Phenomenological Study on the Underrepresentation of Entrepreneurial African American Male Small Business Owners in Houston, TX

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurial small business owners in Houston, Texas, within a diverse urban entrepreneurial ecosystem. The problem addressed was the disparity between population representation and business ownership, which limits economic participation, wealth creation, and equitable access to entrepreneurship. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of African American male entrepreneurs to understand how cultural influences, business practices, resource access, and systemic conditions shaped entrepreneurial engagement and to inform culturally responsive entrepreneurship support models, equitable capital access strategies, and inclusive ecosystem policies aimed at increasing participation and sustainability among underrepresented entrepreneurs. The guiding framework integrated anthropological, contemporary, minority, and resource-based perspectives on entrepreneurship to examine identity, historical context, and resource dynamics. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected African American male business owners in Houston. Open-ended questions aligned with four research questions addressing cultural traditions, adaptive strategies, socioeconomic constraints, and minority-specific barriers. Data analysis followed a modified phenomenological approach using horizontalization, identification of invariant themes, and synthesis of shared experiential descriptions. Results indicated that entrepreneurial participation was shaped by cultural resilience, adaptive strategies, structural barriers, and unequal access to financial and social resources. Participants described leveraging networks and innovation to navigate systemic constraints, including funding barriers and fragmented support systems. Findings suggested that underrepresentation was primarily linked to structural and environmental conditions rather than

individual capability and demonstrated how culturally embedded strategies interact with systemic constraints to shape entrepreneurial participation. Conclusions indicate that strengthening culturally responsive entrepreneurial ecosystems and expanding equitable access to capital may enhance participation and sustainability; future research is recommended to examine evolving entrepreneurial pathways longitudinally.

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This achievement is lovingly dedicated to my mother, whose memory remains a guiding light in my life. I made a promise to pursue higher education and to persevere despite the darkness our family endured. Fulfilling that promise has been a source of enduring motivation. Though she is no longer physically present, her influence, resilience, and belief in my potential continue to shape my path. May her spirit soar in heaven, and may this milestone stand as a testament to the hope, perseverance, and strength she instilled within me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are essential to national and global economies; they stem from entrepreneurship and are vital to job creation and innovation in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Houston ranks number one overall as the most diverse city in the nation, with a diversity score of 71.87 in socioeconomic, cultural, economic, household, and religious categories, with a population of 2,320,268 as of July 1, 2019; 1,648,768 are foreign-born, 73.5% entered the U.S. before 2010 (Fox, 2021). Houston is home to many diverse cultures, including Pakistani, Syrian, Indonesian, and other minority and marginalized communities, which have created startups that have thrived in Houston since their infusion, despite initial threat perceptions (Legrain, 2020; Yong et al., 2021). The terminology of 'minority' and 'marginalized' are greatly misunderstood as a small number of people in society; however, these communities are representative of large percentages of populations (ethnic cultures, enclaves, silent groups) and should not be dismissed as irrelevant to the greater well-being of the Nation (Cooney, 2021).

At first glance, the ideology of varied cultures blossoming and thriving appears as an evolving success story of the American Dream. Houston exemplifies the ideology of cultures that prosper in America. The 2021 U.S. Census Bureau Annual Business Survey, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), and the Lending Tree Financial Analysis 2020 reports show that Houston ranks fifth in the Nation for minority-owned businesses, with nearly 5,600 startups. Wealth building adds to the gross domestic product (GDP), making it vital to communities, providing employment, and bolstering local economies that would otherwise remain stagnant with low to no growth (Baker & Welter, 2020; Cooney, 2021).

Ryan Muldoon, Director of Undergraduate Studies; Associate Professor, Director of Philosophy, Politics and Economics Program, Department of Philosophy, College of Arts and Sciences at University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, was quoted as stating, "There is a consistent pattern in the literature that diversity (whether that is measured by race, religion, or immigration status) tends to lead to greater productivity and growth in cities" (Fox, 2021, p. 2). Diversity comes from integrating as equal members of society, creating equality and inclusion as part of the equation. Diversifying the population brings different perspectives and advanced economic opportunities, one of the attributes that has made the U.S. as successful as it has been over the years.

African Americans represent seven percent of businesses across the United States, according to the Small Business Administration and the Kaufman Foundation, and three-point-three percent (3.3%) of companies in Houston, Texas (Davis, 2023; Eyal-Cohen, 2021; Fox, 2021; Leighton, 2019). In terms of startups in Houston, from 5,600 startups, that equates to 156 startups by African Americans. Minorities have succeeded in business creation; however, the African-American process of business startups appears to greatly trail other minority cultures despite their American-born longevity and embedded history of nation-building in the country (Davis, 2023; Fox, 2021; Leighton, 2019). The data empirically demonstrate that there is a problem among African-American business owners (Cooney, 2021).

When cultures become marginalized, they are stigmatized and marked by society; social labeling is a deterrent to progress. These sentiments have been displayed in the American Indian culture, the Aboriginal culture of Australia, the Aztec culture of South America, and many others (Oboler, 2019). The treatment of differentiation with labels (minorities, majority, third world, etc.) creates discriminatory practices that soon manifest into negative connotations (Oboler,

2019). History has shown that cultures susceptible to marginalization have been held in low regard, placing them in a less-than-favorable economic position and creating a greater overall disadvantage (Cooney, 2021).

African American culture has been blemished with the same deference of marginalization. Historically viewed by the government as second-class citizens and inferior, it was burdened with a social handicap that took decades to overcome, with policies considered equal to those of other cultures (Thai et al., 2021). The perception is relevant to the study; surveying peer ideology across different cultures toward African-American males in the business world has merit and adds to the study's legitimacy (Cooney, 2021; Thai et al., 2021).

The notable disparities are not new revelations; the national and state economic development initiatives were created to combat declines in wealth opportunities and promote cultural fairness for those identified as minority groups. Governmental organizations such as the Small Business Administration (SBA), the Governor's Office of Small Business Assistance, and the Business Permit Office assist small and medium Texas businesses through advocacy, entrepreneurial support, education, and technical assistance (Office of the Governor, 2023; U.S. Small Business Administration, 2023). According to past research, these steps have yet to equalize the field of opportunity, making this a relevant and warranted topic (Cooney, 2021). Scholars have studied affiliated concerns, both qualitatively and quantitatively, regarding the role of race in business perceptions (Bruton et al., 2023; Conley & Bilimoria, 2022; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019). Empirical data show that disadvantages persist in African-American communities, as many speculate and surmise that the foundational cause of the disparities is race-related (Bruton et al., 2023; Conley & Bilimoria, 2022; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019).

The Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs (ASE) collected data on minority standings until it was discontinued after the 2016 survey; data on the progress of African American entrepreneurs are limited and currently managed as part of the Annual Business Survey (ABS), starting with the reference year 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Notably, ABS is sponsored by the National Science Foundation's National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. The ABS, working jointly with the Census Bureau, combines the Survey of Business Owners, the Business R&D and Innovation for Microbusinesses Survey, and the Innovation section of the Business R&D and Innovation Survey, providing select annual data on business owners, all of which shows a dim projection for African American business owners (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Houston outranked other Texas cities in 2021 in the number of new business applications per capita, with 21.2 new business applications per 1000 residents (Egan, 2022; United States Census Bureau, n.d.). A 27.5 percent rise created 150,971 new business applications filed in Houston, a 75.2 percent jump from 2019, of which the ASE noted African Americans accounted for three percent in Houston's entrepreneurship, inclusive of women in 2017, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021; Egan, 2022; United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Despite the growth in new businesses, African American progress has been slow (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021; Egan, 2022; United States Census Bureau, n.d.).

African American women have made considerable advances in the business community, specifically in entrepreneurship and in breaking glass ceilings, despite their intersectionality (Sales et al., 2020). However, their monumental breakthroughs have not extended to African American males, who continue to lag in various U.S. Census Bureau statistics, with African American male-led firms in Houston rated at 17,464 and 111,086 for the State of Texas (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). The Annual Business Survey (ABS), including all nonfarm

employer businesses filing the 941, 944, or 1120 tax forms, are recorded to 2017 (Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, 2017; United States Census Bureau, n.d.).

Examining the phenomenon through the combined lens of anthropological, contemporary, minority, and resource-based entrepreneurial theories may provide insight into shortcomings that lie beyond biases. Theories blend in research; historical practices (anthropological) compare processes passed along generational lines against current practices (contemporary). Minority cultures that are succeeding, such as Asian and Indian (Indo-Pak), through resources (resource-based) currently available can contrast to the views other researchers hypothesize; contrasting African-American entrepreneurs in Houston can identify barriers, if any, that may explain the participation (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023; Cooney, 2021; Jabareen, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study was the low representation of African American male entrepreneurial business owners in Houston, which reflects broader systemic challenges in achieving racial equity in business ownership. Despite African Americans comprising approximately 18.5% of Houston's population, they account for only about 4% of employer businesses in the area, a stark disparity that translates to over 21,000 fewer Black-owned businesses (Perry et al., 2022). Such underrepresentation signals persistent inequities and stifles economic growth and community empowerment among African Americans (Baboolall et al., 2020).

Further complicating this issue, the classification and reporting systems, such as those used in the 2020 Annual Business Survey (ABS), obscured key demographic distinctions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Minority-owned firms were broadly classified as any group other than

non-Hispanic Whites, masking the unique challenges faced by African American males, including disparities linked to systemic racism, entrenched poverty, and the impact of immigrant entrepreneurs leveraging support systems unavailable to native-born African Americans (Jordan, 2023; Somashekhar, 2019). The lack of accessible and accurate data at the city and state levels compounded the problem, making targeted interventions difficult.

Nationally, the disparity persisted despite federal initiatives like Executive Order 13985, which aimed to advance racial equity (The White House, 2021). African Americans continued to face higher poverty rates and fewer entrepreneurial opportunities compared to other minority groups, with African American males particularly disadvantaged (The White House, 2023). This underrepresentation hindered the cultural and economic flourishing of African American communities, reinforcing systemic disparities and limiting progress. Addressing this issue required a clear understanding of the barriers and the development of policies that could effectively promote equity in entrepreneurship.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the low representation of male African-American entrepreneurial business owners in Houston through the lived experiences of the lowly represented male African-American entrepreneurs in Houston. Conducting interviews, asking open-ended questions to collect data about African American entrepreneurs' experiences, presented the most logical qualitative, phenomenological approach to studying the problem, guided by the combined lens of anthropological, contemporary, minority, and resource-based entrepreneurial theories (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023; Cooney, 2021; Jabareen, 2009). This study was designed to enhance insight into factors related to African American entrepreneurs. The data contributed to the body of knowledge available to

policymakers, government officials, scholars, and business owners seeking to eliminate barriers to African American entrepreneurs in Houston.

The desired outcome was to gather testimonies from current African American SMEs in Houston that provided contextual accounts of how they initiated and sustained their startups, drawing on anthropological, contemporary, minority, and resource-based entrepreneurial theories. The generational influences (anthropological) addressed the historical aspects, spotlighting which modern (contemporary/minority) practices were used to sustain markets, and which resources (resource-based) were available and which remained out of reach (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023; Cooney, 2021; Jabareen, 2009). The data provided greater detail to explain the underrepresentation and significantly confirmed whether racial undertones were warranted in the prevailing climate.

The targeted population consisted of African American male entrepreneurs who (a) owning 51% of the firm, (b) lived in Houston, and (c) earned an annual income of at least $68,000 in revenue to coincide with the median income of the metro area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Houston was within Harris County, which had a median income of $68,000 (+/- $1,435), and the median household income in Texas was $72,284 (+/- $443), according to the 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Theoretical literature supported that saturation was fulfilled with approximately ten interviews; however, the study interviewed until saturation was achieved (Boyd, 2001; Bryman, 2012; Buckley, 2022; Charmaz, 2012; Dworkin, 2012; Groenewald, 2004; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Marshall et al., 2013; Mason, 2010).

Moser and Korstjens (2018) noted sampling techniques, stating that " in qualitative research, you sample deliberately, not at random" (p. 10). The study employed purposive and

associative sampling, based on the researchers' judgment of the most informative sources, the most crucial non-probability sampling, and the most commonly used deliberate sampling strategies (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Sampling recruitment was conducted via social media posts (e.g., LinkedIn) and broad email solicitation, with written site permission obtained from existing services. The data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured, individual in-person interviews, using open-ended questions that began with simple questions and progressed to probing ones (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2012; Dworkin, 2012; Mason, 2010).

The data collection consisted of interviews and observations; online questionnaires and document analysis were discouraged because of the phenomenological (lived-experience) format (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2012; Dworkin, 2012; Mason, 2010). The qualitative steps included data cleaning, reduction, interpretation, and representation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Specifically, a subset of male African American business owners in Houston was interviewed using Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach. This approach involved a modification of van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of analyzing phenomenological data, which focused on listing each participant's observed expressions. It employed a modification of Stevick's (1971), Colaizzi's (1973), and Keen's (1975) method of analysis, incorporating the researcher's own experience of the phenomenon derived from the verbatim transcript (Moustakas, 1994).

The combined modified approach used horizontalization to create listings and groupings to identify invariant constituents, which were then filtered by a relevance criterion, validated, and used to construct an individual textual description of the experience for each respondent (Moustakas, 1994). Colaizzi's (1973) and Keen's (1975) methods included listing nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements (invariant horizons) and synthesizing the invariant meanings into a composite textural-structural description that was universal and represented the group

(Moustakas, 1994). The information gathered related to the ongoing gaps associated with the underrepresentation of entrepreneurial African-American male small business owners in Houston.

A guiding questionnaire built with semi-structured questions based on the conceptual framework was used during the in-person interview. The review protocol incorporated Wong et al.'s (2013) developed Realist and Meta-narrative Evidence Syntheses: Evolving Standards (RAMESES), which was a publication standard for realist syntheses (Mohamed et al., 2021). The protocols were altered to include aspects of BEME Collaboration, Joanna Briggs Institute, Campbell Collaboration, and Cochrane Collaboration (Mohamed et al., 2021) to ensure a rigorous systematic review. The theoretical literature review included empirical evidence gained through ANOVAs, Kruskal-Wallis H tests, and multiple regression analysis. The theoretical literature had different methods of attaining findings, and their varied opinions culminated in this study to create greater inclusion of data. NVivo was used for coding, organizing, and analyzing text, audio, video, and image data due to its features for exploring patterns, themes, and relationships in qualitative data.

Introduction to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework was a combination of anthropological, contemporary, minority, and resource-based entrepreneurial theories, as seen in Table 1, Multi-Disciplined Entrepreneurial Theories (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023; Cooney, 2021; Jabareen, 2009). The lived experiences of African American entrepreneurs in Houston, particularly in relation to business, idealism, optimism, pragmatism, and resilience, served as foundational elements for understanding entrepreneurship. These experiences highlighted the diverse and evolving nature of the entrepreneurial practice, which expanded into multiple subsections and

challenged the notion of a one-size-fits-all theory, as argued by Baker and Welter (2020) and Faghih and Forouharfar (2022). The combined theories allowed the researcher to open different aspects of what brought the African American SMEs in Houston the wherewithal to start a business and strive to sustain, despite the discrepancies they faced (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023; Cooney, 2021; Jabareen, 2009).

Table 1

Multi-Disciplined Entrepreneurial Theories

Entrepreneurial Theories	Definition
Anthropological Entrepreneurship	Interconnected perspectives, sociocultural ties between people, and connections between the past and the present (Verver & de Koning, 2023).
Contemporary Entrepreneurship	An ontological understanding of entrepreneurship as a relational, material, and processual practice directs scholars to observe and explain the real-time practices of entrepreneurial practitioners (Thompson et al., 2020).
Minority Entrepreneurship	Immigrant studies, ethnic entrepreneurial motivations, the ethnic startup process, motives for ethnic business success, failure factors in ethnic businesses, unique ethnic challenges, and favorite strong ties of ethnic minorities were identified as central themes (Sithas et al., 2021).
Resource-based Entrepreneurship	Resource-based theory is a model of effective management of firms' resources, exploiting productive opportunities to achieve their goals. This created competitive advantages from the unique heterogeneity firms possessed. It prescribed that organizations positioned themselves strategically based on their resources and capabilities rather than their products and services. Resources were anything attached to the firm, in terms of strength or weakness, tangible or intangible, including banking opportunities, human capital, and assets (Hameed et al., 2021; Utami & Alamanos, 2023).

Anthropological Entrepreneurship Theory

The anthropological entrepreneurship theory aligned with the cultural and social context, studying past and present, identifying opportunities from difficulties, and advocating solutions in business activities (Faghih & Forouharfar, 2022; Pfeilstetter, R., 2021). Including anthropological entrepreneurship theory prevented the repetition of previously discovered analyses within the culture when exploring opportunities for advancement. This theory covered the fallacies that marred the depiction of African Americans in the past, from Jim Crow laws, laws of segregation known as the black codes, and others that were implemented to inflict barriers (Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020).

African American resilience continued to surpass stereotypes about their determination, overcoming distant jobs due to limited transportation, claims of low levels of education, biased operational laws, and restricted access to assets, as seen in the anthropological entrepreneurship theory within the culture (Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). Historically, African Americans had to look within their culture for support and sustainment regarding business opportunities in the past and through recent challenges of COVID-19, a global epidemic.

Contemporary Entrepreneurship Theory

The father of innovation, Joseph Schumpeter, practiced contemporary entrepreneurship, describing it as creative destruction (Kim & Maubourgne, 2023). The modern view involved a customer-centric approach, flexibility and adaptability, globalization, finding new funding options, and creating markets without disruption (Kim & Maubourgne, 2023).

For over 30 years, international trade had been conducted on the premise that disruption was the only way to survive, succeed, and grow within industries (Kim & Maubourgne, 2023). The fluidity of innovation had brought forth non-disruptive creations outside the bounds of existing industries; there were no existing markets or established players to disrupt (Kim &

Maubourgne, 2023). Non-disruptive opportunities may have been a linchpin in elevating the African-American entrepreneur's overall representation in businesses in Houston.

Minority Entrepreneurship Theory

Minority entrepreneurship theory covered known societal inequality and injustice factors, deep-rooted racial disparities, and systemic oppression that required social justice initiatives (Jewiss, 2018; Mertens et al., 2009; Wulff, 2021). The concepts of justice, constraints, infrastructure, and systems were inclusive and associated with transformative paradigm philosophical assumptions (Mertens et al., 2009).

Resource-based Entrepreneurship Theory

Resource-based entrepreneurship theory focused on resources (human, social, and financial), enhancing individuals' abilities; identifying conditions for resource-based views (RBV) that had been considered sustained above-normal returns in existing entrepreneurial theory; resource heterogeneity, ex-post limits to competition, imperfect factor mobility, and ex-ante limits to competition (Alvarez, 2002; Baboolall et al., 2020; Daniels, 2022).

The relationship between economic discourse, including cultural and social effects, was a vital concept that aligned with resource-based entrepreneurship theory, addressing financial and social concerns that existing entrepreneurship theory did not address (Alvarez, 2002; Baboolall et al., 2020; Daniels, 2022). Limited by a lack of insight into creativity and entrepreneurial acts, Alvarez (2002) advocated discovering alternative ways to use resources that yielded heterogeneous assets for the advantage of firms, associatively critical of the stagnant growth in entrepreneurial theory.

The framework guided the research by exploring the phenomenon and the gap in entrepreneurial guidance, specifically the absence of standard practices, systemic firm creation,

and sustainment, through informative feedback from those affected by the phenomenon. Linking multidisciplinary bodies of knowledge with interdisciplinary perspectives of entrepreneurship created value through new research on economic, cultural, social, and personal growth (Baker & Welter, 2020).

Introduction to Research Methodology and Design (Nature of the Study)

The study used a qualitative methodology, designed as applied research, to address real-world issues in Houston, Texas's workforce and business environment. It was an exploratory phenomenological study that investigated human experiences and behaviors through non-numerical data collection and analysis. Research data were collected from interviews with respondents, segmented, and categorized for analysis, culminating in a report that addressed the gaps and research questions derived from the study.

The German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was credited as "the fountainhead of Phenomenology in the twentieth century" (Vandenberg, 1997, p. 11). Edmund Husserl had been a student of Franz Brentano (1838-1917), who stressed the intentional nature of consciousness, defined as the internal experience of being conscious of something (Groenewald, 2004; Holloway, 1997). In an era when philosophies abound between positivism and subjectivism, amid forms of irrationalism and relativism, they sought to instill a process of knowing what was concrete and specific (Eagleton, 1996; Groenewald, 2004).

The researcher's phenomenological research aimed to accurately describe the phenomenon, faithfully reflecting the facts, from the perspectives of the people involved (Groenewald, 2004). The selected research methodology and design were intended to identify the underrepresentation of male African American entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas, and to present the logical steps to achieve this purpose through data collection and analysis, culminating in a

report that answers the research questions (Daniels, 2022). The phenomenological method allowed the researcher's epistemological position to draw data directly from those affected by the phenomenon of the male African American Entrepreneur in Houston, Texas (Daniels, 2022; Groenewald, 2004).

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to be measurable within the given timeframe at the location identified in the problem and purpose statements. The study included the following research questions that guided this study:

RQ1

What cultural traditions influenced the entrepreneurial experiences of African-American male business owners in Houston?

RQ2

What aspects of contemporary entrepreneurship theory encouraged and sustained business growth within African-American male businesses to increase their presence in Houston?

RQ3

How did the current socioeconomic climate limit resource-based entrepreneurship theory strategies within African-American male businesses in Houston to the extent of causing low representation?

RQ4

What aspects of minority entrepreneurship theory contributed to the low representation of African-American male business owners in Houston?

The researcher presented information from preliminary research data, African American entrepreneurs, and SMEs within Houston, Texas. They offered insights into innovative strategies and opportunities to overcome barriers which negatively affected the representation of African American male entrepreneurs in small business ownership.

Significance of the Study

It was essential to identify the barriers to African American entrepreneurs' growth in businesses, enhance lending practices for practitioners, change legislation to eradicate disablements, and add to the body of knowledge for scholars, guiding future research in applied studies. The benefits of addressing low representation included advancing a slow-growing entrepreneurship theory and contributing significantly to the nation's gross domestic product (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022). Healthy Black-owned businesses could contribute to closing the cultural wealth gap and culturally support cycle funding throughout the community, from local spending and employing residents to passing labor skills and garnering local support, reinforcing the local ecosystem that these small businesses sought to root in (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022). Efforts to construct the right business ecosystems negated the effects of structural obstacles to business building for black business owners and added $290 billion in business equity, according to Baboolall et al. (2020). Houston’s population was 64% minority; compared to the nationwide level, minority startups in Houston ranked fifth-largest (Mistretta, 2023). McKinsey & Company reported that 58 percent of black-owned businesses were at risk of financial distress, compared to 27 percent of white-owned companies (Baboolall et al., 2020).

Revealing what was identified as barriers to growth processes increased transparency and aided in equal rights for all business entrepreneurs, regardless of background. The goal was to contribute to the existing body of research by informing interested parties (researchers,

policymakers, government officials, and agencies) of updated, relevant data on African American entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022).

Definitions of Key Terms

African American Entrepreneurs

The Library of Congress described African American entrepreneurs as founders of small businesses that served their communities after the Civil War. They created small businesses such as barber shops, funeral homes, hotels, retail stores, restaurants, catering businesses, newspapers, and beauty products (Library of Congress, n.d.).

Bricolage Theory

This theory of entrepreneurship focused on how entrepreneurs could create businesses in resource-poor or economically depressed areas. It was based on the idea that entrepreneurs could use limited resources to create something new and productive (Busch & Barkema, 2021).

Environmental Munificence

The scarcity or abundance of critical resources that firms needed while operating within an environment was defined as environmental munificence (Dahan & Shoham, 2023).

Invariant Constituents

Termed Invariant Horizons or Constituents: Suspicion; the invariant horizons pointed to the unique qualities of an experience, those that stood out. Publisher de Koning (1979) reduced the experience of one co-researcher's description of suspicion to the following core horizons in which the conditions of doubt arose, the clues of suspicion were recognized, and the suspicion itself was validated or shown to have been unfounded (de Koning, 1979; Moustakas, 1994).

Minority

Sometimes the term was used to signify immigrants; at other times, it referred to ethnicity. More broadly, it described people from communities that were underrepresented in entrepreneurial activity. The term ‘minority’ is frequently understood to refer to a small number of people in society and, therefore, to be almost irrelevant to the country's greater well-being. However, these communities constituted a large percentage of every nation’s population and, therefore, could not be dismissed as inconsequential (Cooney, 2021).

Paradigm

Stanage (1987) traced ‘paradigm’ back to its Greek (paradeigma) and Latin origins (paradigm), meaning pattern, model, or example. A paradigm was the patterning of a person's thinking; it was a principal example among examples, an exemplar or model to follow, according to which design actions were taken. Put differently, a paradigm was the submission to a view (Stanage, 1987). This view was supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), who defined a research paradigm as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action,” dealing with first principles, “ultimates,” or the researcher’s worldviews (p. 157).

Racial Animus

A term that described a person’s resentment was defined as a negative sentiment or hostility towards cultural minority groups (Brookman et al., 2022).

Silent Groups

They were identified as Women, Youth, Seniors, Unemployed and Immigrants, Gay, Disabled, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), and Ex-Offender communities as being disadvantaged in terms of entrepreneurial behavior (Cooney, 2021). Others saw African

Americans and minorities overall as silent groups and marginalized their existence (Bruton et al., 2023).

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)

The definition of SMEs varied across industries in the United States, as reflected in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). The maximum number of employees varies by country. Generally, independent firms/businesses had between 50 and 250 employees, with no more than 500 workers in the U.S. and 200 in other countries (CFI Team, 2023; Upson et al., 2023).

Summary

Chapter 1 of this study stated the research problem and presented the need for the study, acknowledging its purpose and background. It provided a rationale for the theoretical direction and research questions. Many of the terms were defined to help readers understand them and how they were employed in the study.

The study's purpose stemmed from a lack of information about why African American male entrepreneurs were underrepresented in Houston, Texas, despite its growing economy. The aim was to address the low representation of the marginalized to increase business growth within the community, which was primarily viewed as marginalized (Conley & Bilimoria, 2022; Cooney, 2021). This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of lowly represented male African American entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas, and, through a combined entrepreneurial-theory lens, determine whether barriers inhibited underrepresentation in Houston, Texas (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022).

Using applied research to address real-world issues through a qualitative phenomenological study allowed the researcher to systematically explore information gathered

from anthropology, contemporary, resource-based, and minority entrepreneurship. The study revealed effective past practices and identified persistent barriers that informed strategies to close existing information gaps and guided future entrepreneurial support efforts. The literature review in the next chapter provided a comprehensive examination of existing scholarship related to the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas, offering critical context for understanding the phenomenon and guiding the direction of this study. (Daniels, 2022; United States Census Bureau, n.d.; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center, 2023). Chapter 2 comprehensively reviewed the scholarly literature related to African American entrepreneurship, systemic inequities, resource challenges, and the socio-cultural context of Houston, Texas. Chapter 2 included a critical evaluation of the material to draw a finer point on the underrepresentation and merits of the findings, confirming or dismissing current assumptions (Daniels, 2022; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; United States Census Bureau, n.d.; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Writing Center, 2023).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas, through the lived experiences of small business owners. This study sought to understand the systemic, cultural, and resource-based barriers these entrepreneurs faced and to identify strategies they had used to achieve business sustainability within a racially complex and economically dynamic environment. The literature review included scholarly contributions from peer-reviewed literature that examined the systemic underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston through a multi-disciplinary theoretical lens. The discussions contributed to the existing body of knowledge by integrating related theories, paving the way to address the challenges faced by African American business owners.

Chapter 2 detailed the databases accessed and search parameters, ensuring a rigorous and comprehensive review of peer-reviewed sources. The literature review provided a comprehensive overview of scholarly articles, studies, journals, and other relevant documents that explored the factors influencing African American entrepreneurship, particularly within Houston, Texas. It examined theoretical frameworks, historical perspectives, and empirical research to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities associated with this subject. This chapter integrated anthropological entrepreneurship theory (AET), contemporary entrepreneurship theory (CET), minority entrepreneurship theory (MET), and resource-based entrepreneurship theory (RBET) to investigate how systemic barriers, cultural resilience, and resource dynamics influenced the entrepreneurial experiences of African American men in Houston (Baker & Welter, 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

AET explored the influence of historical and cultural practices on entrepreneurial strategies, emphasizing how trading, bartering, and communal support systems contributed to resilience and economic agency (Verver & de Koning, 2023). CET examined the role of innovation and adaptability in addressing modern entrepreneurial challenges, highlighting how African American entrepreneurs in Houston leveraged digital platforms and flexible business models to overcome barriers and expand market reach (Brown et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2020).

MET investigated the social and structural challenges faced by African American entrepreneurs, including systemic inequities and limited access to financial resources. It also underscored the importance of cultural identity and community networks in mitigating these challenges (Bruton et al., 2023; Sithas & Surangi, 2021). RBET analyzed the significance of tangible and intangible resources, such as financial capital, social networks, and human capital, in fostering entrepreneurial success. It highlighted how African American entrepreneurs in Houston navigated resource scarcity and utilize innovative strategies to create value in underserved markets (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Perry et al., 2022).

The following analyses explored recurring challenges and opportunities identified in the literature review. The topics of *Anthropological Entrepreneurship and African American Entrepreneurs in Houston* highlighted how cultural resilience and historical dynamics influenced entrepreneurial practices, emphasizing kinship networks and community ties (Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020), while local analyses document how these dynamics operate within Houston's structural business environment (Perry et al., 2022). A comparative analysis of native African American Entrepreneurs and naturalized African immigrants revealed structural and cultural differences, showing how immigrant enclaves leveraged close-knit networks while native-born

entrepreneurs faced fragmented ecosystems (Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Sithas & Surangi, 2021). *Contemporary Entrepreneurship and African American Entrepreneurs in Houston* discuss the importance of innovation, adaptability, and digital platforms in addressing systemic barriers (Baker & Welter, 2020; Tobin & Thakker, 2019).

Explorative Analysis of Challenges in Minority Entrepreneurship identified systemic barriers, including discriminatory lending practices, limited access to capital, and resource scarcity. The section also explored the role of cultural resilience in navigating these challenges (Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019). *Challenges in RBET for African American Entrepreneurs in Houston* focused on resource scarcity; this section examined how entrepreneurs used innovative strategies like crowdfunding and bricolage to overcome financial and systemic barriers. The role of community-based initiatives like the Houston Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) was also discussed (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Verver & de Koning, 2023). This explorative analysis synthesized insights from the literature to examine the multifaceted challenges and opportunities encountered by African American entrepreneurs in Houston. By focusing on systemic barriers, resource constraints, and cultural influences, the chapter provided a foundation for understanding how targeted interventions could foster inclusivity and support entrepreneurial growth in this population (Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024).

Multiple academic databases and search engines were accessed to ensure a comprehensive and rigorous literature review. These included the National University Library's scholarly resources, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Additionally, local library resources in the Houston metropolitan area and surrounding regions were utilized to access community-specific data and historical insights. The search

process employed a systematic approach with various key terms and their combinations to yield relevant literature. Examples of these terms included "African American entrepreneurs," "minority entrepreneurship," "resource-based entrepreneurship theory," "contemporary entrepreneurship," "social capital," "systemic barriers," "critical race theory in business," "small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)," "ethnic business success factors," and "Houston entrepreneurial ecosystem." Complex keyword combinations such as "minority entrepreneurs and funding disparities," "African American businesses; systemic racism and resource-based theory" were used to refine results. Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) and truncations (e.g., entrepreneur or entrepreneurship) were employed to expand or narrow the scope of searches as needed.

The literature reviews prioritized sources published in the last five years (2019–2024) to ensure inclusion of current studies and data, while incorporating foundational works and seminal studies to provide historical context and theoretical grounding. The types of literature reviewed included peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, systematic reviews, dissertations and theses, government reports (e.g., SBA data, U.S. Census Bureau), local community reports, and books or book chapters on entrepreneurial theories and minority studies. The inclusion criteria focused on articles that explored African American entrepreneurship, systemic barriers in business, minority entrepreneurship theory, and related frameworks. Studies that lacked relevance to African American entrepreneurship or focused solely on international entrepreneurial contexts without comparative value to the U.S. were excluded.

Search engines such as Google Scholar and library-integrated tools like EBSCO Discovery Service were employed to locate peer-reviewed studies and gray literature. Citation chaining and snowballing techniques were also used to identify additional resources from

references in selected works. Advanced filters were applied to limit searches to English-language sources, full-text availability, and subject relevance to ensure quality and precision. A detailed table listing the search terms, their Boolean combinations, and the databases used was included in Appendix K to provide transparency and facilitate replication of the search methodology. This structured and methodical approach ensured the literature review was grounded in credible, relevant, and diverse academic resources, offering a robust foundation for understanding the low representation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a multidisciplinary conceptual framework that integrated anthropological entrepreneurship theory, contemporary entrepreneurship theory, minority entrepreneurship theory, and resource-based entrepreneurship theory. These theories provide a comprehensive lens to investigate the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston. By examining the interplay of cultural, systemic, and resource-based factors, the framework offers a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities shaping African American entrepreneurship in this context (Robinson, 2024; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Anthropological Entrepreneurship Theory

*An*thropological entrepreneurship theory explored the cultural and historical contexts that shape entrepreneurial strategies, emphasizing how generational resilience and cultural practices influenced economic behavior (Verver & de Koning, 2023). Rooted in early anthropological works by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown and Franz Boas, this perspective underscored the interplay between societal structures, cultural norms, and economic systems. Radcliffe-Brown (1940) introduced a structural-functional approach, positing that human interactions, governed by

kinship systems and tribal rules, form the foundation of societal order (Eriksen, 2022; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). In his ethnographic studies of the Kwakiutl tribe (1920), Boas examined the potlatch, a ritualized system of exchange, demonstrating how cultural practices influence economic agency and competition within symbolic systems (Boas, 1920; Eriksen, 2022; Pfeilstetter, R., 2021).

Building on these foundations, economic anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, Fredrik Barth, and Joseph Schumpeter expanded AET to explore entrepreneurship as a mechanism of social change and cultural adaptation. Schumpeter (1934) characterized entrepreneurship as a driver of innovation and societal transformation, while Barth (1967) highlighted how individuals navigate societal constraints through micro-level adaptations, showcasing entrepreneurial behavior as a dynamic response to broader systemic pressures (Barth, 1967; Pfeilstetter, R., 2021). Geertz's (1963) analysis of the Javanese bazaar economy and Douglas's (1982) studies on rituals in economic practices further reinforced the importance of embedding entrepreneurship within community and symbolic systems.

Recent contributions by Pfeilstetter, R. (2021) linked entrepreneurship to postcolonial contexts, emphasizing the intersection of historical inequities and entrepreneurial agency. These insights echoed Geertz's (1963) findings that informal markets often emerged as a response to exclusion from mainstream economic systems. In Houston, such challenges were compounded by historical traumas, including the legacy of violence against African American businesses, such as the 1921 Tulsa massacre, which continued to exert psychological and economic impacts (Fain, 2017). AET provided a lens to illuminate how cultural and historical dynamics influenced entrepreneurial agency, highlighting the systemic barriers and adaptive strategies that shaped

African American entrepreneurship in historically marginalized contexts (Pfeilstetter, R., 2021; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Contemporary Entrepreneurship Theory

Contemporary entrepreneurship theory highlighted adaptive approaches, including innovation and digital platforms, to navigate modern market challenges, as well as non-disruptive business models to remain competitive (Kim & Maubourgne, 2023; Thompson et al., 2020). It comprehensively explained how modern entrepreneurs created value within dynamic markets (Baker & Welter, 2020; Conley & Bilimoria, 2022; Petricevic & Teece, 2019; Thompson et al., 2020). It encompassed various elements, such as digital transformation, access to information, and the critical role of networks in shaping entrepreneurial success (Baker & Welter, 2020; Pfeilstetter, R., 2021).

Contemporary entrepreneurship theory was essential for examining the strategies African American entrepreneurs used to navigate the complexities of modern business environments, including digitalization, market access, and the effective use of social media for business promotion. These entrepreneurs leveraged networks and digital tools to overcome barriers to growth and ensured their businesses thrived in increasingly competitive and digitally connected markets (Baker & Welter, 2020; Conley & Bilimoria, 2022). Contemporary entrepreneurship theory practiced strategies to drive innovation and disrupt traditional practices (Petricevic & Teece, 2019). Technology and digital marketing were used to reach global markets and improve efficiency with an online presence and capabilities (Petricevic & Teece, 2019).

Minority Entrepreneurship Theory

Minority entrepreneurship theory provided a critical lens for examining the unique challenges and opportunities that underrepresented groups faced in entrepreneurial contexts

(Bruton et al., 2023; Sithas & Surangi, 2021). Early scholars, such as Ivan Light and Howard Aldrich, laid the foundation for MET by examining the role of ethnic networks, social capital, and structural barriers in shaping minority business ownership (Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990; Light, 1972). Rooted in the intersection of sociology, economics, and cultural studies, MET explored how systemic inequities, cultural influences, and social networks shaped the entrepreneurial experiences of minorities (Sithas & Surangi, 2021).

Minority entrepreneurship theory aligned closely with the study's aim of investigating African American entrepreneurship in Houston, particularly as it related to navigating systemic barriers, leveraging cultural resilience, and adapting to market conditions (Busch & Barkema, 2021; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022). It offered valuable insights into key themes, such as community networks, which examined the role of familial and community ties in providing resources, mentorship, and a loyal customer base (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019). Systemic inequalities addressed the impact of discriminatory practices, limited access to capital, and historical disenfranchisement on entrepreneurial efforts; cultural Identity played a role in the interplay between cultural heritage and entrepreneurial strategies in defining market positioning and resilience (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022).

