nonconformists are often penalized. Through discursive practice, gendered acts transition from thought to action and speech.

Many scholars believe that people are so used to acting out gender roles and practicing gender that they often do not realize they are doing it. For example, “Men who act like men without having reflected on their practices may be unaware that their actions embody

masculinities that women experience as harmful” (Martin 2003:256). This is what Butler means by performativity: a person’s actions are unconsciously in line with the dominant social construction about how they are supposed to act.

Performativity theory posits that there is no identity prior to discourse. Instead, the power of speech is the main gateway for claiming a gender position (Hall 1999). For example, phrases that devalue women like “throwing like a girl” or the other shaming types of the verbiage of being told to “act like a lady” help to manipulate women and girls into compliance with gender norms (Hall 1999).

Some scholars have confused the performativity of gender with the act of performing gender (Hall 1999). Likewise, numerous researchers have muddled the performativity of gender orientation with the demonstration of performing gender. According to Butler:

It is one thing to comment that sexual orientation or gender is performed and somewhat different about stating that gender is performative. To state that gender is performative is somewhat extraordinary because for something to be performative implies that it creates a progression of impacts, we act and walk and talk in manners that unite an impression of taking care of being a man or a woman. (Butler 2011)

Performativity theory’s interaction with the self is widespread among many scholars (Fine 2016). It can be difficult to be a stable entity concerning others and everyday life rituals (Jackson 2004). Constituting a subject through discursive means is dynamic; discourse from family, friends, and the work environment may involve different kinds of power relations that lead to different constructions of the self (Jackson 2004). Gender identity is performative; sex and gendered bodies are created by repeating socially approved norms (Butler 1993).

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993) speaks to interpellation, a term coined by the French Marxist Louis Althusser. In Althusser’s notion of interpellation, a subject is "hailed" into existence. Hailing ("Hey you!") is an act of forming the subject to comply with and obey the

laws of its domain. Conformity is the anticipated outcome, a compulsion that regulates and governs the norms of identity formation and intelligibility" (Jackson and Mazzei 2012:74).

Interpellation is a form of putting someone into a category linguistically, which in turn forms their identity. For example, consider the term "non-traditional student." On the surface, this term describes a student who is not of typical college age and is a first-generation college student. However, this term can also serve to form a student's understanding about which behavior needs to, or should, accompany the term "non-traditional." For example, the student may feel that they have to work harder and prove that they belong. When a student is not "traditional," this status can in turn shape their behavior. The student is being hailed by the term "non-traditional" to answer the powerful norms of accepted academic behavior.

INTERSECTIONALITY

The term intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw (1991) to address how African American women face overlapping forms of discrimination because of their race and gender. As an attorney, Crenshaw noted that many courts only ruled in favor of these plaintiffs based on a single-axis framework. By this, she meant that the courts only ruled in favor of gender discrimination or racial discrimination, not a combination of both. As a result, African American women plaintiffs were forced to fit their discrimination in a box, and for that reason, issues had to be attributed strictly to their gender or race, but not an intersection of both.

Collins (2015), one of the most recognized and highly regarded scholars in black feminist theory, has noted that a multitude of scholars spent years addressing the intersection of race, class, and gender in academic literature prior to 1991. For Collins, the very act of having Crenshaw (1991) hailed as the "foremother of intersectionality" is an exercise in domestic colonization. Just as indigenous people in America were here before Christopher Columbus

"discovered" them, scholars were analyzing the intersection between gender, race, and class alongside other similar categories before the academy recognized Crenshaw (1991) and the term intersectionality.

Feminist and critical race scholars have expanded the definition of intersectionality to address more than just race and gender. Collins has noted:

The term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities. (Collins 2015:2)

Scholars have debated the question of what constitutes intersectionality for decades, and the definition, as mentioned above, is in no way meant to be static. There is a lack of scholarly consensus on the definition and true origin of intersectionality and whether intersectionality is a methodology, theory, or ideology (Collins 2015). Shields noted, "Many feminist scholars also define intersectionality as the mutually constitutive relationship among social identities" (Shields 2008:301). The term "constitution" is often used in intersectional literature. Hence, one category such as race acquires meaning in relation to another category, such as social class. For example, an African American woman who is upper class has a different interaction with the world around her than an African American woman who is working class. Thus, the upper-class African American woman's identity is an amalgamation of African American and upper class identities in America.

In her work on the dilemmas involved with defining intersectionality, Collins (2015) identifies six consistently examined thematic focal points of intersectional scholarship:

1. The application of intersectionality to the workplace and labor issues for women and men of color.
2. Literature expands the intersectional lens past race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Scholarship has recently included sexuality, nation, and age.

3. Intersectional frameworks in violence against women.
4. Identity is a point of attention, specifically how identity produces rich social experiences and constitutive interactions.
5. A myriad of critiques about the epistemological application of intersectionality. Is it a perspective, theory, or methodology?
6. Methodological approaches associated with intersectional literature.

McCall (2005) classified three methodological approaches she identified as being used in intersectionality based studies. The first approach is anti-categorical complexity, which speaks to how scholars question the use of categories at all (Gullion 2018). McCall identified power as a critical factor in how categories are thrust upon individuals. Categories such as race, class, sexuality, and gender are socially constructed and shaped by individual experiences and different social localities. For example, the category of race is constantly redefined through multiracial experiences. The United States census is under constant scrutiny from social scientists for its lack of complex racial categories. Anti-categorical complexity seeks to critically question the underlying root of categorization and its use when applied to marginalized individuals.

McCall (2005) defines a second methodological approach as “intracategorical complexity.” Scholars who use this approach are also critical of categories but do use them. The use of narratives of marginalized subjects is salient to this approach. Researchers show how subjects' lived experiences cross, overlap, and intersect with different categories. This study is rooted in the intracategorical approach. Nash noted, “Scholars working in this tradition problematize the exclusionary repercussions of the act of categorization and use multiple

marginalized subjects' experiences as a way of demonstrating the inadequacy of categories" (Nash 2008:5).

The third methodological approach McCall (2005) identifies is the intercategorical approach. In this approach, scholars accept the categories and are critical in identifying the complexity of relationships among them. For example, if a researcher studies gender, they examine two categories (male and female). However, if one adds class categories of upper, middle, working-class, and impoverished, the researcher must consider the relationships between them all. As McCall states, "It is not the intersection of race, class, and gender in a single social group that is of interest but the relationships among the social groups defined by the entire set of groups constituting each category" (McCall 2005:1787)

APPLYING GENDER PERFORMATIVITY TO RACE AND CLASS

Race, like gender, is a social construct. Racial performance is an ongoing process of mitigating and performing identity (Patel 2005). Numerous performance approaches have been applied to racialized subjects negotiating identities (Patel 2005). Rottenberg (2003) applies racial performativity to the phenomenon of blacks "passing" to be white, as depicted in novels. Hegemonic coercive power used by individuals in a higher social position on those in a lower social position has historically been the reason behind choosing a race with higher social status (Rottenberg 2003). Discursive messages pressure non-white subjects to act in ways that are considered more acceptable, and similar to whites. They thus dilute their agency to being constituted by repetitive racial discourses (Rottenberg 2003). In other words, they act in ways that are more comfortable for white people to accept. Rottenberg goes on to claim that imitation of whites is accomplished through performative reiteration—not simply acting, but becoming. For example, an African American woman working in corporate America must look a certain

way and behave in a particular manner to be successful. Performative reiteration happens when she is with her own family or other African Americans and uses the same diction and mannerisms used in her interactions in white-dominated corporate America. Rottenberg adds race as a focus for colonized people behaving under hegemonic pressures. She explains that, within this context, as long as blackness is deemed “less than,” individuals will have to increase their ability to display behaviors linked to whiteness to be successful (Rottenberg 2003).

Anglo-conformity is alive and well in American society. Although many scholars feel that the United States has become a multicultural society, cultural pluralism seems to be the dominant theory (Gordon 2019). America will accept aspects of the “other’s” culture that are profitable. Food, music, clothing all lead to significant profits for corporate structures. However, the same corporation that may help franchise a soul food restaurant for an African American owner may force African American female employees to wear their hair in acceptably corporate styles at the home office, which translates to the behavior and appearance of white people. As Payne and Thakkar point out:

Racial minorities and African American women, in particular, have lost a part of their cultural identity in rejection of ethnic hairstyles. Ethnic hairstyles are forbidden in the labor market based on employer's requirements to reconcile assimilation. (Payne and Thakkar 2011:33)

Readers would be hard-pressed to find a more obvious example of Anglo-conformity and Anglo-assimilation. For African Americans to move up the corporate ladder, they often have to adopt an outward appearance that is acceptable to white people. Many Americans are being forced through Anglo-conformity to adhere to dominant ideas about what it means to be professional, business-appropriate, or aesthetically pleasing. While black people are bombarded with white supremacist discourse, black media, music, and sports convey subversive messages and examples of success to black people.

Nelson (2015) discusses how the performativity of the family can be a means of changing the power of racist utterances. If the family makes a concerted effort to speak anti-racist speech and have anti-racist discourse during the socialization process, there is a possibility of subverting racist influences from outside the home. Furthermore, the family's repeated challenging of racist speech helps the family to have a constitutive effect on its members. The family thus creates a new way of thinking about racism, and produces a shift in the way family members feel about racism and racist behavior (Nelson 2015).

The power of the family and the ritualistic challenge of leading positions on racism disrupt what is socially acceptable within the family unit, creating racially conscious social actors (Tate 2007). Racial performativity can also operate in an interracial context. A black woman of mixed-race heritage or a woman with a different hair texture or skin tone is pressured through discourse to maintain an anti-racist aesthetic. In other words, such individuals are encouraged to have hairstyles that reaffirm their blackness: "So, the only authentic black hairstyles would be dreadlocks, afro, cane-row, and plaits. By extension, the only authentic blackness would be a dark-skinned one" (Tate 2007:303). This issue leaves mixed-race black women subversive to anti-racist hairstyles. As Tate has written, "If black beauty is performative, then it can be performed differently and disrupt the normalized racializing black beauty of black anti-racist aesthetics" (Tate 2007:307). Performativity has a power dynamic—the power to have the subject constituted and by the process of interability, which is the constrained repetition of norms (Butler 1997). Racial performance is predicated upon the actor's overt behavior in terms of how they perceive others, a racialized looking glass self-process (Mahtani 2002).

CLASS PERFORMATIVITY

This section focuses on class performativity among African Americans. To ensure alignment with the subjects of this study, I briefly review the concepts of agency and social class as they apply to African Americans.

Agency

Butler (1990) contends that agency is a person's power to either go along with or combat how society tells them to interact through discursive mediums. Is the subject being summoned into existence by discursive mediums, i.e., television, radio, and the opinions of other social actors? Or does the subject have the will to mimic which discursive tenants they fancy and ignore the ones they do not? (Walker 2003). "My argument is that there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (Butler 1990:195). Butler purports that being exposed to discursive mediums causes individuals to make subconscious decisions based on those mediums without realizing it. Butler goes on to argue, "All signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; agency then it is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition" (Butler 1990:198). However, scholars have noted that Butler's notion of agency departs from the accepted use of the term. In Butler's conception of agency, a subject's will does not belong to the subject; instead, it belongs to the discursive mechanisms that bring that subject into being (Walker 2003). Butler writes:

Here, at the risk of repeating myself, I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of the process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition of the subject. (Butler 1993:60)

Two scholars have offered comprehensive criticisms of Butler's concept of agency. Mahmood (2001, 2006) and Asad (2000) both challenge the binary of resistance/subordination as being the only condition of agency. Mahmood posits, "In other words, the normative political

subject of poststructuralist feminist theory often remains a liberatory one whose agency is conceptualized on the binary model of subordination and subversion” (2006:42). Asad (2000) explains that the idea of resistance as a characteristic of agency has become over-popularized:

Of course, “resistance” occurs in everyday life, and it is often important to outcomes when it does so. My concern, however, is that our fascination with “resistance” itself comes from larger, supporting ideas. The tendency to romanticize resistance comes from a metaphysical question to which this notion of “agency” is a response. (Asad 2000:32)

Mahmood (2006) explains in her study of the women’s mosque movement in Egypt that the pious behavior of Muslim women, which Westerners may view as subjugating, does not correlate with a lack of agency. Mahmood (2006) argues that these women may seem to the Westernized eye to be passive or docile. However, their agency lies in how they make changes to the system working within the system. She writes, “In this sense, the capacity for the agency is entailed not only in acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms” (Mahmood 2006:42).

