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African American Women Bloggers' Lived Experiences with Digital Entrepreneurship: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

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2019

Abstract

African American Women Bloggers' Lived Experiences with Digital Entrepreneurship:

A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

by

Melissa McDowell

Ed.M., Harvard University, 2000

BA, Tuskegee University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

November 2019

Abstract

The professionalization of blogs has elevated blogging to an organizational field whereby bloggers develop a legitimate career path. For many minority women bloggers, the transition from being traditionally employed to managing a one-person digital enterprise is often met with racial and gender imbalances created by nontraditional modes of work. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. To address this gap, a transcendental phenomenological method was used to collect data from African American women bloggers. This study was framed by 3 key concepts focused on African American women bloggers: Brydges and Sjöholm's concept of personal style blogger, Martinez Dy et al's concept of women digital entrepreneurs, and Gabriel's concept of Black female identity online. Data were gathered using 9 virtual semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the modified Van Kaam method. Eight themes emerged when answering the research question. The findings of the research showed that being an African American woman blogger means conducting entrepreneurial activity, working towards financial solvency, being proud of racial identity, and creating and delivering content as a blogger. Results gleaned from this transcendental phenomenological study may help promote social change by bringing awareness to policymakers on the issues of equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized populations who seek to become digital entrepreneurs.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my mom, Christine T. Harvard, my dad, William C. McDowell, and my stepdad, Christopher A. Harvard. To all the Black women bloggers: I see you.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to my Chair, Dr. Daphne Halkias, my Committee Member Dr. Michael Neubert, and my University Research Reviewer, Dr. Sheryl Kristensen. Your contribution to my success is priceless and immeasurable. Thank you to all my friends and family for your support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Within the context of technological changes, labor market instability, and minority women's search for greater career mobility, female digital entrepreneurship in the form of blogging has emerged as disruptive to employment in terms of traditional on-ground jobs for women of color (Duffy, 2017; Novoselova & Jenson, 2018). For many minority women bloggers, the transition from being a salaried employee to managing a one-person digital enterprise is often met with racial and gender imbalances created by nontraditional modes of work (Duffy, 2017; Hatfield, 2018; Martinez Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018). A recent meta-analysis of female digital entrepreneurship literature indicates the underrepresentation of women of color, particularly in studies of top-ranked bloggers (Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017). This literature gap holds particularly true for studies on digital entrepreneurship among women of color, and specifically African American women (Harris, 2015; Juma, & Sequeira, 2017).

Blogging as digital entrepreneurship places Black women in a unique position to open new meanings of racial and gender identity within the entrepreneurship field (Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018); however, these women may find their lived experiences with digital entrepreneurship thwarted by financial challenges, lack of access to financial credit, and gaps in entrepreneurial skills (Krieger-Boden & Sorgner, 2018; Martinez Dy, Marlow, & Martin, 2017). This qualitative study of African American women bloggers' lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise may contribute to social change by launching original exploratory research on racial and gender bias within the context of entrepreneurial online blogging. Such an in-depth exploration of the challenges

faced by African American women digital entrepreneurs may inform policymakers to initiate more accessible funding and mentoring programs for minority women entrepreneurs (Edelman & Brush, 2018).

This chapter discusses the problem statement development and outlines the gap in the literature. Following is information regarding the problem, purpose and research questions, and conceptual framework of the study. Lastly, this chapter discusses the significance, assumptions, and limitations of the study along with definitions of key terms used throughout this study.

Background of the Study

Digital technologies and societal shifts are reconfiguring traditional forms of work and labor markets (Robinson, 2017). Long and Wilhoit (2018) found that women bloggers grapple with tensions related to transitioning into full-time blogging, authenticity, and brand loyalty. Blogger participants in this study incorporated consistent 8-hour workdays to mirror the schedule of productivity they were accustomed to prior to transitioning from the traditional workplace. This study highlighted having an authentic blogging voice as essential for loyal followership and marketability, although conflicts exist between being true to oneself and advertising for brands. Blogger influencers create a massive amount of advertisement content for brands that is recirculated freely, often with little to no compensation (Abidin, 2016).

Bloggers have a unique opportunity to position themselves as influencers. Lepkowska-White and Kortright (2018) posited that independent bloggers have an intentional strategy for portraying a curated image that supports personal branding. A

majority of bloggers endorsed privileged lifestyles that readers may or may not be able to aspire to in reality; yet they are in many cases able to capture loyal followers and convert them to consumers. Personal branding that was once limited to celebrities is now an equal opportunity for anyone (Safitri, 2017; Erz & Christensen, 2018), including bloggers. Bloggers and other social media personalities are regarded as more credible than high profile personalities because they are relatable for everyday people, specifically young women (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Individuals from an array of social backgrounds have taken up fashion blogging as a hobby or as a means for earning a living (Armstrong & McDowell, 2018). Duffy (2017) conducted an extensive 3-year study exploring the lived experiences of women bloggers, video bloggers, and social media influencers on Instagram in their quest to become full-time profitable bloggers, and found success as an independent entrepreneurial blogger was closely tied to the same social and racial constructs that guide the success of traditional creative and tech economies; lacking racial diversity, and ethnically marginalized groups. For example, many successful bloggers are economically privileged, and their image closely mirrors the fashion industry stereotype of being young, thin, and White (Armstrong & McDowell, 2018).

Juma and Sequeira (2017) applied disadvantage theory and protected market theory to explore the success of venture performance of African American women; a group understudied and inadequately represented in the management literature. Juma and Sequiera found that individual factors such as social capital and psychological capital and external factors such as environment and financial capital have implications for venture

performance. Neumeyer, Santos, Caetano, and Kalbfleisch (2019) found that social capital and networks are critical to the success of women entrepreneurs in their entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, African American women entrepreneurs have unique barriers, bounded by race and gender that cause them to trail behind White women entrepreneurs. Bloggers have begun transforming the blogosphere into an organizational field (Erz & Christensen, 2018); it is important that African American women bloggers are included in the development and economic success of this emerging organizational market (Steele, 2018).

Roca-Sales and Lopez-Garcia (2017) conducted a study of lifestyle blogs written and edited by women bloggers compared to the traditional content of women's magazines, examining themes such as beauty and fashion, relationships, and traditional roles of women in the home, and concluded that lifestyle blogs have writing tones that are more progressive and mirrored portrayals of femininity via themes similar to those found in the content of popular women's magazines, with style and beauty being the most prevalent. However, African American women have a different perspective of beauty compared to mainstream beauty standards. Beauty and fashion are intrinsically connected to race and identity in the United States (Mannur, 2017), particularly for the African American woman. Steele (2018) argued that blogging provides an online environment for political resistance and cultural discourse traditionally expressed in the African American community. These online spaces create opportunities to participate in debate and dialogue that excludes marginalized groups, such as mainstream media. Blogs naturally create a

space for marginalized groups to converge and discuss topics and issues that are not traditionally a topic of focus in the majority culture (Steele, 2016).

Problem Statement

Within the context of technological changes, labor market instability, and minority women's search for greater career mobility, female digital entrepreneurship in the form of blogging has emerged as a disruptive technology to traditional modes of work among women of color, and specifically African American women (Martinez Dy, 2017, 2018; Steele, 2018). The flexibility of blogging is a factor that leads many women to see it as an attractive career, as is the ability to work in a creative field, be one's own boss, and the possibility of sponsored vacations and complimentary products (Duffy, 2017; Novoselova & Jenson, 2018). Approximately 29 million career bloggers were estimated to be in the United States in 2016 (Statista, 2017) and 11% are considered digital entrepreneurs earning more than $30,000 annually from blogging (Collamer, 2015). The general problem is many minority women bloggers' transition from being traditionally employed to managing a one-person digital enterprise can result in racial and gender imbalances created by nontraditional modes of work (Duffy, 2017; Hatfield, 2018; Martinez Dy et al., 2018).

Researchers and practitioners have largely ignored understanding business and personal implications for women bloggers in managing as a one-person digital business (Coleman, 2016; Lepkowska-White, & Kortright, 2018). A meta-analysis of female digital entrepreneurship literature indicates the underrepresentation of women of color, particularly in studies of top-ranked bloggers (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Duffy &

Pruchniewska, 2017). This literature gap holds particularly true for studies on digital entrepreneurship among women of color, and specifically African American women (Harris, 2015; Juma, & Sequeira, 2017). Blogging as digital entrepreneurship places Black women in a unique position to open new meanings of racial identity within the entrepreneurship field (Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018); however, their lived experiences may be complicated by current racial and gender imbalances, such as financial challenges, access to financial credit, and gaps in entrepreneurial skills (Krieger-Boden & Sorgner, 2018; Martinez Dy et al., 2017). The specific problem is a deeper understanding was needed on the lived experiences of African American women bloggers on managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; Long & Wilhoit, 2018; Martinez Dy et al., 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. Data were collected starting with a purposeful sample of 15-20 information-rich participants for in-depth study until data saturation was achieved. Qualitative methodologists support that no more than 15 participants may be used to reach thematic saturation for a qualitative study, and long interviews with up to 15-20 people tend to be sufficient for a PhD phenomenological study (Baker & Edwards, 2012; Dworkin, 2012; Mason, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). The

phenomenona studied for this research was how African American women bloggers managed a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of racial and gender identity in their online work. To ensure trustworthiness of data and the potential to affect positive social change, this empirical phenomenological study's data were analyzed by distinguishing between the internal horizon, the construction of trustworthiness as it takes place within the research project, and the external horizon, which points to the impact of the study results in the world mediated by trustworthiness (Collier-Reed, Ingerman, & Berglund, 2009; Moustakas, 1994) .

Research Question

How do African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work?

Conceptual Framework

This study was framed by three key concepts that focus on the experiences of African American women bloggers who identify as digital entrepreneurs: Brydges and Sjöholm's concept of personal style blogger, Martinez Dy et al.'s concept of women digital entrepreneurs, and Gabriel's concept of Black identity online. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. The findings of this empirical investigation were aimed at advancing knowledge and a deeper understanding of blogging as a professional career

and a form of digital entrepreneurship for African American women and contribute

original qualitative research to the study's conceptual framework.

      Personal style blogger. The blogging business is an evolving and unpredictable

enterprise that demands consistency, marketing plans, structured and planned content,

revenue models that outline streams of income, and discipline to ensure a sustainable

career for the professional blogger (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019). Brydges and Sjöholm

(2019) developed their concept of the professional blogger by building a skillset involved

in transforming blogging into a professional endeavor for commercial benefit, which

includes how capacities and attributes of the blogger evolve into aesthetic and digital

work behavior with an audience comprising readers, sponsors, and the wider blogger

community (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Rocamora, 2011). Brydges and Sjöholm (2019)

constructed a more focused concept of personal style blogger through an integrated

literature review of scholarly papers addressing recent trends surrounding personal style

blogging. Wherever human beings exist, social spaces are also found (Bourdieu, 1985).

Bourdieu (1989) theory of fields and social spaces posits that a "person's social existence

is always aligned with life circumstances, social position, and culture" (p. 16). The

explanation of what it means to be a career blogger is helpful to understanding the path of

blogging as an evolutionary process through social spaces (Pedroni, 2015).

      Women digital entrepreneurs. Digital entrepreneurship is idealized as an

opportunity for marginalized and economically challenged groups to participate in and

reap financial benefits from the market (Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial

activity is viewed as an answer to solving socioeconomic inequalities and poverty around

the world (Brush, Edelman, Manolova, & Welter, 2018). The adoption of mobile Internet

across global populations has led to an upsurge in digital entrepreneurial possibility,

given the assumption that digital enterprises require minimal resources from startup to

full functionality (Barman & Das, 2018; Park, Sung, & Im, 2017). In addition to

ubiquitous access to technology, disadvantage theory posits that social capital,

psychological capital, financial capital, and environment play a role in business venture

performance (Juma & Sequeira, 2017).

Digital technology access is expected to reduce underemployment and

unemployment, enabling greater economic participation for women and other

marginalized groups and thus offer wider economic benefits across societies (Global

Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2018; Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Martinez Dy et al. (2017)

developed their concept of women digital entrepreneurs in a study where their work

extended intersectionality theory as a critical analytical framework to inform social

standing and its impact on digital entrepreneurial activity. Originating in Black feminism

(Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1986), intersectionality theory explained how multiple

identities form relative to power relations (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson,

2013), and intersectionality can thus show workplace experiences reflect the intersections

of race and gender (Bowleg & Bauer, 2016).

Black female identity online. Despite being a socially and economically

marginalized group, African American users' proficiency in terms of social networking

and use of various online platforms helps in confronting oppressive systems (Brock,

2009). All demographic groups have strong participation in social networking; however,

African Americans over index in terms of social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). The form and content of African American oral culture is visible through African Americans' contributions to online platforms (Brock, 2009; Florini, 2014; Steele, 2018). African Americans and other groups who have maintained an oral narrative tradition within their culture are uniquely positioned to benefit from recent digital technologies (Steele, 2018), due to the dominant Western society's transfer to a secondary orality online (Ong, 2002).

In approaching the Black female identity online, attention is being conveyed to the possibilities that exist for Black female users of digital technologies to express their cultural identity through blogs (Gabriel, 2016). Past research indicated that individuals express a sense of racial identity, using the Internet to negotiate their own online identities (Brock, 2009; Byrne, 2008). These findings are grounded in Black feminist theory (Collins, 1990), which calls attention to how knowledge empowers Black communities and situates Black women as agents of knowledge (Brewer, 2016). As "agents of knowledge", Black women build their online identity by referencing their lived experiences in order to challenge intersectionality and gendered racism (Collins, 1990, p. 221). The research on Black women bloggers is limited in terms of information regarding how this marginalized group interacts with blogging technologies to communicate with their audience helps to develop deeper understanding of bloggers and the blogosphere (Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018).

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. By using a phenomenological research method, I addressed scholars' recommendations for further research on the study topic and explicated the meaning, structure, and essence of explored a sample of African American women bloggers and their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of racial identity within this nontraditional mode of work (Jones, 2017; Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; Long & Wilhoit, 2018). Transcendental phenomenology as suggested by Moustakas (1994) was employed as a qualitative research design and aligns with a natural form of inquiry that facilitated discovery of participants' meanings of lived experiences. Quantitative analysis was not recommended as an applicable research method for this study (Lampard & Pole, 2015). Quantitative methods are best suited for studies seeking causation or documenting results related to range and correlation (Harkiolakis, 2017). Numerical measurement is immaterial to this study, as the purpose does not involve objective analysis of numerical data, causality, nor correlation of variables for gaining an in-depth understanding of African American women bloggers lived experiences.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested qualitative inquiry as a natural means for collecting data that provides in-depth insight into the phenomenon under investigation. In contrast with quantitative research, where conditions are controlled and variables are

managed, qualitative research is conducted naturally in everyday life settings related to the phenomenon under study. In a qualitative study, the researcher discovers meanings through interviews, reflexive journaling, and analyzing autobiographical narratives that participants in their natural settings connect to a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

To reach saturation where no new knowledge is obtained, thorough interviews with 15-20 participants are sufficient for a qualitative study (Mason, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In a qualitative study, the population of a study is the totality of persons from which cases may legitimately be sampled for participation in interviews or other data collection protocols (Robinson, 2014). The sample of 15-20 participants for this study was drawn from a population group meeting the following inclusion criteria: African American adult females over the age of 30, founders of a lifestyle blog identified as a one-person digital enterprise, managing a personal lifestyle blog for a minimum of 2 years after startup, and possessing well-developed attitudes and opinions regarding African American women bloggers managing a one-person digital enterprise. The age criterion is used by scholars in other similar studies who conclude that this age criterion allows sufficient time for participants to establish a specific direction in their careers as leaders of an enterprise (Bamiatzi, Jones, Mitchelmore, & Nikolopoulos, 2015; Juma & Sequeira, 2017; Overbeke, Bilimoria, & Perelli, 2013). The age of business enterprise criterion, for participant selection, distinguished women who entered the business as a stop-gap measure or in a clerical or supportive position absent of an intention to assume sustained executive responsibilities (Overbeke et al., 2013). The knowledge criterion was

used by scholars in similar studies on career bloggers (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; SanMiguel, & Sádaba, 2018).

Data collection occurred via long interviews ranging from 45 minutes to 1 hour in length, distinctive of phenomenological research, incorporating probing questions that elicited open-ended responses in a relaxed setting, as recommended by Moustakas (1994). Virtual, semi-structured interviews were administered using Skype or telephone with respondents who met the participation requirements of the study. Evidence collected from interviewing African American women bloggers produced data that provided deep insight into the lived experiences of the study's sample. A sample size of 15 to 20 African American women bloggers was determined with the goal of attaining data saturation, as recommended for on a qualitative study (Mason, 2010; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

The method of data analysis of interview transcripts for this study incorporated Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method, recommended for the analysis of phenomenological data. Because some scholars suggest the use of qualitative analysis software, and at times can compromise the trustworthiness of results in studies with a long interview format; manual hand coding was employed to analyze the data (de Casterle, Gastmans, Byron, & Denier, 2012; Jennings, 2007; Rogers, 2018). The purpose of this study guided the connection of the data to the findings which revealed a deeper understanding of African American women bloggers' lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work.

Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis is one of rigor and structured processes. First, I followed the epoche protocol by removing bias, preconceived thoughts, and viewed the events from as objective a viewpoint as possible (Moustakas, 1994). Second, I clustered meaning units and themes constructed using horizonalization to extract meaningful expressions information from interview transcriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Third, through the process of imaginative variation, I clustered the themes into an explanation of the experiences of the individual participant's textual/individual and structural descriptions, and then constructed a composite structural description of all the individual structural descriptions into a group of universal structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of African American women blogger's lived experiences. I synthesized the themes into an explanation of the experiences of the individuals (textual and structural descriptions), and then constructed a composite description of the meanings and the essences of African American women bloggers' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Definitions

Digital entrepreneurship: A business enterprise that leverages and relies on the Internet to sell products and services (Standing & Mattsson, 2018).

Entrepreneurial activities: Business activity undertaken by an entrepreneur related to starting a business or sustaining an established business, such as opportunity evaluation, opportunity exploitation, and creating products and services (GEM, 2018; Kollmann, Stockmann, & Kensbock, 2017).

Entrepreneurial blogger: A blogger who participates in economic activity and has monetized their blog for the purposes of generating revenue (Gustafsson & Khan, 2017).

Lifestyle blogger: A blogger who authors a blog with an engaging editorial tone, which typically focuses on the areas of family, relationships, beauty, and health with a largely female audience, and where the reader perceives advertisements as recommendations (Roca-Sales & Lopez-Garcia, 2017).

One-person digital enterprise: An independent self-enterprise that exists and operates in a digital environment online (Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017).

Online identity: A curated desired image (Lepkowska-White & Kortright, 2018) and the dissemination of one's personal brand online via various social networks and platforms (Ashman, Patterson, & Brown, 2018; Kozinets, Patterson, & Ashman, 2016).

Personal style blogger: Self-employed digital content creators of style and fashion via a branded persona (Duffy & Hund, 2015).

Social media influencer: A person who uses their personal lifestyle to share advertised content on social media and blogs (Abidin, 2016) with the intention that their followers will purchase the advertised product. A person who shares content as merchandise online (Roca-Sales & Lopez-Garcia, 2017).

Assumptions

An assumption is that with the continued growth and rapid expansion of social media tools and online platforms, digital entrepreneurship is a growing field sought after as an untraditional career path. The evolving development of new and free social media tools will make it easier for traditionally underrepresented groups to start and run their

own one-person digital enterprises, thus eliminating traditional barriers to entry for

entrepreneurship faced by minority women (Shelton, & Minniti, 2017), and particularly

African American women.

It is assumed that bloggers and digital influencers are uniquely positioned to be

their own boss, develop their own brand, and market themselves directly to consumers

using social media and online platforms. As digital entrepreneurship becomes more

appealing, those in the beginning stages of entrepreneurial activity will experience

challenges transitioning from a traditional workplace with structure, to a one-person

digital enterprise with a wide-open territory. Securing healthcare (Fossen & Konig, 2017)

and managing one's schedule and time are assumed challenges in this expanding field of

entrepreneurship.

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study was to understand the lived experiences of African

American women bloggers in the United States in terms of managing a one-person digital

enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this

nontraditional mode of work. This population was chosen because African American

women are a rising group of bloggers and content creators; however, they are often not

equally represented (Rodney, Cappeliez, Oleschuk, & Johnston, 2017) at the highest

levels of blogging. The entrepreneurial activity of African American women in the

United States is substantial (GEM, 2016; Winch, 2017), yet this group traditionally has

been marginalized in terms of capital and other resources that are required to start and

sustain a successful venture. Moreover, racial and gender inequalities can complicate the transition from a traditional means of employment to a one-person digital enterprise.

The data collection sample for this study was delimited to a population group meeting the following criteria: African American adult females over access the age of 30 who were founders of a lifestyle blog identified as a one-person digital enterprise, managed a personal style blog for a minimum of 2 years after startup, and possessed well-developed attitudes and opinions regarding African American women bloggers managing a one-person digital enterprise. This study has the potential to be transferable to future research related to African American women who transition from a traditional nine-to-five career with a desire to become entrepreneurs. Additionally, this study of lived experiences of African American women bloggers managing a one-person digital enterprise may be transferable, because the field of digital entrepreneurship has experienced exponential growth (Standing & Mattsson, 2018), and the online aspect of this emerging field provides economic opportunities for women of color who face challenges advancing to top-tier positions in corporations (Berkoff & Fredrich, 2017).

Limitations

Identifying African American women bloggers who manage their one-person digital enterprise on a full-time basis was difficult. Many style bloggers start blogging as a hobby while they are still working in a traditional employed environment (Delisle & Parmentier, 2016; Armstrong & McDowell, 2018; Pedroni & Pofi, 2018). Increasingly, African American women bloggers are reaching the revenue level needed to leave their

traditional career field. However, there were some participants who did not meet that ideal requirement.

As the researcher and an African American woman style blogger myself, I needed to avoid potential bias in this study. To ensure that my current experience and knowledge as a style blogger did not influence this study, I incorporated the protocol of epoche. Epoche calls for removing understandings, biases, what is known, and preconceived notions so that the researcher can approach the phenomena from a fresh viewpoint, as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it may fill a gap in research regarding the lived experiences of African American women bloggers with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial identity within this non-traditional mode of work (Juma, & Sequeira, 2017; Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Although there is a group of studies that examine the African American woman's history in predominantly White workplaces (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). This study is important in that it explores many facets of experiences among African American women bloggers identifying as digital entrepreneurs, a rarely studied phenomenon in entrepreneurship and management literature. Historically, traditional forms of employment did not provide adequate pathways to success for minorities, leading some African Americans to create fruitful black market economies in major cities, like Chicago (Venkatesh, 2006). Entrepreneurial endeavors tend to be a natural fit for racial minorities, as entrepreneurship is recognized as an opportunity for advancement and financial growth over traditional means of

employment (Bates, Bradford, & Seamans, 2018). Notwithstanding the appeal of being an entrepreneur and the enactment of public policies geared toward supporting racial-minority entrepreneurship, today's women digital entrepreneurs from marginalized populations continue to face barriers that drive systemic inequality (Byrne, Fattoum, & Diaz Garcia, 2018).

Discriminatory barriers have negative implications for racial minorities who desire to embark on entrepreneurial ventures but lack the social and economic resources required when starting a new venture (Edelman & Brush, 2018; Kanze, Huang, Conley, & Higgins, 2018). Since these unequal barriers are pervasive for minority entrepreneurs involved in digital entrepreneurship, the study of a sector of this population may lead to significant implications for theory, practice, and social change (Martinez Dy et al., 2018; Neville, Forrester, O'Toole, & Riding, 2017). At the time of the review of literature for this study, not one peer-reviewed paper was available that explored the business experiences of African American women bloggers on managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial identity within this non-traditional mode of work (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; Long & Wilhoit, 2018).

Significance to Practice

This study is significant to practice and explored gender and racial imbalances in the age of digitization and barriers that may hinder women from taking advantage of digital entrepreneurship (Harris, 2015; Juma, & Sequeira, 2017). Developing a critical discourse exposing inherent gender and racial biases within entrepreneurship practice is significant in terms of recognizing how discriminatory assumptions fundamentally shape

the definition of entrepreneurship (Sriram, & Mersha, 2017). Scholarly discourse on this topic (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Foss, Henry, Ahl, & Mikalsen, 2018) has revealed the traditional normative stereotype of entrepreneurs as mature White males from middle-class backgrounds narrows understanding of entrepreneurship practice and behavior. Recommendations from this proposed study may inform policy to support digital entrepreneurship opportunities for women to gain access to capital, higher education, and digital technologies, all of which can support digital entrepreneurial opportunities (Halabisky, 2018).

It is important for the practice of entrepreneurship and management to study the benefits and challenges of blogging as a self-managed one-person enterprise among women, the largest demographic group among bloggers, who leave behind employed work, managerial supervision, employee benefit programs, and flexibility policies (Long & Wilhoit, 2018; Neumeyer et al., 2019). The pursuit of blogging as digital entrepreneurship among women of color will only grow in the coming decade (Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Blogging as digital entrepreneurship places African American women in a unique position to open new meanings of racial identity within the entrepreneurship field (Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018).

Significance to Theory

Although there is literature that documents biases against women of color who attempt blogging as a one-person digital enterprise, there is a dearth of studies specifically documenting the lived experiences of African American women entrepreneurs who have transitioned from salaried employment to blogging as a career

option (Martinez Dy et al., 2017; Sorgner & Krieger-Boden, 2017). While it is now recognized that gendered ascriptions critically influence the entrepreneurial activity of women, the literature has largely focused upon women as a homogeneous category to explain this thesis (Marlow & Martinez Dy, 2018). Thus, critical analyses of gender and race based upon women's propensity for and experiences involving business venturing have been of fundamental and far-reaching importance in challenging prevailing theories that have informed contemporary understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship (Dean, Larsen, Ford, & Akram, 2019; Henry, Foss, & Ahl, 2016).

Blogging as digital entrepreneurship places Black women in a unique position to open new meanings of racial identity within the entrepreneurship field; (Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018), however, their lived experiences may be complicated by current racial and gender imbalances, such as financial challenges, access to financial credit, and gaps in entrepreneurial skills (Martinez Dy et al., 2017; Sorgner & Krieger-Boden, 2017). This study offers a theoretical lens to view unequal treatment within the scope of entrepreneurship in driving systemic discouragement among certain marginalized groups toward specific entrepreneurial activities (Neville et al., 2017). This study is significant in that it makes an original contribution to theoretical literature on advancing knowledge and a deeper understanding of blogging as a form of digital entrepreneurship and racial identity construction for African American women, and to contribute original qualitative research to the study's conceptual framework.