In this conceptual framework, MET complemented other theoretical perspectives, such as Anthropological Entrepreneurship Theory and Resource-Based Entrepreneurship Theory, by highlighting the specific experiences of African American entrepreneurs. While AET emphasized cultural practices and traditions, MET focused on the systemic structures and racialized environments that uniquely shaped minority entrepreneurship (Light & Dana, 2019; Robinson, 2024). By integrating MET into the conceptual framework, this study addressed the

broader socio-economic and cultural forces influencing African American entrepreneurship in Houston, offering a nuanced understanding of both the systemic barriers and the cultural strengths that defined their entrepreneurial journeys (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022).

Resource-Based Entrepreneurship Theory

Resource-based entrepreneurship theory originated from the firm's broader resource-based view (RBV), first articulated by Edith Penrose in her seminal work, The Theory of the Growth of the Firm (1959). Penrose argued that a firm's growth was determined by utilizing its unique resource bundle, including tangible assets, human capital, and organizational capabilities (Penrose, 1959). This perspective was further advanced by Barney (1991), who emphasized that resources must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) to create a sustained competitive advantage.

Resource-based entrepreneurship theory built on this foundation by focusing on the entrepreneurial process and examining how resources such as financial capital, social networks, and human capital enable entrepreneurs to overcome systemic barriers and achieve business success (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). The theory highlighted the interplay between resource scarcity and systemic disparities, emphasizing the critical role of both tangible (e.g., financial capital) and intangible (e.g., knowledge, skills, and relationships) resources in addressing entrepreneurial challenges (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023). Resource-based entrepreneurship theory aligned closely with the aims of this study, particularly in understanding how African American entrepreneurs in Houston navigated systemic barriers, leveraged community networks, and deployed innovative strategies to sustain

and grow their ventures (Busch & Barkema, 2021; Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2020; Perry et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024).

Key dynamics explored through RBET include resource scarcity, social capital, and value creation (Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Fairlie et al., 2022; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024; Santos et al., 2024). Resource scarcity referred to the systemic exclusion of African American entrepreneurs from mainstream financial resources, such as venture capital and business loans, and their reliance on alternative strategies, such as crowdfunding and community support (Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022). Social Capital described the role of social networks and mentorship in mitigating resource constraints and fostering entrepreneurial growth (Light & Dana, 2019; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). Value Creation involved transforming limited resources into culturally resonant products and services catering to underserved markets, demonstrating resilience and innovation (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Santos et al., 2024).

Existing research studies that similarly used this framework included Verver and de Koning (2023), who applied AET to explore how cultural practices shaped entrepreneurial behavior in marginalized communities, demonstrating its relevance to examining African American entrepreneurship in Houston. Ruef and Grigoryeva (2020) applied AET to investigate the role of kinship networks and cultural norms in entrepreneurial decision-making, aligning with the study's focus on leveraging cultural identity and community networks. Thompson et al. (2020) used CET to highlight adaptive business models and digital strategies among minority entrepreneurs, particularly in urban contexts with systemic barriers. Brown et al. (2023) used CET to examine the impact of digital platforms on overcoming traditional market barriers for African American entrepreneurs in Houston.

Light and Dana (2019) used MET to examine systemic inequities and the role of social capital in sustaining minority-owned businesses, thereby providing a foundation for analyzing community resilience in Houston. Bruton et al. (2023) used MET to examine racialized barriers in entrepreneurial ecosystems, emphasizing structural challenges that mirrored those African American entrepreneurs faced in Houston. Chen et al. (2022) used RBET to explore how resource scarcity impacted minority entrepreneurs' strategic adaptations, supporting this study's focus on overcoming systemic inequities. Rakshit and Peterson (2024) used RBET to investigate racial disparities in resource access, underscoring the importance of tangible and intangible resources in entrepreneurial success.

Alternative Frameworks

Alternative frameworks, such as critical race theory (CRT) and social network theory, were considered for their potential to address systemic inequities and social dynamics in entrepreneurship. While CRT provided a strong foundation for understanding systemic racism, it focused more on broad societal structures rather than the specific interplay of cultural, systemic, and resource-based factors examined in this study. The chosen frameworks offered a more targeted approach to analyzing entrepreneurial strategies and outcomes. The social network theory framework emphasized the role of networks in facilitating resource flow and opportunity creation. However, it lacks the depth to comprehensively explore systemic barriers and cultural dynamics, making it less suitable for the study's multifaceted objectives. Integrating AET, CET, MET, and RBET was chosen because these frameworks collectively addressed cultural influences, modern entrepreneurial challenges, systemic inequities, and resource dynamics, aligning closely with the study's research focus.

The selected frameworks guided this study by providing a structured lens to examine African American entrepreneurship in Houston (Barney, 1991; Boas, 1920; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Geertz, 1963; Light & Dana, 2019; Penrose, 1959; Sithas & Surangi, 2021). Anthropological entrepreneurship theory highlighted the importance of cultural and historical practices, aligning with the study's focus on leveraging cultural identity in entrepreneurial strategies. Contemporary entrepreneurship theory offered insights into adaptive strategy and digital tools, which were critical for addressing systemic barriers in Houston's entrepreneurial landscape. Minority entrepreneurship theory focused on systemic inequities and community resilience, directly addressing the study's research questions on overcoming structural barriers. Resource-based entrepreneurship theory explored the role of resource scarcity and social capital, informing the study's exploration of how resources shaped entrepreneurial success. These frameworks directly informed the development of the problem statement by identifying the systemic barriers that African American entrepreneurs faced. They shaped the purpose statement by emphasizing the need to explore adaptive strategies and cultural resilience, and they guided the research questions by focusing on the interplay of cultural, systemic, and resource-based factors (Chen et al., 2022; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Santos et al., 2024).

Anthropological Entrepreneurship and African American Entrepreneurs in Houston

Anthropological entrepreneurship theory offered a cultural lens for examining how historical, social, and economic structures shaped entrepreneurial behavior, particularly within marginalized communities (Verver & de Koning, 2023). Anthropological entrepreneurship theory revealed how socio-cultural ties underpinned entrepreneurial resilience and adaptability by emphasizing cultural values, kinship networks, and traditions (Pfeilstetter, R., 2021; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023). This approach aligned with broader

anthropological discussions on how economic systems reflected cultural norms and historical legacies (Douglas, 1982; Geertz, 1963).

In the context of African American entrepreneurship in Houston, AET offered a robust framework for understanding how cultural heritage and systemic barriers converge to shape entrepreneurial practices (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Verver & de Koning, 2023). African Americans in Houston have faced centuries of systemic oppression, from the Middle Passage to the Jim Crow era and beyond, which entrenched economic disenfranchisement (Daniels, 2022; Korver-Glenn, 2021). However, this history also fostered strong mutual support networks within African American communities, enabling resilience and cultural cohesion (Baboolall et al., 2020). These networks often served as the backbone for entrepreneurial ventures, aligning with AET's emphasis on the interplay between socio-cultural traditions and economic behavior (Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Anthropological entrepreneurship theory focused on community and cultural values and paralleled the entrepreneurial strategies employed by African Americans in Houston, who often embedded their businesses within their cultural heritage (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Verver & de Koning, 2023). African American entrepreneurs leveraged faith-based organizations, family ties, and informal networks to sustain their ventures (Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). These practices aligned with the anthropological emphasis on symbolic systems and shared values as drivers of economic agency (Douglas, 1982; Pfeilstetter, R., 2021).

Despite these strengths, systemic barriers such as discriminatory lending practices and limited access to capital continued to impede the growth of African-American-owned businesses in Houston (Fairlie et al., 2022). Research highlighted that systemic inequities persisted despite

modern interventions such as Opportunity Zones and small-business accelerators (Baboolall et al., 2020; Mistretta, 2023). African American entrepreneurs in Houston often relied on community-centric operations and cultural identity as a differentiator in the market, demonstrating the sociocultural dimensions of their ventures (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022).

Houston's diverse demographic landscape further underscored the relevance of AET (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Fox, 2021; Light & Dana, 2019). As the most diverse city in Texas, Houston served as a microcosm for studying the intersection of cultural identity and entrepreneurship (Baboolall et al., 2020). African American entrepreneurs in the city navigated systemic barriers by blending traditional cultural practices with contemporary approaches, such as digital marketing and community-based initiatives (Pfeilstetter, R., 2021; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). However, research suggested that existing support structures often fail to address the entrenched inequities that African American entrepreneurs faced, reinforcing the need for culturally informed interventions (Utami & Alamanos, 2023).

Anthropological entrepreneurship theory provided a compelling lens to analyze African American entrepreneurship in Houston (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Pfeilstetter, R., 2021; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023). By situating entrepreneurial practices within their cultural and historical contexts, AET highlighted the resilience and adaptability of African American entrepreneurs while exposing the systemic barriers that constrained their success (Light & Dana, 2019; Pfeilstetter, R., 2021; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023). This comparative framework deepened our understanding of the sociocultural dimensions of entrepreneurship and informed strategies for fostering equity and inclusion in entrepreneurial ecosystems (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Convergence Among Studies

Cultural and historical context: The works of Boas (1920), Douglas (1982), and Geertz (1963) emphasized how cultural practices, traditions, and rituals shaped economic behavior. These studies collectively highlighted the importance of integrating cultural norms into entrepreneurial strategies. Similarly, Santos et al. (2024) explored the role of racial identity in African American entrepreneurship, identifying it as both a challenge and a strength. Based on 21 interviews, their findings showed that while racial identity could hinder resource access, it often inspired entrepreneurial action as a response to segregation and discrimination (Santos et al., 2024). Within business ventures, racial identity manifested in two ways: (a) as an asset through value propositions and racially centered target markets, and (b) as a liability when racial salience limited resource acquisition (Santos et al., 2024). These ventures created economic opportunities and empowered the African American community, positioning racial identity as a source of strength and inspiration for future generations (Santos et al., 2024).

These insights were particularly relevant to African American entrepreneurs in Houston, where many businesses drew on cultural heritage to shape their identity and strategies (Fain, 2017; Santos et al., 2024). Research highlighted how cultural identity was both a guiding principle and a differentiator in competitive markets, allowing entrepreneurs to cater to niche audiences while reinforcing community ties (Verver & de Koning, 2023). This approach aligned with the cultural and historical influences emphasized in foundational studies (Boas, 1920; Douglas, 1982; Geertz, 1963), demonstrating the enduring relevance of embedding cultural and racial identity into entrepreneurial practices (Light & Dana, 2019; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020).

Resilience and Adaptability

Barth (1967), Light and Dana (2019), and Verver and de Koning (2023) highlighted how entrepreneurs navigated systemic constraints by leveraging cultural and social networks. Barth (1967), Light and Dana (2019), and Verver and de Koning (2023) converged on bricolage, where limited resources are creatively used to overcome barriers. African American entrepreneurs in Houston displayed similar resilience by leveraging kinship networks and community ties to sustain their ventures despite systemic barriers (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020).

Systemic Barriers

Recent studies emphasized the systemic inequities that disproportionately affected African American entrepreneurs, particularly in accessing capital and resources. Perry et al., (2022) highlighted discriminatory lending practices and limited access to financial resources as persistent challenges. Similarly, Fairlie et al. (2022) examined how racial disparities in capital allocation hindered the growth and sustainability of Black-owned businesses. In Houston, these barriers were further compounded by socioeconomic dynamics that exacerbated inequities, as Klineberg and Bozick (2022) noted.

These findings aligned with broader research by Light and Dana (2019), who emphasized the importance of cultural and social networks in navigating systemic constraints. Ruef and Grigoryeva (2020) further explored how systemic barriers intersected with cultural and racial identity, revealing the intricate ways in which structural inequities shape entrepreneurial experiences. Together, these studies underscored the need for targeted financial programs and policies to mitigate systemic barriers and foster an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem for African American entrepreneurs in Houston. These findings were mirrored in Houston's socio-

economic environment, where systemic barriers are entrenched and continued to limit entrepreneurial opportunities for African Americans (Fairlie et al., 2022; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022).

Divergence Among the Studies Focus on Tradition vs. Innovation

Boas (1920) and Douglas (1982) emphasized the importance of tradition and rituals in shaping economic behavior, underscoring a connection to cultural heritage. In contrast, Schumpeter (1934) and Verver and de Koning (2023) highlighted innovation and disruption as key drivers of entrepreneurship, focusing on the transformative potential of entrepreneurial agency. A critical insight was that while African American entrepreneurs in Houston relied significantly on cultural heritage, while their success also depended on their ability to adapt and innovate in a modern, competitive market (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Recent studies revealed different approaches to addressing the systemic barriers that African American entrepreneurs in Houston faced, especially in balancing tradition and innovation. Perry et al. (2022) emphasized the lasting impact of cultural traditions and historical practices on entrepreneurial strategies. Their findings suggested that many entrepreneurs depened on community-driven support systems and established cultural networks to navigate systemic inequities. Similarly, Light and Dana (2019) stressed the significance of cultural and social capital, arguing that traditional practices, such as kinship-based resource sharing enhanced resilience against discriminatory lending practices.

Conversely, Daniels (2022) and Fairlie et al. (2022) shifted the focus toward innovation, showcasing how African American entrepreneurs adopted modern tools and strategies to overcome systemic challenges. Daniels (2022) noted the growing use of digital platforms and

non-traditional funding sources, such as crowdfunding and microloans, to bypass traditional financial barriers. Fairlie et al. (2022) pointed out that adaptive strategies that blended innovation with resourcefulness allowed businesses to thrive despite systemic obstacles.

Recent data further highlighted the role of innovation in fostering entrepreneurial growth. The Kinder Institute for Urban Research (2023) reported significant growth in new business registrations in predominantly Black neighborhoods during the COVID-19 pandemic, driven by entrepreneurial resilience and adaptability. Initiatives such as Black Entrepreneurs Week also provided essential platforms for innovation and collaboration among Black-owned businesses in Houston (AFRAM News, 2023). Nonetheless, systemic barriers continued to persist. The U.S. Small Business Administration (2022) indicated that African American-owned businesses struggled with limited access to capital and resources, which constrained their ability to scale and innovate.

Klineberg and Bozick (2022) bridged these perspectives, noting that Houston's African American entrepreneurs often combined traditional cultural identities with innovative business practices to cater to diverse markets. This convergence of tradition and innovation represented the dynamic and multifaceted approaches entrepreneurs took to address systemic barriers while fostering growth in their ventures.

Homogeneity vs. Heterogeneity in Entrepreneurial Practices

Geertz (1963) and Ruef and Grigoryeva (2020) explored entrepreneurial practices in relatively homogeneous communities, such as the Javanese bazaar or African American enclaves. Perry et al., (2022) and Klineberg and Bozick (2022) emphasized the heterogeneity of urban environments like Houston, where African American entrepreneurs had to navigate a complex interplay of diverse cultural and systemic dynamics. The critical insight was that this

divergence highlighted the need to adapt AET to account for the unique challenges posed by multicultural and urban settings (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Quantitative vs. Qualitative Approaches

Dahan and Shoham (2023) and Fairlie et al. (2022) employed quantitative methods to analyze resource allocation and disparities in capital access. Boas (1920), Douglas (1982), and Light and Dana (2019) employed qualitative, ethnographic approaches to understand the socio-cultural dimensions of entrepreneurship. The critical insight was that combining both approaches was necessary to capture the multifaceted nature of African American entrepreneurship in Houston, blending systemic analysis with rich, contextual narratives (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Subculture Dynamics

Studies like Boas (1920) and Geertz (1963) focused on smaller or more contained communities, which may not have fully aligned with Houston's large, diverse urban environment. As Klineberg and Bozick (2022) highlighted, incorporating urban-specific dynamics refined AET's applicability to metropolitan settings. There was little literature addressing native African Americans and immigrant African Americans. Entrepreneurship among African Americans, particularly within the native-born population, often emerged as a response to historical exclusion from mainstream economic opportunities and systemic barriers (Perry et al., 2022). However, disparities within the broader category of "Black entrepreneurship" became evident when comparing native-born African American entrepreneurs to naturalized African immigrants (Baboolall et al., 2020; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Tesfai & Thomas, 2020). These differences underscored the varying cultural, structural,

and systemic factors influencing their entrepreneurial trajectories (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Tesfai & Thomas, 2020).

Cultural and Structural Resources

African immigrant communities frequently leveraged strong internal cohesion and resource-sharing mechanisms rooted in cultural practices and shared experiences from their home countries (Ogbolu & Singh, 2019). These networks, often based on tribal, familial, or ethnic ties, served as informal support systems, providing capital, mentorship, and a loyal customer base (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). Such enclaves act as incubators for entrepreneurial success, creating pathways for resource mobilization and market penetration (Ogbolu & Singh, 2019).

In contrast, while drawing on cultural resilience and historical solidarity, native-born African Americans often lacked the dense social structures characteristic of immigrant enclaves (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). Their entrepreneurial efforts were frequently hampered by systemic disparities in access to capital, market networks, and institutional support (Tesfai & Thomas, 2020). These differences highlighted a structural gap in resource availability and the community cohesion that often underpinned thriving entrepreneurial ecosystems (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020).

Labor Market and Educational Attainment

Research shows that Black immigrants, mainly African and Caribbean populations, exhibited high labor force participation rates, with African immigrant populations growing by 137% since 2000 (Tesfai & Thomas, 2020). Despite these gains, they face significant underemployment in low-skilled jobs, often due to employer bias and credential-recognition

issues (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). These challenges drove many African immigrants toward entrepreneurship as a means of economic empowerment and social mobility (Tesfai & Thomas, 2020).

Conversely, native-born African Americans faced historical and systemic barriers perpetuated economic disenfranchisement (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). While they benefited from a legacy of resilience and cultural innovation, they frequently lack the same opportunities for resource pooling and cooperative ventures in immigrant enclaves (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). The subcultural dynamics underscored the need for tailored interventions to address the unique challenges of native-born entrepreneurs (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020).

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and Policy Implications. Ethnic enclaves were critical for fostering immigrant entrepreneurship and reinforcing cultural bonds and loyalty within their social networks (Ogbolu & Singh, 2019). By contrast, native-born African American entrepreneurs often operated in fragmented or underserved ecosystems, where resource mobilization was more challenging (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). Policies and programs designed to support African American entrepreneurship frequently overlooked these distinctions, failing to address the structural inequities that disproportionately affect native-born populations (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020).

While community-based initiatives such as Opportunity Zones and small business accelerators in cities like Houston aimed to promote minority entrepreneurship, their impact was often uneven (Fairlie et al., 2022; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson,

2024). African immigrant entrepreneurs tended to benefit disproportionately due to their cohesive social networks and ability to capitalize on existing community structures (Baboolall et al., 2020). Meanwhile, native-born African American entrepreneurs remained at a disadvantage, grappling with systemic barriers that hindered equitable access to resources and opportunities (Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020).

Anthropological Insights

Anthropological entrepreneurship theory provided a nuanced framework for understanding these dynamics by examining how cultural resilience, historical context, and systemic barriers shaped entrepreneurial practices (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023). This perspective revealed that native-born African American entrepreneurs often lacked the cultural and structural support that immigrant communities enjoyed, further amplifying disparities in business outcomes (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). Integrating insights from this theory with the Minority Entrepreneurship Theory enabled researchers to identify targeted strategies for fostering inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Sithas & Surangi, 2021; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Structural Interventions

Works such as Light and Dana (2019) and Verver and de Koning (2023) highlighted the importance of community and cultural resilience but provided limited analysis of how changes to policy structures could have enhanced these efforts. Insights from Fairlie et al. (2022) and Perry et al. (2022) could have informed policy recommendations to dismantle systemic barriers. The studies converged on the significance of cultural and historical contexts in shaping

entrepreneurial practices, emphasizing resilience and adaptability (Light & Dana, 2019; Pfeilstetter, R., 2021; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

However, they diverged in their focus on tradition versus innovation, homogeneity versus heterogeneity, and methodological approaches (Boas, 1920; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Douglas, 1982; Fairlie et al., 2022; Geertz, 1963; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Schumpeter, 1934; Verver & de Koning, 2023). By critically integrating these perspectives, AET could have been tailored to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by African American entrepreneurs in Houston, fostering a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Future Directions

A holistic approach to supporting African American entrepreneurship in Houston required recognizing the distinct challenges and contributions of native-born and immigrant entrepreneurs (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). Tailored strategies addressed the structural inequities faced by native-born African Americans while building on the strengths of immigrant communities (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). Future research explored adapting existing programs to better serve these populations, contributing to more inclusive and equitable economic development (Baboolall et al., 2020; Ogbolu & Singh, 2013; Tesfai & Thomas, 2020). By integrating AET with the lived experiences of African American entrepreneurs, scholars better understood the interplay between cultural resilience, systemic barriers, and entrepreneurial innovation (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef &

Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023). This understanding informed policies and programs that fostered sustainable growth and equity (Cooney, 2021; Perry et al., 2022).

Areas for Further Exploration

Intersectionality of Barriers: While studies such as those by Perry et al. (2022) and Fairlie et al. (2022) explored systemic inequities, they often lacked a deeper examination of intersectional barriers (e.g., race, gender, and class) that uniquely affected African American entrepreneurs. Future research could have integrated insights from AET with frameworks like critical race theory to better address these layers (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Light & Dana, 2019; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Contemporary Entrepreneurship and African American Entrepreneurs in Houston

Contemporary entrepreneurship theory was marked by its diversity and lack of a unified framework, which led to semantic discourse and varying definitions across scholarly work (Thompson et al., 2020). This theoretical fragmentation often resulted in underdeveloped empirical foundations, which made replication studies essential for solidifying its claims and ensuring its legitimacy (Crawford, 2022). For African American entrepreneurs in Houston, replication studies were particularly critical as they provided data-driven insights to identify systemic inequities and informed targeted, evidence-based programs at the federal, state, and local levels (Crawford, 2022).

Government Programs and Challenges

The Small Business Administration (SBA) and other governmental bodies developed various initiatives to address entrepreneurial disparities (National Small Business Association, 2023; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; U.S. Small Business Administration, 2022). Programs like microloans, the Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) Act of 2012, and the Opportunity

Zones program created through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 aimed to provide minority entrepreneurs with greater access to capital and investment (Robinson, 2024; Stanberry, 2023). While well-intentioned, these programs often fell short of effectively addressing the needs of African American entrepreneurs, including those in Houston (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; U.S. Small Business Administration, 2022). Critics argued that the benefits of these initiatives frequently bypassed African American business owners due to structural inequities and a lack of alignment with their specific challenges (Snidel & Newman, 2022).

Texas Governor Greg Abbott nominated 628 Opportunity Zones, including many in Houston's Harris County, but the program's effectiveness was limited (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; Texas Economic Development & Tourism, 2024). Many businesses and investors avoided the trade-offs required to participate, reducing the program's impact on underrepresented entrepreneurs (Texas Economic Development & Tourism, 2024). Similarly, the SBA's expanded efforts to support minority and veteran-owned businesses were valuable but insufficient in addressing the profound systemic barriers facing African American entrepreneurs (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; U.S. Small Business Administration, 2022).

Local Initiatives and Resource Gaps

Houston's entrepreneurial ecosystem attempted to address these gaps through innovative local initiatives (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Mistretta, 2023; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). Programs like the Houston Technology Center (HTC) and Surge Accelerator aimed to provide mentorship, funding opportunities, and community collaboration for startups in energy, aerospace, and life sciences (Tobin & Thakker, 2019). While these initiatives yielded

some success, generating over $700 million in economic impact annually and creating thousands of jobs, they also faced challenges (Mistretta, 2023; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). Surge Accelerator's focus on a narrow industry segment led to the closure or relocation of many startups, limiting its long-term success (Tobin & Thakker, 2019).

Other programs, such as Station Houston, took a more holistic approach by creating low-cost co-working spaces and fostering collaborative environments for entrepreneurs (Mistretta, 2023; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). By providing mentorship, networking opportunities, and resources, Station Houston sought to mitigate the isolation that early-stage entrepreneurs often experienced (Tobin & Thakker, 2019). Additionally, local academic institutions like the University of Houston's Wolff Center and Rice University's Alliance for Technology and Entrepreneurship expanded their role in supporting students and community entrepreneurs (Mistretta, 2023; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). These efforts included providing workspaces, hosting events, and developing project-based learning curricula to bridge the gap between academic and entrepreneurial communities (Tobin & Thakker, 2019).

Despite these initiatives, Houston's African American entrepreneurs faced significant barriers, particularly in accessing venture capital (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). Compared to Austin, Texas ($1.2 billion annually in venture funding) or San Francisco ($25 billion), Houston's $238 million in annual venture funding as of 2017 was strikingly insufficient (Tobin & Thakker, 2019). This lack of funding forced many startups to relocate or limit their growth (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). However, some entrepreneurs remained rooted in Houston due to family ties and the city's comparatively low cost of living (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Mistretta, 2023; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019).

Digital Innovation and Resilience

One area in which African American entrepreneurs in Houston demonstrated remarkable adaptability was their use of digital platforms to overcome systemic barriers (Brown et al., 2023; Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). Recent studies highlighted a shift from traditional storefront operations to online retail and marketing, driven by the need to circumvent discriminatory lending practices and limited access to physical capital; this aligned with broader trends identified by McKinsey & Company, where 68% of consumers reported considering social values, including support for minority-owned businesses, in their purchasing decisions (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Digital platforms offered cost-effective solutions for expanding market reach, reducing operational expenses, and increasing visibility for African American entrepreneurs (Brown et al., 2023; Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). Perry et al. (2022) emphasized the role of technology in creating opportunities for marginalized groups, noting that e-commerce and social media became critical tools for building resilient business models. These shifts underscored the importance of innovation and adaptability in navigating systemic barriers and illustrated the relevance of CET in addressing the unique challenges faced by African American entrepreneurs (Baker & Welter, 2020; Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019).

Changing Policies and Strategies

Contemporary Entrepreneurship Theory explored entrepreneurial practices that responded to the unique challenges and opportunities of the socioeconomic climate at the time, emphasizing adaptability and innovation within dynamic and often inequitable systems (Baker & Welter, 2020). In Houston, Texas, a city shaped by its diversity yet influenced by a

predominantly conservative political climate, these challenges were particularly acute as systemic barriers intersected with legislative shifts, creating significant hurdles for underrepresented groups (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022).

The Role of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives historically provided essential support for fostering equity in entrepreneurship (Greenwood & Anas, 2021; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Velardo, 2021). Designed to address systemic disparities, DEI frameworks promoted access, opportunity, and advancement for marginalized groups, including African American entrepreneurs (Greenwood & Anas, 2021; Parker, 2020). By embedding principles of transparency, fairness, and belonging into organizational and economic structures, DEI initiatives enhanced morale, engagement, and innovation within workplaces and entrepreneurial ecosystems (Greenwood & Anas, 2021; Parker, 2020; Perry et al., 2022; Velardo, 2021).

The research underscored that exposure to diverse perspectives central to DEI goals improved critical thinking, empathy, and problem-solving abilities, all of which were vital for entrepreneurial success (Gurin et al., 2002; Page, 2010). Moreover, initiatives such as employee resource groups (ERGs) and targeted funding programs supported African American entrepreneurs by providing access to networks, mentorship, and capital (Baboolall et al., 2020; Robinson, 2024).

The Dismantling of DEI Initiatives

Recent Republican-led policy initiatives increasingly dismantled DEI programs at the state and federal levels, framing such efforts as challenges to "divisive concepts" or critiques of perceived identity politics (Samuel & Robertson, 2021). President Donald Trump and other conservative leaders advocated for the removal of affirmative action policies and reductions in

funding for programs that supported minority-owned businesses (Bahar, 2017; Carter, 2020). Texas was a Republican-led state, and the Governor supported the conservative agenda to remove DEI initiatives that previously aided minorities (Perry et al., 2022; Samuel & Robertson, 2021; Texas Tribune, 2023).

The 2023 Supreme Court decision restricting race-conscious college admissions catalyzed a broader wave of anti-DEI measures (Students for Fair Admissions, 2023; Sukin, 2023; Svitek, 2023). These included legislative bans on mandatory diversity training and restrictions on affirmative action practices in higher education and the workplace, further narrowing the mechanisms available to address systemic inequities (Samuel & Robertson, 2021). Critics of DEI often argued that such initiatives undermined meritocratic principles, yet scholars cautioned that their removal risked exacerbating historical disparities and limiting opportunities for marginalized communities to participate equitably in the economy (Bahar, 2017; Carter, 2020).

Implications for African American Entrepreneurs in Houston

The erosion of DEI initiatives had profound implications for African American entrepreneurs in Houston (Greenwood & Anas, 2021; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024). These policies had historically acted as scaffolding to mitigate systemic barriers, including discriminatory lending practices, limited access to capital, and exclusion from influential networks (Baboolall et al., 2020; Robinson, 2024). The dismantling of DEI initiatives reduced the availability of support structures, leaving minority entrepreneurs more vulnerable to structural inequities that hindered business development and sustainability (Greenwood & Anas, 2021; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024).

The impact was particularly significant in Houston, where systemic disparities intersected with a growing entrepreneurial ecosystem (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Mistretta, 2023; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024). Research showed that policies eroding DEI principles risked stalling progress toward inclusivity and created environments that discouraged collaboration, trust, and investment in minority-led ventures (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner, 1960; Mauss, 1925). Samuel and Robertson (2021) emphasized that these shifts perpetuated the misconception that DEI programs prioritized favoritism rather than addressing systemic imbalances, ultimately undermining their role in fostering fairness and equity.

Tensions and the Need for Adaptation

This policy trajectory highlighted a broader ideological conflict between competing visions for addressing inequality (Greenwood & Anas, 2021; Perry et al., 2022; Samuel & Robertson, 2021). On the one hand, DEI advocates underscored the importance of systemic interventions to level the playing field; on the other, critics argued for merit-based frameworks that often failed to account for deeply embedded historical inequities (Carter et al., 2020). For African American entrepreneurs, this tension manifested as a widening gap between the resources available to address their unique challenges and the structural barriers they faced in accessing capital, networks, and markets (Robinson, 2024).

Removing DEI mechanisms risked being counterproductive, particularly for underrepresented entrepreneurs whose success depended on equitable access to resources and opportunities (Greenwood & Anas, 2021; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024). Contemporary entrepreneurship theory, which emphasized the need for adaptive strategies in a changing socio-economic landscape, suggested that dismantling DEI frameworks limited entrepreneurial resilience and innovation by weakening the mechanisms that supported

inclusivity and equity (Baker & Welter, 2020). Future research and policy development prioritized understanding and mitigating the effects of these changes (Greenwood & Anas, 2021; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024). By building data-driven and inclusive strategies that aligned with DEI principles, policymakers ensured a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem that enabled African American entrepreneurs in Houston and beyond to thrive (Baboolall et al., 2020; Samuel & Robertson, 2021).

Future Directions

Contemporary entrepreneurship theory provided a valuable lens for understanding the entrepreneurial strategies employed by African American entrepreneurs in Houston (Baker & Welter, 2020; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). By highlighting the importance of innovation, resource mobilization, and community collaboration, this framework shed light on the successes and limitations of existing programs (Baker & Welter, 2020; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024; Tobin & Thakker, 2019). However, the persistent disparities in venture funding, resource accessibility, and policy effectiveness underscored the need for more tailored, data-driven interventions (Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024).

Moving forward, a greater emphasis on replication studies, as Crawford et al. (2022) advocated, could have strengthened the empirical foundation of entrepreneurship scholarship and guided the development of more inclusive economic policies. By aligning theoretical insights with the lived experiences of African American entrepreneurs, scholars and policymakers could have better supported this underrepresented group, fostering equitable growth and opportunity in Houston's dynamic entrepreneurial landscape (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Explorative Analysis of Challenges in Minority Entrepreneurship

Minority entrepreneurship theory provided a critical lens to examine how systemic inequities, cultural factors, and economic opportunities intersected to shape the entrepreneurial experiences of underrepresented groups (Sithas & Surangi, 2021). This framework was particularly relevant for African American entrepreneurs in Houston, where historical segregation and systemic barriers continued to impede access to essential resources and opportunities. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen's observation that the U.S. economy had never worked fairly for Black Americans underscored the urgency of addressing these inequities (Perry et al., 2022). Systemic racism operated through deliberate policy choices that shaped resource distribution along racial lines, highlighting the need for intentional interventions to create equitable economic opportunities (Perry et al., 2022).

Systemic Barriers and Economic Inequities

The literature consistently identified systemic barriers as central challenges for minority entrepreneurs. Practices such as discriminatory lending and redlining had long excluded African Americans from property ownership and business loans, forcing reliance on personal savings or community support for capital (Baradaran, 2017; Fairlie et al., 2022). Studies by Perry et al. (2022) and Robinson (2024) revealed that African American entrepreneurs in Houston experienced higher denial rates for business loans, even when their financial metrics matched those of non-minority peers. This systemic exclusion perpetuated economic disadvantages, limiting the growth and scalability of African American-owned businesses (Jett & Howell, 2023; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019). In addition to outright denial, African American entrepreneurs often faced predatory lending practices, such as higher interest rates and shorter repayment terms, exacerbating financial vulnerabilities (Rakshit & Peterson, 2024; Robinson, 2024). These

dynamics underscored the structural disadvantages embedded within traditional financial systems, further perpetuating disparities in entrepreneurial outcomes.

Cultural Resilience and Community Networks

Despite systemic barriers, African American entrepreneurs demonstrated remarkable resilience using cultural and community networks. These "strong ties" within familial and community relationships served as a vital safety net, providing mentorship, funding, and loyal customer bases (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022). In Houston, these networks fostered community-driven enterprises where cultural identity was central to building trust and consumer loyalty (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022). Studies emphasized that cultural resilience manifested in both traditional practices and adaptive strategies. Entrepreneurs often leveraged digital platforms to overcome physical and financial barriers, integrating online tools to reduce operational costs and expand their reach (Brown et al., 2023). These practices aligned with MET's emphasis on resourcefulness and creativity as essential strategies for navigating structural inequities (Busch & Barkema, 2021).

Access to Capital and the Need for Policy Reforms. Systemic inequities in access to capital remained a critical barrier for African American entrepreneurs. Only a fraction of venture funding was allocated to Black-owned businesses, with African American entrepreneurs receiving just 1.2% of venture capital in 2021 (NVCA et al., 2021). This disparity was compounded by limited generational wealth and biases in lending practices, which restricted African American entrepreneurs' ability to secure external funding (Fairlie et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024).

Policy interventions such as Opportunity Zones frequently failed to address these challenges effectively. Scholars argued that these programs often bypassed the communities they

supported, highlighting the need for reforms prioritizing inclusivity and equity in resource distribution (Harris, 2023; Perry et al., 2022). Expanding minority-focused lending programs and creating targeted financial initiatives were essential steps toward addressing these disparities.

Tradition, Innovation, and Racialized Market Dynamics

African American entrepreneurs in Houston employed a blend of traditional and innovative strategies to overcome systemic challenges. Cultural resilience fostered loyalty within underserved markets, while digital platforms and crowdfunding provided new avenues for resource acquisition and market expansion (Brown et al., 2023; Daniels, 2022; Fairlie et al., 2022). This blend of approaches illustrated the adaptability of minority entrepreneurs, who integrated heritage with modern tools to foster long-term growth (Busch & Barkema, 2021; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022). Racial identity emerged as a dual force in entrepreneurial dynamics, serving as an asset and a liability. While systemic biases may have limited access to resources, racial identity enabled entrepreneurs to create culturally resonant value propositions that appealed to underserved markets, offering a unique competitive advantage (Light & Dana, 2019; Santos et al., 2024).

This analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the entrepreneurial experiences of African American entrepreneurs in Houston by exploring the interplay between systemic barriers, cultural resilience, and market dynamics. This explorative approach highlighted the critical need for targeted interventions that addressed disparities while empowering community-driven solutions. These insights aligned with MET's framework, offering practical pathways to foster equity and growth in Houston's entrepreneurial landscape (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2024).

Challenges in RBET for African American Entrepreneurs in Houston

Resource-based entrepreneurship theory emphasized the strategic acquisition, utilization, and optimization of resources, both tangible (such as financial capital, property, and infrastructure) and intangible (such as social networks, industry knowledge, and innovative strategies to address systemic challenges) (Barney et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022). However, systemic inequities often restricted access to these resources for African American entrepreneurs, perpetuating disparities in entrepreneurial outcomes (Fairlie et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). These barriers were especially pronounced in Houston, where historical segregation and institutional biases exacerbated resource gaps, influencing the entrepreneurial trajectories of male African American entrepreneurs through dynamics of resource scarcity, social capital, and value creation (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022).

Resource Scarcity and Strategic Adaptation

Male African American entrepreneurs in Houston operated in environments characterized by resource scarcity and encountered systemic disparities in access to venture capital and small business loans (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). Studies indicated that racial biases, coupled with lower generational wealth, led to disproportionately high denial rates for financial resources, even among applicants with comparable financial credentials to their non-minority counterparts (Fairlie et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). Entrepreneurs also faced unfavorable loan terms, including higher interest rates and shorter repayment schedules, which constrained their ability to scale operations (Robinson, 2024).

One of the primary challenges African American entrepreneurs faced was limited access to venture capital and business loans (Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024). Research revealed that only 1.2% of venture capital funding in 2021 went to

African American startups, compared to disproportionately higher allocations to non-minority entrepreneurs (NVCA et al., 2021; Bruton et al., 2023). The lack of generational wealth further restricted their ability to self-finance or secure favorable loan terms, perpetuating cycles of economic disadvantage (Branch & Jackson, 2020; Dhingra et al., 2022; Fairlie et al., 2022). Entrepreneurs without substantial personal savings or financial support from relatives often encountered difficulties in securing bank loans due to reluctance and systemic bias in lending practices (Robinson, 2024).