Asad (2000) formulates an argument for the utility of mental and physical pain in agency. He conceives of pain not as a passive state but as an experience that may fuel the actor into action. Actors may readily disempower themselves for moral reasons and be satisfied to do it. Asad (2000) speaks to a medium between resistance and subordination that is necessary for the actor to be progressive and mentally stable. Understanding traditions, cultures, and religion is salient to understanding this notion of agency. Asad writes: “My point is that one can live sanely or insanely in a painful world and that the progressivist model of agency diverts attention away from our trying to understand how this is done in different traditions” (Asad 2000:43). Asad (2000) and Mahmood (2001, 2006) both try to move the concept of agency beyond a Westernized binary model towards a more inclusive one—not a zero-sum game but a game in which the actor survives and thrives through their customized exertion of their agency.

The contradictory nature of Butler's notion of the subject is an issue for Walker (2003), who argues, "By positing a temporal 'outside' that is separable from her spatial 'inside,' Butler ascribes a theoretical freedom taken from one level of analysis of the subject that she posits in another" (164). Butler's notion of agency is dependent on the language used in the formation of the subject. Some scholars have taken issue with Butler's non-reliance on the actual performance in performativity:

In other words, performance is the way that culture exhibits oneself to itself and others. She maintains that it becomes discussable as soon as performativity comes to rest on a performance. Therefore, it provides the context for investigating questions of embodiment, social power relations, political effects, and so forth. It makes cultural conflict concrete and accessible. (Langellier 1999:129, as cited in Morrison and Macleod 2013:570)

The "I," which is salient in the concept of agency, cannot be formed without social normative pressure exhibited linguistically. In essence, we become the sum of our experiences, both conscious and unconscious.

SOCIAL CLASS

Agency is essential to the class performative process: messages from society outside of the subject or person can begin to seem like an intrinsic thought process. Social class is a system of economic stratification based on education, occupation, and income (Grusky and Weisshaar 2014). In the case of African American class struggle, social class status is determined by one's education, income, and occupation (Hunt and Ray 2012). The same variables constitute white social class values. Family status is another essential factor—that is, being known as a good family and being connected to a church (Gilkes 1998). In considering the performativity of social class, we must first identify how the subject understands what class they occupy. Social class in terms of African American life can affect multiple aspects of one's existence. A person's socioeconomic status is defined as an economic and social position compared to others. These

comparisons are based on income, occupation, and education (Grusky and Weisshaar 2014).

However, race has served to be a formidable impediment to social stratification among African Americans. As Landry and Marsh observe, “After a long history of enslavement and de jure segregation, African Americans have developed a middle class that shares in both the benefits and limitations of that class” (2011:374).

The Social Class Worldview model speaks to similarities and differences between social class groups. Groups can have a significant impact on the individual actor. Sánchez et al. observe:

Additionally, a person's worldview is influenced by interpersonal relationships and expectations. Unique messages about social class come from and are based on various social groups, including a person's family of origin, racial/ethnic community, and same-gender peers. (Sánchez et al. 2011:170)

The black middle class has a tradition of benchmarks and behaviors, solidifying its place in the African American class system, which does not always translate to the same position in the white majority class structure. African Americans hold education and income as the two most essential indices of social class (Hunt and Ray 2012). African Americans are discursively enacted through messages from the majority. Stylized repetitions of norms become performative, leaving the actor with and without agency simultaneously. In the African American middle class, a subversion of the norm of marriage has occurred. Traditionally, to be considered a member of the black middle class, one had to be married (Dickson and Marsh 2008). However, as Dickson and Marsh (2008) identify in their study, there is “The Love Jones Cohort” of African Americans who are “SALA” (Single, and Living Alone). Individuals who identify as members of this group hold high-wage occupations, advanced degrees, and middle-class incomes. A study by Marsh et al. (2007) posited that 11 percent of the African American middle class in 2000 were single and living alone from ages 25–54. The study concluded that married-couple households had

considerably decreased their stronghold in the black middle class, with the single and living alone cohort gaining status. When African Americans remain unmarried, they subvert norms and reinforce their agency.

APPLYING THE LENSES OF INTERSECTIONALITY AND PERFORMATIVITY TO AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Intersectionality

Restrictive work environments are the leading motivators that encourage necessity entrepreneurship among African American women (Consulting Premier Quantitative 2017). Many women are either pushed out of the workforce by lack of opportunity due to discrimination or the need to spend more time with their families (Patrick et al. 2016). This stands in contrast to other women, who are pulled from the workforce in the hopes of success through opportunity (Patrick et al. 2016). African American women entrepreneurs feel that the vehicle of entrepreneurship can help them achieve holistic success and have control of their own work (Mirchandani 1999). The latent effects of necessity entrepreneurship can sometimes lead to highly skilled minority entrepreneurs operating a business unrelated to their expertise (Carter et al. 2015). For example, healthcare and social assistance are some of the most significant areas of participation for African American women entrepreneurs (Walker's Legacy 2016).

African American women entrepreneurs often lack the social networks to help them be successful, including access to different racial and ethnic groups (Asiedu, Freeman, and Nti-Addae 2012). Upward reaching connections are defined as connections to a higher level of social resources that can lead to knowledge of and access to lending programs and financial resources (Casey 2012). Access to social networks of the majority group, which can serve as a resource for access to lending capital, is essential for the success of minority businesses (Casey 2012). The

intersection of race, class, and gender makes access to majority networks challenging. Access to resources in a higher socioeconomic status has improved the minority business owner's chances of success (Casey 2012). The only needs for which black people will not patronize non-black businesses are for funerals and hair care (Anderson et al. 2015). In all other sectors of society, African American women-owned businesses must compete with many companies. In a study published in the *Journal of Business Diversity*, Anderson et al. (2015) write:

Participants described a dialectic interplay between the benefits of being encouraged and supported by members of their ethnic group, while simultaneously dealing with the costs of being discouraged and disapproved of by members of their ethnic group. (51)

Minority business owners appear less likely to use a business loan as a source of start-up financing than non-minority business owners (McManus and Regulatory Economist 2016).

When controlling for variables like credit scores, personal wealth, and revenues, minority business owners are disproportionately denied credit, especially African American and Hispanic borrowers (Kymn 2014). Wealth inequality leads to minority business owners having lower asset levels than whites, and women having lower asset levels than men. Race and gender positively correlate with start-up capital and the owner's success in acquiring business loans (Robb and Fairlie 2007).

Performativity

Little research exists on how African American women entrepreneurs define their ideas of success by different standards than white male entrepreneurs. Robinson, Blockson, and Robinson (2007), in their study of African American women entrepreneurs, noted:

It appears that AAWEs define success more broadly than do management and entrepreneurship scholars. We believe these women's stories provide some evidence that supports creating an augmented definition of success—one that reflects populations that are currently absent, underrepresented, or misrepresented in current entrepreneurship statistics. (150)

African American women entrepreneurs can speak to the discursive effects of labelling, and to how race, class, and gender have impacted their entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurism is generally understood to be an undertaking based on creativity, innovation, and hard work. Unfortunately, much of the discourse surrounding entrepreneurship revolves around the ideal of masculinity. In their study of women entrepreneurs, Marlow and Patton concluded:

Women are free to engage with entrepreneurship, but, in fact, not upon equal terms as this liberal approach fails to address socialization issues, persistent stereotypes which devalue women, and the continuing inequality in the distribution of domestic and caring labor. The outcome is equal access from a position of disadvantage. (2005:730)

In many instances, women are still referred to as females, reducing their reproductive parts and abilities in the contemporary business world. A leading source of information on women-owned businesses is the “Survey of Business Owners,” which states:

All firms classifiable by gender, ethnicity, race, and veteran status, in which companies could be women-owned or female-owned. Women own 51 percent or more of the interest or stock of the business. Men-owned or male-owned. Men own 51 percent or more of the interest or stock of the business. Equally men-/women-owned or equally male-/female-owned. A 50-percent male and 50-percent female ownership of the interest or stock of the business. (United States Census Bureau 2014)

In this survey, the word “female” emerges from a “sexed bodies” ideology to construct gender. This discursive basis of identification and judgment permeates every aspect of business interaction that a woman must face. Women are not only subjected to gender stereotypes, they are also held to a masculine standard of what an entrepreneur is—a sort of double dose of gender trouble (Butler 1990).

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS, HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY

African American women entrepreneurs are not a new phenomenon. Their origin can be traced back to pre-colonial West Africa, long before the transatlantic slave trade and middle

passage (Walker 2009). In his book *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Herskovits (1990) wrote about the division of labor in West Africa: “As a matter of fact, the economic position of women in West Africa is high. It is based on the fact that the women are traders quite as much as agricultural workers” (1941:58). Instead of bringing home the proverbial bacon and frying it up in a pan, women in West Africa processed foods and sold them in markets. Shea butter, palm oil, and kola nuts were some of the foods sold by women in the markets. Shea butter is still a popular product today, with countless mainstream beauty products bearing the name.

Walker (2009) is the most accomplished researcher of the entrepreneurial exploits of African American woman entrepreneurs pre- and the post-the-transatlantic slave trade. She provides an account of an African business couple:

A seventeenth-century Dutch trader on the Gold Coast observed that wives of fisherman sold their husband’s catch at local markets, while other women purchased fish in large quantities and then would carry them to other towns within the land, to get some profit by them, so that fish which is taken by the sea, is carried at least a hundred or two miles up in land. (Walker 2009:15)

The transatlantic slave trade began in 1444, with 235 Africans transported from West Africa to Portugal (Walker 2009). Africa was awash with slave traders who sold enslaved Africans to European slave traders. The enslavement of people was a result of warfare between tribal groups, the kidnapping of Africans for sale to Europeans, and the judicial process in Africa. The commercialization of Africans as labor commodities in America began at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 (Walker 2009). Enslaved people in colonial America were responsible for clearing land and agriculture, and also worked as unskilled laborers and artisans.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP DURING SLAVERY

The use of slave provision grounds served as the springboard for African American enterprise in the United States (Walker 2009). Slave provision land was set aside by plantation

owners for enslaved people to grow their own food. Having a background in agriculture and marketing in Africa, many enslaved people sold excess commodities from their provisional grounds to the public for profit. Profits made from provisional grounds helped some enslaved people buy their freedom and even land while still in slavery. Walker explains:

The right of slaves to own property was established quite early in the American colonies through both statutory legislation and the judicial system, and this right remained virtually unassailable through the colonial era. (2009:36)

Enterprising slave women not only made money during slavery from the production and marketing of commodities, they also hired out their time from their owners to other people in the community as cooks and dressmakers. Walker (2009) writes about the example of one particular slave:

The North Carolina slave Sally hired her time from her owner and set up a small-town cookshop in a property that she had rented. Her profits were used to pay her owner, expand her restaurant, and provide for her children's savings to purchase their freedom. (2009:92)

The Antebellum period saw free African American women entrepreneurs enter a new world by utilizing manumission and inheritance, and by being bought out of slavery by free black men (Hine and Thompson 1999).

ANTEBELLUM AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

With the arrival of African American women's freedom, the primary way to become entrepreneurs was through self-employment and land ownership. Women of African descent were self-employed as cooks, midwives, shopkeepers, washers, laundresses, sewists, hucksters, hoteliers, and boarding house owners (Schweninger 1990; Walker 2009). This mirrored many of the occupations they held in slavery. However, in some southern states, freed African American women were plantation owners and slave owners. As Schweninger writes, "To manage their plantations, these women acquired an increasing number of slaves. While occasionally

manumitting a bondsman for long years of service or purchasing a family member to keep a slave family together” (1990:18).