Significance to Social Change

Encouraging more women to engage with business venturing is deemed highly desirable to social inequities addressing issues such as extreme poverty in third world countries (Sutter, Bruton, & Chen, 2019), to unemployment and flexible working in developed economies (Neville et al., 2017). Consequently, this study of minority female digital entrepreneurship may contribute to social change by exploring gender bias and the significance of racial identity online in terms of assumptions underpinning entrepreneurial activities and policy initiatives to fund and support minority women entrepreneurs through mentoring programs and access to financing (Edelman & Brush, 2018). By doing so, the results of this study may further promote social change by making policymakers aware regarding issues of equal treatment and access to digital entrepreneurial opportunity for marginalized populations such as African American women bloggers managing a one-person digital enterprise (Martinez Dy et al., 2017; Sorgner & Krieger-Boden, 2017).

Summary and Transition

The growth of one-person digital enterprises and blogging among African American women has initiated the need to study how this population transitions from the traditional workforce to operating a one-person digital enterprise. Furthermore, the rise of style blogging and influencers opens new entrepreneurial opportunities for an otherwise traditionally marginalized group. While blogging is growing and bloggers are taking advantage of generating revenue as a one-person digital enterprise, African American women are largely underrepresented among top-tier bloggers. As a result, a deeper

understanding is needed regarding lived experiences of African American women bloggers in terms of managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work.

The qualitative phenomenological research method is applicable to this study as it aligns with the form of inquiry designed to discover the participant's meanings of lived experiences. The conceptual framework that guided this study centers on the concept of personal style blogger, women digital entrepreneurs, and Black identity online. This study addresses suggested future research in the literature and is important as it explores a rarely researched phenomenon in the entrepreneurship and management literature. Chapter 2 includes a literature review focused on African American women bloggers as a one-person digital enterprise, related themes, and the conceptual framework of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Blogging as digital entrepreneurship places Black women in a unique position to open new meanings of racial identity within the entrepreneurship field (Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018); however, their lived experiences may be complicated by current racial and gender imbalances, such as financial challenges, access to financial credit, and gaps in entrepreneurial skills (Krieger-Boden & Sorgner, 2018; Martinez Dy et al., 2017). The specific problem is a deeper understanding is needed on the lived experiences of African American women bloggers on managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; Martinez Dy et al., 2018). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. There is a critical need for research that extends to all areas of female entrepreneurship (Yadav & Unni, 2016), and specifically Black women who are underrepresented in literature (Duffy, 2017; Steele, 2018).

In Chapter 2, I provide the literature search strategy along with the conceptual framework upon which the research rests. I present a synthesis of knowledge on the lived experiences of African American women bloggers. Finally, I offer a critical analysis of the literature in which this study is grounded.

Literature Search Strategy

Chapter 2 consists of a review of literature on African American women bloggers and digital entrepreneurship to support, review, and analyze information relevant to understanding how this group operates as a one-person digital enterprise. This chapter is organized into eight major categories. The first category provides insight into African American women in the traditional workplace, including their experiences and challenges. The second category focuses on women entrepreneurs in the United States today, reviewing the gender gap and minority experiences of entrepreneurship. The third category provides insight into digital entrepreneurship. The fourth category reviews the evolution of blogging and types of bloggers. The fifth category, entrepreneurial blogger, reviews literature on the business of blogging and monetizing blog content. The sixth category reviews African American women and online identity. The seventh category, reviews African American women as digital entrepreneurs. The final section addresses the literature gap involving studies of African American women bloggers as digital entrepreneurs.

A search of literature on African American women in the traditional workplace yielded information on obstacles that African American women experience in the workforce and racial and gender imbalances they face as employees. A search of women entrepreneurs revealed the literature tends to exemplify White males as the prototypical entrepreneur. This search further revealed the unique obstacles minority women entrepreneurs face in comparison to their White counterparts. A search of the literature on digital entrepreneurship yielded a definition of this genre of entrepreneurship. Digital

entrepreneurship informs the specific area of one-person digital entrepreneurship for women in general and African American women specifically. A search of the evolution of blogging yielded results that provided information on the history of blogging, types of bloggers, and how this group conducts marketing as a one-person digital enterprise. A search of entrepreneurial blogger yielded information on blogging as a business enterprise and monetizing blogs to generate revenue. A search of African American women and online identity returned information concerning cultural identity and online platforms that provide digital spaces where African American women can share their identity. A search of the literature on African American women as digital entrepreneurs returned minimal research on African American women operating as digital entrepreneurs. To address the lack of research in this area, I focused on the potential of African American women as digital entrepreneurs based on the literature review of digital entrepreneurship.

Google Scholar was the starting point for the majority of the literature review searches on African American women bloggers and digital entrepreneurship. Search terms were *minority women and the workplace*, *African American women and the workplace*, *career obstacles for minority women*, *gender inequalities in the workplace, racial issues in the workplace, microaggressions and African American women, women entrepreneurs, minority women entrepreneurs, Black women entrepreneurs, African American women entrepreneurs, digital entrepreneurship, one-person digital entrepreneurship, female digital entrepreneur, African American women digital entrepreneurship, black women digital entrepreneur, history of blogging, blogosphere,*

types of bloggers, style blogger, personal style blogger, fashion blogger, influencers, social media influencers, marketing and bloggers, advertising as a blogger, advertising and digital enterprise, advertising as one-person digital enterprise, entrepreneurial blogger, blogging business, monetizing blogs, online identity, African American women and online identity, and Black women and online identity. The search terms help to retrieve peer-reviewed journal articles from the following databases: Academic Search Complete, EBSCOHost, Business Source Complete, the Digital Commons, Elsevier, ProQuest Central, PsycNet, ResearchGate, SAGE Journals, Science Direct, Springer, Taylor & Francis Online, and Wiley Online Library. A total of 273 articles were retrieved and incorporated in this study for a review of the research literature on African American women bloggers and digital entrepreneurship.

Conceptual Framework

This study is framed by three key concepts that focus on the experiences of African American women bloggers who identify as digital entrepreneurs: Brydges and Sjöholm's (2019) concept of *personal style blogger*, Martinez Dy et al.'s (2017) concept of *women digital entrepreneurs*, and Gabriel's (2016) concept of *Black identity online*. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. The findings of this empirical investigation are aimed at advancing knowledge and a deeper understanding of blogging as a professional career and form of digital entrepreneurship for African American

women and to contribute original qualitative research to the study's conceptual framework.

Personal Style Blogger

The blogging business is an evolving and unpredictable enterprise that demands consistency, marketing plans, structured and planned content, revenue models that outline streams of income, and discipline to ensure a sustainable career for the professional blogger (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019). Brydges and Sjöholm (2019) developed their concept of the professional blogger by building a skillset involved in transforming blogging into a professional endeavor for commercial benefit. This skillset includes how capacities and attributes of the blogger evolve into aesthetic and digital work behavior with an audience comprising readers, sponsors and the wider blogger community (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Rocamora, 2011). By engaging followers, bloggers share their personal preferences and cultivated aesthetic taste, resulting in the acquisition of cultural capital, which can then be monetized (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013). The majority of female bloggers recently researched online by Brydges & Sjöholm (2019) belong to a subcategory of the professional blogger: the personal style blogger. The personal style blogger must share a consistent and curated professional image that is perceived as real-life or authentic content, which can lead to both notoriety and credibility within their readership and blogging community (Pihl & Sandström, 2013).

Brydges and Sjöholm (2019) built their concept of personal style blogger through an integrated literature review of scholarly papers addressing recent trends surrounding personal style blogging. Wherever human beings exist, social spaces are also found

(Bourdieu, 1985). Bourdieu's (1989) theory of fields and social spaces posits that a "person's social existence is always aligned with life circumstances, social position, and culture" (p. 16). The explanation of what it means to be a career blogger is helpful to understanding the path of blogging as an evolutionary process through social spaces (Pedroni, 2015). Social spaces comprise of relationships between individuals, individuals and institutions, and between institutions themselves (Bourdieu, 1989), and these social spaces include online communities built by personal style bloggers (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; Pedroni, 2015). Scholars concur that further research is needed in this emerging field of personal style blogging, a profession that can be fully understood, by exploring of voices of single bloggers in juxtaposition to their particular offline and online social spaces (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; Harju, 2018).

Women Digital Entrepreneurs

Digital entrepreneurship is idealized as an opportunity for marginalized and economically challenged groups to participate in and reap financial benefits from the market (Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial activity is viewed as an answer to solving socio-economic inequalities and poverty around the world (Brush et al., 2018). The adoption of mobile Internet across global populations has ignited an upsurge in digital entrepreneurial possibility, given the assumption that digital enterprises require minimal resources from start-up to full functionality (Barman & Das, 2018; Park et al., 2017). Digital technology access is expected to reduce under and unemployment, enabling greater economic participation for women and other marginalized groups and thus, offer wider economic benefits across societies (GEM, 2018; Martinez Dy et al.,

2017). With ubiquitous access to technology, women digital entrepreneurs will also

require social capital, psychological capital, financial capital, and an optimal business

environment to increase the likelihood of success, according to disadvantage theory

(Juma & Sequeira, 2017).

Martinez Dy et al. (2017) developed their concept of women digital entrepreneurs

in a study where their work extended intersectionality theory as a critical analytical

framework to inform social standing and its impact on digital entrepreneurial activity.

Originating in Black feminism (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1986), intersectionality theory

explained how multiple identities form relative to power relations (Carbado et al., 2013),

and intersectionality can thus show workplace experiences reflect the intersections of

race and gender (Bowleg & Bauer, 2016). Experiences of gendered racism arise from

stereotypes associated with minorities and women, perpetuating stereotypes that produce

the social practices of exclusion (Essed, 1991; Feliciano, 2016). Martinez Dy et al. (2017)

developed an extension of intersectionality theory to explain how the concept of

intersectionality affects women's experiences of digital entrepreneurship and social

inequalities while also grounding their writing in feminist entrepreneurship theory (Ahl &

Marlow, 2012; Poggesi, Mari, & De Vita, 2015).

Characteristics such as gender, technology usage, and institutional biases can

become barriers to gendered entrepreneurship posing various challenges for women

digital entrepreneurs (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). Through their conceptual research,

Martinez Dy et al. (2017) identified these biases as disadvantageous leading to a shortage

of women digital entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs have reported less accessibility to

resources as a direct result of limitations posed by gender, race/ethnicity and social class position (Edelman & Brush, 2018). Given these limitations, researchers continue to monitor women engaged in digital entrepreneurial ventures while weeding through multiple challenges (GEM, 2018). Martinez Dy et al. (2017) argued that despite the assumed neutrality of the Internet, women digital entrepreneurs face multiple challenges and the present research is inadequate to explain the daily life experiences of women digital entrepreneurs as influenced by gender, race, and class position.

Black Female Identity Online

Despite being a socially and economically marginalized group, African American users' proficiency in social networking and the use of various online platforms persist in confronting oppressive systems (Brock, 2009). All demographic groups have evinced strong participation in social networking; however, African Americans over-index in social media platform giants Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Duggan et al., 2015). The form and content of African American oral culture is visible in African Americans' contributions to online platforms (Brock, 2009; Florini, 2014; Steele, 2018). African Americans and other groups who have maintained an oral narrative tradition within their culture are uniquely positioned to benefit from recent digital technologies (Steele, 2018), due to the dominant Western society's transfer to a secondary orality online (Ong, 2002).

In approaching the Black female identity online, attention is being conveyed to the possibilities that exist for Black female users of digital technologies to express their cultural identity through blogs (Gabriel, 2016). Past research indicated that individuals express a sense of racial identity, utilizing the Internet to negotiate their own online

identities (Brock, 2009; Byrne, 2008). These findings are grounded in Black feminist theory (Collins, 1990), which calls attention to how knowledge empowers Black communities and situates Black women as 'agents of knowledge' (Brewer, 2016). As 'agents of knowledge', Black women build their online identity by referencing their lived experiences to challenge intersectionality and gendered racism (Collins, 1990, p. 221).

The Internet as a medium has been employed for online discourse on the meaning of Black identity (Daniels, 2013). Black women have begun using blogs as an entry to digital entrepreneurship and challenging cybertypes – negative stereotypes about marginalized populations circulating in cyberspace (Martinez Dy et al., 2018; Nakamura, 2013). Black women bloggers are coming out of anonymity to own their cultural heritage and define their lived experiences to develop their Black female identity online (Gabriel, 2016). Viewing the Internet as a place for public and private dialog is critical to understanding how blogger identities are developed online (Coleman, 2019). Seeing the blogosphere in this light declares it as a space for rhetoric and reflexivity, and for sharing blog posts as a means of self-expression to be shared with a larger online audience (Boylorn, 2013). When race is considered, scholars suggest that motivations of Black bloggers are often to challenge negative stereotypes of Black identity (Ramushu, 2014; Steele, 2018).

Literature Review

African American Women and the Traditional Workplace

Women are significantly underrepresented as executive leaders in organizations, with few organizations actually being led by a woman CEO (Ng & Sears, 2017; Glass &

Cook, 2016). Advancement is marginal in corporate executive positions where women often reach a glass ceiling (Ganiyu, Oluwafemi, Ademola, & Olatunji, 2018) and are unable to advance further. The intersection of race and gender has singled out the African American woman and a closer look into how intersectional identity informs the experiences that are encountered by these women in the workplace is largely under documented (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016). With a lack of research and documentation, this marginalized group of women has experienced a muted voice, which results in their stories not being told and their experiences not being understood (Remedios & Snyder, 2018). The traditional workplace is a long-standing, White, male network and continues to be an obstacle for women of color to gain equal opportunity status with their Caucasian peers- men and women (Chavez & Wingfield, 2018).

In an organization, the pressure of being the only minority corporate leader brings extra scrutiny, limits the ability to be successful at leading, and negatively affects job satisfaction (Cook & Glass, 2014). Women of color in particular face double discrimination, once for their gender and again for their race (Mora & Davila, 2014). Black women are almost never represented in top-tier leadership positions (Linnabery, Stuhlmacher, & Towler, 2014). Minority women are more likely to be selected for leadership positions during a time of organizational crisis for optics and not necessarily for their ability to lead (Kulich, Iacoviello, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2018). When Black women leaders are associated with organizational failure, they are penalized at a higher rate than all other leaders, male and female (Vial, Napier, & Brescoll, 2016).

In addition to these challenges, African American women experience inequality in income in the traditional workforce (Balkin et al., 2017). A wage gap exists between professional women of color and all other ethnic groups and genders, with women of color earning the least for completing the same job (Vardeman-Winter & Place, 2017). Career mentoring has been shown to be effective for African American women to flourish in the workplace (Wozencroft, 2017). However, mentoring relationships are not readily available nor abundant for African American women (Davis, 2016). Mentorship is important because an advanced degree does not guarantee advancement for Black women in the workplace (Hall, 2018).

Organizations are built upon and embedded with capitalist intentions, power dynamics, and objectives based on neoliberalism, which often supersedes the promotion of diversity and equality (Rodriquez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2016; Shepherd, 2018). Societal norms are mirrored in workplace culture where White males establish organizational policies and practices, which were not created with women or minorities in mind (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016). While diversity programs in organizations are ubiquitous, they often do not result in more Black women leaders (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Companies that prominently feature Black women employees may deal with negative perceptions of the company's reputation stemming from negative racial stereotypes (Wilton, Sanchez, Unzueta, Kaiser, & Caluori, 2019).

Career obstacles are prominent for marginalized groups (Kim & O'Brien, 2018). Black women deal with daily discriminations and stereotypes that contribute to the role of how Black professional women are viewed in the traditional workplace (Rahman,

Shore, & Lightner-Laws, 2016). For example, Black women are viewed as less intelligent and when they are vocal, they are characterized as aggressive (Breslin, Pandey, & Riccucci, 2017). These stereotypes contribute to the racial discrimination of women of color that takes place in the workplace and is compounded, with discrimination based on their gender (Reese, 2019). As a result, Black women negotiate separate identities at work in the form of identify shifting as a coping and protection mechanism from discrimination and marginalization (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Identity shifting by African American women in the workplace can support professional social advancement, but constant switching is at the detriment of their well-being and causes physical and emotional stress (Dickens, Womack, & Dimes, 2019). Women of color also deal with stressors related to work that do not necessarily take place in the workplace. Work-life balance is an obstacle for African American women because they are more likely to need childcare and have to find alternative ways to meet the demands of family life and work (Hamidullah & Riccucci, 2017).

Marginalization of ethnic minorities contributes to negative workplace stress, job displeasure, and motivation to seek new employment (Duffy et al., 2018). These stressors create barriers for African American women who are trying to build their career. Black women contend with the paradox of sticking out as a minority while also being dismissed as invisible at the same time (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Women of color deal with discrimination based on their physical and visible ethnic attributes. To avoid additional discrimination, women of color will attempt to conceal their social economic status in the workplace (Kallschmidt & Eaton, 2019), as social class is an additional target for

oppression at work (Hollis, 2018). Communication can also prove to be a stressor in the workplace. Microaggressions have a negative effect on the mental health and self-perception of people of color (Bonifacio, Gushue, & Mejia-Smith, 2018) and are pervasive in the workplace (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). Microaggressions are slighted statements made by a person in social and racial power, that are demeaning and insensitive to the recipient, based on racial or ethnic stereotypes (Mekawi & Todd, 2018).

It is important to Black women, for both their racial identity and their gender identity to be accepted and valued in the workplace (Pietri, Johnson, & Ozgumus, 2018). However, Black women are less likely to be noticed or heard by their White counterparts (Sesko & Biernat, 2018), they are labeled stereotypically as incompetent, low-performers (Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017), their contributions are overlooked for promotions and pay increases (Allen & Lewis, 2016), their accomplishments are more likely to go unrecognized, and Black women are evaluated more stringently than their White, and even Black male, colleagues (Rosette et al., 2016). Therefore, stressors that are typical in the workplace are exacerbated and become chronic for Black women because they are valued differently than their non-minority colleagues (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012).

Racial and gender imbalances in the traditional workplace. Gender differences have been shown to not have an effect on the ability to lead (Seo, Huang, & Han, 2017), yet women, and more specifically minority women, are most often not represented in management and leadership positions (Christensen & Muhr, 2018). Gender imbalances have an effect on how women work. Women and minorities are more likely

to advance to management positions when there is a human resource executive at the top-tier leadership level of the organization (Graham, Belliveau, & Hotchkiss, 2017) overseeing the hiring and promotion process.

The exemplar of the prototypical worker as male perpetuates gender inequities and identity challenges for women in the workplace (Bierema, 2016). Gender and race discrimination in the workplace contribute to and encourages the promotion gap disparities between men and women (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017), leading to women being promoted less often. Ultimately, African American women fare poorly with this discriminatory combination due to the intersection of race and gender (Tao, 2018). The notion that certain professions are masculine further propagates the exclusion of women from jobs that are traditionally seen as for men only (Ray, Galvan, & Zarestky, 2018), such as technical jobs.

When women are the minority gender in the workplace, informal everyday interactions lead to negative exchanges and experiences (Wright, 2016). Women who violate gender norms in the workplace pose a threat to the masculine status quo and risk being challenged by male colleagues (Allen, French, & Poteet, 2016). Women are also at high risk for bullying in the workplace, with black women at an even higher risk for bullying based on their ethnicity (Attell, Brown, & Treiber, 2017). In addition, women are more likely to accept and complete illegitimate job tasks, which has been shown to lead to workplace stress, and diminished work performance (Omansky, Eatough, & Fila, 2016). In the service industry, which employs Black women at a high rate, workers must mitigate subtle discrimination with customers under the banner that customers are always

correct. This extra layer of interaction with customers in service jobs leads to additional stress for African American women in the workplace (Yazejian, Morganson, & Cornelius, 2017).

African American women are often recipients of microaggressions that reflect stereotypes about their race and gender (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Huntt, 2016). Discrimination administered in subtle ways in the workplace is more damaging than overt, explicit discrimination (Jones, Arena, Nittrouer, Alonso, & Lindsey, 2017). Subtle discrimination negatively influences the performance management of women and ethnic minorities leading to detrimental effects that limit their growth and advancement in the workplace (Agars & Cazares, 2017). In alignment with intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), employees who have multiple stigmatized characteristics are more frequent targets of harassment, experience higher work-related stress, and tend to be more insecure about their job status (Lavaysse, Probst, & Arena, 2018).

Research exploring microaggressions and the professional status of Black Women in the workplace is lacking in the Management literature. However, studies exist that have examined the relationship between microaggressions, the workplace environment, and social economic status (SES). These studies found that racial microaggressions have a negative effect on African Americans in the high SES category (Higginbotham & Weber, 1992; Hudson, Neighbors, Geronimus, & Jackson, 2016). Racial microaggressions have been shown to negatively affect self-esteem, with higher instances of racial microaggressions leading to sharper decreases in self-esteem (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014). The treatment of African American women as

second-class citizens in school or the workplace is an example of racial microaggressions that contribute to low self-esteem in this group of women (Muhammad, 2018).

The experience of extended amounts of racial microaggressions in the workplace or in educational settings have a negative effect on the self-esteem and self-worth of the recipient (Nadal et al., 2014). For African Americans, the goal to succeed and ascend to a higher SES amid systemic, socially constructed racial discrimination can be extremely stressful and challenging (Hudson et al., 2016). Hudson et al. (2016) examined the relationship between depression, racial discrimination, SES, and John Henryism using a sample of 3,570 African Americans. Hudson et al. (2016) defines John Henryism as "a strong behavioral predisposition to cope actively with psychosocial and environmental stressors". Hudson et al. (2016) applied the Everyday Discrimination Scale (Essed, 1991; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997), the John Henryism Scale for Active Coping, and the International Diagnosis Interview (CIDI) to their study and found a significant positive relationship between racial discrimination of African Americans and education, linking higher levels of education with higher levels of racial discrimination. Contributing to the Hudson et al. (2016) findings, a study conducted by Maddox (2013) found a correlation between high job dissatisfaction and experiences of acute discrimination among professional Black women, and that this group reported racial discrimination at higher rates in the workplace.

Women Entrepreneurs in the United States Today

Despite significant growth in female entrepreneurship, women lag behind men in entrepreneurial activity (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017). The literature shows that men are

more likely to act on their entrepreneurial intentions than women (Shinner, 2018).

Additionally, businesses led by men are more likely to survive than businesses led by

female entrepreneurs (Yang & Triana, 2019). Most prominent in the literature is lack of

capital, which restricts women entrepreneurs from expanding, creating new services and

products, and completing other entrepreneurial tasks to grow their enterprise (Tur-Porcar,

Mas-Tur, & Belso, 2017). When starting new ventures, it is important for entrepreneurs

to seek venture capital, hire proficient employees, and secure a business mentor who is an

experienced entrepreneur (Spigel & Harrison, 2017). Women entrepreneurs may seek out

homogeneous networks for support and mentorship. However, female-only networks

hinder women from fully establishing credibility and legitimacy in the masculine-

structured entrepreneurial ecosystem (McAdam, Harrison, & Leitch, 2019).

Access to angel investment capital is a continued barrier for women entrepreneurs

(Coleman & Robb, 2018). Despite progress in venture capital given to women

entrepreneurs, male-owned ventures are still more likely to be the recipients of funding

over women-owned ventures (Leitch, Welter, & Henry, 2018). While banks are a

valuable resource for funding, they tend to be more risk-averse and less likely to lend to

start-up businesses (Coleman & Robb, 2018), making venture capital all the more

necessary. A study conducted by Malmstrom, Johansson, and Wincent (2017) found that

venture capitalists have biased views, rooted in gender stereotypes, as to the potential of

women entrepreneurs. With the gender gap so wide in angel investing, women

entrepreneurs face a significant barrier in raising capital to fund their business ventures.

According to Mollick and Robb (2016), women entrepreneurs can combat this barrier and

benefit from other forms of funding, such as crowdfunding. Geiger and Oranburg (2018) found the opposite to be true, in that businesses led by women still receive less funding from crowdsourcing campaigns than men.

Much of the management literature related to women entrepreneurs focuses on the barriers that women face in the field of entrepreneurship. However, there are exceptional areas of progress and growth for women entrepreneurs. Women-owned businesses had an overall growth of 58% compared to only 12% for all entrepreneurial firms and 1,821 new businesses owned by women were created daily from 2017 to 2018 (American Express, 2018). The gender gap decreased by 5% due to increases in women's Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rates (Master Card, 2018), and women entrepreneurs are succeeding in many areas despite operating amidst inequality in the entrepreneurial field (Stiles, 2018).

Minority women entrepreneurs. The literature on minority women entrepreneurship is scarce, and more research is needed on this group of business owners (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). Much like the entrepreneurship literature tends to focus on White males, minority entrepreneurship is not often differentiated in the literature by gender and mostly references ethnic groups and immigrants in bulk as "minority entrepreneurs". The term "minority women entrepreneurs" is frequently used in the literature to refer to women of color, particularly African American women.

Minority women who have the potential to be entrepreneurs can find themselves discouraged from pursuing entrepreneurship due to social biases that sexualize Black women, associate Middle Eastern and Muslim women as terrorists, and perpetuate

stereotypes that view Asian women as submissive (Romero & Valdez, 2016). There is an acknowledgment in the research that slavery and the historical implications of being marginalized in all facets of society have affected the ability of African Americans to succeed in the entrepreneurial field (Neville et al., 2017). Notwithstanding these challenges, minority women business owners still enter the entrepreneurial arena and are the fastest expanding group of entrepreneurs in the United States (McManus, 2016). Harper-Anderson (2019) suggests that Black business owners who provide professional services are less likely to experience many of the aforementioned challenges.

A number of programs have been developed by the government specifically to support minority-owned businesses (NCSL, 2016). Becoming a certified minority-owned-business can support minority women enterprises with access to training and procured resources (Bramble, 2015). Minority female business owners who partake in entrepreneur training programs are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activity (Lyons & Zhang, 2017). Minority-owned businesses benefit from government set-aside regulations that require a certain percentage of government contracts to be reserved for minority-owned businesses (NCSL, 2016).

African American women entrepreneurs. In line with intersectionality research (Crenshaw, 1989), Black women business owners have the burden of constantly switching between their identities related to their race, gender, class, and their identity as an entrepreneur (Stead, 2017), in order to fit into the social structures of entrepreneurship. However, this group continues to seek opportunities in creating new ventures. African American women entrepreneurs are more resilient in their entrepreneurial activity than

women business owners of other ethnic groups such as Latino, Asian, and White women (Lugo & Shelton, 2017; Freeland & Keister, 2016). The entrepreneurship literature on African American women is scarce. Sonfield (2016) heralds the need for more research on African American women entrepreneurs to better understand the needs and challenges experienced by this group of entrepreneurs.