Additionally, exclusionary networks and spatial constraints historically limited African American entrepreneurs' access to broader markets (Fairlie et al., 2022; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024). In cities like Houston, where urban planning prioritized automobile access, the lack of public transportation and affordable mobility options exacerbated entrepreneurs' challenges in underserved neighborhoods (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022). This systemic isolation contrasted with immigrant entrepreneurs, who often benefited from concentrated enclaves facilitating resource sharing and market penetration (Ogbolu & Singh, 2019).

Entrepreneurs used alternative funding strategies to mitigate these barriers, such as crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe and Kiva, community-based lending circles, and cooperative financing (Dahan & Shoham, 2023). The concept of bricolage, the creative use of existing resources, emerged as a pivotal strategy for navigating systemic constraints (Verver & de Koning, 2023). Local initiatives, such as the Houston Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), provided grants and training programs. However, they failed to address broader institutional inequities (Perry et al., 2022; Tobin & Thakker, 2019).

Environmental munificence, a concept introduced by Dahan and Shoham (2023), explored how resource scarcity shaped entrepreneurial strategies. In resource-constrained environments like Houston, male African American entrepreneurs adopted customer-centric approaches and collaborative strategies to sustain their businesses. These adaptations demonstrated innovation and resilience in the face of systemic inequities (Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Perry et al., 2022).

Social Capital and Community Dynamics

Social capital was a critical resource for male African American entrepreneurs in Houston, enabling them to navigate systemic barriers through familial and community ties (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). Bonding capital provided mentorship, funding, and loyal customer bases, forming a vital support network. However, bridging and linking capital, which facilitated connections to broader networks and external markets, remained limited due to institutional exclusions (Rakshit & Peterson, 2024).

Collaborative opportunities, such as Black Entrepreneurs Week in Houston, helped entrepreneurs expand their social capital beyond local communities (Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). Fintech solutions and workshops offered by organizations such as the Center for Entrepreneurial Innovations (CEI) enhanced financial literacy and created pathways to external investors, thereby addressing gaps in financial knowledge and network accessibility (Tobin & Thakker, 2019). Partnerships with institutions like the Greater Houston Black Chamber of Commerce further extended entrepreneurial reach into broader markets, providing access to investors, cross-industry mentors, and public-sector collaborations (Perry et al., 2022). Despite these efforts, disparities persisted for entrepreneurs without advanced education or preexisting networks, limiting scalability and long-term growth (Robinson, 2024).

Value Creation Through Cultural and Digital Strategies

Male African American entrepreneurs in Houston displayed resilience and innovation by transforming limited resources into culturally resonant products and services that catered to underserved markets (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Santos et al., 2024). Cultural identity was a value proposition that fostered trust and loyalty within the African American community (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Santos et al., 2024). Digital platforms, such as Shopify and Amazon Marketplace, provided cost-effective solutions for market expansion, enabling entrepreneurs to bypass traditional retail barriers and engage directly with customers through social media channels like Instagram and TikTok (McKinsey & Company, 2023; Perry et al., 2022).

Convergence and Divergence in Scholarly Perspectives

Scholars agreed on the importance of cultural and digital strategies for overcoming systemic barriers, but they diverged on their long-term efficacy. Klineberg and Bozick (2022) cautioned that businesses heavily tied to cultural identity might have struggled to scale to broader markets. In contrast, Santos et al. (2024) argued that cultural authenticity strengthened brand differentiation and facilitated expansion into national and global markets.

Synthesis and Implications

Resource-based entrepreneurship theory highlighted the strategic ingenuity of male African American entrepreneurs in Houston, emphasizing their resilience in addressing resource scarcity and leveraging community networks. These entrepreneurs exemplified adaptability despite systemic barriers by aligning their business strategies with community needs and employing innovative tools. The findings underscored the importance of targeted interventions, such as mentorship programs, public-private partnerships, and equitable access to capital, to

foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Houston (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Perry et al., 2022).

Summary

Chapter 2 examined the theoretical frameworks and key factors shaping African American entrepreneurship in Houston, Texas. Through an explorative analysis, the chapter integrated anthropological entrepreneurship theory, contemporary entrepreneurship theory, minority entrepreneurship theory, and resource-based entrepreneurship theory to investigate how systemic barriers, cultural resilience, and resource dynamics influenced the entrepreneurial experiences of African American men in Houston (Baker & Welter, 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Anthropology entrepreneurship theory examined the role of historical and cultural practices in shaping entrepreneurial strategies, emphasizing how trading, bartering, and communal support systems contributed to resilience and economic agency (Verver & de Koning, 2023). Contemporary entrepreneurship theory investigated the importance of innovation, adaptability, and digital platforms in addressing systemic barriers and expanding market reach. This theory highlighted how African American entrepreneurs in Houston leveraged digital tools and flexible business models to navigate modern entrepreneurial challenges (McKinsey & Company, 2023; Thompson et al., 2020).

Minority entrepreneurship theory focused on the social and structural challenges faced by African American entrepreneurs, including systemic inequities and limited access to capital. It underscored the importance of community ties and cultural identity as resources for mitigating these barriers and sustaining entrepreneurial efforts (Bruton et al., 2023; Sithas & Surangi, 2021). Resource-based entrepreneurship theory explored the interplay between tangible and

intangible resources, financial capital, social networks, human capital, and entrepreneurial success. It provided insights into how African American entrepreneurs navigated resource scarcity, utilized innovative strategies, and created value in underserved markets (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Perry et al., 2022).

The chapter concluded with an explorative analysis of systemic inequities, cultural identity, and resource dynamics. This investigation revealed how African American entrepreneurs in Houston demonstrated resilience by leveraging community networks, cultural heritage, and innovative approaches to overcome systemic challenges. These findings underscored the need for targeted interventions that addressed disparities while fostering inclusivity and entrepreneurial growth in Houston's diverse business ecosystem (Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024).

Chapter 3 outlined the research design and methodological procedures used to explore these lived experiences. It described the study's qualitative, phenomenological approach, participant selection criteria, data collection methods, and the ethical protocols used to ensure the credibility and integrity of the research process. This chapter also explained how data were analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns that reflected the essence of participants' entrepreneurial experiences.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter outlined the research methodology used to explore the challenges and experiences of male African American entrepreneurs in Houston. It detailed the research design, population, sampling methods, data collection procedures, data analysis strategies, and ethical considerations. The methodology ensured a rigorous qualitative approach aligned with the study's objectives.

The problem addressed in this study was the low representation of male African American entrepreneurial business owners in Houston. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the low representation of male African American entrepreneurial business owners in Houston through the lived experiences of the underrepresented male African American entrepreneurs in the area. To improve strategies for increasing representation among African American entrepreneurs, it was essential to identify the gaps experienced when confronting challenges such as limited access to capital, systemic inequities, and barriers to market entry. The entrepreneurial ecosystem was complex and needed to be contextualized within cultural and societal conditions to be effective (Ratten, 2020; Sithas & Surangi, 2021).

This chapter provided a structured approach to answering the research questions using a qualitative phenomenological design. It included a discussion of the study's participants, recruitment strategies, data collection instruments, and the analysis process, ensuring that findings accurately reflected the perspectives of African American entrepreneurs in Houston. The chapter concluded with ethical considerations, ensuring confidentiality and data integrity throughout the study.

Research Methodology and Design (Nature of the Study)

A qualitative phenomenological approach was selected as the most suitable method for examining African American male entrepreneurs' lived experiences, capturing their perspectives on the systemic barriers, cultural resilience, and resource-based challenges they faced. This methodology, supported by a multidisciplinary conceptual framework that integrated anthropological entrepreneurship theory (AET), contemporary entrepreneurship theory (CET), minority entrepreneurship theory (MET), and resource-based entrepreneurship theory (RBET), provided a structured lens for understanding the complexities of underrepresentation.

The qualitative phenomenological methodology was particularly suited to addressing the study's research problem, which sought to understand the lived experiences of underrepresented African American male entrepreneurs in Houston. This approach prioritized the participants' perspectives, providing rich, detailed insights into how they navigated systemic barriers and entrepreneurial challenges (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Phenomenological research allowed for an in-depth exploration of the social, economic, and cultural dynamics shaping these experiences, going beyond statistical trends to capture the "how" and "why" behind their entrepreneurial journeys (Perry et al., 2022; Petion et al., 2023).

This study utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach to identify participants with direct experience of the research topic and the ability to reflect meaningfully on those experiences. This approach included conducting in-depth interviews, recording and transcribing responses, and analyzing the data to identify recurring themes and insights (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The study aimed to uncover actionable strategies for addressing the representation gap and improving entrepreneurial outcomes in the African American community by synthesizing participants' narratives.

Phenomenology focused on the subjective experiences of individuals, allowing the researcher to uncover patterns, meanings, and emotions that shaped how African American entrepreneurs navigated financial constraints, racial biases, and access to resources (Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was particularly relevant because it described experiences and interpreted how individuals made sense of their reality (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This was essential for understanding how African American entrepreneurs internalized and adapted to systemic barriers while identifying opportunities for success (Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). Phenomenology aligned with the research problem and purpose to create the depth and personal narratives required to understand how these entrepreneurs perceived, interpreted, and responded to systemic challenges (Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024).

This study employed semi-structured interviews for open-ended, in-depth discussions while ensuring participant consistency (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kallio et al., 2016). This format enabled flexibility, allowing respondents to elaborate on key themes while the researcher maintained focus on the core research questions (Kallio et al., 2016). Phenomenological research acknowledged the researcher’s role in interpreting participants’ experiences. Using bracketing (epoche), the researcher actively set aside biases to engage deeply with respondents’ narratives (Moustakas, 1994). This ensured that findings remained authentic to participants' lived realities (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018).

Although phenomenological research had traditionally been grounded in in-depth, semi-structured interviews to elicit rich, nuanced accounts of lived experience (Creswell & Poth,

2018; Neubauer et al., 2019), participants in this study were given the option to provide written responses to the interview questions. This methodological adaptation had been implemented to respect participant autonomy and reduce barriers to participation, particularly for individuals who might have been uncomfortable with recording devices, had time constraints, or preferred reflective written expression (Birt et al., 2016). Allowing written responses had aligned with ethical principles of participant-centered research and inclusivity.

While written narratives had not always captured the spontaneity and conversational depth achieved through oral interviews, they still yielded meaningful phenomenological insights when carefully analyzed (Nowell et al., 2017). To mitigate limitations, follow-up clarification had been made available to participants who chose written responses, ensuring that the descriptions of lived experience remained thick, detailed, and faithful to the phenomenological approach (Neubauer et al., 2019). This flexibility had strengthened trustworthiness by honoring diverse modes of participant engagement while maintaining fidelity to the study's phenomenological framework.

Alternative methodologies were considered but deemed less appropriate for this study because they could not fully address the depth and complexity of the investigated phenomenon. Alternative methodologies, such as quantitative and mixed methods, had been considered less appropriate for the study's objectives. While effective for identifying numerical trends and correlations, quantitative methods lacked the depth needed to explore entrepreneurs' lived experiences and the nuanced interplay among systemic barriers, cultural dynamics, and resource availability (Patton, 2015). For example, surveys and questionnaires in quantitative studies often reduced complex phenomena to statistical metrics, failing to capture the richness of individual

experiences or explain how systemic inequities shaped entrepreneurial opportunities (Patton, 2015).

A mixed methods design was also considered, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, the additional complexity and resource demands of integrating two methodologies made this approach less feasible, given the study's emphasis on qualitative insights. The research focus required capturing deeply personal narratives, which a qualitative design uniquely aimed to achieve (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Other qualitative designs were evaluated but deemed less suitable, including case studies, grounded theory, and ethnography. While the case study design could provide detailed insights into specific organizations or communities, it was too narrow to address the study's broader systemic and cultural dynamics. The case study focused on a bounded system and did not include multiple individuals' lived experiences or broader patterns within a particular entrepreneurial landscape (Yin, 2018). The case study approach lacked the scope to comprehensively explore the shared experiences of male African American entrepreneurs in Houston and to address systemic and cultural barriers.

The case study could have examined business networks, entrepreneurial incubators, or specific businesses in the context of African American entrepreneurship in Houston. However, the case study approach would have been contextualized to the specific case selected, limiting the study's generalizability, rather than offering a broader understanding of the lived experiences of multiple entrepreneurs across different industries and backgrounds. Detractors of case studies would have included the extended period of engagement often required to develop a comprehensive analysis (Yin, 2018). Case studies that focused on detailed organizational or contextual factors restricted the scope of the research, whereas exploring cultural, systemic, and

financial challenges that male African American entrepreneurs in Houston faced would have provided a broader understanding. Another limitation of the case study method was the potential for researcher bias, as case selection and interpretation could have influenced the findings (Stake, 1995). This was particularly relevant when studying minority entrepreneurship, as individual cases might not have fully captured the diverse economic, social, and historical factors shaping African American business ownership (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Grounded theory focused on constructing new theoretical frameworks from data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2012). However, this study did not seek to generate a new theory but to expand on and apply existing frameworks, such as AET, CET, MET, and RBET. These established models provided a structured lens for examining the lived experiences of African American entrepreneurs and analyzing the systemic challenges they encountered within an existing theoretical context. The grounded theory approach was valuable for developing novel theories, emphasizing theory development rather than exploring lived experiences. Grounded theory was instrumental for exploring areas where prior research was limited, as it allowed the construction of theories in emerging or less-explored fields (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory followed an inductive process in which concepts and patterns emerged from the data rather than being guided by a predefined theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2012). While ethnography provided rich insights into cultural practices by immersing the researcher within a community, it primarily focused on group behaviors and shared traditions over extended periods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This long-term observational approach, though valuable for studying cultural patterns and collective identities, did not align with the study's objective of exploring individual lived experiences and the systemic barriers that African American male

entrepreneurs faced in Houston. Unlike ethnography, phenomenology prioritized participants' first-person narratives, enabling a deep, participant-centered exploration of their entrepreneurial challenges.

The phenomenological approach allowed for a more nuanced understanding of systemic inequities by capturing the essence of their experiences. It provided actionable strategies to help Black business owners overcome these barriers (Moustakas, 1994). This alignment ensured that the research questions were addressed through a participant-centered approach, providing actionable recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and future entrepreneurs.

Population and Sample

This study focused on male African American entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas, a metropolitan area with one of the largest and most diverse economies in the United States. As of July 1, 2023, Houston had an estimated population of 2,314,157 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Approximately 64% of Houston's population identified as minorities, with African Americans representing 22% of the total population (Davis, 2023; Fox, 2021).

The city was home to over 92,000 Black-owned businesses, placing it among the leading U.S. cities for African American entrepreneurship (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). However, despite their significant presence, African Americans remained underrepresented in business ownership, accounting for only 11% of employer businesses, even though they made up 22% of the population (Houston Minority Business Development Agency [MBDA], 2023). African American entrepreneurs in Houston contributed significantly to the local economy, operating across diverse industries. The largest sector was professional and business services, accounting for 23% of Black-owned businesses, followed by healthcare and social assistance (17%), retail

trade (15%), and construction and real estate (12%) (Greater Houston Black Chamber of Commerce, 2023).

The focus on male African American entrepreneurs was appropriate given the study's problem, purpose, and research questions, which sought to explore the systemic barriers, resource dynamics, and cultural factors that influenced their representation in Houston's entrepreneurial ecosystem. This population was uniquely situated at the intersection of cultural, economic, and structural inequities, making it an ideal group for understanding the factors that impacted minority entrepreneurship in this urban setting.

The sample for this study consisted of male African American entrepreneurs who met specific inclusion criteria. Participants owned at least 51% of a business for five years in the Houston metropolitan area and resided within Houston. Participants operated businesses with annual revenues exceeding Houston's median income of $68,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). This sample was appropriate because it targeted individuals with direct experience navigating the entrepreneurial landscape in Houston, aligning with the study's focus on capturing lived experiences. The inclusion criteria ensured that participants possessed the depth of knowledge and relevance to the research questions.

The study used a criterion-based purposive sampling strategy, a common approach in qualitative research, particularly for phenomenological studies (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This method allowed for the deliberate selection of participants who met the defined criteria, ensuring that the sample provided rich, detailed insights into the research problem (Boyd, 2001; Bryman, 2012; Groenewald, 2004). Given the qualitative nature of the study, the sample size was determined based on data saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from the data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Mason, 2010). The study began with 10 participants and

continued until saturation was achieved. Phenomenological research typically required smaller sample sizes, ranging from 10 to 25 participants, to allow for in-depth exploration and analysis of individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Dworkin, 2012; Flynn & Korcuska, 2018).

Criterion-based purposive sampling was particularly well-suited to the phenomenological design, as it prioritized participants who could provide detailed, meaningful accounts of their experiences (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Unlike random sampling, this approach focused on selecting individuals whose lived experiences aligned with the study's research questions, enhancing the relevance and depth of the findings. The decision to focus on male African American entrepreneurs in Houston ensured that the study directly addressed the representation gap identified in the problem statement. This sampling approach aligned with the study's purpose and objectives and contributed to a broader understanding of minority entrepreneurship by capturing voices that were often excluded from traditional research.

Participants were recruited using social media networks. The researcher posted recruitment messages on LinkedIn and Facebook groups dedicated to African American entrepreneurship and Houston-based small businesses and sent direct messages to business owners active in these networks (see Appendix D). Recruitment materials clearly outlined the study's purpose, inclusion criteria, confidentiality protocols, and contact information. Posts featured clear, concise language and professional graphics to enhance engagement. Social media engagement was continuously monitored, and strategies were adjusted as needed to improve response rates.

Interested respondents received an informed consent form and a screening questionnaire via email or direct message (see Appendix C). These materials explained the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation. After reviewing the

responses, the researcher contacted the first ten eligible participants by phone or video call to confirm eligibility, review the consent form in detail, answer any questions, and reiterate that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. A mutually convenient time and location for the interview were arranged upon verbal confirmation of consent.

Instrumentation

This study used a semi-structured interview protocol comprising carefully designed questions aligned with the problem, purpose, research questions, and conceptual framework to examine the lived experiences of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston. The questionnaire elicited detailed responses aligned with the study's research questions (see Appendix C). The open-ended format enabled participants to discuss their entrepreneurial experiences, challenges, and strategies for overcoming systemic barriers in greater depth. The interview protocol was grounded in Edmund Husserl's (1931) phenomenological research methodologies and further refined by Jaegerschmid (2015), Kallio et al. (2016), Heidegger (1962), van Manen (1990), and Moustakas (1994). These scholars provided foundational insights into phenomenological inquiry, emphasizing the importance of capturing lived experiences through structured yet flexible interview techniques.

The interview instrument underwent expert review by three academic scholars with terminal degrees to ensure clarity, relevance, and effectiveness. Feedback and suggested modifications from these experts were incorporated to refine the instrument, resulting in a robust and effective data collection process. This evaluation process enhanced the reliability and validity of the study by confirming that the questions elicited meaningful and comprehensive responses aligned with the research objectives. In preparation for data collection, a final validation review of the interview guide was conducted to ensure consistency with the

dissertation research questions and methodological standards. This review confirmed that the questions were ideally structured to yield in-depth, phenomenologically rich responses aligned with the study's conceptual framework and approved IRB protocol. The interview guide was determined to be ready for deployment in participant interviews.

Audio recording and transcription tools ensured data accuracy and the verbatim capture of responses. All in-person interviews were recorded using the Zoom audio/video platform, and virtual interviews were recorded there as well. Transcriptions were conducted using the Zoom platform to ensure accurate and efficient conversion of verbal responses into text. Participants' responses were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of their narratives. The researchers' notes provided additional insights into participants' emotions and reactions, offering qualitative depth beyond what was expressed in words or observable postures.

To enhance the validity of findings, data were triangulated using multiple sources (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Triangulation was employed to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. This process involved comparing interview transcripts and observational notes to validate themes. The selected instruments aligned with interpretive phenomenology, prioritizing rich, descriptive narratives over numerical data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). These measures ensured that the findings reflected the authentic experiences of African American entrepreneurs in Houston, addressed the study's research questions, and mitigated potential biases in qualitative research (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

Study Procedures

Before commencing the study, recruitment procedures and study materials were submitted to the National University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. This submission included the recruitment plan, consent and disclosure forms, semi-structured

interview guide, and data collection procedures. Only after IRB approval did participant recruitment and data collection begin, ensuring compliance with ethical research standards (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018).

Participants in this study were recruited through targeted outreach on professional social media platforms, including LinkedIn and Facebook. Recruitment posts were strategically shared in entrepreneur-focused groups, and eligible respondents were identified and contacted for follow-up. A purposive sample of 12 qualified respondents was recruited via social media, with additional participants added until data saturation was achieved. This digital approach ensured outreach to a broad network of African American entrepreneurs in Houston while maintaining efficiency and alignment with the study's inclusion criteria.

After reviewing the informed consent form, participants received a phone call and were asked to provide verbal confirmation of their consent. They selected a mutually convenient date, time, and location for the interview. A confirmation email was sent summarizing the study details and emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation, followed by a 24-hour reminder prior to the scheduled session. Based on participants' availability, interviews were conducted either virtually or in reserved spaces, such as a library meeting room or a hotel office, to ensure a neutral, distraction-free environment. Semi-structured interviews were guided by the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to comprehensively understand participants' lived experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

The researcher used Zoom audio recording devices to capture verbatim responses for transcription. Observational notes were used to document nonverbal cues, gestures, and contextual factors. Semi-structured questioning allowed for flexibility in responses while maintaining focus on key research themes. Each face-to-face or virtual interview lasted

approximately 25–60 minutes and included eight or more open-ended questions exploring participants' entrepreneurial experiences, challenges, and strategies.

Regarding reflexivity and bracketing, the researcher used reflexive journaling to document personal reflections, assumptions, and potential biases throughout the study. By maintaining a self-critical stance and acknowledging preconceptions, the researcher ensured that findings emerged authentically from participants' narratives rather than personal perspectives (Tufford & Newman, 2012). This process was essential in phenomenological research to enhance the credibility and authenticity of the analysis (Moustakas, 1994). A detailed, context-rich portrayal of participants' experiences would enhance the study's transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This included direct quotations, contextual background, and thematic explanations to enable readers to assess the applicability of findings in similar contexts.

Immediately following each interview, audio recordings were uploaded to a password-protected, encrypted storage system. The researcher's observational notes were securely stored to comply with IRB and ethical research standards (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018). Interviews were transcribed using the Zoom platform, and participants' identities were anonymized by assigning pseudonyms (e.g., Interview #1, Interview #2).

Each participant received their transcript via email within seven days of their interview and had five days to review it and provide any necessary clarifications or corrections. While a response was encouraged to validate the accuracy of the transcript, it was not mandatory. If no response was received within the designated timeframe, the researcher assumed the transcript was accurate and proceeded with the data analysis. These procedures ensured confidentiality, transparency, and adherence to ethical research practices throughout the study.

Data Analysis

This section outlined the systematic approach to data analysis, ensuring rigor and credibility in interpreting participants' lived experiences. A qualitative phenomenological research design necessitated a methodical process to extract meaningful themes, patterns, and insights from the collected data. The study employed Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach, which modified van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method and incorporated elements of Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975). This method enabled the researcher to capture the essence of participants' experiences through an iterative and structured analysis process.

Data preparation involved multiple steps following the completion of interviews. The analysis followed the phenomenological reduction technique, incorporating horizontalization, invariant constituents, and textural-structural descriptions for data coding and theme development. Horizontalization identified significant statements (horizons) from each transcript related to the research questions (Moustakas, 1994). Each expression was documented without prioritizing any one over another. This step produced a comprehensive list of expressions reflecting the participants' experiences, laying the foundation for subsequent coding.

The identification of invariant constituents involved extracting non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements that were fundamental to participants' experiences. Each expression from the horizontalization process was tested for relevance, abstract ability, and purpose (Moustakas, 1994). The goal was to determine whether the expression contained a necessary and sufficient moment of experience for understanding relevance and whether the expression could be abstracted and labeled. Expressions that did not meet these criteria were eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, or vague expressions were revised or discarded to ensure clarity and

precision. The remaining expressions constituted the invariant constituents of the phenomenon. This step refined the data to identify the core elements of the lived experience.

Categorization and thematic clustering involved grouping invariant constituents into themes, encapsulating common patterns across participants' narratives based on their shared meanings (Moustakas, 1994). These clusters formed the core themes of the study, capturing the essence of participants' experiences. Next was the textual, structural, and composite description. The textural description developed individual descriptions of each participant's experience, highlighting their perspectives and emotions. This step ensured that the participants' voices remained central to the analysis, providing rich, detailed accounts of their perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). The structural description examined the underlying contexts and conditions that influenced the participants' experiences. Structural description employed imaginative variation to uncover potential meanings and connections within the data, revealing broader systemic, cultural, and resource-based factors that influenced entrepreneurial experiences. A composite description integrated all individual analyses into a synthesized narrative that represented the collective experiences of African American entrepreneurs in Houston. This synthesis explored the phenomenon's meanings and essence at a universal level (Moustakas, 1994).

Theme development involved a rigorous process of pattern recognition grounded in phenomenological analysis. Initially, the researcher conducted a manual review of interview transcripts to identify significant statements and generate preliminary codes. To enhance reliability and manage the large volume of qualitative data, NVivo software was used to systematically code, organize, and analyze transcribed materials. This approach supported structural alignment with phenomenological methods, facilitating efficient data retrieval for

comparison and validation. Throughout the process, multiple validation strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. Clustering related codes, visualizing recurring patterns, and verifying emerging themes across various data sources enabled the researcher to refine patterns and ensure consistency. This iterative process strengthened the alignment between the qualitative data and the study's research questions, ultimately enhancing the robustness of thematic development.

Triangulation enhanced the reliability of interpretations by incorporating multiple data sources and analytical methods. These methods reinforced the rigor of the analysis, ensuring an accurate representation of African American male entrepreneurs' lived experiences in Houston. This approach enabled the researcher to identify consistencies and discrepancies across different forms of evidence, resulting in more robust and credible conclusions. To strengthen validity, the study employed a rigorous coding process on interview transcripts, utilizing multiple analysis cycles to cross-verify emergent themes for consistency. This structured approach ensured that identified patterns accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences and reduced the likelihood of research bias influencing interpretations. These validation strategies aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Observational notes served as a secondary data set, capturing nonverbal cues, contextual elements, and environmental influences. Integrating these sources ensured consistency across multiple forms of evidence (Patton, 2015).

Finally, the researcher synthesized the findings into a finalized report, presenting the emergent themes and their implications. The report included detailed descriptions, participant quotes, and a discussion of how the findings addressed the research questions. The study aimed to rigorously explore African American entrepreneurship in Houston by following these

structured procedures and employing reliable analytical tools. This final report served as a comprehensive resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to understand and address the challenges faced by African American entrepreneurs.

Assumptions

The study assumed that respondents possessed sufficient knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation to articulate their entrepreneurial experiences in detail. It was also assumed that respondents would provide thoughtful reflections on their entrepreneurial journeys, offering insights relevant to the research questions. Furthermore, the researcher assumed that the information shared by participants was valid and truthful, given the qualitative phenomenological approach's emphasis on capturing authentic lived experiences directly from the source. This method prioritized the depth and richness of individual narratives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon that was studied (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Limitations

This study had several limitations that impacted the scope and generalizability of the findings. One key limitation was that much of the existing literature on minority entrepreneurship was broad and did not focus specifically on African American male entrepreneurs in Houston. Prior research often combined multiple racial and ethnic minority groups into a single category, making it difficult to extract insights that applied solely to African American entrepreneurs (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022). Because this study focused exclusively on the experiences of African American male business owners in Houston, comparisons with existing studies were constrained by differences in sample populations, economic conditions, and research frameworks. The lack of disaggregated data in prior studies

further limited the ability to build directly on previous research, requiring this study to establish a more specific contextual foundation.

Furthermore, geographic and cultural contexts highly influenced African American entrepreneurship, as systemic barriers, access to capital, and business opportunities differed by location (Bruton et al., 2023; Light & Dana, 2019). Houston offered a unique entrepreneurial landscape characterized by Opportunity Zones, a growing minority business sector, and a relatively diverse economy. However, the challenges African American entrepreneurs faced in Houston may not have fully represented those in other U.S. cities, where policies, market structures, and financial access varied. As a result, findings from this study may not have been directly transferable to African American entrepreneurs operating in cities with different economic conditions, such as Atlanta, New York, or Los Angeles. This regional specificity was an inherent limitation of qualitative research, as the study captured deeply contextualized lived experiences that may not have reflected broader national trends.

Another limitation was the potential reluctance of participants to engage in the study, which could have affected the richness and depth of the data collected. Some entrepreneurs may have hesitated to discuss financial, systemic, or personal challenges due to concerns about confidentiality, distrust of research processes, or the sensitive nature of business-related disclosures (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). While efforts were made to build rapport, ensure confidentiality, and use a purposive sampling approach, some individuals may have still self-censored their responses or declined to participate. This reluctance could have led to selective or incomplete data, particularly in discussions of financial barriers, business funding challenges, and racial discrimination in entrepreneurship.

Additionally, self-reported data were inherently subjective and may have introduced recall, social desirability, or selective memory bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants may have unintentionally omitted key details or presented responses that aligned with socially acceptable narratives rather than their full lived experiences. Although qualitative methods prioritized depth over breadth, the reliance on personal narratives may have meant that external factors influencing business success, such as market conditions, economic policies, or racial biases in lending, were not fully captured. To mitigate these biases, the study employed multiple validation strategies, including methodological triangulation, member checking, and investigator triangulation, to cross-verify findings (Birt et al., 2016; Nowell et al., 2017).

Despite these limitations, the study's rigorous methodological approach ensured that the data remained credible, dependable, and confirmable. The thick description provided context-rich narratives, enhancing the study's transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By integrating diverse perspectives and ensuring a transparent analytic process, this research contributed meaningful insights into the lived experiences of African American entrepreneurs in Houston and informed future studies and policy interventions.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to male African American entrepreneurs operating independently owned businesses within Houston, Texas. Participants were required to meet specific eligibility criteria, including owning at least 51% of their business, operating it for at least 5 years, and generating annual revenue of $68,000, which aligned with the median income in Houston (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). This baseline revenue requirement ensured that the study focused on entrepreneurs with sufficient financial capacity to address systemic and

resource-based challenges, distinguishing them from smaller, less sustainable ventures that might not have had long-term viability (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022).

The study excluded entrepreneurs outside the African American community, naturalized African immigrants, and female business owners to maintain a clear focus on the specific lived experiences of male African American entrepreneurs (Light & Dana, 2019; Sithas & Surangi, 2021). This targeted sample enabled an in-depth exploration of systemic barriers, access to resources, and business sustainability within this demographic, thereby addressing gaps in existing research (Bruton et al., 2023). Additionally, participants had to be fluent in English to effectively communicate their experiences during interviews, ensuring consistency in data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The methodological approach adopted a qualitative phenomenological design, focusing on collecting in-depth narratives through semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Other research methods, such as mixed-methods or quantitative approaches, were excluded to prioritize the richness of individual lived experiences over numerical analysis (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The data collection was limited to a specific timeframe, ensuring that findings reflected Houston's economic and systemic conditions at that time (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022).

These delimitations supported the study's aim of exploring systemic barriers, resource dynamics, and cultural resilience that shaped the experiences of male African American entrepreneurs in Houston. The findings provided targeted insights to inform policy, entrepreneurial support programs, and future research to foster a more equitable business landscape (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024).

Ethical Assurances

This study followed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines set forth by the National University. The study was independent and did not receive any corporate contributions to academic research, ensuring no financial conflicts of interest (Resnik, 2020). The study upheld the ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for people, prioritizing the well-being, safety, and voluntary participation of all research subjects (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Before engaging in the study, participants were required to sign an informed consent form, ensuring they understood the study's intent, potential risks, and their rights as participants. The study excluded participants who did not provide consent (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018; Yin, 2018). The confidentiality of interviewees was protected in accordance with applicable laws governing data collection.

All participants were given written and verbal explanations of the study's purpose and ethical safeguards, including their right to withdraw from the study at any time, either during or after the interview process, without penalty (in-person or virtual sessions) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All interview responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and participants' identifying information was replaced with pseudonyms (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Data were gathered using reflective written note journals, audio recordings, and encrypted digital storage devices to maintain accuracy and security (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Electronic files were password-protected and stored on encrypted devices. At the same time, physical data (e.g., consent forms and observational notes) were kept in a locked cabinet for three years in compliance with IRB regulations and federal guidelines (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018).

Summary

Chapter 3 used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to examine the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas. It was grounded in business owners' lived experiences and informed by a multidisciplinary conceptual framework that integrated anthropological, contemporary, minority, and resource-based entrepreneurship theories. Rooted in Edmund Husserl's phenomenological tradition of lived experience, the approach was well-suited to capturing deep meaning through the voices of those most affected by business inequities (Groenewald, 2004; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Moustakas, 1994).

The study targeted African American male entrepreneurs who owned at least 51% of their Houston-based businesses and generated annual revenues above the median regional income. Purposeful and associative sampling were used to recruit participants through social media and email outreach. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that utilized open-ended questions aligned with the study's theoretical lens. However, participants were also given the option to submit written responses to the interview questions. This methodological adaptation was designed to reduce participation barriers, particularly for those who were uncomfortable with audio recordings or time-constrained, while still eliciting thick, meaningful descriptions of lived experiences.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method, which emphasized horizontalization and the identification of invariant constituents. NVivo 15 software was employed to support thematic coding, organize complex qualitative data, and generate visual representations of emerging patterns. This analytical approach provided a multidimensional lens for examining how structural and social conditions influenced African American business ownership in Houston. Key assumptions included

participant honesty and the relevance of their experiences. Limitations involved geographic and demographic scope, while delimitations restricted participation to a specific income and ownership threshold. Ethical standards were upheld through IRB approval, informed consent, and participant confidentiality.

Chapter 3 underscored the methodological rigor and ethical considerations that were critical to understanding the lived experiences of African American entrepreneurs in Houston. With this framework firmly established, the study advanced to data analysis and interpretation. The next chapter presented the results, highlighting emergent themes, patterns, and narratives that illuminated the systemic, cultural, and resource-based challenges participants encountered.

Chapter 4: Findings

The problem addressed in this study was the low representation of African American male entrepreneurial business owners in Houston, reflecting broader systemic challenges to achieving racial equity in business ownership. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the low representation of male African American entrepreneurial business owners in Houston through the lived experiences of these entrepreneurs. The qualitative phase of this phenomenological study was grounded in the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and Clark Moustakas (1994), emphasizing the pursuit of meaning through lived experiences.

This chapter presented the findings derived from the analysis of participant interviews and the interpretation of their narratives. It was organized into four major sections. The first section, "Trustworthiness of the Data," outlined the strategies employed to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data. The second section, Results, presented the emergent themes and invariant structures that reflected the participants' lived experiences. The third section, Comparison to the Literature Review, connected the study's findings to existing research, highlighting both consistencies and divergences, and identified contributions to the broader body of knowledge. The final section, Summary, synthesized the key findings and transitioned to Chapter 5, where the interpretation and implications of the results were discussed.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Establishing trustworthiness was crucial to ensure the rigor, authenticity, and transparency of this phenomenological study, as assessed through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this

approach was endorsed by recent qualitative scholars, such as Nowell et al. (2017) and Braun and Clarke (2021). Each criterion was discussed below, outlining the strategies employed, their implementation, the results achieved, and the rationale supporting their use..

Credibility

Credibility referred to the extent to which qualitative findings accurately represented participants' lived experiences (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It ensured that interpretations were trustworthy and grounded in the data rather than the researcher's assumptions. Establishing credibility was foundational in phenomenological research because it strengthened confidence in the authenticity of participants' narratives and the accuracy of meaning derived from them (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

Member Checking. Member checking was conducted to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the lived experiences of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston. Each participant received their verbatim transcript to verify wording, clarify meanings, and correct inaccuracies. This process allowed participants to expand on incomplete statements and to confirm that the transcript accurately reflected their intended meaning (Birt et al., 2016; Doyle, 2022).

The member-checking was conducted in accordance with Birt et al.'s (2016) guidelines and resulted in meaningful refinements to the dataset. All participants received their verbatim transcripts and were invited to confirm accuracy, clarify statements, or elaborate where they felt additional context was needed. Several participants responded with minor corrections, primarily clarifying wording, adjusting phrasing for accuracy, or adding brief contextual notes about their experiences. These participant-provided clarifications were incorporated into the final transcripts and coding database. No participants disputed the interpretations, but several clarified the intent

behind key statements, which strengthened the authenticity and precision of the emergent codes. This process enhanced credibility by ensuring that analytical decisions remained closely aligned with participants' intended meanings.

Peer Debriefing. Peer debriefing was implemented to enhance analytic rigor and reduce interpretive bias. This process followed the guidelines of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Maher et al. (2022), which emphasized the value of external qualitative experts in questioning analytical decisions. In this study, doctoral-trained SMEs with experience in phenomenology and NVivo-assisted thematic analysis provided structured feedback on coding, theme development, and the interpretive alignment with Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological reduction, particularly the processes of horizontalization, clustering of meaning units, and deriving textural-structural descriptions. Peer debriefing occurred across several milestones, pre-coding, post-coding, mid-theme review, and pre-finalization through scheduled Zoom sessions. These meetings offered systematic opportunities to challenge emerging interpretations, test alternative explanations, and ensured analytic coherence (Cypress, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017).