In addition, Walker (1999) mentions one of the most popular antebellum financiers, CeCee McCarthy, who was a black woman. During the year 1830, McCarthy was New Orleans’ most crucial slaveholder. As a business owner, she had also opened an imported goods store, and when purchasing and filling orders, she utilized a traveling sales force of 32 slaves.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

As the 20th century emerged, African American entrepreneurs became activists, social justice warriors, and industrialists. Jim Crow laws and other discriminatory practices led to the Great Migration of African Americans from southern to northern states. A new type of African American woman entrepreneur was born, steeped in survivalism and progress.

At the beginning of the 20th century, African American women-owned beauty shops, boarding houses, seamstresses, and laundresses (Boyd 2000). African American women understood that the businesses they started made fiscal sense, and they wanted to help the community. Maggie Lena Walker started the *St. Luke Herald* in 1902. Ms. Walker wished to have a means of communicating unjust acts perpetrated against African Americans. Her over 100,000 subscribers helped her start the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank (Walker 1999). Maggie Lena Walker was the first African American bank president in our country. Continuing in the African American women entrepreneurial spirit, Evelyn Berry and Victoria Ross began manufacturing Berry’s Famous Brown Skin Dolls in 1919. Due to their astounding successes, they changed the business’s name to the Berry and Ross Manufacturing company (Walker 1999). By 1920, Walker writes, the company

employed 30 women who produced 2,000 women's and children's dresses each week. Also, that same year, Berry & Ross purchased a three-story building in Norfolk, Virginia, to establish the first chain of Berry & Ross Department Stores. (Walker 1999:605)

On a national level, African American women entrepreneurs continued to create and maintain businesses. Nevertheless, they were more dominant in some regions than others. For example, in 1930, African American males owned 4.1 percent of all male-owned businesses in West Virginia, compared with African American women who owned 10.5 percent of women-owned businesses (Walker 1999).

Many African Americans chose to leave the southern states and move to northern states between 1910 and 1970. Their geographical movement is known as the Great Migration (Tolnay 2003). Grossman recounts, "They moved North in search of many of the same things black Americans would once hope would accompany emancipation: good schools, equal rights before the law, and equal access to public facilities" (Grossman 1989:35). Tens of thousands of young single men sought temporary accommodation until they could find permanent housing in the northern cities. The black women entrepreneurs who owned properties could take advantage of the opportunity to rent out their homes and offer cooking and laundry services to their renters (Walker 1999). The Great Migration allowed African American women entrepreneurs to sell their products to other African Americans in highly populated urban areas.

In 1946, Rose Meta was the first African American cosmetic company to sell an entire line of products (Walker 1999). In the same year, Gladys Hampton became the first African American woman to own a record company. According to Walker, "The activities of a black woman in business in the last half of the twentieth century have been documented by *Ebony*, since 1945 and by *Black Enterprise*, since 1976" (Walker 1999:611).

CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

A March 2021 article in the Harvard Business Review claims that 17 percent of African American women are in business or the beginning phases of a business. This is compared to 15 percent of white men and 10 percent of white women (Kelley, Majbouri, and Randolph 2021). The number of African American woman entrepreneurs grew by 50 percent from 2014 to 2019 (American Express 2019). Many contemporary African American women entrepreneurs are what business publications call “side-entrepreneurs,” i.e., African American women who work less than 20 hours a week on their businesses according to a survey of small business owners (American Express 2019). According to a report by American Express, “By far the highest rate of growth in the number of ‘sidepreneur’ ventures is among African American/Black women. It is triple that for all businesses over the past five years: 99% compared to 32%, respectively” (American Express 2019:8).

Most contemporary African American women-owned businesses are in services like beauty salons and professional services, along with health care and social assistance businesses (American Express 2019). In addition, African American women entrepreneurs are now also opening science, technology, engineering, and mathematics businesses. In a 2020 study of African American women entrepreneurs conducted by Guidance Financial (2021), 33 percent of African American entrepreneurs had bachelor’s degrees.

During this research, I noticed that many study participants were college-educated. Enthusiasm and survivalism are still significant drivers for contemporary African American women entrepreneurs. The major hurdles faced by nascent African American women entrepreneurs are getting more attention from mainstream investors, but unfortunately these hurdles remain. African American women entrepreneurs lack capital, funds for advertising,

resources for recruiting/retaining employees, administrative help, and resources for managing and providing benefits (Guidance Financial 2021). However, from Africa to America, and from slavery to freedom, African American women entrepreneurs have a history of survival and progress.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter described the theoretical grounding of this study by considering the frameworks of intersectionality and gender performativity. In this chapter, I explain how the study was conducted, outlining the methodology, research design, and data collection procedures. I then discuss how I used thematic analysis to interpret the data gathered from the participant narratives. I sought to answer the following question: How do race, gender, and class affect the success of African American women entrepreneurs? I conducted in-depth interviews and employed Butler's theory of performativity as a theoretical lens in the data collection process as well as the subsequent analysis.

METHODS

Using a theoretical framework of gender performativity, I sought to understand the performative acts that produce and reproduce the subjectivities of African American women participants in terms of the intersection of gender, race, and class (Jackson and Mazzei 2012). I believe the most effective way to study this problem is through qualitative research. As Dewey (1931, as cited in Savin-Baden and Howell-Major 2013:5) observed, "The way in which individuals experience the world directly influences the way in which they think about it." Proceeding from this notion, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with African American women entrepreneurs. I felt this would be the best way to acquire an understanding of their stories. The primary reason for this study was to gather information about the entrepreneurs' experiences in their own words in order to address the main research question.

Qualitative research explores people's lives and how they perceive their world. African American women entrepreneurs have been discussed in academic literature but have rarely

discussed how they view their world as entrepreneurs—not in the sense of start-up capital or access to credit, but in a holistic manner. Qualitative research helps to parse through a participant’s dense descriptions of their experiences, which gives the reader a genuine understanding of the participant’s thoughts and emotions (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2020).

Interviews

The protocols for this study were approved by the Texas Woman’s University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I conducted 20 semi-structured, video-recorded interviews from January 2021 to November 2021. All interviews were conducted on video using the Zoom platform. Participants agreed to the recording and were informed that their names and identifying information would remain confidential. I transcribed all of the interviews and then destroyed the video recordings to protect the participants’ privacy.

Data Collection Procedures

I began recruiting participants via the social networking platform LinkedIn. I contacted potential participants using LinkedIn instant messenger or email to arrange an interview time and date. A consent form explaining the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the interview was provided to each participant before the interview. In addition, participants were asked if they would be willing to have their interview video and audio recorded for the purposes of transcribing and analyzing the interview. All the participants agreed to have their interviews videoed, transcribed, and compiled into a report. During the interview process, participants were told that they could stop or reschedule the interview at any time. In general, the interviews were expected to take between 30 to 60 minutes, depending on how deeply the participants responded to each question. I used snowball sampling and asked participants to have colleagues contact me if they believed their colleagues might be interested in participating in the study.

Participants

The participants of this study were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. To maintain confidentiality, participants are referred to with these pseudonyms throughout this dissertation. All data was transferred to an external drive, de-identified, and kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. The audio, video recordings, and electronically signed consent forms on the hard drive will be destroyed within three years after the study is finished. All of the women I interviewed self-identified as African American or black.

Participants' industries confirmed information from other studies (see Figure 1). The bulk of African American women entrepreneurs are concentrated in the industries of healthcare, professional/scientific/technical services, and other services (Walker's Legacy 2016). Figure 1 shows how the participants are categorized using the standard North American industry classification system. The professional/scientific/technical services category included participants ranging from accountants to sales consultants.

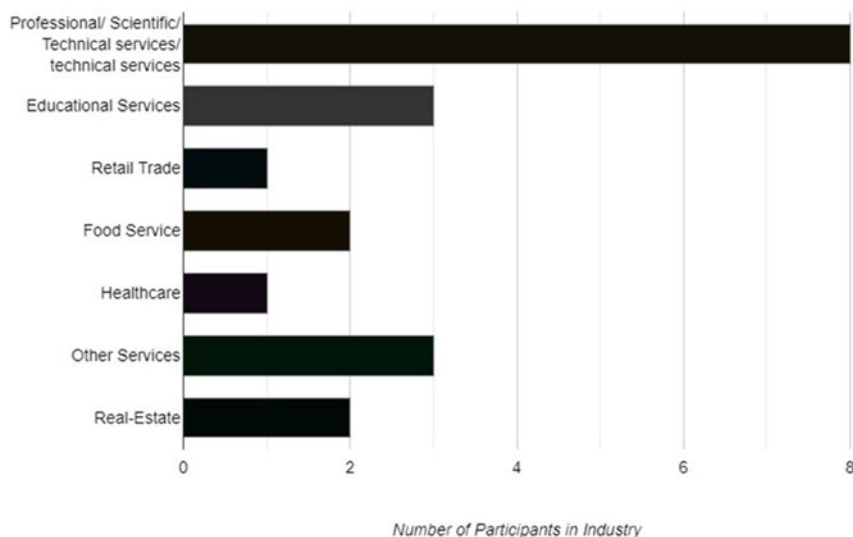


Figure 1. Industries of Participants per the North American Industry Classification System Farm Production Chart

Data Analysis

To analyze interview transcriptions, I used the narrative analysis approach. This approach offers a useful method to investigate participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition (Saldaña 2016). As Wertz stated:

Narrative analysis is conducted within two hermeneutic traditions detailed by Ricoeur: a hermeneutics of faith, which aims to restore meaning to a text, and a hermeneutics of suspicion, which attempts to decode meanings that are disguised (Josselson, 2004). Thus, a narrative analysis may both re-present the participant's narrative and also take interpretive authority for going beyond, in carefully documented ways, its literal and conscious meanings (Chase, 1996; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). (Wertz 2011:226)

Using the anchoring theory of gender performativity, I highlighted words and phrases from participants' interview transcripts and assigned them with codes. I then grouped these into categories using the existing relationships between the codes, and created themes as if Butler (1990) were sitting next to me, assisting me in applying her gender performativity theory. This process is crucial to the data analysis procedure; the researcher must first understand the guiding theory in order to discover overarching holistic meaning in the participants' narratives (Wertz 2011). I have created a table of codes, categories, and themes, which are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes	Categories	Themes
Being a black woman, do better, pride, hard work, job mistreatment, doing it for me, white men, black customers, white customers, I want freedom, middle class, I have to present, community, family, husband, expectations, disrespect, sexism is common, customers, control over my time, education, reputation, be better, money, opportunity, perceptions, history, self-motivated, males don't get treated the same, success is positive, successful careers, white clients don't ask for a discount, black clients ask for a discount, sometimes gender helps, class and customer base not aligned, my people, stereotypes, horrible bosses, types of black, fight for my rights, conflict with men, lack of knowledge.	Racial challenges	1. Steeped in otherness, not a black thing but a black woman thing.
	Community matters	
	Gender-based issues	
	Having something to prove	2. Stylized repetitions of worth: participants constantly have to model how being capable looks/speaks/and acts.
	I have to keep on guard	
	As a black woman	3. Success is agency: A conundrum exists between the intrinsic and extrinsic socially constructed definitions of success.
	My clients are important	
	Work/life balance	
	Why did I quit my job	

Researcher Reflexivity

I maintained an awareness of my position as an African American male while interviewing my participants and walking them through the research process. A reflexive researcher examines how their own characteristics influence their research (Gullion 2018). Although my study participants and I shared a race, we did not share a gender. I persisted in being mindful of the patriarchal society in which we all live. My background and upbringing had the potential to color my facial expressions and reactions to participants' responses. As Miles et al. point out, "Only through such sustained reflexive awareness can regular self-correction occur—not just during specific analysis episodes. However, over time, as methods themselves iterate and develop" (Miles et al. 2020:335). The goal of this study was to hear African American women entrepreneurs' voices speak about their idea of success. I did not want to prevent their perspectives, feelings, and agency from reaching the reader. Collins asserts:

Why this theme of self-definition should preoccupy African American women is not surprising. Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African American women with our objectification as the other. (2000:110)

During the research process, I put deliberate practices in place on a holistic level so that participants' narratives were as genuine as possible, and transcripts were untainted and uncompromised. I kept a journal of participants' responses and feelings to the final interview question: What else should I know about the issue that we have not discussed? Early reflection in this journal helped me add the question: How do you think your home life affects your success or lack thereof? My position as an African American male who is married without children did not prompt questions about the family's effect on African American women entrepreneurs. Researchers need to understand themselves and their stances so that they can determine how those stances affect the research lens they adopt (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major 2013).