Racial and gender imbalances in entrepreneurship. Establishing an identity and legitimacy as an entrepreneur is imperative for business owners (Orlandi, 2017). African American women must overcome barriers related to both their race and gender. Femininity and being a woman are less advantageous in legitimizing the entrepreneurial norm of masculinity (Swail & Marlow, 2018). Include the intersection of race, and African American women suffer additional challenges with establishing their identity as legitimate entrepreneurs (Wang, 2018).

Barriers to entrepreneurship. African American women experience unique barriers in entrepreneurship. Blacks are at a disadvantage for receiving supplier business credit and end up investing significant amounts of their own capital into start-up ventures (Freeland & Keister, 2016). When seeking business loans, African American entrepreneurs are rejected for loans at a higher rate than their White counterparts and are more likely to be charged higher interests rates when they are approved for loans (Bates & Robb, 2016). Upward mobility is one area that can mediate these barriers. Entrepreneurial success is aided by the entrepreneur's social position in society, such as access to education, resources, and experience (Dy & Agwunobi, 2018). Despite the

challenges of being in business, Black women persist in selecting entrepreneurship and self-employment over the traditional workplace (Benson & Sanders, 2017).

Digital Entrepreneurship

Digital entrepreneurship has transformed the structure and process of business creating a market that is no longer tethered to a physical structure or limited to local economy (Nambisan, 2017). Digital entrepreneurship is defined as commercialized business activity of products and services that are carried out on a digital medium (Kraus, Palmer, Kailer, Kallinger, & Spitzer, 2019), typically via the internet; and the quest for entrepreneurial opportunities via the use of digital media (Farani, Karimi, & Motaghed, 2017). Digital entrepreneurship is the merging of the digital ecosystem and the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Sussan & Acs, 2017). A digital entrepreneur is characterized as an individual who develops and distributes business activity, content, products, and services (Ngoasong, 2018). Digital entrepreneurs share similar characteristics of the traditional entrepreneur with the added traits of a heightened sense of risk, creativity, and the ability to move fast with market trends (Horne, Dutot, & Zhang, 2016). Digital entrepreneurship ventures all have digital artifacts in the form of goods and services in common; however, the entrepreneurial activities pursued by each venture varies from one business to another (Briel, Recker, & Davidson, 2018).

Digital spaces diminish barriers to digital entrepreneurship and traditional entrepreneurship, providing access and opportunity to anyone willing to pursue entrepreneurial activities (Giones & Brem, 2017; McAdam, Crowley, & Harrison, 2018; Nambisan, 2017). The digitization of products decreases, and in some cases, eliminates

the supply chain and intermediaries (Autio, Nambisan, Thomas, & Wright, 2018)

creating opportunity for greater profit margins. Digital enterprises have the unique ability

to adapt technology features to market demand and customer needs at a faster pace than

traditional entrepreneurial enterprises (Dong, 2019). The ability to edit content, such as

with blogs, is a fundamental characteristic of digital entrepreneurship and is an essential

opportunity that digital entrepreneurs must seek out (Gustavsson & Ljungberg, 2018).

Digitized economic activity accelerates production and daily operations of business

(Bogenhold, Klinglmair, & Kandutsch, 2018), making digital entrepreneurship an

appealing option. Digital entrepreneurship is a retreat from the status quo of

entrepreneurship. However, departure from the conventional process of entrepreneurship

is reflective of opportunity recognition, which is the essence of entrepreneurship itself

(Guercini & Cova, 2018). In order to be successful, digital entrepreneurs must be

flexible, maximize opportunities, and be able to function in uncertainty and changing

processes (Nzembayie, 2017).

   One-person digital entrepreneurship. Digital entrepreneurship is becoming

increasingly ubiquitous in the economy (Geissinger, Laurell, Sandstrom, Eriksson, &

Nykvist, 2019). One-person enterprises, entrepreneurs who do not employ personnel,

conduct entrepreneurial activities as a self-employed person (Ablyazov, Asaturova, &

Koscheyev, 2018). The literature on one-person digital entrepreneurship is still fairly new

and evolving and there does not seem to be one comprehensive description for one-

person digital entrepreneurs. A number of researchers such as Ashman et al. (2018), and

Guercini and Cova (2018), refer to one-person digital entrepreneurs as autopreneurs,

defined as a sole proprietor, or a one-person business working in the digital realm.

Delacroix, Parguel, and Benoit-Moreau (2019), define the one-person digital entrepreneur

as a micro-entrepreneur who leverages digital technologies to expedite the exchange of

products and services. Digital entrepreneurship is an emerging field of research, and more

studies are needed to understand the complexities and dimensions of digital

entrepreneurship (Zaheer, Breyer, Dumay, & Enjeti, 2018) and one-person digital

enterprises.

Women and one-person digital enterprises. Digital spaces provide fewer

obstacles to entry for digital entrepreneurship and reduce gender marginalization of

women that exists in traditional forms of entrepreneurship (Scuotto, Serravalle, Murray,

& Viassone, 2019). In a study conducted in Greece, women view digital entrepreneurship

as a significant means to success (Pappas et al., 2018). Yet the literature is scarce, at best

of research on the topic of women as one-person digital enterprises. There is however a

positive outlook on women and this type of entrepreneurship. The digital labor force

favors women's social skills coupled with advanced education and digital fluency

(Krieger-Boden & Sorgner, 2018), which has the potential to give women an advantage

in digital enterprise.

African American women one-person digital enterprises. The research on

African American women one-person digital enterprises is practically non-existent in the

literature. A study in the United Kingdom found that while Black women of color in

general are marginalized in the entrepreneur research, they are increasingly monetizing

the internet with entrepreneurial activity (Martinez Dy, 2015). Prior research suggests

that entrepreneurship is a means for women of color to overcome systemic and economic marginalization (Gold, 2016). Operating as a one-person digital enterprise may provide a pathway to reaching this goal for African American women.

The Evolution of Blogging

Blogs were introduced in the 1990's as an online technology medium that empowered users to both produce and consume content (Pinjamaa & Cheshire, 2016). The year that is most recognized for the start of the blog is 1994 (Relojo, 2017). Blogs are the most prolific medium to come out of the Web 2.0 era (Bolivar, 2017). A blog, or its original name weblog, is seen as a democratic process tool for publishing information to a wide internet audience (Jolly & Matthews, 2017; Khan & Daud, 2017) that would otherwise likely be unreachable. Blogs started out as casual diary-style personal journals published online in reverse chronological order so that readers can view the most recent post of the author (Fischer, 2017). Published information shared on blogs in the format of text and images are called blog posts (Khan et al., 2017). Blog posts are written by the blog author, also known as a blogger.

Blogs are a form of social interaction where bloggers share their views and recommendations on numerous topics with readers, in many ways acting as a reference for products, services, and experiences (Khan & Daud, 2017). A key benefit of blogs is that content can be added as needed and published instantaneously (Bissonnette-Maheux et al., 2018). This allows tremendous flexibility that does not exist in traditional forms of media such as magazines, newspapers, radio, and television, which require extensive production timelines. Blogs provide the opportunity for the reader to engage with the

author of the content. Unlike a static website, blogs have built in technologies that allow the audience to engage with the blogger via sharing comments on the topic, linking to relevant material, and tagging for search queries (Baumer, Sueyoshi, & Tomlinson, 2008). Blogs embrace a participatory culture whereby readers can comment, reply, and engage in a two-way conversation with the blogger (Tennent & Jackson, 2019).

Blogging benefits and empowers women; specifically, those who share personal life experiences in their blog posts (Parson & Pearson, 2015). Bloggers are most relevant and influential if they are able to create an emotional connection with their blog audience (Magno, 2017). Self-storytelling is a major component to blogging, allowing bloggers to build trust and create personal connections with a targeted audience (Pera, Viglia, & Furlan, 2016). Through storytelling, bloggers and influencers can seamlessly integrate commercial products in a way that seems natural and not like an overt product placement (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack, & Zahid, 2018). The consumer's ability to relate to a blogger increases the perception that the blogger is authentic and credible, and therefore worth following through on purchasing the goods being advertised (van Esch, Arli, Castner, Talukdar, & Northey, 2018). Consumer's perceived credibility of bloggers may be a result of assuming bloggers are independent of brands and being recognized as valued product reviewers (Esteban-Santos, Medina, Carey, & Bellido-Perez, 2018). The professionalization of blogs has elevated blogging to an organizational field whereby bloggers develop a legitimate career path (Erz & Christensen, 2018).

Types of bloggers. There are upwards of 30 million bloggers in the United States (Statista, 2018). Not all bloggers are alike; blogs tend to fall into either an information

dissemination category or an entrepreneurial category. Typically, firms, organizations and personal bloggers use blogs to educate and share information with the public; whereas entrepreneurial bloggers intentionally create content with the expectation of generating revenue (Archer & Harrigan, 2016; Colton & Poploski, 2019). Blogs are typically part of a niche theme and cover all conceivable topics (Relojo, 2017), making it impossible to itemize every type of blog. Some of the more popular types of bloggers are mommy bloggers, travel bloggers, healthy living bloggers, lifestyle bloggers, and style bloggers.

Mommy bloggers are bloggers who are mothers that share products related to motherhood, parenting, and children (Petersen, 2016), typically babies. Mommy bloggers have capitalized on sharing content and products related to motherhood and childrearing through entrepreneurial blogging (Song, 2016). Blogs offering parenting advice are particularly popular among new mothers (Steiner & Bronstein, 2017). There are concerns however, that mommy bloggers share an enormous amount of data and information about their children without their consent (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017), which may cause privacy issues to arise in the future of the child.

The travel blogger is another type of blogger. Travel bloggers share information, tips, and their experiences traveling around the world with their followers (van Nuenen, 2016). Many travel bloggers receive compensation or commission for sharing their travel experience. A study conducted by Fahada and Rahman (2017), found that travel bloggers blogged to educate, inspire, and encourage others to travel. The documentation of travel journeys has grown from travelers merely documenting their travels to a full-time career

option as advertisers of travel destinations (Stainton & Lordanova, 2017). The most

successfully travel bloggers turn their travel blogs into published travel books (Azariah,

2016).

Healthy living bloggers cover health conscious topics focused on healthy eating,

exercising, and living an overall healthy lifestyle (Rodney, 2018). With the popularity of

healthy living blogs, there is a concern about health content being shared by bloggers

who are not health professionals (Dickinson, Watson, & Prichard, 2018), and therefore

could be providing inaccurate information. Blog readers (Bissonnette-Maheux, et al.,

2018) view healthy living bloggers who have nutrition, fitness, or other health industry

related credentials as more credible.

The lifestyle blog is the most popular themed blog (Vuelio, 2017) likely because

it encompasses anything that would be considered a part of the blogger's lifestyle.

Lifestyle blog topics can include personal style, favorite food recipes, hobbies, family

life, travel, and much more (Arizzi, 2017). Another popular type of blogger is the style

blogger (Johnson, 2017), which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

The personal style blogger. Blogs have created pathways for knowledge sharing,

allowing users to readily find content that is of interest to them (Faisel et al., 2019),

including fashion. Personal style bloggers, also referred to as fashion bloggers, are a

growing portion of new entrepreneurs (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019). The fashion blogger

genre was born when a select few style bloggers received invitations to New York

Fashion Week in 2009 (Findlay, 2015). Fashion Week is the global fashion industry's

presentation of new styles for the upcoming season and sets the direction for fashion

commerce, marketing, and publishing (Perthuis, 2016). Personal style bloggers share fashion trends, style ideas, how-to achieve celebrity style, and all things related to the fashion and style industry (Mortara & Roberti, 2017). Style bloggers are rising in popularity as they share authentic style and provide an alternative view of the fashion industry's ideal thin body (Kraus & Martins, 2017), highlighting more realistic body types on their blogs. Blogs are a valuable source of information and influence the purchasing decisions of fashion mindful consumers (Loureiro, Costa, & Panchapakesan, 2017) of all sizes.

Style bloggers create a branded persona as a commodity for advertising on behalf of brands and agencies (Draper & McDonnell, 2017) for profit. Word of mouth marketing and personal endorsements are an advantage in the style blogging world (Lungeanu & Parisi, 2018), influencing followers to purchase the exact outfits worn by bloggers on their blogs. Effective bloggers must achieve a high level of engagement and social influence with readers in order to be considered credible and sustain a loyal following (Arrieta, Pena, & Medina, 2019). Corporate firms also see the value in blogs and many have dedicated positions for blogging in their marketing departments (Kumar & Gupta, 2016). Retailers understand the power that product recommendations from personal style bloggers have as a strategy to affect sales and drive traffic to their online stores (Guan, Qin, Ling, & Ding, 2016). Companies allocate a budget and dedicate time to identifying and collaborating with fashion bloggers who can facilitate the advancement of their brand as ambassadors (Rossi, 2016).

While style bloggers enjoy the independence of self-branding, Liu and Suh (2017) argue that inevitably, style bloggers must follow the demand of market desires reducing blogger authenticity. As fashion bloggers move into the professional realm, they must follow Federal Trade Commission guidelines that require bloggers to disclose content that is an advertisement or sponsored by brand contracts (Ramirez, 2018). Advanced bloggers include a disclosure on their blog; however, amateur bloggers may not be aware of the need to be explicit about their commercial partnerships. It is increasingly rare to find personal style bloggers who are not in some way affiliated with referral marketing to generate revenue (Makkur & Yap, 2018).

Blogging in the context of the black blogosphere creates opportunities for digital entrepreneurship (Robinson & Cantey, 2016). There is little empirical and peer-reviewed research on African American women style bloggers. However, African American women are a growing group of beauty influencers (Bracken-Ferguson, 2017), and most influencers also blog. Further research is needed on the intersection of race and gender in lifestyle bloggers (Jantti, Saresma, Leppanen, Jarvinen, & Varis, 2018), which includes a sub section of style bloggers.

Social media influencers. Social media influencers are third-party advertisers who use their influence to interact and engage potential customers on behalf of brands (Dahlqvist & Preiksaite, 2018). The term *Influencer* is defined as the ability to affect the thoughts, beliefs, and most importantly, the purchasing intentions of the consumer (Wright, 2017). Social media influencers perform the ultimate word-of-mouth marketing via online social media networks (Bjurling & Ekstam, 2018). Influencers employ their

tech savviness and use a myriad of hashtags and keywords in their content to broaden their reach and visibility (Erz, Marder, & Osadchaya, 2018). Key factors that support the impact social media influencers have on their social network include a combination of quality content, trustworthiness, candidness, and charm (Smith, Kendall, Knighton, & Wright, 2018). Social media influencers who incorporate stories and share their personal challenges, for example, weight loss struggles, are more likely to influence the decision-making of female consumers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

The lines between blogger and influencer are increasingly indistinct as bloggers take on the same role as influencers (Hawkins, 2016). Many bloggers realize the value of also sharing and posting to social media sites such as Instagram, which has a high fashion presence (Ramos-Serrano & Martinez-Garcia, 2016). Style bloggers in particular, also double as social media influencers and utilize Instagram in conjunction with their blog because it is the most popular photo social media network and provides tools to share visually pleasing fashion trends (Casalo, Flavian, & Ibanez-Sanchez, 2018). Curated blogger-generated content facilitates customer decision-making when evaluating and considering online purchases of products and services (Kumar, Singh, & Gupta, 2018). Blog readers who consume content far outnumber bloggers who develop content (Chen & Behm-Morawitz, 2018). This is an ideal scenario for influencers.

Professional bloggers dominate the blogosphere and are an attractive option for public relations firms who want influencers to market products (Weltz, 2016). Top influencers are courted into marketing contracts for fashion brands and gain an international following, in some cases celebrity, as a result (D'Aloia, Baronian, &

Pedroni, 2017). The ability of social media influencers to inspire purchase intentions of niche markets makes them attractive to large brands and small businesses (Lim, Radzol, Cheah, & Wong, 2017). In the Management literature, influencers are also referred to as opinion leaders. Social media influencers are a type of opinion leader and encourage consumer's personal connection to the hedonic and utilitarian properties of products (Lin, Bruning, & Swarna, 2018).

While social media influencers enjoy many benefits, the reality of being an influencer demands extensive emotional labor, requires influencers to brand themselves, and influencers must always be in brand mode (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017), unlike in a traditional nine to five job. Another challenge is dealing with cyber bullies. Cyber bulling has been found to be an issue for social media influencers who may be targeted in order to ruin the influencer's reputation and influence as a product endorser or ambassador (Hassan, Yacob, Nguyen, & Zambri, 2018). There are some researchers (Chae, 2018) who attribute less professional characteristics to social media influencers and describe them as micro-celebrities who flaunt their extravagant, envious life on social media.

Advertising as a one-person digital enterprise. Bloggers have the unique ability to influence potential future clients (Walsh, 2007) in a way that traditional marketing cannot. Sponsored posts are the prominent way that bloggers advertise. A sponsored post has blogger generated content, typically in collaboration with a brand, with commission links that take readers directly to the online purchasing page of the product or service (Mutum, Ghazali, Mohd-Any, & Nguyen, 2018). Every time a consumer makes a purchase, the blogger receives a commission for the sale. There are concerns that

monetization of sponsored content may alter a blogger's true thoughts about the products they share (Jorgensen, 2017), risking authenticity. However, as in traditional sales, followers are in a position to decide for themselves which products to consume.

Influencer marketing is a growing marketing trend where brands either provide free product or paid contracts for social media postings of product placement ads (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2018). This form of marketing provides opportunity for advertising as a one-person digital enterprise. A key element to marketing as a one-person digital enterprise is to develop a brand. Self-branding is essential for increased visibility, acknowledgment, and consumer loyalty in online digital spaces (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017).

Entrepreneurial Bloggers

Social media, which encompasses blogging, provides new pathways for entrepreneurial activity in emerging economies (Cesaroni, Demartini, & Paoloni, 2017). Users have capitalized on digital innovations used in everyday life to start entrepreneurial ventures (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014). Blogging as an online publishing space has allowed for users with little or no skills and no start-up capital to write and publish content online (Rosenkranz, 2016). The onslaught of the mainstream presence of bloggers in various genres blur the lines between journalism, magazines, news, and other traditional means of communication and media (Pirolli, 2017). Bloggers have positioned themselves as professionals. With the decline of print media and the continued growth of digital media, blogs are a natural location for the dissemination of curated information (Fricker, 2015), ideal for entrepreneurial bloggers.

Blogging as a business. Blogging as a business is an evolving area of entrepreneurship. The blogosphere is a space for bloggers to become entrepreneurs, branding themselves and the merchandise they advertise (Mora & Rocamora, 2015). Bloggers generate considerable income just from advertisers alone (Cuomo, Tortora, Festa, Giordano, & Metallo, 2017). Entrepreneurial bloggers curate content and publish it in commercial form on social media (Scolere & Humphreys, 2016) and blogs. Style bloggers are an example of bloggers who have merged their personal lives and love of fashion into a blogging business (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019). The entrepreneurial activity of bloggers is growing so much so that influencers, like fashion bloggers, are becoming competitive with fashion magazines (Maares & Hanusch, 2018).

Monetizing blogging. Bloggers have full control of their digital identity and brand and use it to their advantage (Dejmanee, 2016) to maximize monetized content. Bloggers integrate advertising marketing hyperlinks into blog platforms that pay affiliate income for clicks and purchases (Mathur, Narayanan, & Chetty, 2018). This is the most popular form of monetizing blogs and does not require that bloggers sell their own product or service; rather bloggers share recommendations of products and services and link readers to brands where they can make a purchase (Lediard, 2017). Entrepreneurial blogging does not exist without a blog that generates revenue. Affiliate marketing falls under the broader term of digital marketing which is a way to target a specific audience and measure sales online via affiliates, (Todor, 2016) like bloggers.

Affiliate marketing also benefits commercial brands, as collaborating with bloggers cost less than traditional means of marketing and advertising (Duffy, 2015).

Affiliate marketing allows advertisers to pay only when sales occur without the upfront

production costs of traditional advertising (Edelman & Brandi, 2015). Sales via affiliate

links are most successful when added to a blog that includes the blogger's review,

comments from other readers, and a high volume of likes and interactions (Bala &

Verma, 2018). Establishing emotional bonds with the reader is essential to bloggers being

able to monetize shared content (Magno, 2017).

African American Women and Online Identity

Black women face challenges finding online safe spaces; often not fitting in

autonomous Black spaces or autonomous female spaces due to their intersection of race

and gender (Sutherland, 2019). African American women may therefore seek out online

spaces specifically designed for them. Hair is a mainstay of beauty for African American

women (Garrin & Marcketti, 2018), and is therefore closely associated with identity

(Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). Hair is a major part of African American women's identity

partly due to expectations that African American women straighten their hair to

assimilate with societal beauty standards (Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks, & Araiza,

2016), in essence changing their identity.

It is only natural that in the digital age African American women seek out online

spaces that align with their identity and beauty standards. Black women frequently seek

out online content related to their identity on blogs and social media (Ndichu &

Upadhyaya, 2019). The battle of cultural identity of African American women to

conform to White beauty standards has played out in mainstream society and media for a

very long time. For example, African American women in the United States military are

required to imitate beauty norms based on White feminine standards, with the U.S. military officially banning cornrows, afros, dreadlocks, and twists in 2014 (Jaima, 2017); all of which are popular hairstyles that African American women have been wearing for at least a century.

While there are increasingly more online spaces that praise and celebrate African American women's identity, there are still barriers to overcome. An example is the online harassment of African American tennis star Serena Williams, depicting her as "other" based on her physical identity and body type (Frisby, 2017). An examination of blogs and social media comments reflect a high level of abusive and derogatory language targeting William's race, identity, gender, and sexuality with the assumption that her identity is non-conforming, aggressive, sexualized, threatening, and masculine, (Litchfield, Kavanagh, Osborne, & Jones, 2018). Women of color are more likely to be targets of sexual, racial, and gender harassment than their White counterparts in online digital public spaces (Sobieraj, 2018). These marginalizing stereotypes often accompany the description of African American women in general in mainstream society (Domeneghetti, 2018). It is therefore imperative that positive online spaces created by, and for African American women continue to grow so that societal stereotypes do not dictate the online identity of this already marginalized group (Stanton, Jerald, Ward, & Avery, 2017).

Online identities of African American women frequently mirror the stereotypes perpetuated in society. Online spaces provide opportunity for African American women to write the narrative of their own identity, but it equally provides opportunity for those who wish to comment and engage in negative and hateful speech against this group

(Madden, Janoske, Winkler, & Edgar, 2018). African American women have challenged beauty norms and will continue to dispute ideal European-based beauty standards (Vandenberg, 2018). Online platforms allow African American women to share their online identity on their own terms. The African American woman's identity is complex, including intersections of race and gender, which influence how Black women perceive themselves (Szymanski & Lewis, 2016). A study conducted by Ajibade, Hook, Utsey, Davis and Van Tongeren (2016) found that African Americans who positively associate with their race and ethnicity are more likely to report being satisfied with life. On the contrary, a study conducted by (Morrison & Hopkins, 2019) found that African American women who identified and assimilated with mainstream culture were less stressed and had better coping abilities than those who did not.

Online platforms provide counterspaces where people of color can combat and counter racial and gender stereotypical identities associated with them by society (Mwangi, Bettencourt, & Malaney, 2016), affirming their own true identity. Online users transfer their perceptions and bias in the face-to-face world to online environments (Williams, Oliver, Aumer, & Meyers, 2016), with many online public spaces simply replicating racism and discrimination that exists offline (Pinckney et al., 2018). For example, Black female journalists receive more negative, abusive, and sexualized comments in online spaces than their White male counterparts (Lewis, 2018). Nonetheless, online spaces do provide opportunities for women of color to construct their own identities online (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2018).

African American Women as Digital Entrepreneurs

Digital entrepreneurship has a low barrier to entry compared to traditional entrepreneurship models (Nambisan, 2017). Less start-up capital and fewer resources are needed for digital ventures, and in the case of one-person digital enterprises (Autio & Cao, 2019), costs associated with employees is nonexistent as digital entrepreneurship is ideal for a one-person enterprise. Internet access is the one element required for launching a digital start-up. Low cost Internet plans have become ubiquitous and accessible over time. The largest blog platform, WordPress, (Rampton, 2019) has free plans with enough tools to get started with publishing a blog. In the case of bloggers, access to a mobile phone that includes an internet plan could be enough to become a digital entrepreneur. The growing high-tech quality of smart phone cameras empower bloggers to take professional photos for their blog and website (Layton, 2019).

The availability of free apps allows users to edit photos, create video, and other creative content right on the mobile device. While costs are associated with running a successful digital enterprise, the low barrier to entry and digital affordances make it an attractive option for those looking to start a business (Autio, Szerb, Komlósi, & Tiszberger, 2018). Access to the Internet alone is not sufficient for a successful sustainable business (Martinez Dy, 2018), and ethnic minority business owners may not have business resources in their social networks (Williams, Gavino, & Jacobson, 2017). However, African American women have always operated and succeeded with less than other ethnic groups and their male counterparts (Hannon, 2018).

The online element of a digital enterprise provides spatial flexibility in terms of where the entrepreneur conducts entrepreneurial activity (Autio & Cao, 2019). This creates entrepreneurial opportunities that are not bound by traditional physical office space. Additionally, digital entrepreneurship creates access for those living outside of metropolitan areas who might otherwise not have as many employment options. These two elements provide flexibility and access to an unconventional form of entrepreneurship. For women who desire to start a business while also being able to set their own schedules and take care of their children (Meliou & Edwards, 2018), digital entrepreneurship could serve as a pathway to business ownership.

African American women as digital entrepreneurs have rarely been discussed in the Management literature (Scott & Hussain, 2019); even though African American women entrepreneurs, in general, are growing at a significant rate (Tisdale, 2018). In the traditional workplace, African American women are viewed unfavorably for their ambition (Rosette et al., 2016) and experience extensive stressors (Rosette, Ponce de Leon, Koval, & Harrison, 2018). Digital entrepreneurship has the potential to mediate workplace stress (Scuotto et al., 2019).