Triangulation. Triangulation was used to strengthen the credibility of the analytic findings by drawing on multiple forms of evidence and perspectives, consistent with the procedures outlined in Chapter 1. First, data triangulation was achieved by integrating three data sources: verbatim interview transcripts, field observations recorded during and immediately after conducted interviews, and participants' demographic questionnaire responses. These sources provided complementary viewpoints on participants' experiences and allowed for corroboration of key meanings. Second, investigator triangulation occurred through structured peer debriefing with doctoral-trained SMEs, who reviewed coding decisions, theme development, and the alignment between raw data and phenomenological reduction. Their feedback prompted

refinements to several code definitions and improved analytic clarity. Third, theory triangulation was employed by interpreting meaning units through four theoretical lenses: Anthropological, Contemporary, Minority, and Resource-Based Entrepreneurship Theories, which created a more comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon. Together, these triangulation strategies enhanced the study's credibility by ensuring that interpretations were supported by multiple data sources, multiple reviewers, and multiple theoretical perspectives, rather than by any single analytic pathway.

Transferability

Transferability referred to the degree to which qualitative findings could be applied to other settings or populations, as it provided readers with sufficiently rich detail to judge relevance (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). In phenomenological studies, transferability depended on producing thick descriptions of participants' experiences and the environments in which those experiences occurred, enabling readers to judge the applicability of the findings to similar sociocultural or entrepreneurial environments (Bengtsson, 2016; Levitt, 2021).

The first strategy that supported transferability involved providing detailed, context-rich descriptions of participants' experiences and the environments in which they occurred. This included detailed accounts of Houston's business infrastructure, cultural networks, and resource landscape, particularly as they related to African American male entrepreneurs. Descriptions of industry type, entrepreneurial stage, and participant background were retained to help readers assess the applicability of the findings to similar settings.

A second strategy involved using contextual visual data to enhance readers' understanding of the entrepreneurial environment. Figures 1-4 and Tables 3-7 provided visual

representations of participant characteristics, thematic relationships, and contextual patterns within the Houston ecosystem. These visual elements supplemented the narrative descriptions by illustrating how contextual factors shaped participants' experiences across different industries and business stages.

The strategies designed to support transferability produced rich, thick descriptions of how African American male entrepreneurs interpreted and navigated Houston's entrepreneurial environment. These narrative accounts captured the structural, economic, and cultural conditions that shaped opportunity, allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of these findings to similar metropolitan contexts.

A second outcome of the transferability strategy was the added clarity provided by contextual visual data. Figures 1-4 and Tables 3-8 offered concrete depictions of participant characteristics, thematic patterns, and environmental conditions, enabling readers to understand the contextual variability across industries and business stages. These visual representations complemented the narrative descriptions by demonstrating how contextual factors interacted with participants' lived experiences.

Dependability

Dependability referred to the stability, consistency, and logical coherence of the research process across time, ensuring that methodological decisions were traceable and systematically documented (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In qualitative research, particularly phenomenological inquiry, dependability demonstrated that the study was conducted in a transparent and replicable manner, allowing an external reviewer to understand how data were collected, coded, and interpreted (Nowell et al., 2017). The purpose of establishing dependability was to show that the

findings did not emerge from arbitrary or shifting procedures but from a stable, well-documented analytic strategy aligned with established methodological standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability was supported through the creation and maintenance of a detailed audit trail, a methodological log, and systematic consistency checks, consistent with recommended strategies for establishing procedural transparency in qualitative research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). The audit trail documented every analytic decision from initial code generation to theme consolidation, including the rationale for code merges, eliminations, and revisions. NVivo's internal digital timestamps preserved node creation dates, memo links, and coding sequences, enabling transparent tracking of analytical progression. A methodological log captured procedural details, including interview scheduling, transcription steps, software usage, and analytic reflections, creating a clear, chronological record of study activities.

To support analytic stability, a code-recode strategy was used in which segments coded in NVivo were revisited and compared with the original transcript excerpts to verify consistency in meaning, language representation, and coding application. This approach aligned with recognized dependability techniques that emphasized documenting stable coding decisions over time and ensuring interpretive coherence (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). In addition to this internal consistency check, a doctoral-trained SME independently reviewed randomly selected excerpts to confirm alignment between raw data and coded interpretations, following best practices for external dependability examination in qualitative research (Maher et al., 2022).

These procedures produced a transparent chronology of methodological decisions that demonstrated how themes emerged coherently from the data. The complete audit trail enabled the research process to be examined, traced, and potentially replicated by another qualitative

researcher. By showing stability and alignment across data collection, coding, and analysis, the dependability strategies confirmed the methodological consistency of the study. This level of documentation met contemporary expectations for dependability audits and reinforced analytic trustworthiness in phenomenological research (Cypress, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017).

Confirmability

Confirmability referred to the extent to which qualitative findings were grounded in participants' experiences rather than in the researcher's bias, assumptions, or motivations (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The purpose of confirmability was to demonstrate that analytic decisions were transparent, traceable, and supported by the data itself, allowing external reviewers to evaluate how interpretations were formed (Nowell et al., 2017).

Confirmability in this study was supported through reflexive journaling, maintenance of a chain of evidence, and external review of selected coded excerpts. Reflexive journaling documented the researcher's assumptions, positionality, and evolving reflections throughout data collection and analysis. As shown in Appendix I, reflexive entries captured moments where personal reactions or prior experiences could have influenced interpretation, ensuring that potential biases were identified and bracketed early in the analytic process.

A chain of evidence was maintained through NVivo's timestamped coding structure, analytic memos, and organized document logs. These records traced each analytic step, from initial horizontalization to theme development, and linked interpretive decisions back to specific participant quotations. To further strengthen confirmability, an external subject-matter expert independently reviewed randomly selected coded excerpts to verify alignment between the raw data and the assigned codes. This external review followed contemporary guidelines for

confirmability checks by assessing whether interpretations were data-driven and consistently applied.

These strategies ensured that findings emerged from participants' lived experiences rather than the researcher's assumptions. The reflexive journal, chain of evidence, and external review process created a transparent record of how interpretations were formed, enabling a clear audit trail for external evaluation. Collectively, these procedures aligned with current qualitative standards for confirmability by demonstrating analytic neutrality and transparency (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas, and to understand the factors that contributed to their underrepresentation in business ownership. Consistent with transcendental phenomenology, the results were presented to privilege participants' voices and foreground the meanings they ascribed to their experiences. This section began with a description of the participants and their demographic characteristics, followed by an explanation of the analytic procedures used to derive the study's themes. The section then presented the findings organized by thematic patterns and linked to the research questions, with supporting quotations included throughout to illustrate the essence of participants' perspectives.

Description of the Participants

This section provided an overview of the 12 African American male entrepreneurs who participated in the study, including their ages, industries, years in business, and firm characteristics. This contextual information situated the findings and helped readers understand the backgrounds and experiences represented in the dataset. Each participant owned and operated

a business that had been active for at least five years and had generated annual revenues meeting or exceeding Houston's median household income of $68,000. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 65 and held educational backgrounds that spanned from high school diplomas to graduate degrees. Their businesses spanned a variety of sectors, from sole proprietorships to firms with 20 or more employees. Several participants had prior military, managerial, or entrepreneurial experience, which contributed to the diversity of perspectives captured.

Three participants provided written responses to the semi-structured interview protocol, which had been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). These written submissions underwent identical analytic procedures as the in-person interviews to maintain methodological consistency. Although the written responses were more concise and structured, they did not materially diverge from the oral interviews in substance. Their inclusion strengthened methodological triangulation and ensured a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This range of professional, educational, and experiential backgrounds enhanced the study's phenomenological aim to capture a broad spectrum of lived experiences among African American male entrepreneurs in Houston. Table 2 provided a demographic overview of the study participants.

Table 2

Demographic Overview of Study Participants (N = 12)

Participant ID	Age Range (Years)	Education Level	Years in Business	Business Type	Industry Sector
P200	60–65	Bachelor's Degree	20	Contractor	Engineering
P201	40–49	Some College	10	Independent Contractor	Financial advisor / Transportation
P202	40–49	Some College	7	Small Business Owner	Transportation
P203**	50–59	Graduate Degree	25	Real estate investor	Mortgage Inspection Services
P204	45–54	Bachelor's Degree	10	Restaurant Owner	Food & Beverage
P205**	35–44	Some College	5	Clothing Store owner	Clothing
P206	50–59	Bachelor's Degree	12	Meat market/ Cattle Rancher	Food & Beverage / Agriculture
P207	40–49	Graduate Degree	10	Medical Private Practice	Healthcare
P208**	60–65	Bachelor's Degree	9	Independent Contractor	Insurance
P209	40–49	Bachelor's Degree	6	Mechanic	Automotive
P210	45–54	Graduate Degree	14	Independent Consultant	Government Contracting
P211	35–44	Bachelor's Degree	7	Hospice Care/ LLC	Healthcare Management

Note. Asterisks indicate the written responses.

Phenomenological Reduction and Coding Process

The analytic process began with phenomenological reduction, following Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method. The researcher conducted multiple iterative readings of each transcript, including three IRB-approved written responses, to identify significant statements that revealed participants' lived experiences as African American male entrepreneurs in Houston.

Through horizontalization, each statement was given equal weight to prevent premature prioritization of meaning. Redundant or overlapping expressions were removed, leaving invariant constituents that reflected the essential components of participants' experiences. Initial codes were generated inductively from participants' explicit language and refined through constant comparison across cases to ensure conceptual coherence.

Using NVivo 15, the researcher conducted open and axial coding, which allowed for the development of relationships among codes and the clustering of similar ideas into categories. The software supported frequency queries, cluster analyses, and cross-case comparisons that illuminated patterns and relationships embedded in the data while preserving the interpretive role of the researcher. Each code was linked to exemplar participant quotations to maintain authenticity and provide an auditable trail from raw text to emergent meaning.

Through this systematic process, 126 initial codes were identified and refined until thematic saturation was achieved. Codes representing similar meanings or related experiential elements were merged into broader conceptually coherent categories. Table 3 provided an overview of the analytic chain-of-evidence structure used in this study, summarizing how significant statements progressed through coding and category development toward the formation of final themes.

Table 3

Analytic Chain-of-Evidence Structure Used in This Study

Analytic Step	Description of Process	Output	Location of Full Evidence
1. Significant Statements (Horizontalization)	All relevant participant expressions were initially treated with equal value to avoid premature weighting.	Raw meaning units representing lived experiences.	Quoted excerpts appear in Appendix J within the chain-of-evidence matrix.
2. Open Coding	Statements were inductively coded using participants' own language when possible; codes captured explicit meanings.	Codes reflecting distinct experiential concepts.	All codes linked to their quotations appear in Appendix J.
3. Code Consolidation & Constant Comparison	Redundant, overlapping, and semantically similar codes were merged through iterative refinement.	A refined set of non-redundant codes with NVivo frequency counts.	Code frequencies and supporting quotations appear in Appendix J.
4. Category Formation (Inductive Clustering)	Related codes were grouped into conceptual categories reflecting shared meaning patterns. Triangulation occurred here across participants, industries, peer-debriefing input, and reflexive memos.	The researcher constructs categories to combine related codes into mid-level analytic groupings.	All categories with linked codes and quotations appear in Appendix J.

Analytic Step	Description of Process	Output	Location of Full Evidence
5. Thematic Synthesis	Categories were examined for convergence into higher-order thematic patterns supported by multiple participants. Themes reflect the phenomenological "essence" of experience.	Themes 1–4, each supported by multiple categories and frequency distributions.	Theme structure and evidence trails are fully documented in Appendix J.
6. Alignment to Research Questions	Each theme was mapped to the research question it most directly answered, based on conceptual alignment and analytic coherence.	Final Theme → RQ mapping guiding the Results narrative.	Theme-to-RQ links appear in the rightmost column in Appendix J.

Note. Appendix J contains the complete chain-of-evidence framework in the sequence required for qualitative auditability: Quote - Code - Category - NVivo Frequency - Theme - RQ, including NVivo frequency counts for each code. This table summarizes the analytic pathway, while Appendix J provides the full evidentiary record.

Appendix J provided the complete chain-of-evidence table for all participant quotations across Participants 200-211. Organized in the analytic sequence required for qualitative auditability: Quote - Code - Category - NVivo Frequency - Theme - RQ, the appendix enabled readers to trace how each segment of raw data supported the study's thematic structure. All quotations from the merged transcripts were included and aligned exclusively with the identified codes and category clusters from the finalized codebook. NVivo frequency values were reported where available to document code and theme level reference density, saturation tendencies, and the distribution of meaning across the dataset. All Excel-based participant responses were imported into NVivo in their entirety and coded within the same analytic environment as

interview transcripts; thus, NVivo frequency counts reflected the number of coded references associated with analytic nodes, independent of data source format. Any blank frequency fields reflected label titles or structural placeholders within the analytic framework rather than uncoded data, and all quotations remained analytically valid and fully traceable through their assigned code, category, and theme designations.

Table 4 presented the alignment between the study's research questions, emergent themes, and cumulative NVivo-coded references (341 in total) across Participant 200-211. Consistent with qualitative analytic conventions, NVivo frequency values were reported at the code-aggregation level to document analytic density, saturation patterns, and the distribution of meaning rather than to suggest thematic importance or causal weight (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Guest et al., 2020).

Table 4

Alignment of Research Questions, Themes, and Cumulative NVivo Code Mentions (Participants 200–211)

Research Question	Overarching Theme (One per RQ)	Category (Analytic Dimension)	Cumulative NVivo Mentions
RQ1	Cultural Work Ethic Influence	Discipline–Resilience Practices	25
		Identity Positioning	30
		Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks	43
		Total Theme Mentions	98
RQ2	Business Start–Sustainment–Growth Continuum	Foundational Influences	21
		Networked Knowledge Flows	44
		Adaptive Strategy Patterns	46
		Resource Deployment Strategies	21
		Transitional Pathways	21
		Total Theme Mentions	153
RQ3	Multilevel Constraint Barriers	Strain–Constraint Factors	17
		Structural Access Limitations	32
		Total Theme Mentions	49
RQ4	Cultural Identity–Trust Dynamics	Trust Navigation Processes	22
		Identity-Based Constraints	19
		Total Theme Mentions	41

With the analytic pathway established through the chain-of-evidence structure and the complete coding record provided in Appendix J, the chapter transitioned from analytic

procedures to the presentation of findings. The thematic findings that followed were derived from systematically coded participant quotations and analytically clustered categories that emerged through phenomenological reduction and iterative comparison. Rather than relying on frequency as a determinant of meaning, themes were constructed through patterned coherence across participant narratives and verified code structures, as documented in the supporting tables and appendices. This thematic presentation illuminated how African American male entrepreneurs in Houston described the cultural, structural, and relational forces that shaped their entrepreneurial experiences. The analysis began with Research Question 1, which examined the role of cultural traditions in these experiences.

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Research Question 1 asked: What cultural traditions influence the entrepreneurial experiences of African-American male business owners in Houston? The theme associated with RQ1 illustrated how deeply rooted cultural values, such as family legacy, faith-based support systems, cultural pride, community responsibility, and disciplined work ethics, shaped participants' entrepreneurial motivations. These cultural traditions were not incidental influences; instead, they functioned as central interpretive frameworks through which participants understood resilience and discipline, positioned their identities within entrepreneurial spaces, and drew sustained support from community-based networks. Participants consistently described how church involvement, relationships with family and friends, and culturally grounded mentoring practices reinforced their capacity to persist, maintain professional standards, and navigate challenges while remaining aligned with shared cultural expectations.

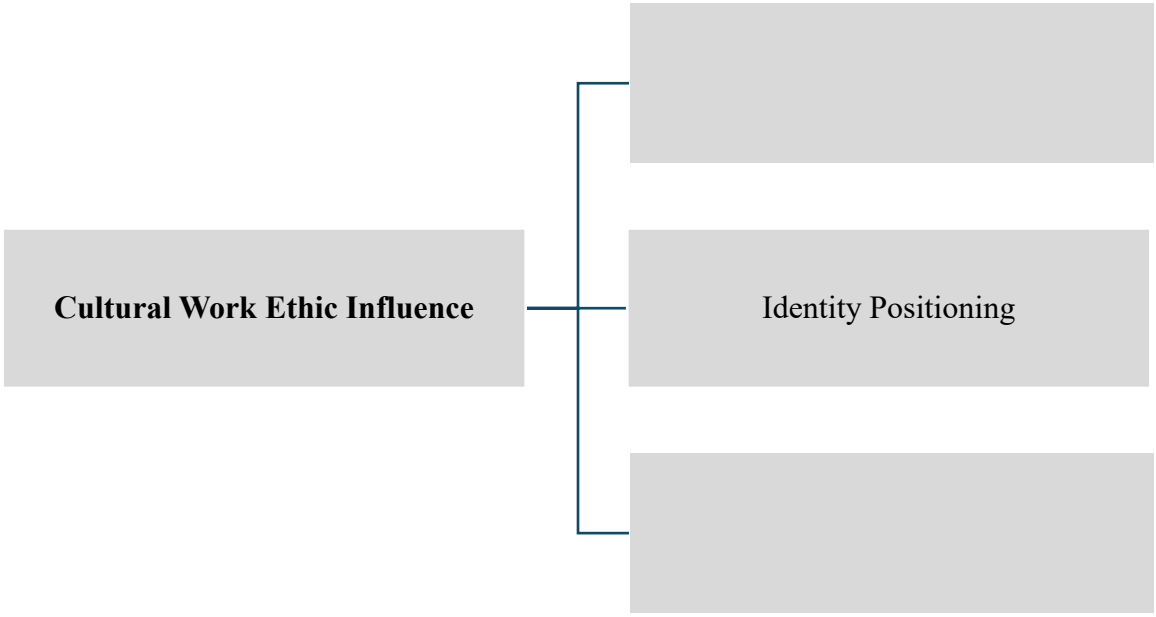
Theme 1: Cultural Work Ethic Influence. Figure 1 illustrated the thematic architecture associated with Research Question 1, showing the code categories that collectively contributed to the development of a single overarching theme. While the figure offered structural orientation, the findings revealed how participants' entrepreneurial experiences were shaped by culturally embedded expectations related to work ethic, responsibility, and community orientation. Across participant narratives, the cultural work ethic did not emerge as a singular or abstract value; instead, it was constructed as a patterned framework formed through disciplined practices, identity-based meaning-making, and traditions of support rooted in community and faith.

The data demonstrated that the participants' cultural histories, identity positioning, and community-embedded practices converged to shape their understanding of leadership, resilience, and long-term business sustainability. These influences were evident in how participants approached their work, assumed responsibility for outcomes, and interpreted entrepreneurship as both an individual pursuit and a collective obligation. Together, the categories of Discipline-Resilience Practices, Identity Positioning, and Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks functioned as the foundational building blocks through which Cultural Work Ethic Influence was constructed and expressed across participant experiences.

Table 5 provided descriptive context for this thematic construction by summarizing the distribution of coded references and participant representation across the three contributing categories. While the table did not indicate relative importance, it reinforced the breadth of engagement with each category across the participant sample and supported the analytic conclusion that Cultural Work Ethic Influence emerged through multiple, overlapping dimensions of experience.

Figure 1

Code Categories Contributing to Theme Cultural Work Ethic Influence.



Note. Figure 1. Code Categories Contributing to Theme Cultural Work Ethic Influence. The complete listing of contributing codes and their analytic categorization is provided in Appendix H. These codes were derived from participant transcripts and represent the granular qualitative data through which individual statements were clustered and interpreted to form the reported theme.

Discipline-Resilience Practices (Category). Nested within the broader theme of Cultural Work Ethic Influence, discipline and resilience emerged as interrelated practices that shaped participants' approaches to entrepreneurship. This category was supported by 25 NVivo-coded references across all 12 participants, reflecting recurring patterns related to disciplined work habits, persistence, and strategic endurance. Primary codes contributing to this category included consistent work ethic, preparation and planning, withstanding pressure, and long-term orientation (see Table 5). Building on these contributing codes, participants described discipline and resilience not as isolated traits, but as learned practices that were shaped over time. These practices were framed as learned behaviors reinforced over time through cultural socialization,

professional expectations, and lived experience. Discipline was associated with consistency, preparation, and sustained effort, while resilience reflected the ability to withstand pressure and to plan strategically in the face of uncertainty.

Primary codes related to consistent work ethic, preparation, and planning illustrated how discipline was enacted as a visible and enduring practice. Participants emphasized that their work ethic was recognizable to others as a defining characteristic. Participant 201 noted, “People would say I am definitely a hard worker… consistent… disciplined,” highlighting how discipline functioned as both an internal standard and an externally observed practice. Primary codes associated with withstanding pressure and long-term orientation illustrated how resilience was framed as a strategic and forward-looking process. Participant 202 extended this understanding by framing resilience in strategic terms, explaining, “Resilience means not folding under pressure, preparing financially for hard days, and thinking like a Fortune 500 company.

This perspective reflected an advanced orientation toward planning and foresight, positioning resilience as an active, forward-looking process rather than a reactive response to hardship. Importantly, discipline was not described solely in terms of productivity but as value-driven labor. Participant 200 explained, “The commitment to add value… not a transaction thing, but more about I am trying to help you.” Taken together, the data suggested that discipline-resilience practices were culturally informed behaviors that guided how participants worked, prepared, and persisted, particularly in environments where stability and recognition could not be assumed.

Identity Positioning (Category). Identity Positioning was supported by 30 coded references across 10 participants and captured how participants interpreted leadership, responsibility, and entrepreneurial identity within their cultural and social contexts. Primary

codes contributing to this category included leadership responsibility, cultural self-awareness, comparative identity reflection, and ownership accountability (see Table 5). Collectively, these codes revealed Identity Positioning as an ongoing sense-making process through which participants situated their entrepreneurial roles in relation to culture, responsibility, and aspiration. Participants described moments of cultural contrast and heightened awareness that shaped their views of success, leadership, and belonging within business spaces. Exposure to diverse socioeconomic environments often prompted reflection and recalibration of both personal and professional identity, reinforcing entrepreneurship as not only an economic pursuit but also an expression of self and social positioning.

Primary codes associated with leadership responsibility and ownership accountability illustrated how identity positioning involved accepting sustained responsibility for outcomes. As Participant 201 recalled encountering a markedly different cultural context, stating, “That was a whole different culture from where I came from… this guy lived in the River Oaks… a home that had seven bedrooms… I was just like, wow, this is not what I came from.” Such reflections illustrated how identity positioning was shaped through comparison and observation, influencing participants’ motivation and understanding of what was possible. These experiences did not result in disengagement; instead, they informed how participants positioned themselves as leaders and decision-makers.

Identity was also closely tied to responsibility and accountability. As Participant 200 articulated, “You just cannot say somebody else needs to take care of it… there’s a responsibility degree that has to be dealt with.” This statement underscored how identity positioning involved accepting ownership and sustained leadership. Primary codes related to cultural self-awareness and collective identity illustrated how identity positioning extended beyond individual success

toward shared advancement. Participant 202 framed identity through a collective lens, emphasizing a desire for broader inclusion and growth, noting the importance of minority entrepreneurs working together across industries. Stating, “As an entrepreneur, a minority entrepreneur, I would love to see more minorities pulled together and grow. Grow abroad, no matter what your industry is, you know, transportation; you need transportation for anything to move your product.” Collectively, these accounts showed that identity positioning functioned as a mechanism through which participants aligned cultural awareness, leadership responsibility, and long-term vision.

Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks (Category). Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks was supported by 43 NVivo-coded references across 11 participants and reflected recurring patterns of community-based mentorship, faith-informed values, and culturally rooted systems of support that sustained entrepreneurial motivation and perseverance. Primary codes contributing to this category included faith-based guidance, community mentorship, collective support traditions, and value transmission through social networks (see Table 5). Together, these codes revealed how participants consistently identified community and faith-based traditions as influential forces that shaped their entrepreneurial values and behaviors. Participants described these traditions as providing early exposure to models of success, reinforcing moral frameworks, and sustaining them through ongoing learning and reflection. Rather than peripheral influences, community and faith emerged as integral components of participants’ sense of purpose, direction, and resilience throughout their entrepreneurial journeys.

Primary codes related to community mentorship and value transmission through social networks illustrated how early exposure within trusted environments shaped entrepreneurial

values. Participants described formative experiences within community and church contexts that left lasting impressions. For example, Participant 201 reflected, “I remember going to their house… beach house… cars… those traditions and values… pinged off on me,” indicating how early exposure within trusted community spaces shaped aspirations and value systems. Primary codes associated with faith-based guidance illustrated how spiritual frameworks informed discipline, ethics, and perseverance. Faith-based influences were described as grounding forces that emphasized respect, discipline, and ethical conduct. Participant 202 stated, “Obedience to God… keeping the Sabbath… treating people with respect has been the biggest blessing.”

Participants also framed entrepreneurship as a spiritually informed journey of growth rather than a fixed destination. Participant 200 explained, “I think it is a spiritual thing… the journey is to learn, and if you already know it, why are you doing it?” These perspectives illustrated how community and faith networks reinforced resilience, humility, and continuous learning. Collectively, the data demonstrated that traditions of cultural support functioned as sustaining structures that shaped motivation, values, and perseverance over time.

Together, the categories of Discipline-Resilience Practices, Identity Positioning, and Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks illustrated how Cultural Work Ethic Influence emerged as a cohesive framework that guided participants’ entrepreneurial behavior. The data showed that participants’ work ethic was deeply rooted in cultural expectations surrounding effort, responsibility, and collective meaning. These culturally embedded influences shaped how participants navigated challenges, enacted leadership, and sustained their entrepreneurial pursuits over time.

Collectively, the findings associated with Theme 1 demonstrated that Cultural Work Ethic Influence was constructed through the interaction of disciplined labor practices, identity-

based responsibility, and culturally grounded systems of support. These elements did not operate independently; rather, they functioned as an integrated framework through which participants approached business ownership as both a personal obligation and a community-informed practice.

Table 5

Code Frequencies and Participants Under Theme 1 for RQ1, Cultural Work Ethic Influence

Category (Cluster)	NVivo Coded References	Participants (n)	Participant IDs
Discipline-Resilience Practices	25	12	P200–P211
Identity Positioning	30	10	P200-206, 209-211
Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks.	43	11	P200-P209, 211
Theme 1 Total	98		

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Research Question 2 asked: What aspects of contemporary entrepreneurship theory can encourage and sustain business growth within African-American male businesses to increase their presence in Houston? The study explored how participants described initiating, sustaining, and expanding their businesses over time, with particular attention to the strategies and processes that supported growth and continuity. The findings addressed how participants navigated business development through experience accumulation, networked learning, adaptive decision-making, and strategic resource use. Rather than portraying growth as a linear progression, participants' accounts reflected an evolving continuum shaped by contextual demands, opportunity recognition, and intentional adjustment.

Theme 2: Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum. Theme 2 captured how participants described the processes through which they initiated, maintained, and expanded their businesses over time. The data illustrated that business development was not a linear progression

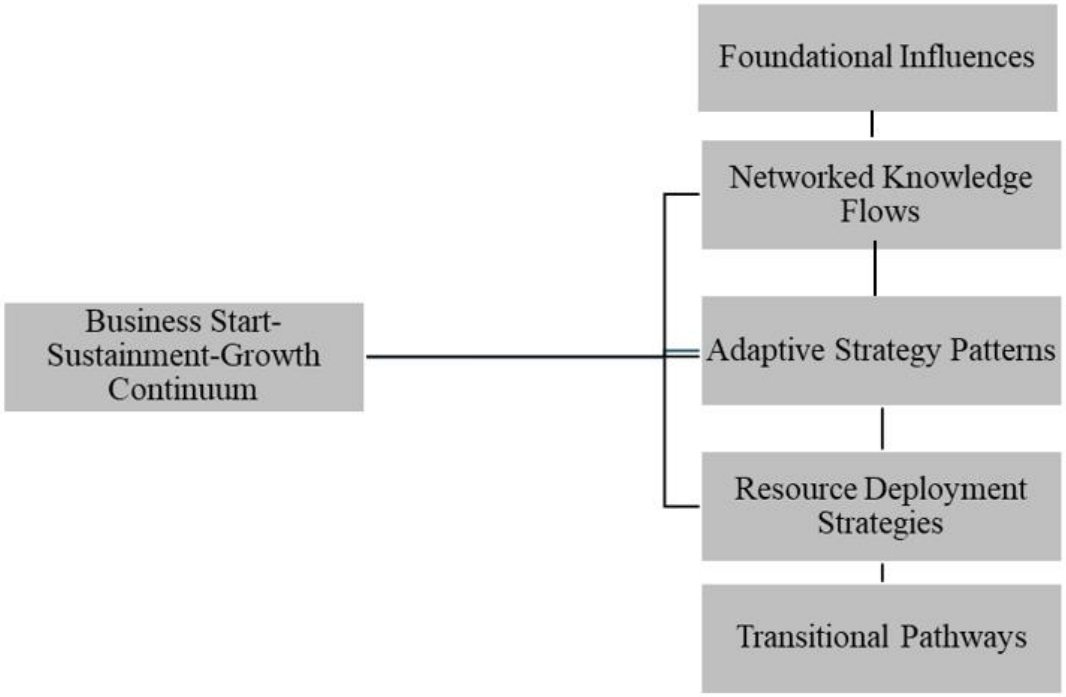
but an evolving continuum shaped by learning, adaptation, and strategic decision-making. Across participant narratives, entrepreneurial growth emerged through the accumulation of experience, the use of relational and informational networks, and the ability to respond to changing market and contextual conditions. These processes were evident in how participants described early business formation, ongoing sustainment efforts, and adjustments made to support long-term viability.

Within this theme, participants' accounts clustered into five interrelated categories: Foundational Influences, Networked Knowledge Flows, Adaptive Strategy Patterns, Resource Deployment Strategies, and Transitional Pathways. Together, these categories reflected how entrepreneurs moved from initial exposure and motivation, through knowledge acquisition and strategic adjustment, to the deployment of resources and navigation of key transition points. Rather than representing discrete stages, the categories illustrated overlapping processes that collectively shaped participants' experiences of business start-up, sustainment, and growth.

Figure 2 provided a visual representation of the thematic architecture associated with Research Question 2, illustrating the code categories that collectively contributed to the development of the overarching theme, Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum. While the figure offered structural orientation, the findings that followed described how participants' accounts clustered across these categories to reflect the processes through which businesses were initiated, sustained, and expanded over time.

Figure 2

Code Categories Contributing to Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum



Foundational Influences (Category). Nested within the broader theme of the Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum, the category Foundational Influences captured how participants described the formative experiences, motivations, and early conditions that shaped their entry into entrepreneurship. Foundational Influences was supported by 21 coded references across 11 participants and reflected shared accounts of early exposure, skill development, and formative experiences that shaped participants' entry into entrepreneurship. Primary codes contributing to this category included early work exposure, family influence, industry immersion, and initial opportunity recognition (see Table 6). Collectively, these codes indicated that business formation emerged as a cumulative developmental process, rooted in exposure, skill acquisition, and moments of recognition rather than abrupt or isolated decisions.

Participants traced their entrepreneurial beginnings to prior work experiences, family traditions, observed market gaps, and evolving career trajectories that gradually oriented them toward business ownership.

Participants described entrepreneurship as beginning with a conscious decision informed by prior professional exposure. As Participant 203 explained, “My first steps in starting this business were simply deciding to do it. Once I made the decision, I began to research the industry.” This participant further emphasized how later exposure to retail management shaped an entrepreneurial mindset and sparked a desire to become a business owner. For many participants, these early influences were reinforced through self-directed learning, mentorship seeking, and financial self-investment. As Participant 203 noted, “I always did a lot of self-funding before learning about other people’s money or OPM… I spent a lot of time and money self-educating myself.”

Primary codes associated with family influence and early work exposure illustrated how generational knowledge shaped entrepreneurial motivation. Participant 204 attributed their business idea to generational knowledge and relational values, stating, “The idea came from my love for cooking and my grandmother teaching me how food can bring people together.” This participant described early resource mobilization as incremental and relational, explaining, “I saved money, borrowed some from family, and put together a business plan.” Similarly, Participant 206 traced their entrepreneurial motivation to longstanding family involvement in agriculture, noting, “I grew up around cattle in Texas; my grandfather was a rancher, and my parents sold beef locally at farmers’ markets,” which ultimately inspired them to create a vertically integrated meat market.

Participants described identifying unmet needs or gaps within their industries as catalysts for entrepreneurship. Participant 205 explained that their business originated from recognizing a cultural and market opportunity, stating, “I opened it about six years ago after noticing a gap in the market for professional, stylish clothing that spoke to the cultural pride of African American men.” Participant 207 similarly described a career transition prompted by systemic limitations within healthcare delivery, explaining that “long waiting times, insurance hurdles, and cultural disconnects left patients frustrated,” which motivated them to open an independent practice after “training and practicing medicine for over a decade in hospitals across Houston.”

Primary codes related to professional credentialing and industry immersion illustrated how formal preparation contributed to business readiness. Participant 208 described entrepreneurship as emerging through formal preparation, noting, “The first step in launching my insurance career was to acquire a license to adjust insurance claims,” ultimately holding licenses in 25 states. Participant 209 traced their entrepreneurial path to early hands-on experience, stating, “I started working on cars as a teenager… After finishing trade school, I worked at a dealership for almost a decade.” These accounts illustrated how prolonged skill development and industry immersion contributed to readiness for business ownership.

Finally, participants described entrepreneurship as an iterative process unfolding across multiple ventures. Participant 211 highlighted a trajectory of sequential business development over time, noting the launch of several healthcare-related ventures between 2008 and 2024, culminating in “Home Health Pro, an automated staffing tool… kind of like the ‘Uber for healthcare staffing.’” This longitudinal perspective underscored how foundational influences extended beyond initial startup moments to include accumulated experience and strategic evolution.

Collectively, the data indicated that foundational influences were not singular triggers but layered experiences that shaped participants' readiness, confidence, and orientation toward entrepreneurship. These influences formed the groundwork for participants to initiate and sustain business activity within the broader start-sustainment-growth continuum. Building on these foundational experiences, participants described how entrepreneurial development continued through ongoing access to knowledge, guidance, and relational support. As businesses moved beyond initial formations, participants emphasized the importance of learning from others, seeking advice, and leveraging networks to navigate unfamiliar challenges. These accounts highlighted how growth was supported not only by individual effort but by the flow of information and insight exchanged through mentors, peers, and institutional connections.

Networked Knowledge Flows (Category). Networked Knowledge Flows was supported by 44 NVivo-coded references from 10 participants and reflected a patterned reliance on mentorship, peer exchange, and professional networks to acquire business knowledge and refine decision-making. Primary codes contributing to this category included mentorship guidance, peer learning, professional networking, and knowledge exchange through relationships. Building on the foundational conditions that prompted entry into entrepreneurship, participants described how business development was sustained and expanded through ongoing access to knowledge, guidance, and relational support. Participants consistently relied on interpersonal networks, mentorship, and professional communities to navigate unfamiliar aspects of business ownership, refine strategic decisions, and adapt to evolving business demands. These knowledge flows were not confined to formal education but were embedded in relationships that facilitated learning through experience, observation, and exchange.

Primary codes related to mentorship guidance and professional networking illustrated how relational learning supported early business development. Participants emphasized that early progress depended on actively building connections and remaining visible within professional environments. Participant 200 described persistent outreach as a critical mechanism for opportunity creation, noting, “I was calling on everybody all over the city, like every day,” which eventually positioned him to benefit from being “in the right place at the right time and continuing that work.” This participant further explained that sustained commitment often attracted support organically, stating, “If you pursued something with 100% commitment, there was somebody who was going to help you.” In his case, mentorship extended beyond advice to include tangible access, as “an older gentleman… pretty much put all the funding up, and he got me connected with… New York Life and Mutual of Omaha,” demonstrating how relational ties facilitated entry into established business networks.

Mentorship also emerged as a central conduit for reframing entrepreneurial thinking. Participant 203 described learning to differentiate between employment, self-employment, and business ownership, explaining that “true business ownership is about building something that serves a purpose, supports a community, or provides meaningful value.” This participant attributed growth to a learning-oriented network, stating, “The most help came from my friends who also had a similar mindset to mine,” and further noted that “my mentors helped shape my habits and routines to complement my new way of thinking.” These accounts illustrated how networked knowledge extended beyond technical advice to include cognitive and behavioral development.

Participants also highlighted the role of peer and institutional networks in fostering confidence and persistence. Participant 207 explained that encouragement from senior colleagues

was instrumental, stating, “Confidence came from two things: my clinical training and the encouragement of mentors,” recalling advice from senior physicians who emphasized autonomy and innovation. Similarly, participant 203 referenced structured networking opportunities, noting that “The Greater Houston Black Chamber provided networking opportunities,” which supported access to information and professional relationships within the local business ecosystem.

For other participants, networked knowledge was sustained through industry-specific communities and continuous learning. Participant 208 described engaging with “a small community of people of color engaged in the Independent Adjusting community,” emphasizing that building relationships within a nationwide professional network enabled ongoing exchange of knowledge and best practices. This participant emphasized preparedness and learning the industry's technical language, reinforcing the idea that competence and credibility supported effective networking.

Primary codes associated with peer learning and knowledge exchange illustrated how ongoing interaction refined decision-making. Participants operating in trade and service industries also described knowledge flows as practical and problem-oriented. Participant 209 emphasized that “networking with other small business owners in Houston was a lifeline,” explaining that these relationships facilitated shared learning around “taxes, staffing, and vendors.” When complexity increased, this participant relied on professional advisors, noting, “I leaned on professional accountants and lawyers when things got too complex.” Across narratives, continued education, whether through certifications, mentorship, or peer exchange, was framed as essential to long-term viability.