SUMMARY

Summarily, I enlisted 20 participants to address the following research question: How do gender, race, and class affect African American women entrepreneurs? The themes of the study were developed with the theoretical underpinnings of Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. The study participants ran their businesses in varied industries (see Figure 1). One of the motivations of this study was to move away from the approach with which this population is consistently studied. Therefore, demographic information such as age, patrilineal-based methodology of marital status, educational attainment, and time in business was purposely not recorded.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to allow African American women entrepreneurs define their idea of success outside of the widely used white male-dominated methodology. Butler's (1990) theory of performativity serves as the lens through which the findings are analyzed. African American women entrepreneurs must contend in a society where race, class, and gender are treated as salient descriptors. African American women entrepreneurs sit at the intersection of all three descriptors, navigating a world that socially interacts with them singularly or in tandem based on those descriptors. Codes were produced from the transcripts, categories were produced from the codes, and themes were produced from the categories, which are rooted in Butler's (1990) theory of performativity (see Table 1).

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do gender, race, and class affect African American women entrepreneurs?

The study involved conducting 20 semi-structured interviews. All of the participants were African American women entrepreneurs. Transcripts of the participants' responses to interview questions were used as data for analysis. The remaining information in this chapter is divided into three thematic sections:

Theme 1. Steeped in otherness: Not just a black thing but a black woman thing.

Theme 2. Stylized repetitions of worth: Participants constantly have to model how being capable looks/speaks/acts.

Theme 3. Success is agency: A conundrum exists between the intrinsic and extrinsic, socially constructed definitions of success.

Each thematic section contains excerpts of participant interview responses. An analysis guided by Butler's (1990) theory of performativity is completed at the close of the thematic sections. The chapter closes with a discussion section that addresses data in all three thematic sections.

THEME 1. STEEPED IN OTHERNESS: NOT JUST A BLACK THING BUT A BLACK WOMAN THING

"My main goal is to defy every single stereotype."

Participant 17 uses verbiage to express the feeling of being preyed upon and being at a disadvantage due to the intersectional location of being a black woman business owner. In her view, the challenges she faces are greater than those faced by people of all other races or genders in business:

P17: Yeah. So, it's real predatory out there. I am, like, I guess you would say I'm the ultimate minority. I'm a small business owner. I'm a woman, and I'm black. Super predatory.

Participant 15 speaks to the feeling that there is an expectation of her being less than the standard. According to her, others expect that African American women entrepreneurs will fail:

P15: I'm a young Black woman from Mississippi. So, one of my main goals is to defy every single stereotype that there is, like, you can't put me in that category. Put me in a stereotype of people didn't expect her to do this. And I'm happy. So, I pushed myself really hard for that reason.

Participant 11 speaks to the mental strain African American entrepreneurs have due to their awareness of their position in society and its heavy burden—due to knowing that they are expected not to meet standards.

P11: And I think after going to an HBCU, in some instances, when you're the first and the only, then you're representing your whole culture and your race. So, then the burden, slash responsibility is even more heightened. And that can be a lot of work, it can be crushing, on some days, it can be anxiety-producing, it can be a lot. And so, to get to the

point, I don't know that I would have the behavior of they should not have an expected difference if I didn't already believe that they do have an expected difference.

"Got tired of working for people who did less than I did."

African American women entrepreneurs have a history of survival entrepreneurship. When jobs were unavailable to African American women, they created businesses to survive; when a job environment is discriminatory and salary expectations fall short, African American women become entrepreneurs. Participants 13, 14, and 16 all speak about push factors that led them to become entrepreneurs. They shared their belief that their talents and abilities may be better served by creating their own enterprise. Some of the participants shared a feeling of being alienated and treated unfairly in the work environment.

P13: Well, I guess in one sense, we're the lowest on the totem pole when it comes to salary and opportunities and leadership and things like that. We just found out that we have our now second black woman CEO of a major fortune 500 company, Rosalyn Brewer, at Walgreens....

P14: To be perfectly honest, I feel the main driver initially was just the fact that I was an over-educated black woman. I have five, soon to be six degrees. I am very knowledgeable in my field and confident about what I know. I really had just reached a point, especially at the job I had, maybe two jobs prior to where I'm at now, where I just got tired of working for people who did less than I did and then made it difficult for me to do my job....

P16: Okay, so that's a couple of relatively long stories that I will do... Make sure. So, it starts with the first job I ever had, which was at a law firm. I was a practicing intellectual property law, patents, trademarks, copyrights. And I was miserable in that job for a lot of reasons and many related to racism and sexism, So I quit. After 18 months, they told me either I had to move to a different group in the firm or leave.

"Oh, you thought I was one of these?"

Various African American entrepreneurs discuss how they feel about the support or lack thereof in the black community. Some say that community members are fickle or tepid when dealing with them, while others are loyal supporters and champions of their cause. However, some participant responses lead me to think that they expect more support from the black

community. Participants 3 and 4 express that they cannot escape their intersectional location in a community that shares their race. They feel as though the black community has become a microcosm of the majority society with regard to the treatment of their businesses. So, in a place where they should feel like insiders, they can feel like “others.”

P3: Because in some instances, you stand out in the African American community, and your community is proud of you. But then there's like, again, some other people that are like, oh, well, it's an African American business, or she's a woman, so the labels are what they are in our society, unfortunately.

P4: My name is not...my name is neutral. My name is race-neutral. My name is gender-neutral. So, you people are I had someone I did his taxes. Like he got referred to me. I did his taxes. He didn't meet me. He met my staff. So, he had a question. I came out. He was surprised I was black. It was a black man. But he was like, shocked that I was black. And I was like, “Oh, you thought I was one of these?” He's like, “Yeah.” I just, yeah, I mean, he probably won't come back. Because he wanted people who wants to, he wants these people. Like some of us want them to want... I'm trying to say the right word. Some of us want white people to tell us what to do...

“Lean into it. Like, I'm not the one for that.”

Reflecting on the process of generating and conducting business, participants recalled incidents where potential male colleagues were less than professional. Sexist behavior on the part of would-be associates adds another challenge to the business process. Participants 10, 1, and 2 shared similar thoughts on this issue. The interviewees described men's inappropriate behavior as just another day in the office, or the cost of doing business. It seems that participants have dealt with life at the intersection for so long that they are numb to it. However, participants became more detailed and passionate as they expounded on the issue. When participants have to be on guard about the nature of a business dinner, this impedes their work. Mentally, they have to be ready for the worst-case scenario based on their intersectional location and what it means to their potential business contact.

P10: There's no department, there's no protection to hide behind as an entrepreneur, and so when it comes to my business dealings with men, another layer of difficulty being a

woman. Being a black man, as an entrepreneur, his kind of, you kind of got it. There are things that we all deal with. But being a black woman as an entrepreneur, it made things like a business dinner more strategic and more difficult. I had to realize that I couldn't go on a business dinner by myself with a man, in our business, by myself with a man. Because I could find out, I did find out that their intentions were different from mine. And also, just the guy who, we want to talk about business, but you're touching my hand, don't touch my hand and just always reverting it back to business and networking. That's another thing, we're doing a lot of networking as an entrepreneur. And I find myself always, I'm talking business, and they turn the conversation to, "Oh, yes, lunch or dinner anytime," you completely turn....

P2: I have. I've been connected to a couple of guys who can help me get into different school districts. And somehow, the conversation waves from the business to telling me their personal business, slide in that they're single and tried to figure out if I'm single. They were giving me information that really doesn't have any relevance to what I'm trying to do. So, yeah! I guess I have experienced some sexism. But again, it would be done in a way that you take, like, okay. But it's normally from men who look like me. I get it more so from men who look like me. And so, I can recall going to lunch with one and the person who connected me to him—their conversation was cut and dry. And then lunch was over within a reasonable time. So, I was telling them some of the things that we talked about during our conversation. And they were taken aback; wait a minute, what, I didn't get all that information from them. They didn't say all of that. To the extent that one of them even sent me a text message for Valentine's Day. Why? Yeah! You should [unclear 27:38]. Happy Valentine's Day.

P1: Oh, yeah. Yes, it's different for men; first of all, you have to make sure that you're on your guard and your mind is right because they may kind of try you or do something inappropriate. That's always an option that could always happen. So being kind of aware of your surroundings and just making sure you're presenting yourself like a business. Sometimes men will talk down to you or try to, and so you have to kind of keep your composure, but then, in a way, lean into it. Like, I'm not the one for that, you know?

"So, I say it with pride because I love being black."

African American women entrepreneurs who were participants in this study mentioned how a level of pride is associated with the designation. Although they may be bombarded by negative images of their race and gender, some participants understand who they are. The African American women entrepreneurs quoted above have an against-all-odds outlook on their intersectional location in the business world. They are aware of societal realities and challenges.

However, like many African American women entrepreneurs before them, they choose to move forward and concentrate on progress.

P15: Yeah, to me, it gives me a sense of pride to say that I'm an African American female entrepreneur. And the reason why I say pride is because I'm from Mississippi. I say that people are like, "Oh, all got paved roads?" Like, I hear so many negative things. And I'm just like, "Okay, all right. If that's how you feel, then I'm going to be the best hillbilly you ever thought you will meet." So, I say it with pride because I love being black. I think being black is the most beautiful thing ever. it to be a female, it's just empowered in general, because people have always put women in the shadows of man....

P14: I think it also brings me back to the point I was making earlier just about being almost proud of the fact that despite what's out there in society, [and] despite what's out there working against me sometimes, that I'm able to because of I think the positives of being a black woman in terms of like having to fight, or having that grit, or being able to overcome so much, with so little is also a point of pride in terms of just saying, "Hey, it's hard being a black woman." Just being one and working in a regular space, but then let's add some bonus sprinkles to it, and do some more things that often aren't things that people necessarily want to see black women do or help black women do....

THEME 2. STYLIZED REPETITIONS OF WORTH: PARTICIPANTS CONSTANTLY HAVE TO MODEL HOW BEING CAPABLE LOOKS/SPEAKS/ACTS

"There's this perception going in that I'm not going to perform as expected."

Perceptions of reality and definitions of the social situation are essential concepts to understand when examining the interview excerpts from this study. Some participants share a world view that regulates their behavior in mainstream society. For example, Participant 10 sheds light on a stereotype of African American women's behavior, "the angry black woman." The "angry black woman" stereotype depicts black women as aggressive, combative, and confrontational. Participants 9, 20, and 1 discuss how they must be mindful of how the world views them in certain social situations. Participant 1 also feels she has to be aware of the labels she carries and what those labels mean in a business setting. In sum, participants give much attention to presenting an image that can be viewed as professional, competent, and capable at all times.

P10: I don't want to be labeled as the angry black woman. This is the same as you as an angry black man; it's worse for you guys. But it's similar for me, whereas men, they can be firm, they can be pushy, they can get business done, but for a woman, she knows, "she is difficult and not a team player."

P1: Oh, yeah. Yes, it's different for men. First of all, you have to make sure that you're on your guard and your mind is, right, because they may kind of try you or do something inappropriate. That's always an option that could always happen. So being kind of aware of your surroundings and just making sure you're presenting yourself like a business. Sometimes men will talk down to you or try to, and so you have to kind of keep your composure, but then, in a way, lean into it. Like, I'm not the one for that, you know?

P20: Yes, I feel like anytime that you are dealing with someone outside of your race, that there is a certain level of expectancy to fit into the pop culture norm of, hey, you should speak like this. You should act like this. So yes, I definitely think that is a true stigma that is placed. And I don't think it's far off. Like I understand why. Because if I'm walking, and I'm like, "Hey, all, you awesome?" You apply with you, though? And I'm just like, they're going to be like, "Oh, no, ma'am. No, we're good." You know, it's just it just does; it doesn't make them feel comfortable. That's not what they're used to, right?

P9: There's this perception going in that I'm not going to perform as expected. So that creates a lack. But then, at the same time, because of my race, I've had certain struggles that have taught me lessons early on that make me, you know, a little bit more sharp when I encounter certain situations, because of that experience, being a Black woman.

"I make sure I'm dressed like I'm always dressed."