As a digital entrepreneur, African American women can operate as their own Chief Executive Officer and not have to experience the stressors of the glass ceiling and lack of promotions (Martinez Dy, 2015). Success and advancement can instead be determined by and based on the work, time, and effort that African American women apply to their business venture (Knight, 2016). African American women deal with daily microaggressions in the workplace (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015). Digital

entrepreneurship has the potential to lessen the frequency of microaggressions,

positioning African American women to choose whom they associate and engage with in

business. However, digital spaces are also hotbeds for online racial and sexual

harassment where commenters can easily conceal or alter their identity (Veletsianos,

Houlden, Hodson, & Gosse, 2018).

Literature Gap in Studies on African American Women Bloggers as Digital

Entrepreneurs

There is little evidence examining the outcomes of participation in digital

entrepreneurship, specifically for marginalized and disadvantaged people (Martinez Dy et

al., 2017; Sussan & Acs, 2017). Exploring the meaning of women's lived experiences of

digital entrepreneurship is possible through qualitative methods such as phenomenology

(Berglund, 2007), and collecting with demographic data to capture data, such as age,

race, ethnicity, access to start-up resources, annual income, educational level, and job

title at last paid employment (Martinez Dy et al., 2018). Entrepreneur ecosystem

viewpoints and frameworks are pertinent for determining which elements support or

hinder entrepreneurship, and recognition of gender and race within these frameworks

may further extend theory and a deeper understanding of digital entrepreneurship

ecosystems (Brush, et al., 2018).

The research on Black women bloggers is limited and understanding how this

marginalized group interacts with blogging technologies to communicate with their

audience helps to develop deeper understanding of bloggers and the blogosphere

(Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018). Studying Black female bloggers as digital entrepreneurs

challenges the westernized and Eurocentric view of Caucasian men and women as the only representation of legitimate experiences and worldviews (Martinez Dy et al., 2018; Taylor, 1998). By utilizing the theoretical lens of Black feminism to present Black women as protagonists in future studies of digital entrepreneurship, scholars may further explore how the Black female identity online adopted by bloggers is shaped by intersectional, cultural experiences (Gabriel, 2016; Martinez Dy et al., 2018)

Summary and Conclusions

A review of data from multiple research studies shows a lack of representation of women of color in digital entrepreneurship, principally in studies of the most accomplished style bloggers. (Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017). The gap in the literature is most evident in studies of minority women digital entrepreneurs, and primarily for African American women (Harris, 2015; Juma, & Sequeira, 2017). Digital entrepreneurship provides an opportunity for Black women bloggers to create new understandings about the intersection of race and gender in the field of entrepreneurship (Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018), however Black women may find barriers in their lived experiences with digital entrepreneurship such as raising capital, access to business credit, and a lack of entrepreneurial skills. (Krieger-Boden & Sorgner, 2018; Martinez Dy et al., 2017). An exhaustive exploration of the barriers African American women digital entrepreneurs face can provide policymakers with valuable data to increase funding and mentoring programs for this group of women digital entrepreneurs (Edelman & Brush, 2018).

Unlike other forms of online presence, like social media platforms, blogs provide a distinctive space for African American bloggers to be in total control of the aesthetic design, dialogue, and revenue of their blog and create discourse unique to their community and culture. Extending the theoretical literature on female digital entrepreneurship, more in-depth investigation is warranted for qualitative researchers to explore diverse blogs (Berglund, 2007) as it relates to how minority women bloggers brand themselves as influencers in the context of race and gender (Martinez Dy et al., 2018).

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology for this qualitative study, the purpose of the study, and provide the central research question on how African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work. The sampling rationale and method followed by the method of data collection is also detailed in the chapter. Finally, the logic for the study and methodological support for the data collection and analysis is provided along with aspects of trustworthiness of data and ethical research procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. Black women bloggers are coming out of anonymity to own their cultural heritage and define their lived experiences to develop their Black female identity online (Gabriel, 2016). The growth of one-person digital enterprises and blogging among African American women has initiated the need to study how this population transitions from the traditional workforce to operating a one-person digital enterprise (Hatfield, 2018; Martinez Dy et al., 2018).

I chose the transcendental phenomenology model research design as suggested by Moustakas (1994) as it aligns as a research method with a natural form of inquiry that facilitated discovery of participants' meanings of lived experiences. This chapter provides detailed information on the research method and rationale for conducting a transcendental phenomenological study, as well as the central research question guiding this empirical investigation. In this chapter, I present a foundational rationale for the participant selection strategy, data collection strategies and data analysis, role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and a summary on main points of the research method.

Research Design and Rationale

Determining the appropriate methodology for this study was driven by the purpose of the study and the research question. Qualitative research focuses on comprehending how people make meaning of their lived experiences, how they construct

those experiences, and how they define their experiences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

The purpose of qualitative inquiry is to uncover and present in narrative form what

groups experience in their day-to-day lives and what meaning they apply to the actions

they carry out (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This methodology aligns with the research

question: How do African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences

with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and

gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work?

Quantitative analysis was deemed unsuitable for this study. The qualitative

research method provides an exploratory benefit to a research study (Alase, 2017), which

is not available in a quantitative research design. Qualitative research aims to understand

aspects of social life (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The quantitative research method

focuses on examining numerical data and variables, and the researcher creates distance

between themselves and participants (Quick & Hall, 2015). A quantitative research

design is therefore deemed unsuitable for this study. Ebrahim and Singh (2017) used the

phenomenology research method for a study on understanding challenges that women

experience transitioning from corporate careers to entrepreneurial ventures. In a study

conducted by Thompson-Whiteside, Turnbull, and Howe-Walsh (2018), interpretative

phenomenology was used to study how female entrepreneurs experience managing their

brand. Laukhuf and Malone (2015) conducted a phenomenological research study

exploring the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs and mentorship.

The appropriate research design for this study is transcendental phenomenology.

Other qualitative methods were considered for this study; however, they were not deemed

applicable. During this study, I applied the epoche process which requires the researcher to dismiss judgment, biases, preconceived ideas and concepts, and discount past experiences and understandings in order to clearly study the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2018). According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology concentrates on delineating the lived experiences of research participants. The central focus of phenomenological reduction is to discover the essence of the meanings, principles, or structures at the center of a phenomenon as it is practiced and experienced in the present (Creely, 2016).

Role of the Researcher

For this phenomenological study, the researcher role was one of observer. The researcher as observer is particularly beneficial in a phenomenology study to observe the phenomenon in action (Vagle, 2018). The researcher in a qualitative study is the research instrument (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018), acting as a conduit for data collection and acquiring understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Rivera, 2018). The researcher must also recognize their unique presence and position and remove all bias and subjectivity (Moustakas, 1994); this includes reducing the distance between researcher and participants (Raheim et al., 2016). Additionally, researchers are required to uphold ethical standards when conducting research with human participants, ensuring confidentiality, informed consent, and a clear understanding of the nature, requirements, and purpose of the research study (Moustakas, 1994). Due to the lack of previous research on African American women bloggers' lived experiences with digital entrepreneurship (Remedios & Snyder, 2018), it was necessary to study the lived

experiences of this group using qualitative research which allows for illuminating understanding and gaining meaning (Leeming, 2018), unlike quantitative research, which deals solely with numerical data (Nardi, 2018). The latter would not provide insight into the meaning and experiences of African American women bloggers.

As the researcher, I had no affiliation with any of the participants in this study and did not select participants I knew or with whom I have a relationship. I am however, both an African American woman and a style blogger operating as a one-person digital enterprise. Awareness of the phenomenon and scenario being studied supports credibility of the researcher as instrument (Toma, 2006).

As the researcher, I had no supervisory or instructor relationship with participants, and I did not foresee any power dynamics with participants as we had no relation. Nonetheless, as the researcher, I had to observe power issues that might have arisen throughout the research process. For example, the participant's power to withdraw from participation at any time and my power as the researcher of selecting questions to ask during an interview (Finlay, 2012a). I do sell products via my entrepreneurial venture as a style blogger, and I elected to disqualify potential participants who have purchased my product to avoid any conflict of interest. Researchers have a responsibility to conduct themselves in an ethical manner (Cumyn, Ouellet, Cote, Francoeur, & St-Onge, 2018). To ensure there was no conflict of interest, I asked potential participants if they were familiar with my business and if they ever purchased a product from me. I verified this by reviewing my sales logs.

Methodology

Methodology in a research study refers to the steps the researcher undertakes to conduct the research (Maxwell, 2013). Methodology for qualitative research includes procedures that explore experiences involving phenomena by examining linguistics instead of verifying or disproving hypotheses and theories (Tuval-Mashiach, 2016). In the following section, I outline participant selection logic, instrumentation for the study, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and the data analysis plan.

Participant Selection Logic

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. With this in mind, a purposeful sample of 15-20 participants was proposed for this study or until saturation was reached. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for phenomenological studies as experience with the phenomenon of study is a necessary criterion (Min & Wilson, 2019; O'Halloran, Littlewood, Richardson, Tod, & Nesti, 2018). Saturation is used to determine the sufficiency of sample size in qualitative studies (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). Thematic saturation was achieved when themes began to repeat and no new themes resulted from the interview data (Saunders et al., 2018).

Population. This study sought to comprehend the views and experiences of a sample of participants representing the population of African American women in management in the United States. While 23% of C-suite executives in the United States

are women, only 4% of this group reflect women of color; furthermore, women of color are the most underrepresented group at every level in the workplace, lagging behind all ethnic groups and genders (McKinsey & Company, 2018). There are currently no African American women CEO's of Fortune 500 companies (McGirt, 2017). Women of color represent 11.9% of professional and managerial positions, and since this population is made up of multiple ethnic races, it is necessary to highlight that African American women make up only 5.3% of women at this level (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Sampling criteria. When identifying a sample population, detailing the specific population and applying the relevant methodology is imperative to research integrity in qualitative research (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Selection of participants for this transcendental phenomenology study incorporated purposeful participant selection, meeting of applicable criterion, and the network and snowball sampling strategy (van Manen, 2016).

Participant inclusion criteria for selection consisted of the following: 1) must identify as an African American adult female over the age of 30; 2) be the founder of a lifestyle blog identified as a one-person digital enterprise; 3) have managed a personal lifestyle blog for at least 2 years after start-up; 4) have well informed attitudes and opinions concerning African American women bloggers managing a one-person digital enterprise. In addition to meeting the aforementioned criteria, it was essential to select participants who had experience with the phenomenon being studied and had an interest in understanding its essence, were willing to take part in an extensive recorded interview, and who granted permission for the research to be published in a dissertation (Moustakas,

1994). After selecting two to three participants for the study, I applied the network and snowball technique associated with purposive sampling by asking the originally selected candidates for recommendations of potential participants who meet the qualifying criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Network and snowball sampling is the most popular method for identifying research participants in purposive sampling and is administered by requesting a small group of current participants to refer others they know who may meet the sample criteria (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The network and snowball technique was applicable to this study because it increased the likelihood of identifying a hidden sample population that the researcher may have been unaware of; specifically, African American women bloggers over the age of 30, who are the founder of a lifestyle blog identified as a one-person digital enterprise, which they have managed for at least two years after start-up, and who have well informed attitudes and opinions concerning African American women bloggers managing a one-person digital enterprise. Identifying this specific population could prove difficult using different sampling techniques that do not necessitate intimate knowledge of the target participant group (Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2018; Woodley & Lockard, 2016).

Sampling strategy. Qualitative studies in general have smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies, focusing on exhaustive descriptions from each participant (Levitt et al., 2018). In qualitative studies, ampleness of data is not drawn from number of participants, rather from the rich substance of information about the phenomenon provided by the individual participants (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017). The target number of 15-20 participants for this research study is in line with a

recent phenomenological study of entrepreneurs (Szkudlarek & Wu, 2018). This study followed the data saturation guidelines of Mason (2010) but depart from Gill's (2014) proposal of very small sample sizes for phenomenological studies. Incorporating a sample size of 15-20 participants for my transcendental phenomenological study increases the likelihood of yielding thick, rich data and reaching saturation (Mason, 2010).

Participants for this study were recruited via the social media site LinkedIn. LinkedIn is the number one social media site for fostering professional and business connections (Koch, Gerber, & De Klerk, 2018). Request for participation in this study was sent via sharing channels and direct messages on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is an effective means of participant recruitment of professionals for a research study and can facilitate a natural network and snowball effect to identify participants (Stokes, Vandyk, Squires, Jacob, & Gifford, 2019).

Instrumentation

The study's instrumentation was developed based on the nature of the qualitative method of understanding a phenomenon from participants' subjective data, and the purpose of the transcendental phenomenological design of reporting lived experiences while limiting the researcher's judgments and assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). The ultimate goal in carrying out this phenomenological research was achived by an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of the participants (van Manen & Adams, 2011). The researcher as a human being inevitably influences the research process and in

bracketing my own knowledge and experience, I minimized my own influence on the data collection process throughout the research process.

Individual face-to-face interviews in qualitative research are pivotal in building rapport and gaining rich and in-depth information and variable opinions in comparison to a group interview, in which one's opinion may be changed by answers of others and result in similar responses (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The intent of phenomenological research is to explore the array of meanings within a sample group, as a group, and not the sole meaning of each individual within the group (Akerlind, 2012). The foundation of transcendental phenomenology is that the explanation of the phenomena "should be connected to the meaning structure of real people" (Aspers, 2009, p. 5). The transcendental phenomenological approach was considered when choosing an interview protocol to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work.

Qualitative researchers sometimes consider themselves an instrument in data collection, resulting in the researcher and participants both being essential to the process of exploring lived experiences (Alase, 2017). As shown in Appendix B, an interview script with questions written to align with the phenomenology tradition was used to ensure an orderly interview process. This script aided in the researcher gathering the participants' lived experiences through a semi-structured interview process guided by open-ended questions (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). When using the phenomenological approach during the interviews, the main aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the

nature or significance of everyday experiences (Zahavi, 2018). A semi-structured interview is a technique for generating qualitative data and is characterized by open-ended questions that are developed in advance and by prepared probes (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In the semi-structured interview, I had a set of questions on an interview schedule, but the interview was guided by the schedule rather than dictated by it; I probed interesting areas that arose from participants' lived experiences. The open-ended questions were developed around probes to ensure that broad coverage of issues were achieved during the semi-structured interview, and the participants were allowed to express themselves freely (Moustakas, 1994).

The instrument I used in this study is a semi-structured, piloted interview protocol adapted from the research work of Prof. Angela Martinez Dy, of the Glendonbrook Institute for Enterprise Development at Louborough University, Prof. Susan Marlow of Nottingham University Business School and Dr. Lee Martin of University of Warwick in a seminal study (Martinez Dy et al., 2017) conducted in the United Kingdom analyzing the manner in which intersectionality and related social positionality shape digital enterprise activities. Using an interpretivist approach, Martinez Dy's research team analyzed empirical evidence that revealed how the privileges and disadvantages arising from intersecting social positions of gender, race, and social class are experienced by UK women digital entrepreneurs. This study was the first to challenge the assumption that the Internet is a neutral platform for entrepreneurship and study results supported their offline inequality, in the form of gender, social positionality, and associated resource constraints, as reflected in the online environment (Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Martinez Dy et al.

(2017) piloted and standardized the interview protocol using a sample of UK women entrepreneurs. Permission to use Martinez Dy's et al.'s (2017) interview protocol for my study can be found in Appendix B.

I kept a reflective journal and record all pertinent information, observations, and situations emerging from the study participants' narratives of their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview protocol (Appendix B) provided a good basis to pursue an area of interest that was guided by these questions, while still allowing the participants to introduce issues of which I had not previously thought of. This constructionist view of gathering data through lived experiences of participants for intersectionality research (Windsong, 2018) allowed me to take part in the interview process while not actually participating. No one beyond the participants possess better knowledge than themselves regarding their lived experiences. All the measures adopted in the data collection and analysis process, including bracketing, ensured that the findings were as close to what the participants meant as possible (Chan et al., 2013).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

African American women bloggers in the United States who meet the qualifying criteria were purposively selected via the network and snowball sampling strategy. I requested recommendations of African American women bloggers from the first 2 to 3 selected participants. I continued this process until I had 15 to 20 participants or until the saturation of data had been attained. The preliminary assessment of African American

women bloggers consisted of a review of their lifestyle blogs. Bloggers typically share personal experiences as a means of connecting with and marketing to their audience (Abidin, 2016). A review of participants' lifestyle blogs can provide supplementary rich data that contributed additional context to their lived experiences. A review of blogs was used in a prior phenomenological research study, providing a comprehensive narrative experience and positioning the researcher as an immersed observer (Thomas, Allison, & Latour, 2018).

As the researcher, I conducted the data collection for this research study. Data collection was administered via thorough, semi-structured interviews. The goal was to obtain thick, rich data from participants with the intention of gaining an understanding of the meaning of participant responses (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, creating opportunities to gain a deep understanding (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Mattisson, Nevala, & Wilkens, 2017) of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity with this non-traditional mode of work. Semi-structured interviews were used in a previous phenomenological study of fashion bloggers (Simunic, 2017).

Interviews were planned with the participant's schedule in mind. I planned to schedule 2 interviews a day over the course of a 2-week period. I was flexible with participants and allowed the scheduling of interviews on a weekend if needed. I anticipated that interviews would take place over a 45 minute to 1-hour period. This is in line with recommendations for long interviews for phenomenological research in order to

obtain the maximum amount of responses and thick descriptions from participants (Høffding & Martiny, 2016). The duration of the interviews included built-in time if needed for follow up questions. During the interviews I engaged in the epoche process to bracket all bias, prejudice, and preconceived ideas so that the phenomenon was explored with a fresh and clear conscious (Moustakas, 1994). When applying epoche, the researcher has a shift in attitude and can embark on new meanings, attitudes, and experiences (Bevan, 2014). Applying the Epoch process allowed me to approach the interview and research question as if for the first time in order to attain new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviews were carried out via Internet voice-over IP (VOIP) using Skype. Skype was the ideal means of conducting the interviews. However, telephone communication was also made available to maximize participant availability and to address technical issues. Interviews were recorded using an audio recording device to assist in data recall, transcription, and data analysis. Upon conclusion of the interview I provided participants with a transcription of their respective interviews for member checking within 3 days of the interview. Member checking is used as a strategy to assess validity in qualitative research and foster accurate knowledge exchange (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). Participants had an opportunity to verify the interview transcript and corrections were made as needed. Additional approval was requested of participants after the completion of data analysis for further validation and consensus of the conclusions drawn, as is recommended by methodologists for maintaining ethical procedures in qualitative research (Mero-Jaffe, 2011).

The interviews proceeded according to Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological process for data collection (see Figure 1): initiate the epoche process to develop rapport and create a comfortable environment for carrying out the interview; bracket the interview question; proceed with the qualitative interview questions to gather rich descriptions of the phenomenon. I followed Moustakas' (1994) guidance to commence interviews by initiating a casual social conversation or a reflection activity focused on easing tension and setting a relaxed and trusting atmosphere for the phenomenological interview. To resolve possible pre-interview stress and tension, I prompted the participants with an introductory question that requires the participant to reflect on their experience as an African American woman managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work.

I shared commentary as needed and as it related to the feelings and thoughts shared by the participant. Starting the interview in this manner as suggested by Moustakas (1994), allowed the participant to begin providing meaning to their lived experience as an African American woman blogger and set the tone for the entire interview. This type of question according to Moustakas allowed the participant to "focus on the experience…and then to describe the experience fully" (p. 114). I then conducted and reported on a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question.

After conducting and reporting a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on a bracketed topic and question, I conducted follow-up interviews as needed to further

clarify details of the participants narrative (Moustakas, 1994). Following the interviews,

I organized and analyzed the data to facilitate development of individual textural and

structural descriptions, a composite textural description, a composite structural

description, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences (Moustakas,

1994).
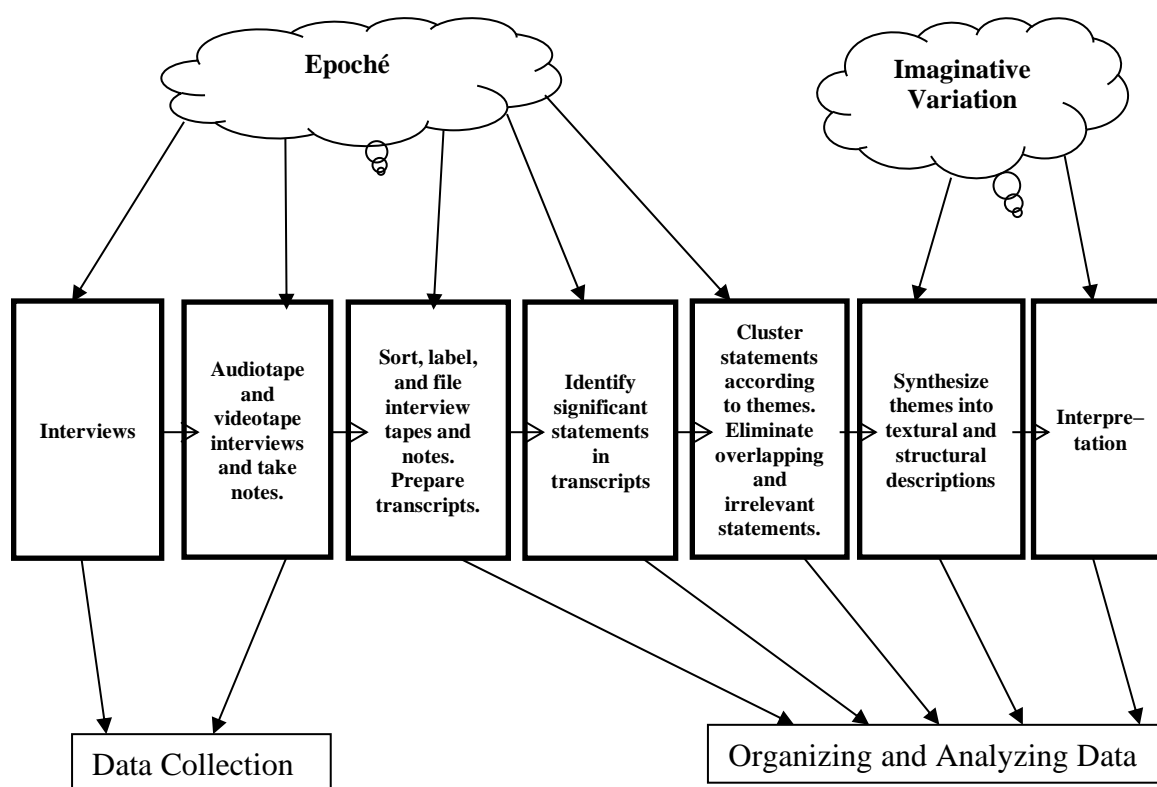
Figure 1. Moustakas' empirical phenomenological research model. Adapted from
Phenomenological Research Methods (p. 180–182), by C. Moustakas, 1994, Thousand
Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. Copyright 1994 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

Prior to the start of the interview, I provided an inviting atmosphere and

introduced myself in a trustful manner to develop rapport with participants. I thanked

participants for their willingness to participate in this study. Participants were provided

with expectations of the interview and provided with an opportunity to ask me questions

prior to starting. I reviewed the purpose of the study and reminded participants of the

ethical expectations of the study and their right to terminate the interview at any time.

Participants were reminded of member-checking to review the data analysis to verify and

clarify responses (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Participants were asked to respond with edits to the

transcripts within 48 hours. If after reviewing my written data analysis summary, the

participant felt my analysis and conclusions were sufficient for describing the meaning of

their lived experiences, then I considered the data collection complete.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis requires the researcher to synthesize and summarize textual and

descriptive data obtained during the data collection process in order to apply meaning to

the phenomenon so that it can be conveyed to others (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). A key

tenant of transcendental phenomenology is that the researcher explicates the phenomenon

via reflection as the phenomenon is perceived, described, and experienced, by the subject

(Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Moustakas, 1994). In order to uncover descriptive themes

that garner the essence and meaning of participant's lived experiences (Moser &

Korstjens, 2018), Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam data analysis was applied in

this transcendental phenomenological study to provide meaning to African American

women bloggers' lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the

implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work.

Coding was conducted manually without the use of electronic software. Manual hand-

coding allowed me to navigate the often complex and distinctive elements of analyzing

data while also maintaining control and ownership of the data analysis process (Saldana, 2013).

Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analyzing phenomenological data consisted of seven steps. Each step of the modified Van Kaam data analysis method was thoroughly applied to participant data (Sullivan & Bhattacharya, 2017). In this research study, each participant's transcript was reviewed extensively according to this method. The modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis consisted of the following steps: horizonalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, validation, individual textual description, and textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis is one of rigor and structured processes. I followed the epoche protocol by removing bias, preconceived thoughts, and viewed the events from as objective a viewpoint as possible (Moustakas, 1994).

The first step that was applied in the modified Van Kaam data analysis method is horizonalization. This required listing all expressions pertinent to the lived experience and giving equivalent value to each statement (Moustakas, 1994). The next step required me to go through the process of identifying invariant elements and determining if the language provided understanding of the phenomenon and if the language can be labeled as a horizon of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). The third step in the data analysis process was to arrange similar invariant elements into thematic labels that become central themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). I clustered meaning units and themes constructed using horizonalization to extract meaningful expressions from interview

transcriptions (Moustakas, 1994). The fourth step was application validation, which required a check of the central themes against the entire transcript to ensure the themes were explicitly expressed and compatible, if not they were eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). This step required "evidence from the participant's own words" (Grumstrup & Demchak, 2019, p. 118). The fifth step required building an individual textural description of the experience for each participant's interview transcription using the validated themes (Moustakas, 1994). The sixth step involved developing structural descriptions of each participant's overall experience based on the prior constructed textual description and incorporating imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). The final step was to create a textural-structural description of the experience for each participant conveying the essence and meanings of the experiences, including the invariant elements and themes (Moustakas, 1994). Through the process of imaginative variation, I clustered the themes into an explanation of the experiences of the individuals (textual/individual and structural descriptions), and then constructed a composite structural description of all the individual structural descriptions into a group of universal structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of African American women blogger's lived experiences.

The culmination of the modified Van Kaam data analysis method required generating one overall description that embodies the overall meanings, essence, and experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994); providing one comprehensive descriptive meaning of the phenomenon as a representation of the lived experience of the participant group as a whole (Carter & Baghurst, 2014). The modified Van Kaam data analysis method was used in previous phenomenological studies to identify themes,

relationships, and connections between the experiences of participants (Anthony & Weide, 2015; Grumstrup & Demchak, 2019; Mpuang, Mukhopadhyay, & Malatsi, 2015). This method of data analysis supported this study by allowing the me to establish themes from the data collected to assign and describe the essence and meaning of how African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work.