Collectively, the data indicated that networked knowledge flows served as an ongoing support system, enabling participants to adapt, refine strategies, and sustain growth. Rather than

operating independently, participants' learning processes were embedded within relational ecosystems that provided access to information, encouragement, and practical guidance across different stages of the entrepreneurial journey, enabling participants to translate these into adaptive adjustments in roles, decision-making, and strategic direction as business conditions evolved.

Adaptive Strategy Patterns (Category). Adaptive Strategy Patterns were supported by 46 NVivo-coded references across all 12 participants, indicating widespread experiences related to strategic adjustment, role recalibration, and learning through disruption over time. Primary codes contributing to this category included strategic adaptation, role redefinition, learning from setbacks, and iterative decision-making (see Table 6). Collectively, these codes reflected how participants modified their roles, thinking, and operational approaches in response to changing business conditions and growth demands. Across participant narratives, adaptation emerged as an ongoing learning process, shaped by experience, disruption, and intentional recalibration rather than a one-time adjustment. Participants consistently framed adaptability as essential to sustaining momentum and aligning business practices with long-term growth objectives.

Primary codes related to role redefinition illustrated how growth required relinquishing preferred operational tasks. Participants described adaptation as requiring deliberate shifts away from preferred or familiar tasks as businesses expanded. Participant 200 explained that growth necessitated relinquishing hands-on involvement, noting, "A lot of things that I used to enjoy doing, I just could not do them, if I was committed to growing the business." This participant further observed that remaining deeply involved in every aspect of operations could constrain scale, stating, "You had to be integral to everything… it kept you at a certain size." These

accounts illustrated how adaptive strategy patterns involved role redefinition and acceptance of strategic trade-offs to support expansion.

Primary codes associated with learning from setbacks illustrated how disruption functioned as a catalyst for strategic adjustment. Participant 201 emphasized vigilance and openness to experience, advising, “Keep your eyes open… watch everything… ask 1000 questions… do not be scared because you are going to win some, lose some.” This participant recounted a significant operational challenge in which multiple assets failed within a short period, resulting in prolonged financial strain. Reflecting on this experience, the participant explained, “I learned a lot from that,” highlighting how setbacks functioned as catalysts for strategic learning rather than deterrents.

Participants also described adaptation as a cognitive and behavioral shift toward entrepreneurial thinking. Participant 203 explained that pursuing business ownership required intentionally reframing one's mindset and habits, noting that it involved “actively developing a business mindset, learning from experience, and creating success habits and routines.” This participant emphasized the importance of ongoing learning, stating, “I believed what had helped me the most was still having a burning desire to succeed with an open mind for continued learning.” These accounts reflected how adaptation extended beyond operational decisions to include sustained changes in perspective and self-management.

Other participants emphasized strategic recalibration through diversification and persistence. Participant 201 described recognizing the need to expand and adjust business direction, stating, “In my mind, I was thinking I needed to grow and diversify myself and do some other things.” Participant 209 similarly framed adaptation as an iterative process, noting, “There was no perfect blueprint. You learned as you moved forward.” This participant

emphasized responding to challenges through problem-solving and coalition-building, and reaffirmed commitment by stating, “Even when it got tough, I never thought about giving up.”

Collectively, the data indicated that adaptive strategy patterns functioned as mechanisms through which participants navigated uncertainty, redefined their roles, and learned from both success and disruption. Adaptation was not portrayed as reactive improvisation but as a deliberate, experience-driven recalibration that enabled participants to sustain growth and progress along the business start-sustainment-growth continuum. As participants adjusted their strategies and decision-making approaches, these adaptive processes often prompted more intentional consideration of how resources were obtained, organized, and applied, thereby shaping subsequent choices related to sustaining operations and expanding support.

Resource Deployment Strategies (Category). Resource Deployment Strategies was supported by 21 NVivo-coded references across 10 participants and captured how participants intentionally organized, leveraged, and reallocated human, financial, and institutional resources to support business start-up, sustainment, and growth. Primary codes contributing to this category included delegation of roles, professional advisory use, bootstrapping strategies, and strategic alignment of resources (see Table 6). Collectively, these codes reflected how participants identified, mobilized, and leveraged resources with purpose rather than relying solely on access. Participants emphasized that effective resource deployment required planning, role differentiation, persistence, and alignment between entrepreneurial intent and operational demands. Resource strategies were described as dynamic and responsive, shaped by experience and evolving business needs rather than static availability.

Primary codes related to role delegation illustrated how human capital was intentionally organized. Participant 211 explained how responsibilities were deliberately divided to maximize

expertise, noting, “My twin brother handled the clinical side… and I focused on business and finance.” This participant emphasized that professionalism and polished presentation were intentional on their part and further described equitable service delivery across communities. These accounts illustrated how human capital was strategically organized to support both credibility and operational effectiveness.

Trust and delegation also emerged as critical components of resource deployment. Participant 210 described the difficulty of relinquishing control, explaining that “letting go was hard, especially trusting others with client relations.” Nevertheless, they emphasized that mutual trust within the team created “a strong collaborative environment.” This reflected how participants deployed relational resources internally, recognizing that sustainment depended on shared responsibility rather than individual control.

Participants also framed resource deployment as a response to perceived market inefficiencies and ethical considerations. Participant 209 described initiating their business after recognizing that “the dealership charged high prices but did not always give people honest service,” positioning transparency and fairness as strategic differentiators. Similarly, Participant 208 emphasized preparedness and persistence, stating that “the key to growth and sustainability is persistence and level of skills,” and underscoring the need for entrepreneurs to be equipped to navigate ongoing challenges.

Institutional and professional support structures were frequently cited as essential resources. Participant 207 advised, “Get business training early, hire a good accountant, and stay connected to why you chose medicine,” emphasizing that while “profit matters, purpose sustains you.” This participant further noted that clinical training alone was insufficient for business ownership, explaining that running a business required “mentors, business coaches, and legal

support." These accounts demonstrated how participants strategically supplemented their expertise through external professional resources.

Participants also described persistence in navigating formal resource channels. Participant 206 explained, "Do not let rejection stop you. Each 'No' response I got from a bank or supplier taught me how to refine my business plan and pitch," ultimately relying on "the USDA's Beginning Farmer program, some small grants, and word-of-mouth marketing." This illustrated how resource deployment involved iterative learning and refinement rather than immediate access. Participant 205 similarly emphasized the role of organizational support, stating, "The Greater Houston Black Chamber has also been instrumental in helping me network with other Black business owners."

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of knowledge and alignment in effective resource use. Participant 203 noted, "Resources are out there, but without knowledge, gaps emerge… Closing these gaps starts with education, strategy, and the right mindset." Participant 200 echoed this perspective by emphasizing alignment among advisors and employees, stating that success depended on "advisors, mentors, and a lot of employees who were aligned in the right way." This participant further described how structural systems supported scalability, explaining that "this franchise business model… allowed them to have the systems and the processes of the brand."

Collectively, the data indicated that the intentional organization of human capital shaped resource deployment strategies, the strategic use of institutional and professional support, the persistence in navigating access barriers, and the alignment of values, expertise, and operational systems. Rather than viewing resources as isolated inputs, participants described deployment as an active process through which adaptive intentions were translated into sustainable business

practices within the start-sustainment-growth continuum. These resource-related decisions were frequently situated within broader moments of transition that altered participants' professional roles and trajectories, such as leaving prior employment, redefining identity, or responding to catalytic events that prompted movement into or between entrepreneurial ventures.

Transitional Pathways (Category). Transitional Pathways was supported by 21 NVivo-coded references across seven participants and reflected shared accounts of pivotal shifts into, across, or within entrepreneurial activity shaped by opportunity recognition, career transitions, and strategic repositioning. Primary codes contributing to this category included career transition, opportunity recognition, leaving structured employment, and relocation for market opportunity (see Table 6). Collectively, these codes captured how participants described transitional movement as a sequence of intentional changes rather than abrupt or isolated decisions. Across narratives, participants emphasized that transitions were shaped by dissatisfaction with existing structures, exposure to alternative possibilities, and strategic relocations that prompted the redefinition of professional identity and entrepreneurial direction. These pathways often involved leaving prior employment, responding to catalytic events, and recalibrating goals in ways that opened new entrepreneurial trajectories.

Primary codes related to relocation for market opportunity illustrated how geographic movement shaped entrepreneurial entry. Participant 200 traced their pathway through federal service, explaining that prior to moving to Texas, they had worked "with the federal government in Mississippi… at the Waterways Experiment Station," but relocated due to market opportunity, noting that "Houston worked out and worked out well." This participant described transferring with the Army Corps of Engineers to Galveston "with the intention of starting a business one year after," and reported that this planned transition culminated in the formation of a business as

anticipated. These accounts illustrated how relocation and career shifts were strategically aligned with perceived market activity and growth potential.

Participants described transitions driven by a desire for change, exposure to new possibilities, and the pursuit of financial knowledge. Participant 201 recounted moving into financial advising after a period of reflection, stating that the transition "began one day… like, man, I had to do something different." This participant described pursuing multiple licenses over time and explained that exposure to new professional environments influenced aspirations, noting, "I saw a classroom… all Caucasian people… they would become a financial planner… I said that's what I was going to do." These experiences were framed as responses to limited early exposure to financial literacy, with entrepreneurship serving as a pathway to autonomy and improved opportunities.

Opportunity recognition through lived experience also shaped transitional movement. Participant 203 explained that they discovered an entrepreneurial opportunity after observing a market need firsthand, stating, "I discovered the opportunity after having my own home inspected for roof damage, saw its potential, and turned it into a profitable business." This participant described sustaining the venture over time, noting long-term operation in Houston and continued involvement in inspection services. Similarly, Participant 208 described entering entrepreneurialism at the encouragement of family, explaining that they "began their entrepreneurial career as an Independent Insurance Adjuster at the instigation of a nephew." This highlighted how relational exposure facilitated the transition into a new field.

Primary codes associated with leaving structured employment illustrated how dissatisfaction with institutional constraints prompted transition. Participant 210 described moving from military service into federal contracting and later entrepreneurship, explaining that

transitioning from “20 years of military service” required developing a business mindset and ultimately recognizing that “in order to grow, I had to leave the structure and comfort of a federal job.” Participant 211 similarly described departing corporate environments due to identity strain, stating, “It was why I left corporate America. I felt like I was always code-switching… or being set up to fail.” Entrepreneurship was framed as a liberating shift, allowing greater authenticity and autonomy in professional expression.

Collectively, the data indicated that transitional pathways functioned as critical inflection points through which participants repositioned themselves professionally and entrepreneurially. These transitions were shaped by planning, exposure to opportunity, relational influence, and the pursuit of autonomy. Rather than representing singular moments, transitional pathways unfolded as sequences of decisions that redirected participants’ trajectories and enabled progression within the business start-sustainment-growth continuum. While Theme 2 highlighted how participants navigated entrepreneurial growth through strategic action and transition, the findings next turned to the contextual conditions that shaped the limits within which these strategies were enacted.

Table 6 provided a descriptive context for the findings associated with Research Question 2 by summarizing the distribution of NVivo-coded references and participant representation across the categories contributing to Theme 2, Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum. While the table did not indicate relative importance or causal weight, it illustrated the breadth of participant engagement across the five interrelated categories. It supported the analytic conclusion that business development emerged through multiple, overlapping processes related to initiation, sustainment, adaptation, resource use, and transition over time. While Research Question 2 focused on how participants initiated, sustained, and expanded their businesses, the

findings next turned to the contextual conditions that shaped the constraints within which these entrepreneurial processes occurred.

Table 6

Code Frequencies and Participants Under Theme 2 for RQ, Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum

Category (Cluster)	NVivo Coded References	Participants (n)	Participant IDs
Foundational Influences	21	11	P200-209, 211
Networked Knowledge Flows	44	10	P200-204, P207- 211
Adaptive Strategy Patterns	46	12	P200-211
Resource Deployment Strategies	21	10	P200, 202,203, 205-211
Transitional Pathways	21	7	P200-203, 208, 210, 211
Theme 2 Total	153		

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

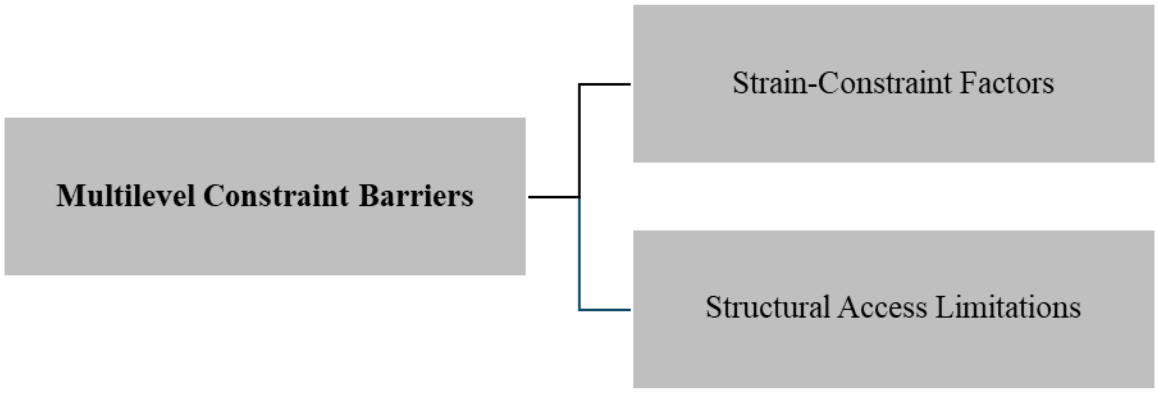
Research Question 3 asked: How does the current socioeconomic climate limit resource-based entrepreneurship theory strategies within African American male businesses in Houston, to the extent of causing low representation? Examined how participants described the external conditions and structural factors that constrained their entrepreneurial efforts. The findings associated with this research question focused on how socioeconomic conditions, access limitations, and systemic barriers shaped participants' ability to acquire resources, scale operations, and sustain long-term growth. Rather than centering on entrepreneurial action or

strategy, this question foregrounded the contextual pressures and constraints within which participants' business decisions were made.

Figure 3 illustrated the thematic architecture associated with Research Question 3, showing the code categories that collectively contributed to the development of Theme 3. While the figure offered structural orientation, the findings that followed described how participants' accounts clustered across these categories to reflect multilevel constraints shaping entrepreneurial activity.

Figure 3

Code Categories Contributing to Multilevel Constraint Barriers



Theme 3: Multilevel Constraint Barriers. Theme 3 captured how participants described multilevel constraints that limited access to resources, opportunities, and institutional support within the Houston entrepreneurial ecosystem. The data illustrated that these constraints operated across structural, financial, and psychological dimensions, shaping not only business outcomes but also participants' perceptions of possibility and sustainability. Within this theme,

participants' accounts clustered into two interrelated categories: Strain-Constraint Factors and Structural Access Limitations. Together, these categories reflected how internalized pressures associated with entrepreneurial strain intersected with external barriers related to funding, gatekeeping, and resource exclusion, constraining participants' capacity to sustain their businesses.

Strain-Constraint Factors (Category). Nested within the broader theme of Multilevel Constraint Barriers, the category Strain-Constraint Factors reflected how participants described the cumulative psychological, emotional, and physical pressures associated with navigating entrepreneurship under constrained conditions. Strain-Constraint Factors were supported by 17 NVivo-coded references across seven participants and illustrated cumulative psychological, emotional, and operational pressures associated with sustaining entrepreneurship under such circumstances. Primary codes contributing to this category included mental fatigue, responsibility overload, financial stress, and constant vigilance (see Table 7). Collectively, these codes revealed strain not as a singular stressor but as an ongoing condition shaped by responsibility overload, mental fatigue, vigilance, and the continual management of credibility, finances, and decision-making. Participants described these pressures as both internalized and externally reinforced, influencing how they sustained their businesses and navigated entrepreneurial demands over time.

Primary codes related to responsibility overload and mental fatigue illustrated how sustained entrepreneurial oversight produced cumulative strain. Participant 200 described the impossibility of maintaining comprehensive control, stating, "You've got to know all the customers, all the clients, and all the employees, and you can't do all that." This participant emphasized that challenges were ongoing rather than occasional, noting, "I had obstacles and

barriers every day," and reflected that the most difficult aspect was internal, explaining, "The biggest challenge in anything is the mindset I've had to deal with." These accounts highlighted how cognitive load and responsibility saturation contributed to sustained strain.

Primary codes associated with constant vigilance illustrated how internalized expectations intensified psychological strain. Participant 200 observed, "There's this disbelief with a lot of business owners… you have to be integral to everything that goes on in the business; you have to make all the major decisions." At the same time, this participant cautioned against expecting total preparedness before action, noting that "the journey is to learn." These reflections illustrated how internalized expectations intensified stress and delayed relief from self-imposed demands.

Primary codes related to financial stress illustrated how economic precarity compounded ongoing strain. Participant 201 described actively rejecting unfavorable opportunities to avoid long-term disadvantage, explaining that accepting lower-paying contracts would lead to continued exploitation. This participant stated that in trucking, "I was often offered lower-paying contracts than white counterparts," which required constant monitoring of rates, timing, and expenses. Operational penalties compounded stress, as "if you're late, you get fined $50… then $100… then $200," leading the participant to describe being "definitely stressed in everything that I'm doing." Early gaps in financial socialization further intensified pressure, as this participant reflected, "Growing up… nobody really just talked about finances."

Primary codes associated with mental fatigue and constant vigilance illustrated how identity-linked scrutiny intensified strain beyond routine business pressure. Participant 202 noted that "taking on more responsibility than they are" was a major early hindrance, particularly when working with brokers. Participant 203 described the mental effort required to navigate skepticism

and stereotypes, stating, “At times, this means I must work smarter to establish credibility,” and adding, “As a Black man, I sometimes had to work harder to establish credibility due to assumptions.” These experiences illustrated how identity-based scrutiny amplified psychological strain beyond routine business pressure.

Participants also described strain associated with isolation and limited advocacy. Participant 208 identified a lack of industry representation, stating, “The major resource gap was the fact that I knew too few people who were actively involved in the industry who could vouch for my capabilities,” and emphasized the underrepresentation of African Americans in that sector. Participant 211 pointed to the uncertainty inherent in opaque systems, noting that “even with a strong application, decisions are still subjective,” and expressed concern that algorithmic decision-making introduced additional stress due to potential bias.

Collectively, participants described strain-constraint factors as persistent conditions that accumulated across mental, emotional, and physical dimensions. These pressures did not occur in isolation but compounded over time, shaping how participants managed responsibility, sustained endurance, and navigated environments characterized by heightened scrutiny, uncertainty, and limited margin for error. While participants described strain as something they carried internally, sustained responsibility, vigilance, and emotional endurance, these pressures did not develop in isolation. Many of the stressors participants experienced were intensified by external conditions that shaped what resources were available, who controlled access, and how opportunities were distributed. In this way, internal strain was frequently intertwined with broader structural constraints that influenced participants’ ability to secure support, capital, and institutional recognition.

Structural Access Limitations (Category). Structural Access Limitations had been supported by 32 NVivo-coded references across 11 participants and reflected recurring experiences of restricted access to capital, institutional gatekeeping, and regulatory barriers that constrained business sustainability and expansion. Primary codes contributing to this category included loan denial, institutional scrutiny, regulatory burden, and restricted access to networks (see Table 7). Collectively, these codes captured how participants had described barriers embedded within financial, institutional, and regulatory systems rather than isolated or episodic obstacles. Participants emphasized that these limitations had been encountered repeatedly when seeking funding, navigating gatekeeping practices, or engaging with institutions intended to support entrepreneurship. These structural barriers had constrained access to capital, limited favorable terms, and slowed expansion, shaping not only the scale and pace of business growth but also the level of personal risk, persistence, and strategic maneuvering required to remain viable.

Primary codes related to loan denial and restricted access to capital illustrated how structural barriers constrained business expansion. Participant 200 explained that structural conditions “kept you at a certain size,” signaling how external constraints, not lack of effort, restricted expansion. Participant 211 echoed this connection between capital and growth, stating, “Growth was directly tied to capital. Without it, everything slowed down.” These accounts underscored how access limitations functioned as structural ceilings rather than motivational barriers.

Primary codes associated with restricted access to networks illustrated how informational exclusion delayed entrepreneurial progress. Participants frequently described limited access to institutional support and information, particularly early in their entrepreneurial journeys.

Participant 201 reflected that “some of the things I didn’t even know, like SBA… they helped you come up with a business plan… gave you funding,” noting that the absence of early guidance contributed to prolonged self-funding. This participant explained, “I pretty much funded everything myself… if something broke down… it was very tough,” and added, “I didn’t have those resources, so I couldn’t get them from anybody or get any help from anybody.” These experiences illustrated how informational gaps compounded financial vulnerability.

Primary codes related to institutional scrutiny and regulatory burden illustrated how gatekeeping practices restricted equitable access to opportunity. Participant 201 noted having been offered less favorable contracts, explaining that instead of earning “$8 a mile,” they were repeatedly offered “$3.50 a mile,” and situated this experience within a historical context, stating, “If you go back to the 70s… trucking industry… good-old-boys network that marginalized Black entrepreneurs.” This participant further observed that increasing regulatory requirements appeared exclusionary, noting, “They were making it so tough… putting qualifications in place so people couldn’t just get a license.” Participant 202 similarly described early experiences in which “brokers overcharged for loads and gave minimal percentages,” reinforcing patterns of constrained access through intermediaries.

Primary codes associated with loan denial illustrated how repeated rejection limited scalability despite preparedness. Banking and credit access emerged as a consistent challenge across industries. Participant 204 stated, “In banking, my applications seemed to get more scrutiny,” and described facing “extra hurdles with permits, inspections, and zoning.” Despite having a solid plan, this participant explained, “Banks turned me down multiple times despite my solid plan and decent credit,” limiting their ability to expand or market effectively. Participant 205 similarly reported, “I got denied lines of credit even after years of consistent sales,” and

described leasing barriers, noting that “the good locations weren’t made available to me without extra hurdles.” This participant added, “Some landlords weren’t quick to negotiate with me, and I felt judged based on my appearance.”

Participants in agriculture and healthcare described structural constraints tied to industry concentration and institutional power. Participant 206 explained that expansion had required loans and access to agricultural programs, but “that was harder,” adding, “Slaughterhouses were few, and the big processors dominated.” As a result, “getting fair pricing and access to facilities had been a fight.” Participant 207 described similar disparities in healthcare, stating, “Banks were reluctant, even though I had a solid business plan,” and explained that “insurance reimbursements were a nightmare,” noting that large hospital systems negotiated better rates, leaving independent practices at a disadvantage.

Primary codes related to restricted network access illustrated how closed referral systems limited entry for African American entrepreneurs. Participant 208 explained that entering insurance adjusting depended heavily on referrals, stating that new adjusters must have been “referred by an experienced adjuster,” and that in the absence of connections, “it would usually take many calls to reach the person making the deployment decision.” This participant identified the “close-knit nature of the Adjuster community” and noted that “very few people of color were involved,” resulting in “a lot of nepotism and favoritism.”

Across accounts, participants emphasized that structural access limitations had required them to rely heavily on personal savings, family support, or bootstrapping strategies. Participant 209 explained, “Banks weren’t quick to give me loans, so I had to bootstrap,” and described zoning and permitting challenges that slowed expansion. Even after years of steady revenue, this

participant noted, “I still got denied loans that other shops seemed to get.” These patterns reinforced the perception that access had been uneven and conditional rather than merit-based.

Collectively, participants had described structural access limitations as persistent, layered barriers that shaped the pace, scale, and sustainability of their businesses. These constraints extended beyond individual preparedness or effort, requiring entrepreneurs to absorb greater personal risk, navigate opaque systems, and accept delayed growth. Within the Houston entrepreneurial ecosystem, access to capital, institutional support, and opportunity had frequently been experienced as negotiated rather than guaranteed, reinforcing disparities that constrained long-term expansion.

At the same time, participants’ accounts revealed how these external barriers intersected with internalized strain. Rather than encountering obstacles as isolated incidents, participants had described how sustained stress, mental fatigue, and responsibility overload accumulated alongside repeated encounters with funding restrictions, institutional gatekeeping, and regulatory burden. These multilevel constraints shaped not only business outcomes but also the personal endurance required to remain operational over time. Together, the findings illustrated how entrepreneurial activity unfolded within bounded conditions that narrowed strategic options, heightened personal risk, and continuously tested participants’ resilience, adaptability, and persistence.

Table 7 provided descriptive context for the findings associated with Research Question 3 by summarizing the distribution of NVivo-coded references and participant representation across the categories contributing to Theme 3, Multilevel Constraint Barriers. The table offered an overview of how participant engagement had been distributed across strain-related pressures and structural access limitations, supporting the analytic conclusion that entrepreneurial constraints

had been experienced as layered and interconnected across psychological, financial, and institutional dimensions.

Table 7

Codes and Frequencies Under Theme 3 for RQ3, Multilevel Constraint Barriers

Category (Cluster)	NVivo Coded References	Participants (n)	Participant IDs
Strain-Constraint Factors	17	7	P200-203, 208, 210, 211
Structural Access Limitations	32	11	P200-202, P204-211
Theme 3 Total	49		

While Research Question 3 examined how socioeconomic conditions and structural barriers constrained entrepreneurial activity, the analysis shifted to how participants' experiences aligned with key aspects of minority entrepreneurship theory. This transition changed the analytic focus from contextual limitations to the theoretical mechanisms that helped explain persistent underrepresentation within African American entrepreneurship in Houston.

Research Question 4 (RQ4)

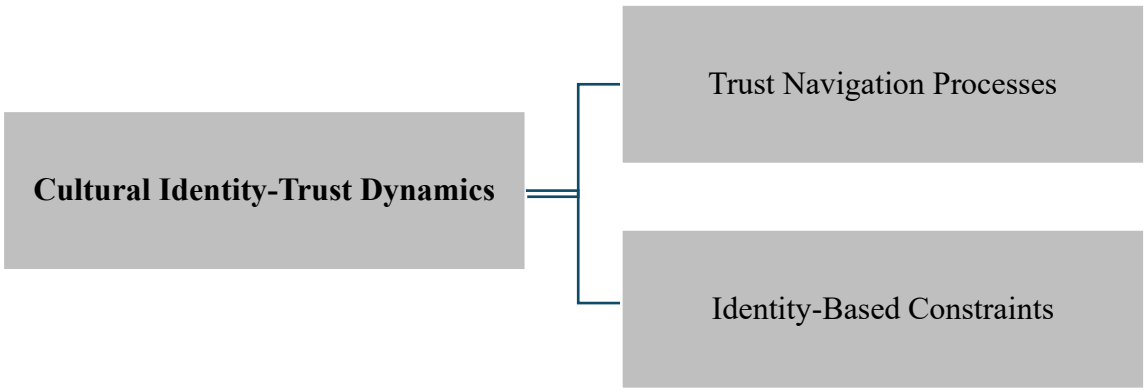
Research Question 4 asked: What aspects of minority entrepreneurship theory contribute to the low representation of African American male business owners in Houston? The examination of participants' experiences reflected theoretical elements commonly associated with minority entrepreneurship, including constrained access to opportunity structures, unequal resource accumulation, and differential exposure to market and institutional support. The findings associated with this question focused on how these theory-consistent dynamics manifested in participants' entrepreneurial trajectories and contributed to patterns of underrepresentation. Rather than introducing new explanatory constructs, this research question

situated participant accounts within established minority entrepreneurship frameworks to illuminate how systemic conditions shaped entrepreneurial participation and persistence.

Figure 4 illustrated the thematic architecture associated with Research Question 4, showing the code categories that collectively contributed to the development of Theme 4. The figure offered structural orientation for the findings by mapping how participant accounts clustered around theory-consistent dimensions of minority entrepreneurship.

Figure 4

Code Categories Contributing to Cultural Identity–Trust Dynamics



Theme 4: Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics. Theme 4 captured how participants described experiences that aligned with key aspects of minority entrepreneurship theory related to identity, trust, and social positioning. The data illustrated how participants' entrepreneurial trajectories were shaped not only by access to resources or structural conditions, but also by how trust was formed, evaluated, and negotiated within business relationships, and how identity influenced perceptions of credibility, belonging, and opportunity. These dynamics contributed to

patterns of engagement and disengagement that helped explain persistent underrepresentation among African American business owners in Houston.

Within this theme, participants' accounts clustered into two interrelated categories: Trust Navigation Processes and Identity-Based Constraints. Together, these categories reflected how participants consciously interpreted relational interactions and identity-linked perceptions while making entrepreneurial decisions. Rather than functioning as abstract concepts, trust and identity emerged through lived experiences that shaped how participants assessed risk, pursued opportunities, and navigated environments where legitimacy and acceptance were often uncertain.

Trust Navigation Processes (Category). Trust Navigation Processes were supported by 22 NVivo-coded references across nine participants and reflected patterned processes through which participants evaluated, negotiated, and recalibrated trust in entrepreneurial relationships. Primary codes contributing to this category included relational caution, credibility assessment, prior racialized experience, and strategic partnership decisions. Nested within the broader theme of Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics, these codes captured lived experiences through which participants consciously formed, assessed, and adjusted trust while engaging in entrepreneurial decision-making contexts. Participants consistently described trust not as an assumed condition but as something actively negotiated over time through repeated interactions, observed behavior, and contextual cues. Across narratives, trust navigation was shaped by prior socialization, racialized experiences, and ongoing assessments of perceived credibility and competence, influencing how participants selected partners, engaged with institutions, and determined the extent to which they relied on others while pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities.

Primary codes related to prior racialized experience and relational caution illustrated how early socialization shaped participants' approaches to trust. Participant 200 reflected on growing up in a segregated environment and learning implicit rules about social and professional boundaries, explaining that "nobody just sat down with me and just laid it out… it was just something that was known." This participant connected those experiences to later business interactions, noting that "most of the folks I was doing business with were white folks," and expressed hesitation and caution in extending trust. Trust, in this context, was framed as something that required careful evaluation rather than default reliance.

Primary codes associated with credibility assessment and strategic partnership decisions illustrated how participants adjusted trust based on observed patterns of differential treatment. Participant 201 explained encountering situations in which they received "the short end of the stick," prompting a decision to "find other people to partner with." This participant noted that hiring white administrative staff sometimes resulted in being treated more favorably in contractual arrangements, stating, "I tended to get the better end of the contract." These accounts illustrated how trust decisions were shaped by observed patterns of differential treatment and pragmatic adaptation rather than abstract preference.

Primary codes related to relational caution illustrated how trust navigation varied across professional environments. Participant 203 explained that trust-related challenges were more pronounced in corporate environments, stating, "…this was more of a problem for me when I was in Corporate America," and noted that entrepreneurship provided greater control over relational boundaries. In contrast, Participant 205 described navigating dual perceptions, explaining that "being male sometimes gave me an edge, but being Black often created an extra

barrier of suspicion or doubt." This participant recounted wholesalers making assumptions about the nature of their business before engagement, reinforcing the need to manage trust carefully.

The primary codes associated with the credibility assessment illustrated how misrecognition required participants to actively establish legitimacy. Participants in agriculture and healthcare described trust as something that had to be actively earned due to misaligned expectations. Participant 206 noted that people were often surprised to learn they owned both a cattle operation and a retail market, explaining that "small Black-owned ranching operations are not what people expect." This participant described loan officers questioning ownership and legitimacy and emphasized that "over time, consistency and visibility helped me build a loyal base." Similarly, Participant 207 described being misrecognized at professional events, stating that people often assumed they were "just a guest or a vendor," rather than a physician operating a practice. This participant also highlighted navigating patient mistrust rooted in broader historical experiences, noting an awareness of "the mistrust some patients carry toward the healthcare system."

Primary codes related to relational caution and credibility assessment illustrated how heightened self-monitoring served as a trust-negotiation strategy. Participant 208 explained that working in professional spaces with limited racial representation created an environment where performance was constantly evaluated, stating, "there was always an unspoken question of competency." As a result, this participant described striving for exceptional thoroughness and professionalism to counter anticipated scrutiny. Participant 209 echoed similar experiences, noting that while gender sometimes facilitated trust in technical settings, "being Black added another layer of skepticism," with suppliers assuming the business was informal or illegitimate.

Primary codes associated with strategic partnership decisions illustrated how participants relied on demonstrated outcomes to recalibrate trust. Participant 210 explained experiencing situations where ideas were initially dismissed, stating that they were not taken seriously "until someone else echoed them." Rather than disengaging, this participant described using results as validation and leveraging these experiences to advocate for others, emphasizing persistence and demonstrated competence as tools for navigating trust.

Collectively, the data indicated that trust navigation processes functioned as active, ongoing assessments shaped by racialized experiences, professional context, and observed behavior. Participants did not approach trust as a static trait but as a strategic process that influenced partnership decisions, engagement with institutions, and the degree of reliance placed on others. These dynamics aligned with minority entrepreneurship theory by illustrating how relational trust often had to be deliberately negotiated in environments where credibility and legitimacy were not uniformly granted. While trust navigation reflected how participants evaluated relationships over time, participants also described constraints that operated before interaction, rooted in how their identities were perceived and interpreted within entrepreneurial spaces.

Identity-Based Constraints (Category). Identity-Based Constraints were supported by 19 NVivo-coded references across eight participants and captured how perceptions tied to racial identity, professional presentation, and cultural positioning shaped access to opportunity and credibility (see Table 8). Primary codes contributing to this category included heightened scrutiny, over-preparation, self-monitoring, and identity-linked credibility challenges. Collectively, these codes reflected lived experiences in which participants consciously perceived limitations and pressures associated with how they were seen by others and how they understood

themselves within entrepreneurial spaces. Across participant narratives, identity emerged as an active dimension of entrepreneurship rather than a neutral background characteristic. Participants described how racial identity, gender, professional presentation, and cultural positioning shaped interactions with customers, institutions, and gatekeepers, influencing credibility assessments, access to opportunity, emotional labor, and decisions about when to assert, adapt, or withhold aspects of identity in business settings.

Primary codes related to identity-linked credibility challenges and self-monitoring illustrated how internalized evaluation shaped entrepreneurial confidence. Participant 200 reflected on early comparisons with established professionals, stating, “I would look at those guys who were doing consulting, and I was thinking, am I good enough, am I smart enough?” This participant described beginning in Houston with minimal contacts, noting, “I started from ground zero,” and emphasized that one of the most persistent challenges involved mindset rather than technical skill, explaining, “The biggest challenge out here in running the business is the mindset that I’ve had to deal with.” These accounts illustrated how internal validation and self-belief were actively negotiated rather than assumed.

Primary codes associated with heightened scrutiny illustrated how participants learned to interrogate refusals rather than accept them at face value. Participants described identity-based vigilance shaped by awareness of unequal intentions and uneven support. Participant 201 explained learning to interrogate refusals rather than accept them at face value, stating, “As a Black man, I learned not to take ‘no’ at face value. I had to go and investigate and research for myself.” This participant emphasized the need for perseverance and discernment, noting that “everybody don’t want to see you get as far as they have sometimes,” while also recognizing the

value of mentors who were willing to share information fully. These experiences reflected how identity-informed strategies for interpreting feedback and navigating opportunity developed.

Primary codes related to self-monitoring illustrated how internalized narratives constrained action prior to external barriers. Participant 203 stated, “Most of my barriers were self-imposed from negative self-talk,” and explained overcoming these constraints by deliberately changing “mindset, habits, and routines.” Similarly, Participant 210 acknowledged moments of doubt, noting, “I had moments where I wondered if I was good enough,” and described the added awareness of being “one of the few people who look like me in certain rooms.” These accounts highlighted how identity-based constraints operated internally alongside external conditions.

Primary codes associated with over-preparation and heightened scrutiny illustrated how participants responded strategically to anticipated evaluation. Participant 204 explained, “I made sure all my paperwork was flawless. Persistence and documentation were my main tools,” and stated directly, “Being a Black man in business means I often feel I have to prove myself twice as much.” This participant further noted that while gender could be advantageous in some negotiations, “being Black often makes people underestimate me.” Participant 205 echoed this experience, stating, “Being a Black man in fashion means I constantly have to prove the legitimacy of my business.” These narratives illustrated how identity shaped the effort required to establish credibility.

Primary codes related to identity-linked credibility challenges illustrated how identity considerations shaped strategic decisions about visibility and representation. Participant 211 explained, “We’ve also made strategic decisions, like not putting our faces on our website to avoid unconscious bias,” highlighting how identity considerations informed branding and

visibility choices. In contrast, Participant 207 described the positive representational impact of visibility, noting that patients found it meaningful to see “a Black physician owning a clinic,” which challenged stereotypes and reinforced representation within the community. Together, these accounts demonstrated how identity-based constraints were navigated through both concealment and assertion, depending on context.

Collectively, the data indicated that identity-based constraints shaped entrepreneurial experiences through both internalized self-assessment and externally mediated perception. Participants described continuously interpreting how they were seen, adjusting behavior and presentation, and managing the emotional and cognitive labor associated with credibility, legitimacy, and representation. These dynamics aligned with minority entrepreneurship theory by illustrating how identity operated as a structuring condition that influenced access, effort, and persistence, contributing to patterns of underrepresentation beyond individual capability or motivation.

Table 8 provided descriptive context for the findings associated with Research Question 4 by summarizing the distribution of NVivo-coded references and participant representation across the categories contributing to Theme 4, Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics. The table supported transparency in the analytic process by illustrating how participant experiences were distributed across trust navigation processes and identity-based constraints, reinforcing the role of minority entrepreneurship theory in understanding patterns of underrepresentation.