Some participants shared that they are under constant scrutiny from society, and especially from the majority race when doing business. Whether it is their business practices, speaking, gender, or behavior, many of these behavioral judgments are rooted in class differences. Participants who mentioned "I always dress" exhibit class-based social graces and give off the appearance of someone educated, competent, and cultured. Participants 4, 11, and 8 share beliefs about how they are viewed. Participants have constructed ways of masking their frustration with this process; they have constructed ways of portraying a more acceptable persona to the majority business culture. For example, Participant 11 had to change her voice to sound more representative of the majority race.

P4: Because you look at it from a different way, because you feel some kind of way, because you came here, and you've done what you needed to do. And blah, blah, blah. So white people have this: you should pull yourself up by your bootstrap's mentality, not understanding that, like, with black Americans it's not that we can't, it's that opportunities have been purposely taken away from us.

P8: I just in like, specific instances, no, but I just know, in general, because I dress a certain way. I make sure I'm dressed like I'm always dressed. But it's more casual now. So, I know people look at me, and they think a certain thing like, "oh, oh," I know I can be talking to somebody, and they're not listening. Like they're not listening. They're listening, or you can tell between when you're talking to women or when I'm talking with a dude. And they're these attorneys who are on our floor; we work with them. My father worked with them, did a lot of their taxes....

P11: Well, that's interesting. I think given the service's nature or service-oriented nature of our business, the male clients expect us to be nurturers but again, because I rarely will interact with the male clients, like I rarely interact with female clients, in person, it's normally on the phone, and I think because I've been very good at working in or code-switching and working frequently in white America, I would like to think that I've become fairly good at not giving away my race from a voice standpoint, from an audio standpoint.

"You have to be very, very cognizant."

The experiences of participants when interacting with others in the business world are varied. Some participants go head-to-head with white male representatives, while others attempt a more subtle approach to show their capabilities. Some of the participants in this study even go as far as to delegitimize the superiority of whites. In their estimations, many of their white counterparts are insincere and incapable. Participants who have had extensive interpersonal social interactions with agents of white supremacy communicated their feelings. Participants 16 and 4 are highly educated African American women entrepreneurs—an accountant and a lawyer, respectively—who represent a sample of unapologetically black entrepreneurs, the kind who prefers to do business with other African Americans and have manipulated their business models to cater to them. Participants 16 and 4 feel that making high profits is not more important than advancing their race.

P3: I don't know. That's, that, that always is kind of tricky. I do think sometimes I get white clients that I think like, maybe I grew up, I was, I grew up in the hood or something like that, like, they'll, they'll try to like, I used to go to this business. And I'm like, I've never been there. Like, I'm like, I totally grew up in Sugar Land. I don't. So, I think sometimes they're trying to just see, like, they're trying to assimilate to see like, if they're on the same level, or where you are. And I'm like, yeah, just be yourself. Because, yeah, so you get that from time to time.

P15: Oh, of course, yes. Hands down. I don't have any issues with other minorities never had an issue really with them. It's mostly white men. And it's more so just things where it's like, oh, you don't have to worry about that I take care of it. Or, oh, yeah, well, we'll get to it eventually. And I bring up things, and they kind of just downplay what I'm bringing up. I've had that happen a lot of times in my business personally because I don't deal with them as much. It's not really an issue for me. Simply because, like I said, the guys don't reach out when you see people on Facebook, asking for tutors, [it] is always the women, never a guy. So, my interaction with them is more so just from a networking perspective than an actual tutor and business perspective.

P2: I don't want to be too boogie with the black clients, but still want to be professional. You don't want to go in and homegirl mode. But when you're dealing with your white clients, you have to have the Boogie Persona. But yeah, it's definitely very mindful of the things you say and your mannerisms, such as no shaking of the head or popping your lips or any bet. You have to be very, very cognizant of how you approach those situations.

P14: "Yeah, no. I mean, again, I wouldn't say, maybe it was just that place, but I've had similar, probably lesser experiences, in other places. And I've kind of deduced from that, that it's the intersectionality base. Because I would be in meetings with white women, for example, who—some of them—knew very little and would just say things that would be completely wrong. And it would be accepted, and then what I would counter with my facts [and] with my evidence it was a problem because then they were upset, or hurt.

P4: I went to all white school, all white private schools all my life. I have always had that ... My father continuously ... I know you watch everybody wants Olivia Pope. And when her daddy gave her that speech, like, I've heard that speech all the time. So, I've always known twice as hard to get half as far. So, I don't really think about it. I do what has to be done. But I also have a certain type of like, St. John's arrogance, as my mother puts it, but I'm like, "You're not better than me. I'm better than you." And it's kind of like, you have to have that. It can be bad. But like, seriously, I'm like, "I'm better than you." It sounds really bad. But I literally do not like, but I look at white people and be like, I'm smarter than you. I'm better than you.

P16: Yes, but I really do. Like I said before, there's one thing that I'm going to do, is I set very clear expectations upfront, very, very clear. So, like, the work that I do with the clients who hire me, almost always, they're black women, not every time, but almost always, when white folks reach out to me and as I say, on my website and everywhere

else, if you are an ally, and you're a person who's okay with being in black spaces, come and join us if you do not stay where you at....

"I've been very good at working in or code-switching."

All of the participants in this study are in business. They have to generate revenue to continue in business, and customers are the lifeblood of any business entity. African American women entrepreneurs have to win over their customers of every race, class, and gender, often meeting expectations and dispelling stereotypes to achieve a sale. Participants 6, 11, 10, 5, and 3 share one salient trait: they have all figured out how to get their desired outcomes from customers. Each participant has her own demographic of customers from which they have to figure out how to extract business. Participants are aware that the entrepreneur's class is essential; others are more willing to do business with them because of their gender.

P3: I think they... I don't know, I think I'm not gonna say all in particular, my older male clients, I think they expect me to be a little bit more quiet, I'm very outspoken. Right! And so... Like, I think sometimes they're like, oh, like, you're actually gonna have something to say. And I was raised by a very strong African American woman who was a leader in a hospital. So, I always have something to say.

P5: Well, my female real estate clients, I can relate to them. Because I'm a female. But I am a married female, so I understand them if they're married and a female. I've been a single female who purchased in real estate. So, I can relate to them there.

P10: I don't think so. So, with male clients, there's no expectation there immediately. It's just how you start that. And so, I haven't had any problems with clients at a certain expectation, they want information, if you're the person who provides that information for them, they are perfectly fine. Expectations have been exceeded with male clients when it comes to women. I'm just because the natural care that we provide to our clients not so salesy when it comes to financial services. And so, I've had clients who have just only dealt with me and so now to work with the woman, they're like, "Wow, it's different, and I appreciate your care, I feel like you care, you're listening to me." So, a lot of my peers, they realize that, and so they actually want to do joint work with women. Because clients, its psychology and you're aware of that, people feel more comfortable sharing personal information with women.

P4: Right, there was straight up, was there, I have no concrete proof. Otherwise, my system would have insisted that we sue. But I know for a fact that there was a particular client who led a campaign to get people to leave. And he was going around telling people

I was not a CPA, even though my name had been in the door since 2015. And that I didn't know what I was going to do and that the firm would not survive. And then he attempted to steal my staff members from me of them, and he thought that he was going to be offering her a raise, which was actually only 40% of what my father was paying. And I was personally insulted by that. Because I really was like, "You really think that this woman has been working for my father for 20, over 20 years? And she's making \$30,000 a year? Like, you really think that you inspired ...?" And his wife is a member of my sorority. And so, I'm like, "How are you?"

P11: Well, that's interesting. I think given the service's nature or service-oriented nature of our business, the male clients expect us to be nurturers but again, because I rarely will interact with the male clients, like I rarely interact with female clients, in person, it's normally on the phone, and I think because I've been very good at working in or code-switching and working frequently in white America, I would like to think that I've become fairly good at not giving away my race from a voice standpoint, from an audio standpoint.

P6: Yeah, they can't take my strongness, my directness as much. And so honestly, the type of women clients that I work with, they have to be strong. And I can gauge that when I'm doing a discovery call. If I sense that they're meek and their feelings are going to get hurt. I just tell them, "You know what? I don't think that I'm a good fit for you." I take ownership of it. I don't want to say there's nothing wrong with them. I say, "I'm not a good fit for you." And with men. That doesn't happen as often. But sometimes, it does. If I feel like they have unrealistic expectations, I say the same thing.

"And you don't know where you come from?"

The issue of participants dealing with customers of their own race is complicated. This issue demands special attention due to the emotion in the responses and the participants' frustration with expectations of price negotiations by customers of the same race. Participants also spoke about being covertly assessed to see if their customers were "black enough." The responses of Participants 3, 15, 12, 10, and 1, although different in nuanced ways, shared a meaningful sentiment. From facial expressions during the interview, one could sense a sadness related to not granting the wishes of their same-race customers without incurring injury to their business. This issue seemed to be a significant sources of pain for participants that was apparent in their responses.

P1: All of my, I will say that there is a little less time spent on negotiating with the white clients than the black clients. And that may be because their budgets are different. Who knows? There may be some reasons why they have a lot more money, then over here, I find that we have to be a little bit more creative about how we set things up. Maybe I can't come for six hours a day, three times a week, but I can come maybe one full day and two-half a day. And we do it that way. So, we just have to be more creative. And find tracking and constructing the deal. Or maybe that's how I think about it. I want to get this. I'm trying to get the money. So, let's see what we can do to make it win, win.

P10: Yes, surprisingly, so my white clients don't expect me to act in a certain manner. And my black clients, there is an intended test to pass with individuals. Like, are you bougie? And you don't know where you come from?

P12: Not necessarily I, to be honest with you probably about, I'm just throwing a figure out, they may be about 75 to 80% of my clients are white, you know, because they don't have, most time, they don't have a certain stigma as far as pricing, right? They don't question certain things. And so, if I say, "hey, you know, my price is, you know, \$575 for this specific package," there is no bargaining. There's no, you know, there's no swing, there's no, "Hey, man, you know, it's okay, no problem," you know, or, "Okay, let me get back with you," or whatever their response may be, [there] isn't a haggle, right? So, there is a difference between my, you know, black clients and my white clients.

P15: I don't know if that empathy is the word that I'm looking for in my head. But we're always trying to help somebody else, and sometimes we screw us up in the process. And I'm not. Yeah, like I don't think that we don't need it at all. But we can't let every sob story sway whatever, whether that be our prices or our time. We kind of got to be rude, you know, if we hook everybody up, we wouldn't get well.

P3: I think sometimes they don't expect people to be as professional. And like I said, there's always that like, kind of that, like, "Can we get a discount?" type thing, it seems, but I don't think that they always expect us to be professional, but they want professionalism. And then when it's not professional, and it can go bad, but I think they don't always expect that of people that look like them.

THEME 3. SUCCESS IS AGENCY: A CONUNDRUM EXISTS BETWEEN THE INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

"Success is like freedom."

All of the participants in this study were asked about their definition of success. I found this to be the question that elicited the most interesting responses. Very few participants' success markers were monetary. Responses included freedom, happy customers, increased sales, and

being an asset to the community. Some participants cited a combination of all of the characteristics above as their definition of success. All participants spoke to freedom as being a marker of success, whether financial freedom or the comfort to go where they would like and take care of their families. Some also cited getting their time back, meaning that their businesses helped them afford more time in their lives. Some of the participants merely wanted the freedom to work on their own terms in the environment of their choice. All participants wanted to be free.

P17: But so this is, this is why I said that the definition of success to me is doing what I want. Regardless of anyone. I cannot live for anybody. But for me, I've learned that nobody belongs to us. We come in this world ourselves, we are going to leave this motherfucker by ourselves. I'm even teaching my kids that, especially my daughter, my son is more like me. But she's like, emotional. And I just have to tell her, I'm like, it's a tough world out there. Nobody cares. I'm not saying, "I don't care." But I'm saying, "Nobody cares." And you got to stop making decisions off your emotion and start making decisions for you....

P4: Being able to pay all my bills, out of credit card debt, being able to take two one-week vacations a year, and only having to go to the office 30 hours a week. That is my definition of success....

P7: Okay, so my definition of success is not you have, you don't have to have all the money in the world, as long as you have what you need, get what you want, and spend the time that you would like to spend with your family, get what you need, get what you want, and spend time with your family. And I think that's a success.