Software

While Nvivo software was not used to code data for this research study, Nvivo was used to organize and manage data storage. I manually hand-coded the data collected from this research study as per Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam data analysis method. Nvivo can be restrictive and limiting for researchers who prefer visual and kinesthetic work processes (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, & de Eyto, 2018), such as myself. An example of a restrictive element associated with Nvivo is the limited amount of data that can be easily viewed on a computer screen at any one time (Maher et al., 2018). Ultimately, the obligation for analyzing data is the responsibility of the researcher (Najda-Janoszka & Daba-Buzoianu, 2018). Stuckey (2015) argues that qualitative software programs do not actually code data and should not be used in place of the researcher conducting data analysis. Nvivo software was therefore used as a data storage tool, and not for coding data related to this research study.

Coding

Coding is an integral part of data analysis in qualitative research. The coding process consisted of labels, themes, or tags generated by the researcher to apply meaning to the data (Williman, 2017) and described the essence of the data (Clark & Veale, 2018). I manually coded data for this research study using the 7 steps of the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative research generates large quantities of data. During the process of developing codes, I kept a codebook with code descriptions to support organization and trustworthiness of the data (Rogers, 2018). Coding began by reviewing each participant interview transcript following the modified Van Kaam method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

Discrepant Cases

During the data analysis process, discrepant or deviant cases that did not align with the majority findings were categorized and listed as alternative findings. These discrepant cases are discussed thoroughly by me and analyzed for conclusions to contribute to the overall findings of the research study. Alternative findings may arise from discrepant cases and may alter or confirm themes that arise from data analysis (Suter, 2012). A negative or discrepant case is an exception in the data or a variant case that cannot be categorized into the determined themes (Hadi & Closs, 2016).

My role as the researcher in this study is to foster and increase credibility by ensuring rigor in data collection, data analysis, interpretation of the data, and reporting of the findings. A deliberate effort was enacted via epoche, as suggested by Moustakas (1994), to eliminate personal bias and prejudice during the process of this research study

and while collecting, analyzing, and reporting on data. Personal integrity of the researcher is a hallmark in this study, ensuring quality and approval of the research study results (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Demonstrating rigor in qualitative research is essential to validate the integrity of the research study findings and to dispel the criticism that often befalls qualitative research (Hadi & Closs, 2016). During this study, I kept a reflective journal with thorough synthesized notes and thoughts, as recommended by Saldana (2013). Taking the appropriate steps supports the trustworthiness of results. In the following subheadings, I describe how trustworthiness in the form of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations were addressed in this research study.

Credibility

Credibility attests a research study measures what it intended to measure and that the study is a true reflection of participant experiences (Maher et al., 2018). Member checking supported credibility of this study. Member checks involved validation of interview transcripts and data analyzation by each participant to ensure I correctly captured their responses (Smith & McGannon, 2018), and validates my interpretations of the data (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Member checking aided in reducing researcher bias by allowing participants to check and confirm results (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Member checking was conducted in this research study to ensure that participants lived experiences were accurately captured and described.

Transferability

Transferability refers to whether the findings of a study can be adapted in other scenarios and contexts (Noble & Smith, 2015). Transferability of a study is established by demonstrating, via comprehensive descriptions and theoretical examples, that the elements of a study can be transferred and applied widely across a myriad of participants, groups, and settings (Suter, 2012). Rich, thick descriptions are shared from this research study describing how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work. Providing this level of detail allows future researchers to model their research after this study in order to achieve similar results.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the ability of a study to result in similar findings if it were repeated in the same context with different participants (Suter, 2012). Evidence is shared in this research study to demonstrate the study's ability to be replicated with similar results. To ensure dependability in this study, an audit trail was incorporated, the study protocol is outlined, and the data collection process is discussed in detail (Forero et al., 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the study's ability to be corroborated and verified by other researchers (Forero et al., 2018). To support this area of trustworthiness, triangulation and epoche were applied in this research study. Triangulation involves

applying several different information sources to gather information about the same phenomenon in order to confirm the data collected (Hadi & Closs, 2016). The use of triangulation reduced the potential of researcher bias (Renz, Carrington, & Badger, 2018). Confirmability and the removal of researcher bias was applied in this study by applying epoche which requires the researcher to bracket and set aside all preconceived notions, ideas, thoughts, and biases regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This process allowed me to capture the essence of the true descriptions of participants lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Ethical Procedures

Protecting the well-being and safety of research participants in qualitative data is imperative. Qualitative data by nature are in lengthy narrative form with thick descriptions. As a result, research participants have the potential to feel especially vulnerable while sharing the intricate details of their lived experiences. Therefore, all data collected during this research study is being kept confidential with restricted access only provided to me, as the researcher, and as needed, to those associated with the research study (Ross, Iguchi, & Panicker, 2018). Following are the ethical procedures that I followed for this research study:

- The International Review Board (IRB) governs research involving human subjects (Antes, Walsh, Strait, Hudson-Vitale, & DuBois, 2018). The proper protocol for submitting for and receiving approval from the IRB to conduct this study was followed according to research standards.

- All participants were made aware of the purpose of this research study. Each participant provided consent to participate by responding "I consent" to a consent form explaining the research study, participant expectations, and their rights. Participants had the right to decline to participate in this study. At any time during interviews, participants were able to elect to stop an interview and discontinue participation in the study. Had either of these situations occurred, I would have recruited new participants using the purposive network and snowball sampling strategy to recruit new participants as outlined in the sampling criteria for this research study.

- I did not foresee harm being inflicted on participants for this study. However, during the process of member there was a potential to trigger distress for traumatic circumstances that participants may not have wanted to review in detail (Birt et al., 2016). Therefore, participants in this study were given the option to participate in member checking and the opportunity to dialog with me about the results if they wished.

- Data collected during this research study is electronically stored in Nvivo, a reflective journal in Microsoft Word, and on a physical recording device used to record interviews.

- Data collected for this research study is both anonymous and confidential. The privacy of research participants is being honored, and each participant has been given a pseudonym in place of their real name to protect their identity. Reports of this study will not share identities of participants.

- Research results are being published in the form of a student dissertation. Participants were made aware of this during the informed consent process.

- I disclosed to participants that as the researcher, I am also an African American woman style blogger myself. I did not see a conflict of interest, as I disclosed this information and applied epoche as suggested by Moustakas (1994). Epoche supports the removal of bias, prejudice, and preconceived ideas so that I was able to approach this research study as if being introduced to the information for the first time (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness of this transcendental phenomenological research study is demonstrated by the incorporated processes for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. All these elements were essential to demonstrate rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative data. Ethical procedures were applied and followed in this research study to ensure the protection of participant rights. Creating an environment where participants felt safe supported understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work.

Summary

A transcendental phenomenological study was chosen to address the research question of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work. This qualitative research

method allowed for the discovery of the essence and description of the phenomenon by interviewing participants via long, semi-structured interviews. Prior studies have incorporated phenomenology to research women entrepreneurs' experiences. Purposeful sampling via the network and snowball technique was employed with 15-20 participants or until saturation was reached. Recruitment took place via the social network LinkedIn. Participant criteria included African American women over the age of 30 who founded and managed a lifestyle blog as a one-person digital enterprise and who had well informed attitudes and opinions concerning their nontraditional mode of work.

Interviews took place via VOIP utilizing Skype and were recorded using an audio recording device. Phone calls were made an available option to participants. As the researcher I employed epoche in order to bracket and eliminate bias, preconceived notions and prejudices; this allowed me to approach the phenomenon fresh as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). The 7-step modified Van Kaam method was utilized to analyze data. This method allowed for the generation of an overall description that describes the essence of the participants lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness of this phenomenological qualitative research study was safeguarded by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical procedures were followed to guarantee the protection of research participants. This included IRB approval and oversight, informed consent, protection of data, anonymity of research participants, and disclosures about the researcher. Chapter four outlines and discusses the results of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work. The central research question guiding this study was as follows: How do African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work? I designed this question after an exhaustive review of the extant literature to identify literature gaps associated with understanding the business and personal implications for women bloggers in managing as a one-person digital business (Coleman, 2016; Lepkowska-White, & Kortright, 2018).

A literature gap holds particularly true for studies on digital entrepreneurship among women of color, and specifically African American women (Harris, 2015; Juma, & Sequeira, 2017). Blogging as digital entrepreneurship places Black women in a unique position to open new meanings of racial identity within the entrepreneurship field (Gabriel, 2016; Steele, 2018). To address these gaps, I used a transcendental phenomenological design to collect data from the personal narratives of nine African American women bloggers. By sharing their stories, these African American women allowed me to gain valuable insight into their daily business experiences as bloggers, and the implications of their racial and gender identity within a digital entrepreneurial context.

Moustakas' (1994) a modified Van Kaam data analysis approach was applied in this transcendental phenomenological study to provide meaning to African American women bloggers' lived experiences, thereby addressing the purpose and research question for the study. The phenomenon as perceived by, as it appears to the participant, is the noema, or meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The noesis is the manner in which the phenomenon is experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Noema and noesis coexist together and represent the intentional consciousness of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1977). The explication, unveiling, and clarifying what is present in the consciousness is noematic; while explicating and revealing the intent of the process (Husserl, 1977). The experiences of individuals are continuous and never terminate, with new meanings continuously arising in fresh ways in the world (Moustakas, 1994). When motivation and fresh life connect the process of deriving meaning starts anew (Moustakas, 1994). The understanding and contentment of our knowledge and experience of any phenomenon is limitless; and by giving new life to a phenomenon, regardless of perplexity, new meaning reveals itself (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher, I explicate meaning via the process of epoche, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994).

The modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis consisted of the following steps: horizonalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, validation, individual textual description, and textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994). In the transcendental phenomenology approach according to Moustakas (1994), the researcher follows the process of reading the data, creates meaning elements via reduction, reviews reductions to develop thematic clustering, makes comparisons in the

data, develops descriptions, and repeats this process of engagement with the data, documenting summarized reflections to the point that the researcher can describe the essence of the participants' lived experience of becoming, that is— participants growing into their full potential, and being— participant's approach to being in the world (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The coding process I used consisted of labels, themes, or tags I generated to apply meaning to the data (Williman, 2017) and described the essence of the data (Clark & Veale, 2018). I manually coded data for this research study using the seven steps of the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). The study results presented in this chapter involve the personal and business experiences of African American women bloggers previously undocumented in scholarly literature. In this chapter, I also present the research setting, demographic data, data collection and analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness of the qualitative data, and finally, a composite of the study results.

Research Setting

Data for this transcendental phenomenological study were collected by conducting virtual semi-structured interviews with nine African American women bloggers. When possible, face-to-face or VOIP interviews were conducted using Skype, as proposed for this study. The option to conduct interviews via telephone was made available to participants as needed. One participant was available for a true face-to-face video conducted via Skype, while seven participants chose telephone interviews for various reasons, including Internet or computer technical issues, and one participant chose to email responses to the interview questions after it was determined the

participant's schedule would not accommodate meeting synchronously. Interviews ranged in time from 12 to 30 minutes.

Participants were recruited using the professional networking social media site LinkedIn. Recruitment occurred by sending potential participants requests to participate via the sharing channels and direct messaging located within the LinkedIn platform. Once connections were made, potential participants were sent the introductory letter and consent form. Participants were given the option to continue communication within LinkedIn communication channels or opt for continued communication via email. Most participants were comfortable communicating solely using LinkedIn but some requested that I send the introduction letter and consent form to their email address, which they provided. For potential participants who were recommended via the network and snowball technique and not on LinkedIn, I sent requests to participate via email or via direct message on the social media site Instagram. In these cases, the participants responded almost immediately. After making initial contact, all nine participants provided consent to participate in my study. Several participants took a while to schedule a date and time during which they were available to meet for semi-structured interviews. However, overall the scheduling process was uneventful. Interviews took place over a 3-and-a-half-week period and were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the participant. I conducted a cursory review of each participant's blog prior to interviews to ensure they had a robust and regularly updated blog.

The participants in this study were African American adult females over the age of 30 who were founders of a lifestyle blog identified as a one-person digital enterprise,

managed a personal lifestyle blog for a minimum of 2 years after startup, and possessed

well-developed attitudes and opinions regarding African American women bloggers

managing a one-person digital enterprise. All interviews were conducted at a time that

was convenient for the participant and in a quiet, calm, and virtual environment.

Participants were reminded of their right to end the interview and cease participation in

the study at any time. I also reminded participants the interview would be recorded, and I

indicated to them when I started and stopped the recording. All interviews were recorded

using computer software downloaded from voipcallrecording.com and an Olympus VN-

541PC portable digital recorder. The interviews conducted via telephone were recorded

using the Call Recorder app and the Olympus digital recorder was used as the backup

recorder. Participants appeared comfortable during the interviews, did not show signs of

distress, and expressed themselves freely while sharing their lived experiences.

Demographics

Participants for this study were selected using purposeful sampling via the

network and snowball technique. This required identifying two to three potential

participants and requesting them to recommend additional potential participants who met

the criteria. All nine participants met the criteria to participate in this study. There were

seven demographic questions asked of participants in this study which provided

additional insight into their lived experiences. The demographic categories included age,

ethnic group or background, marital status, number of children, highest level of

education, annual income generated by the blog, and whether the participants were the

sole, primary, or secondary earners in their household. The majority of participants in this

study were between the ages of 31-40. Participants were able to select from five ethnic groups or background, including an option for other. The majority of participants identified as Black. Marital status ranged from married, divorced, and partnered. Just over half of the participants have children. Nearly all participants have advanced degrees with 2 participants having earned terminal degrees. All but 1 participant reported generating less than $30,000 in annual revenue from their blog. Finally, over half of participants reported being the secondary earner in their household while the other participants were either the primary or sole earners for their household. These demographic variables were essential elements to the conceptual framework for this study. Table 1 below outlines the demographic details of all participants in this study. Participants are identified with the pseudonym of participant followed by numerals that randomly indicate the number of participants.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics and Characteristics

Participant	Age	Ethnic Group/ Background	Marital Status	Children and No.	Education Level	Blog Annual Income	Household Earner
Participant 1	31-40	African American	Divorced	No	Bachelors, Mass Communications	Less than $30,000	Sole
Participant 2	51-60	Black	Partnered (Engaged)	Yes - 3	Doctorate, Organizational & Leadership Behavior	Less than $30,000	Secondary
Participant 3	31-40	African American	Declined to provide response	No	Masters	Less than $30,000	Secondary (*table continues*)

Participant 4	31-40	Black	Divorced	Yes - 3	Some College	Less than $30,000	Primary
Participant 5	31-40	Black	Divorced	No	Masters, Educational Leadership	Less than $30,000	Sole
Participant 6	31-40	Black	Divorced	Yes - 1	ABD	Less than $30,000	Secondary
Participant 7	31-40	African	Married	Yes - 1	Masters, Education	Less than $30,000	Primary
Participant 8	41-50	Black	Married	Yes - 4	PhD	More than $30,000	Secondary
Participant 9	31-40	Black	Partnered (Boyfriend)	No	MBA	Less than $30,000	Secondary

Data Collection

The data collection for this transcendental phenomenological study began on May 28, 2019 after receiving IRB approval from Walden University. The Walden University IRB approval number for this research study is: 05-24-19-0526547. Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling. I used the search tool within the business social networking site LinkedIn to conduct a search of potential participants to participate in this study. I used search terms related to the inclusion criteria in order to identify 2 – 3 potential participants, which is in line with the network and snowball sampling strategy applied in this study (Min & Wilson, 2019). LinkedIn search terms included *blogger, lifestyle blogger, African American lifestyle blogger, Black blogger, influencer, and blog editor.* These search terms yielded hundreds of results. I was then able to go through the

search results and visually identify African American women, via their LinkedIn profile picture, and contact them regarding participation in this study.

LinkedIn is set up in such a way that you can only send an in-platform email message to people with whom you are connected. For the purposes of identifying potential participants for this study, I had to first send a connection request to potential participants in order to be connected on LinkedIn and to send an email message via the platform's sharing channels. Once connected, I emailed the introductory email and attached the consent form to prospective participants using the LinkedIn email messaging system. Not all potential participants to whom I sent a connection request accepted my request to connect on LinkedIn. In these cases, I was not able to contact them directly within the LinkedIn platform. For those potential participants who did accept my request to connect on LinkedIn, I sent the introduction letter and consent form via the LinkedIn email messaging system. Following are a list of scenarios that occurred upon sending the invitation and consent form to potential participants on LinkedIn. Either the potential participant did not respond, the potential participant responded with questions about the study, the potential participant responded that they did not meet the inclusion criteria, the potential participant indicated they could not participate at this time, or the potential participant responded and indicated they were interested and provided consent to participant in the study. The potential participants who did not meet inclusion criteria, either did not meet the age criterion or the number of years managing a lifestyle blog after startup criterion.

After identifying two to three participants who provided consent to participate in this study, I requested a recommendation from them of other potential participants who meet the inclusion criteria and who may be interested in participating in this study. Those participants who knew an African American women blogger provided me with recommendations which included name and contact information. In many cases the potential participants were not on LinkedIn but did have an email address and profiles on the social media site Instagram. Instagram is a popular social media website for lifestyle bloggers (Maares & Hanusch, 2018). I sent an email and a direct message to the recommended potential participants on Instagram via direct messaging in the social media app. In total, I sent 24 invitations to participate in this study and consent forms on LinkedIn and 18 on Instagram. Once potential participants provided consent to participate in this study, they indicated whether they wanted to continue communicating via the LinkedIn email messaging or via traditional email. Most opted to continue messaging via LinkedIn. The participants whom I initially contacted via Instagram opted for traditional email communication.

Semi-structured Interviews

The next phase of data collection consisted of scheduling participants for interviews. The long form semi-structured interview is characteristic of transcendental phenomenological research (Høffding & Martiny, 2016) to help understand the meaning and essence of the lived experiences of African American women bloggers. Participants were scheduled for virtual face-to-face Skype interviews at a time that was convenient for them; with the option of a telephone interview if needed. Seven participants in this study

opted for a telephone interview over a virtual face-to-face Skype interview. One participant completed the interview via face-to-face virtual Skype interview, and 1 participant requested to email her responses to interview questions after multiple failed attempts to find a time in her schedule to interview via Skype. Interviews took place over a three-and-a-half-week period. Interviews via Skype were recorded using voipcallrecording.com and telephone interviews were recorded using the Call Recorder App. All interviews were recorded with a backup portable device to ensure no data was lost and to mitigate technical recording issues.

During the data collection process of conducting interviews I engaged in the epoche process according to Moustakas (1994). I dismissed all bias, preconceived ideas, judgements, and concepts I had of African American women bloggers. By applying epoche, I was able to approach the phenomenon with a clear conscious and be receptive to new attitudes, experiences, and meanings (Bevan, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). I also disclosed to each participant that I myself was an African American style blogger. I kept a reflective journal and reviewed each participant's blog prior to the interview to compliment the narrative of their lived experience.

I followed the semi-structured piloted interview protocol (see Appendix B) and bracketed my own knowledge and experience. I listened to each participant intently and allowed participants to fully express their lived experiences with no interruption. While conducting interviews, I observed that participants were open and frank in their responses. Participants shared freely while detailing vivid descriptions of their lived experiences. The interviews yielded thick, rich descriptions of African American women

bloggers lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work. Participants were comfortable and expressive in their responses and there were no signs of distress in their communication. Upon completing interviews with Participants 4 and 5, I noticed common themes forming across participant responses. After conducting an interview with Participant 9, evidence of data saturation appeared as no new themes emerged from the data. I confirmed data saturation upon reviewing the participant data from all 9 participants and verified that themes were being repeated and no new knowledge was emerging in the interview responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018).

Member checking

After the completion of each interview I uploaded the audio file of the recorded interview to the transcription service Rev.com for transcribing. Each transcription took between 2 and 8 hours to complete. Each participant was emailed a copy of the transcript for member checking to ensure accuracy of their statements and to ensure I had accurately captured each participant's responses. This type of transcript review is a part of the member checking process to further ensure rigorous results in qualitative studies. (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Participants were asked to respond back to me within 24 hours if there were any edits needed. Two participants requested minor edits to their transcripts. I made the requested edits to the corresponding transcripts and verified the edits with the participants. Data collection concluded on June 29, 2019 after completing the member checking process. All data collected for this study is electronically stored in

Nvivo, an electronic reflective journal in Microsoft Word, and on recording devices used to record interviews. I managed the process for confidentiality of participant data as was outlined in Chapter 3. The following section details the data analysis process using the modified Van Kaam method associated with phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994) to provide a comprehensive descriptive meaning of the lived experiences of African American women bloggers.

Data Analysis

Epoche Protocol

To start the data analysis, I engaged in the epoche protocol to prepare for uncovering new knowledge. I meditated on my experience and perceptions with the phenomenon and then consciously set aside my suppositions, perceptions, bias, to disconnected from any application my memories have to the phenomenon being studied (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing my own interpretations and assumptions allowed me to see the phenomenon for what it was (Finlay, 2014). This process of epoche in necessary for explicating the meaning of the lived experience of African American women bloggers.

Preliminary Coding or Horizonalization

Participants in this study provided rich, thick, verbal data in response to interview questions. All data collected was valuable in providing descriptive themes and providing meaning to the phenomenon. The first step in the transcendental phenomenological data analysis, using the modified Van Kaam method, is to identify pertinent quotes from participants related to the phenomenon. In this preliminary step of data analysis,

horizontalization, significant statements from participants are highlighted from

participant transcript responses (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). I hand coded the

collected data and identified participant statements relevant to the research question: How

do African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a

one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity

within this non-traditional mode of work? Following are all the significant statements

from each participant in this study, as quoted by the participants themselves:

Significant statements from Participant 1:

- "*You know what, I'll start a YouTube channel just to kind of show my makeup experience to help girls figure out how to do their day to day make up." And so from there is kind of where the blog launched.*"

- "*…having a full-time job helps, because you're able to take that income and put it back into the blog and back into buying things to show and things you need to create your content.*"

- "*Trying to make decisions on my own because you know, as a sole proprietor, in your business you don't really have anyone else to kind of bounce ideas off of.*"

- "*..hearing minority women talk about the differences in being a Black woman in blogging and influencing versus being a woman, a White woman or Caucasian woman-- it's different because you do see some women who aren't Black, who may not create content as well as you, but are rewarded far higher just because of their skin tone or they may get more opportunities.*"

- "*..being a blogger is expensive, especially when you're a new blogger and you're constantly having to reinvest into your business.*"

- "*When I started my blog, I started my blog with the intent to make it a business.*"

- "*I'm a small blogger but I believe in putting out quality content and having the mindset that I want to be the best in my niche.*"

- "*I think a lot of times as Black women we kind of downgrade ourselves in terms of how much money, you know, when we're pitching ourselves, we're not pitching the way that other women are pitching.*"

Significant statements from Participant 2:

- "*I've found that when I attach someone that is a lighter complexion, mainly White, then I get more traction [on my blog].*"

- "*The reality for me is that I recognize that as a black woman I am one of the most marginalized people out there. So I have to...I can't rest when it comes to my work.*"

- "*The biggest lesson is really holding on to what my worth is and knowing that, yeah, I got this. I'm enough, no matter what anybody else has to say.*"

Significant statements from Participant 3:

- "*The good thing about starting a blog, of course you need money, but to start-up a WordPress or anything like that is actually free to start it.*"

- "*You definitely need technological skills because although I use WordPress, although WordPress is easy, there is still definitely technical things that you may*

need to go in and put a code in or you need a plugin or you need something like
that."

- **"***I think one person is definitely difficult.***"**

- **"***I would say money is another obstacle.***"**

- **"***I think I'm in groups where we are creating spaces, where we [African American women bloggers] are creating spaces for us, but the mainstream is still difficult to try to get into there, even the people that are in this space.***"**

- "*Whatever your niche is, there's going to be a lot of women that ... There's a lot of beauty bloggers. There's a lot of travel bloggers, plus size bloggers. There's a lot of people with the same niche, but don't feel like you can't find your place in the space.*"

Significant statements from Participant 4:

- "*…it's difficult if you- like I'm still in the process right now of finding people who want to invest in me.*"

- "*It's like if you don't have a certain number of followers, or page views, then you're basically worthless in the eyes of a lot of people. You throw on top of that, the fact that I'm female and Black, does not help.*"

- "*It is hard. It is serious, hard work.*

- "*At the same time I also struggle with feeling like I'm not Black enough in certain circles because the style that my blog is, or the pictures and things that I put up, or I didn't go to college, I didn't finish college, I didn't pledge a sorority, just different things... or I don't listen to a certain type of music.*"

- "*I feel stuck sometimes, like I said, because I have to work 10 times as hard as a White woman would just to prove myself, to get my foot in the door, and then if I do get my foot in the door, I'm not black enough.*"

- "*Because I'm a black, single woman, single mom now... That has opened a lot of doors for me. I will use it quite a bit when I pitch someone I want to work with.*"

- "*I am a business. I am my brand.*"

Significant statements from Participant 5:

- "*I just use my money from my nine-to-five to help fund and start-up my blogger business.*"

- "*Knowing how to deal with SEO and Google AdSense, and just the whole search engines and..... It's a learning curve.*"

- "*I feel like sometimes my lived experience is a bit of a struggle, because I feel like my blog and brand, and me being black, it hasn't really been super popular or famous, based on what I'm writing.*"

- "*I struggle with like, am I black enough, or it is what I'm putting out there beneficial to the black community?*"

- "*That's a big obstacle--- just trying to continue getting some type of income.*"

- "*And I feel like they [White female bloggers] have entered a realm where they were able to fully fund without having to work full-time.*"

Significant statements from Participant 6:

- "*I use the blog primarily as a way to get traffic to my business.*"

- "*Financially, I poured my own money into it…*"

- "*You're actually honing in on a niche audience, a particular target market, and you have to actually learn how to write to appeal to them.*"

- "*It's more about copy now because everything is marketing and a blog is just another venue, another asset, another lane for marketing.*"

- "*…it's like Black women or people in general, that we are diverse and we belong and we fit in and we're not ... It's still, in 2019, it's like you're trying to edge your way into the field and into the big network, the big milieu, of bloggers.*"

- "*I've battled with, "Do I put my face on the brand, or do I just put various content showing that I am about diversity?"*"

Significant statements from Participant 7:

- "*I never really asked for start-up resources. I feel like as a black woman, because of the limitations we have when it comes to resources, like I said, it never occurred to me to raise money to start my blog.*"

- "*I had to learn all things that has to do with running a blog, which includes photography, that includes at least a little bit of knowledge of using a computer…. html, CSS, graphic design—at least a basic knowledge of those things. I've had to teach myself how to edit videos myself.*"

- "*I think, I feel like sometimes I struggle with connecting with my audience because I'm in the United States, I'm Black. When you first see me, you think I'm Black, but I'm not necessarily Black-- because I'm African. So trying to find my audience has been a little bit harder because my experiences are a little bit different.*"

- "*I guess being Black [is an asset]…when you find brands or campaigns where they're looking for, I don't want to say the quota, but sometimes there are people who want you just because of your audience. You know, they want your audience. They want that diversity.*"

- "*I would say in the last few years is when I've made the most money and it's because of my social capital, because prior to that, I really wasn't making any money.*"

Significant statements from Participant 8:

- "*I chose to become a fashion blogger because every time I posted a picture online, I would get so many requests asking for me to inform them where I was purchasing my outfits from so this inspired me.*"

- "*It [blogging] can be very time consuming. It can also be expensive if you are a fashion blogger because you have to constantly buy new clothing items to keep up with the seasons changing and the current fashion styles.*"

- "*I believe as an African American woman, we are afforded the same opportunities as our White counterparts.*"

- "*I find exposure to be the most significant obstacle, reaching out to the big brands and getting contracts has been a challenge.*"

- "*I have capitalized off of it [blogging] by becoming a brand ambassador for specific businesses and promoting their brand/products for them.*"

Significant statements from Participant 9:

- *"I was able to use my network and then use my own personal finances and my own income to start-up, but there was no external funding or external support."*

- *"A lot of the really highly technical stuff I still outsource—like SEO optimization I outsource."*

- *"I think it's pretty challenging getting brand sponsorships and getting brands to pay attention to you. When you're a woman of color, I do feel like there is quite a bit of bias, I think, against African Americans in particular, which is more so than just overall women of color. We just don't get quite as many opportunities or if you want to focus your efforts on brands that are black-owned, they just don't quite have budgets so you'll have a lot of trouble trying to get paid sponsorships— instead you'll just get free stuff."*

- *"I also feel like in terms of your content, I feel like there is a little more pressure for you to have a social message or be about something or talk about Black issues or talk about something-- but White women don't have to be about anything. They just post fashion pictures and it's okay but for us, we have to be about something else or have another message, you can't just be about pretty pictures."*

- *"I also just like building a following because the fact that people who are not black, I guess there's an identity issue, you don't have as wide of audience trail-- or you might be more likely to have audiences in your own races but you won't have as many followers that are White or Asian or whatever else, where someone who is not an African American could have black followers, could have Asian*

followers, could have followers of all different races. We're more likely to have a niche audience, which then I think, that audience seems less valuable to a brand."