Collectively, the findings associated with Theme 4 demonstrated that cultural identity and trust dynamics played a significant role in shaping participants’ entrepreneurial experiences. Participants described how trust was not assumed but actively navigated through ongoing assessment of relationships, observed behavior, and prior racialized experiences. These trust

navigation processes influenced how participants selected partners, engaged with institutions, and determined the extent to which they relied on others when pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities.

At the same time, participants described identity-based constraints that operated independently of relational trust, shaping access to opportunity and the effort required to establish legitimacy. Across narratives, racial identity, professional presentation, and cultural positioning influenced how participants were perceived within entrepreneurial spaces, often requiring heightened self-monitoring, over-preparation, or strategic adaptation. Together, trust navigation processes and identity-based constraints illustrated how minority entrepreneurship dynamics functioned as lived conditions that shaped credibility, access to opportunities, and persistence, contributing to patterns of underrepresentation among African American business owners in Houston.

Table 8

Codes and Frequencies Under Theme 4 for RQ4, Identity-Based Constraints

Category (Cluster)	NVivo Coded References	Participants (n)	Participant IDs
Trust Navigation Processes	22	9	P200-201, 203, 205-210
Identity-Based Constraints	19	8	P200-201, 203-205, 207,210, 211
Theme 4 Total	41		

Across these themes, the findings illustrated that entrepreneurial participation and persistence were shaped by the interaction of cultural values, strategic action, structural conditions, and identity-based dynamics. Participants described how culturally rooted

orientations informed business behavior, how growth unfolded through adaptive processes rather than linear stages, how structural and psychological constraints limited expansion, and how trust and identity influenced access, legitimacy, and representation. Together, these findings provided a comprehensive account of the conditions that contributed to the low representation of African American business owners in Houston, as experienced by those who navigated entrepreneurship in this context.

Comparison of Results to the Literature Review

This section compared the study's results to the existing scholarship and relevant theoretical perspectives. The discussion was organized by research question and focused on the extent to which the findings aligned with, extended, or diverged from prior research and the four theoretical lenses: anthropological entrepreneurship theory (AET), contemporary entrepreneurship theory (CET), minority entrepreneurship theory (MET), and resource-based entrepreneurship theory (RBET) (Baker & Welter, 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Verver & de Koning, 2023). Consistent with the study's qualitative design, comparisons were interpretive rather than causal and remained bounded to what the findings directly supported.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Cultural Traditions Influencing Entrepreneurial Experience.

What cultural traditions influenced the entrepreneurial experiences of African-American male business owners in Houston? The findings associated with Theme 1 (Cultural Work Ethic Influence) aligned with anthropological entrepreneurship theory (AET), which conceptualized culture as an enabling infrastructure for entrepreneurial resilience rather than a background attribute. Participants described discipline and resilience as learned, value-driven practices embedded within social norms, communal expectations, and historically patterned forms of accountability. This perspective was consistent with AET scholarship, which emphasized that

economic behavior was socially embedded and shaped by culturally transmitted norms, mutual support structures, and collective meaning-making processes, particularly within marginalized entrepreneurial contexts (Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020; Verver & de Koning, 2023). Participants' accounts illustrated how work ethic was cultivated through cultural socialization and reinforced through ongoing accountability to community, purpose, and reputation.

The category of Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks reflected a well-documented emphasis in entrepreneurship scholarship on kinship, faith, and community ties as mechanisms of resilience, mentorship, and resource-sharing, particularly in contexts where institutional access was constrained (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020). Prior research conceptualized these relationships as "strong ties" that provided identity reinforcement, moral guidance, and stabilization during periods of uncertainty (Granovetter, 1985; Light & Dana, 2019). Participants' accounts converged with this literature, as community and faith networks were consistently described as durable sources of perseverance, ethical orientation, and meaning-making, rather than as episodic or transactional forms of support (Perry et al., 2022; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

At the same time, the findings sharpened existing scholarship on cultural identity by illustrating how identity functioned not only as a source of resilience but also as a structuring influence on entrepreneurial behavior. Prior research had emphasized cultural heritage as a differentiator and a resource for resilience, particularly within racially stratified and regionally complex entrepreneurial environments such as Houston (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Verver & de Koning, 2023). The findings extended this literature by demonstrating how identity positioning operated as an active interpretive process rather than a static background condition. Participants described consciously calibrating leadership responsibility, personal

standards, and long-term vision in relation to cultural expectations and observed contrasts in opportunity structures. This aligned with recent work that emphasized identity work as central to entrepreneurial agency, showing how culture became actionable through lived interpretation rather than remaining an abstract contextual influence (Santos et al., 2024; Verver & de Koning, 2023).

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Processes Supporting Business Start, Sustainment, and Growth

What aspects of contemporary entrepreneurship theory encouraged and sustained business growth within African-American male businesses to increase their presence in Houston? The findings associated with Theme 2 (Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum) aligned with contemporary entrepreneurship scholarship that conceptualized entrepreneurial development as adaptive, iterative, and networked rather than linear or stage-bound (Baker & Welter, 2020; Thompson et al., 2020). Contemporary entrepreneurship theory emphasized how entrepreneurs navigated dynamic markets through flexibility, experimentation, learning-by-doing, and responsiveness to disruption (Baker & Welter, 2020; Conley & Bilimoria, 2022). Participants' accounts converged with this perspective, describing growth as an ongoing process shaped by recalibration, experiential learning, and continuous adjustment to changing conditions.

The category Networked Knowledge Flows further reinforced the centrality of relational and informational infrastructures in entrepreneurial continuity. Prior research consistently identified mentorship, peer exchange, and professional networks as key mechanisms through which entrepreneurs accessed knowledge, refined strategy, and sustained confidence, particularly when formal education or institutional pathways were unevenly accessible (Baker & Welter, 2020; Conley & Bilimoria, 2022; Perry et al., 2022). Participants repeatedly described

mentorship relationships, peer learning, and chamber-based networking as sources of guidance and validation, underscoring the role of networks as ongoing learning systems rather than episodic supports.

The findings also aligned closely with resource-based entrepreneurship theory, particularly scholarship emphasizing that minority entrepreneurs often depended on intangible resources, such as relationships, experiential knowledge, mentorship, and accumulated expertise, to compensate for constrained access to financial capital (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Perry et al., 2022). Participants described resource deployment as a strategic and adaptive process, involving role delegation, the use of professional advisors (e.g., accountants, attorneys, business coaches), and iterative refinement of plans following rejection. This was consistent with research emphasizing that effective resource utilization was not a one-time acquisition event but an ongoing organizational practice shaped by scarcity and learning (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023).

Where the findings added nuance was in how the entrepreneurial "continuum" was experienced as a lived sequence of transitions rather than solely as a conceptual growth model. While the literature broadly addressed adaptation and innovation, participants foregrounded transition points, such as leaving structured employment, relocating for opportunity, or responding to catalytic events, as pivotal moments shaping entrepreneurial direction. These accounts extended existing frameworks by specifying how adaptation and resource dynamics were enacted through turning points, identity shifts, and strategic repositioning already implied by the literature's emphasis on entrepreneurial dynamism (Baker & Welter, 2020; Chen et al., 2022).

Research Question 3 (RQ3): Socioeconomic Constraints Limiting Resource-Based Entrepreneurship

How did the current socioeconomic climate limit resource-based entrepreneurship theory strategies within African-American male businesses in Houston to the extent of causing low representation? The findings associated with Theme 3 (Multilevel Constraint Barriers) were strongly consistent with extensive scholarship that documented structural inequities and resource scarcity as persistent constraints shaping Black entrepreneurship outcomes. Research repeatedly identified discriminatory lending practices, limited access to capital, and uneven institutional support as central barriers to business scaling and sustainability (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024). Participants' descriptions of constrained financing, heightened banking-sector scrutiny, unequal contract terms, and institutional gatekeeping converged directly with this body of research.

The category Structural Access Limitations further aligned with resource-based entrepreneurship theory's emphasis that scarcity was not merely an individual deficit but a condition produced by inequitable systems of allocation and opportunity (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023). Participants described business growth as effectively "capped" by capital constraints and institutional friction, reinforcing the argument that environmental conditions shaped the range of viable entrepreneurial strategies. These findings also mirrored research highlighting fragmented support ecosystems for native-born African American entrepreneurs compared to the more cohesive enclave dynamics that were often available to immigrant communities, particularly regarding advocacy, sponsorship, and access to "who can vouch for you" networks (Light & Dana, 2019; Ogbolu & Singh, 2019; Perry et al., 2022; Ruef & Grigoryeva, 2020).

The category Strain Constraint Factors complemented this structural emphasis by illustrating how prolonged exposure to constraint produced cumulative psychological and operational strain. Prior research emphasized that systemic barriers operated continuously rather than episodically, generating sustained pressure over time (Fairlie et al., 2022; Klineberg & Bozick, 2022). Participants' narratives of responsibility overload, vigilance, and mental fatigue provided experiential detail consistent with this framing, demonstrating how structural inequities were lived as ongoing burdens that shaped daily decision-making, endurance, and persistence (Perry et al., 2022).

Research Question 4 (RQ4): Minority Entrepreneurship Dynamics Shaping Underrepresentation

What aspects of minority entrepreneurship theory contributed to the low representation of African-American male business owners in Houston? The findings associated with Theme 4 (Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics) aligned with minority entrepreneurship theory, which conceptualized underrepresentation as a product of unequal opportunity structures, constrained resource accumulation, and relational dynamics shaped by racialized contexts (Bruton et al., 2023; Sithas & Surangi, 2021). Scholarship emphasized that minority entrepreneurs had to navigate environments in which credibility, legitimacy, and trust were unevenly granted, and where cultural identity could both buffer constraints and shape market positioning (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022).

Participants’ accounts converged with this literature, describing trust as actively negotiated rather than assumed. The category Trust Navigation Processes reflected research highlighting how minority entrepreneurs had to continually assess relational conditions, interpret institutional signals, and adjust engagement strategies in environments where access was

mediated through informal gatekeeping mechanisms (Bruton et al., 2023; Light & Dana, 2019). Participants described calibrating partnership decisions, assessing institutions, and adjusting engagement strategies based on observed inequities and prior experiences. These findings reinforced MET's relevance to the lived mechanics of underrepresentation, primarily where relational "access" functioned as a gatekeeping mechanism alongside financial access.

The category Identity-Based Constraints likewise emphasized identity as a dual force, both an asset and a liability, shaping entrepreneurial trajectories (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Santos et al., 2024). Participants described heightened scrutiny, the felt need to over-prepare, and strategic choices about visibility and presentation. These accounts aligned with the literature review's discussion of how racial identity shaped market dynamics and resource access, and they also provided culturally resonant value propositions in underserved markets (Santos et al., 2024). Importantly, the findings did not suggest that identity alone "caused" underrepresentation; instead, identity dynamics operated as lived conditions that influenced effort, legitimacy negotiations, and access to opportunities, consistent with MET's emphasis on structural and relational constraints (Bruton et al., 2023; Sithas & Surangi, 2021).

Taken together, the Chapter 4 findings demonstrated broad alignment with existing scholarship across anthropological entrepreneurship theory, contemporary entrepreneurship theory, resource-based entrepreneurship theory, and minority entrepreneurship theory. Cultural and community systems supported resilience (AET), entrepreneurial growth was sustained through adaptive learning and networks (CET), resource scarcity and unequal access shaped strategy boundaries (RBET), and identity-trust dynamics influenced legitimacy and opportunity navigation (MET) (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Verver & de Koning, 2023). The primary contribution at the results-to-literature boundary

was not a new theoretical claim but a grounded, phenomenological articulation of how these dynamics were lived, sequenced, and interpreted by African American male entrepreneurs in Houston.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings of this qualitative phenomenological study that explored the lived entrepreneurial experiences of African American male business owners in Houston. Guided by four research questions, the analysis produced four overarching themes: Cultural Work Ethic Influence (RQ1), Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum (RQ2), Multilevel Constraint Barriers (RQ3), and Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics (RQ4). Across these themes, participants described entrepreneurship as shaped by culturally grounded work ethics and community support systems, enacted through iterative learning and adaptive strategies, constrained by structural access barriers and accumulated strain, and continuously negotiated through trust and identity dynamics within entrepreneurial spaces.

The Comparison of Results to the Literature Review situated these findings within established scholarship on cultural resilience, contemporary entrepreneurial adaptation, resource-based constraints, and minority entrepreneurship dynamics. Across themes, participants' accounts aligned closely with prior research that emphasized the role of culturally embedded work practices, networked learning and mentorship, systemic inequities in resource access, and identity-trust processes that shaped entrepreneurial legitimacy and opportunity navigation (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2022; Fairlie et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022). Rather than introducing new theoretical claims, the findings provided phenomenological detail that clarified how these dynamics were lived, sequenced, and

interpreted within the entrepreneurial experiences of African American men operating in Houston's complex economic environment.

Chapter 5 built on these results by interpreting their meaning in relation to the study's purpose, examining implications for practice and policy, and identifying directions for future research. Drawing on minority entrepreneurship theory and related perspectives, the discussion advanced the understanding of how structural, cultural, and relational forces interacted to shape entrepreneurial underrepresentation and resilience. In doing so, the chapter integrated the study's findings with existing scholarship to clarify both the persistence of underrepresentation and the conditions under which entrepreneurial agency was exercised.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Study Summary

The problem addressed in this study was the low representation of African American male entrepreneurial business owners in Houston, reflecting broader systemic challenges to achieving racial equity in business ownership. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the low representation of African American male entrepreneurial business owners in Houston through the lived experiences of the underrepresented male African American entrepreneurs in Houston. Chapter 5 built on the findings presented in Chapter 4 by interpreting the results in relation to the study's research questions, conceptual framework, and the broader scholarly literature.

This applied qualitative phenomenological study used purposive sampling to recruit 12 African American male entrepreneurs in Houston and collected data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. Data analysis followed Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's phenomenological reduction, supported by NVivo 15 to code transcripts, cluster meaning units, and develop themes aligned with the study's research questions. The findings yielded four themes corresponding to RQ1-RQ4: Theme 1, Cultural Work Ethic Influence; Theme 2, Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum; Theme 3, Multilevel Constraint Barriers; and Theme 4, Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics.

Although participants' narratives provided rich, detailed accounts of entrepreneurial experience, the study was bounded by limitations common to phenomenological inquiry, including a geographically specific sample, a small participant group, and reliance on self-reported experiences that reflected participants' perceptions and meaning-making. Despite these limitations, the results provided a grounded account of the cultural, strategic, structural, and minority entrepreneurship dynamics that contributed to underrepresentation among African

American male business owners in Houston. The findings were interpreted in relation to the study's conceptual framework and relevant entrepreneurship scholarship. The discussion was organized by research question, followed by recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, and a concluding study summary.

Discussion

This study sought to address the persistent underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston by examining the cultural, strategic, structural, and identity-based dimensions that shaped their entrepreneurial experiences. Interpreted through the study's conceptual framework, the findings engaged directly with prior scholarship on minority entrepreneurship, social capital, and resource-based constraints that documented persistent disparities in access to capital, networks, and institutional support for African American business owners (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023; Fairlie et al., 2022). In this respect, the findings contributed to the literature by clarifying how culturally embedded motivations and adaptive strategies interacted with structurally constrained entrepreneurial ecosystems, extending existing explanations beyond individual-level determinants.

Across the four research questions, the results were largely consistent with research emphasizing the centrality of social networks, community-based resources, and experiential knowledge in minority entrepreneurial outcomes (Light & Dana, 2019; Sithas & Surangi, 2021; Thompson et al., 2020). At the same time, the findings refined these perspectives by illustrating how identity-based trust dynamics and localized community structures shaped entrepreneurial persistence and growth within a large metropolitan context. Where prior studies had emphasized generalized structural barriers, the findings suggested that the interaction between cultural identity and relational trust offered a plausible explanation for variation in entrepreneurial

strategies observed across participants, thereby extending contemporary minority entrepreneurship theory.

Interpretive Context and Influencing Factors

Interpretation of these findings was informed by contextual factors that emerged directly from participants' narratives. Across interviews, participants consistently described operating within an entrepreneurial environment shaped by longstanding structural inequities, shifting political climates, and evolving institutional relationships. These contextual conditions influenced how participants interpreted their opportunities, constraints, and decision-making processes, shaping how experiences were recalled and how meaning was constructed during interviews. Rather than describing isolated circumstances, participants articulated shared conditions that framed their entrepreneurial realities within Houston's broader business ecosystem.

Participants frequently referenced heightened skepticism toward public institutions, regulatory bodies, and formal funding mechanisms, which they attributed to broader state- and local-level political dynamics affecting minority business support. Narratives reflected perceptions of policy environments that were viewed as unstable or unsupportive, contributing to a cautious approach to growth, external partnerships, and formal financing. These perceptions appeared to influence how participants framed their entrepreneurial strategies, with many emphasizing self-reliance, community-based solutions, and risk mitigation as adaptive responses to uncertainty. Such responses were not framed as individual preferences but as rational strategies shaped by environmental conditions.

Participants' interpretations were also shaped by collective and historical experiences related to race, trust, and economic participation. Narratives reflected an awareness of prior

exclusion from mainstream entrepreneurial systems, which informed guarded expectations and reinforced adaptive behaviors. These shared experiences influenced how participants defined success, sustainability, and agency, situating entrepreneurship as both an economic activity and a means of navigating structural constraints. Together, these contextual influences shaped how participants made sense of their entrepreneurial journeys and articulated their experiences during interviews, providing essential interpretive context for understanding the meaning embedded in the study's findings.

Cultural Work Ethic Influence. What cultural traditions influenced the entrepreneurial experiences of African-American male business owners in Houston? Findings related to Research Question 1 indicated that participants' entrepreneurial engagement was deeply rooted in culturally embedded work ethic values transmitted through family, faith, and community traditions. Participants described entrepreneurship as an extension of collective responsibility, cultural continuity, and intergenerational obligation rather than solely an individual economic pursuit. These narratives directly supported Baker and Welter's (2020) view of contextual embeddedness, in which entrepreneurship emerged from cultural expectations and social responsibilities that extended beyond individual profit motives.

The findings further corroborated minority entrepreneurship scholarship that identified culture, family socialization, and community norms as central drivers of entrepreneurial intent and persistence among underrepresented groups (Light & Dana, 2019; Sithas & Surangi, 2021). Participants' narratives reflected patterns described in prior studies, in which entrepreneurial motivation was intertwined with collective advancement and responsibility rather than with individual wealth accumulation alone. In this respect, the findings reinforced existing research by

demonstrating how cultural values functioned not as peripheral influences but as core organizing principles of entrepreneurial behavior.

At the same time, the findings extended this body of literature by illustrating how a culturally grounded work ethic operated within a historically racialized urban economic context. Participants' shared location within Houston's entrepreneurial ecosystem heightened the salience of cultural responsibility, positioning work ethic as both a stabilizing force and an obligation. This contextual emphasis built on prior work by Thompson et al. (2020) and Bruton et al. (2023), which highlighted how structural inequities interacted with cultural resources to shape minority entrepreneurial resilience and persistence.

Theme 1 was constructed from the convergent categories of discipline-resilience practices, identity positioning, and traditions of cultural support through community and faith networks. These findings directly addressed the study's problem by demonstrating that African American entrepreneurship could not be fully understood without accounting for culturally grounded value systems that simultaneously empowered entrepreneurs and imposed sustained responsibility within inequitable environments. By situating the cultural work ethic as an active, contextually grounded force, this study contributed to the existing literature by clarifying how cultural identity and structural constraints jointly shaped entrepreneurial engagement..

Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum. What aspects of contemporary entrepreneurship theory encouraged and sustained business growth within African-American male businesses to increase their presence in Houston? Findings related to Research Question 2 indicated that entrepreneurial growth among participants unfolded not as a linear trajectory, but as an adaptive continuum shaped by experiential learning, strategic recalibration, and iterative decision-making. Participants described relying heavily on trial-and-error learning, social media

marketing, service pivots, and incremental scaling to sustain their businesses in competitive, resource-constrained markets. This interpretation aligned with Bruton et al. (2023), who argued that contemporary entrepreneurship is increasingly defined by adaptability, networked learning, and innovation under conditions of uncertainty rather than by predictable growth stages.

Participants' capacity to "do more with less" further reinforced scholarship emphasizing resourcefulness and iterative learning as core entrepreneurial competencies. Consistent with Faghih and Forouharfar's (2022) findings, participants demonstrated how learning through action, adjustment, and feedback informed business decisions over time. These patterns also reflected Contemporary Entrepreneurship Theory, which positioned adaptability as a defining feature of entrepreneurial practice in dynamic environments (Baker & Welter, 2020; Bruton et al., 2023). Rather than viewing growth as progression through discrete stages, participants described development as continuous recalibration in response to market signals, customer feedback, and resource availability.

Interpretation of these findings was further shaped by participants' limited access to institutional support and formal capital, a condition frequently documented in minority entrepreneurship literature. In the absence of stable external resources, participants relied on networked knowledge flows, adaptive strategy patterns, resource deployment strategies, and transitional pathways to sustain operations. This continuum-based growth process illustrated how entrepreneurial persistence emerged through ongoing adjustment rather than through expansion alone, thereby clarifying how start-up, sustainment, and growth functioned as interdependent processes within constrained entrepreneurial contexts.

Multilevel Constraint Barriers. How did the current socioeconomic climate limit resource-based entrepreneurship theory strategies within African-American male businesses in

Houston to the extent of causing low representation? Findings related to Research Question 3 indicated that entrepreneurial activity was shaped by multilevel constraints operating across psychological, financial, and institutional dimensions. Participants described persistent strain, mental fatigue, and responsibility overload intersecting with structural access limitations, including restricted access to capital, zoning challenges, unequal contracting opportunities, and institutional gatekeeping. These findings aligned with existing literature documenting systemic exclusion and structural inequality within business ecosystems that disproportionately affected minority entrepreneurs (Conley & Bilimoria, 2022; Hameed et al., 2021).

The findings extended Resource-Based Entrepreneurship Theory by illustrating how unequal access to both tangible (e.g., capital, property, credit) and intangible (e.g., trust, legitimacy, institutional support) resources compounded over time, narrowing strategic options and increasing personal and financial risk. Participants' narratives demonstrated that these constraints were rarely experienced in isolation; instead, internalized pressures related to responsibility and endurance operated simultaneously with external structural barriers. This interaction reflected how resource scarcity was not merely episodic but cumulative, shaping entrepreneurial behavior across multiple levels.

A key factor influencing the interpretation of these findings was that participants frequently normalized constraint as an expected condition of entrepreneurship rather than an exceptional challenge. Participants described adapting to limitations as a routine aspect of business ownership, suggesting that structural barriers had become embedded in entrepreneurial expectations. Constraints clustered into strain-related factors and structural access limitations, illustrating how psychological endurance and institutional exclusion functioned together. In this way, the findings demonstrated that underrepresentation was experienced not as a reflection of

entrepreneurial capability, but as a predictable outcome of persistent structural conditions shaping participants' business environments.

Minority Entrepreneurship Dynamics. What aspects of minority entrepreneurship theory contributed to the low representation of African-American male business owners in Houston? Findings related to Research Question 4 situated participants' experiences squarely within Minority Entrepreneurship Theory by examining how trust-navigational processes and identity-based constraints shaped entrepreneurial engagement. Participants described episodes of self-doubt, internalized pressure, and the psychological toll of representing their racial identity in professional and commercial settings. These narratives aligned with Sithas and Surangi's (2021) findings that intersectional identity influenced both entrepreneurial confidence and external reception, particularly within environments where minority status remained salient.

Across participant accounts, trust emerged as something actively negotiated rather than assumed, while identity influenced assessments of credibility and access to opportunity. Participants described modifying behavior, over-preparing, or strategically managing visibility to navigate environments where legitimacy was not uniformly granted. These adaptive behaviors reflected patterns identified in minority entrepreneurship literature, where relational trust and perceived legitimacy functioned as gatekeeping mechanisms that shaped entrepreneurial participation beyond formal qualifications or preparation.

Minority entrepreneurship dynamics were reflected through the interrelated categories of trust navigation process and identity-based constraints, offering an interpretive lens for understanding persistent underrepresentation, even among well-prepared and experienced entrepreneurs. The findings extended existing minority entrepreneurship scholarship by illustrating how relational and perceptual dynamics functioned as structural conditions embedded

within entrepreneurial ecosystems rather than as individual attitudes or confidence deficits. In this way, the results reinforced Minority Entrepreneurship Theory by demonstrating how identity and trust interacted to shape entrepreneurial opportunity, persistence, and visibility within constrained business environments.

Integrative Interpretation. Taken together, the findings illustrated a complex entrepreneurial reality characterized by cultural resilience fused with strategic adaptability, operating within environments shaped by structural inequity and identity-mediated dynamics. The study meaningfully addressed its problem and purpose by demonstrating that African American male entrepreneurship in Houston was constrained not by a lack of motivation or skill, but by the interaction of cultural expectations, adaptive demands, systemic barriers, and dynamics of minority entrepreneurship. While some participants reported limited overt discrimination in specific contexts, constraints were more often experienced as cumulative, procedural, and embedded within systems that appeared neutral but produced unequal outcomes, explaining nuanced or divergent experiences. Overall, these findings confirmed, nuanced, and extended existing theory while offering grounded insights into why underrepresentation persisted despite sustained entrepreneurial effort.

Recommendations for Practice

Consistent with the study's findings, multiple practice-oriented recommendations emerged to address the cultural, structural, and relational barriers that contributed to the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston. These recommendations were grounded in participants' lived experiences and emphasized strengthening support mechanisms that aligned with how entrepreneurs navigated constrained business environments. Collectively, the recommendations focused on improving access,

coordination, and legitimacy within entrepreneurial ecosystems rather than attributing underrepresentation to individual-level deficiencies.

Strengthening Mentorship Infrastructures Embedded in Trusted Cultural Institutions

Findings from Theme 1 (Cultural Work Ethic Influence) and Theme 4 (Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics) indicated that participants relied heavily on culturally trusted spaces (family, faith networks, Veteran communities, and community relationships) while simultaneously navigating trust as something negotiated rather than assumed. Strengthening mentorship infrastructures within institutions that were already perceived as legitimate and culturally safe could have reduced reliance on informal, chance-based guidance. This recommendation was consistent with scholarship that emphasized cultural resilience, community networks, and social capital as compensatory resources in minority entrepreneurship (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022) and complemented Minority Entrepreneurship Theory's focus on how networks and institutional exclusion shaped opportunity structures (Bruton et al., 2023; Sithas & Surang, 2021). Practical approaches included structured mentor matching, accountability touchpoints, and referral bridges to lenders and procurement channels, while recognizing that mentorship alone could not resolve the systemic barriers identified in the findings (Bruton et al., 2023; Perry et al., 2022).

Coordinate Ecosystem Partnerships to Reduce Fragmentation and Improve Access

Across Themes 2 and 3, participants' experiences suggested that sustained growth depended on access to networks, timely information, and coherent pathways to resources, yet available supports were often encountered as fragmented or uneven. Practice stakeholders responded by coordinating ecosystem partnerships among financial institutions, universities, and minority business organizations to streamline referral routes and reduce duplicative barriers (e.g.,

shared intake pathways, warm handoffs to vetted supports, and coordinated technical assistance). This recommendation was consistent with literature documenting how structural inequities persisted despite the presence of programs, and that uneven ecosystem design limited impact for African American male entrepreneurs (Klineberg & Bozick, 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024). It also reflected Resource-Based Entrepreneurship Theory's emphasis that both tangible and intangible resources (capital, information, relationships, legitimacy) shaped entrepreneurial outcomes in resource-scarce environments (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). These partnerships were framed as a plausible Houston-specific ecosystem.

Build Entrepreneurship Education That Integrates Identity, Trust, and Ecosystem Navigation with Technical Skill

Findings from Theme 2 (Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum) demonstrated that participants relied on adaptive, trial-and-error learning and strategic pivots to sustain operations. In contrast, Theme 4 illustrated that credibility and identity management increased the relational labor required to operate in entrepreneurial spaces. Entrepreneurship education programs offered by universities, community organizations, and incubators could have benefited from integrating culturally grounded content that addressed identity, trust navigation, and minority business ecosystem awareness alongside technical instruction (e.g., accounting, contracting readiness, digital marketing). This recommendation aligned with Contemporary Entrepreneurship Theory's emphasis on adaptability and innovation in dynamic markets (Baker & Welter, 2020; Thompson et al., 2020) and literature highlighting digital platforms and adaptive practices as mechanisms for overcoming barriers (Brown et al., 2023; Tobin & Thakker, 2019; Perry et al., 2022). It also remained consistent with the study's findings by positioning education

as a support for resilience and navigation rather than as a cure for structurally constrained opportunity.

Expand Culturally Responsive Capital Pathways and "Loan-Readiness" Supports

Findings from Theme 3 (Multilevel Constraint Barriers) indicated that participants experienced persistent structural access limitations related to capital, funding terms, and institutional gatekeeping that slowed scaling and increased reliance on personal risk. Practice partners responded by expanding capital pathways through minority-serving institutions and community development lenders, paired with practical "loan-readiness" supports (e.g., documentation coaching, application packaging, financial literacy refreshers, and navigation of SBA-related resources). This recommendation aligned with research documenting persistent lending disparities and resource scarcity affecting Black-owned firms (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Robinson, 2024) and with Resource-Based Entrepreneurship Theory's emphasis on the uneven availability of tangible resources such as credit and capital (Chen et al., 2022; Dahan & Shoham, 2023; Rakshit & Peterson, 2024). Participants' accounts indicated that capital access was not only financial but also procedural and relational; capital expansion efforts were paired with guidance that reduced friction and strengthened entrepreneurs' capacity to engage formal systems (Light & Dana, 2019; Perry et al., 2022).

Taken together, these recommendations underscored that improving entrepreneurial outcomes for African American male entrepreneurs required coordinated, culturally responsive approaches that addressed relational trust, ecosystem design, and resource access simultaneously. Rather than isolated interventions, participants' experiences pointed to the need for integrated support structures that aligned with how entrepreneurship was actually practiced in constrained, racialized business environments. Viewed collectively, the recommendations emphasized that

sustainable change depended on aligning cultural legitimacy, institutional coordination, and practical access to resources within entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies examined how culturally grounded work ethic, adaptive growth strategies, and multilevel constraints interacted across different demographic and historical contexts within African American entrepreneurship. This recommendation was justified by findings from Themes 1 and 3, which showed that participants' entrepreneurial behaviors were shaped by both cultural obligation and structural constraint. Comparative studies that disaggregated African American entrepreneurs by lineage, region, or generational status allowed researchers to assess whether the dynamics identified in this study reflected shared structural conditions or context-specific historical influences.

Longitudinal research designs were also warranted to build upon the adaptive start-sustainment-growth continuum identified in Theme 2. This study captured participants' experiences at a single point in time; it could not observe how entrepreneurial strategies evolved in response to changing policy environments, market conditions, or life-course transitions. Following entrepreneurs over time would have allowed researchers to examine how adaptability, resource deployment, and trust navigation developed, stabilized, or shifted across different stages of business ownership.

Future studies also improved upon previous research by extending the methodological approach beyond phenomenology while retaining attention to lived experience. The phenomenological design of this study prioritized meaning-making and perception, providing depth but limiting the ability to examine structural dynamics quantitatively or across broader populations. Integrating phenomenological insights with participatory, mixed-method, or

comparative approaches would have allowed researchers to test, refine, or expand the conceptual framework advanced in this study while preserving its grounding in entrepreneurial lived experience.

Finally, the next logical step in this line of research was to examine how ecosystem-level interventions influenced the dynamics identified in this study. Findings across all four research questions indicated that underrepresentation was shaped by the interaction of cultural assets, adaptive strategies, and structural barriers rather than individual deficiency. Future research that evaluated how coordinated mentorship, capital access initiatives, or ecosystem partnerships altered these conditions would have directly built on this study's findings and assessed their applicability across different entrepreneurial environments..

Study Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of 12 African American male entrepreneurs in Houston to understand factors contributing to their persistent underrepresentation in business ownership. Despite Houston's economic scale and diversity, African American men remained disproportionately excluded from entrepreneurial ownership, making this problem both locally salient and nationally relevant. By centering participants' lived experiences, the study examined how cultural, structural, and identity-based factors shaped entrepreneurial engagement beyond individual effort or motivation.

Findings demonstrated that entrepreneurship among African American men in Houston was shaped by culturally grounded work ethic values, adaptive start-sustainment-growth processes, multilevel structural constraints, and minority entrepreneurship dynamics related to trust and identity. Rather than operating independently, these factors interacted to influence how participants entered, sustained, and grew their businesses within constrained environments. The

study showed that underrepresentation was not attributable to individual deficit, but to the cumulative interaction of cultural assets, strategic action, structural inequities, and identity-mediated conditions that shaped opportunity over time.

This study contributed to entrepreneurship scholarship by extending minority entrepreneurship and resource-based frameworks to more fully account for relational trust, cultural obligation, and adaptive navigation within inequitable entrepreneurial ecosystems. The findings demonstrated that African American entrepreneurship must be understood simultaneously as an expression of agency and as a response to enduring structural conditions. The central takeaway of this study was that addressing underrepresentation required engaging both dimensions, supporting entrepreneurial resilience while also confronting the systemic conditions that continued to constrain access, legitimacy, and opportunity.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

9388 Lightwave Ave.
San Diego, CA 92123
irb@nu.edu

Notice of Exemption

June 9, 2025

To: Freddie King

Project Title: Phenomenological Study on the Underrepresentation of Entrepreneurial African American Male Small Business Owners in Houston, TX
NU IRB Number: IRB-FY24-25-681
Determination: Exempt from further review 45 CFR 46.101 Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Status: Active - Research activities may begin as of June 9, 2025

Dear Freddie King:

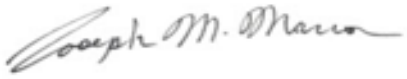
The study referenced above has been reviewed by the National University IRB. The IRB has determined your research is exempt from further review under 45 CFR 46.104, which means

you will not need to renew your study and may begin your study effective immediately. However, if you find the need to change your study in any way, you will need to submit a modification to the IRB prior to implementing the changes. This will allow the IRB to determine whether or not the study still meets exemption criteria.

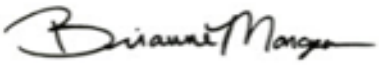
Please review your Post Approval Responsibilities here: Approved Documents Guidelines

For any questions regarding your protocol, please reach out to the IRB at irb@nu.edu.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph Marron, IRB Chair



Dr. Brianne Mongeon, Director, HRPP & IRB

Jenessa Eberhardt, Associate Director, HRPP & IRB

Appendix B

Predeveloped Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

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Predeveloped Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. Interviewer Name

2. Participant ID#

3. Interview Date (dd/mm/yyyy) |___|___|/|___|___|/|___|___|___|___|

4. The participant agrees to the interview being digitally recorded

Yes ..... ☐

No..... ☐

5. Time Interview Began (hhmm-24hr clock) |___|___|___|___|

6. Time Interview Ended (hhmm-24hr clock) |___|___|___|___|

Step 1: Complete Q1-3 above at the start of the interview.

Step 2: At the beginning of the interview, introduce yourself and thank the participant for participating.

Step 3: Read Section A below to the participant.

Step 4: Ensure the demographic questionnaire is completed.

Step 5: Ask the participant permission to record the interview; tick the appropriate box in Q4 above.

Step 6: Turn on the audio recorder if acceptable, document the time the interview begins in Q5 above, and conduct an interview.

Step 7: At the end of the interview, thank the participant and ask if she/he has any further questions; document the time the interview ended in Q6 above.

Step 8: Ask if the participant is interested in being re-contacted with study results; if yes, document the appropriate email. Inform the participants that their email addresses will not be connected to their study data.

Step 9: Complete the IRB Personal Data Disclosure Form

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Interviewer: Please read the following to participants at the beginning of the interview.

SECTION A: Introduction to the Study

- Hello, thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to speak with me today. My name is Freddie King, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at the National University. Is now still a good time to talk?
- Before we begin, I would like to provide you with an overview of the study and explain how the information you share will be used.
- The research study aims to better understand the lived experience of African American male small business owners in Houston, Texas. Specifically, I am exploring how cultural identity, systemic challenges, and resource accessibility shape entrepreneurial success.
- As noted in the informational sheet you received, your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question or may stop the interview at any time without penalty. You may choose to participate in this study by either taking part in a recorded interview or by providing written responses to the interview questions. Both options are voluntary, and your choice will not affect your participation in the study.
- There are minimal risks associated with participation. However, some questions may evoke emotional discomfort, particularly when discussing personal or professional challenges. You are free to skip any question, pause the interview, or withdraw at any point.
- While there are no direct personal benefits to you, your participation may contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by African American entrepreneurs and may inform future policies, community support, and academic research.
- With your permission, this interview will be conducted via Zoom and is expected to last approximately 60 minutes. If you prefer, we can conduct the interview in person or by phone.
- I would also like to audio-record our discussion to ensure accuracy during transcription. The recordings will be securely stored and permanently deleted once the study is complete. If you prefer not to be recorded, I will instead take detailed notes throughout our conversation.
- Do you have any questions for me before we begin? If you have any questions later, please refer to the contact information provided on the study information sheet, including contact details for the National University IRB.

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[If yes, answer the participant's questions, then proceed with completing the demographic form.]

[If no, proceed with completing the demographic form.]

Is it okay if I turn on the audio recorder now?

[If yes, begin audio recording now.]

[If no] That is okay; I will take detailed notes as we talk. Ok, let us get started!