P15: Okay, I know, I love questions like that. Everybody, as you know, everybody's definition is different. So, I would say my definition of success is being able to take a week's vacation, and my business runs smoothly without me. Because I've seen it so many times where people have this thriving business, but they can't take a day out. And my thing is, what's the point of building something, and then not being able to reap the benefits from it. So, like, I have a crew set for spring of 2023. And my goal is, I'm not doing anything while I'm gone. I'm not checking nothing. I need everything to go exactly how it's supposed to go.

P2: Success for me is just being in a position where I am comfortable. When I think about teen single moms, success for me is to watch the girls that I impacted be successful and understand the importance of independence and make it to the other side of the teen years without having another baby and finishing school, getting degrees, getting full-time jobs, finding their own housing, and just maintain. For me, that's success when it comes to what I do.

P1: For me, my definition of success is freedom. And so, in some ways, I'm getting some freedom time because I'm like setting up systems and hiring people and directing my energy to other tasks. So, the freedom is there. Financial freedom is another part of it. I haven't made it there. But I'm beginning, right? Time. I think just like the freedom to be able to, like I said before, get up and walk away, like have options. And even if you don't have anything else on the table, know that you can figure it out or create something. Period! So, I'm not even gonna worry about that. So, I'm pretty much in that freedom too, so once this money catches up, I will be free.

P16: Yeah, figure it out for yourself, as you define success for yourself. One of the reasons it was so traumatic for me to walk out of my first job after 18 months was because everybody told me that's what success was to your first job, as I think I was 25 or 26. I was making like \$145,000 a year, I was working at the largest law firm in the state of, and I was in South Carolina then. And it was like the firm everybody wanted to work at; it was the job everybody wanted. And I bought a house; I bought all these golden handcuffs stuff. And that's what success I thought it was. That's what everybody told me it wasn't; I didn't know this. I didn't care about any of this shit. I didn't care about having the firm name behind me. I wanted to make money, but you can make 140 either walk out the door, throw a rock, and hit 15 ways to make \$145,000, but I thought this was the thing and what I had to find out was, no, success doesn't have to look that way at all. And in fact, many of the people who have, quote, that kind of success are unhappy [as fuck], many of them on their second or third marriages, their kids hate them, they work around the clock, they never get to take a vacation. What do you want then?

"Success is different, but mine is really tied to being able to give back."

The study participants also communicated the ways in which community is salient to their definition of success. This includes being able to give back in efforts to make a difference. Making an impact in the world they live in was also very important for them. They exhibit a spiritual sense of doing business in a way that is pleasing to God, in a way that is akin to Max Weber's notion of the Protestant work ethic.

P19: Success for me is built on a lot of things. So, one of the big aspects of success to me is the ability to give back. I think that when you're truly successful, you can give back, and it's not painful. Whether it's time, whether it's money, whether it's energy, [or] positive feedback or whatever for that other nonprofit or business owner. I think that is the key thing is when you're successful, you're able to give. I think a lot of people talk success to money. You know what? I get it. I understand it. But my success measuring stick is not someone else's. I know a business owner, and her success is tied to the new things she's been able to develop....

P9: Success equals peace of mind to me. That, “have I maintained my integrity in my interactions with other people? Have I helped someone else to get to where they want to go? Have I inspired somebody to be better or do better? Have I learned from a bad situation something that I might have gone through and made a bad decision and then recognized that and then that’s something different in the future?” To me, those are the things that I consider success. “Have I made a difference in the world? When I walked into a place or encountered someone, did I do something to help their lives be better or did they do something that I could gain from reporting to me in some kind of way?” To me that is success. And then when you have all of that, then everything else just kind of comes to you. If you are attracted to positivity, you find yourself in situations where there’s positive energy around you. And so, success as they say. So once you can get on that frequency where all that is happening, then you know, I will say, “Surely goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life....”

P12: So my definition of success is its kind of like your cliché or traditional, it’s more so just knowing that my contribution to my community, it helps people, right? It’s not to me, it’s not just about the dollar amount that I charge, and it’s about the value that I get, right? Because I do more than just read a résumé or tell you how to go to an interview or tell you, I advise, I educate, I give people more than what they get. So, it’s a value thing. For me, my success is knowing what I do, knowing that my small contribution makes a huge difference within my community.

“Success for me is in my customers.”

From the following excerpts it is clear that, for the study participants below, doing well for their customers is their definition of success, in contrast to other participants who want to do well for the community. These participants specifically identified their customer’s happiness as their definition of success.

P3: I think success for me is measured by how many people I help, whether it’s in my clinic, whether it’s in the hospital, whether it’s in my real estate business, it’s not monetary for me, many people, I helped those people that come back and say, you truly made a difference in my life.

P8: Success to me is not... A lot of people base success on money. Success for me is in my customers and how they come back to me. And so, my success is in my customers. I’ll give you an example. I had a customer. I was on the Amazon platform. And so, this was initially an Amazon customer. But he switched over to Participant 8’s make-ready services because it was limited in what I could do for him on their platform. So, he’s like, “Well, I’m just going to... Is it okay with you? Let me pay you.” I couldn’t suggest it. But if the customer suggested, I don’t have to refuse. So anyway, this is a customer that I got from Amazon. And so, time passed. And two years later, he emailed me and said, “I had the pleasure of having Participant 8 make-ready service clean for me in the past, and I

need your services again. I moved out of my home, and I want to see if you can do a make-ready service this time.

“Make more and work less.”

The participants below chose a familiar indicator in their definition of success; money was used as a resource that lets them know their business is going well, and opportunities flow from there. Unlike prior participants, these participants feel that money will satisfy and gratify them.

P6: My definition of success. I guess, right now, my definition of success is, you know, I've doubled revenue in a pandemic, and I've doubled revenue in a pandemic. And I really haven't done a lot of external marketing or really going out there trying to find clients, I've done networking, but I have to get word of mouth referrals; I get a lot of stuff coming to me. So, for me, my definition of success would be to hit the next level, and for me, that next level is to hit seven figures. And so, while hitting seven figures working less, that will be my goal, make more and work less.

P11: Oh, wow. So, I lit up the way that I just did it. Because what comes to mind is being, it's having total control and freedom. Over my time and my resources, I want to have so much money and so much time and so much. Yeah, so much money and so much time, where if I decide I want to take a trip and not pack a bag, I can do that. That's my definition of success. Total freedom and total control over my finances. If I want to, and I always say when I have moments like this, I feel like the universe is listening. Because I'm a firm believer and manifestation. I believe that. So, when I say total control of finances because I think that you can be broke and have total control of your finances, meaning you don't spend your money. But I want to be clear, I want to be able to buy whatever I want. I don't want to have to question the price of something; I want to feel comfortable. Whenever someone says, “It cost this much.” And I didn't even ask; I don't want to have to balk at it. I want to be able to get on a plane, I want to be able to travel, I want to be able to walk in any setting and feel comfortable from a monetary standpoint that I can operate whatever way that I want to. Now I understand I'm fully aware, money doesn't buy you confidence. It doesn't buy you success. It buys you in my opinion, opportunity, it buys you experiences. And so that's what I want total access to experiences, total access to all opportunities. That's my definition of success.

ANALYSIS

The above section produced excerpts from the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity elucidates how our gender is not defined at birth. Instead, our gender is a result of discursive interactions in society, and we

behave in a manner that is gender appropriate for society. Performativity does not connote a “performance,” because that would mean we are being deliberate, but refers to how we act both consciously and subconsciously. Various participants have had to be subversive in their entrepreneurial journey. Many of them left the safe confines of corporate employment to exercise their agency. It seems that being subject to constant attacks was unacceptable for many participants. In owning their own business, the participants control when and how they engage with the majority social order.

Additionally, other participants spoke about ways in which they were gendered in their business meetings. If they do not react in a manner deemed appropriate for a woman, specifically a black woman, they can risk economic sanctions. Actors in their communities discursively enact racial performativity at times. Questions concerning their skills and business acumen leave African American women entrepreneurs confused about whether individuals of their same race are self-loathing blacks or do not find women credible. Other participants discussed experiences of interpellation—being hailed into conforming with the norms and behaviors of the majority—signalling how they do not fit into a stereotype. Participants in this study are motivated to become entrepreneurs. Their drive to stay in business can feel like an act of subverting the social story that is consistently told about African Americans. The participants have spoken about gender, racial, and class performativity. Some participants reflected on how they have to behave in a certain way to be accepted as capable individuals by mainstream society. They change their voice to answer business calls and, when feeling attacked, they make sure they do not replicate “angry black woman” behaviors. Each participant is socially constructed by every stylized repetition that makes them more acceptable as an African American woman (Butler 1990).

Participants went on to discuss a looking glass self-effect, in which they feel that they are seen by society as less than, or as the “other.”

Consequently, as a defense, these women make sure not to fit into any negative stereotypes of African American women. Butler (1993) refers to the process outlined above as constituting the subject through discursive means. Class performativity is demonstrated by how participants are able to mold their behaviors, dress, and speech so that they can be seen as legitimate by the majority. Butler (1990) argues that agency refers to the ability of individuals to go along with or resist how society commands them to interact. Some study participants made concerted efforts to maintain their agency through subversive acts like tailoring their business to African Americans and refusing to partake in Anglo-conformity.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to elicit the responses of actual African American women entrepreneurs to answer the following research question: How do race, class, and gender affect the success of African American women entrepreneurs. Much of the prevailing literature on African American entrepreneurs highlights their deficiencies in startup capital, networking, and yearly revenue when compared to the white male entrepreneurial model (Asiedu et al. 2012; Bruni et al. 2004; Carter et al. 2015; Casey 2012; Kymn 2014; Robb and Fairlie 2007). There is limited research that applies gender theories as a lens to explore the intersectionality of race, class, and gender among African American women entrepreneurs (Bruni et al. 2004; Dy and Marlow 2017). African American women entrepreneurs are among the fastest-growing demographics in business startups, and own 45 percent of all women-owned businesses (Walker’s Legacy 2016). However, most research on African American women entrepreneurs is fixated on what they lack compared to entrepreneurs from the racial majority.

STEEPED IN OTHERNESS: NOT JUST A BLACK THING BUT A BLACK WOMAN THING

The data shows that participants felt that being an African American woman brought extra challenges due to their intersectional location. Participants spoke about how others often expected that they would fall short of the standard. This aspect of the data reinforces the insights on intersectionality and gender performativity discussed earlier. Crenshaw (1991) explained how an intersectional status refers to being not just a woman or an African American but rather the meeting of the two. One's interaction with society is determined by what womanhood and blackness mean in a social setting. This intersectional reality is a theme in most of the participants' answers. The majority of research on African American women entrepreneurs does not account for their intersectional location. Perception is reality; many of this study's participants have a perception that society, on the whole, judges them based on stereotypical features of femininity and blackness. This is apparent in Participant 15's answer:

P15: I am a young Black woman from Mississippi. So, one of my main goals is to defy every single stereotype that there is like, you can't put me in that category. Put me in a stereotype of people didn't expect her to do this. And I'm happy. So, I pushed myself really hard for that reason.

Butler (1993) explains how, when discursive enactment occurs, an individual starts to behave appropriately for their gender according to the messages that society communicates to individuals through speech, word, and actions. However, there are times when an individual will disrupt what is expected of their behavior in various acts of subversion. Some participants in this study are subversive in terms of how they present themselves to the white power structure. Participants' Anglo-conformity shows the white-dominated business world that they are capable and professional, thus reinforcing the tenets of white supremacy in their efforts towards success in business (Rottenberg 2003).

This study documents African American women's consistent efforts to take control of their agency. Participants in this study spoke about how they began their journey as entrepreneurs due to disrespect or disregard at their place of employment. These struggles confirm the findings of prior literature that identifies push or pull factors that lead to African American women leaving the workforce (Patrick et al. 2016). Some participants felt that they would create more opportunities by striking out on their own than they would have if they remained at a job that could be stifling. Other participants wanted to be in an environment where they are respected and valued, a sentiment that reinforces the findings of Mirchandani (1999).