- "*I'm very much a fashion and lifestyle blogger and it's very much something that anyone can come to and read and connect to without it being about race so that's kind of the space that I exist in.*"

Phenomenological Reduction

The process of phenomenological reduction involved identifying and eliminating participant statements that do not provide elements for understanding the lived experience, are nonspecific to the experience, and those which cannot be labeled (Moustakas, 1994). I reviewed and eliminated participant quotes that did not meet this requirement of the modified Van Kaam phenomenological data analysis. Completing this reduction process ensured that invariant participant statements that speak to the horizon of the lived experience remain (Moustakas, 1994).

Participant statements that were eliminated as a result of this process included: "*And what I've learned is that everyone has their own unique stories. So, you can find a way to really tell your story because it's going to essentially bless someone and help someone else's life. Because ultimately that's what blogging is all about*", "*I don't really recall any actual resources other than the fact of getting on there and writing and hoping that somebody catches it*", "*Videos… getting comfortable with doing videos, because just the writing part and putting the blog out there is really not enough*", "*I think I have surrounded myself with a lot of African American travel bloggers and I'm in these different groups, but I would say that if I were not in these different groups, I would say*

White people kind of rule the travel blogging world or the travel space, for some reason",
"*Wow. People are really out there paying attention to what you're doing and appreciate
what you're doing*", "*I just fell in love with blogging because I started meeting people,
not just in my city, but from all over the world*", "*I struggle with finding where I fit in
among the Caucasians and Blacks and I kind of feel like I'm in limbo here, I'll just keep
chugging along doing my thing, because it's working*", "*Past experience has taught me
being myself and staying true to who I am and sharing my story is beneficial for other
people*", "*I'm in that age group where I grew up on computers, so it seems to have come
very easy to me. I just had to find the information and implement it*", "*Blogging became
something about expressing not only my creativity, but as a way to become a bit more
diverse and learn about others around me--and connect with others around me*", "*…it's
about finding that niche and finding that group of people who can help you grow to
expand*", "*I feel that it's a struggle because I come from a family who was on welfare and
not a very affluent family, so people.... as I'm trying to break away into things, I've gotten
perceptions that I'm stuck up or trying to be better than other people, but all I'm doing is
I've caught onto something.*"

Theme Formation

The invariant themes that I formed as a result of reduction and elimination
focused on African American women bloggers lived experience of becoming and being
one-person digital enterprises. According to Moustakas (as cited in Stratman, 1990), the
notion of becoming, is the process of growing into the full potential that one can be and
the notion of being (as cited in Rhodes, 1987), is a consequence of looking within to

discover one's own path; reflecting a manner of existence (as cited in Schneider, 1987).

The eight themes that emerged from the reduction process include: becoming a digital entrepreneur, becoming tech savvy, becoming an entrepreneurial marketer, becoming financially solvent, being a personal style blogger, being a woman digital entrepreneur, being a Black woman online, and being an African American woman digital entrepreneur.

Theme formation in transcendental phenomenology best reflects reality when the researcher to be open to a learning that occurs by initiating distance between ourselves and the phenomenon being studied and intuitively merging with the subject's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) wrote one learns about reality by identifying with the observed phenomenon and not by controlled experiments. This perception of life requires becoming aware through seeing and noticing while consciously suppressing prejudgments about what is observed, pondered, visualized or felt. Before making judgements and arriving at conclusions, as in the case of them formation in a research design, we must allow what is the participant's experience to simply be and observed from various perspectives. Knowledge and discovery are the course of being, existing, within something, ourselves, and others—while connecting personal experiences and meanings; and, thus forming a never-ending connection to what exists and what is important in life (Moustakas, 1994).

Individual Textual Description

A textual description is a complete description of the phenomena experienced by the individual participant in their own words (Moustakas, 1994), including quotes from

the participant's transcripts. I constructed the textual descriptions based on the invariant themes and the horizons of the experience. Constructing textual descriptions reveals the "what" of the phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019). The following section outlines the textural descriptions I created for each participant's responses.

      Textual description of participant 1. Being an African American woman blogger for participant 1 is intentional, "*When I started my blog, I started my blog with the intent to make it a business*", She has a marketing focus on the beauty industry, "*You know what, I'll start a YouTube channel just to kind of show my makeup experience to help girls figure out how to do their day-to-day make up.*" Managing a one-person digital enterprise has its challenges, "*Trying to make decisions on my own because you know, as a sole proprietor, in your business you don't really have anyone else to kind of bounce ideas off of.*" Access to capital is of importance in becoming a digital entrepreneur, "*..being a blogger is expensive, especially when you're a new blogger and you're constantly having to reinvest into your business*", and having access to additional financial support is necessary "*…having a full-time job helps, because you're able to take that income and put it back into the blog and back into buying things to show and things you need to create your content.*" Participant 1 experiences challenges in her business, "*..hearing minority women talk about the differences in being a Black woman in blogging and influencing versus being a woman, a White woman or Caucasian woman-- it's different because you do see some women who aren't Black, who may not create content as well as you, but are rewarded far higher just because of their skin tone or they may get more opportunities*", while also being aware that she may not advocate for equal pay, "*I*

think a lot of times as Black women we kind of downgrade ourselves in terms of how much money, you know, when we're pitching ourselves, we're not pitching the way that other women are pitching." Participant 1 is motivated to be the best, "*I'm a small blogger but I believe in putting out quality content and having the mindset that I want to be the best in my niche*".

Textual description of participant 2. Participant 2 experiences marginalization, "*The reality for me is that I recognize that as a black woman I am one of the most marginalized people out there*." She is motivated, "*So I have to...I can't rest when it comes to my work*." She has experienced racial imbalances, "*I've found that when I attach someone that is a lighter complexion, mainly White, then I get more traction [on my blog].*" She recognizes her worth as a Black woman, "*The biggest lesson is really holding on to what my worth is and knowing that, yeah, I got this. I'm enough, no matter what anybody else has to say*".

Textual description of participant 3. Access to financial capital is an obstacle for participant 3, "***I would say money is another obstacle***." She uses free resources, "***The good thing about starting a blog, of course you need money, but to start-up a WordPress or anything like that is actually free to start it***." She has experienced becoming tech savvy, "***You definitely need technological skills because although I use WordPress, although WordPress is easy, there is still definitely technical things that you may need to go in and put a code in or you need a plugin or you need something like that***." Operating as a one-person digital enterprise is challenging, "*I think one person is definitely difficult*." She engages as a Black woman online, "***I think I'm in groups where we are***

creating spaces, where we [African American women bloggers] are creating spaces for us, but the mainstream is still difficult to try to get into there, even the people that are in this space." Participant 3 has a niche as a woman digital entrepreneur and blogger, "*Whatever your niche is, there's going to be a lot of women that ... There's a lot of beauty bloggers. There's a lot of travel bloggers, plus size bloggers. There's a lot of people with the same niche, but don't feel like you can't find your place in the space*".

Textual description of participant 4. Participant 4 describes her experience as a personal style blogger, "*It is hard. It is serious, hard work.*" Securing financial capital is difficult, "*…it's difficult if you- like I'm still in the process right now of finding people who want to invest in me.*" Her social media ranking and identity is a challenge, "*It's like if you don't have a certain number of followers, or page views, then you're basically worthless in the eyes of a lot of people. You throw on top of that, the fact that I'm female and Black, does not help.*" Participant 4 struggles with expressing her identity being a Black woman online, "*At the same time I also struggle with feeling like I'm not Black enough in certain circles because the style that my blog is, or the pictures and things that I put up, or I didn't go to college, I didn't finish college, I didn't pledge a sorority, just different things... or I don't listen to a certain type of music*", and "*I feel stuck sometimes, like I said, because I have to work 10 times as hard as a White woman would just to prove myself, to get my foot in the door, and then if I do get my foot in the door, I'm not black enough.*" Participant 4 sees herself as a business, "*I am a business. I am my brand,*" and uses her identity for marketability, "*Because I'm a black, single woman, single mom*

now... That has opened a lot of doors for me. I will use it quite a bit when I pitch someone I want to work with".

Textual description of participant 5. Financial capital is an obstacle for participant 5, "*That's a big obstacle--- just trying to continue getting some type of income,*" specifically, start-up capital, "*I just use my money from my nine-to-five to help fund and start-up my blogger business.*" Participant 5 compares racial and financial disparities, "*And I feel like they [White female bloggers] have entered a realm where they were able to fully fund without having to work full-time.*" Becoming tech savvy is essential, "*Knowing how to deal with SEO and Google AdSense, and just the whole search engines and..... It's a learning curve.*" Participant 5 struggles with presenting her identity online, "*I feel like sometimes my lived experience is a bit of a struggle, because I feel like my blog and brand, and me being black, it hasn't really been super popular or famous, based on what I'm writing*", and where to fit in "*I struggle with like, am I black enough, or it is what I'm putting out there beneficial to the black community?*"

Textual description of participant 6. Participant 6 is self-funded, "*Financially, I poured my own money into it.*" She values the importance of marketing, "*You're actually honing in on a niche audience, a particular target market, and you have to actually learn how to write to appeal to them*", and as an entrepreneurial marketer, "*It's more about copy now because everything is marketing and a blog is just another venue, another asset, another lane for marketing.*" Participant 6 has a marketing plan, "*I use the blog primarily as a way to get traffic to my business.*" Her identity is important to her, "*I've battled with, do I put my face on the brand, or do I just put various content showing that I*

am about diversity?", and how to fit in as an African American woman digital entrepreneur, "…*it's like Black women or people in general, that we are diverse and we belong and we fit in and we're not ... It's still, in 2019, it's like you're trying to edge your way into the field and into the big network, the big milieu, of bloggers*".

Textual description of participant 7. Participant 7 did not receive start-up capital, "*I never really asked for start-up resources. I feel like as a black woman, because of the limitations we have when it comes to resources, like I said, it never occurred to me to raise money to start my blog.*" Her blog generated revenue, "*I would say in the last few years is when I've made the most money and it's because of my social capital, because prior to that, I really wasn't making any money.*" Becoming tech savvy is important to participant 7 as a woman digital entrepreneur, "*I had to learn all things that has to do with running a blog, which includes photography, that includes at least a little bit of knowledge of using a computer…. html, CSS, graphic design—at least a basic knowledge of those things. I've had to teach myself how to edit videos myself.*" She has struggled with her identity as a Black woman online, "*I think, I feel like sometimes I struggle with connecting with my audience because I'm in the United States, I'm Black. When you first see me, you think I'm Black, but I'm not necessarily Black-- because I'm African. So, trying to find my audience has been a little bit harder because my experiences are a little bit different.*" Her identity is an asset for entrepreneurial marketing, "*I guess being Black [is an asset] …when you find brands or campaigns where they're looking for, I don't want to say the quota, but sometimes there are people who want you just because of your audience. You know, they want your audience. They want that diversity*".

Textual description of participant 8. Being a personal style blogger came naturally for participant 8, "*I chose to become a fashion blogger because every time I posted a picture online, I would get so many requests asking for me to inform them where I was purchasing my outfits from so this inspired me.*" Time and financial investment are key elements, "*It [blogging] can be very time consuming. It can also be expensive if you are a fashion blogger because you have to constantly buy new clothing items to keep up with the seasons changing and the current fashion styles.*" Securing brand contracts has been a challenge, "*I find exposure to be the most significant obstacle, reaching out to the big brands and getting contracts has been a challenge.*" Participant 8 has generated revenue, "*I have capitalized off of it [blogging] by becoming a brand ambassador for specific businesses and promoting their brand/products for them.*" She has experienced equality as an African American woman digital entrepreneur, "*I believe as an African American woman, we are afforded the same opportunities as our White counterparts*".

Textual description of participant 9. Participant 9 had access to start-up capital, "*I was able to use my network and then use my own personal finances and my own income to start-up, but there was no external funding or external support.*" Being technically savvy is not a priority, "*A lot of the really highly technical stuff I still outsource—like SEO optimization I outsource.*" Participant 9 experiences challenges "*I think it's pretty challenging getting brand sponsorships and getting brands to pay attention to you*", and experiences bias as an African American woman digital entrepreneur, "*When you're a woman of color, I do feel like there is quite a bit of bias, I think, against African Americans in particular, which is more so than just overall women*

of color... we just don't get quite as many opportunities." Engaging in entrepreneurial

marketing is challenging, "*…or if you want to focus your efforts on brands that are*

black-owned, they just don't quite have budgets so you'll have a lot of trouble trying to

get paid sponsorships—instead you'll just get free stuff." Participant 9 is pressured to

share her racial identity, "*I also feel like in terms of your content, I feel like there is a*

little more pressure for you to have a social message or be about something or talk about

Black issues or talk about something-- but White women don't have to be about anything.

They just post fashion pictures and it's okay but for us, we have to be about something

else or have another message, you can't just be about pretty pictures" and this affects her

audience, "*I also just like building a following because the fact that people who are not*

black, I guess there's an identity issue, you don't have as wide of audience trail-- or you

might be more likely to have audiences in your own races but you won't have as many

followers that are White or Asian or whatever else, where someone who is not an African

American could have black followers, could have Asian followers, could have followers

of all different races. We're more likely to have a niche audience, which then I think, that

audience seems less valuable to a brand." Being a personal style blogger, "*I'm very much*

a fashion and lifestyle blogger and it's very much something that anyone can come to and

read and connect to without it being about race so that's kind of the space that I exist in".

    Composite textual description. Upon completing the individual textural

descriptions of participant's significant statements, I provided a table of all the themes

formed from participants responses. Recurring themes included, becoming a digital

entrepreneur, becoming tech savvy, becoming an entrepreneurial marketer, becoming

tech savvy, being a personal style blogger, being a woman digital entrepreneur, being a

Black woman online, and being an African American woman digital entrepreneur.

Additional themes that arose were grouped as follows: Intention and motivation were

grouped under becoming a digital entrepreneur, perseverance and branded business were

grouped under being a personal style blogger, challenges were grouped under being a

woman digital entrepreneur, racial imbalances were grouped under being a Black woman

online, and self-funded, equal pay, free resources and securing brand contracts were

grouped under becoming financially solvent. The themes from individual participant's

responses are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes from Participants' Responses

Participant	Themes
Participant 1	Intention, becoming an entrepreneurial marketer, challenges, becoming financially solvent, being an African American woman digital entrepreneur, perseverance, motivation
Participant 2	Being a Black woman online, motivation, racial imbalances, being an African American woman digital entrepreneur
Participant 3	Becoming financially solvent, free resources, becoming tech savvy, challenges, being a Black woman online, being a woman digital entrepreneur
Participant 4	Being a personal style blogger, becoming financially solvent, challenges, being an African American woman digital entrepreneur, being a Black woman online, branded business
Participant 5	Becoming financially solvent, being an African American woman online, becoming tech savvy, being a Black woman online (*table continues*)
Participant 6	Becoming financially solvent, self-funded, becoming an entrepreneurial marketer, being a Black woman online, being an African American woman digital entrepreneur

Participant 7	Becoming financially solvent, becoming tech savvy, being a Black woman online, becoming an entrepreneurial marketer
Participant 8	Being a woman digital entrepreneur, becoming financially solvent, challenges, being a personal style blogger, securing brand contracts
Participant 9	Becoming financially solvent, securing brand contracts, being an African American woman digital entrepreneur, being an entrepreneurial marketer, being a Black woman online, being a style blogger

Constructing Meaning via Bracketing and Imaginative Variation

I reflected on my preconceived ideas about the phenomenon and bracketed them (Finlay, 2014; Moustakas, 1994) in order to construct the structural meanings of individual participants. Using imaginative variation, next I constructed the themes into structural descriptions of the individual participant's experiences. Removing quotes of individual participants that were not relevant to African American women bloggers experience with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work.

Individual Structural Descriptions

Applying imaginative variation in this process supported the identification of potential meanings and unveiled the hidden and underlying factors of the participant's individual experiences (Lin, 2013). Imaginative variation revealed the "how" of the phenomenon being studied (Neubauer et al., 2019). The individual structural descriptions reveal the hidden meanings and dynamics of the individual participant's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I used imaginative variation to unveil how individual participants experienced the cultural, emotional, racial, social, and gender aspects of being an African American woman blogger.

Structural description of participant 1. The lived experience of participant 1 is that of an African American woman blogger and digital entrepreneur who used her innate talent to intentionally start her business venture as a blogger. Engaging in business activity such as marketing, raising capital, generating revenue, and operating as a one-person digital enterprise are challenges, she has experienced. She displayed an emotional connection to the financial aspects of starting and maintaining her blogging business; understanding that financial investment is essential to business growth. Participant 1 experiences the realities of her racial identity as it is expressed online as a Black woman. She is aware of the racial imbalances that exist when conducting entrepreneurial activities online as a blogger, and when seeking new opportunities; often wondering why her White counterparts do not have to put forth as much efforts as she does. She has an emotional connection to the realities of the barriers she must overcome to receive the same recognition as non-Black women bloggers in her online space. Nonetheless, she values the quality of her digital content and perseveres as an African American woman digital entrepreneur and blogger despite the barriers in the way.

Structural description of participant 2. Participant 2 is deeply connected to her identity as a Black woman online. Racial identity evokes proud emotions and is a major component of her experience as an African American woman blogger. Her experiences as a Black woman online motivate her to work harder as a digital entrepreneur, understanding that as a Black woman she strongly believes that she must put forth more effort than her White counterparts. The racial imbalances she has experienced are evident in the content she creates as an African American woman blogger. She has experienced

racial imbalances in how her blog content is consumed by her audience and following. She values her identity as a Black woman online and believes she can be successful as a blogger and digital entrepreneur despite what she has experienced in as an African American woman online.

Structural description of participant 3. Access to financial capital is an obstacle for participant 3. However, she is resourceful and seeks out free resources to mitigate the lack of start-up capital and financing. Becoming tech savvy is an element of her experience as a blogger and digital entrepreneur. She applies her skills to ensure her blog functions as she intends it to. Operating her blog as a one-person digital enterprise is challenging. She values the network and connections with other African American women bloggers; and therefore, purposely seeks out online spaces to engage and interact with them. Being a Black woman online and creating spaces for African American women digital entrepreneurs is important to her and her success. Her identity as a plus-size Black woman is intertwined in her existence and business as a blogger. Participant 3 values her work and values where she fits in as woman digital entrepreneur and blogger. She has learned from her lived experience that there is a place for her in the blogosphere, regardless how saturated it may seem.

Structural description of participant 4. Participant 4 experiences being a personal style blogger as a business that requires intense effort and hard work. Often, she experiences having to put forth more effort and work to secure contracts than her White counterparts. She has found it difficult to secure financial capital to become financially solvent. Her financial challenges are further challenged by her low social media ranking

and racial identity as an African American woman digital entrepreneur, which she has experienced as keeping her from advancing in her business as a blogger. Culturally, participant 4 struggles with expressing her identity as a Black woman online and not fitting in fully in Black or White spaces. She is deeply tied to her experiences as a blogger, mother, and Black woman. A feeling of otherness is a barrier that keeps her from being able to fully express herself as who she is, instead of societal stereotypes of who she is expected to be based on her visual identity. Despite this, participant 4 sees herself as a business and therefore marketable, based on her identity as a single mother and an African American woman digital entrepreneur and blogger.

Structural description of participant 5. Participant 5 experiences financial capital as an obstacle, especially start-up capital to fund her business. She experiences racial and financial disparities being an African American woman digital entrepreneur and blogger. She is aware that her White counterparts do not experience the same barriers and benefit from having access to capital without having to supplement their blogging business with a fulltime job. Becoming tech savvy is a learning experience for participant 5 and important to her business. Participant 5 struggles with presenting her cultural identity as a Black woman online. She has an emotional connection and desire to market to other Black women. It is a balancing act for her to determine where exactly she fits in the blogosphere and how to convey her Black identity online.

Structural description of participant 6. The lived experience of participant 6 revealed her concentrated focus on marketing, as a key aspect of her digital enterprise and as a woman digital entrepreneur. She is strategic in her marketing efforts and sees the

value in becoming an entrepreneurial marketer. She did not rely on external funding and bootstrapped her business start-up costs. Participant 6 battles with her identity as a Black woman online and how to fit in as a blogger and African American woman digital entrepreneur.

Structural description of participant 7. Start-up capital was not a consideration for participant 7. She moved forward with starting her style blog without external start-up capital and did not realize that raising funds was an option for her blogging business. Nonetheless, her blog began generating revenue and was profitable. Becoming tech savvy was an important experience to participant 7 as a woman digital entrepreneur. She has struggled with how to present her identity as a Black woman online as both an African woman and a Black woman in America. However, she views her identity as a strength and asset. Participant 7 leverages her identity as a Black woman online for entrepreneurial marketing.

Structural description of participant 8. Starting a blogging business as a woman digital entrepreneur formed organically for participant 8 based on her lived experiences online. It is not lost on her that being a personal style blogger requires a lot of time and effort. Likewise, the financial investment into her digital enterprise is relevant to her experience as a personal style blogger and can be expensive to manage. The lived experiences of participant 8 involves challenges with securing brand contracts. Despite this obstacle, Participant 8 has been successful in generating revenue and believes she has experienced equal opportunities as a style blogger.

Structural description of participant 9. The lived experience of Participant 9 involved using a combination of fundraising and her own finances for start-up funding to start her style blog business. Being technically savvy is not a priority for her business and she opts to outsource the highly technical aspects of her work. Participant 9 experiences challenges in securing brand partnerships and experiences bias as an African American woman digital entrepreneur when trying to secure partnerships. In her lived experience she finds engaging in entrepreneurial marketing challenging when seeking partnerships with Black brands who may not have budgets for collaborations, and this affects marketing to her audience; which is tied to the ability to market her brand. However, for participant 9, being a personal style blogger does not have to be tied to her cultural identity as a Black woman online and she wants to attract a following from all backgrounds who enjoy her lifestyle and fashion content. She wants to be valued for her expertise as a style blogger and not just for being a Black woman.

Composite structural description. In the final step of the data analysis process, I applied the process of imaginative variation to construct a composite structural description, integrating all the individual participant's structural descriptions into one comprehensive, universal structural description of the meanings and essences of African American women blogger's lived experiences. Through this data analysis process, I identified the cultural, emotional, racial, social and gender aspects of how participant's experienced being an African American woman blogger managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work. The composite textual-structural description I have developed

provides the meanings and essences representative of the lived experiences of the entire group of participants, as a whole (Moustakas, 1994).

Synthesis of textural and structural descriptions. Being an African American woman blogger means conducting entrepreneurial activity, working towards financial solvency, being proud of racial identity, and creating and delivering content as a blogger in the Internet blogosphere. African American women bloggers conduct entrepreneurial activities as digital entrepreneurs operating as one-person digital enterprises. They are inspired to launch blogs intentionally as income producing ventures. They manage the day-to-day activity of business including acquiring the digital skills needed to setup and run a blog with highly technical tasks being outsourced. They learn search engine optimization (SEO), computer skills, photography skills, video skills and other skills needed to operate a digital enterprise. African American women bloggers engage in social media and use it as a platform for engagement and marketing to increase traffic to their blogs. They build and nurture a blog audience and create plans for marketing to that audience. They pitch brands, securing collaborations and contracts to develop content in exchange for compensation. While they experience challenges and barriers developing brand partnerships they persist, nonetheless. Marketing is a key element to revenue generation for African American women bloggers and a considerable amount of time and finances are devoted to marketing efforts. African American women bloggers have experienced bias when trying to secure brand partnerships and report having to work ten times harder to secure the same contracts, if at all, as their White women counterparts.

While African American women bloggers enjoy blogging, their intentions are entrepreneurial and focused on generating revenue. Financial solvency is the main goal for these women bloggers. Content creation for personal style bloggers especially, can be financially burdensome. When just starting out, style bloggers must purchase their own clothing and products to market and advertise until they generate revenue or receive clothing at no cost from brands or via partnership contracts. This financial burden is not lost on Black women bloggers. They incorporate affiliate hyperlinks linking to clothing brands to generate commission with the hopes of making a profit. Some African American women bloggers can raise capital for start-up cost while others self-fund. In either circumstance, Black women digital entrepreneurs are resourceful and seek out opportunities to obtain free or low-cost resources, such as launching with a free blog website.