SECTION B: Entrepreneurial Background

Can you tell me about your most recent entrepreneurial venture and how it began?

- How did your business idea come about?

- What were your first steps in launching it?

- How long have you operated in Houston?

SECTION C: Cultural Identity & Influence

In what ways, if any, has your cultural identity shaped your business journey?

- Are there traditions, values, or cultural expectations that have influenced your business?

- How do you see your identity reflected in your work or approach?

SECTION D: Resource Access & Barriers

Can you describe your experience in securing resources (e.g., funding, mentorship, education) for your business?

- If any barriers arose, how did you handle them?

- What resource gaps do you believe impacted your progress?

SECTION E: Social Capital & Community Support

Tell me about the types of support systems you've had while running your business.

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- Who has been most helpful (e.g., family, peers, institutions)?

- How, if at all, have local networks or the Houston community played a role?

SECTION F: Systemic Barriers & Navigational Strategies

Have you encountered any systemic or structural challenges as a business owner?

- How did these show up (e.g., banking, zoning, licensing)?

- What strategies, if any, did you use to navigate them?

SECTION G: Intersectional Identity (Race & Gender)

How, if at all, has your experience as a Black man shaped your entrepreneurial path?

- Do you think your gender and race interact in specific ways in business settings?

- Have you experienced situations where being a Black male entrepreneur affected how others responded to you?

SECTION H: Resilience, Success, and Advice

Looking back, what has helped you sustain and grow your business?

- What does resilience mean to you in entrepreneurship?

- What advice would you offer to young African American men entering this space?

Closing Script:
That's the end of the questions. Thank you again for sharing your story. Is there anything we haven't discussed that you think is important for this study, any final thoughts or questions that you would like to ask about this study? I want to sincerely thank you for your time and for the helpful information that you provided.

Note. The semi-structured interview questionnaire was developed specifically for this study, informed by the literature on phenomenological research design (Moustakas, 1994) and prior research on minority entrepreneurship (Fairlie et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2022; Light & Dana, 2019).

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

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irb@nu.edu

Consent Form

My name is Freddie King, and I am a doctoral student at National University. I am conducting a research study to explore the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas.

I am recruiting individuals who meet all of these criteria:

- You self-identify as male
- You self-identify as African American or Black
- You are at least 30 years old and no older than 65 years old
- You reside in the Houston, Texas metropolitan area
- You are the owner of at least 51% of the business
- You have operated the business for a minimum of five years
- Your business must generate annual revenue of at least $68,000 (aligning with Houston's median income)
- Your business must be legally registered and active in the state of Texas
- You must be fluent in English

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Listen to the research overview, provide verbal consent, and participate in a demographic questionnaire over the phone for 15 minutes.
- Participate in a one-on-one interview over Zoom for approximately 60 minutes. (If you would prefer to interview in person or over the phone, please let me know.)
- You may choose to participate in this study by either taking part in a recorded interview or by providing written responses to the interview questions. Both options are voluntary, and your choice will not affect your participation in the study.
- Review a transcript or summary of your interview for accuracy via email (member checking), which may take 15–30 minutes.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about

- Meeting the recruiting criteria, demographic background questions regarding how long you have lived in Houston, and the highest level of education. Your experience as a business owner: how many years have you operated your current business, how many employees do you employ, and if you have any other business prior to your current one?

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- Interview questions cover: Origins & Cultural Foundations; Business Operations, Resources, and Strategy; Identity, Discrimination, and Inclusion; Vision, Meaning, and Policy (Empowerment and Closure).

Risks: There are minimal risks associated with this study. However, you may experience emotional discomfort when discussing personal or professional experiences. You may skip any question, pause the interview, or withdraw at any time without penalty.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating. However, this research may contribute to understanding the barriers faced by African American male entrepreneurs and inform future policies and support systems.

Recording: I would like to audio-record the interview session using Zoom or a digital recorder to ensure accuracy. Video is optional. You may choose to disable your video at any time.

Confidentiality: I will keep records of this study private. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. All digital files will be password-protected and stored securely. Data will be destroyed after 3 years, following IRB and APA ethical guidelines.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop participation at any time for any reason without penalty.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at f.king7484@o365.ncu.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at irb@nu.edu.

Appendix D

Recruitment Message for Study Participation

National UNIVERSITY

RECRUITMENT MESSAGE FOR STUDY PARTICIPATION

Subject: Seeking African American Male Entrepreneurs in Houston for Research Study

Greetings, Houston Entrepreneurs,

My name is Freddie King, and I am a doctoral student at National University. I am conducting a research study to explore the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas.

I am recruiting individuals who meet all of these criteria:

- You self-identify as male
- You self-identify as African American or Black
- You are at least 30 years old and no older than 65 years old
- You reside in the Houston, Texas metropolitan area
- You are the owner of at least 51% of the business
- You have operated the business for a minimum of five years
- Your business must generate annual revenue of at least $68,000 (aligning with Houston's median income)
- Your business must be legally registered and active in the state of Texas
- You must be fluent in English

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

- Listen to the research overview, provide verbal consent, and participate in a demographic questionnaire over the phone for 15 minutes.
- Participate in a one-on-one interview over Zoom for approximately 60 minutes. (If you would prefer to interview in person or over the phone, please let me know.)
- Review a transcript or summary of your interview for accuracy via email (member checking), which may take 15–30 minutes.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about

- Meeting the recruiting criteria, demographic background questions regarding how long you have lived in Houston, and the highest level of education. Your experience as a business owner: how many years have you operated your current business, how many employees do you employ, and if you have any other business prior to your current one?
- Interview questions cover: Origins & Cultural Foundations; Business Operations, Resources, and Strategy; Identity, Discrimination, and Inclusion; Vision, Meaning, and Policy (Empowerment and Closure).

If you are interested in participating in this study or have questions, please contact me at [f.king7484@o365.ncu.edu].
Thank you for considering participating in this voluntary research!

Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

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Demographic Questionnaire

Purpose: The following questionnaire is designed to collect background information from participants in the study titled Exploring the Underrepresentation of African American Male Entrepreneurs in Houston: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study. Your responses will be kept confidential and used only to determine eligibility and provide descriptive context for data analysis.

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

Section 1: Eligibility questions

You self-identify as male
☐ Yes ☐ No

You self-identify as African American or Black
☐ Yes ☐ No

You are at least 30 years old and no older than 65 years old
☐ Yes ☐ No

You reside in the Houston, Texas metropolitan area
☐ Yes ☐ No

You are the owner of at least 51% of a business
☐ Yes ☐ No

You have operated the business for a minimum of five years
☐ Yes ☐ No

Your business must generate annual revenue of at least $68,000 (aligning with Houston's median income)
☐ Yes ☐ No

You must be fluent in English
☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 2: Background questions

How many years have you lived in Houston?

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☐ Less than 1 year
☐ 1–5 years
☐ 6–10 years
☐ More than 10 years
☐ Lifelong resident

What is your highest level of education?

☐ Did not finish
☐ GED
☐ High School
☐ College graduate/some college
☐ Graduate degree

How many years have you operated your current business?

☐ Less than 1 year
☐ 1–3 years
☐ 4–7 years
☐ 8–10 years
☐ More than 10 years

How many employees currently work in your business (including yourself)?

☐ Sole proprietor (no other employees)
☐ 2–5 employees
☐ 6–10 employees
☐ 11–20 employees
☐ More than 20 employees

Have you owned or operated any other businesses prior to your current one?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, briefly describe the nature and duration of the prior business(es):

Note: Participation in this questionnaire is voluntary. All responses are protected under confidentiality protocols approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Appendix F

Risk Mitigation Plan

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Risk Mitigation Plan: Assessing and Responding to Participants' Distress During Data Collection

This risk mitigation plan outlines protocols to follow if a research participant becomes visibly upset, emotionally distressed, or otherwise demonstrates signs of psychological discomfort during participation. The procedures are developed in alignment with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines and ethical research principles (e.g., The Belmont Report, APA, and federal regulations under 45 CFR 46) to ensure participant safety, voluntary participation, and informed withdrawal. The plan details how to assess the severity of emotional responses, determine whether continued participation is appropriate, and implement supportive measures, including referral to counseling services if needed.

Look/listen for the following signs:

The subject sounds sad, anxious, depressed, angry, etc.

The subject verbalizes that they are depressed.

The subject shows that they are upset (i.e., start to cry, use rude language or an angry tone of voice, body language communicates that they are feeling hostile, etc.).

The subject stays very quiet/refuses to answer for a long period of time.

Based on any one or more of these signs, the subject may be too upsetting to continue.

At this point, you should ask them if they are feeling well and if they would like to end the interview.

If they are all right and wish to continue:

Ask them if they would like to take a break, and you can finish later.

Remind the participants that they do not have to answer any questions that they do not want to.

Remind the participants that they do not have to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable.

Remind participants that if they are uncomfortable with anything that they have disclosed during the interview, they have the right to have this information removed from the research data.

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If they say they are not all right and want to end the interview, ask them:

If they would like contact information for counseling services:

If an interviewee becomes emotionally distressed during an interview in Houston, Texas, several free and confidential counseling services are available to provide immediate support:

1. Crisis Intervention of Houston

- **24/7 Hotline: Call 832-416-1177 for immediate assistance.**
- **Teen Support: Teens can call 832-416-1199 or text 281-201-4430.**
- **Services: Offers free, confidential, and anonymous crisis and suicide prevention counseling around the clock.** University of Houston-Clear Lake+8Findhelp+8Crisis Intervention of Houston+8FOX 26 Houston+2Crisis Intervention of Houston+2McGovern Medical School+2McGovern Medical School+1Crisis Intervention of Houston+1

2. The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD

- **24/7 Crisis Line: Call 713-970-7000 or toll-free 1-866-970-4770.**
- **Text Support: For emotional support, text 832-479-2135.**
- **Services: Provides crisis counseling, mental health assessments, and referrals.** University of Houston+6Harris Center for Mental Health+6McGovern Medical School+6

3. National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

- **24/7 Support: Dial 988 for immediate connection to trained crisis counselors nationwide.** Texas Health and Human Services+4NAMI Greater Houston+4Findhelp+4

4. Crisis Text Line

- **Text Support: Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.**

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- **Services: Offers free, 24/7 support for individuals in crisis via text message.** Wikipedia+12FOX 26 Houston+12Verywell Mind+12Food & Wine+1Wikipedia+1

5. Bo's Place

- **Contact: Call 713-942-8339 or visit** bosplace.org.
- **Services: Provides free grief support programs for children, families, and adults, including virtual options.** Wikipedia+2McGovern Medical School+2Texas Children's+2Wikipedia+1McGovern Medical School+1

6. Montrose Center

- **Contact: Call 713-529-0037 or visit** montrosecenter.org.
- **Services: Offers mental health counseling, support groups, and case management, specializing in services for the LGBTQ+ community.** Mental Health America of Greater Houston+1Wikipedia+1

7. University of Houston Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

- **24/7 Support: Call 713-743-5454 for crisis assistance.**
- **Services: Provides crisis intervention and counseling services to students and the university community.** University of Houston+1Texas Children's+1

8. University of Houston-Clear Lake Counseling and Mental Health Center

- **Contact: Call 281-283-2580 and press 2 for immediate crisis assistance.**
- **Services: Offers free, confidential consultations and crisis support.** University of Houston-Clear Lake+1University of Houston-Clear Lake+1University of Houston-Clear Lake

9. 211 Texas/United Way Helpline

- **Contact: Dial 2-1-1 for assistance.**
- **Services: Provides referrals to local mental health services, including free and low-cost counseling options.** Houston Chronicle+18Harris Center for Mental Health+18Harris Center for Mental Health+18

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If they do not want contact information for counseling services, let them know that if they need to talk to someone later, they can contact the study's main investigator:

Freddie King 323-542-7165
f.king7484@o365.ncu.edu

Or email us at irb@nu.edu

Appendix G

Interview Guide Validation Summary

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Interview Guide Validation Summary

To ensure the clarity, validity, and alignment of the semi-structured interview guide with the study's purpose and research questions, a panel of three academic scholars holding terminal degrees in relevant fields (entrepreneurship, minority business studies, and qualitative research) was invited to review the interview questions. These external reviewers were asked to provide feedback on question clarity, alignment with the conceptual framework, potential for eliciting rich and meaningful responses, and any signs of bias or leading language.

Each reviewer received a study summary, the draft interview guide, and a brief feedback form outlining the areas for review. Their insights informed final revisions to the instrument, enhancing its rigor and appropriateness for capturing the lived experiences of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston. The validated interview guide was subsequently used in the IRB-approved data collection phase of this study.

Study Summary for Reviewers

This phenomenological study explores the underrepresentation of African American male entrepreneurs in Houston, Texas. The study aims to understand how cultural identity, systemic barriers, and resource-based dynamics shape their entrepreneurial experiences and success. Insights from this research may help inform more inclusive policies, entrepreneurial support programs, and future scholarship on minority entrepreneurship.

Invitation Script Sent to Reviewers

Dear [Scholar Name],

I am conducting a qualitative phenomenological dissertation study exploring the lived experiences of African American male business owners in Houston, Texas.

I would like to respectfully request your feedback on my semi-structured interview questions to ensure they are:

- Aligned with the study's purpose and conceptual framework
- Clear, unbiased, and understandable to participants
- Capable of eliciting rich, meaningful responses relevant to the study's aims

Summary of Requested Feedback:

You will receive the interview guide and a brief feedback form. I ask that you review the questions and provide feedback on:

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1. Clarity – Are the questions understandable?

2. Alignment – Do the questions align with the study purpose and research questions?

3. Bias – Are there any leading or biased questions?

4. Depth – Are the questions likely to elicit detailed, reflective responses?

5. Suggestions – Any additional comments or suggested revisions?

Your expertise in [entrepreneurship / qualitative research/minority business studies] would greatly enhance the quality of this instrument.

If you are willing to participate in this validation process, please let me know. Your input would be greatly appreciated and will be acknowledged in my dissertation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Freddie King

Doctoral Candidate, National University

National University IRB
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Brief Feedback Form

Study Title:

Phenomenological Study on the Underrepresentation of Entrepreneurial African American Male Small Business Owners in Houston, TX

Reviewer Name: _____

Date: _____

Reviewer Expertise/Field: _____

Instructions for Reviewer:

Please review the attached semi-structured interview questions and provide feedback on the areas below. Your insights will help ensure that the questions are clear, aligned with the study purpose, and capable of eliciting rich and meaningful responses.

Clarity

Are the questions understandable and clearly worded?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

_____

_____

Alignment

Do the questions align with the study purpose and research questions?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

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_____

_____

Bias

Are there any questions that appear biased, leading, or potentially problematic?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

_____

_____

Depth

Are the questions likely to elicit detailed, reflective responses from participants?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

_____

_____

Suggestions

Do you have any additional comments, suggestions, or recommended revisions?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

_____

_____

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Reviewer Signature (optional): _____

Date: _____

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The Reviewers Response

Reviewer One (Dr. Garry Bruton, Professor, Texas Christian University): [Verbatim]

Freddie

What you want in qualitative research is stories from your interviewees. Then in those stories your analysis develops themes on what they addressed.

Right now I read your questions and I see more things that sound like a quantitative survey. I would start with tell me about your most recent entrepreneurship venture. You get all the descriptive information on that business – started X, sales now Y, sells Z. Then you ask them as they go through about some of things you have noted as needing information on. If you ask people straight up about barriers or how culture shapes things they will typically tell you nothing that is useful. However, if you get them telling you a story you probe.

The entrepreneur is telling you their story and if they raise the issue financing and you probe. Where did their financing come from. Likely some friends and family money as a foundation. So you ask them about how much money did they were able to generate from FF. Then you probe deeper does the entrepreneur's family mostly own their homes? If not were they able to support them. The issue most marginalized groups don't have home ownership and what FF can do is more limited. (an insight or theme you could write about) Then as they tell you about it you ask questions about how the bank responded (perhaps they said no – you probe why etc). Then then if they use alternative financing mechanisms probe for insights. You have to largely bring your questions but they part of the story telling from the entrepreneur.

Qualitative is getting people 45 minutes to an hour to talk to you about experiences. Is it not yes/no questions or short answers. As they tell you then you have domains you want to be sure they touch. Right now I think you have things that would take 10 minutes maximum. I am assuming you tape the interviews, transcribe them and then analyze that data?

Free advice is worth what you pay for it but my 2 cents.

Garry

Dr. Garry D. Bruton is a Professor of Management in the Management & Leadership Department at TCU's Neeley School of Business. His teaching focuses primarily on:

- Strategic Management (e.g., MANA 40153, the core undergrad Strategic Management course)
- Entrepreneurship, International Business, and Strategic Management more broadly.

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Students describe his course style as "lecture heavy" with a strong emphasis on group projects and real-world application.

In summary:

Dr. Bruton teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Strategic Management, alongside modules in Entrepreneurship and International Business, aiming to combine theoretical insights with practical, often community-based projects.

Reviewer Two (Dr. Meg Roberts, National University, Proofreading Supervisor and an Academic Coach):

Hello Freddie,

I've looked over your interview questions and think you have done really well at making them open-ended to avoid leading or bias. I do worry a bit about the number of questions (16) because this would likely mean the interview would last 90 minutes or longer. Consider focusing on a primary 8-10 questions with others listed as back-up or potential if there is time.

Your validation form looks great. You will also be practicing your interview procedure with these reviewers, which will provide you with reflection data as well. The process will help prepare you for the participants and add trustworthiness in the dissertation.

Let me know any other questions or ways I can be of support.

Meg Roberts, PhD

Academic Coach

Dr. Meg Roberts serves as the Proofreading Supervisor and an Academic Coach. Her role centers on supporting students with academic writing, dissertation progress, and proofreading. In this capacity, she provides:

- One-on-one or small group coaching on dissertations
- Proofreading and writing guidance
- Navigational support through graduate-level research and writing processes

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Reviewer Three (Dr. Alexander C. Lewis, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Management and Alvarez Research Fellow in the Carlos Alvarez College of Business at the University of Texas at San Antonio):

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Hi Freddy,

The questions generally look good to me. My only big concern would be that it is a little long, and you risk running into participant fatigue. I've added additional comments on the feedback form.

Alignment- Do the questions align with the study purpose and research questions? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments: I would suggest adding a question or two that directly or indirectly reflects an interest in gender. I think that your decision to concentrate on Black males is a good one, and you may want to bring in some research on intersectionality and entrepreneurship to justify attention to a single gender.

Bias- Are there any questions that appear biased, leading, or potentially problematic? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments: Generally good. Some of the questions are a little leading, in the sense that you assume some things have had an effect. This can be fixed pretty easily by adding "if any" or "if at all" to some of the questions, so that people who don't feel like something has had an effect have "permission" to say that and not feel pressured to give you a response otherwise.

Overall, it's looking good. Houston is a great city for you to carry out this research in.

Best,

Alex

Dr. Lewis teaches courses in:

- Entrepreneurship
- Organizational Theory
- Strategy

He is involved in undergraduate and potentially graduate-level instruction, blending theoretical frameworks with practical applications in business settings. Dr. Lewis conducts empirical research that explores entrepreneurship, market systems, and social value creation, with particular attention to challenges emerging from racial and structural inequality. His work has

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been published in prestigious outlets such as the Academy of Management Review, Journal of Business Venturing, and Academy of Management Annals.

Appendix H

Complete Listing of Codes for RQ1–RQ4

Name	Description	Files	References
			98
THEME 1-Cultural Work Ethic Influence	RQ1-What cultural traditions influence the entrepreneurial experiences of African American business owners in Houston?	12	98
Category Discipline–Resilience Practice	Experiences describing sustained effort, perseverance, or disciplined behaviour required to continue business operations despite ongoing challenges. [Endurance, Persistence, Ongoing effort, and Learning through repetition]	12	25
Advising action through identity-based effort	Participants offered advice based on their entrepreneurial experience, emphasizing taking action with available resources, building relationships, and intentionally using personal identity to shape a business niche.	1	1
Anticipatory preparedness through proactive orientation			1
Continuing to draw on military and personal values in leadership	The participant described that both their military background and personal values shape how they approach leadership, guiding them toward humility, fairness, and doing the right thing even when it is difficult.	1	1
Cultural preservation through business activity	Participants described experiencing their business activities as a means of preserving cultural traditions, where everyday work was understood as contributing to community continuity and collective resilience.	1	1
Drawing on military-learned discipline and resilience	The participant described how their military background shaped their approach to entrepreneurship by instilling leadership skills, disciplined habits, and resilience that now support their ability to handle challenges and guide their business.	1	1
Emphasized the importance of resilience	Participants described resilience as the essential factor that enables continued effort and supports success in their endeavours.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Experiencing resilience as consistently showing up despite challenges	The participant described resilience as the lived commitment of showing up consistently, even when facing personal or professional difficulties, and finding ways to fulfill responsibilities to the people who rely on them.	1	1
Experiencing the demands of ranching work	Participants described the physical and emotional demands of ranching work, noting the challenges of weather, feed costs, and animal health, as well as the sense of fulfillment when their work contributes to family and community life.	1	1
Feeling pride in personal and community impact	The participant expressed that pride in growing his business, providing jobs, and helping community members is what keeps him going.	1	1
Intentional cultivation of disciplined routines in the absence of guiding traditions	Participants described intentionally developing disciplined habits and consistent routines in their business activities despite the absence of formally transmitted cultural or traditional guidance.	1	1
Intentional formation of entrepreneurial mindset and practices	Participants described intentionally forming an entrepreneurial mindset and routines through experience and self-directed practice when such approaches had not been previously modelled for them.	1	1
Learning resilience, adaptability, and hard work	The participant described that growing up Black in America and serving in the military taught them resilience, adaptability, and the importance of hard work, which they experienced as interconnected qualities shaped through life circumstances.	1	1
Limited exposure to alternative economic pathways	Participants described growing up within cultural expectations that emphasized traditional employment, with limited exposure to alternative economic or entrepreneurial pathways.	1	1
Maintaining financial preparedness under sustained pressure	Participants described resilience as maintaining financial preparedness and long-term thinking in order to continue operating without folding under sustained pressure.	1	1
Moderating persistence in response to situational limits			1
Motivated by patient and family gratitude		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Orienting business relationships around helping rather than transactions	Participants described orienting their business relationships around helping others rather than emphasizing transactional exchange.	1	1
Practicing consistency and self-discipline	Participants described being recognized by themselves and others as consistent, disciplined workers, emphasizing reliability and sustained effort in their approach to work.	1	1
Practicing financial discipline and budgetary control	Participants described exercising strict control over budgeting and financial decisions across their business operations, emphasizing discipline and structure in managing expenses.	1	1
Practicing resilience through adaptation and creative problem-solving	Participants defined resilience as an active process involving persistence through rejection, ongoing adaptation to changing conditions, and the use of creativity to address challenges as they arise.	1	1
Receiving a culturally rooted work ethic from parents	The participant attributed their discipline and work ethic to parents who grew up in sharecropping families, emphasizing how cultural teachings of pride and hard work shaped their entrepreneurial resilience.	1	1
Reflected parental influence on work orientation	Participants described reflecting on their parents as a possible source of how they approached work, expressed with uncertainty rather than definitive attribution.	1	1
Resilience is defined through faith and persistence after failure	Participants described resilience as repeatedly recovering from failure, continuing efforts when opportunities are blocked, and maintaining faith throughout the process.	1	1
Resilience through learning, community reliance, and vision alignment	Participants described resilience as an ongoing process of learning from setbacks, relying on community support, and remaining aligned with a personally held vision.	1	1
Category Identity Positioning	Experiences describing how participants understood, expressed, or situated their personal or cultural identity within their business roles or professional environments. [Cultural pride, Representation, Identity expression, and Meaning of self in role]	10	30

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Absence of perceived negative stereotyping	Participants described not perceiving experiences of negative stereotyping in their business interactions.	1	1
Articulation of collective minority advancement through entrepreneurship	Participants described a forward-looking orientation that emphasized collective growth among minority entrepreneurs across industries.	1	1
Assuming ongoing responsibility for the business	Participants described understanding business leadership as an ongoing responsibility that could not be deferred to others.	1	1
Attuning to cultural nuances in community interactions		1	1
Conditional willingness to help others	Participants described being willing to help others when they perceived honesty and commitment.	1	1
Contextual use of shared identity to facilitate professional rapport	Participants described instances in which shared cultural or gender identifiers facilitated rapport and trust within specific professional interactions.	1	1
Cultural awareness	The participant described an awareness that their cultural identity influenced all dimensions of their experiences and actions.	1	1
Cultural expression through fashion design	Participants described incorporating African American and Afrocentric fashion elements into their business designs, blending culturally specific styles with modern tailoring.	1	1
Cultural identity expressed through culinary representation	Participants described their cultural identity as being expressed through food, with culinary traditions representing personal and collective stories tied to heritage.	1	1
Cultural norm of looking sharp	Participants described the expectation of maintaining a polished appearance as a shared cultural norm within their community, where presentation was understood as meaningful and socially significant.	1	1
Desire to remain connected to personal roots	Participants described a desire to create work or business activities that sustained a sense of connection to their personal background following career transitions.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Emphasizing treating people with respect	The participant expressed that consistently treating people with respect shapes one's reputation and is foundational to sustaining their work.	1	1
Encouraging persistence and long-term resilience	The participant emphasized that success requires patience, hunger, and determination, encouraging future Black entrepreneurs to keep pushing forward and not accept early rejection.	1	1
Exposure to contrasting professional lifestyles	Participants described encountering contrasting professional and socioeconomic environments through relationships with family or social contacts and experiencing heightened awareness of cultural differences through observation and proximity.	1	1
Expressed belief in effort as a prerequisite to reward	Participants described holding the belief that effort and work were necessary conditions for obtaining desired outcomes.	1	1
Faith-guided counsel emphasizing mentorship and generosity	Participants articulated faith-guided counsel that emphasized mentorship, trust in God, and generosity of time, resources, and knowledge as guiding orientations in their entrepreneurial approach.	1	1
Identity enacted through a cultural hub	Participants described their business space as functioning beyond commerce, where it served as a culturally meaningful gathering place that reflected shared identity and community presence.	1	1
Identity expressed through food and environment	Participants described expressing their identity through the food they serve and the environments they intentionally create.	1	1
Identity expressed through work practices and personal conduct	Participants described their identity as being enacted through their work, with personal qualities such as integrity and determination manifesting in how they approached and conducted their business activities.	1	1
Identity-linked sense of community responsibility	Participants described experiencing a sense of responsibility connected to their cultural background, which shaped how they viewed representation and opportunity creation within their communities.	1	1
Incorporating cultural food traditions	Participants described weaving family food traditions and culturally rooted culinary practices into their business offerings as a continuation of their cultural heritage.	1	1
Inherited starting asset	Participants described receiving inherited land as the initial material condition that enabled them to begin their business	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Peer recognition for culturally aligned style knowledge	Participants described being informally recognized by peers as a point of reference for culturally aligned and professional style, based on repeated requests for advice rather than intentional positioning.	1	1
Perceived rarity of Black supply-chain ownership	Participants described noticing how uncommon it was for African Americans to be present in ranching and meat production, particularly in owning the entire supply chain, and positioned themselves within that rarity.	1	1
Positioning oneself as a committed and selective team member			1
Rapport facilitated through shared cultural and gender experiences	Participants described instances in which shared cultural and gender-related experiences contributed to ease of interaction and rapport with others.	1	1
Reminding oneself of past accomplishments to keep going	The participant described overcoming moments of doubt by reminding themselves of their past accomplishments, which helped them continue moving forward.	1	1
Strategic positioning of identity within professional environments	Participants described intentionally drawing on their perspective and identity to offer insight while maintaining professional adaptability across diverse business settings.	1	1
Striving to perform work at a high standard			1
Category Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks		11	43
Belief that guidance requires earned commitment	Participants described believing that access to others' knowledge and guidance required demonstrating commitment and responsibility.	1	1
Brotherhood-based mentorship as cultural reinforcement		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Building confidence through customer encouragement	Participants described gaining confidence from their hands-on experience and from customers who encouraged them to consider opening their own business.	1	1
Business idea emergence through repeated community inquiry	Participants described the emergence of business ideas through repeated inquiries and comments from community members regarding their cooking.	1	1
Business self-presentation aligned with cultural and faith identity	Participants described expressing their cultural and faith identity through business symbolism, such as logos, and noticing new opportunities in connection with increased self-identification.	1	1
Community affirmation of ownership	Participants described receiving verbal affirmation and expressions of pride from community members who recognized and supported their identity-connected entrepreneurial work.	1	1
Community and family-based financial support	Participants described accessing financial support through family and community-based resources following the denial of support from traditional banking institutions.	1	1
Community recognition emerging through a visible business identity	Participants described increased recognition and engagement from community members resulting from the visible display of their business identity, which fostered unsolicited interactions and expressions of interest.	1	1
Community-based engagement	Participants described engaging with local community organizations and businesses through invitations and product provision, reflecting ongoing relational interactions.	1	1
Community-based word-of-mouth support	Participants described relying on informal word-of-mouth support within the African American community, reflecting culturally rooted practices of mutual support that helped sustain their business during its early stages.	1	1
Community-embedded startup practices	Participants described initiating their businesses through small-scale, community-embedded practices such as online sales and pop-up engagements in familiar local spaces.	1	1
Connection to land and community			1
Cultural emphasis on stability over entrepreneurship		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Customer coming to support a Black-owned business	The participant described customers choosing his shop because they intentionally wanted to support a Black-owned business.	1	1
Encountering previously unprovided financial knowledge	Participants described later-life encounters with financial concepts—such as investing and interest accumulation—that were not made available or explained during their upbringing.	1	1
Experiencing business growth through community word-of-mouth	The participant described depending on community-driven word-of-mouth referrals, indicating that trust within the local network, not formal advertising, was central to the growth of the business.	1	1
Faith-based structuring of the work week			1
Familial and peer support during business entry	Participants described receiving practical support from family members and peers during the early stages of business formation.	1	1
Familial reinforcement of responsibility and persistence	Participants described receiving spousal support that reinforced a sense of responsibility, shared commitment, and persistence in their entrepreneurial efforts.	1	1
Family-based operational support in business		1	1
Gained early visibility through family connection	Participants described receiving early visibility in the industry through the assistance of a family member with established connections.	1	1
Gaining community-based referrals		1	1
Gaining trust through shared understanding		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Hospitality and resilience are learned through communal traditions	Participants described learning hospitality and resilience through repeated participation in family gatherings, church activities, and communal traditions.	1	1
Indirect moral encouragement in the absence of formal support systems		1	1
Intergenerational role modelling through observed family life	Participants described observing how respected individuals navigated family and parental roles, and how these observations shaped intentions to model alternative values and financial practices for their own children.	1	1
Motivation sustained through long-term customer relationships	Participants described deriving ongoing motivation from long-standing relationships with community customers, where repeated patronage over time reinforced persistence and personal meaning in their work.	1	1
Observing success through community-based mentorship exposure	Participants described being exposed to successful lifestyles and practices through community-based relationships, including mentorship, family, and peer networks, where repeated observation of material outcomes and daily conduct shaped their understanding of what was possible.	1	1
Observing tangible financial practices through community role models (2)	Participants described observing concrete financial behaviours, such as saving money and property ownership, among community-based role models, and experiencing these visible practices as informative and influential in shaping their own understanding of wealth-building.	1	1
Participation in community fundraising activities is linked to reciprocal engagement	Participants described engaging in organized fundraising activities within community organizations and experiencing reciprocal outreach from the community as part of their business involvement.	1	1
Payment flexibility			1
Peer encouragement prompted by a visible shared identity	Participants described providing encouragement to peers who shared their cultural or national identity when those	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Professional engagement with minority-owned firms	Participants described engaging in professional work with Black-owned, Hispanic-owned, and other firms during the early stages of their business experience.	1	1
Recognition of faith and cultural identity in business interactions	Participants described being recognized by others for their cultural and faith identity during business interactions, which led to increased inquiry and engagement.	1	1
Recognizing omitted financial instruction in early guidance	Participants described realizing that early guidance from authority figures emphasized employment and hard work while omitting information about financial instruments and investment-based wealth generation.	1	1
Relied on community-based organizational support	Participants described drawing consistent support from churches, community centers, and local organizations that played a central role in their business operations.	1	1
Religious observance guiding daily business conduct			1
Relying on foundational support from family, church, and mentors	The participant described drawing steady support from family, church, and mentors, noting these relationships as foundational elements that have shaped and sustained their path.	1	1
Spiritual framing of the entrepreneurial journey	Participants described understanding their entrepreneurial experience through a spiritual lens, emphasizing learning and personal growth as part of the journey.	1	1
Transportation importance	The participant described transportation as an essential part of daily life in their community, shaping how people access work, school, and faith activities.	1	1
Value placed on locally sourced meat	Participants described how customers expressed appreciation for locally sourced meat, emphasizing transparency and connection to place as meaningful aspects of their purchasing experience.	1	1
Word-of-mouth through community and church networks	Participants described gaining early customers through informal word-of-mouth communication within African American professional circles and church-based community networks.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
RQ 2	What aspects of contemporary entrepreneurship theory can encourage and sustain business growth within African-American businesses to increase their presence in Houston?	12	153
THEME 2- Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum	RQ2 -What aspects of contemporary entrepreneurship theory can encourage and sustain business growth within African-American business to increase their presence in Houston?	12	153
Category Adaptive Strategy Patterns	Experiences in which participants described adjusting behaviors, practices, or routines in response to situational demands encountered during business operation. [Adjustments after engagement, Tactical changes, Practice-level responses, and Doing something differently after recognition]	12	46
Absence of personally experienced systemic barriers			1
Actively expanding through client acquisition and funding efforts		1	1
Adapting care interactions to honor cultural and relational practices	Participant describes adjusting clinical routines to accommodate culturally meaningful practices and shared decision-making.	1	1
Advising action and relationship-building through cultural strength		1	1
Articulating commitment to business growth	Participants described expressing a personal commitment to growing their business, which framed subsequent decisions and sacrifices.	1	1
Balancing technical identity with business growth aspirations	Participants described experiencing a tension between maintaining a strong technical focus and pursuing business growth.	1	1
Building community trust in work and price		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Building strong cases to push for my team	The participant described learning to build strong cases, present data-driven arguments, and push for their team when resources were difficult to obtain.	1	1
Business longevity in place	Participants described the duration of their residence in a specific location alongside the length of time their business had been in operation.	1	1
Collaborated with allied heath professionals			1
Communicating clearly to gain support	The participant described using clear communication—such as presenting data and anticipating concerns, to build support from leadership and keep progress moving despite structural obstacles.	1	1
Delayed institutional access enabling SBA-supported growth strategies	Participants described gaining access to SBA mentorship, funding, and structured resources later in their entrepreneurial journey, which enabled them to shift toward externally supported growth strategies and reduce reliance on personal financial risk.	1	1
Diversified income streams under external pressure			1
Emphasis on delivering values through service quality	Participants described understanding business success as centered on delivering value through the quality of service provided.	1	1
Encountering pre-existing operational systems	Participants described encountering pre-existing operational and administrative systems as part of their business structure.	1	1
Expansion of roles interacting with clients	Participants described an increase in the number of employees who interacted directly with clients as the business evolved.	1	1
Experienced early financial pressure	Participants described anticipating early debt strain and adapting by arranging staggered payment terms to reduce financial pressure.	1	1
Experiencing relationship differences across organizational levels		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Focusing on problem-solving and coalition-building when obstacles arise	The participant described responding to obstacles by engaging in problem-solving and coalition-building, working with stakeholders to develop workable solutions.	1	1
Founder centrality limits growth		1	1
Gaining independence through equipment purchase	Participants described saving money to purchase their own tools, an act that provided a sense of independence in their work.	1	1
Intentional cultivation of an entrepreneurial orientation	Participants described consciously developing an entrepreneurial orientation through experience, habits, and routines that were not previously modeled, shaping how they approached business decisions over time.	1	1
Internally reflecting on personal and professional diversification	Participants described engaging in internal reflection about the need to grow and diversify themselves by considering additional directions for their work.	1	1
Keeping paperwork tight and building relationship with credit unions	The participant described maintaining strict documentation of expenses and forming relationships with smaller credit unions as part of their everyday effort to keep the business functioning smoothly.	1	1
Learning while moving forward	The participant expressed that there is no predetermined blueprint to follow and that learning happens while progressing through each step, gaining understanding through the act of moving forward.	1	1
Maintained a positive demeanor	Participants described maintaining a consistently positive demeanor in interactions, which they experienced as helping smoother entry into existing professional circles.	1	1
Maintaining attentiveness and inquiry amid variable outcomes			1
Not thinking about giving up		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Peer connection through Black Chamber network	Participants described being connected to other entrepreneurs through community-based business organizations, gaining relational support from peers navigating similar challenges.	1	1
Perceived absence of structural challenges	Participants described not encountering systematic or structural challenges during their entrepreneurial efforts, often framing this experience as a matter of personal fortune rather than universal conditions.	1	1
Perceived economic justification for increased regulatory control	Participants described perceiving increased regulatory control as economically justified, particularly in relation to pricing stability, national economic conditions, and increased difficulty within business operations.	1	1
Perceived local market gap	Participants described noticing mismatches between local consumer demand and available products within their geographic market, based on direct observation of existing offerings.	1	1
Persisting in loan attempts	The participant described repeatedly applying for funding and staying persistent until eventually qualifying for a small SBA loan.	1	1
Recognized conditions for sustainable business engagement	Participants described recognizing key conditions necessary for sustaining a business, including surrounding themselves with trusted counsel, conducting prior research, aligning household support, and orienting their efforts toward long-term stability and contribution.	1	1
Reflected on absence of overt discrimination	Participants described not experiencing overt racism or sexism in their early career, while acknowledging uncertainty about whether subtle bias may have been concealed as inexperience.	1	1
Responded to favoritism by maximizing opportunities and relationships	Participants described responding to favoritism and nepotism by taking full advantage of available opportunities, doing quality work, and building relationships.	1	1
Sacrificing personal activities to pursue business growth			1
Seeing education as the factor that enables access to funding		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Strategic realtor relationships for negotiation support	Participants described intentionally forming relationships with local realtors who provided trust-based support and assistance during negotiation processes.	1	1
Sustained long-term business operations	Refers to the continued maintenance of business activity over extended periods despite financial constraints, market volatility, and limited institutional support.	1	1
Sustained operational disruption due to multiple concurrent equipment failures	Participants described experiencing extended business disruption following multiple simultaneous equipment failures, resulting in significant financial strain and interruption of operations.	1	1
Use of social media for trust-building	Participants described using digital platforms to share aspects of their work processes as a way to build trust and enhance transparency with their customers.	1	1
Valuing structure for managing personal and business demands	Participants described recognizing structure as important for managing energy and demands across both personal life and business activities.	1	1
Viewed franchise model as providing structural support			1
Viewing resources as sufficient while learning from experience	Participants described experiencing resources as sufficient and approaching situations as opportunities to learn from whatever was encountered.	1	1
Category_Foundational Influences		11	21
Anticipated business formation following employment	Participants described holding a clear intention to start a business following a defined period of prior employment	1	1
Assembly of initial financial and planning resources	Participants described assembling initial financial resources and formal planning documents through personal savings,	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Business idea formation through family-based culinary modeling	Participants described the initial formation of their business ideas as emerging from early family-based experiences, where practices such as cooking were modeled as ways to connect people.	1	1
Business origins rooted in personal living environment	Participants described beginning their businesses within their own homes, using personal living spaces as the initial site of entrepreneurial activity.	1	1
Community care concerns			1
Completed essential licensing to begin career	Participants described completing required licensing as the foundational action necessary to begin their insurance careers.	1	1
Described early automotive experience	Participants described their foundational development through early hands-on work, followed by formal training and early career employment that shaped their entry into the field.	1	1
Describing the development of a new staffing venture	The participant described their experience developing a new automated staffing venture, noting its conceptualization period and eventual launch.	1	1
Describing the sequence of business launches	The participant described the chronological order in which their businesses were launched, noting the years each venture began.	1	1
Desire for end-to-end production oversight	Participants described creating businesses that allowed direct involvement and oversight across all stages of production, from sourcing through final delivery.	1	1
Early familial exposure to cattle and local sales	Participants described growing up in environments where livestock production and local product sales were part of everyday family activities, providing early exposure to agricultural work and informal market exchange.	1	1
Entrepreneurial origin through perceived market gap	Participants described initiating their business after perceiving an unmet market need, where the absence of culturally representative products informed the decision to establish the venture.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
First client engagement during business launch	Participants described completing an initial paid project during the early stage of business formation, followed by subsequent work opportunities.	1	1
Intentional decision-making followed by industry research	Participants described beginning their entrepreneurial efforts by first making a deliberate decision to start a business, followed by researching the industry as an initial preparatory step.	1	1
Later exposure to business operations through retail management	Participants described gaining exposure to business practices later in life through roles in retail management, which familiarized them with operational processes preceding business ownership.	1	1
Material comparison shaping self-perception	Participants described observing the material conditions of others and, through comparison, experiencing a shift in self-perception that prompted consideration of alternative economic paths.	1	1
Observed access disparities	Participants described noticing differences between healthcare availability and the ability of underserved communities to access services, based on firsthand clinical experience.	1	1
Realizing mistrust within predominantly white business relationships	Participants described coming to a realization of mistrust while conducting business primarily with white counterparts during the early stages of their business.	1	1
Reliance on personal and informal financial resources at startup	Participants described initiating their businesses using personal savings, family support, and credit-based financing in the absence of formal institutional capital.	1	1
Reliance on personal funds prior to exposure to external financing	Participants described relying on personal funds during early business development before becoming aware of external financing options, while simultaneously engaging in self-education and mentorship to build business knowledge.	1	1
Category_Networked Knowledge Flows	Experiences in which participants received guidance, encouragement, information, or confidence through interpersonal relationships such as mentors, peers, or professional networks. [Mentor encouragement, Informal	10	44