P14: To be perfectly honest, I feel the main driver initially was just the fact that I was an over-educated black woman. I have five, soon to be six degrees. I am very knowledgeable in my field and confident about what I know. I had just reached a point, especially at the job I had, maybe two jobs prior to where I'm at now, where I just got tired of working for people who did less than I did and then made it difficult for me to do my job.

The participants in this study were educated, and their business entities aligned with their fields of study. In contrast, previous literature claims that minority women often operate businesses unrelated to their expertise (Carter et al. 2015). While the participants' road to entrepreneurship was varied, they share the intersectional challenges of their location and Anglo-conformist pressures to imitate and assimilate for success. However, these pressures were not only applied by the white power structure. Participants also identified their own community as a source of frustration at times. Due to the latent effects of domestic colonization and the acceptance of white supremacy, some individuals in the African American community question the legitimacy and ability of African American women entrepreneurs. The literature speaks to hegemonic pressures reinforcing blackness as "less than" (Rottenberg 2003). African American women entrepreneurs must go great lengths to convince members of their community to do business with them. As Participant 3 reflected:

P3: Because in some instances, you stand out in the African American community and your community is proud of you. But then there's like, again, some other people that are like, "Oh, well, it's an African American business," or "She's a woman," so the labels are what they are in our society, unfortunately.

The intersectional location of participants can be the source of questions based on individual beliefs. According to participants' responses, other community members are champions of African American women entrepreneurs. However, community behavior toward African American women entrepreneurs is inconsistent. This study found that participants must contend with male colleagues and potential customers flirting during business interactions. This phenomenon demonstrates how participants' bodies are constituted through discursive means (Butler 1993). This sort of behavior tells African American women entrepreneurs of this study that, no matter how prepared and competent they are, there are men who will still see them as a representation of femininity, in all of the positive and negative forms germane to the actor. As Participant 10 noted, "being a black woman as an entrepreneur, it made things like a business dinner more strategic and more difficult."

When participants have to prepare for potential negative behaviors informed by gender stereotypes, this reinforces their experience of otherness. Once again, the intersectional location of being black and women comes with a set of responses to bad male behavior that is socially acceptable. Collins (2000) discusses this concept in her book *Black Feminist Thought*. The "matrix of domination" refers to how these intersecting oppressions are organized. "Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression" (Collins 2000:21).

To maintain their agency, participants show pride in being African American and being women. Taking on the challenges of entrepreneurship in spaces that are not always welcoming has become a motivating factor for participants—another form of subversion identified by Butler

(1990). Participants refuse to be rejected and subjugated, such that they no longer claim their differences from the traditional entrepreneur.

P14: I think it also brings me back to the point I was making earlier just about being almost proud of the fact that despite, what's out there in society, [and] despite what's out there working against me sometimes, that I'm able to because of I think the positives of being a black woman in terms of like having to fight, or having that grit, or being able to overcome so much, with so little is also a point of pride in terms of just saying, "Hey, it's hard being a black woman."

STYLIZED REPETITIONS OF WORTH: PARTICIPANTS CONSTANTLY HAVE TO MODEL HOW BEING CAPABLE LOOKS/SPEAKS/ACTS

Another critical finding hinges on the perceived stereotypical behavior of African American women entrepreneurs. As Participant 10 stated:

I don't want to be labeled as the angry black woman. This is the same as you. as an angry black man, and it's worse for you guys. But it's similar for me, whereas men, they can be firm, they can be pushy, they can get business done, but for a woman, she knows, "she is difficult and not a team player."

The above quote is an example of the effects of interpellation, which puts someone into a linguistic category that forms their identity (Butler 1990). The literature illustrates how interpellation can be used as a behavior regulation tool. The participant in the example above goes out of her way not to seem like an angry black woman. But what if anger is the proper response to racially motivated or gender-based aggression? Participants are either received or rejected by the business community primarily based on mannerisms, dress, and perceived social background. The data from this study confirms the literature on class performativity. African Americans' social status communicators are similar to majority social status indicators (Hunt and Ray 2012). Participants in this study shared that they give substantial attention to presenting an image that is conducive to successful business interactions. As Participant 8 stated, "It's just in

like, specific instances, no, but I just know, in general, because I dress a certain way. I make sure I'm dressed like I'm always dressed. But it's more casual now."

This constant monitoring of one's behavior to communicate perceived class, gender, and racial markers begins to transform the subject. In other words, the doer is being constructed by the deed (Butler 1990). The following is an example of discursive enactment:

P11: I think because I've been very good at working in, or code-switching and working frequently, in white America, I would like to think that I've become fairly good at not giving away my race from a voice standpoint, from an audio standpoint.

Literature on racial performativity confirms the reasons for which this participant's verbal performance in interactions with white customers is received positively. Racial performance is informed by how the participant feels majority race actors will respond to their behavior (Mahtani 2002). Rottenberg (2003) points out that the type of racial performance outlined above leads to the dilution of the actor's agency; this causes a participant's self-image of positive blackness to suffer due to stylized repetitions in their efforts to have a successful business. Findings also show that some participants refuse to consciously partake in racial performativity, constituting a concerted effort to disrupt the socially prescribed power arrangement. One participant who attended a majority white private school in Houston, TX, shared her feelings about combating racialized perceptions:

P4: But I also have a certain type of like, St. John's arrogance, as my mother puts it, but I'm like, "You're no better than me. I'm better than you." And it's kind of like, you have to have that. It can be bad. But like, seriously, I'm like, "I'm better than you." It sounds really bad. But I literally do not like, but I look at white people and be like, "I'm smarter than you. I'm better than you."

While this participant's response may seem highly prejudicial, her mode of maintaining her agency is a response to constant discursive attacks in the business environment. Participants in this study spoke of challenges with customers of different races that were a result of the

customer's perception of the entrepreneur. The findings show that some participants strictly base their business on a model of helping other African Americans and keeping their agency intact.

P16: So like, the work that I do with the clients who hire me, almost always, they're black women, not every time, but almost always. When white folks reach out to me and as I say, on my website and everywhere else, if you are an ally, and you're a person who's okay with being in black spaces, come and join us. If you do not, stay where you at.

One interesting finding from this study is African American entrepreneurs' frustration with doing business with other African Americans. Although some participants prefer to do business with African Americans, others had different responses. Literature on class performativity speaks to the ways in which a subject's actions are guided by their worldview (Sánchez et al. 2011). This is reflected in Participant 10's response:

Yes, surprisingly, so my white clients don't expect me to act in a certain manner. And my black clients, there is an intended test to pass with individuals. Like, are you bougie? And you don't know where you come from?

The participant's response above alludes to the client checking to see if the participant identifies with the bourgeoisie or proletariat, as discussed in Engels and Marx's (2004) *The Communist Manifesto*, written initially in 1848. In the African American community, identification with the bourgeoisie is seen as not being down to earth, and being devoid of compassion for the social positions of average African Americans. In their efforts to present a particular social status, participant must also be aware that a presentation that resonates with a high social class may be considered undesirable by some African American clients.

Being down to earth was not the participants' only hurdle when dealing with African American clients. Participants also identified African American clients as constant negotiators in terms of pricing. As Participant 1 stated, "I will say that there is a little less time spent negotiating with the white clients than the black clients. And that may be because their budgets are different. Who knows?" Previous studies document how African Americans are

disproportionately denied credit (Kymn 2014). Consequently, African American women entrepreneurs can rarely afford to give the deep discounts that some African American clients attempt to negotiate. As Participant 15 put it, “We can’t let every sob story sway whatever whether that be our prices or our time. We kind of got to be rude, you know, if we hook everybody up, we wouldn’t get nowhere.”

Participants also have to walk a fine line about when to code-switch to be more acceptable to their black and white clients. Another interesting finding was that participants know when to project high levels of femininity or low levels of masculinity. Some participants shared that their communication style is generally associated with men, and so men usually respond more positively to the way they share information. The study’s findings show that participants use marital status and gender to build trust with potential clients:

P5: Well, my female real estate clients, I can relate to them. Because I’m a female. But I am a married female, so I understand.

P6: Yeah, they can’t take my strongness, my directness as much. And so honestly, the type of women clients that I work with, they have to be strong. And I can gauge that when I’m doing a discovery call. If I sense that they’re meek and their feelings are going to get hurt, I just tell them, “You know what? I don’t think that I’m a good fit for you.” I take ownership of it. I don’t want to say there’s nothing wrong with them. I say I’m not a good fit for you. And with men. That doesn’t happen as often. But sometimes, it does. If I feel like they have unrealistic expectations, I say the same thing.

The participant’s response above exemplifies the notion of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Study participants find themselves using their gender identity to relate to clients in order to facilitate a business relationship. Prior research on gender, class, and racial positively correlates with this study’s findings. Participants are discursively enacted and constituted by the messages communicated in everyday social contract. Even those who are very aware of how they are viewed by society still find themselves behaving in ways that the majority has deemed

socially acceptable ways. Consequently, the same mannerisms that may be appealing to the white majority may not foster admiration in the African American community. Code-switching seems to be crucial to ensure success for African American women entrepreneurs. They know when to display the stereotypical behaviors of middle-class white culture or middle-class black culture. Participants have to gauge when they should appear highly feminine or masculine according to society's definition of those behaviors. Performativity is not carried out consciously, however, and the deed constructs the doer, so that participants begin to be the sum of all their experiences as they consciously and unconsciously negotiate their agency.

SUCCESS IS AGENCY: A CONUNDRUM EXISTS BETWEEN THE INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

In answering the research question (How do race, class, and gender affect the success of African American women entrepreneurs?), it is essential to understand how study participants define success. The study's findings point to several participants conceiving of success as a form of freedom, such as the freedom to spend more time with their families and pursue personal interests. Many participants alluded to wealth not being a key indicator of their success. I believe the reason for participants not equating success with the amount of money their business makes is directly tied to their intersectional location. Different women experience intersectionality in different ways, and their reactions are varied. Financial freedom is a concept that participants do define as a form of success. However, this kind of financial freedom is not necessarily an abundance of wealth but being able to pay their bills and have peace of mind without outside forces being in charge of how they spend their time. As Participant 2 stated, "Success for me is just being in a position where I am comfortable." This study's findings confirm prior research that shows that African American women entrepreneurs define success broadly (Robinson et al.

2007). The findings also demonstrated that participants felt that their success was defined by having power over their own time. As Participant 16 stated:

P16: And in fact, many of the people who have, quote, that kind of success are unhappy [as fuck], many of them on their second or third marriages, their kids hate them, they work around the clock, they never get to take a vacation. What do you want then?

The African American women entrepreneurs interviewed for this study reflected on their interesting relationship with their community. Their community has served as a place of motivation, judgment, and frustration. However, many participants define success as being able to give back to the community. African American woman entrepreneurs have a history of supporting their communities. For example, Maggie Lena Walker, the first African American woman to own a bank, created the *St. Luke Herald* in 1902, a community paper that shared issues of importance to the African American community (Walker 1999). Participants demonstrated a need to contribute their resources to the uplifting of their African American communities. Participant 12 stated, “So my definition of success is its kind of like your cliché or traditional, it's more so just knowing that my contribution to my community, it helps people, right?” Similarly, Participant 19 reflected:

I think that when you're truly successful, you can give back, and it's not painful. Whether it's time, whether it's money, whether it's energy, [or] positive feedback or whatever for that other nonprofit or business owner. I think that is the key thing is when you're successful, you're able to give.

Many participants also expressed that their definition of success was ensuring that their families were taken care of:

P7: Okay, so my definition of success is not you have...you don't have to have all the money in the world, as long as you have what you need, get what you want, and spend the time that you would like to spend with your family, get what you need, get what you want, and spend time with your family. And I think that's success.

The literature identifies one of the roles of the family unit as a place of disruption from white majority-centered discourse (Nelson 2015). On multiple occasions during this study, African American entrepreneurs discussed how they view the world in which they live. Their definition of success is directly tied to their view of reality. Participants defined doing well for their customers as a form of success. When happy customers let them know that they are doing a fine job, this can fulfill their desire to do something positive in their community. The history of African American women entrepreneurs is built on their intention to provide good service and products to their community. Participants in this study have a historical understanding of their societal position.