African American women bloggers strive to be digital entrepreneurs and do not necessarily want to be singled out as Black women entrepreneurs but desire to be included in the group of entrepreneurs in the United States. This desire is mirrored in their day to day existence in life. They want to exist and be, how they are, as they are, and not systemically labeled in the category of their race and gender. These Black women bloggers are proud of their cultural heritage and see the value and advantage of their blackness as it applies to their image, their business, and marketing to their audience. This means that sharing their cultural and racial identity is a personal decision, an option, they decide as an entrepreneur; not a label that is exploited and dictated by societal norms

and stereotypes. African American women bloggers desire to be accepted as bloggers and entrepreneurs and not identified solely by their race and gender.

Black women digital entrepreneurs have an affinity for sharing their blackness and cultural heritage with a Black market, but do not want to be typecast or pigeon-held into one way of existing and being as a blogger. There is a constant struggle to be both Black and fit into cultural norms of the mostly White dominated field of professional blogging. Not all African American women bloggers have mastered a dual existence in this space.

Digital content creation is a major component to the business of African American women entrepreneurs. Operating as a one-person digital enterprise means they must rely on themselves to create content published on their blog. They must be the photographer, photo editor, copy editor, videographer, video editor, and an entrepreneurial marketer. Operating as one person is not easy, and most Black women bloggers ascribe content creation as hard, serious work. Content creation is critical to revenue generation and a lot of time and effort is poured into this type of work by African American women bloggers. Black women bloggers recognize blogging as a non-traditional mode of work and seek out online spaces for support with other bloggers. They value connecting and networking with other bloggers in their niche and organically find or create spaces online to commune, dialog, network, and grow as a one-person digital enterprise.

African American women bloggers conduct the same business and entrepreneurial activity as any other blogger. However, these women experience unique racial and gender

challenges and barriers to starting, operating, financing, and existing online, in their one-person digital enterprises as bloggers. The participants persist despite these obstacles to become and be bloggers and digital entrepreneurs.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study denotes thorough, high-quality research (Peterson, 2019); the components of which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I provided evidence of trustworthiness to ensure rigor in this qualitative study (Mandal, 2018) and support the data analysis results. Following I outline this support as it aligns to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is essential to a research study by demonstrating the study results are an accurate reflection of participant's experiences (Maher et al., 2018). I followed Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method of data analysis, which is a proven, structured, and rigorous process for analyzing the lived experiences of participants in phenomenological studies. To establish credibility of the study findings, I completed member checking with each participant involved in this study. I notified participants in writing via email prior to the interview that I would conduct member checking and that it involved me sending them a copy of their transcribed interview after completing the interview. They were then to review the transcript and verify that I accurately captured their lived experiences or if edits were needed. Two participants requested that I make edits to their transcribed interviews. Both edits were minor with one participant asking that I remove her relationship status and her degree concentration, and the other

participant corrected one word that was transcribed incorrectly. After making those minor edits, both participants confirmed the accuracy of their transcripts; as did all other participants in this study. I preceded with data analysis only after completing the member-checking process.

Transferability

Transferability ensures that research findings are applicable to other scenarios and contexts in the broader field (Rheinhardt, Kreiner, Gioia, & Corley, 2018). In this study I obtained rich, thick, descriptions of participant's lived experiences providing a model for future research in other research contexts. The theoretical lens for this study including disadvantage theory's role in business ventures (Juma & Sequeira, 2017), Bourdieu's (1989) theory of fields and social spaces, intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), and Black feminist theory (Collins, 1990; Brewer, 2016), can be transferred and applied in various settings, with various participants, and contexts (Suter, 2012) within the field.

Dependability

Dependability ensures that similar findings would arise if this qualitative study were replicated with different participants in the same context (Suter, 2012). An examination of the audit trail included a review of how data analysis was conducted, notes, how themes were constructed, and how data was coded (Cruz & Tantia, 2017). My dissertation committee chair, Dr. Daphne Halkias acted as an external auditor to strengthen the dependability and trustworthiness of this study. The interview protocol for this study was used with permission from a study conducted by Martinez Dy et al. (2017) with Black women bloggers in the United Kingdom. I provided a detailed description of

the data collection process using Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam method. All these elements support the potential replication of similar findings with different participants.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the consistency of research findings and the degree to which findings can be verified or replicated by another researcher (Connelly, 2016). In support of this element of trustworthiness, I applied triangulation to confirm data collection and the epoche process to address researcher bias. Triangulation consists of reviewing multiple sources of information to confirm the collected data in a research study and ensure consistency (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Prior to, and after conducting interviews, I reviewed each participant's blog for additional insight into their lived experiences. I kept a reflective journal to record thoughts, observations, and consistent themes shared by participants of their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work. I also engaged in epoche to bracket my prior knowledge, bias, and preconceived thoughts about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Study Results

I developed the research question for this study based on the purpose of the study, the research problem, and the qualitative research design. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional

mode of work. The research question for this phenomenological research study was: How do African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work? Themes were constructed from participant's responses to interview questions, as displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Theme Formulation Based on Participant's Quotes

Theme (Number of occurrences)	Excerpts from Participant Quotes
Becoming a digital entrepreneur (3)	"You know what, I'll start a YouTube channel.." "Trying to make decisions on my own..as a sole proprietor.." "..I started my blog with the intent to make it a business."
Becoming tech savvy (3)	"You definitely need technological skills.." "..I've had to teach myself how to edit videos myself." "A lot of the really highly technical stuff I still outsource.."
Becoming an entrepreneurial marketer (6)	"I am a business. I am my brand." "Knowing how to deal with SEO and Google AdSense, and just the whole search engines.." "I use the blog primarily as a way to get traffic to my business." "You're actually honing in on a niche audience, a particular target market.." "..everything is marketing and a blog is just another venue, another asset, another lane for marketing." "..I'm not necessarily Black-- because I'm African.. So trying to find my audience has been a little bit harder."
Becoming financially solvent (12)	"..being a blogger is expensive.." "..when we're pitching ourselves, we're not pitching the way that other women are pitching." "..to start-up a WordPress or anything like that is actually free to start it." "I would say money is another obstacle." "..I'm still in the process right now of finding (*table continues*) people who want to invest in me." "I just use my money from my nine-to-five to help fund and start-up my blogger business." "..[White female bloggers] have entered a realm where they were able to fully

	fund without having to work full-time." I poured my own money into it…" "..it never occurred to me to raise money to start my blog." "..in the last few years is when I've made the most money.." "I have capitalized off of it [blogging] by becoming a brand ambassador for specific businesses and promoting their brand/products for them." "..there was no external funding or external support."
Being a personal style blogger (3)	"There's a lot of people with the same niche, but don't feel like you can't find your place in the space" "I chose to become a fashion blogger.." "I'm very much a fashion and lifestyle blogger.."
Being a woman digital entrepreneur (4)	"It is hard. It is serious, hard work." "I think one person is definitely difficult." "It [blogging] can be very time consuming.." "I find exposure to be the most significant obstacle.."
Being a Black woman online (7)	"…you do see some women who aren't Black, who may not create content as well as you, but are rewarded far higher just because of their skin tone or they may get more opportunities." "..when I attach someone that is a lighter complexion, mainly White, then I get more traction [on my blog]." "..as a black woman I am one of the most marginalized people out there." "..I also struggle with feeling like I'm not Black enough.." "I struggle with like, am I black enough, or it is what I'm putting out there beneficial to the black community?" "I think it's pretty challenging getting brand sponsorships and getting brands to pay attention to you. When you're a woman of color..there is quite a bit of bias.." "..there's an identity issue, you don't have as wide of audience trail-- or you might be more likely to have audiences in your own races.."
Being an African American woman digital entrepreneur (9)	"..we [African American women bloggers] are creating spaces for us, but the mainstream is still difficult to try to get into.." "..the fact that I'm female and Black, does not help." "..I have to work 10 times as hard as a White woman would just to prove myself, to get my foot in the door.." "..I feel like my blog and brand, and me being black, (*table continues*) it hasn't really been super popular or famous, based on what I'm writing." "I've battled with, "Do I put my face on the brand.." "I guess being Black [is an asset].." "..as an African American woman, we are

afforded the same opportunities as our White counterparts." "..there is a little more pressure for you to have a social message or be about something or talk about Black issues or talk about something-- but White women don't have to be about anything." "..I want to be the best in my niche."

Table 4

Theme Formed Relative to Participants' Responses to Interview Questions

Interview Question	Themes Formed
1. Please tell me your story by reflecting on your lived experiences, and why you chose to be an online entrepreneur. Can you recall any specific circumstances, events or decisions that led you to become a blogger?	Becoming a digital entrepreneur; Being a personal style blogger;
2. What were your lived experiences of obtaining start-up resources to set up your business as a blogger?	Becoming financially solvent; being a woman digital entrepreneur; being an African American woman digital entrepreneur;
3. What technical knowledge or skills have you needed to develop/build your business blog?	Becoming tech savvy; becoming a digital entrepreneur; becoming an entrepreneurial marketer; being a personal style blogger;
4. As an African American woman what are your lived experiences with owning a one-person digital business through your blog?	Becoming financially solvent; being a Black woman online; being an African American woman digital entrepreneur;
5. Can you please share with me your lived experiences of identifying as an African American woman online?	Being a Black woman online; being an African American woman digital entrepreneur;
6. As an African American business woman what have you experienced as the most significant obstacles to you getting to where you want to be?	Becoming an entrepreneurial marketer; becoming financially solvent; being an African American woman digital entrepreneur; (*table continues*)
7. As an African American business woman what have you experienced as the most significant asset in getting to where you want to be?	Being a personal style blogger; being a Black woman online;

8.	As an African American woman what are your lived experiences with social capital – e.g. people you know, resources to which you have access, and the way you are viewed by others- in doing business in an online environment?	Becoming an entrepreneurial marketer; being a Black woman online;
9.	Through your lived experiences of conducting business online as an African American woman, what have been your most important lessons?	Being a Black woman online; being an African American woman digital entrepreneur;
10.	Are there any more experiences you wish to share in your journey of becoming an African American woman digital entrepreneur?	Being a woman digital entrepreneur; being a Black woman online; being an African American woman digital entrepreneur;

Thematic Outcomes

Becoming a digital entrepreneur. The formation of this theme is based on participant responses to interview questions one and three. The participants described their lived experiences and the circumstances that led them to become a blogger. A participant stated, *"You know what, I'll start a YouTube channel"*, which led to her starting a blog as a digital entrepreneur. Another participant started her blog with *"...the intent to make it a business"*. Participants also described their need to acquire specific technical knowledge and skills in their experiences of becoming a digital entrepreneur, such as learning how to edit videos and SEO to ensure optimal search indexing of their blog content.

Becoming text savvy. I formed this theme based on participant responses to question three. Participants described their need to acquire specific technical knowledge and skills in their experiences of becoming tech savvy, such as learning how to edit videos and SEO to ensure optimal search indexing of their blog content. Learning

technical skills was a lesson learned for one participant who stated. *"You definitely need technological skills"*, and options for learning the specific skills needed for blogging were not available "*There was no class on blogging"*.

Becoming an entrepreneurial marketer. I formed this theme based on the statements from participants to questions three, six, and eight. The participants described the importance of marketing to increase business and generate revenue as an entrepreneur by determining who their target market is and then generating blog content geared towards that market. One participant described becoming an entrepreneurial marketer as "*You're actually honing in on a niche audience, a particular target market.."*.

Becoming financially solvent. The formation of this theme is based on participant responses to questions two, four, and six. Participants described their lived experience and desire of becoming financially solvent in their blogging business. A response by one participant describing financial solvency stated, *"..in the last few years is when I've made the most money.."*. Participants described concerns about the financial costs associated with being a style blogger like negotiating paid contracts with brands, "*we're not pitching the way that other women are pitching"*, business capital, *"I would say money is another obstacle",* inequities in funding, *"..[White female bloggers] have entered a realm where they were able to fully fund without having to work full-time"*, and self-funding, *"I just use my money from my nine-to-five to help fund and start-up my blogger business."*.

Being a personal style blogger. I formed this theme based on participant's description of their lived experiences to questions one, three, and seven. The theme of

personal style blogger is reflected in the need to, *"..keep up with the trends because what's popular today could be gone in two weeks."* Participants described the need to develop content for their style blog, "*I have gotten a lot better at shooting my own photos and also doing my own editing"*. Participants realized the revenue generating aspects of being a personal style blogger, *"I chose to become a fashion blogger because every time I posted a picture online, I would get so many requests asking for me to inform them where I was purchasing my outfits from so this inspired me"*. By blogging about fashion content and personal style, bloggers monetized brand recommendations via their blog.

Being a woman digital entrepreneur. This theme was formed based on participant responses to questions number two and ten. Being a woman digital entrepreneur was largely described in combination with being a Black woman. *"You throw on top of that, the fact that I'm female and Black, does not help"*. Participants also described the belief that there is opportunity for all women digital entrepreneurs, *"..There's a lot of people with the same niche, but don't feel like you can't find your place in the space"*, and *"There is room at the table for everyone"*. Support from other women digital entrepreneurs was essential for one participant in being a woman digital entrepreneur, *"..what I needed, or how I got started, really was a community of other women who are already blogging.."*.

Being a Black woman online. The theme of being a Black woman online was a dominate theme and I formed it based on participant responses to questions four, five, seven, eight, nine, and ten. Participants describe their lived experience being a Black woman online as it relates to racial ethnicity, *"..but I've found that when I attach someone*

that is a lighter complexion ...... mainly White ...... then I get more traction", and *"..you do see some women who aren't Black, who may not create content as well as you, but are rewarded far higher just because of their skin tone or they may get more opportunities."* Participants also described the notion of invisibility as a Black woman online, *"I'm here. I'm not different than the majority.."*. Then there is the burden of being a Black woman online, described by participants, *"I have had moments where people want to make me the spokeswoman for certain things because I'm Black, and I don't want that.."*, and *"..as someone who doesn't want to talk about being a black woman, you don't have to. You can still have that platform and still have your success and it's fine", and "Even though I'm Black, my brand is for women in general"*. However, being a Black woman online has also supported meaningful connections, as described by one participant, *"..connections and networking that I have with other African American women doing the same line of work"*.

Being an African American woman digital entrepreneur. I formed this theme based on responses to questions two, four, five, six, nine, and ten. This theme, along with the theme of being a Black woman online, was the most dominate theme that resulted from participant statements on their lived experiences. A myriad of responses contributed to the formation of this theme including, *"I've learned a lot about how far I can push myself. How to push through obstacles"*, *"..it becomes definitely overwhelming for one person"*, and *"..you have to be self-motivated"*. These participants speak to what it takes to be an entrepreneur and what it takes to monetize their blog content, *"I started working with brands very early on when I started my blog"*, and *"..a lot of brands work with the*

same influencers all the time". Lastly, one participant describes how she wants to be viewed, *"..we're here and we don't want to be judged on our blackness"*. These statements encompass what African American women digital entrepreneurs experience.

Discrepant Cases

During the data collection process there was one participant who described her opportunities as an African American as equal to that of her White female counterparts. Here statement was as follows, *"I believe as an African American woman, we are afforded the same opportunities as our White counterparts"*. This belief ran counter to the lived experiences of how the other participants in this study described their lived experiences as bloggers and African American women digital entrepreneurs.

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Summary

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Data collection for this qualitative study was determined by the research question: How do African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work? In conducting data analysis via the modified Van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) and reviewing participant interview responses, I determined eight themes of *becoming* and *being*, that describe the lived experiences of Black women bloggers. These themes include becoming a digital entrepreneur, becoming tech savvy, becoming an entrepreneurial marketer, becoming financially solvent, being a personal style blogger, being a woman digital entrepreneur, being a Black woman online, and being an African American woman digital entrepreneur.

African American women bloggers in the United States conduct entrepreneurial activities as digital entrepreneurs operating as one-person digital enterprises. Their intentions are entrepreneurial and focused on generating revenue, with the goal of being financially solvent. African American women bloggers are digital entrepreneurs and desire to be identified as any other entrepreneur in the United States, instead of by their gender and race. Black women digital entrepreneurs are proud of their Black identity and cultural heritage but desire to be accepted and respected as simply a digital entrepreneur and blogger. African American women bloggers conduct entrepreneurial activity and operate as legitimate businesses. While Black women bloggers experience unique barriers and challenges related to their racial identity and gender, like starting, operating, financing, and existing online, in their one-person digital enterprises as bloggers, they persist, nonetheless. In Chapter 5, I discuss interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications of this study and my final conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Blogging as a digital enterprise has become a legitimate means for women to generate income and earn a living (Armstrong & McDowell, 2018; Erz & Christensen, 2018). Blogging has evolved from a casual means of publishing diary-style content in the early 1990's (Fischer, 2017) to entrepreneurial ventures where bloggers publish curated content to targeted audiences for the purposes of marketing and generating revenue (Martensen et al., 2018; van Esch et al., 2018). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this nontraditional mode of work.

I conducted semi-structured interviews and collected data over the course of 3-and-a-half weeks. I engaged in the epoche process as recommend for a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994), in order to bracket my prior knowledge on the topic and remove my bias and preconceived thoughts and ideas. Participants in this study described their lived experiences as they related to becoming a digital entrepreneur, becoming tech savvy, becoming an entrepreneurial marketer, becoming financially solvent, being a personal style blogger, being a woman digital entrepreneur, being a Black woman online, and being an African American woman digital entrepreneur.

Interpretation of Findings

Accessibility to online technology and minimal startup capital needed to become a blogger has created opportunities for women to become digital entrepreneurs (Martinez

Dy et al., 2017). This organizational field of blogging has provided opportunity for marginalized and economically challenged groups to develop a blogging career (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019; Erz & Christensen, 2018) and capitalize from the market (Martinez Dy et al., 2017), particularly African American women. The findings of this study confirm that some of the racial and gender imbalances that African American women experience in the traditional workplace are mirrored in their experience as Black women digital entrepreneurs (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Additional findings of this study confirm that startup capital and angel investment for women entrepreneurs continues to be a barrier (Coleman & Robb, 2018). None of the participants in this study received capital to start their digital venture, opting instead to bootstrap their startup costs or invest their own money, *Financially, I poured my own money into it", "I'm fully self-funded"* or *"I just use my money from my nine-to-five to help fund and start up my blogger business"*. One participant stated that she did not ask for funding, "*So I never really asked for startup resources..*", and for another participant it never occurred to her to raise capital, "*It never occurred to me to raise money to start my blog*".

The findings of this study confirm the burden of identity switching that African American women experience of switching between their identities of being a woman and their cultural identity of being Black (Crenshaw, 1989; Stead, 2017). One participant described her experience having to always represent her race, "*I have had moments where people want to make me the spokeswoman for certain things because I'm Black, and I don't want that. I'm not your Black Google, your Black encyclopedia..*". Shifting between

identities is a way of coping with discrimination and marginalization (Dickens & Chavez, 2018) for Black women. One participant stated, *"I'm very much a fashion and lifestyle blogger and it's very much something that anyone can come to and read and connect to without it being about race… I would say as someone who doesn't want to talk about being a Black woman, you don't have to. You can still have that platform and still have your success and it's fine"*.

Findings of this study confirm the ability of African American women bloggers to advertise as a one-person digital enterprise. One participant in this study stated, *"I started working with brands very early on when I started my blog",* another stated*, "I have capitalized off of it by becoming a brand ambassador for specific businesses and promoting their brand/products for them"*. Bloggers are typically also marketing influencers and receive paid contracts to advertise (Audrezet et al., 2018). However, not all participants experienced success with paid advertising, one participant stated, *"We [Black women] just don't get quite as many opportunities or if you want to focus your efforts on brands that are black-owned, they just don't quite have budgets so you'll have a lot of trouble trying to get paid sponsorships—instead you'll just get free stuff"*.

The effects of microaggressions on Black women has also been confirmed in this study. The biased treatment of African American women in the workplace is an example of a microaggression (Muhammad, 2018) that also translates to African American digital entrepreneurs. One participant stated, *"I feel like there is a little more pressure for you to have a social message or be about something or talk about Black issues or talk about something-- but White women don't have to be about anything. They just post fashion*

pictures and it's okay but for us, we have to be about something..". Another participant

described the frustration of having to work harder than her White counterparts, *"I have to*

work 10 times as hard as a White woman would just to prove myself, to get my foot in the

door, and then if I do get my foot in the door, I'm not black enough. That is hard, I'm still

trying to figure out how to cope with that".

The themes I constructed from participant responses consisted of participants'

lived experience of becoming and being. Related to the themes of becoming, including,

becoming a digital entrepreneur, becoming tech savvy, becoming an entrepreneurial

marketer, and becoming financially solvent; creating distance from the phenomenon and

suspending prejudgments allowed for perceiving, noticing, imagining and reflecting on

the phenomenon with a new vision and perspective (Moustakas, 1994). Related to the

themes of being, including, being a personal style blogger, being a woman digital

entrepreneur, being a Black woman online, being an African American woman digital

entrepreneur; the course of realizing meanings and new pathways of a self-selected way

of being and living, impacted their future way of being and living infinitely (Moustakas,

1994).

Table 5

Comparison of Themes to Conceptual Framework and Theories

Conceptual Framework/Theories	Themes	Alignment with Conceptual Framework/Theories
Brydges and Sjöholm's concept of personal style blogger (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019). Bloggers have professional skillsets to turn their digital	Becoming a digital entrepreneur; Being a personal style blogger; Becoming tech savvy; Becoming financially solvent;	Being a personal style blogger requires possessing a specific skillset, including technology skills to run and manage a blog, and entrepreneurial skills for becoming a (*table continues*)

endeavor into a commercial profit.		digital entrepreneur with the expectation of creating a commercial business that generates revenue and provides for financial solvency.
Martinez Dy et al's Concept of Women Digital Entrepreneurs (Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Marginalized and economically challenged groups idealize entrepreneurship to reap financial benefits from the market.	Becoming a digital entrepreneur; Becoming an entrepreneurial marketer; Becoming financially solvent;	Increased access to digital technology provides a pathway for marginalized and economically challenged groups in becoming digital entrepreneurs with minimal resources for startup and marketing, providing a means to generate revenue and become financially solvent.
Gabriel's concept of Black female identity online (Gabriel, 2016). Despite being economically and socially marginalized, African American online users use social media to confront oppressive systems.	Being an African American woman digital entrepreneur; Being a Black woman online.	African American woman entrepreneurs take advantage of digital technologies like blogs and social media to express their cultural identity and make contributions to an oral narrative culture online.
Disadvantage Theory (Juma & Sequeira, 2017). Social capital, psychological capital, financial capital and environment impact business venture performance.	Being a woman digital entrepreneur; Being an African American woman digital entrepreneur; Becoming financially solvent;	Lack of access to social capital, psychological capital, financial capital, and environment impacts the ability to be successful as an African American woman digital entrepreneur and impacts their means of attaining financial solvency.
Bourdieu's Theory of Fields and Social Spaces (Bourdieu, 1989). Social existence is congruent with one's culture, social status, and life circumstances.	Being a personal style blogger;	Being a personal style blogger aligns with the storytelling nature of bloggers about their culture, social status and life circumstances.
Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1991). African American women are discriminated against once	Being a Black woman online; Being an African American	Barriers related to the intersection of race and gender are experienced by African American (*table continues*)

for their gender and again for their race.	woman digital entrepreneur;	woman digital entrepreneurs and being a Black woman online influences how bloggers are perceived online.
Black feminist theory (Collins, 1990; Brewer, 2016)	Being a Black woman online	The identities that Black women create online support the empowerment of their communities

Comparison of Findings to Conceptual Framework and Theories

The conceptual framework is constructed by interlinking concepts, each with distinct attributes, that deliver a comprehensive understanding of the framework as a whole (Eizenberg & Jabareen, 2017). This study is framed by Brydges and Sjöholm's (2019) concept of *personal style blogger*, Martinez Dy et al's. (2017) concept of *women digital entrepreneurs*, and Gabriel's (2016) concept of *Black female identity online*. In addition to the concepts, this research study is framed by four theoretical theories. The first is disadvantage theory (Juma & Sequeira, 2017), the second is Bourdieu's (1989) theory of fields and social spaces, the third theory is intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), and the final theory is Black feminist theory (Collins, 1990; Brewer, 2016).

Transcendental phenomenology is a natural form of inquiry that facilitated discovery of participants' meanings of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As the researcher, I discovered the essence and meaning of participant experiences by engaging in epoche, phenomenological reduction, and applying imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Participants applied meaning to their lived experiences both in how they perceived (noema) and explicated (noesis) the essence of their experiences (Husserl, 1977). Following are the themes and meanings that align with the concepts and theories that framed this study.

Concept of personal style blogger. According to the concept of personal style blogger, bloggers have a skillset that allows them to transform blogging into a professional revenue generating enterprise, by curating authentic content, generating a following, and marketing to their audience with monetized content (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019). Participants in this study identified with this concept stating, "*Now I'm learning more about the business side of having an LLC, and taxes and things of that nature. What you can expense and what you can't expense. Negotiating. That's what I'm learning right now. You know, how to negotiate better. How to leverage opportunities", "I use the blog primarily as a way to get traffic to my business", "You're actually honing in on a niche audience, a particular target market..", You definitely need technological skills..", "I would say the skills of networking", "..knowledge of social media and social media presence", "..having a relationship, and organically talking about their product inside of my content",* and *"If I'm getting paid for something or I'm an affiliate, I disclose that".* Participants attribute meaning to their lived experiences related to the skillsets they have acquired being a personal style blogger. With an understanding that experiences are always evolving and are never completed (Moustakas, 1994), their statements explicate the meaning of their experiences creating a commercial business to generate revenue.