Name	Description	Files	References
Active engagement in self-directed learning and mentorship access	Participants described engaging in self-directed learning while simultaneously seeking guidance from mentors during their business development process.	1	1
Advising others to start small and learn the business	The participant emphasized starting small, learning both the trade and the business side, and remaining persistent despite setbacks such as bank rejection.	1	1
Assistance from peers with shared perspectives	Participants described receiving assistance from friends whom they perceived as sharing similar perspectives during their business development journey.	1	1
Assistance through financial backing and institutional connections	Participants described receiving assistance in the form of financial backing and access to established institutional networks through relationships with individuals in the financial industry, which facilitated entry into business operations.	1	1
Attendance at Mississippi State University			1
Believing in oneself while continually learning	The participant emphasized self-belief and the importance of ongoing learning from books, mentors, and online tools to guide their entrepreneurial journey.	1	1
Described distribution of support across peers, mentors, and family	Participants described the relative distribution of support they experienced from peers, mentors, and family members during business development.	1	1
Emerging work opportunities over time			1
Encouraged excellence and preparation	Participants emphasized the importance of excellence, preparedness, and gaining varied experiences when advising others entering the field.	1	1
Experienced industry context as providing greater access to support		1	1
Experiencing ease in building a diverse team in Houston		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Experiencing growth through continual learning and advocating for others	The participant expressed that continual learning, building meaningful relationships, and speaking up on behalf of others were lived ways of evolving in their work and caring for people around them.	1	1
Experiencing growth through continual learning for self and team	The participant described how continually learning themselves and supporting their team's learning contributed to a shared sense of growth and strengthened their work over time.	1	1
Experiencing legacy as helping people grow	The participant described legacy as being shaped not only by work accomplishments but by the ways they help others grow.	1	1
Feeling motivated to lift others and create inclusive spaces			1
Focused professional work in engineering specialization	Participants described concentrating their professional work on specific engineering specializations during business formation.	1	1
Guidance emerging when ready to learn	Participants described perceiving guidance as emerging at moments when they felt ready to learn or receive direction.	1	1
Guided step-by-step mentoring through institutional processes		1	1
Hearing affirmations of leadership ability from a mentor	The participant described receiving affirming feedback from a mentor who told him he had a natural gift for leadership.	1	1
Institutional community support	Participants described receiving business-related knowledge and networking opportunities through formal community-based organizations and structured workshops.	1	1
Investment in tools	The participant described needing to invest in updated equipment and continuing education to meet the technical demands of the work.	1	1
Leading and mentoring others through learned lessons		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Leaning on professional help	The participant described turning to accountants and lawyers when business challenges exceeded what they felt able to handle alone.	1	1
Learning distinctions between employment, self-employment, and business ownership	Participants described learning to distinguish between being an employee, being self-employed, and being a business owner, with ownership understood as creating purpose, community support, or meaningful value rather than simply holding a job.	1	1
Learning practical skills through a peer's direct guidance	The participant described gaining practical business knowledge through peer mentorship, emphasizing how trusted interpersonal relationships served as a primary source of learning about inventory and supplier management.	1	1
Mentor-derived confidence	Participants described gaining confidence through the direct encouragement of mentors who affirmed their professional abilities and motivated them to pursue independent practice models.	1	1
Mentor-influenced formation of habits and routines	Participants described mentors influencing the development of personal habits and routines that aligned with evolving ways of thinking about business.	1	1
Motivated by others' success	The participant described feeling inspired and energized by observing the successes of others, explaining that seeing peers achieve their goals strengthens their own belief in what is possible and fuels their motivation to continue.	1	1
Noted overlap between national and local network			1
Offering practical support to peers	Participants described offering practical help and support to peers without framing the role as formal mentorship.	1	1
Ongoing peer-based knowledge exchange within group interactions		1	1
Perceived corrective role of research in racialized economic contexts		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Providing entry guidance through peer knowledge exchange	Participants described sharing practical guidance and encouragement with peers seeking advice on how to enter and initiate business activities.	1	1
Reaching out to mentors and people in the field	The participant described reaching out to mentors and people already working in the field to ask questions and seek guidance.	1	1
Recognizing limits of control while relying on commitment			1
Relying on mentors for guidance	The participant described consistently turning to mentors or coaches for honest feedback and direction, viewing this supportive guidance as a necessary part of personal and professional development.	1	1
Relying on peer networking	The participant described depending on relationships with other small business owners for shared advice and mutual guidance, highlighting how peer networks functioned as an essential support system for navigating daily business challenges.	1	1
Relying on strong support systems	The participant described depending on strong support systems, particularly colleagues, mentors, and family, as central sources of encouragement and stability.	1	1
Sharing business knowledge through their own writing	The participant described creating a book to share what they have learned about business, aiming to help medical professionals understand business strategy.	1	1
Sought connection within small peer community			1
Sought connection within small peer community (2)	Participants described making ongoing efforts to connect with a small group of peers of color within the Independent Adjusting community.	1	1
Spending nights reading, researching, and watching webinars		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Category_Resource Deployment Strategies		10	21
Being intentional about presenting work professionally	The participant described intentionally presenting their business professionally and with a polished appearance as part of how they operate.	1	1
Black Chamber facilitated peer networking	Participants described accessing business networking opportunities through formal Black-led business organizations that facilitated connections with other Black business owners.	1	1
Dividing responsibilities based on individual expertise	The participant described dividing responsibilities with his twin brother according to their areas of expertise, with his brother managing the clinical work and the participant focusing on business and financial operations.	1	1
Emphasized foundational business preparation and purpose			1
Emphasized the need for persistence and skills	Participants described growth and sustainment as dependent on persistence and sufficient skills to address the challenges that inevitably arise.	1	1
Experiencing ease in accessing advisors	Participants described experiencing little difficulty in accessing advisors when needed.	1	1
Experiencing fair licensing access	The participant experienced equitable treatment in Houston's licensing system, attributing this fairness to strong representation of people of color in these departments.	1	1
Experiencing mutual trust with the team	The participant described a reciprocal sense of trust with their team, emphasizing that both giving and receiving trust shaped their day-to-day interactions.	1	1
No barriers identified at the current stage			1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Perceiving employee alignment	Participants described perceiving employees as aligned in how they approached their work within the business.	1	1
Persistence through repeated rejection	Participants described learning to persist through repeated rejection from banks or suppliers, using each refusal as a moment of refinement and eventual progress toward support.	1	1
Providing care without regard to background or neighborhood	The participant described offering services without making distinctions based on a person's background or neighborhood, emphasizing a commitment to treating clients with the same level of care regardless of where they come from.	1	1
Recognition of knowledge-mediated resource gaps	Participants described recognizing that although resources were available, gaps emerged when they lacked the knowledge needed to access or apply those resources, leading to retrospective insights about education and strategy.	1	1
Recognized dishonest service practices	Participants described recognizing service practices they perceived as unfair or dishonest, which became a motivating factor in deciding to create an alternative through their own business.	1	1
Recognizing aligned support relationships	Participants described recognizing the importance of advisors, mentors, and employees whose values and approaches aligned with their own.	1	1
Relying on guidance from professional networks	Participant describes how entering entrepreneurship required leaning on mentors, coaches, and legal advisors as essential sources of knowledge beyond clinical training.	1	1
Struggling to let go and trust others	The participant described the difficulty of releasing control and trusting others to handle client interactions, expressing how challenging it felt to let go.	1	1
Use of athletic analogy to express excellence			1
Utilization of availlable start-up resources		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Category_Transitional Pathways	Descriptions of how participants experience moving from one lived condition to another, as consciously perceived and expressed during periods of change.	7	21
Breaking from inherited financial limitations	Participants described recognizing the absence of financial knowledge or investment exposure in their upbringing and, through observing alternative possibilities, seeking to pursue different economic pathways.	1	1
Business formation following personal service exposure	Participants described the emergence of their business following direct personal exposure to a service, during which they recognized its applicability beyond their own use and subsequently developed it into a business activity.	1	1
Duration of entrepreneurial operation across business contexts	Participants described the length of time they had been operating as business owners, distinguishing between overall entrepreneurial duration and years of involvement within a specific industry.	1	1
Early uncertainty during business launch			1
Employment with federal government in Mississippi	Participants described being employed with the federal government in Mississippi prior to later professional roles.	1	1
Employment with the Army Corps of Engineers	Participants described being employed with the Army Corps of Engineers during the period preceding business formation.	1	1
Entered entrepreneurship through family prompting	Participants described beginning their entrepreneurial journey in response to encouragement from family members with established industry experience.	1	1
Experiencing an internal turning point toward doing something different	Participants described progressing through required licensing and examination steps as part of transitioning into a new professional role.	1	1
Experiencing freedom from identity-based scrutiny		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Leaving corporate work due to racialized pressures		1	1
Leaving the structure and comfort of a federal job	The participant described realizing that growth required leaving the structure and comfort of a federal job.	1	1
Navigating required licensure and credentialing processes	Participants described progressing through required licensing and examination steps as part of transitioning into a new professional role.	1	1
Observing racial homogeneity within a professional training environment		1	1
Perceived economic activity in Texas		1	1
Reflecting on diverse prior entrepreneurial experiences	Participants described reflecting on their involvement in multiple types of businesses as part of their broader entrepreneurial journey.	1	1
Relocation experienced as successful	Participants described experiencing relocation as successful as it unfolded alongside continued employment and subsequent business formation.	1	1
Relocation preceding business formation	Participants described relocating to Houston prior to launching their businesses, situating their entrepreneurial beginnings within a new geographic context.	1	1
Temporal marking of transition to independent work		1	1
Transitioning from military service into federal contracting		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Transitioning toward a new professional role	Participants described a recent shift toward a new professional role, emerging from an initial moment that prompted reconsideration of their work direction.	1	1
RQ 3	How does the current socioeconomic climate limit resource-based entrepreneurship theory strategies within African-American businesses in Houston to the extent of causing low representation?	12	49
THEME 3 - Multilevel Constraint Barriers	RQ 3 -How does the current socioeconomic climate limit resource-based entrepreneurship theory strategies within African-American businesses in Houston to the extent of causing low representation?	12	49
Category_Strain-Constraint Barriers			17
Assuming disproportionate responsibility in brokerage relationships	Participants described early business strain arising from assuming greater operational responsibility than other parties when working through brokerage arrangements.	1	1
Being held back by the belief that learning must precede action	Participants described experiencing delays in progress due to the belief that complete knowledge was required before taking action, despite viewing learning as an ongoing process.	1	1
Encountering subjective and algorithmic bias	The participant described facing persistent uncertainty in funding decisions due to subjective judgment and emerging AI-driven evaluation systems, expressing concern that these institutional mechanisms may reinforce or reproduce racialized bias even when applications are objectively strong.	1	1
Enforcing strict budgetary controls under operational constraints	Participants described maintaining strict oversight of spending and enforcing budget limits within their operations, sometimes facing social resistance, as a necessary response to operational and financial constraints.	1	1
Experienced lower compensation rates within trucking contracts	Participants described receiving trucking contracts that consistently paid lower per-mile rates compared to other available contracts, experienced as constrained economic opportunity within their business operations.	1	1
Experiencing a racialized division between labor and financial knowledge	Participants described growing up in environments where Black men were positioned primarily in physically demanding labor roles, alongside a lack of exposure to conversations about financial knowledge and wealth.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Experiencing limits of personal oversight	Participants described experiencing limits in their ability to personally oversee all clients, customers, and employees as the business grew.	1	1
Experiencing mindset as the primary challenge	Participants described experiencing their mindset as the most significant challenge they had to deal with.	1	1
Heightened credibility demands under skepticism and stereotyping	Participants described experiencing heightened demands to establish credibility in response to skepticism or stereotypes, requiring increased attentiveness and adaptive decision-making within constrained professional environments.	1	1
Heightened credibility standards under racialized assumptions	Participants described encountering heightened expectations to establish professional credibility due to racialized assumptions, requiring additional effort to be regarded as legitimate within business contexts.	1	1
Lacked industry contacts to vouch for capabilities	Participants described lacking industry contacts who could speak to their abilities, identifying this absence of connections as a significant resource gap.	1	1
Noticed limited African American representation			1
Recognizing ongoing workforce and workload challenges		1	1
Refusal of repeated unfavorable terms to interrupt patterned treatment	Participants described refusing repeated unfavorable terms to prevent the continuation of patterned treatment that consistently limited economic outcomes.	1	1
Relating to ongoing obstacles and barriers		1	1
Stress generated by penalty-based operational constraints		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			32
Bootstrapping under loan denial	The participant described being unable to secure bank loans and therefore relied on savings, side-job income, and small amounts of family assistance to move forward.	1	1
Brokerage extraction through overcharging and low percentage allocations	Participants described early business constraints arising from brokerage practices in which loads were overcharged while returning minimal percentage shares to them.	1	1
Contrained bank financing	Participants described encountering limitations in accessing traditional bank financing, which influenced how they moved forward with funding their businesses.	1	1
Delayed awareness of Small Business Administration support resources	Participants described becoming aware, later in their entrepreneurial journey, of institutional resources provided by the Small Business Administration, including business planning assistance and funding support, which had not been known to them earlier.	1	1
Difficulty accessing required programs and loans			1
Experienced industry networks as exclusionary toward Black entrepreneurs	Participants described recognizing historically embedded industry networks that they experienced as exclusionary toward Black entrepreneurs within the trucking industry.	1	1
Experienced inequitable insurance reimbursement rates	Participants described facing inequitable insurance reimbursement structures that placed independent practices at a financial disadvantage compared to large hospital systems.	1	1
Experiencing a growth ceiling			1
Experiencing bureaucracy slowing progress		1	1
Experiencing layered challenges in becoming loan-ready		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Experiencing repeated credit denial despite steady business revenue	The participant described repeatedly being denied credit even after years of consistent revenue, expressing the experience as their biggest hurdle in trying to move the business forward.	1	1
Experiencing slowed growth due to insufficient capital	The participant described how growth stalls without sufficient capital, emphasizing that progress is directly tied to having the proper funding.	1	1
Faced reluctance from lenders	Participants described encountering lender hesitation and compensating for restricted access to capital by relying on personal funds and limited loan options.	1	1
Facing unexpected barriers when trying to expand the business	Participants described encountering unexpected procedural or regulatory barriers during efforts to expand or modify their business operations, often expressing frustration at how these obstacles added difficulty to growth.	1	1
Insufficient startup capital constraining early business expansion	Participants described limited access to financial capital during the early stages of business development, which constrained their ability to expand operations and invest in marketing activities.	1	1
Limited access due to processor dominance	Participants described encountering limited access to essential processing facilities due to the dominance of large processors, which restricted their ability to obtain fair pricing or equal treatment.	1	1
Limited access to expansion capital			1
Needed referral-based access to enter field	Participants described needing referral from an experienced adjuster to gain initial access to insurance deployment opportunities.	1	1
Observed nepotism and favoritism in close-knit field		1	1
Perceived credit denial despite demonstrated business performance	Participants described being denied access to lines of credit despite a sustained history of consistent business sales.	1	1
Perceived differential tratment across stakeholder groups		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Perceived increased banking scrutiny			1
Perceived judgment during leasing negotiations	Participants described experiencing difficulty negotiating commercial leases, accompanied by a perception of being judged based on appearance during interactions with landlords.	1	1
Perceived restricted access to desirable leasing locations	Participants described experiencing restricted access to desirable commercial leasing locations, accompanied by additional procedural requirements that were perceived as barriers	1	1
Perceived restriction of access through heightened licensing qualifications	Participants described experiencing increased licensing qualifications as restricting access to business entry, perceiving these requirements as making it more difficult to obtain necessary credentials.	1	1
Questioning whether success would transfer across different cultural environments	The participant reflected on whether their business success would translate to other cities and expressed uncertainty about how differences in cultural acceptance might shape outcomes.	1	1
Relied on persistent outreach without connections	Participants described repeatedly calling companies to make their availability known when they did not have existing connections, often requiring multiple attempts to reach the decision-maker.	1	1
Repeated loan denials despite documented eligibility	Participants described experiencing repeated loan denials from financial institutions despite having established business plans and adequate credit.	1	1
Self-funding business operations under limited external support	Participants described relying primarily on personal financial resources to fund their business operations, experiencing significant strain when unexpected expenses arose due to limited access to external financial support.	1	1
Self-navigation in the absence of accessible institutional support	Participants described the absence of accessible institutional resources during business development, requiring them to independently seek out information and later recognize the importance of formal support systems such as chambers of commerce.	1	1
Systematic undercompensation within constrained market access	Participants described experiencing systematic undercompensation in business transactions, where access to higher-paying work was restricted, resulting in consistently	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Systemic barriers; Regulatory challenges	Participants described encountering regulatory obstacles related to permits, inspections, and zoning requirements.	1	1
RQ 4	What aspects of minority entrepreneurship theory contribute to the low representation of African-American business owners in Houston?	11	41
THEME 4 - Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics	RQ4 -What aspects of minority entrepreneurship theory contribute to the low representation of African-American business owners in Houston?	11	41
Category_Identity-Based Constraints	Lived experiences in which participants consciously perceive limitations or restrictions tied to how they are seen or understand themselves.	8	19
Carrying awareness of being one of the only Black men in certain professional spaces	The participant described consistently carrying an awareness of his racial identity in professional settings, noting that he is often one of the only Black men present, which shapes how he experiences and interprets those environments.	1	1
Choosing not to display their faces to avoid bias	The participant described intentionally leaving their faces off the company website to prevent potential unconscious bias from influencing how others perceive their business.	1	1
Commitment to working through internal challenge			1
Comparing self to established professionals	Participants described comparing their own skills and knowledge to those of more established professionals, accompanied by internal questioning of readiness.	1	1
Experienced affirmation of representational impact		1	1
Experiencing mindset as a challenge in business leadership	Participants described experiencing their own mindset as a central challenge while running their business.	1	1
Experiencing oneself as the primary challenge	Participants described experiencing themselves as the primary source of challenge while navigating their business journey.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Learned skepticism toward verbal refusal requiring independent verification	Participants described learning to treat verbal refusals with skepticism, engaging in independent investigation to determine whether limitations were factual or situational before accepting them.	1	1
Limited social support during startup	Participants described having limited social or professional contacts during the initial startup period, accompanied by feelings of uncertainty about their capabilities.	1	1
Moments of doubt about being good enough			1
Navigating receptivity to external advice		1	1
Perceived differential credibility based on intersecting identity	Participants described varying perceptions of credibility during negotiations based on the simultaneous influence of racial and gender identity.	1	1
Perceived need to over-prove professional legitimacy	Participants described an ongoing awareness of heightened expectations in business contexts, expressed as a perceived need to demonstrate competence beyond standard norms.	1	1
Perceived need to prove business legitimacy		1	1
Persistence through procedural precision	Participants described responding to perceived barriers by maintaining persistence and ensuring accuracy and completeness in required documentation.	1	1
Recognition of self-attributed limitations		1	1
Reorienting perceptions in business relationships		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Category_Trust Navigation Process	Lived experiences through which participants consciously perceive forming, assessing, or adjusting trust in others while engaging in relationships or decisions.	9	22
Being treated as not serious by suppliers		1	1
Differential experience of bias across corporate and entrepreneurial contexts	Participants described experiencing bias within corporate employment contexts while reporting minimal or no comparable experiences after transitioning to entrepreneurship.	1	1
Experienced identity-based misrecognition	Participants described being misidentified in professional settings, leading them to confront assumptions that undermined their recognized identity as doctors.	1	1
Experiencing dismissal until ideas are validated by others		1	1
Experiencing gender-based assumptions and racial skepticism	The participant described being assumed knowledgeable because he is male, yet also experiencing added skepticism because he is Black.	1	1
Experiencing racialized mistrust in business relationships	Participants described experiencing mistrust in business relationships with white counterparts, articulated in connection with their racialized experiences.	1	1
Feeling pushed to excel and prove expertise to counter stereotypes		1	1
Growing up within segregated educational settings	Participants described growing up in segregated areas and attending segregated schools during their early educational years.	1	1
Heightened self-monitoring under anticipated scrutiny	Participants described increasing their thoroughness and professionalism in anticipation of heightened scrutiny connected to their cultural identity.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Needing to prove oneself to be taken seriously	The participant described that some clients did not take him seriously at first and that he had to prove himself before gaining their trust.	1	1
Noted varied responses to his presence	Participants described consistently encountering varied reactions to their presence in professional settings, ranging from overt to covert and from negative to positive.	1	1
Perceived differential trust based on race and gender	Participants described experiencing differential levels of trust during business interactions, where gender was sometimes perceived as advantageous while race introduced suspicion or doubt.	1	1
Perceived racialized mistrust in lending	Participants described experiencing doubt or questioning from financial institutions about the legitimacy of their land and livestock ownership, reflecting perceived mistrust connected to their identity.	1	1
Perceived unspoken doubts about competency	Participants described sensing unspoken skepticism about their competency from non-minority colleagues and supervisors.	1	1
Perceived wholesaler assumptions about product identity	Participants described encountering assumptions about their business identity from wholesalers prior to product review, where externally imposed stereotypes shaped early perceptions of their enterprise.	1	1
Recognition of comparative pay disparity in business partnerships	Participants described becoming aware of differences between their compensation and that of business counterparts, recognizing the potential financial consequences of those disparities.	1	1
Recognizing the roots of patient mistrust	Participant recognizes patients' lived mistrust through his own experience, articulating how shared racial identity provides insight into why trust is fragile within healthcare settings.	1	1
Reorientation of partnership pathways following repeated unfavorable treatment	Participants described experiencing repeated unfavorable treatment in contractual relationships and subsequently adjusting partnership selections to avoid continued exposure to similar outcomes.	1	1
Staffing choices associated with improved contract outcomes	Participants described making staffing decisions that they experienced as leading to more favorable contract outcomes during business negotiations.	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
			1
Trust-building through identity-based skepticism		1	1
Unexpected owner identity		1	1

Appendix I

Reflexive Journal Excerpts

Date / Phase	Context or Event	Reflexive Observation	Analytic Insight / Action
7/15/2025. Pre-interview reflection	Before first participant interview.	I felt both anticipation and concern about how my background as a Veteran and small-business owner might influence rapport.	Reminded myself to bracket assumptions about discipline and resilience, will note if participants mention these traits.
7/15/2025. Durning interview #200	Participant shared frustration about realizing he couldn't trust white people.	I sensed my own empathy as a business owner. Had to focus on active listening rather than advocacy.	Ensured I created codes that would address this pivotal acknowledgement.
7/15/2025. During interview #201	The participant demonstrated a penchant for creating multiple businesses.	Notably, a motivated person who sought many avenues to entrepreneurship.	Credited many whites for mentorship and guidance, opposed to cultural support. Noted in Nvivo.
7/31/2025. Interview #202	The participant uniquely attributed his success to his religious belief.	I was inspired seeing a person so motivated from a faith-based stance.	Created codes to reflect his deep belief, associated with cultural traditions.
8/14/2025. Participant #203	Felt comfortable writing his responses over a live interview.	Leeway was given to avoid losing the opportunity to capture the experience.	I was able to follow up by phone to confirm any misnomers.
8/17/2025. Participant #204	The restaurant industry appears to be a busy enterprise that deters many from participation.	I found it challenging to obtain owners to commit to interviews.	I will seek other industries that allow owners to shift focus from their daily business affairs.
8/20/2025. Participant #205	Opted to write responses to the predesigned questionnaire.	This enablement was optional for participants reluctancy to interviews, due to their personal reasons.	There were many phone calls to clarify the meanings of written responses. I believed I gained the essence of his story.

Date / Phase	Context or Event	Reflexive Observation	Analytic Insight / Action
8/25/2025. Participant #206	Great opportunity to witness a farm-to-table process.	Had to ensure I kept my personal thoughts at bay and allow his responses to provide the data.	I was astonished to witness a complete circle process on a smaller scale. Ensured I coded all quoted responses.
8/30/2025. Participant #207	The participant expressed how fragile this transition from the conglomerate to a private-run facility is, and how it is a day-to-day challenge.	I could sense the timidness and shortness in responses. It was the unknown that led to the limited responses. Unsure of a financial strain.	The interview was relatively short in terms of usable data, yet the participant's story and all viable quotes were coded.
8/31/2025. Participant #208	Interesting feedback on an industry that's dependent on insider connections, apparently.	Insurance adjusters who are independently contracted are subject to the gatekeepers currently in place.	Ensured I kept my personal reflections and opinions to myself to not bias his responses.
9/2/2025. Participant #209	From shade-tree to an officially licensed LLC.	The story was inspiring, and I was familiar with a grassroots, bootstrapping business within the culture.	This operation was reflective of most minority neighborhoods that draw support from their local community.
9/3/2025. Participant #210	Interesting connection to the government contracting with private contractors.	These two brothers showed how they could join their scholastic disciplines, business, and medicine into a joint venture.	Reflecting on the business side of the partnership, his expansion into related fields shows that growth is part of their priorities. Noted in NVivo.
9/5/2025. Early coding phase	Reviewing transcripts in NVivo	Noticed repeated emphasis on "family support" across participants. Wondering if I'm over-valuing it because of my own upbringing.	Recall creating several codes related to family roles and planned to triangulate with other codes before merging.

Date / Phase	Context or Event	Reflexive Observation	Analytic Insight / Action
7/15/2025. Pre-interview reflection	Before the first participant interview.	I felt both anticipation and concern about how my background as a Veteran and small-business owner might influence rapport.	Reminded myself to bracket assumptions about discipline and resilience, will note if participants mention these traits.
7/15/2025. Durning interview #200	Participant shared frustration about realizing he could not trust white people.	I sensed my own empathy as a business owner. Had to focus on active listening rather than advocacy.	Ensured I created codes that would address this pivotal acknowledgement.
7/15/2025. During interview #201	The participant demonstrated a penchant for creating multiple businesses.	Notably, a motivated person who sought many avenues to entrepreneurship.	Credited many whites for mentorship and guidance, opposed to cultural support. Noted in Nvivo.
7/31/2025. Interview #202	The participant attributed his success uniquely to his religious beliefs.	I was inspired seeing a person so motivated from a faith-based stance.	Created codes to reflect his deep belief, associated with cultural traditions.
8/14/2025. Participant #203	Felt comfortable writing his responses over a live interview.	Leeway was given to avoid losing the opportunity to capture the experience.	I was able to follow up by phone to confirm any misnomers.
8/17/2025. Participant #204	The restaurant industry appears to be a busy enterprise that deters many from participation.	I found it challenging to obtain owners who were willing to commit to interviews.	I will explore other industries that allow owners to shift their focus away from daily business affairs.

Date / Phase	Context or Event	Reflexive Observation	Analytic Insight / Action
8/20/2025. Participant #205	Opted to write responses to the predesigned questionnaire.	This enablement was optional due to participants' reluctance to attend interviews, which was attributed to personal reasons.	There were many phone calls to clarify the meanings of written responses. I believed I gained the essence of his story.
8/25/2025. Participant #206	An excellent opportunity to witness the farm-to-table process.	I had to ensure that I kept my personal thoughts at bay and allowed his responses to provide the data.	I was astonished to witness a complete circle process on a smaller scale. Ensured I coded all quoted responses.
8/30/2025. Participant #207	The participant expressed how fragile the transition from the conglomerate to a privately run facility is, and how it presents a day-to-day challenge.	I could sense the timidity and brevity in their responses. It was the unknown that led to the limited responses. Unsure of a financial strain.	The interview was relatively short in terms of usable data, yet the participant's story and all viable quotes were coded.
8/31/2025. Participant #208	Interesting feedback on an industry that's dependent on insider connections, apparently.	Insurance adjusters who are independently contracted are subject to the existing gatekeepers.	Ensured I kept my personal reflections and opinions to myself to avoid biasing his responses.
9/2/2025. Participant #209	From shade-tree to an officially licensed LLC.	The story was inspiring, and I was familiar with a grassroots, bootstrapping business within the culture.	This operation was reflective of most minority neighborhoods that draw support from their local community.
9/3/2025. Participant #210	Interesting connection to the government contracting with private contractors.	These two brothers showed how they could join their scholastic disciplines, business, and medicine into a joint venture.	Reflecting on the business side of the partnership, his expansion into related fields demonstrates a growth priority. Noted in NVivo.
Date / Phase	Context or Event	Reflexive Observation	Analytic Insight / Action

9/5/2025. Early coding phase	Reviewing transcripts in NVivo	Noticed repeated emphasis on "family support" across participants. I am wondering if I am overvaluing it because of my own upbringing.	Recall creating several codes related to family roles and planned to triangulate with other codes before merging.

Appendix J

Comprehensive Code–Category–Theme–Research Question Crosswalk

Research Question	Theme	Category (Cluster)	Representative Codes	Illustrative Participant Quotations
RQ1. How do cultural traditions shape business formation, motivation, and sustainability among African American male entrepreneurs in Houston?	Theme 1: Cultural Work Ethic Influence	Discipline-Resilience Practices	Practicing consistency and self-discipline	Participant 201 noted, "People would say I am definitely a hard worker… consistent… disciplined." Participant 202 stated, "Resilience means not folding under pressure, preparing financially for hard days, and thinking like a Fortune 500 company."
		Identity Positioning	Exposure to contrasting professional lifestyles	Participant 201stated, "That was a whole different culture from where I came from… this guy lived in the River Oaks… a home that had seven bedrooms… I was just like, wow, this is not what I came from."
		Traditions of Cultural Support through Community and Faith Networks	Spiritual framing of the entrepreneurial journey	Participant 200 explained, "I think it is a spiritual thing… the journey is to learn, and if you already know it, why are you doing it?"

Research Question	Theme	Category (Cluster)	Representative Codes	Illustrative Participant Quotations
RQ2. What aspects of contemporary entrepreneurship theory can encourage and sustain business growth within African-American male businesses to increase their presence in Houston?	Theme 2: Business Start-Sustainment-Growth Continuum	Foundational Influences	Intentional decision-making followed by industry research	Participant 203 stated, "My first steps in starting this business were simply deciding to do it. Once I made the decision, I began to research the industry."
		Networked Knowledge Flows	Persues networking efforts	Participant 200 noted, "I was calling on everybody all over the city, like every day," which eventually positioned him to benefit from being "in the right place at the right time and continuing that work."
		Adaptive Strategy Patterns	Sacrificing personal activities to pursue business growth	Participant 200 noted, "A lot of things that I used to enjoy doing, I just cannot do them, if I am committed to growing the business."
		Resource Deployment Strategies		Participant 211 noted, "My twin brother handles the clinical side… and I focus on business and finance."
		Transitional Pathways	Experiencing an internal turning point toward doing something different. Observing homogeneity within a professional training environment	Participant 201 recounted, "began one day… like, man, I have to do something different." noting, "I seen a classroom… all Caucasian people… they would become a financial planner… I said that's what I'm going to do."

Research Question	Theme	Category (Cluster)	Representative Codes	Illustrative Participant Quotations
RQ3. How does the current socioeconomic climate limit resource-based entrepreneurship theory strategies within African American male businesses in Houston to the extent of causing low representation?	Theme 3: Multilevel Constraint Barriers	Strain-Constraint Factors	Experiencing founder centrality in decision-making	Participant 200 observed, "There's this disbelief with a lot of business owners… you have to be integral to everything that goes on in the business; you have to make all the major decisions."
		Structural Access Limitations	Experiencing slowed growth due to insufficient capital	211 echoed this connection between capital and growth, stating, "Growth is directly tied to capital. Without it, everything slows down."
RQ4. How do African American male entrepreneurs interpret their own identities, confidence, and access to resources within Houston's business ecosystem?	Theme 4: Cultural Identity-Trust Dynamics	Trust Navigation Processes	Tacit understanding of how trust operates	200 explained, "nobody just sat down with me and just laid it out… it was just something that was known." This participant connected those experiences to later business interactions, noting that "most of the folks I was doing business with are white folks."
		Identity-Based Constraints	Comparing self to established professionals	200 reflected on early comparisons with established professionals, stating, "I would look at those guys who were doing consulting, and I was thinking, am I good enough, am I smart enough?"

Appendix K

Search Terms, Boolean Combinations, and Databases Used

Table 9

Search Terms, Boolean Combinations, and Databases Used

Search Terms	Boolean Combinations	Databases Used
African American entrepreneurs	African American entrepreneurs AND minority entrepreneurship	EBSCOhost, ProQuest, JSTOR
Minority entrepreneurship	Minority entrepreneurship AND systemic barriers	Web of Science, Google Scholar
Resource-based entrepreneurship theory	Resource-based entrepreneurship theory OR financial barriers	National University Library, Scopus
Contemporary entrepreneurship	Contemporary entrepreneurship AND innovation	EBSCOhost, JSTOR, ProQuest
Social capital	Social capital AND minority business networks	Google Scholar, National University Library
Systemic barriers	Systemic barriers AND racial disparities	Web of Science, JSTOR
Critical race theory in business	Critical race theory AND entrepreneurship	Google Scholar, EBSCOhost
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)	Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) OR startups	ProQuest, Scopus
Ethnic business success factors	Ethnic business success factors AND minority entrepreneurs	JSTOR, Web of Science
Houston entrepreneurial ecosystem	Houston entrepreneurial ecosystem AND African American entrepreneurs	Local library databases, National University Library

Note. Boolean combinations were designed to extract peer-reviewed studies focusing on minority entrepreneurship and systemic barriers. Database selection was based on accessibility and scholarly rigor.