P3: I think success for me is measured by how many people I help, whether it's in my clinic, whether it's in the hospital, whether it's in my real estate business, it's not monetary for me, many people, I helped those people that come back and say, you truly made a difference in my life.

Making a difference is a motivational factor for many of the participants. Although participants are under hegemonic pressures, their intention to devote resources to the community, provide for their families, and provide excellent service is steadfast.

Lastly, some participants defined success as making money. These participants cited the amount of money they have profited from in their business, and how much of that money can be used to improve the quality of their lives, unlike many of the other indices that measure a successful business, such as several employees and yearly revenue. Some participants shared a personal definition of financial success:

P11: But I want to be clear, I want to be able to buy whatever I want. I don't want to have to question the price of something; I want to feel comfortable. Whenever someone says it costs this much. And I didn't even ask; I don't want to have to balk at it. I want to be able to get on a plane, I want to be able to travel, I want to be able to walk in any setting and feel comfortable from a monetary standpoint that I can operate whatever way that I want to.

The statement above does not include a quantitative financial goal. Many of the responses from participants did not have quantitative indicators of their business success. For many participants, their business is an extension of themselves, their family, and their community.

The findings in this research project contribute to the wider discussion on African American women entrepreneurs. Much of the literature on African American women entrepreneurs is deficient. Scholars rarely examine the gender performativity and intersectional location of African American women entrepreneurs. African American women entrepreneurs want to exercise their agency—their right to self-define and self-determine (Collins 2000).

When we apply Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity to the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs, it becomes clear why their responses can be similar in some ways and vastly different in others. Participants cannot avoid the societal messages to which they are exposed. Those messages are draped in sexism, white supremacy, and classism. Each participant is discursively enacted in different ways. Each participant, moreover, has their own way of acting subversively in the face of racial, gender, and class performative reiteration. Participants define success differently and interact with the white male-dominated business culture in different ways. This research has identified some participants who feel that code-switching and displaying behaviors of assimilation are the best methods for social acceptance when conducting business. Stylized repetitions—ranging from body gestures, dress, voice inflection, and gendered behaviors—are kept in the participant's coping toolbox. The behaviors above put the participant's agency and sense of self in jeopardy. Some African American women entrepreneurs expressed frustration with African American customers' bargaining behaviors. Institutional racist policies and procedures that impede African Americans from acquiring wealth

can be blamed for customers' unwillingness to pay the full price for products and services, rather than a shared group mentality is critical of African American women entrepreneurs.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the key findings from the study are summarized in terms of their relevance to the research question. In addition to reviewing the study's shortcomings, I also suggest ways to improve future research. Key findings from the data reveal the different ways that participants define success, whether it be as admiration of their customers, creating revenue, giving back to the community, or their ability to improve the quality of life for their families. The study's findings also pointed to the participants' desire to prove themselves to customers and colleagues in general, regardless of race and gender. Some participants feel judged through intersectional lenses that force them to assimilate. The data also showed how same-race customers cause participants frustration with their negotiating tactics. Many participants assessed that they did not get as much interaction over price from their white customers.

The effects of race, class, and gender on the success of African American women entrepreneurs are holistic. Prior literature outlines issues in acquiring startup capital (Casey 2012) and how social networks of African American women entrepreneurs are inadequate for initiating a sustainable number of business contacts (Asiedu et al. 2012). Outside forces communicate her "otherness" in terms of race, gender, and entrepreneurship. They discursively pressuring the subject to behave in ways that are more acceptable in the white majority culture. Externally, the African American community sends mixed signals about whether they are champions of the African American woman entrepreneur's success or naysayers who are critical of her price structure (Anderson et al. 2015). Internally, the African American woman entrepreneur must negotiate her agency, both consciously and subconsciously. She carefully considers how to dress, act, and speak, intrinsically negotiating with the African American

community as the object of her charity and pride as well as the source of her frustration and confusion. Some participants are outwardly unapologetically black and feel that no weapon on the part of the majority will deter them from their purpose. Other participants are strategic when interacting with their customers and the community at large, taking precautions not to make any missteps that could jeopardize their revenue. These holistic effects of social interactions cause African American women entrepreneurs to understand their agency differently and perceive the world in different ways. Unfortunately, most of the literature on African American women entrepreneurs understands their world differently, seeing it through the lens of white male superiority, a view that has been constantly myopic and misleading.

Butler's theory is suitable for explaining how gender, race, and class affect African American women entrepreneurs. Participants spoke about feeling judged as the "other," as someone who is outside of the accepted gender, race, and class-based behaviors. The data also reveals the use of discourse to enact participants' behavior, as in the case of participants going to great lengths to assume behavior opposite from the "angry black woman." Participants are enacted by discourse, which is informed by stereotypical behaviors associated with different races, genders, and classes. The use of Butler's theory here implies that researchers can attempt the application of other feminist theories in their study of African American women entrepreneurs. A combination of rich qualitative interview data and a theoretical framework that is not rooted in white male superiority has the potential to elicit information and perspectives rarely acknowledged in the existing literature.

LIMITATIONS

This study uses Butler's (1990) theory of performativity as a lens with which to explore the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs. Asad (2000) and Mahmood (2001,

2006), formable critics of Butler's theory, identify her concept of agency as limiting.

Consequently, the agentic application of Butler's theory of performativity to the research data is a limitation of this project. Butler (1990) argues that agency refers to the ability of individuals to go along with or resist how society commands them to interact. When examining the historical journey of African American women entrepreneurs who have had to deal with significant social restrictions, there are numerous examples of how they have exercised agency. Contemporary African American women entrepreneurs need a median lens of agentic behavior to examine their current experiences. In an email message to me, Dr. Sadri explained how one could interpret the agency of a subjugated population: "The submerged masses are not 'either' subversive resisters or puppets imbibing and regurgitating their habitus. They survive by learning the game and 'sincerely' playing it."¹ Some of the data from participants speaks to a non-binary application of agency:

P11: I think because I've been very good at working in or code-switching and working frequently in white America, I would like to think that I've become fairly good at not giving away my race from a voice standpoint, from an audio standpoint.

Participant 11 does not communicate a tone of injury from "playing the game." She appears to be proud of her ability to master a situation that could have been an impediment to her business progress. Another participant expressed that she has not experienced racism in her business, and that her interaction with the white majority has been one of inclusion and not one of resistance:

P1: I'd say no, they're two. Um, I just think I haven't had like blatant racism, you know, just in general, people have their preferences. We have folks that support us that are white. But we may have differing opinions outside of the business room. Whether it's politics or whatever. And so, you know, one of the things for me is I try my best to stay offline.

¹ Dr. Sadri, email to author February 22, 2022.

Participant 1 knows that a social media display of her politics may be detrimental to her business. Critics of Butler's agency would identify Participant 1's actions as agentic; she chooses to maintain good relations in a system that may not support her political views. Critics could attempt to link the participant's morality and piety to her decision, but maintaining peace and shunning confusion do not correlate to a lack of agency.

An additional limitation of this study is the number of participants; 20 participants do not represent a national sample. This study was also limited because of the lack of prior research that focuses on African American women entrepreneurs' intersectional challenges of gender, race, and class while using a contemporary feminist theory as a theoretical framework.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future qualitative research can focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer African American women entrepreneurs. These populations would provide data on participants positioned in different intersectional locations than the participants in this project. Future research with this population could also incorporate interview questions addressing participants' agency. For example, do they view their situation as one of subversion or submission? Alternatively, do they feel they exist in a non-binary agentic reality, one where the ends justify the means and behaviors are calculated to produce survival and progress?

IMPLICATIONS

Faced with suspicion because of previously held stereotypes, African American women entrepreneurs find that they can overcome the dubiousness and the obstacles this suspicion creates. Furthermore, the statement above implies that African American women entrepreneurs are emotionally capable of navigating the white male-dominated business environment. Consequently, scholars may want to provide minor critiques on African American women

entrepreneurs' business management history and education as contributors to business failure. Redirecting their focus on the application of emotional intelligence surviving African American women entrepreneurs wield in the business environment. During this project, African American American women entrepreneurs explained what they really needed to be successful. Most participants claimed increased business opportunities were salient. Much of the research points to start-up capital being one of the most significant concerns of African American women entrepreneurs. This study implies to government policymakers and private lenders to focus on sustaining surviving African American women entrepreneurs with increased business opportunities, as much as start-up capital attainment. African American women entrepreneurs have a history of serving their communities and being pioneers in many fields. Unfortunately, one cannot attest to the future of the institutional racist, sexist, and classist challenges that they consistently face. However, I can commit to declaring that African American women entrepreneurs will continue to be successful on their terms and in their own way.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW TOOL

Interview Questions

Tell me about your business [prompts: What kind of business is it?, How big is the business?].

How did you end up going into business for yourself?

What does it mean to you to be labeled as an African American woman entrepreneur?

As I said before, this study is about how gender, race, and class impact you as an entrepreneur.

What are your initial thoughts about that?

Do you think you are treated differently by men versus women in the business setting? How so?

Do you think your male clients expect you to behave in a certain manner? If so, how?

What about your female clients? If so, how?

Do you think you are treated differently in the business setting because you are African American? How so?

What would you say is your current social class? Why?

Do your clients generally mirror your social class? If so, why or why not?

Do you think your African American clients expect you to act in a certain manner? If so, how?

Do you think your white clients expect you to act in a certain manner? If so, how?

Have you experienced sexism as you've built your business? What about racism? Can you give me examples?

What is your definition of success?

How do you think your home life affects your success or lack thereof?

Do you think your success or lack thereof has anything to do with your gender?

Do you think your success or lack thereof has anything to do with your race?

Do you think your success or lack thereof has anything to do with your class?

What characteristics do African American women entrepreneurs generally display that make them successful?

What characteristics do African American women entrepreneurs generally display that make them unsuccessful?

What else should I know about this issue that we have not discussed?

APPENDIX B
RECRUITING MESSAGE

Hello _____

Robert McNeill from my networking group is doing a study on African American women entrepreneurs. I would like for you to consider being interviewed. Information about the study is below:

African American women entrepreneurs are the fastest growing business start-up demographic in the country. They represent 45% of all woman minority-owned enterprises; you have been selected as part of a representative sample of African American women entrepreneurs residing in the United States.

We are hoping to identify how your entrepreneurial journey has been impacted by being African American, a woman, and a member of whichever social class you associate with (i.e., working-class, upper class, and middle class). How has the intersection of these classifications helped or hurt your business success? I also want to share stories of women business owners' growing population to educate potential African American women entrepreneurs. Participants will receive a \$25 card from Amazon, as a result of their participation in the study. If you have additional questions, my email address is rmcneill@twu.edu. You may also contact me by phone at (832) 701-8144.

I am writing to request your participation in my research study that will involve a personal interview. The interview process will last no longer than an hour, which entails a series of twenty open-ended questions. Participants will receive a \$25 card from Amazon, as a result of their participation in the study. If you have additional questions, my email address is rmcneill@twu.edu. You may also contact me by phone at (832)701-8144.

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



Texas Woman's University
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

irb@twu.edu

<https://www.twu.edu/institutional-review-board-irb/>

October 21, 2021

Robert McNeill

Sociology

Re: Renewal - IRB-FY2019-376 An intersectional approach to understanding narratives of African American Women entrepreneurs using Butlers' Theory of Performativity.

Dear Robert McNeill,

The renewal for the above referenced study has been reviewed and approved on October 20, 2021, by TWU IRB - Denton. Please be reminded that if you are using a signed informed consent form, the approved form was stamped by the IRB and was previously uploaded to the Attachments tab under the Study Details section. The most recently approved version of the consent must be used when enrolling subjects in your study.

Note that any modifications to this study must be submitted for IRB review prior to their implementation, including the submission of any agency approval letters, changes in research personnel, and any changes in study procedures or instruments. Additionally, the IRB must be notified immediately of any adverse events or unanticipated problems. All modification requests, incident reports, and requests to close the file must be submitted through Cayuse.

Approval for this study will now expire on October 19, 2022. A reminder of the study

expiration will be sent 45 days prior to the expiration. If the study is ongoing, you will be required to submit a renewal request. When the study is complete, a close request may be submitted to close the study file.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please email your IRB analyst at irb@twu.edu or refer to the IRB website.

Sincerely,

TWU IRB - Denton