Concept of women digital entrepreneurs. The concept of women digital entrepreneurs idealizes entrepreneurship as a means for groups that are marginalized and economically challenged in society to participate in entrepreneurial activity and benefit financially in the market (Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Increased access to digital technology provides a means for marginalized groups, such as African American women,

to become digital entrepreneurs and profit from the market to support becoming financially solvent. This concept was confirmed in this study with participants stating, "*The good thing about starting a blog, of course you need money, but to start up a WordPress or anything like that is actually free to start it*", "*So when I started my blog, I started my blog with the intent to make it a business*", "*I would say in the last few years is when I've made the most money..*", "*I really, really started honing in on trying to make it a business. And so I started to create content that I feel, my audiences has responded to it as well, but that I felt has been excellent quality..*", "*And I also was seeing how the blogging business was booming and being a marketer in a full time role, I was just seeing how much we were paying bloggers, Instagram influencers to do posts on behalf of the brand..*". One participant described her social and economic struggle in becoming a digital entrepreneur, "*..I come from a family who was on welfare and not a very affluent family, so people.... as I'm trying to break away into things, I've gotten perceptions that I'm stuck up or trying to be better than other people, but all I'm doing is I've caught onto something. I've realized that the business world, the business realm, entrepreneurship is actually-- it's a thing and it's doable*". Participant statements reflected on their noema, or meaning, (Husserl, 1977) of their lived experiences participating in entrepreneurial activity and benefiting from the market despite being marginalized and economically challenged.

Concept of Black female identity online. Gabriel's (2016) concept of Black female identity online indicates that despite being economically, and socially marginalized, African American women use social media to confront oppressive systems.

African American women entrepreneurs use digital technologies such as blogs, to express their identity and contribute to oral culture online. Results of this study confirm this concept. Participants stated, "*For a long time I was hesitant to share my story. Being a Black woman and divorced and raising kids because to some that's just another statistic, this is why we can't give people xyz. Just another Black woman who's failed, living whatever someone's stereotype of a black woman may be*", and *"Some people who are in the space, they have conformed to more of a Eurocentric lifestyle and haven't held true to their Black values, their Black history and culture. They've kind of swayed away so they look more Eurocentric, but I think that we need to stay true to ourselves when we're in these spaces so that we aren't as shocked when we come through with ... like I have Afro hair.."*. These participants consciously explicated their experiences being an African American woman digital entrepreneur and what it means to share oral narratives about their identity online, even if it is counter to what may be expected of them in society.

Disadvantage Theory. Disadvantage theory states that social capital, psychological capital, financial capital, and environment impact business venture performance (Juma & Sequeira, 2017). A lack of this type of capital impacts the ability of African American women digital entrepreneurs to be successful. The result of this study confirms this theory. Participants stated, "*My social capital is not that high. It's not that great. And I need to collaborate more with people and reach out and build relationships*", *"I would say in the last few years is when I've made the most money and it's because of my social capital because prior to that, I really wasn't making any money"*, *"I engage a ton with other bloggers on social media and I think in return that*

has helped me gain social capital", *"I have advantages but also disadvantages too. I do know certain people and so I'm able to get my foot in the door some places. This is where I have noticed, a lot of the advantages I do have, and the work I'm doing and the experiences I'm having.."*, and *"I would say I have more social capital because of my experience in my full time role"*. Participant statements indicate their perceive value, noema (Husserl, 1977), of social capital and apply meaning to the reality that possessing social capital impacts the success of their business.

   Bourdieu's Theory of Fields and Social Spaces. According to Bourdieu's theory of fields and social spaces (Bourdieu, 1989), social existence is congruent with one's culture, social status, and life circumstances. This theory was reflected in the results of this study of participant's experience being a personal style blogger. The theme *of being a personal style blogger* aligns with the storytelling nature of bloggers about their culture, social status and how it connects to their life circumstances. Participants stated, "*I chose to become a fashion blogger because every time I posted a picture online, I would get so many requests asking for me to inform them where I was purchasing my outfits from so this inspired me"*, *"I started my Instagram and Facebook just to show my makeup artist experience ....You know what, I'll start a YouTube channel just to kind of show my makeup experience to help girls figure out how to do their day to day make up." And so from there is kind of where the blog launched"*, and *"I was always wondering, I can't be the only plus size girl who loves fashion—who follows trends and things like that, because at that time we didn't have a lot of options"*. These participants used online spaces to share the meaning of their real-life experiences as style bloggers. Participant's

initial experiences moved in a continuum from where they were to where they are now, confirming that experiences are ever evolving and never completed (Moustakas, 1994).

Intersectionality Theory. Intersectionality theory states that African American women suffer double discrimination, as they are discriminated against once for their gender and again for their race (Crenshaw, 1989). Barriers related to the intersection of race and gender are experienced by African American woman digital entrepreneurs, specifically bloggers who visibility share their identity online. The results of this study confirmed this theory, with participants stating, *"You throw on top of that, the fact that I'm female and Black, does not help"*, *"..it's different because you do see some women who aren't Black, who may not create content as well as you, but are rewarded far higher just because of their skin tone or they may get more opportunities"*, *"The reality for me is that I recognize that as a black woman I am one of the most marginalized people out there"*, *"And sometimes it's hard being a Black woman and being a single Black woman compared to our counterparts"*, *"..because I am a Black woman, it's easy for people to begin to say, "Oh, you don't really know what you're doing.."*, and *"... a lot of times it all, no matter how it starts it all comes back around to this whole thing of being a Black woman, because there's no mistaking that for me. I can't hide from it, I can't choose to be something else.."*. Participant statements provide conscious meaning (Husserl, 1977) to their lived experiences being discriminated against as a Black woman and how they are perceived online as African American digital entrepreneurs.

Black feminist theory. Black feminist theory, which highlights Black women as agents of knowledge for empowering Black communities by sharing their lived

experiences and online identity with the intention to combat gendered racism (Collins, 1990; Brewer, 2016). This theory was confirmed by participants stating, *"But I love it. I love writing. I love connecting with people and having a sense of community. I love having something that's mine, that I created, and nobody can take that from me"*, *"I struggle with like, am I black enough, or it is what I'm putting out there beneficial to the black community? I do most of it to the black community..."*, *"I think that being the fact the African American community is quite supportive and is really encouraging so it's really nice to have that built in support system".* Participant statements attribute meaning to being Black women agents of knowledge as well as the pressure of expectations to be an agent of knowledge for their community.

Limitations of the Study

As the researcher, it is important that I am aware of the limitations of this research study (Cypress, 2017). Identifying limitations of a study is critical for ensuring trustworthiness of qualitative research (Kornbluh, 2015). While this study contributes to the literature by furthering the understanding of how African American women bloggers described their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the meaning of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work, limitations of this study must be noted. There are three limitations in this research study.

The first limitation is the difficulty in identifying African American women bloggers who manage their one-person digital enterprise on a full-time basis. While I was able to contact full-time bloggers during participant recruitment for this study, most of them were unavailable to participate in this research for reasons such as travel and busy

schedules. These full-time bloggers expressed interest in participating, however, due to time constraints they were unable to participate in an interview. I provided these potential participants the option to submit responses to interview questions via email, but ultimately, most of them were unable to dedicate the required time to participate. Due to this limitation, this study included some bloggers who were also working full-time jobs in the traditional workplace.

Many bloggers start their blog while simultaneously being employed in the traditional workplace (Armstrong & McDowell, 2018). Out of the 9 participants in this study, 5 participants mentioned working full-time outside of being a blogger, 2 participants indicated they were full-time bloggers, and 2 participants did not indicate whether they had a traditional job in addition to their blogging enterprise. Future researchers should consider the most effective way to collect data from full-time bloggers whose schedules tend to be hectic. This limitation could be addressed in future research by using a different research instrument such as an online survey, that would not require full-time bloggers with busy schedules to dedicate as much time as does a face-to-face long interview.

The second limitation of this study is, as the researcher of this study, I am both an African American woman and a style blogger. To ensure that having similar characteristics to the study participants did not introduce bias, I engaged in the epoche process. Applying the epoche process supports confirmability and trustworthiness in this study. In the transcendental phenomenology approach, the researcher participates in a disciplined effort to bracket knowledge, prejudgments, and beliefs, of the phenomenon

(Moustakas, 1994). I considered my knowledge, thoughts, ideas, and beliefs about being a blogger and my experience as an African American woman and bracketed them for the purposes of viewing the phenomenon with fresh eyes as recommend by Moustakas (1994).

The third limitation of this study relates to research methodology. This study followed the transcendental phenomenology methodology. However, critiques of varying methods in phenomenology exist throughout the literature (Finlay, 2009) For example, Husserl's transcendental reduction has been challenged and not all researchers approach this process the same (Finlay, 2012b). As such, the results of this study may be subject to alternative interpretations by the reader (Finlay, 2009).

Recommendations

Through my research I have provided insight into how African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work. The research findings of this study provide opportunities for future research. Findings of my study have shown that African American women bloggers in my sample conduct entrepreneurial activity by creating and delivering marketed blog content for the purposes of generating revenue and the goal of becoming financially solvent. Content marketing is relevant for bloggers as a branding process whereby content creators develop and disseminate branded content to engage a target market (Du Plessis, 2017), making their audience aware of a brand and its products. Future research may explore the

type of content African American women bloggers market to their audience and the results of their marketing techniques.

The results of my study revealed that all but one participant, generated less than $30,000 in annual revenue. While African American women bloggers are generating income from their one-person digital enterprises, they trail behind their White counterparts (American Express, 2018). The literature could benefit from longitudinal quantitative research of this group's revenue generation over time to investigate why African American women are not generating revenue at the same rates as their White counterparts. These recommendations are supported by the themes of *becoming financially solvent*, *becoming an entrepreneurial marketer*, and being an *African American digital entrepreneur* that emerged in this study.

The findings in this study also showed that African American women strive to be digital entrepreneurs and do not necessarily want to be singled out exclusively as Black woman entrepreneurs. There is opportunity in future studies to include a heterogenous sample population of women bloggers from various racial and ethnic groups. This recommendation is in line with the theme of *being a woman digital entrepreneur* which emerged from this study. African American women are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs, yet they are not equally represented in the literature (McManus, 2016). The research on African American women entrepreneurs is scarce and this population is most often grouped under the broad scope of minority women entrepreneurs (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016).

Blogging is a legitimate form of work and the current research on blogging mainly focuses on affluent White women bloggers (Duffy, 2017). African American women are making strides in this field, yet still experience challenges establishing their identity as legitimate entrepreneurs (Wang, 2018) and bloggers. To ensure diverse literature on women digital entrepreneurs, future studies should focus on the specific population of African American women bloggers as digital entrepreneurs. This recommendation supports the themes of *becoming a digital entrepreneur* and *being an African American woman digital entrepreneur* that emerged in this study.

Nearly all the African American women bloggers in my sample self-funded their blogging enterprise, with one participant sharing she was unaware she could raise money. Future studies should focus on why this group does not seek out financial capital to start blogging ventures and how this group can benefit from have mentors to support business startup, particularly in the area of venture capital. This recommendation supports the themes of *becoming a woman digital entrepreneur, becoming financially solvent*, and *being an African American woman digital entrepreneur* that emerged in this study.

My study found that Black women digital entrepreneurs have an affinity for sharing their cultural heritage online with a Black market, but they do not want to be pigeon held and typecast into only marketing to a homogeneous group. These findings open new possibilities for future comparative studies of African American women bloggers, who specifically market to a Black audience and those who target an audience from culturally diverse backgrounds. This study can be replicated with other marginalized groups, such as other racial and ethnic minority bloggers and replicated

beyond gender norms, such as LGBTQ bloggers. Regardless of audience type, marginalized bloggers have a smaller audience reach (Novoselova & Jenson, 2018) than their White counterparts. Future research may be conducted to examine the marketing strategies of marginalized blogger groups and consumer attitudes towards bloggers from minority groups. These recommendations support the themes of *becoming an entrepreneurial marketer*, *being a woman digital entrepreneur*, *being an African American woman digital entrepreneur*, and *being a Black woman online*.

Future research may also focus on African American women influencers, as most bloggers are also influencers and the two terms are becoming synonymous as corporations recognize the distinct value of leveraging niched down influencers to market their brands (Glucksman, 2017). There are many niche categories of bloggers and influencers, as has been revealed in the results of this study. Future research should focus on the underrepresentation of women of color bloggers (Duffy, 2017; McAdam, Crowley, & Harrison, 2019), while expanding on specific categories of bloggers to give meaning to the essence of their experiences. For example, African American women bloggers over 40, African American women travel bloggers, African American women plus-size bloggers, African American women style bloggers, African American women beauty bloggers, and African American women lifestyle bloggers. This recommendation supports the themes of *becoming a digital entrepreneur*, *being a personal style blogger*, *being a woman digital entrepreneur*, *being a Black woman online*, and *being an African American woman digital entrepreneur*.

Social media apps are highly popular among African Americans, particularly Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Duggan et al., 2015). Future research should explore how African American women bloggers leverage social media apps Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LIKEtoKNOW.it to drive traffic to their blogs for marketing and how they generate revenue from these digital technologies. This recommendation supports the themes of *becoming tech savvy*, *becoming an entrepreneurial marketer*, and *becoming financially solvent*, which emerged from the results of this study. As technology evolves, it may be imperative for future research to focus on how African American women bloggers discover and learn new technologies.

Implications

Positive Social Change

Findings from my study may impact positive social change by encouraging minority women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. The decision to start an entrepreneurial venture is a means for women to address socio-economic inequalities (Brush et al., 2018) and poverty in communities around the world (Sutter et al., 2019). Findings of my study may contribute to positive social change by propelling policy initiatives that combat gender and racial bias online, initiatives that fund minority women entrepreneurs via mentoring programs and financial capital (Edelman & Brush, 2018), and a market-based approach to alleviating poverty (Sutter et al., 2019).

Black women face many barriers in their path to digital entrepreneurship as shown in the results of my study, such as lack of, or no access to fundraising, building brand partnerships, bias in brand opportunities, having to work harder than their White

blogger counterparts, discrimination for merely existing as a Black woman online, trying to fit into cultural norms, and the workload that comes with operating as a one-person digital enterprise. Many of the same challenges Black women face in traditional entrepreneurship are translated in digital spaces (Martinez Dy et al., 2017). Despite these barriers, the African American women bloggers in my study have persevered nonetheless in conducting entrepreneurial activities and persisting towards self-employment (Benson & Sanders, 2017). Findings from my study have the potential to impact positive social change by bringing awareness to policymakers on the issues of equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized populations who seek to become digital entrepreneurs (Sorgner & Krieger-Boden, 2017; Martinez Dy et al., 2017).

Policy Implications

I have made recommendations for future research based on the findings of my study which may offer opportunity for continued research on the experiences of African American women entrepreneurs to fill the paucity of representation of women of color in the literature (Harris, 2015; Juma & Sequeira, 2017). As the research literature and scope of digital entrepreneurship continues to develop (Zaheer, Breyer, & Dumay, 2019), it is important that marginalized entrepreneurial experiences are included. Policy changes and government action is often driven by research. Increasing the existence of literature on African American women and women of color may have implications to drive policy makers to enact changes and create legislation that can support female entrepreneurs in overcoming the barriers experienced by women entrepreneurs from marginalized populations, particularly since the online environment of the Internet can mirror the

social and racial issues that exist offline in the real world (Martinez Dy et al., 2017).

Implementing policy may help facilitate the success rate of minority digital

entrepreneurs.

Institutional Implications

My study has implications to inform university and business school programs to

develop and provide extensive curriculum related to digital entrepreneurship and the

emerging business opportunities of blogging. The results of my study showed that

women digital entrepreneurs were largely self-taught, chiefly as it relates to blogging

technologies, photography, and social media. This group could also benefit from

entrepreneurship curriculum that focuses specifically on the new frontier of blogging and

influencer ventures. Digital literacy is critical for women entrepreneurs (Sorgner &

Krieger-Boden, 2017) as brands are reaching out directly to bloggers at an increasing rate

for promotions, brand sponsorships, and paid contracts for influencer marketing.

University and business school curriculum should focus on the business acumen and

skills needed to broker these relationships and business opportunities.

Theoretical Implications

The research on African American woman digital entrepreneurship is scarce

(Juma & Sequeira, 2017; Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). This absence of research has

resulted in theoretical frameworks that lack representation of African American women

entrepreneurs, specifically African American women digital entrepreneurs, diversity in

gender and ethnic representation, and thus the generalizability of findings. The findings

of this empirical study contributed original qualitative data to the study's conceptual

framework aiming to advance the knowledge of African American women bloggers operating as a one-person digital enterprise.

My study confirms the concept of personal style blogger whereas participants in my study have amassed a specific set of skills that allow them to exploit entrepreneurial activity in the blogosphere (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2019). The results of my study also confirm the concept of the woman digital entrepreneur where African American women bloggers have used entrepreneurship to benefit from and generate revenue from the market (Martinez Dy et al., 2017), towards financial solvency. The concept of Black female identity online (Gabriel, 2016) was confirmed with participants in my study existing and confronting oppressive societal systems in online spaces via their blogs and social media. Likewise, my study has extended the theoretical lens by which my study was framed including disadvantage theory (Juma & Sequeira, 2017), Bourdieu's (1989) theory of fields and spaces, Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), and Black feminist theory (Collins, 1990; Brewer, 2016). These theoretical implications open new opportunities for research to inform institutions, practitioners, policymakers, university leaders, academics, venture capitalists, and marginalized women entrepreneurs.

Implications for Practice

Several implications for practitioners can be derived from my study. African American women bloggers have no lack of motivation to conduct entrepreneurial activity and persist through barriers in the process of becoming entrepreneurs. However, my study findings have implications for startup phase entrepreneurs and established entrepreneurs to form meaningful mentoring relationships. Many of the participants in

my study indicated challenges accessing startup funding, building relationships with brands, and navigating the entrepreneurial landscape in general, particularly operating as a one-person digital enterprise in a new and evolving field of being an entrepreneurial blogger. There is a need for dyadic structured mentorships that includes regular interaction, meaningful conversation, observations, and formal feedback (Memon, Rozan, Ismail, Uddin, & Daud, 2015). Mentoring should produce outcomes related to identifying opportunities, developing a business vision, managing a business day-to-day, setting goals, account and operations management, increased self-efficacy as an entrepreneur, and personal development (Kunaka & Moos, 2019). Having a mentor provides a support system for women entrepreneurs when they come up against challenges and barriers in business (Laukhuf & Malone, 2015).

Based on my study results, African American women digital entrepreneurs will need to develop social capital to continue to grow their blogging digital enterprises. Possessing social capital networks is critical to the success of entrepreneurs as it provides links to resources that would be unattainable without this network of connections (Neumeyer, et al., 2019) and is critical to business success (Smith, Smith, & Shaw, 2017). African American women entrepreneurs must seek out relationships and networks of social capital that will situate them to learn and grow from experienced entrepreneurs in the field. Understanding what social capital is, why it is needed, and how to acquire it is necessary for marginalized women entrepreneurs. African American digital entrepreneurs need to also focus on accruing social capital ties online via social network

sites such as LinkedIn and using online social networks to maintain social capital

connections (Smith et al., 2017).

Conclusions

A plethora of literature exists on the topic of entrepreneurship. However, research

focuses largely on societal norms of White male entrepreneurs, and to a lesser extent

White female entrepreneurship. Moreover, the topic of African American women

entrepreneurs is severely under researched and typically clustered under the umbrella

term of "minority entrepreneur" which tends to group immigrant and ethnic entrepreneurs

together. This study contributes to the literature by extending the entrepreneurship

literature to include the experiences of African American women.

African American women experience marginalization and microaggressions

(Mekawi & Todd, 2018) in the traditional workplace, including a double bind where they

are discriminated against once for their gender and again for their race (Mora & Davila,

2014). Challenges experienced in the workplace by this population include income

inequality (Balkin et al., 2017), lack of mentorship (Davis, 2016), being viewed through

the lens of stereotypes (Rahman, et al., 2016), treated as less intelligent and characterized

as aggressive (Breslin et al., 2017), overlooked for promotions (Allen & Lewis, 2016),

their accomplishments are more likely to go unrecognized (Rosette et al., 2016), and they

are frequent targets of harassment and bullying (Lavaysse et al., 2018); as such, typical

workplace stressors are exacerbated for African American women. Finally, Black women

are significantly underrepresented in executive leadership of corporations (Ng & Sears,

2017).

Workplace stressors and technological advancements have provided new pathways for African American women in the emerging field of digital entrepreneurship (Martinez Dy et al., 2017) in the form of blogging (Duffy, 2017; Novoselova & Jenson, 2018). The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women digital entrepreneurs described their lived experiences managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within the non-traditional mode of work. A transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to discover participant's meaning of their lived experiences.

The findings of this study revealed that being an African American woman blogger means conducting entrepreneurial activity, working towards financial solvency, being proud of their racial identity and creating and delivering content as a blogger in the Internet blogosphere. African American women bloggers experience unique racial and gender challenges related to operating, financing, and existing in online spaces as one-person digital enterprises. Nonetheless, African American women persist and are making tremendous strides in the field of blogging and digital entrepreneurship.

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Appendix A: Letter of Introduction and Recruitment

Good day, I am a doctoral student at Walden University inviting you to participate in my research about African American women bloggers who founded and manage a lifestyle blog as a one-person digital enterprise. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work. I believe that your experience would be a great contribution to the study. Therefore, I am reaching out to discern if you might have interest in participating in the research.

The study is important as the findings may provide future African American women bloggers with insight, tools, and strategies needed to address the inequalities that exist for minority women, specifically African American women in entrepreneurship. Additionally, entrepreneurial research often focuses heavily on studies conducted from the White, masculine perspective and this contribution would add to the female, African American body of knowledge. Finally, the social change impact of this study may serve as a catalyst for social change by challenging the status quo and existing racial and gender barriers that hinder African American women from being successful in one-person digital enterprises. The findings of this study have the potential to encourage policy-makers to create more accessible funding and mentoring programs for minority women entrepreneurs.

If you would be interested in being a part of this study please review and return the signed consent form which is attached to this email. If you would like to request additional information, you may reply to this email. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Melissa McDowell

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Introduction

To Interviewee:

"The interview is recorded on tape for the best possible data. Is this okay? I can turn off the tape recorder along the way if you wish."

"Have you read the information I sent in the e-mail? Have you signed the Informed Consent Form to participate in this study?"

"The title of this research project is: African American Women Bloggers' Lived

Experiences with Digital Entrepreneurship: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

"Do you wish to ask any question regarding the study or this procedure before we proceed?"

Exploring Interviewee Lived Experiences on the Study Topic

To Interviewee:
"Not enough is known about digital entrepreneurship among women of color, and specifically African American women. Blogging as digital entrepreneurship places Black women in a unique position to open new meanings of racial identity within the entrepreneurship field, however their lived experiences may be complicated by current racial and gender imbalances, such as financial challenges, access to financial credit, and gaps in entrepreneurial skills. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to gain a deeper understanding of how African American women bloggers describe their lived experiences with managing a one-person digital enterprise and the implications of their racial and gender identity within this non-traditional mode of work."

<u>Demographic Information</u>

1. Age   ___ 18-30   ___ 31-40   ___ 41-50   ___51-60   ___60+

2. Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background

   Black / African / Caribbean / Black British/ African American

   ___ African (please specify country) _____

   ___ Caribbean (please specify country) _____

   ___ Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe

   _____

3. Marital Status

   ___Single   ___Partnered   ___Married   ___Divorced   ___Widowed

4. Do you have children? ___Y ___N   If yes, how many? ____

   Ages: _____

5. What is your highest level of education ?

   ___ Degree (please specify) _____

6. What is your annual income generated by your blog?

   ___Under $30K

   ___Over $30K

7. Are you the sole, primary, or secondary earner in your household?

   ___Sole

   ___Primary

   ___Secondary

Interview Guide

1. Please tell me your story by reflecting on your lived experiences, and why you chose to be an online entrepreneur. Can you recall any specific circumstances, events or decisions that led you to become a blogger?
2. What were your lived experiences of obtaining start-up resources to set up your business as a blogger?
3. What technical knowledge or skills have you needed to develop/build your business blog?
4. As an African American woman what are your lived experiences with owning a one-person digital business through your blog?
5. Can you please share with me your lived experiences of identifying as an African American woman online?
6. As an African American businesswoman what have you experienced as the most significant obstacles to you getting to where you want to be?
7. As an African American businesswoman what have you experienced as the most significant asset in getting to where you want to be?
8. As an African American woman what are your lived experiences with social capital – e.g. people you know, resources to which you have access, and the way you are viewed by others- in doing business in an online environment
9. Through your lived experiences of conducting business online as an African American woman, what have been your most important lessons?
10. Are there any more experiences you wish to share in your journey of becoming an African American woman digital entrepreneur?

Prompts: *Can you please elaborate on that?*

       How did you experience this specific situation?

Appendix C: Permission to Use Interview Protocol

On Monday, March 25, 2019, 9:31:56 PM GMT+2, Angela Dy <A.Dy@lboro.ac.uk> wrote:

Dear Daphne, cc Melissa,

Thanks for getting in touch and I am very glad you are finding the paper useful!

I have attached here my interview schedule and the participant questionnaire that I used to classify participants by race and social class. A citation if used would be very much appreciated.

I am not often on LinkedIn but am happy to connect. I will be doing a webinar on intersectionality with some colleagues in May, and if you like can share more info on this as things are firmed up.

All the best,
Angela

Dr Angela Martinez Dy
Lecturer in Entrepreneurship, Loughborough University London
The Broadcast Centre, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, London E15 2GZ UK
M: 07807729152

Calls for papers: https://phdy.wordpress.com/calls-for-papers/ *(Digital Inclusion and Scholar-Activism)*

Latest publications:
- Gender and Enterprise Network: Analysing a Feminist Social Change Venture through Autoethnography. Gender, Work and Organization - Special Issue, Gender and Knowledge Production (2018)
- Intersectionality and mixed methods for social context in entrepreneurship (International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research, 2018)
- Emancipation through digital entrepreneurship? A critical realist analysis (Organization, 2018)
- A Web of Opportunity or the Same Old Story? Women Digital Entrepreneurs and Intersectionality Theory (Human Relations, 2017)

From: Daphne Halkias, PhD <daphne_halkias@yahoo.com>
Sent: 25 March 2019 13:24
To: Angela Dy <A.Dy@lboro.ac.uk>
Cc: Melissa McDowell <melissa_mcdowell@post.harvard.edu>
Subject: Interview Protocol from your 2017 paper

Dear Angela--

One of my PHD students, Melissa McDowell, is studying Black female bloggers in the United States based on your 2017 study *A Web of opportunity or the same old story? Women digital entrepreneurs and intersectionality theory*. Would you be willing to share your interview protocol from your this paper? Of course your work will be cited and credited in any future publication.

I sent you an invite to connect on LInkedin so you can learn more about my work. BTW, outstanding paper! I have used it many times in my teaching and research.

https://www.linkedin.com/messaging/thread/6391381720297402368/

Here is my student's profile:

https://www.linkedin.com/in/mcdowellmelissa/

Thank you and best regards